

## Chapter : 8

# D. H. Lawrence : Sons and Lovers

### *Introduction to D. H. Lawrence*

*David Herbert Lawrence was born in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, in 1885, to a coal-miner named John Lawrence and his middle class wife Lydia. The two were incompatible for various reasons, but particularly because of their cultural disparity. The father was scarcely able to write his name, and read the newspaper with great difficulty, while the mother was educated, wrote poetry and had worked as a teacher. Physical attraction had been the only reason that they had married each other. When he was sixteen, David left school to work for a surgical-appliance manufacturer in Nottingham. His older brother, William, to whom his mother was very attached, fell sick and died. The mother recovered from this shock only because David also fell seriously ill, and she nursed him back to health. A close bond developed between the mother and son, so much so, that as a result of her possessiveness, he had to terminate his relationship with a young friend, Jessie. His mother died after a long illness, and he also became ill with tuberculosis. He decided to take up a teaching post in Germany with the help of Professor Weekley, but fell in love with his German wife, Frieda, and later married her. Though he had been writing stories and articles earlier, his first important work was *The Trespasser* published in 1912. Later, he published *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), *Twilight in Italy* (1916), *Women in Love* and *The Lost Girl* (1920), *The Plumed Serpent* (1925) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928). He died in 1930.*

### *Summary of Sons and Lovers*

*The first few pages of the novel introduce us to the setting of the novel, which is the mining village of Bestwood. The mother, Gertrude*

*Morel, is expecting her third child, which they cannot afford. Walter, her husband, is a miner, and as usual, comes home drunk. She comes from an educated family and married him because she was attracted to him because he was virile and a good dancer. He ostensibly is a hard-working homeowner, but in reality, does not own any house and is in debt. She soon realizes that he will never grow mentally or emotionally, and never fails to remind him that he is a failure. An example of their discord is the episode when Walter cuts off William's curly locks, for which she makes him feel terrible. Another such episode is when Walter thrusts her out of the house because she objects to his drinking with Jerry. Lawrence describes vividly how she communes with nature and the floral imagery is extremely effective. Walter tries to show his contrition for her by doing little jobs for her. Soon she gives birth to a son whom she names Paul, and with whom she forms a special relationship. Mrs. Morel always takes the children on her side in the war with Morel, and though his behavior is deplorable, her tactics are inexcusable. Morel falls ill and is confined to bed. There is peace in the house and about a year and a half after Paul's birth, a son is born and is named Arthur, who becomes Morel's favourite. When Morel tries to discipline his children, but Mrs. Morel stops him from striking William, and he loses all authority in his house. As William gets a good job, he moves to the centre of the stage. The only time Morel establishes some rapport with the family is when he has a job to do about the house. Then Paul gets an attack of bronchitis, and though the father also ministers to him, Paul wants his mother near him all the time. They all look forward to William's homecoming at Christmas. In the meanwhile, Paul settles down in his place of work, and once, enjoys an outing with his mother. William returns home with his girl, Lily, and the mother does not approve of her. He returns with her again at Whitsuntide, and they play about with Paul and others in the countryside. Paul likes her, but Mrs. Morel is disgusted and as a result William is in a confused state of mind. He returns to London and falls ill. Mrs. Morel goes to nurse him, but he becomes delirious and dies. She is distraught over his death but survives because Paul falls seriously ill and has to be nursed back to health. The bond between them becomes stronger than ever, which may create problems for him later.*

*In Part II of the book Paul takes up his friendship with the Leivers*

family, particularly with Miriam, who is their pretty sixteen-year old daughter. As Paul and Miriam pursue their common interests in nature and books, Mrs. Morel begins subtly and indirectly, to reject Miriam. When Paul is twenty, the family decides to spend a holiday by the sea at Mablethorpe. Taking Miriam and other friends with him, Paul joins his family in the outing with a great spirit of adventure. During the holiday, Mrs. Morel's resentment towards Miriam increases, and Paul is irritated because she is unresponsive to his amorous advances. One day, Paul meets Miriam in the company of Clara Dawes, of whom he approves wholeheartedly. Miriam realizes that his bond with his mother is such a strong one that it pulls him away. She decides that he has higher and lower desires, and that, if through Clara, she can burn away the lower ones, she might have him for herself. Paul's bond with his mother is becoming stronger but also a little bizarre, as is seen when he takes her on a holiday to Lincoln. Paul tells her about Clara and she is glad that Clara is available to Paul because Clara, she feels, will take his body but leave his soul to her. Paul sends a letter to Miriam telling her of his decision not to continue with her any longer. He then begins to see more of Clara and his passion for her increases. He begins to visit her at her house, and soon becomes her lover. At home, he announces his break with Miriam, and his mother, sensing his anguish, consoles him with a few words of approval. Clara's rejected husband, Baxter Dawes, comes to know about them and one day, insults Paul in the bar until he throws a glass of beer in Baxter's face. His feelings for Baxter vary between pity and hate, probably because he is a father-figure to him. Though Paul lives with Clara for some time, he feels that love stifles him, crushes his creativity, and decides to break off. Paul's mother is taken ill and the family realizes that her illness has no cure, and that she has to be dosed with morphia to reduce the pain. When her condition worsens, one day Paul and Annie give her an overdose of morphia and she dies. After his mother's death, life seems to be a void for him and everything has an air of unreality. He meets Miriam but their relationship does not improve, and they decide to part. Paul travels to the country and gazes at the night sky. He thinks again of his mother but does not give in to his emotions. He strides quickly towards the lights of the city, towards life and hope.

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## **8.0 Objectives**

Friends, a study of this chapter will enable you to :-

- a) Analyse the characters in Sons and Lovers
- b) Analyse the structure of the novel
- c) Study it as an autobiographical novel
- d) Study the novel as a reflection of industrial society

## **8.1 Introduction**

While studying the novel by Joseph Conrad in the previous chapter, we observed that though Conrad depicted man in the context of society, his focus was more on the internal conflict within the man rather than the external one. D.H.Lawrence, in his Sons and Lovers, does show the conflict within the protagonist's mind, but gives equal importance to interpersonal relationships. Eg., the mother-son, the father-son, the husband-wife as well as the man-woman relationship. Unlike Conrad, he does not make use of the multiple-narrator method, but we see the events from the point of view of the protagonist.

## 8.2 Analysis of Characters in Sons and Lovers

Paul's character is moulded right from the time his mother was pregnant with him. So, in the very first chapter of the novel, Walter has an argument with his wife and pushes her out into the garden. Gertrude, pregnant with Paul, walks in the garden and feels the presence of the life force in nature because she is intensely conscious of the stars, the moonlight, the flowers and above all, the heady perfume of the flowers. She is also very conscious of the child within her body and we realize that this child is going to be a very special one for her. When Paul is a child, he gets an attack of bronchitis, and has to stay at home to recover. At that time, she has set her hopes on William, but is also very attached to Paul, while he lies on the couch observing and admiring her. Paul is a very shy child, and hates doing jobs like collecting money for his father or scanning advertisements in the papers for a position suitable. He enjoys the company of his mother the most, as when they spend a day out in the city or in the countryside. He loves spending money to buy little gifts for her and brings home the prizes he wins to her as well as the money he earns at his job. After William's death, it is Paul's illness which saves her from calamity. Paul's association with Miriam is, at first, a charming boy-girl friendship which is spoiled by the mother's possessiveness. Paul realizes what is happening, but is helpless before his mother's blackmailing techniques as well as his own inability to break free from her. Both Miriam and his mother feel that an affair with Clara will do him good from their own point of view, but after it is over, Paul knows that he cannot have a normal relationship with any woman as long as his mother is alive. Though Paul resents his father (a classic example of the Oedipus complex), he admires his strength and virility, and this attitude is reflected in his love-hate relationship with Baxter. Paul's unnatural relationship with his mother is clearly seen when he advises her to detach herself from his father. When the mother dies after the overdose of morphia given by Paul, one would expect him to walk towards self-destruction, as he does at first. With his anchor, his mother gone, he is a broken spirit, restless and directionless. But Lawrence shows that a tenuous link holds him to sanity and he makes a superhuman effort to move away from death and towards life.

Mrs. Morel comes from a middle class background, and hence has rigid morals and values which she realizes Walter does not have, but wants her children to follow. She loves discussions, loves to listen to intellectual talk, neither of which she can get after her marriage to Walter. Her life is drab, lacking promise of personal and social fulfillment. Above all, she feels betrayed and disillusioned by her husband, who has fallen down on his early matrimonial promises because he has neither the social respectability nor the monetary security she wanted. In her disappointment, she turns first to William, and after his death, to Paul, for fulfillment. She places all her feelings and hopes in her sons, casting off her husband altogether. Her outlook and character are set at the very beginning of the novel, and nothing can stop her but death.

Miriam, is the first woman with whom Paul tries to establish a relationship, with whom he has a lot in common. He derives stimulus, inspiration from her, but dislikes her overemotional intensity and sacrificial spirituality.. She is timid and apprehensive (eg. of feeding hens, of riding the swing), which hints at her sexual incapacity. On the other hand, with Clara, Paul finds fulfillment of physical passion, of the life force of the universe. Though he finds joy and an elemental vitality, his relationship with Clara is sketchy outside their physical passion. Perhaps this is why both Mrs. Morel as well as Miriam feel that Clara is harmless. In fact, Mrs. Morel is afraid of Miriam because Paul enjoys special rapport with her. Though Paul at first thinks there is something lacking in the women, he later realizes that the insufficiency lies him and not in anyone else. This is why he is glad when she goes back to Baxter Dawes.

Both Walter Morel and Baxter Dawes are very earthy, physical men. Lawrence draws Walter, in particular, very vividly. Along with his deceit before marriage, drunkenness, savagery, self-pity, insensitivity he wins sympathy through his sheer vitality as well as his delegation to the most unimportant position in the household by the family. Baxter is the father-figure, a paler version of Walter.

## 8.2 Check your progress

**Match the following :-**

|              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| Mrs. Morel   | drunken       |
| Walter Morel | overemotional |
| Miriam       | passionate    |
| Clara        | possessive    |

## 8.3 The structure of Sons and Lovers - Is it two separate novels?

The novel is made up of two parts, each of which is made up of several chapters. The novel is the story of the protagonist from birth through childhood to youth. Part I of the novel is often regarded as the more vivid and appealing one, while Part II is more drawn-out and less interesting. Many critics often say that these various units, the chapters or the two parts, are not really connected. But the counter-argument is that the interconnection between the actions arising out of the characters binds them together. The novel begins with the early married life of the Morels to the last scene when Paul turns from death and walks towards lights and life. The novel has several turning points, eg., when Mrs. Morel rejects her husband and turns to her children, or when William dies, etc. Though such turning points occur again and again in the novel, the mother's obsessive love for Paul cements them together. Thus, the harsh setting, the parental disagreements, the rejection of the father, Paul's efforts to transfer his love for his mother first to Miriam and then to Clara, his rejection of the two and submission to his mother, all are carried forward by their own momentum to the conclusion. The various chapters and the two parts are joined into one whole, and do not appear to be disconnected and the novel is not lacking in form.

## 8.3 Check Your Progress.

**Answer in one sentence :-**

Name one factor that binds the novel into a single whole.

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## 8.4 Sons and Lovers as an autobiographical novel

The source of the novel is the life of D. H. Lawrence, fictionalized in the character of Paul Morel. The autobiographical details, which at times are infused in the account of his journey towards selfhood are numerous. Eg., the Nottingham setting, the disappointment of Mrs. Morel's aspirations, her rejection of Mr. Morel, Paul's conflicts, his unsatisfactory relationship with women, the death of his mother, his final turning away from death towards light and life, etc.

### 8.4 Check Your Progress.

**Answer in two sentences :-**

Mention any two factors that show the autobiographical element in the novel.

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## 8.5 Sons and Lovers as a reflection of industrial society

Sons and Lovers is set in the mining village of Bestwood, near Nottingham.

This is the place where the colliers working in the coal fields of Nottinghamshire live. The houses are ugly and the ash-pits full of squalor. But the countryside was still unaffected by the Industrial Revolution, and the woodlands, cornfields, brooks and old farms were the same as before. The families living here had their lives centered around their home, school, chapel and the pub. Paul was deeply influenced by the natural beauty of the countryside around, especially Willey Farm, and a trip there, was a great treat for the family. Except for a few episodes, which take place in London or the sea resort, the major part of the novel has this as the background. The novel reflects the life of the working class in England during the early part of the twentieth century. Walter Morel represents the proletariat, being rough, earthy, and knowing a world which consists only of the mines



and the pub. Mrs. Morel represents the narrow evangelicalism of the middle class of this period which aspired for respectability and a better life.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

D. H. Lawrence depicts his characters in the context of their social background, and uses the study of the subconscious to penetrate beneath the surface reactions in life. He thus studies the inner aspects of the human personality. In the next chapter, we are going to study a novel by E. M. Forster, who also studies human nature in the context of society, but also regards the cultural background as an important factor that influences it. D. H. Lawrence does not consider the political or cultural angle at all. His concentration is on the individual in the context of his familial and social background.

## **8.7 Summary**

The novel opens with a description of life in the mining community where the Morel family lives. Paul is born and grows up in an atmosphere of animosity between his parents. The mother tries to find satisfaction by concentrating her attention on her sons. William, the elder one dies and she turns to Paul. As he grows up, he tries to establish a relationship with two women but his mother's hold over him is so strong that he finds himself incapable of doing so. When she dies, he is a broken man, and it is only tremendous effort that he pulls himself away from death and decides to start a new life again. An analysis of the characters enables us to understand better the influence of the mother on the lives of her sons, and that it is Paul's fault and not Miriam's or Clara's that he cannot have a normal relationship with them. It is this factor of the mother's domination and Paul's struggle to maintain his independence that bind the novel's structure into one whole. The autobiographical element is very strong because Lawrence has incorporated many incidents from his own life in the novel.

## Check Your Progress - Answers

### 8.2

|              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| Mrs. Morel   | possessive    |
| Walter Morel | drunken       |
| Miriam       | overemotional |
| Clara        | passionate    |

### 8.3

One of the factors that binds the novel into a single whole is Mrs. Morel's obsessive love for Paul.

### 8.4

One of the factors that shows the autobiographical element in the novel is the Nottingham setting. Another factor is the rejection of her husband by the mother.

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#### **Field Work :**

Read the novel *Women in Love* by D. H. Lawrence.





*Notes*

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