



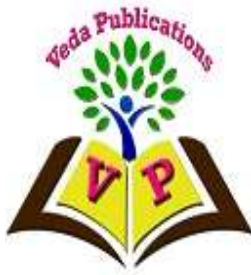
THE FUNCTION OF POWER AND ROLE OF SEXUALITY: D.H. LAWRENCE'S WOMEN IN LOVE

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ABSTRACT



Women in Love is scrutinized as a significant tool by D.H Lawrence through which he was able to explore the relationship between power and sex in the social institution. The interdependency of sex and power force us to question how power is measured in the sexual context. Is it measured by dominance or submission in the sexual relationship irrespective of gender? One can notice the tool of power used by characters in the novel to maintain their sense of superiority over their partners, animals and machines, breaking all stereotypes by discarding the fixed gender role. The exertion of power does not have only pessimistic approach to the subject matter in terms of male dominance but should be analyzed from the another perspective as well. In the patriarchal world women's sexuality had been suppressed considering a taboo. But D.H Lawrence provides the women with ample of space in his novel unraveling their power over sexuality. He has allowed the female characters to portray themselves out of the darkness to discuss their desire of sex and will to power on the social platform. In order to sustain their individuality, women need to resist against the orthodox train of beliefs by exercising their power over sex and accepting their true passion. Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* provides the vivid account of treatment of sex as oppressive element of the society through his theory of 'repressive hypothesis'. To critique the role of sexuality this paper allow us to redefine the significant terms such as Gender, Sex, Power, Homosexuality and Heterosexuality considering the work of Monique Witting, Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Foucault and so on.

Keywords: *Sexuality, Industrialization, Power, Gender*



Women in Love by D.H Lawrence is the most interesting and comprehensive work that attempts to critique modern British society. His work can be analyzed through the theorist Michel Foucault's ideology of power and sex considering his *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault has acknowledged about the term 'repressive hypothesis' that develops an argument – is it the power that has repressed sex or strengthened an individual by acquiring political and sexual liberation by overcoming the repression. D.H Lawrence constantly deals with the theme of homoerotic that can be exemplified through the relationship between Gerald and Rupert Birkin. Gerald's opinion in context of homoerotic notion is:

"it has no basis in nature". This dialogue takes place when Birkin finally confesses his sensuality to Gerald. In response to Birkin's feeling Gerald says: "Surely there cannot be anything as strong as between man and woman. Nature doesn't provide the basis." (Women in Love 352)

Here nature can be critiqued in terms of "repressive hypothesis" that constrains sex establishing a pessimistic relation between sex and power. Nature in Gerald's instinct influenced by society is the power that repressed the sex between man and man relationship. Though notion of homosexuality develops naturally but nature in Gerald's understanding becomes the power to control sex. According to Foucault, power is an element that controls sex and inner desire of sensation. Later on, he broadened his area of research and provided us with the analysis that this power can be productive as it is repressive.

According to 'repressive hypothesis', the treatment of subject like sexuality is suppressed over the past three hundred years. Sex as an object of pleasure is considered as taboo and is never discussed publically. Foucault says that the only way to set ourselves free from repression is to carry out open discussion about the discourse of sex as a tool of pleasure and existence of sex apart from the institution marriage. D.H Lawrence through his novel *Women in Love*, *Sons and lover* and *The Rainbow* came out with the bold discourse of themes related to human sexuality as Oedipus complex, homosexuality and sex under the institution of

marriage. This is the reason his novels were banned and sparked controversy in the society that exerted the norms to confine the sex to the convention of marriage. Lawrence seemed to liberate himself from this repression by dealing with the themes of sex in his novel as confining the discourse of sexuality to the confessional realm of psyche and education will not allow to move out of repression. Lawrence may be influenced by 'Blutbruderschaft' a German practice of deep friendship when men swear by the blood to be friends forever as his mouthpiece Birkin assert him by proposing pledge to loyalty to Gerald:

"We will swear to each other, one day, shall we?" pleaded Birkin. "We will swear to stand by each other – be true to each other – ultimately – infallibly – given to each other, organically – without possibility of taking back". (Women in Love 302)

According to 'Repressive hypothesis' through confession of homoerotic notions Birkin is able to achieve sexual liberation defeated the repression of sex. The character of Birkin reflects Lawrence who resisted the institution of society critiqued as power that constrains sexuality by acknowledging people about man and man relationship in the form of homoerotic feelings. Our knowledge about the concept of homosexuality typified the evolution that society has gone through in dealing with the discourse of sexuality. In Foucault's opinion earlier generation thought of sexual was the same as that of eating habits. He claims that if we cannot judge the character of person through his eating habits similarly homosexuality should not be considered on the basis of judging one's political affiliation and character.

Foucault examines that knowledge, power and discourse [ideas being discussed within the context] are linked. According to him 'Will to knowledge' allows us to know certain things in a particular way that will enhance an exercise of power. Hermione in the novel symbolizes knowledge as the will to power and domination. Birkin's visits to Ursula in the classroom where strong argument between Hermione and Birkin take place, exemplified their character vividly. Birkin's idea considering fact that if children are left without knowledge they



would simply turn out to be animals was disagreed by Hermione. She argues that:

“when we have knowledge, don't we lose everything but knowledge? If I know about flower, don't I lose flower and have only the knowledge”....what this means to me? It means nothing!”(Women in Love 53)

Birkin claimed that he had great lust for power in order to dominate others and replies in response to her above argument:

“Knowledge means everything to you! even your animalism you want it in your head... you want to observe your own animal function....to get mental thrill out of them...passion and the instincts...it all takes place in your head”(Women in Love 54)

Her knowledge or intellect highlighted her will to control as Birkin said:

“It isn't passion at all, it is your will. It's your will. It's your bulling will. You want to clutch things and have them in your power”(Women in Love 54)

The concept of power can be scrutinized in the words of Foucault:

“The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with it's eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace. There was undoubtedly an increase in effectiveness and an extension of the domain controlled; but also a sensualization of power and a gain of pleasure.”(The history of sexuality 46)

The above statement exemplifies the character of Hermione in terms of exercising power for control and complete gain of pleasure over Birkin. On the other hand, Ursula resisted this modern will of power considering it destroyer of life. Foucault unfolds the knowledge as 'ars erotica'[erotic art] and scientia sexuality[science of sexuality]. The ars erotica constitutes the truth about sensual pleasures, one can drive it from experience. The character of Hermione can be critiqued in contrast to erotica art who is unable to recognize the truth of her sexual pleasure in her relationship with Birkin. The scientia sexualis deals with the truth of sex constitute to

form the structure of knowledge-power considering masterful secret that is confession. Here, confession is an essential term described by Foucault as:

“According to him confession has spread its effect far and wide. It plays a part in justice , medicine, education, family relationship and love relation....one confesses one's crime, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires.”(The History of Sexuality 59)

The character of Gerald and Birkin can be studied considering confession one of the main ritual. Birkin was strong enough to confess his love for Ursula as he says:

“What I want is a strange conjunction with you – not meeting and mingling but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single being”.(Women in Love 212)

According to Foucault, confession is the way of finding truth that can be critiqued as liberation from power of repressive hypothesis. This repressive power may be the strong passion rejected by Birkin in his relationship with Ursula. He says:

“We are not broken fragments of one whole rather we are the singling away into purity and clear being of things that were mixed. Rather we are the singling away into purity and clear being of things that the mixed, the unresolved” (Women in Love 293)

On the other hand, Hermione's passion and instinct are too strong that she cannot overcome her sensations. Birkin's confession of man and man relationship has overcome the power that constraints the theme of sexuality and typified his ideologies of truth to survive in the world of civilization. Gerald in contrast to Birkin is a man bounded by the powers failed to confess his love for Birkin and Gudrun. This power exerting over Gerald can be critiqued as mechanical and intellectual overpowering human sensation. The power of passion and its impact on Gerald and Gudrun is scrutinized in chapter 'Rabbit'. It is here Gerald finds himself conscious of fact, his passion that needs to be subdued in order to prevent destruction. Gerald and Gudrun's struggle with rabbit resisted their control causing wound and scratches to both of them. It throws light on their character as Lawrence states:



"There was a league between them abhorrent to them both. They were implicated with each other in abhorrent mysteries." (Women in Love 356)

The force of power in a systematic mechanical control does not allow him to confess his love for the woman [Gudrun] who herself is controlled by the passion of sensation. So, the force exercising on Gerald enables him for any kind of confession that means to liberate himself from the repression of civilization age that become the cause of his death. On the other hand Gudrun was strong enough to move out of the relationship mentally and also to make connection with Loreke. The function of power and role of sexuality can be understood by Foucault's view on the institution of power. The power over life can be critiqued from two different ways. First as Foucault says:

"Power in this instance was essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies and ultimately life itself in order to suppress it." (The History of Sexuality 136)

The above statement is vividly understood in reference to Gerald's relationship with the workers and animals can be understood. In the chapter 'Carpeting' Ursula reflects her aggressiveness towards Gerald's behavior of controlling horse. When Ursula asserts that animals are not to be tortured to which Gerald replies:

"And if your will isn't master, then the horse is master of you". (Women in Love 199)

The above statement clearly reflects his will to power as domination. Also his relationship with workers of coal mine is that one shares with machines. The coal mine can be visualized as the medium through which he can expose his inner will to control others. The exercise industrial power allowed Gerald to be superior as described in the following words:

"...they were all subordinate to him. Although they were ugly and untouched, they were his instrument. Thus he was known as the God of the machines." (Women in Love 326)

Gerald's power over Gudrun also leads to domination and decadence of relationship. Lawrence depicts the power of industrialization over Gerald that permitted him to exercise his control over

Gudrun. Lawrence describes one of their meetings under the bridge in the following words:

"Under the bridge, they came to a standstill, and he lifted her upon his breast. His body vibrated taut and powerful as he closed upon her and crushed her, breathless and dazed and destroyed...."(Women in Love 490)

Gudrun was an artist and carried a strong personality who cannot be controlled as a common woman as she too carries power to dominate Gerald that leads to complete destruction. So, they both exercise their powers that lead to each other's destruction. Second aspect of power over life in the words of Foucault is:

"a power bent on generating forces, making them grow or ordering them rather than on dedicated to impeding them, making them submit or destroying them." (The History of Sexuality 136)

This exercise of power is scrutinized through the relationship of Birkin and Ursula. In the chapter named 'Mino' Ursula expresses her view about the power and dominance. Mino is represented as a male exerting his power over female cat. Ursula feels agitated on seeing Mino attacking female cat also tries to stop him. She says:

"Mino... I don't like you. You are a bully like all the males!"(Women in Love 215)

Birkin justifies the ways of Mino in response to which Ursula compared Birkin with Mino as Birkin compared him to Hermione's dominance. She asserts that males always have the desire to exert power as she says:

"He wants his own way (I know what your fine words work down to) bossiness. I call it Bossiness" (Women in Love 215)

The above statement exemplifies that Ursula is completely against power that may deteriorate one's life through control. We find Birkin to agree with her views in the following words:

"It is the desire to bring this female cat into pure stale equilibrium, a transcendent, and an abiding rapport with the single male. Thus, without him, she is mere wanderer and a fluffy sporadic bit of chaos. It is a *volonte de pouvoir* ...a will to ability...."(Women In Love 215)



Birkin's character is a self- portrait of D.H Lawrence who expresses his views about the function of power as the opposition of mechanized industrialization. The concept of power is also discussed in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* in terms of 'heterosexuality' and 'phallogocentrism'. In order to comment on discourse of power she has provided us with the difference between 'sex' and 'gender' in the following words:

"Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed" (Gender Trouble 9).

According to the above statement gender is fixed as "biology-is-destiny formation". Here Butler developed an argument that if gender is constructed under the set of laws as culturally instructed by society, it is the culture that forms destiny instead of biology. This very concept can be studied in *Women In Love* as characters in the novel are the part of cultured society where norms for male and female are fixed. As initially discussed Gerald refuses to confess his homosexual love by saying "it has no basis in nature". The attributes of nature are well defined by mechanical society by which he was greatly influenced. So, heterosexuality is compulsory aim of reproduction as restriction on sexuality under the social institution. On the other hand, lesbianism or homosexuality leads to the destruction of sex. According to Foucault one can liberate himself from the hegemonic subversion of sex by asserting the power as already discussed under 'repressive hypothesis'. The term 'phallogocentrism' is derived from the two words 'phallus' – refers to male privilege and 'logocentrism' – focuses on the language . Butler examines the function of power considering Foucault's concept of 'Juridico-discourse' where Foucault criticized the 'power' that leads to domination. Butler vividly discussed the role of linguistics and the political aspects that greatly influenced the position of women in the society. Gerald represents the masculine domination who being the God of machines had the desire to exercise his power not only on machines, mare but also on Gudrun. Gudrun being women constitute the

masculine thoughts of domination lost her feminine identity. Therefore role of sexuality can be understood in following words:

"The very concept of sex-as-matter, sex-as-instrument-of-cultural signification, however is discursive formation that act as a naturalized foundation for the nature/culture distinction and the strategies of domination that that distinction supports. The Binary relation between culture and nature promote relationship of hierarchy in which culture freely imposed meaning of nature....safeguarding the ideality of signifier and of signification on the model of domination" (Gender Trouble 47).

In order to acknowledge more about the concept of homosexuality one must prefer '*Same-Sex India*' this will allow us to expand our vision and come across the fact that homosexuality had its roots from ancient time – 2nd C BC – 8th C AD. Though it is about Indian myths and culture but it will aid us to visualize the role that society plays culturally and politically in dealing with the theme of sex. One of the renowned theorist Monique Witting in her essay *One is not Born Women* provides us with the vivid account of lesbian society, heterosexuality and the study of women not being a sex but being a class. She posits Simone de Beauvoir as following:

"One is not born but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is the civilization between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine."(Monique Witting 1)

In respect to the above statement one is not born with the specified or classified attributes differentiating men and women from each other but rather one is the result of one's choice. Our sense of individuality along with the resources society provide help us not only to create our values but to create ourselves. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* evocatively defines the concept of women considering society where women is always treated as 'other' and men is the only observer. As Beauvoir writes:

"The male plays no role or only a secondary one: unfertilized honeybee eggs subdivided



and produce drones; in the case of aphids, male are absent for number of generations and unfertilized produced females.”(The Second Sex 42)

She exemplifies the oppression of women as it is the patriarchal society that provides her with definition of being a woman. According to her women being the part of patriarchal society are suppressed in term of marginalized gender who undergo various psychological, social and cultural domination.

Though D.H Lawrence's *Women in Love* defines the women as the strong characters whose sexuality is not defined by the society. They are individual selves who can exert the power to resist the traditional suppression. As Hermione's bellicose blow on Birkin's head allowed her not only to resist him as the power of domination but also the society asserting control over female sex. According to Foucault's 'repressive hypothesis' characters in the novel carried the power to talk about their sexuality that provide us with the broader vision to scrutinize the character not only as male and female or two different sex or distinct gender but as an individual entity. The function of power and role of sexuality can possibly be interpreted by deep sight into Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Monique Wittig's *One is not Born Woman* also Butler's *Gender Trouble*. The term 'Sexuality' demands the understanding of the other terms as 'Sex', 'Gender', 'Feminist Politics', 'Homosexuality', 'Heterogeneous relationship'. The interpretation of the above terms lead to the exploration of function of power and role of sexuality in the world of civilization. I would like to conclude with Simone de Beauvoir's words:

“Two separate beings, in different circumstances, face to face in freedom and seeking justification of their existence through one another, will always live an adventure full of risk and promise.”(The Second Sex 248)

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