

Women in Lawrence's sons and lovers



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The way gender is conventionally defined and how it is divided and characterized orients the perception of masses. The two genders are different in terms of biological factors but language functions in such a way that some character traits and behavior systems have already been associated in definitions of each gender. Probably the ink belonged to the man, because what we know of a woman is something tender, submissive, passive, nurturer or emotional. This is how the male ink impregnated art and literature with female stereotypes. Whether D. H. Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers* has propagated the same myth or has brought models of women who break away the generalizations provided to them is a matter of concern in this paper.

Readers find that the realistic novel *Sons and Lovers* chooses women equally to trace social and political changes in London. In the very beginning we are introduced with Mrs Morel who after eight years of marriage “despised him” and understands that she has drowned herself into “poverty and ugliness and meanness.” She has “curious, receptive mind” and can talk of religion, philosophies or politics which Mr Morel could not. Readers get to know how dominant the factor of class was through the frustration of this “lady” and her extreme desire to make her children rise above the social ladder. Miriam is taught not to answer back to men. On other hand, she desperately wants “a chance like anybody else” of learning and knows well that “men have everything.” She struggles with her sexual self and her spiritual self which is dictated to her. Probably this is the reason she never explore herself or does the author not take pain in exploring her? With Miriam the text questions Christianity which always tries to maintain a gap between soul and body.

Hence we have on one side Clara who can look striking against the mirror and on the other is Miriam who is “physically afraid” to have Paul sexually. The two cannot unite and so Paul suffers who wants to incorporate both spirituality and sexuality. The text shows the political atmosphere of London through Clara who is the ‘New Woman’, a feminist ideal that came in late nineteenth century. She attends Margaret Bonford’s meeting, can argue well, could manage a divorce and is “free and independent.” This is what makes Lawrence’s text a brilliant one as a realist novel which is rooted in socio-economic context.

It is noteworthy that Lawrence shows hardly any woman who is not able to think and question. Indeed women characters have been portrayed such that the readers almost take a trip to the London of that time. But there are some problems with the portrayal of women characters due to which Lawrence has even been called a misogynist. If these women characters are put into the context of the larger politics of the text, readers see that these women are present only because the patriarch Paul is present. In fact Miriam almost vanishes when Paul breaks relation with her. Simone de Beauvoir points that women in the text have been used to glorify Paul. This is the journey of a young boy towards being patriarch who escapes from being engulfed by his mother, Miriam and then “venture forth and inherit the great masculine world”. Kate Millett says that *Sons and Lovers* sympathizes with Mrs Morel overtly but covertly with the patriarch. Mrs Morel comes as this empowering female figure ready to engulf her sons. Miriam is shown as the spiritual woman who can give up her desire or even refuse to acknowledge her sexual self but not defy her religious beliefs. Clara is the sexually open woman

whose “breast swung slightly in her blouse” and is taken as irrational by the man in the text. Agatha is someone who gets space only when she has to say “make me love him splendidly, because he is Thy son.” Though we have women who break away the generalizations but here they are grouped together when the text focuses on making Paul a man. The text gives space to sons who have turned lovers but not daughter Annie who is first shown as a “tom-boy” who “adored” Paul and then becomes a teacher out of nowhere. Gypsy is also shown as a caricature of a senseless woman with her “insensitive bossiness”.

Is Mrs Morel only a stereotype of an obsessive mother or she is the mother who devotes her whole life to children? She wants to cross class boundaries which she did in her marriage with Mr Morel but has she transcended patriarchal norms? In an attempt to fit into the role of nurturer, has she reached the extreme level to be reduced to a mere obsessive mother who even alienates her children from the father? She is aware of her marginalized condition and hence wishes “if I were a man” but the Clara principle was not familiar and so she lived her dreams but through her sons. Is Clara a caricature of the feminist who hates all men and does not want children? Are all women really made to represent one or the other type to make Paul all rounded? Clara has vocabulary coming from the rise of feminism in the early twentieth century. She is not merely a caricature but a full-fledged character with own flaws, shame and hypocrisies. She is embarrassed to see Paul at her house which gives a real picture of her poor financial condition. She has genuine reasons for leaving her husband. She chooses to leave him because “he tried to bully me into it”. Something that unhappily married Gertrude Morel would do if

she were aware of Clara's principle. Does the novel realistically trace the situation at an emotional level when it comes to Mrs Morel or Clara?

Certainly the type of femininity given to Miriam is not satisfactory but what if the text gave her more space? Lawrence shows that she "quarrelled with her brothers", "wants" to learn and knows that ways of the world are "not fair because I'm a woman." Does the male-female dynamics of Lawrence function in terms of superiority that one is supposed to maintain over another? Are the women who come as engulfing or empowering maintaining this dynamics of male-female relationship or there are any feminist agendas which started even before this principle came as proper definition? In terms of space, *Sons and Lovers* focuses majorly on making of one male character and in the process uses many women. Can readers really trace social, political or economic conditions surrounding the text which made women what they are in the text?