



English Novelist David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930)

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Abstract: David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930) was born at Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. He was the son of a miner and was educated at Nottingham University College where he qualified as a teacher. He taught at Croydon till 1913, when he had to resign because of his illness. Henceforth, he devoted himself to literature. He wrote poetry, but it is for his novels, mostly autobiographical, that he came into prominence. His personal experience which went into the formation of his novels is in itself an indication that Lawrence believed in the emotive aspect of literature which eventually came in for adverse criticism but his greatness lies in giving a touch of romantic nostalgia over the loss of age-old communal values, resulting in the loss of human relationship. That is why he was rejected for what Wimsatt and Beardsley would call 'effective fallacy' of literature.

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Introduction: Lawrence indeed had an anti-academic temper. His criticism, likewise, went against New-Criticism. That is not to say that he had no defenders. For example, F.R. Leavis considered him one of great modern novelists. In his novels, as in his criticism, Lawrence offered a critique of industrial society. His brilliantly unconventional *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1924) condemned the American sense of unfettered freedom without any sense of communal hold on it. In its opening chapter "The Spirit of Place", Lawrence bewailed that there is a different feeling in the old American classics, suggesting a shift from the old psyche to something new which he said was responsible for making Americans as a whole uprooted people, people who had left their homeland back in Europe and wandered in the west, lonely, without the sense of belonging. Lawrence believed in the spirit of the place- one becomes what the place is.

Lawrence's novels beginning with *The White Peacock* (1911) and followed by *The Trespasser* (1912), *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in love* (1921), *Aaron's Rod* (1922), *Kangaroo* (1923), *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), underline the loss of communal life. The novelist repeatedly points out that we are free only in a living homeland, not when we are straying or breaking away from it. It is only in a community as against in a society that we, Lawrence said, can realize our whole self. And the whole self, the whole man alive and the whole woman alive —

come into being "when they obey some deep, inward voice ... obeying from within. Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, believing community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealized, purpose."¹

What Lawrence believed was a study in the depth of the state of soul of an individual in harmony with a natural community, rooted in a soil for generations. In his *Studies in Classics American literature*, Lawrence praised a community that could make its real home at one place, particularly when its soul is in unison with the genius of the place. When it is so, living according to the prompting of one's soul, an individual yields oneself to what Lawrence called "The Spirit of Place".

The first chapter of his book titled -"The spirit of place". Indeed is the communal life in which each individual participates willingly. At the back of Lawrence's mind was, perhaps, Ferdinand Tonnies' typology- community and society, what the sociologist titled *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. The book was translated from German into English in 1887. Lawrence started writing in the first decade but his important novels were published in the second decade. In his distinction between community and society, Tonnies emphasized 'natural will;' he dispensed with any conception of man being determined. The individual had in the community his identity. Indeed, he belonged there. Tonnies regarded human beings as essentially persons² who, in all their experience and activity, in their feeling and thinking, come to live in

accordance with their wills. This is closer to Lawrence's view of human beings as having disturbed. In his novels, Lawrence shows how this sense of the whole-self living in harmony with his community is lost because of industrialization. In *Sons and Lovers*, for example, the colliers, as his own father was, were uprooted people, living in and around coal-pits on meager salaries. Hence, they were not alive and whole persons. They never could live fully, think and act on the basis of a unitary will. This is not to suppose that there is something mysterious about this will. It only stands for a sense of community of individuals subsisting on a living unity.

Novel's

Like William Wordsworth, Lawrence was earlier nostalgic about this lost community of persons, replaced by society based on contractual and commercial basis. Indeed, Lawrence was disillusioned with this replacement of community by society. It is this disillusionment, which informs his reading of the *Studies in Classic American Literature*. He became increasingly disillusioned with his stay in America during 1922-1925. America became a 'society' earlier than England. His letters during his stay show that he was disgusted by American false spiritualization, excessive industrialization and sensationalism. And when he came to write his novels, he, perhaps, felt that England also was losing its sense of community in which a person could feel his whole self alive. As his novels increasingly show, one feels the loss of intimate relationships in and among familial groups. Even while the Brangwens lived on the Marsh, one can see how fast the familial and the communal sense of oneness was losing its hold on individuals. The relationship between mother and child, husband and wife, brother and sister, was becoming contractual and commercial. Gertrude in *Sons and Lovers* has lost the old values of natural affection. She discards her husband only to dote upon her sons, one after the other, for her own well-being. She thinks that her sons would eventually earn more handsomely than her husband could ever do. Her whole endeavour was to keep her sons in her fold, so as to secure her future; there is hardly anything natural in her affection first for William and then for Paul. The relationships that Paul also comes to form are not rooted in natural instinct for the whole man, who needs both physical and spiritual life. No relationship then is rooted in natural instinct and attendant emotion; and the psychic bonds between one person and the other are not continually and mutually affirmed. In fact natural relationships increasingly lose their naturalness as Lawrence moved from *Son and Lovers* to *The Rainbow* and *The Rainbow to Women in Love*.

That does not, however, mean that in a community, these relationships are above clashes, but

the very fullness of shared values and reduction of conflict was enough to balance relationships in a family, forming a close community of wills. Lawrence, therefore, does not rule out conflict in human relationships, for conflicts not only balance but also bind members in a family and a community. This is also moral. In his essay "Morality and the Novel"²³ Lawrence insists on accomplishing a pure relationship between people, places, nations, environment, and even cosmos. This relationship is pure precisely because one is related in some subtle way. In short, one belongs to an ever-widening community and though it amounts to some loss infinite relation, but what Lawrence means to say is that pure relationship which is non-contractual and non-commercial is infinitely extendable. That is what he calls, "The subtle, perfected relation between me and my whole circumambient universe."²⁴

It means that the difference between a 'community' and his 'society' is not that of space-narrow or wide-but of natural will and rational will. The latter Tonnie's regarded as antithetical to natural will. While the natural will is rooted in instinct, habit, sentiment, custom, the rational will is dominated by reason. Hence it is unnatural. It interferes with sense of belonging. He approaches his job not as something worthwhile in itself. Similarly, Lawrence's novels also show, a person becomes an instrument, a tool among tools in a large machine. While life in a community is moral, forming a pure relationship, in society it is amoral. For example, Anna does not feel any sense of shame after her marriage; she remains confined to her room. Thus shame, for example was and is, a central element in a community. For her marriage is a contract.

In this regard the old community was not geared to the end merely; it also evaluated the means to the attainment of the end. In his novel *The Return of The Native* for example, Thomas Hardy strikes us as good a Wordsworthian as any; he seems to give a call back to natural living, spontaneous and free providing the individual room for becoming his whole self. Lawrence's social thought, in so far it has a bearing on his novels, also invites such epithets as romantic, 'utopian' and 'radical'. To be true to his social thought, we find Lawrence thinking in terms of community and society. He, in his novels as well as criticism, aschews all questions of social, moral, economic and political dispensation and condemns society, particularly its morality as evil. But more than even community Lawrence seems to cherish the freedom of the individual as the sole condition for attaining one's fulfillment. For the same reason he condemns any restriction on the individual which hinders his or her self-realization.

But at the same time he did not wish the individual to cut himself from his moorings. He

favours new experience, which the world generally fears, because the new experience displaces many old experiences. Lawrence's treatment of organic relationship can be appreciated in the context when men are free, that is, when they belong to a living, organized community. This may appear paradoxical but this is true that a freedom to do what one likes, that is, an uncharted freedom even tires Wordsworth. One's freedom is always in a community, provided it is living, organized, believing community which acts, as does nature in the case of Lucy, both enkindling and restraining her freedom. When nature took over Lucy to educate her in Wordsworth, it promises to give the child freedom while the foster-mother would act as an 'overseeing power'. If in the end Paul Morel has to run from all old contacts, his mother and his two mistresses, it is because he had no organic and living association with them, He had no natural order of relationship with either or together with them - as a member of a living family would have, relationship as a kin or as a son or as a lover. No relationship was thus satisfying to the whole soul of the man. The threesome did not form a community. He simply did not belong; he had no identity, because all of them separately wanted some portion of his self.

The three women could provide Paul a society, but not a community a society which is qualitatively different from community in terms of human relationships. In fact, they provided him no familiar context of family, either as a son or as a lover. On the contrary, Gertrude sickened his life-divided him against himself. In short, "he suffered from the crippling effects of a mother's love on the emotional development of her son" as Mark Schorer rightly avers. According to Schorer, Paul suffered from the 'split' between kinds of love, physical and spiritual, which the son develops, the kinds represented by two young women--Clara and Miriam. The two themes, Schorer hopes could have worked together, the second being, actually, the result of the first. His contention is that this split must have driven Paul to suicide but 'instead he turns towards the faintly humming, glowing town to life as nothing in his previous history persuades us to visualize.

Schorer's logic is obviously not that of Lawrence. The latter makes Paul leave his old relationships which has become social in the sense that they had become contractual, business-like, taking whatever portion, physical or spiritual or emotional and economic that suited these women, leaving him divided and dispersed. Paul now quests for identifying humming lighted town, symbolizing a community, living an organic life as that of bees humming and working together. He moves towards this new world hoping to get back his identity, his wholeness. He may not get what he expects but the quest is admirable. He

wants to live as a whole man alive, which Lawrence does not tire insisting upon. On this point his emphasis is too obvious. We have already noted Lawrence's dialectic of freedom in community and community in freedom. In the chapter 'The Spirit of Place' in *Studies in Classic American literature*, Lawrence has given pre-eminence to the place where individuals live. In the event of displacement, as for example, in the case of migration, people lose their touch with the community. It happened on a large scale during the Renaissance, when Europe drifted, as Lawrence says, into a very dangerous half truth, of liberty and equality. Perhaps the men who went to America felt this, and so repudiated the old world altogether. Liberty in America had meant breaking away from all dominion. According to Lawrence, it was an unfortunate exodus. It drove people to the west after pulling out their roots its the soil where their generations have lived. That is why, he feels, that Americans are a rootless lot. That is why real America has not begun yet. So far it has been the false dawn, or at least not yet the sun rise. That is, in the progressive American consciousness there has been one dominant desire to do away with the old thing. This is yet another attempt on the part of Lawrence to reconcile the old world and new experience. This is what creates poetry in Lawrence. The Romantics did the same, throwing a colouring of imagination on the ordinary and the commonplace or by reconciling the discordant, as for example, S.T. Coleridge did.

As Lawrence reiterates that Mankind is always struggling in the toils of old relationships, art is always ahead of the times. Lawrence is for a relationship which is not one to one but which transcends narrow limits. He, for example, in the essay "Morality and the Novel" says that when VanGogh paints sunflowers, he reveals, or achieves, the vivid relation between himself, as man and the sunflower, as sunflower, at that quick moment of time. His painting does not represent the sunflower itself. One will never know what the sunflower itself is. "The vision on the canvas of Van Gogh of the sunflower is a third thing, utterly intangible and inexplicable, the off-spring of the sunflower itself and Van Gogh himself". The vision on the canvas is for ever 'incommensurable' with the canvas, or the paint, or Van Gogh as a human organism, or the sunflower as the botanical organism."⁶ Lawrence further says that you cannot weigh or measure nor even describe the vision on the canvas. It exists, to tell the truth, only in the much-debated fourth dimension. In dimensional space it has no existence.

It is exactly the same with the human relationship; our relationship with others, according to Lawrence, should not be in the dimensional space. It should be as flickering and, therefore, alive, as possible. The question of organic relationship

becomes a quest mainly because there is rarely a fourth dimensional relationship with others and theirs with us. It is therefore rarely that we can claim our identity which is always in danger of being robbed or split or membered into pieces. To achieve a sense of belonging is a difficult task. Lawrence's attempt to make human relationship possible in his novels is no mean task. He searches for this relationship of one with the other, which he calls a revelation. His quest is for this very reason, unending. The three generations of Brangwens try to achieve it but the novel ends only with a hope that the perfected relationship may, in the future, be realized. That would be a moment a momentary stay before it gets disrupted. Only in a rooted community can it be possibly realized for a longer period, may be a life-time. Thomas Hardy's community was destroyed by the onset of industrialization. In his study on Hardy, Lawrence showers some qualified praise because Hardy was not a society worshipper. Hardy's great heroes perish because they are not in complete harmony with nature. Some of their actions have no reverence for the communal morality. Lawrence charges Hardy with a Bourgeois taint which impels him to destroy his own aristocrats by giving them a measure of cowardice.

Lawrence, as we know, stood for the law of the old community under which people lived in harmony, though the commercial spirit exalted love more than law.

Lawrence was drawn to the old view of community right from the beginning of his career as a novelist. William Y. Tindall in his study *D.H. Lawrence and Susan his Cow*, (1939), discussed Lawrence's sources for folklore and mythology. That Lawrence was interested in anthropology has long been recognized. For example, he read *Ancient art and Ritual* by Jame Ellen Harrison and even *The Golden Bough* by James Frazer's during the writing of *The Rainbow*. Brandabur said that during "the late spring and into the autumn of 1913, when Lawrence's letters detail the early attempts to write the new novel, they also document his interest in Greek tragedy and his excitement at reading Harrison's book."⁷ Lawrence was fascinated to see art coming out of religious yearning. We have already noted Lawrence's appreciation for a living, organic, believing community in which men are free when they are obeying some deep, inward voice of religious belief. He, for this reason, condemned people who escape to some wild west. What interested Lawrence, in Harrison's book, is his attempt to define the moment in the cultural development of Greece and of Egypt when the sacred dance of the vegetation cults is dulled by the whole community through which life is renewed and the god made present, and becomes instead drama and formal religion. In *The Rainbow*, as we know,

Lawrence has envisioned planting, growing and reaping, reflected in all levels of life. The fore-shortening of time lent to human generations, the same cyclic rhythm as that of the vegetation year, so that at last Ursula becomes the new grain out of the planting of an earlier generation. Even in *Sons and Lovers* which records the ruin of the old community by the onset of industrialization, Lawrence makes an early reference to the country festival called Wakes, where colliers, including Walter Morel, go. These festivals were part of the vegetation ritual. The old agrarian rituals practiced by the Brangwens farmers gradually give way under the impact of technology, "so that Ursula is left without a man who is a source of solar energy and therefore without a partner in the liturgy which makes life possible."⁸ The modern world thus becomes for her purely mechanical. According to Brandabur, this will be Birkin's quest in *Women in love*.

If *Sons and Lovers*, describes an unorganized community in the sense that it is unrelated to the land, to the soil, *The Rainbow* shows how one generation after the other loses its sense of belonging. Underlined in both these novels is Lawrence's longing to belong to an organic community. Lawrence's fascination for a believing, organic community has brought against him the charge of primitivism. It was perhaps because most critics in the thirties, following the rise of Marxist Criticism and later the onset of Feminism could not see that Lawrence's belief organic relationship forms the basis of his so-called Primitivism. Lawrence was not against the Marxist and the Feminist ideology of progress and equality; nor was he a votary of individualism. On the contrary, he proposed a social organization in which common will of a community is established and was thus appropriately regulated by such a body and concrete custom and law which always went back to an original unity of natural wills related by harmony and understanding. The Marxist critics especially, Christopher Caudwell,⁹ in his *Studies In A Dying Culture*, condemned Lawrence for the latter's individualism. This is a general response, including that of George Lucaks, on Western artists for cherishing existential alienation of individuals. The Feminists, among them Kate Millet,¹⁰ viewed Lawrence as a male chauvinist. There may be some truth in the charges, but the fact is that Lawrence's conception of social organism is overseen by some authority, notably the male for harmony of the whole. But this harmony should not be seen as hegemony. We have referred to the kind of community Lawrence wished to create especially one propounded by Ferdinand Tonnies, in his conception of *Gemeinschaft* or natural community in which all patterns of conflicts and cooperation attain a working-balance of authority, obedience and consensus of accepted ways of getting along was established; and the authority itself rested

upon the naturally rooted factors of age, strength, and wisdom.

In the absence of such a community, Lawrence has to propose a newer kind of balance dash moral balance between all relationships, including that of man and woman in his essay "Morality And The Novel"- already referred to, Lawrence said that our life consists in achieving a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe about us. There is no room what-so-ever for individualism as most Marxist critics apprehended in Lawrence. It is an all comprehensive relationship, like the stars of the sky. It is what Lawrence called "The subtle, perfected relation between me and my whole circumambient universe."¹¹ His novels, by the method of negation, point out Lawrence's preference for a community in which everything is related to every other thing, persons, nations, races, species, fauna and flora, the earth itself the skies and sun and the moon, creatures big and small and lastly the stars in the sky. This relationship is his ideal, his morality, in which the relationships are not bound by inflexible wills but by an ever "trembling and changing balance between me and my circumambient universe, which precedes and accompanies a true relatedness."¹² As far as man-woman relationship is concerned, Lawrence is no male chauvinist because he believed that a sacrifice on the part of the woman or of the man is immoral. As a novelist, he does not put his thumb in the pan either on the side of the male or the female. If the novelist does, for whatever reason, "for love, tenderness, sweetness, peace then he commits an immoral act: he prevents the possibility of a pure relationship, a pure relatedness, the only thing that matters: and he makes inevitable the horrible reaction when he lets the thumb go, towards hate and brutality, cruelty and destruction."¹³

Thus, Lawrence hoped to achieve a perfect human relationship in a world that tends to engulf it by some act of cowardice such as love, tenderness, sweetness, peace and so on. This equation, as Lawrence found was not obviously easy first to achieve, and then to maintain. It is because we tend to slip into old relationships—relationships based on what he would call 'stable ego.' Lawrence regarded human beings as essentially persons who, in all their experience and activity, their feeling and thinking, come to think and act in accordance with their wills and if they are

alive enough, they will not surrender themselves to others, nor will they be tempted to dominate others. That is why Lawrence laid so much emphasis on our being alive. In his seminal essay "Why the novel matters",¹⁴ Lawrence vehemently argues for the wholeness of men and women - the whole-selves alive up to their finger-tips. This conception of the self is like the community he visualized is very

comprehensive. "Every tiny bit", as he says, "of my hands is alive, every little freckle and hair and fold of skin... those then little weapons...., that is, ten fingers"¹⁵. So seeing his hand is all alive, Lawrence considers himself alive, not just a bottle, or a jug, but a living, feeling, bleeding parts of the bodies, if any portion is cut from the rest. The soul itself is part of the body, as is the mind. For Lawrence, nothing is so important as life. His quest is not for after-life but this life itself, life with a capital 'L', "Better a living dog than a dead lion. But better a live lion than a live dog."¹⁶

Like his conception of community, Lawrence's conception of the self is equally integral. Each part is alive to the whole, as the whole is alive to the parts. There is neither individualism nor hegemony. As parts of the whole, each individuals is alive to himself and herself, as he or she is to the community. Lawrence, therefore, asks for no absolutes, either the individual or the community. There is no room in his world or extreme good and bad, right and wrong. Lawrence gives full play to his mind because he realizes that life itself and not inert safety, is the reason for living. For out of the full play of all things emerges the only thing, that is, the wholeness of man, the wholeness of a woman, man alive and live woman.

Obviously Lawrence finds it unhealthy when each party seeks his or her own absolutely in the other, instead of regarding the other as man and woman wholly alive. As we have noted, slightly earlier, Lawrence did not favour sacrifice on the part of either man or woman. So he is seeking the identity of each individual neither in sadism nor in masochism. Both situations are immoral. He then points to the third thing, "which is neither sacrifice nor fight to the death: when each seeks the true relatedness of the other. Each must be true to himself, herself, his own manhood, her own womanhood, and let the relationship work out of itself."¹⁷

However for achieving this ideal of this organic relationship, one" needs courage to accept the life -thrust from within oneself and from the other person."¹⁸ Besides courage to be truly oneself, one also needs "discipline, not to exceed oneself any more than one can help. Courage, when one has exceeded oneself. to accept the fact, and not whine about it."¹⁹ This conception of respect for organic relationship is Lawrence's contribution to the establishment of ideal relationship without encroaching upon others' freedom and also not allowing others to do so. For this ideal Lawrence was prepared to break the bond of love if it galled. It is an absurdity for him to say, that man and woman must love. There is no moral compulsion when relationships tilt to such an extent that it becomes impossible to balance them." The only morality is to have man true to his manhood and woman to her womanhood, and let the relationship form of itself in

all honour."²⁰

This relationship has to be organic, not mechanical. In fact, it is the very basis of community life. Lawrence, as we know, planned for a utopian community, his Ranim. It was a kind of community, small, of course, as Emerson and Thoreau planned on the Brook Farm. Lawrence elaborated his conception of community in his first three letters to Gordon Campbell. Here Lawrence evolved a conception of a small community of natural aristocrats bound together not merely to save their individual souls but to create a communism based not on poverty but on riches, not on humility but on pride, not on sacrifice but on complete fulfillment in the flesh of all strong desires, not in Heaven but on earth. Lawrence, in this letter, reiterated his view of the whole people in which the individual can hope to live as a whole person alive. He must live as the center and heart of all humanity, if he is to be free: "It is no use of hating a people or a race or humanity in mass. Because each of us is in himself humanity. You are the English Nation. That which exists as the ostensible English Nation is a mass of friable amorphous individualities."²² He further said, "But in me, and in you, is a living organic nation, it is not politics - it is religion."²³

Lawrence, like the classical sociologists, Ferdinand Tonnies to begin with, but more importantly Emile Durkheim, perhaps favoured the organic society based not on politics, but the essential form of religion. Most modern writers, T.S.Eliot, to name the prominent critic of culture among others, also favoured organic, in place of mechanical community. Durkheim, for one, argued for organic solidarity, synthesizing individualism with socialism. Lawrence's conception also has a closer affinity with that of Durkheim-the society in which organic solidarity prevails allowing individualism to flourish as a result of both a collective necessity and moral imperative. It is the social morality itself which commands each man to fulfill himself in the context of the larger whole, on the basis of common beliefs. It is thus the individuals live a peaceful existence. Lawrence proposed his "Collective Vision"²⁴, seeing how individualism has become the highest law under which people lived more in friction than in harmony. Lawrence did not want a political revolution, "but a shifting of the racial system of values from the old morality and personal salvation... to a larger morality and salvation through the knowledge that the one's neighbour is oneself. This means instant social revolution, grown from indignation with what is."²⁵ In fact what Lawrence calls, a living, believing community is a religious community in the sense that religion underlines social ethics. His creed for organic relationship can be assured only in such a community: "This feeling that one is not only a little individual,

living a little individual life but that one is in oneself the whole of mankind and one's fate is the fate of the whole mankind."²⁶

This resume underlines Lawrence's quest for the self in relation to otherselves and not a relation to oneself alone. His conception of the community is essentially sociological and though it is not Marxist, it does suggest a socialism of individual wills. He finds this process evolutionary, for he believes that mankind will eventually work out a harmonious relationship between the individual and the community. The present dissertation is an attempt to study Lawrence's two novels—*Sons and Lovers* and *The Rainbow* from the point of view of novelists disturbance of organic relationship.

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