

D.H. Lawrence: Philosophy of Fiction

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Abstract

The present study tries to analyse D. H. Lawrence's philosophy of fiction as part of an integrated world outlook. Beside his creative writing, Lawrence wrote prolifically on a host of wide - ranging matters. While Lawrence's non - fictional work has received a considerable degree of attention, there seem to be very few researchers who have analysed Lawrence's philosophical point of view in his fictions. These views have a dimension which is almost religious. His idiom is replete with references to his religious tradition even when the message may seem to contradict the tradition. To highlight this argument, This article has, as far as possible, considered Lawrence's significant fictions and used references from his nonfictional works.



D.H. LAWRENCE: PHILOSOPHY OF FICTION

In order to assess the merit of Lawrence's ideological views as expressed in his novels, one would have to take note of his observations as regarding the creative novelists' need for some form of religion and the philosophy of life. These are born out of his compulsive need as an artist of life reacting intensely to the disturbing social situation around him.

In his fictions, Lawrence projects certain basic human values. To do so, he makes critical observations on his contemporary conditions. The observations are startlingly relevant even today. Lawrence's interests were wide-ranging, and his assimilation of them imaginative. Reflecting on issues which mattered to him, he makes series of comments in his novels. They have a dimension which is almost religious. Lawrence does not profess any particular philosophy. The philosophy of life that he places before his readers is born in the thick of his reflections as a creative artist. He, himself has drawn attention to this in "fantasia of Unconscious:

"This pseudo - philosophy of mine - "Pollyanalytic", as one of my respected critics might say - is deduced from the novels and poems that come unwatched out of one's pen. And then the absolute need which one has for some sort of satisfactory mental attitude towards oneself and things in general makes one try to abstract some definite conclusions from one's experiences as a writer and as a man. The novels and poems are pure passionate experience. These "polyanalytics" are inferences made afterwards from the experiences. (Lawrence, 1971, P.9).

The views expressed in Lawrence's novels relate chiefly to his stand on men, women, their relationships, the socio - political order and, above all, human existence in relation to the circumambient universe.

In his critical essays on "Art and Literature", Lawrence has discussed the importance of the novel as an art - form and the responsibility of the novelist. According to him, a novel should be basically concerned with the trails and tribulations of men and women involved in relationships visible



and invisible. If a novelist fails to do full justice to these, he probes into the basic metaphysics of life. Lawrence had a complaint against Galsworthy Forsytes because as a novelist, he projected only the social side of man, neglecting the subjectivity of human beings. Speaking of Galsworthy's characters Lawrence points out: "They are human enough, since anything in humanity, just as anything in nature is natural. Yet not one of them seem to be really vivid human Being. They are social beings" (MacDonald, 1936, P.540). As Lawrence sees it, it is through one's subjective feelings that one probes towards some form of religion.

As a novelist, Lawrence takes into account the varied facets of human existence. He projects characters which are symbolic expressions of deep urges of men and women visualised imaginatively. It is for this reason that his novels gain in gravity. Another striking aspect of Lawrence's novel is that he is able to draw inferences even from the small incidents of life. In this, he substantiates his claim that there is a due scope for a sensitive novelist to utilise the supple potentialities of a novel as an art medium:

"The novel is a great discovery, far greater than Galileo's telescope or somebody else's wireless. The novel is the highest form of human expression so far attained. Why? Because it is incapable of absolute. In a novel everything is relative to everything else, if the novel is art at all. There may be didactic bits, but they aren't novel. And the author may have didactic 'Purpose' up his sleeve... You can tell me Flaubert had a 'Philosophy', not a 'Purpose' at a rather higher level? And since every novelist, who amounts to anything, has a philosophy - even Balzac - any novel of importance has a 'Purpose'. And not at outs with the passional inspiration" (Inglis, 1979, pp. 161-62).

The last four lines of this excerpt are of great importance in appreciating Lawrence's view point as the creative significance of the novel which is conceived in terms of "passional inspiration". As a creative novelist, Lawrence delighted in projecting in as varied a field and in a



dense as texture as language would permit. His novels combine the talents of an artist and a thinker in a harmonious whole. This is so especially in the case of novels such as Sons and Lovers (1913), The Rainbow (1915), and Women in Love (1921), primarily because in these novels, Lawrence is able to synthesize the contending claims of art and metaphysics imaginatively. These novels reveal the meaning and purpose of life much more than those of other novelists. However, in the later novels his creative expression is examined by his messianic zeal to awaken his readers to the need for working out a better civilized order.

Lawrence's creative mode projects the impulses sprouting out of his unconscious. His novels reveal the meaning and purpose of life. The working out of different shades of reality in his novels, has its own special intensity: "Again I say, don't look for the development of the novel to fall into the form of some other rhythmic form, as when one draws a fiddle - bow across a fine tray delicately sanded; the sand takes line unknown" (Moore, 1962, p.184). Such an approach clearly allows full play to the unconscious impulses, a view point confirmed by the world - renowned psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875-1961) who maintained that the unconscious is pristine source of creativity (p.646).

Lawrence has said that he was primarily, ... "a passionately religious man and my novels must be written from depth of my religious experience" (p.165). His concern with life in all its colour and variety made him examine the basic values of life. It is in the course of striving that he attempted to find out the true bases of religion in modern conditions:

... We go in search of god, following the Holy Ghost, and depending on word. There is no Light. The Holy Ghost is ghostly and invisible ... Yet we hear his strange calling, the strange calling like a hound on scent, away in the unmapped wilderness (Macdonald, 1936, p. 730).

Lawrence is not off the mark when he says that the proper spirit of religion is not known and felt in the course of ordinary day - to - day and



moment - to - moment relationship between men and women, men and men in terms of their contact with the environment.

Cavitch in D. H. Lawrence and the New World (1971) quotes from psychoanalysis and the unconscious in which Lawrence states his extensive idea and trenchant observation: "The whole of life is one long, blind effort at an established polarity with the outer universe, human and non-human, and the whole of modern life is a shrieking failure. It is our fault" (P. Opposite the content).

It is against this background that one can appreciate the importance of his novels "The Rainbow" and "Women in Love." For I consider these novels highly symbolic even though their social texture is sufficiently dense to make the reader somewhat complacent about their cultural and religious importance" (Anoosheh, 1990, p. 53).

Lawrence played with the ideas which would make life fuller, more complete and sane. It is for this reason that he considered unbridled sexuality as insidiously dangerous to optimum growth of human personality. "In a language of oppositions and symbols he argues that the mind is a 'male' principle, and flesh a 'female' principle, and for art to succeed as art in a 'living sense' as 'supreme art', the two must be in a state of true relation (his metaphor is marriage), not imbalance. Developing alongside this thought, are statements on 'true' marriage as a metaphysical partnership (Becket, 2002, pp.55-56). Such an idea is explored in his novels like The Rainbow, Sons and Lovers, Women in Love, Lady Chatterley's Lover, etc. He advocated the cultivation of the "starry singleness" of individuals, especially in man - woman and man - to - man relationships. Man suffers, like Will Brangwen in The Rainbow because he fails to grow into the starry singleness of individuality.



Conclusion

From the explanation above, one notices that as Lawrence developed into a novelist, he kept abreast of contemporary philosophy. He was greatly influenced by the acute observations of the German philosopher, Nietzsche, on Christianity and the instability of modern European civilization. He prized the value of self - restraint and asceticism partly on account of Nietzschean influence and partly owing to the compulsive needs of his art. With Lawrence, notions of instinct, blood - consciousness and oneness with nature, were all catalysed into a world outlook that repudiated the intellect and reason. The romantic heritage is clearly in the ascendant. At a more fundamental level, such extreme repudiation could tend towards a fetishistic cultivation of the individual instinct and individual urges implicit in the romantic outlook. Unchecked, this could result in the cult of Nietzschean, the victory of will over reason, all of which are potentially dangerous as the history of western Europe has shown.



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