

## MAPPING THE PROGRESS OF WOMEN FROM D.H LAWRENCE'S WOMEN IN LOVE TO E.L JAMES' FIFTY SHADES TRILOGY

Palak Arora

(M.A. English, IV Sem, ASLA, Amity University Gurugram)

DOI: [10.333329/joell.7.1.69](https://doi.org/10.333329/joell.7.1.69)



### ABSTRACT

Conferring to the norms is the way of life but stringent forces like feminism worked hard to carve a niche in the society for their own standing individuality. Amid their four waves now we had arrived at an arc of redirecting these efforts to a point of acceptance that the rights they are fighting for are achieved and from here post feminism starts. This research paper aims to map the projection of women in two texts namely DH Lawrence's Women in Love and EL James Fifty Shades Trilogy and the implication of this post-feminist resulting in the concept of life force propounded by GB Shaw. The effluent force through which the women channelize their energies is euphemistically called the force of life, evolving through which early phases of feminism viewed it as a bondage but with the emergence of post feminism this very notion got transformed into liberating life force. The research in context to these two works tries to find out the effects of feminism on the channelization of life force.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Post-Feminaism, Paricharchy, Life-force, Individuality,

**INTRODUCTION**

Dismantling all the previous vestiges of moral and social values, an era of postwar begins with highly mechanized and individualistic mindset. DH Lawrence, a prominent unabashed writer of this postwar and pre-feminist century evolves on the threshold of the concept of the 'New Woman' with works like "*Women in Love*." Emancipation of women from patriarchy is the most fantasized concept in the realm of all waves of feminism and Lawrence's view of pre-war women, as aptly pointed out by Hilary Simpson, suggests that he sought to have harboured a firm faith in woman's capacity to disrupt the order of manly accord. However, the contemporary world's conception of women is framed through ecclesiastical disciplinary conception with concurrent streams of feministic thought process both working adjunct to the antecedent image of women. Though the flagship of feminism had been a century old, the implicit effect fails to show up in the real world forcing the movement to get cut in waves as an analogy to an unprecedented tale of unfinished agony. Hélène Cixous, a second wave feminist, envisions women's libidinal economy different from that of male's libidinal economy and pertaining to this feminism, Lawrence put forward his views in *The Symbolic Meaning*:

*"What woman knows, she knows because man has taught it to her. What she is, that is another matter. She can never give expression to the profound movements of her own being. Man is the utterer, woman is the first cause."*(Lawrence145)

It is not only difficult but impossible to impose a sense of individual entity when such curt thoughts of male hegemony prevail. A view propounded by a feminist philosopher Simon de Beauvoir is that 'one is not born a woman but eventually becomes one.' Toril Moi contemplates on the issue further in her **Feminist, Female, Feminine** to come up with a detailed argument that "*feminists [...] must therefore always insist that though women undoubtedly are female, this in no way guarantees that they will be feminine*" (123). Feminism is a critical social

movement that challenges, and ultimately aims to breakdown, the patriarchal structures of a society. It means different things to different people at different times and has many overlaps, for example the suffrage movement and right to inheritance have been central themes at different times (Mishra 709). Catering to an alienated world and vaguely addressing feminine issues, women took a stance for their emancipation by holding on the most suffused female qualities and liberating themselves from the artifice of conforming societal codes and rebelling on the front foot. Patriarchy makes a woman merge herself into others and neglect her own self. (Mishra 50). This intricate issue of female becoming more like male and detaching themselves from their spirit is dealt by Hilary Simpson in *DH Lawrence and Feminism* where she examines this attitude by pointing to Lawrence's attitude "*from a liberal, pro-feminist position before the first world war to the rabid post-war vision of women as a destructively dominant sex, and of programmes for masculinist revolution*" (Simpson 90).

Paving the way for twenty-first century post-feminism where womanly objectification is transformed to subjectification by traversing the whole gender paradigm to a concentrating individualism. Post-feminism ushered into newer ideologies for a better assimilated way of perceiving self-worth in diversified thinking and bodily projection. With the proliferation of beaming 'power feminism,' EL James with her *Fifty Shades* Trilogy portrayed a woman of post-feminist era clamouring over the dark romantic genre. She presented the female character, Anastasia Steele, with exquisite refinement. The apprehensive and dilapidated attitude of feminism got transformed in post feminism giving birth to the notion of '**have it all**' where women tend to view their lives more fulfilling by striking out the balance between career, marriage and children instead of the venerable feminism viewing marriage as a foundation. This very thought process that prevailed at the time of feminism curbed the mentality of female embracing their will to get married or have children besides their career which resulted in the sheer loss of life force. Life



force is a theory propounded by GB Shaw in his work *Man and Superman*, based on the philosophy of eugenics. Shaw advocated the doctrine of female drive and superiority through their womb which is staunchly opposed by second-wave feminists but cordially received by postfeminists as they view it on the grounds of celebrating the femininity of females.

#### **POST-FEMINISM IN *WOMEN IN LOVE* AND *FIFTY SHADES TRILOGY***

Assertiveness to women's individuality, repudiated by the patriarchy from years and years makes itself a case for all waves of Feminism. Be it, Wollstonecraft, Simon De Beauvoir or Helen Cixous as feminists of different waves remain concurrent to one point i.e. subjective treatment of a woman on the grounds of her individuality. The womanly image of an altruistic Cinderella does stand in the path of self-actualisation where conceptions of a subservient, asexual and angelic wife are placed by poems like '*Angel in the House*' by Coventry Patmore (1854) leading women of the second wave feminism go awry with their conceptualisation of an ideal woman. As in the ubiquitous characterisation of feminism is pervasive with thought pieces like Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969) that stratify marriage as 'interior colonisation,' a kind of relationship based on dominance and subordination, defined by Max Weber as *Herrschaft* and T.S Eliot once observed it as of 'male manufacture' leading to the staunch views of feminists as finding their way to liberation in man-hating stratagem. This male-dominance has resulted in the general failure of woman to find a proper niche for her in society as well as literature. Whatever images of woman prevail in literature, they are the male pictures, whether in Indian or in British or American literature. She is often viewed either as a Madonna or a Whore. It is only in the twentieth century that with the changing values, women have emerged in literature. It seems that hardly any systematic study has been made of women, especially in Indo-Anglian literature (Mishra 51). This process of merely focusing on productive career trying to invigorate the lost identity of female does work but it also at the same time produces man-woman relationship with mechanical relentlessness

as in DH Lawrence's *Women in Love* where Gerald and Gudrun found their inner sphere to be devoid of effectual feelings and only triggered their relation on coitus grounds. The impeding dehumanising or rather mechanised forces in the relationship where Gudrun wants only '*a highly attractive individual of sufficient means*' which itself renders her inner self devoid of any communal feelings and aspirations for her relationship with Gerald. Lawrence's projection of a postwar woman remained isolated on her stance of keeping life force at bay in a relationship resulting in her fragmented personality as Gudrun herself describes: "*one of life's outcast, one of the drifting lives that has no root*" (Lawrence 504) whereas Gerald faced no such complication despite having a fairly dark past he describes himself as "*immune and perfect*" (Lawrence 560). A constant fear to confirm her individuality rendered Gudrun on a state where she feels the thrust and conundrum of her will: "*why wasn't there somebody who would take her in their arms and hold her to their breast, and give her rest, pure, healing rest*" (Lawrence 623). This itself is self-explanatory about the verge where the feminist attitude of Gudrun took her to a ground where she is repudiating the very needs she possesses in her inner being. Life from this one-sided perspective appears as: "*Life does not centre at all. It is artificially held together by the social mechanism*" (Lawrence 73) subsiding with the views of Whelehan in *Overloaded* that feminism made women "*unattractive, unmarriageable and miserable,*" (Whelehan, *Overloaded* 17).

On the other hand, leaving all trepidations behind, the writings of the twenty-first century emerge as of a new dawn for post-feminist women. Post feminism, as explained by Gill, is "*the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the articulation or entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference*" (Gill 255). This extenuating wave of feminism is more liberating as it dwells on the grounds of gender agreement on their mutual disagreements. EL James in her work *Fifty Shades*



*Trilogy* presents her protagonist Anastasia Steele to be a fairly reasonable human being who followed the conventional life path unconventionally laid for women. Her relationship with Christian Grey, a multimillionaire started on a contract of her being his submissive and he on an ascendant position i.e. of a dominant. Paving way for the conventional and rather dogmatic life path, their relationship shifted when Ana raised her voice on various issues starting from her choice of having intercourse to the way she finds it comfortable. Eva Illouz sees Ana as “*the model of assertiveness envisioned by feminism*”, because for her gender disparity is non-existent and the major issue that stands on her path is the will to hold to her own will. This post-feminist attitude is well elucidated in the interpretation of Ayelet Shachar who presents the liberating approach in *Theorizing Twilight* as “*having it all*” (*happiness, true love, a loving partner, fulfilment, belonging, money, security, “power,”*) with all intricacies involved in it “*having it all*” actually means retreating to traditional notions of femininity. (Shachar155). As a post-feminist woman, Ana not only presents her case with firmness but also sticks to it but what differentiates her approach from feminism is the decision she makes at the end of it as in when she stood for not changing her name at her workplace exclaiming that “*I don’t want to get railroaded because the girl you fell in love with will be crushed. And what’ll be left? All that would be left is a vacuous social X-ray, you’ve got to let me make my own decisions, take my own risks, and make my own mistakes, and let me learn from them. [...] I want some independence. That’s what my name means to me.*” (Freed 166) As soon as she gets to know the predilection of Christian with her assuming his surname, she puts her relationship on a higher stance than merely haggling for her own assumed rights.

#### **THEORY OF LIFE FORCE IN WOMEN IN LOVE AND FIFTY SHADES TRILOGY**

Theory of life force is not an extrapolation of conventional scientific theories but creative energy orchestrating the rhythmic flow of life effluence. A theory propounded by George Bernard Shaw drawing a parallel between the origins of mankind in the

Bible. Shaw was agnostic towards the orthodox creeds for trailing myths, hankering around the sensibilities of generations, creating a caricature to look up to for the demarcation of life’s unresolved circulation. Life force is the energy exuded by the female to basically lure the men into a physical connection so as to procure babies, providing fulfilment to the female. In perspective of a French philosopher HENRI BERGSON, this life force is the OLAN VITAL i.e. spirit of life. Women, facing insurmountable challenges to restore the flow of life, prospect over men as predators to cage them in a conundrum of daily life to reach the finality of their existence through begetting children and procuring evolution.

Assuring the theory to get fructified both the works project a flow of living energy transforming it into the actions of the female characters. However, in *Fifty Shades Trilogy* Christian is projected as a dominant to the extent of even stipulating the activities of the submissive but the girl he fell for surprisingly doesn’t possess the submissive bone in her body. His curt behaviour is more like a repercussion to the setback he bore in his childhood, taking a toll on him. Though Ana is more untouched to these complications in life and having fewer and simpler aspirations she seems to comply with the norms of life. After her meeting with Christian who’s ravenous in his sexual interests, she tried to initially acquiesce with his dominant and submissive contractual relationship, but gradually a bone of contention came in their relationship. From here on Ana starts to gradually lead Christian to a new dawn in their relationship as he was drawn towards the lingering innocence through which she channels herself. Leaving little ways to being presumptuous, Ana’s force of direction became acutely clear on the first day at their home after marriage where she asks:

ANASTASIA: *You do you wanna have kids someday, right?*

CHRISTIAN: *someday, sure*

ANASTASIA: *you don’t really sound sure.*

Christian distracting the conversation to avoid this the question says:



CHRISTIAN: you know what I'm sure about?

*That's a great steak.*

ANASTASIA: do you wanna have kids?

CHRISTIAN: one day, not now. I'm not ready to share you with anyone.

The persistent working of the life force on the female's part is quite evident on the other hand the male protagonist is a procrastinator in the matter of procreation. Owing to the facts at the end of the trilogy Ana manages to get pregnant and delineate her emotion towards the baby to the extent of even abandoning Christian and the whole world for the child.

ANASTASIA: I will choose this baby over anybody, coz that is what decent parents do. It's what your mother should have done for you, I'm so sorry she didn't Christian.

*You are not happy about this baby, I got that. So, we can either do this together or either I will do this without you.*

The triggering life force to reach a pedestal to rest after a strenuous task is over is throbbing through Ana while she figured it out, in the end, convincing Christian to have the baby.

CHRISTIAN: I want to have this baby with you.

Life force is the will to eschew anything that attempts to subvert the inner call of the female to procreate, a theory supported by a French Naturalist **Jean Baptiste Lamarck** who propounds that to evolve and actualize the self is the innate drive in life. Lamarck's biological concept revolves around an organism's tendency to self-transformation and adaptation to the environment for survival. This tendency of life force when failed to get accomplished in life would beget death instinct which is conspicuous in *WOMEN IN LOVE*, as the failed manifestation of the energy gauges itself into Thanatos.

GERALD: there's one thing about our family, you know' once anything goes wrong, it can never be put right again not with us. I've noticed it all my life – you can't put a thing right, once it has gone wrong.

Though *Women in Love's* ending is castigated in a more or less traumatic event i.e. Gerald's death, a

call to the primal forces of nature succinctly done. The relationship of Gerald and Gudrun is contemptuous and there was a wave of uncongenial contention. Constant strife rivalled in both of them to subdue each other as Gerald is portrayed as 'god of machine' whereas Gudrun is like an aphotic character trying to find the way in life through the crude idea of modernism. Their relationship is subverted to such an extent that Birkin in the offered Gerald *Blutbruderschafta* vow of complete commitment as brothers for life, it is a symbol of his unfulfilling relationship with Gudrun which is devoid of a life force. Assigning the qualities of *MAGNA MATER* (mother and matter of all substance) to Gudrun, Gerald succumbs to the concomitant relation with her which has an expectant motherly love filled with carnal pleasure.

The drive of Thanatos (death instinct) is voraciously prevalent in Gudrun and Gerald that obstructs the life force to further ensure its way in the relationship. When Gudrun was involved with Loerke, Gerald found no one on his side to fasten his ties with life, so after attempting to strangle Gudrun he found "*what bliss! oh what bliss at last what satisfaction at last*" and went to the ghastly mountains to pursue his death as if it is the womb of his mother. LACAN defines this drive for death as 'a nostalgia for a lost harmony and desire to return to the preoedipal fusion with the mother's breast, the loss of which marked on the psyche in the weaning complex' and further in 1946, he links this Thanatos to the suicidal tendency narcissism. The only bond that could save him through life force was Gudrun but she abhorred the idea of procreating and having children, which we got to know in the beginning: *ooh, but how she hated the infant crying in the night. She would murder it gladly; she would stifle and bury it*". This tentative dismissal of life force is evident in the rabbit scene where a primitive creature symbolizing life and zest is designated with terms as 'lusty', 'demonical' and wild, to render the situation of blooming sentimentality a crude form of self-expression. According to FREUD, "*sexuality is an ambiguous concept, on the other hand, it is self-preservative because it secures the survival of species*



through procreation" and this procreating is a formative process of life force, denied channelizing by Gudrun which rendered the relationship with a death instinct. It is evident from the start as Gudrun felt "an unconquerable desire for deep violence against him." Her fanatical dance in front of Gerald is an outrageous expression of her sadistic voluptuousness. A virile force of stagnation is prevalent in their relationship which makes it devoid of life force as put in apt words by Birkin: "*Aphrodite is born in the first spasm of universal dissolution then the snakes and swans and lotus – marsh flowers- and Gudrun and Gerald – born in the process of destruction creation*".

## CONCLUSION

In its progression towards a more holistic view of life, Feminism had broken numerous glass ceilings, paving the way to a more unified society. Owing to the accomplishments of Feminism, Post-feminism ushered claiming newer grounds and liberation in more subtle ways of life. Expounding these ideologies, women became feminine unashamedly pursuing the life force in their relationships, further propagating fertile land for a bright-eyed generation. Contrastingly *Women in Love* and *Fifty Shades Trilogy*, written in a difference of almost a century, expound waves of feminism that accentuated the grounds for twenty-first century women's progression with a much positive view of career, marriage and children as a simultaneous pedestal of women's life.

## REFERENCES

- Lawrence, David Herbert. *Women in Love*. Thomas Seltzer, 1920. Paperback
- James, Erika Leonard. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. The Writer's coffee shop, 2011. E-book
- . *Fifty shades darker*. The writer's coffee shop, 2011. E-book
- . *Fifty shades of freed*. The writer's coffee shop, 2011. E-book
- Hassinen, Marjaana. "Reading Post feminism in the Fifty Shades "ITÄ-SUOMEN YLIOPISTO" 2015(1-74)
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Ed. and trans. H. M. Parshley. Penguin Books, 1972. Reprinted 1987.
- Cixous, Helene. "Sorties." *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (2nd edition). Ed. David Lodge. Pearson Education, 1988, 2nd Reprint 2004. pp. 263-270.
- Simpson, Hilary. "Lawrence, Feminism and the War." *D. H. Lawrence*. Ed. and Intro. Peter

- Widdowson. London and New York: Longman, 1992. (Reprinted from H. Simpson's *D. H. Lawrence and Feminism*. London: Croom Helm, 1982.)
- Moi, Toril. "Feminist, Female, Feminine." *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. By Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997. 117-32. Print.
- Nelson, Heather Lea, "The Law and the Lady: Consent and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature" (2015). *Open Access Dissertations*. 525.
- Attwood, Fiona. "Through the Looking Glass? Sexual Agency and Subjectification Online." Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff. 203-214.
- Shachar, Hila. "A Post-Feminist Romance: Love, Gender and Intertextuality in Stephenie Meyer's Saga." *Theorizing Twilight: Essays on What's at Stake in a Post- Vampire World*. Ed. Maggie Parke and Natalie Wilson. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011. 147-161. Print.
- Whelehan, Imelda. *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism'*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995. Print. *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism*. London: The Women's Press, 2000. Print.
- Shaw, Bernard. *Man and Superman: a Comedy and a Philosophy*. Indo-European Publishing, 2010.
- Takashi, Toyokuni. "Women in Love: A Study of Three Relationship." *Memoirs of the Muroan Institute of Technology & Culture Studies* Vol. 7 (1971): 285-322
- Khaneghah, Rahim Noori. "The Eros-Thanatos Conflict in DH Lawrence's Women in Love: A Psychoanalytical Study". *Journal of Applied Environmental and Biological Sciences* Vol 5 (2015): 555-560
- Khaneghah, Rahim Noori. "The Eros-Thanatos Conflict in D.H. Lawrence's Women in Love: A Psychoanalytical Study." *Journal of Applied Environmental and Biological Sciences* Vol 5 (2015): 555- 560
- Mishra, P & Agarwal, S. "Interrogating Women Identity in the Novels of Kamala Markandaya". *MIT International Journal of English Language & Literature*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2014): 51-59
- Mishra, P. Dasila, S & Mishra, S.K. "Feminine Sensibility In Shashi Deshpande's Roots And Shadows: A Critical Study". *Dronacharya Research Journal*, Vol. IV, Issue. I (2012) 48-52
- Mishra, S.K. Strengths Of Women And Human Rights, - *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, Vol 5, Issue-2 April-June, 2018. 709-711
- Nelson, Heather Lea, "The Law and the Lady: Consent and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature" (2015). *Open Access Dissertations*. 525. [https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open\\_access\\_dissertations/525](https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/open_access_dissertations/525)