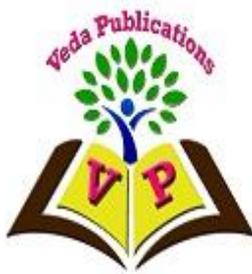


**D.H. LAWRENCE: THE REJECTION AND RESURRECTION OF THE GENIUS**

Vinita Singh

*(PGT, Government Boys Senior Secondary School, Rajendra Nagar, Patna)***ABSTRACT**

Years after his death, Lawrence enjoys more widespread renown than he did during his lifetime. During his lifetime his writings and doctrines were misunderstood and rejected by the public as well as the great masters from Henry James to T.S. Eliot. It is through the relentless efforts and ministrations of a great critic, F.R. Leavis and an industrious scholar Harry T. Moore and other scholars like Dorothy Van Ghent and Mark Spilka that Lawrence finally got his due and emerged as one of the most prominent writers of modern times.

Keywords: *Frieda Lawrence, New Criticism, T.S. Eliot, Blackmur, Richard Adlington, Henry James, F.R. Leavis, great tradition, Harry T. Moore, Dorothy Van Ghent, Mark Spilka.*



D.H. Lawrence was accorded his fair share of respect and renown as a great literary artist only after his death. Lawrence could never make his peace with his times. All his life, the epithet of a 'genius' clung to him, but more often than not, reluctantly. Frieda Lawrence's heartfelt lament helps us see things in perspective 'when I think that nobody wanted Lawrence's amazing genius, how he was jeered at, suppressed, turned into nothing, patronized at best, the stupidity of our civilization comes home to me. How necessary he was! How badly needed! Now that he is dead and his great love for his fellow-men is no longer there in the flesh, people sentimentalise over him critics indeed! Had they been able to take instead of criticizing, how much richer their own lives might have been!'

What Lawrence did get during his life was the trouble to get his novels published, if they did get published –the trauma of getting them banned or suppressed –and the anguish of being rejected by the public as well as the great masters – Henry James to T.S. Eliot. 'I am so sick', he wrote on having *The Rainbow* suppressed, 'in body and soul, that if I don't go away I shall die.' Anticipating the fate of *Women in Love* he wrote, 'I think everybody else will hate it. But this cannot be helped..... And it is another world, in which I can live apart from this foul world which I will not accept or acknowledge or even enter. The world of my novel is big and fearless –Yes, I love it, and love it passionately.'

Richard Adlington's description of the difficulties Lawrence had to face all his life, helps us understand things much better. 'Such a lot of nonsense has been written about Lawrence, as well as stuff which is either stupidly uncomprehending or downright malevolent. I don't want to add to any of it..... This made me think of the ridiculously false and cruel things which have been written or said about Lawrence. People have been terribly eager to point out his faults before ever they allowed themselves to recognize his qualities and achievements; and they've tried to explain him away long before they understood him. Like every creative man, Lawrence suffered from the hundreds of people who would like to create, and can't. The unconscious envy of this type disguises itself as 'critical standards,' and its

attack is always against the essentially creative and original artist. I don't mean that Lawrence wasn't appreciated as a writer. From the Garnetts and Hueffer at the beginning, on to Aldous Huxley at the end, there were always distinguished men who admired him, as well as a growing number of silent people who bought his books. But how much there was against him! The Home Office with its policemen and beastly War-time spies; many of the reviewers; the huge stupid puritanical middle class; and all the nasty busybodies who are always so busy watching and warding other people's morals. It was a lot for a poor miner's son to fight, even though he was a great writer. I do think it is up to us to see that his courage and energy are not misrepresented and betrayed. I often think that the biggest blow Lawrence ever received was the prosecution of *The Rainbow*.....' Adlington's *Introduction to the Apocalypse*, apart from being relevant, also provides a wonderful insight into the persona of D.H. Lawrence.

It is so many years after his death that Lawrence finally got his due. His complete works got printed, his tales and poems were widely anthologised and two books and a tale were made into movies. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, suppressed for so long, was released in England and America and became a best seller. In the last decades, critical studies, biographies, and many assorted texts and essays, as well as travel calendars and collected letters appeared. Lawrence became significant in the literary world. Now he is recognized as the foremost English novelist of his generation and he begins to take his seat among the important modern novelists like Joyce, Mann, Proust, Faulkner and Kafka. As far as a popular audience is concerned, he even begins to exceed the more famous masters.

The Lawrence Revival, however has to be seen in the perspective of what degree of opposition Lawrence had to face during his lifetime. It is important to notice that Lawrence had been prosecuted for the propagation of theories and doctrines, which he was not even the first to initiate. As Richard Adlington points out, before Lawrence, the Primacy of Intellect had been doubted by Bergson, the Psychology of the Unconscious had been formulated by Freud and the whole system of



values of the European civilization had been rejected in their different ways by Tolstoy and Nietzsche and even Dostoevsky. One is forced to wonder, then, for what Lawrence had been punished.

Maybe he was treated differently because he was English, but the main difference lies in the fact that he was, essentially, a poet – a poet who finds prose a more effective medium. He could not help being a preacher and a poet. It was the preacher, according to Richard Adlington, who 'brought the house down on his own head.' For Lawrence, the quality of feelings, intensity of sensations and passions are more important than intellect. He is the very antithesis of Bernard Shaw- a fanatic of the intellect and who was at the peak of his powers and influence when Lawrence began writing. Whereas the Fabians believed that anything could be achieved by the human intellect, Lawrence's conviction was that intellect was a dangerous thing leading to death.

Much of the hostility which Lawrence had to endure was due to his rejection of the sovereignty of the intellect. It made him seem eccentric, and thereby estranged the intellectuals. His rejection of 'organized religion' offended the enormous number of people who continued to be enthralled by it. For Lawrence, the so-called 'spiritual' values had no interest. His seriousness about sexual love, at a time when sexual desire was considered base, impure and sinful, made his alienation complete. The grand Revival of Lawrence is a result of the Critical Renaissance that has taken place. A new approach has now rescued Lawrence from possessive memorialists, sex cultists, hostile liberals and the religious purists who had destroyed his reputation in the Thirties.

Lawrence had emerged as a homosexual fascist preoccupied with sex, a mindless and misguided genius scarcely worthy of attention. By the early Forties, the number of books and essays on him had noticeably dwindled. But then, in the mid- Fifties, the new flood of entries began. A movement called the '*New Criticism*' was gaining strength in the academic field in the late thirties, when Lawrence's stock was falling. It advocated close textual analysis rather than biographical and ideological studies, subordinating life to text. This approach was

potentially beneficial for Lawrence, since the attacks on Lawrence, the man and the ideologist, had always overshadowed his work. But the New critics also favoured 'tradition', conscious and impersonal artistry and befitting contextual beliefs. It seemed that Lawrence fell short on all these counts.

We find Lawrence being attacked by T.S. Eliot as a religious heretic in sensibility, the product of 'vague hymn-singing pietism' or decaying Protestantism. He found him ignorant and untrained, snobbish and humourless, insensitive to 'ordinary social morality,' and given to 'distinct sexual morbidity' and extreme individualism. 'The point is,' he wrote, 'that Lawrence started life wholly free from any restriction of tradition or institution, that he had no guidance except the Inner Light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wandering humanity.' Misguided by that light, Lawrence's vision was intensely spiritual, but also 'spiritually sick,' and likely to mislead unwary readers. I.A. Richards attacked him too for holding magical beliefs in an age of science instead of plunging into the destructive element of unbelief. Whether religious or scientific, then, the Fathers of *New Criticism* found Lawrence's views misleading or untenable in context. Still another contextualist, R.P. Blackmur, attacked Lawrence for favoring inspiration at the expense of craft in poetry. Converting Eliot's religious terms into formal equivalents, he wrote: 'When you depend entirely upon the demon for inspiration, the inner voice, the inner light, you deprive yourself of any external criterion to show whether the demon is working or not.' The deceitful inner guide – inspiration – needs external support from craft or 'rational imagination.' By abandoning such guides, he argued, Lawrence had committed formal heresy, or "the fallacy of expressive form," and had left us with poetic 'ruins'.

However, latent tendencies have emerged among *New Critics* within the last few decades, which have made them more receptive to 'heretical' achievements. Close reader and renegade moralist, F.R. Leavis combines the qualities of two American critics, Cleanth Brooks and Yvor Winters. In his book, *The Great Tradition*, Leavis presents a tradition of mature, serious, and complex writing which makes



for greatness. The tradition is formal, in the sense that forms are modes of exploring life, but its writers chiefly show 'a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity.' In Leavis' view these writers, in the field of the English novel, are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad – and D.H. Lawrence. Lawrence is not discussed in *The Great Tradition* except as a capstone for the opening chapter. But by 1950 Leavis had begun to write those essays, published in *Scrutiny* and later gathered into book form, which largely induced the Lawrence revival.

Nowhere is Leavis' divergence from Eliot more apparent as in the case of Lawrence, whom he defended from Eliot's charges with polemical fervour. Eliot himself, in a later recantation, had modified those charges but, as Leavis rightly saw, he still considered Lawrence an example of 'the crippling effect upon men of letters of not having been brought up in the environment of a living and central tradition.' As a bona fide Englishman, Leavis now charged Eliot with ignorance of English culture. Far from being uneducated and untrained, he argued, Lawrence had led 'an extraordinarily active intellectual life' among youthful friends; he had read widely and had made the most of later training at Nottingham University. As for 'vague hymn-singing pietism,' which Eliot had deplored, Leavis cited the 'strong intellectual tradition' among Congregationalists, their stimulation of strenuous inquiry and moral seriousness, which Lawrence had transposed to his work. Thus, against Eliot's orthodoxy and urban gentility, Leavis cited 'heretic' vitality and provincial vigour. By *New Critical* polemics he placed Lawrence in the 'great tradition' of intelligent moral sensibilities, from Austen through Conrad – a tradition, paradoxically, of individualistic moralists. We have only just begun to gauge the effect of that grouping upon young English redbrick scholars, for whom Leavis and Lawrence are culture heroes.

Leavis' long interpretations of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* remain definitive; his readings of *The Captain's Doll*, *St. Mawr*, and *Daughters of the Vicar* and his discriminating work with other *tales* have helped to establish something like a Lawrence

Canon. He has been instrumental, in fact, in another *New Critical* process: the creation of new hierarchies of accepted texts. Largely through Leavis' efforts, *Women in Love* and *The Rainbow* are now recognized as Lawrence's greatest novels; *Sons and Lovers* has slipped to third place, *Lady Chatterley* to fourth, and *The Plumed Serpent* makes a dubious fifth; then come the longer *tales* – *The Captain's Doll*, *The Fox*, *St. Mawr*, *The Man Who Died*, *The Virgin* and *The Gypsy* – in what constitutes an impressive body of major fiction.

Due to Leavis' amazing powers of critical penetration, Lawrence's novels were seen in a new light. His readings are, for the most part, extraordinarily persuasive; In *Women in Love*, for instance, Leavis demonstrates an integrative intelligence in Lawrence, and a place for intelligence *per se*, which few critics had allowed. Its critique of the mind which tries to dominate and exploit life-sources, as opposed to the mind used instrumentally to define and abet conditions for organic life, was first explained by Leavis. It was Leavis too who replaced the erroneous label, 'religion of sex,' with 'full spontaneous being' as Lawrence's chief concern.

Leavis openly appreciates the richness of rendered life in Lawrence, the normative value of his dramatized distinctions, his neglected powers of characterization, the vitality of wit in his shorter tales, and other attributes denied or submerged by early detractors. With characteristic firmness, he has judged and discarded works which fail to meet his exacting standards. We may quarrel with his exactions, we may question his inclusions and exclusions, we may deplore his ardours and recriminations; but Leavis remains, for all that, the ablest of Lawrence critics and the chief progenitor of his Revival.

After Leavis, it is the American scholar, Harry T. Moore, who has helped promote the Lawrence Revival. Moore's contribution is not primarily critical; but his indefatigable industry, uncommon sense, and temperate judgment have served critical goals. In the doldrums Forties, Moore spoke of Lawrence as 'The Great Unread' and raised the forlorn cry, 'Why Not Read Lawrence Too?' His belief that Lawrence should be read, that his works provide 'one of the richest



reading experiences of our time,' suggests the nature of his service. In 1951 Moore published *The Life and Works of D.H. Lawrence*, a critical biography which subordinated 'life' to 'works,' and which made 'the fullest survey yet.... of Lawrence's writings.' Moore brought to his task an incomparable advantage: he had never met the author, had no memories to record, no personal stake in possessing or effacing him. His ability to take in stride his aberrations and follies, and to measure them against compensatory charms, was cleansing and corrective. That same ability, applied to the whole sweep of Lawrence's works, placed them in perspective for other critics.

Moore was the first to connect *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* with symbolism as an enriching technique. His chief contribution consists, however, in his amazing output of useful texts for Lawrence scholars: *D.H. Lawrence's Letters to Bertrand Russell : The Life and Works*, a group of Lawrence's essays called *Sex, Literature and Censorship : A Second Biography, The Intelligent Heart*, with new material on Lawrence's youth; *Poste Restante : A Lawrence Travel Calendar*; two anthologies of critical essays on Lawrence, *The Achievement of D.H. Lawrence with Frederick Hoffman*, and *A D.H. Lawrence Miscellany*; and finally *The Collected Letters* in two volumes.

The Lawrence Revival thus gathered force through the ministrations of a great critic and an industrious scholar. Father Tiverton, an English critic who connects Lawrence with Christian thought says that Lawrence had 'reached the point in imaginative being at which the preacher and the poet coincide, since the poem is the sermon.'

Dorothy Van Ghent, in *The English Novel: Form and Function*, is troubled at first by Lawrence's apparent neglect of formal niceties. 'D. H. Lawrence's sensitivity to twentieth century chaos was peculiarly intense', she writes, 'and his passion for order was similarly intense; but this sensitivity and this passion did not lead him to concentrate on refinements and subtleties of novelistic technique in the direction laid out, for instance, by James and Conrad.' She implies, however, that Lawrence eludes this art tradition and finds his own techniques for exploring vital problems: 'We need to approach Lawrence with a good deal of humility about 'art,' and a good deal of patience for

the disappointments he frequently offers as an artist, for it is only thus that we shall be able to appreciate the innovations he actually made in the novel as well as the importance and profundity of his vision of modern life.' Here, certainly, there is an abandonment of puristic qualms and a willingness to explore imperfect triumphs in a new aesthetic vein. The novel in question is *Sons and Lovers*. She examines it, not in Freudian terms, but through the Lawrencean idea of 'an organic disturbance in the relationships of men and women'. Miss Van Ghent finds Lawrence 'the most hopeful modern writer, because he looks beyond the human to the nonhuman, which can be discovered within the human.' By foregoing formal niceties and Freudian expectations, by relating form instead to Lawrence's assumptions, Miss Van Ghent discovers what other critics often overlook: as early as *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence was using new techniques to fathom meanings of enormous consequence.

In *The Love Ethic of D.H. Lawrence*, Mark Spilka tries to illuminate the Lawrencean idea of responsibility for the quality of one's being, and for its development through love, friendship, and creative labour. In five important novels –*Sons and Lovers, The Rainbow, Women in Love, Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Man Who Died* – Lawrence had developed a concrete vision of experience with normative value for his readers; that he had tried to set forth the conditions of manhood, womanhood, and marriage as they make for individual and, in the case of *The Man Who Died*, for social regeneration; that the attempt was decidedly artistic, but in the vein of prophetic art which enables us to grasp new moral possibilities. Spilka agrees with Harry Moore, that Lawrence is most successful when his prophetic side 'is best realized in the expressional.'

The main concentration of the Lawrence Revival has been on his novels. The revival had indeed been generated by recovery of the novels –as Lawrence's chief métier. And here the title of Leavis' collected essays, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, seems definitive. In the meantime, the *tales* and longer stories have failed to attract distinctive criticism, except from Leavis and Graham Hough, who treat



them as subordinate triumphs. But to subordinate the *tales* is itself significant. Writing in 1942, H.E. Bates made this prediction: 'Later generations will react to the novels of Lawrence much as we now react to the novels of Hardy. The philosophical rumblings will date; the wonderful pictures, the life directly projected, will remain. From such a test the short stories will emerge as the more durable achievement.'

This, however, cannot be accepted wholeheartedly. The emergence of moral formalism has made the novels, imperfect as they often are, seem more durable and important than more perfectly finished *tales*. A story like *The Prussian Officer* or *The Blind Man* cannot offer as much rendered life as novels like *The Rainbow* or *Women in Love* do, whose 'intention is so tremendous, so central to our lives', says Schorer, that we must learn to tolerate their flaws. We can agree with Leavis when he calls the tales a body of creative work which would alone insure greatness. But we must also agree with Hough that they are byproducts of the novels –not the 'growing points' of Lawrence's fiction, but surplus creations, more compact and fully realized than the novels, less preachy and repetitious.

The attention of many of the recent critics of Lawrence has shifted to his poetry. Taking Blackmur's attack as their point of departure, these critics either defend 'expressive form' as a poetic mode or show that Lawrence goes beyond it. Expressive form, says Blackmur, is directly communicated feeling, unmediated by form; it springs from the belief 'that if a thing is only intensely enough felt its mere expression in words will give it satisfactory form.' For English critics like A. Alvarez and V. de S. Pinto, however, expressive form in Lawrence transcends the level of personal outburst and requires 'instinctive' craftsmanship. Pinto places it in the romantic tradition of 'organic form', by which poems are shaped from within so as to capture living moments of experience rather than perfected bygone moments or static moments in futurity.

Lawrence emerged as a major English Novelist, but sadly a quarter century after his death, when his life and ideology were finally assimilated.

His hostile critics like Anthony West, Katherine Anne Porter, the assorted censors, the new Freudians and the old formalists kept repeating the charges made on Lawrence in the Thirties, but in a much feeble tone. A breakthrough has been achieved in criticism and biography, and Lawrence takes his stance as A Great Prophetic Artist. The 'Genius' finally got his due.

"But my mission is over, and my teaching is finished and death has saved me from my own salvation. Oh Madeleine, I want to take my single way in life, which is my portion. My public life is over, the life of my self importance"

D.H. Lawrence

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