



Class-system and social conflict in sons and lovers

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on “the class system and social conflict” of twentieth century English people in reference to D. H. Lawrence novel, ‘Sons and Lovers’. Here depicts 20th century English society way of life and their sufferings and miseries due to the capitalistic and productive mode of England.

Lawrence has a great impact of this class system towards himself and in his every novel he never failed to depict it in the lives of his characters. Here Paul Morel, who is one of the main characters of the novel portrays how he will never come out the bad effect of that system throughout his life.

Keywords: sons and lovers, social conflict

Introduction

“My God, these folks don’t know how to love – that’s why they love so easily.”

(Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, 127).

Lawrence had been more often seen as a novelist who spurned the contemporary bourgeois society for its ills. But as a thinker the solutions he offered were all of running away from the ruins of modernity into the primitive glory in which man lives in uncorrupted bliss. Two opinions on Lawrence’s political thought, one by Michal Bentley in “Lawrence’s Political Thought: Some English Context, 1906-19” (D. H. Lawrence New Studies, edited by Christopher Heywood) and the other by Jessie Chambers (the real-life Miriam) are important in this regard:

“So far as the political dimension of his thought is concerned, however, the immediate impression is one of patent paucity. Take away Kangaroo and some of the pieces from the Phoenix Collection and surprisingly little direct comment on politics is evident: Indeed, there are obvious senses in which Lawrence is not a political novelist at all.”

Ileana Cura-Sazdanic opines that Lawrence social writing raise some important questions with regard to modern industrial society and its consequences for genuine human living

“Lawrence is clearly at his best as a novelist when he is concerned with his vital study of relationships. This, we believe, constitutes the most relevant part of his social criticism in so far as it indicates the destructive influence of industrialism upon the individual and consequently, upon the whole of our society. Hence, according to Lawrence, the main evil of industrialization lies in “the base forcing all human

energy into competition of mere acquisition” which eventually, destroys the very core of our being.” (D. H. Lawrence as a Critic, 105).

How much ever varied these opinions may be from one another on the social and political though content in Lawrence’s novels, most of them reinforce the underlying presence of ideological content in his novels. However, the effort henceforth would be less of examining clearly stated ideological positions in ‘Sons and Lovers’ and ‘Women in Love’ then to study it in order to decipher positions taken unconsciously by the author which manifest in the text in the form of ambiguities, over emphasis, omissions prejudices etc. The setting in ‘Sons and Lovers’ is that of the age of coming in of industrial capitalism. Lawrence presents the transition from a rural community to an urban society in the novel. It effects a change in the landscape as much as it changes the social and production relations.

“Then some sixty years ago, a sudden change took place. The gin pits were elbowed aside by large mines of the financiers. The coal and iron field of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire was discovered Carston, Waite and Co. appeared. Amid tremendous excitement Lord Palmerston formally opened company’s first mines at Spirney Park, on the edge of Sheerwood forest.” (Sons and Lovers, 3).

This is a distinct change from what was before. There were some gin pits in the same area since the time of Charles 2nd. The pre-industrial Bestwood is described as:

“The cottages of these coal miners, in blocks and pieces here and there, together with odd farms and homes of the stockingers straying over the parish formed the village of Bestwood.” (Sons and Lovers, 3).

Paul's father, Walter Morel, is a miner, whereas his mother once (in her formative years) belonged to a slightly higher class. It may be understood that deep rooted in herself is the consciousness of having belonged to a higher class once financial troubles meant that her family had to take to more laborious means of survival. Mrs. Morel is concerned that her sons William, at first and then, Paul should not follow their father into the pit and wants them to take up clerical job instead. Terry Eagleton describes the family set up of the Morels as part of what is known as the 'sexual division of labour', which in capitalist society takes the form of the male parent being used as the labour power in the productive process while the female parent is left to provide the material and emotional maintenance of him and the labour force of the future (the children) Mrs. Morel remains a house wife throughout the novel.

"Mr. Morel's estrangement from the intense emotional life of the home is due in part to its social division... One which alienates him from his own children and brings them emotionally closer to the mother. If as was with Walter Morel, the father work is especially exhausting and oppressive, his role in the family is likely to be further diminished Morel is reduced to establishing human contact with children through his practical skills about the home." (Literary Theory: An Introduction, 175).

Further he is presented as clumsy. His lack of education makes him less articulate and this further distance him from family. The fatiguing harshly disciplined nature of his work process creates in him a domestic irritability and violence which drives the children deeper into the mother's arms and which spurs on her jealous possessiveness of them. To compensate for his inferior status at work, the father struggles to assert a traditional male authority at home. This estranging his children from him further.

A sense of hierarchization based on class difference is evoked in the description of Walter Morel and Mrs. Morel has what the novel makes out to be the characteristically proletarian in articulateness physicality and passivity.

"Sometime, when she herself wearied of love talk, she tried to open her heart seriously to him. She saw him listen deferentially, but without understanding. This killed her effort at a finer intimacy and she had flashes of fear. Sometimes he restless of an evening. It was not enough for him just to be near her, she realized. She was glad when he set himself to little jobs." (Sons and Lovers, 12).

The way the novel projects Mr. Morel's physicality as against his pronounced inarticulateness reminds one of Edmund Burke's infamous phrase, describing the proletariat: 'Swinish Multitudes'. 'Sons and Lovers' portrays the miners as creatures who live the life of the body than the mind. Eagleton says that

"This is a curious portraiture since in 1912, the year in which Lawrence finished the book, the miners launched

the biggest strike which Britain had ever seen. One year later the year of the novel's publication, the worst mining disaster for a century resulted in a paltry fine for a seriously negligent management and class warfare was every where in air throughout the British coal-fields. These developments with all their acute political awareness and complex Organization were not the action of mindless hulks." (Literary Theory: An Introduction, 176).

The life situations of the central character in 'Sons and Lovers' could be understood better using the Marxist concepts of class-consciousness. E. P. Thompson, in his 'The Making of the English Working Class' says that class is a historical phenomenon unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both the raw material of experience and in consciousness:

"We cannot have love without lovers, nor deference without squires and laborer's and class happen when some men, as a result of common experience (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves and as other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born or enter involuntarily." (The Making of English Working Class; 9).

In 'Sons and Lovers' is depicted a society, which in the process of under going a change from the old productive relations (which could be explained in the feudal paradigm) into capitalist mode of production. In most of the idealist ways of looking at society, there is a tendency to view the relations of production based on which the society is structured as 'given' or already 'determined'. This develops out of a 'casual' way of looking at life which are central to religion, theology and spirituality. This has held sway in western philosophy, which questioned 'causality' of nature and presented an alternative in the 'causality' of things. The 'casual' analysis of the capitalist society tries to understand it coming into existence and the ways it operates where as the casual mode feels that in spite of the ills of such a society, nothing much can be done to change it.

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