

Religion and D.H. Lawrence

Dr. Md. Masleh Uddin

Senior Secondary English Teacher, Mukherjee Seminary, Muzaffarpur, (Bihar) India

Abstract

D.H. Lawrence is a foremost emotional realist of the twentieth century whose sensuous mysticism is the result of the emotional instability of the age caused by scientific advancement and industrial revolution. Religion is based on belief. Here the word “religion” denotes Lawrence’s intense belief in blood which is the chief source of bringing Godhead to man by achieving fullness of spontaneous being. Blood is, nevertheless, the most common metaphor for passion in literary language.

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D.H. Lawrence is a foremost emotional realist of the twentieth century whose sensuous mysticism is the result of the emotional instability of the age caused by scientific advancement and industrial revolution. The modern civilization “as a whole descends like an iron grill to crush the heritage of feeling and faith and the beauty of life.”¹ Ours is essentially a tragic age because the primitive religious bonds are broken and the rise of the machine civilization has cut the modern man adrift from the religion and from himself.

Frieda Lawrence rightly holds:

“My Lorenzo (but the fact is he is not my Lorenzo but all the world’s Lorenzo) is really a religious reformer. He wanted to put religion, that bond with all and everything, back into living and especially sex, that we don’t live like a disturbed ant-hill.”²

Religion is based on belief. Here the word “religion” denotes Lawrence’s intense belief in blood which is the chief source of

bringing Godhead to man by achieving fullness of spontaneous being. Blood is, nevertheless, the most common metaphor for passion in literary language. Though Lawrence uses blood metaphor in a mystical way to convey his “blood consciousness” it still remains traditional. It carries the same meaning as it carries in Shakespeare’s work – a symbol of the impassioned life. It is a staple of European, and especially, German *lebensphilosophie*. Lawrence has given a new dimension to the word by his hymn-singing attitude towards the physicality of life. He wants the liberation of the inner man from his own “idealism” which is the result of personal religious sensibility. In his criticism of the tyrannical modern life he is truly the revolutionary of the primitive life and defines religious faculty as “the inward worship of the creative life-mystery.”³

Lawrence’s is a cosmic consciousness. His religion is deep-rooted in the instinctual core of life. It stresses the need of both spiritual and physical rebirth and rediscovery. Only when this need is fulfilled, man achieves “living organic relations with the cosmos”

and “mystery of touch” appears as an innate religious experience. For, “by the religious faculty” Lawrence means “the inward worship of the creative life-mystery.”⁴ His intuitional consciousness insists that man must know himself but to know himself he must, first, be himself:

“The goal is *not* ideal. The aim is *not* mental consciousness. We want *effectual* human beings, not conscious ones. The final aim is not to *know*, but to *be*. There never was a more risky motto than that: know *thyself*. You’ve got to know yourself as far as possible. But not just for the sake of knowing. You’ve got to know yourself so that you can at least *be* yourself. ‘Be yourself’ is the last motto.”⁵

Again, sound reason behind Lawrence’s religious belief is that like Carlyle and Nietzsche he was born in a very religious home where the mother was the ruler. Like them he, too, was taken out of the warm bath of his early evangelicalism and plunged into the rationalist and scientific scepticism of his time. Carlyle battled against the eighteenth century, Lawrence, on the other hand, battled against the nineteenth century. Theirs was a negative approach to science. Thus, Carlyle ended with religion of his own that was neither Christian nor that of the eighteenth century, Lawrence ended with a religion of his own that was neither Christian nor the popular religion.

His mystery God is nearer to Rilke’s terrible angels: they are objects of desire as well as of fear. Lawrence shares the belief of Rilke: “Every Angels is terrible. Still, though, alas! I invoke you, almost deadly birds of the soul, knowing what you are.”⁶ To him each

man steers towards his own sort of collision with the power of emotion; this Lawrence believes to be the very core of religious experience: an experience of self. His prophetic intention recalls the half-forgotten knowledge, buried as emotion in the unconscious. He believes like Nietzsche that God is dead and nothing remains except self-love, and the Holy Ghost is the power of love in that self.

Lawrence’s thought is deep-rooted in semi-mystical worship of the blood and darkness. He turns from the intellect to the instinct, from the brain to the blood, from the outer light to the inner darkness for salvation.

Mark Spilka is right in saying:

“Lawrence was a religious artist, and that all his work was governed by religious ends. In his fiction, for example, he tried to write a kind of fourth-dimensional prose, so as to give his readers the effect of religious depth.”⁷

Bonamy Dobree, too, holds that Lawrence “is a mystic ... His is a roust religion, to be reached only through an intense appreciation of the physical, especially of the sexual. The religion of which he is priest and prophet is a phallic one.”⁸ Thus, his novels and short novels set forth the conditions of manhood, womanhood and marriage as he feels and understands them in his own life.

The fundamental theological position of the Buddhist Tantras (*Vijrayana*) and that of the Hindu Tantras (*Saktaism*) is the same. The Hindu Tantras believe that male and female (*Siva and Sakti*) are the two aspects of the reality while according to the Buddhist Tantras men and women are nothing but the

manifestation of *Upaya* and *Prajna* in their ultimate nature.

Tantric literature, therefore, deals with a great number of opposing pairs that have to be reunited. The Sun and the Moon must be made one as well as the two mystic veins *ida* and *pingala* symbolic of these two heavily bodies and the two breaths *prana* and *apana*. Above all *prajna* (wisdom) must be joined with *upaya* (the means of attaining it), *Shunya* (the void) with *karma* (compassion).

Martin Wickramasinghe points out only the affinities between Lawrence's sex-mysticism and the Tantra sex-Yogic practice without giving a detailed analysis and mentioning the influence of Tantra on Lawrence, Frederick Carter, too, starts his discussion with the idea of nerve centres "controlling a great power, serpentine dragon-like forces"⁹ that lies within every human being but he never produces or advances any clear evidence regarding the influence of the Tantra on Lawrence's thought.

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Lawrence hates Buddhism, for, his preference is to Hinduism – "I don't like Buddha at the best much prefer Hinduism."¹⁰ it is clear that Lawrence had interest in Hinduism, therefore, in his work he has used terms of Hindu religion and philosophy like *Nirvana*, *Purusa* and *Prakriti*, *Shiva*, *Yoga*, *Om*, *Lotus* etc. in *The Plumed Serpent* the dictum "*Mani Padma om*"¹¹ is a testimony of Lawrence's belief in the Tantric system.

Lawrence believes in the *Kundalini* power. He writes: "There at the navel the first the mystic contemplation of the navel."¹² Hence, he has taken this symbol as "serpent of eternity"¹³ and pins faith on the "solar plexus."¹⁴

Hence, Lawrence's novels and short novels explore most fully the relationship between man and woman and their conflicts. His primary concern is to help us live, by revealing to us our life as a series of living, changing relationships with all the conflicts inherent them.

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13. 'Him with His Tail in His Mouth,' *Phoenix II*, op.cit., p. 427.
14. *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, op. cit., pp. 228-9.