A Psychoanalytic Reading of D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*

Nisha Kumari

**Abstract**

This paper talks about how the psychoanalytical approach could be used in literature to interpret the text, to understand the psychological development of the character and the psyche of the author. Lawrence, being inspired by Freud has produced works like *Sons and Lovers*, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, etc. that cries out for psychoanalytical interpretation of the text. In the novel *Sons and Lover*, the paper focuses on how the over domineering power of the love of a mother and how her jealousy restricts her son’s desire for other women? Ultimately the mother wins by her blood ties over another woman? Also how the early psychological development of the child affects their personality in the later stage of life? In *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, we see how Connie’s repressed sexual desires led her to infidelity in spite of the class difference. Unhappy in married life, due to her husband’s physical disability, Connie has suppressed her desire for a long time. These suppressed desires came out in the form of an outburst of emotions when she sees Mellor. Being driven by the psychic energy or libido, led her to establish sexual affair with the lower class servant and moral dilemma out of her superego.

**Keywords:**

D.H. Lawrence; *Sons and Lovers*; Oedipal Complex; Psychoanalytic Reading; *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*;

**1. Introduction**

Psychoanalysis is both theory and therapeutic practice that helps in treating the patients suffering from anxiety and depression by gaining the insight through free association, dream analysis, catharsis and by making unconscious conscious. Freud in collaboration with Dr. Joseph Breuer studied psychoanalysis. It is Freud who made this term popular. Psychoanalytic reading helps us to understand human behavior on the

* Amity University, Lucknow, India.
basis of theories given by Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalytic criticism and theories are applied to literature to understand human relationship at conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious level. Moreover, it helps us to decipher the hidden motif in the text. The psychoanalytic approach helps us to understand the psychological development of a character and the author’s personality. Therefore, psychoanalysis deals with motives which are hidden or disguised. Freud, Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan are some of the major names who are related to psychoanalysis.

Sigmund Freud, a German psychologist is associated with the term psychoanalysis. He studied conscious and unconscious psyche of the human mind and formulated the theories in the late nineteenth century. He also suggested that dreams has its own significance and tells a lot about human personality and dreams are the outcome of suppressed feelings and desires through defense mechanism. The theory focuses on the importance of childhood experience; the importance of unconscious, sexual and aggressive drives that makes up the personality of the majority of peoples; and how people react differently to the same situation.

In Topographic theory Freud gave the “iceberg” model in which he compares human mind with an “iceberg”. The conscious part of the brain is like the tip of an iceberg which could be seen and a person is aware of his conscious minds such as feelings, emotions, dreams, fantasies, thoughts and memories whereas the unconscious is hidden and unknown, a person is not aware of his personality in this part. Pre-conscious is not the present awareness but it is accessible. Unconscious is hidden for the benefit of an organism because it can trigger an anxiety attack and a person could not bear to look upon them such as memories and emotions related to trauma. According to Freud, we get the motivation from the unconscious part of the brain.

Freud further gave the construct of id, ego and superego in his Structural theory. This theory is based on the psychic development of human beings. Also, an organism is aware of the basic instinct of life that is the birth and the death instinct and the driving force is Libido. Id is the primary instinct and is present in an infant since birth. Id seeks for immediate gratification which is based on the pleasure principle. This principle drives on need such as the need for hunger, sex, thirst. This works out of reality, Ego works on reality principle whereas superego is driven by morality principles. In ego and superego, a person acts consciously on the basis of his own understanding of what is right or wrong socially and individually. People try to suppress their emotions and desires which are morally wrong and socially unacceptable through defense mechanism.

One of the most famous theories given by Freud is “Oedipal complex theory” which focuses on child’s emerging sexuality and Freud applied his Oedipal complex theory to literature and in an attempt to illustrate his theory he took the example of Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex. Oedipus develops intimacy towards his mother and in order to marry her, he kills his father. Likewise, all male children develop intimacy towards their mother and are jealous of their father. In order avoid pain and castration by their father they suppress their sexual desire for their mother and wait for their own sexual experiences. If the child carries on with this complex to the adulthood then they are not able to forge into adult relationships with other women.

Being inspired by Freud, Lawrence used Freud’s Oedipal complex in his novel and this very complex can be seen in the character of Paul Morel. Mrs. Morel unconsciously turned their two sons William and Paul against their father. Both of them envy their father for being a heavy drinker and waste his money in gambling, giving very little money to family. The family suffered from the financial crisis. Always complaining mother ill-treated by her husband made her sons emphasize with her. In Lady Chatterley’s Lover, the structural theory of Freud can use to analyze the character development of heroine Connie.

Therefore, This paper talks about how the psychoanalytical approach could be used in literature to interpret the text, to understand the psychological development of the character and the psyche of the author. Text like Sons and Lovers and Lady Chatterley’s Lover cries out for psychoanalytical interpretation. In the novel Sons and Lover, the paper focuses on the over domineering power of the love of a mother and her jealousy restricts her son's desire for other women. Ultimately the mother wins by her blood ties over another woman. How the early psychological development of the child affects their personality in the later stage of life. In Lady Chatterley’s Lover, we will see how Connie’s repressed sexual desires led her to infidelity in spite of the class difference. Unhappy in married life, due to her husband’s physical disability, Connie has suppressed her desire for a long time. These suppressed desires came out in the form of an outburst of emotions when she sees Mellor. Being driven by psychic energy or libido, led her to establish sexual affair with the lower class servant and moral dilemma out of superego. This paper focuses on the personality development of Connie in Lady Chatterley’s Lover.

2. Research Method

In order to achieve the desired result and to complete this research paper, I have read various books and have gone through various sites and other research papers. I have also explored various books related to my research topic in the libraries. I have gathered all the information and analyzed it and then I had to go through my paper again and again. I have done an extensive research and dived deep to come out with desired
information and this helped me and broadened my knowledge. All in all my exploration enlightened me on various perspective of literature. Finally, I was able to complete my research paper with ample of research that I had done.

3. Results and Analysis

D.H. Lawrence: Life and Works

David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930) was an English novelist, essayist, poet, painter and literary critic. Lawrence’s early childhood experience, his work experience and the conflict between his parents provided the raw material for his literary works. Presently, most of his works serve as a basis for the psychoanalytic reading by various researchers and scholars and give them the deep insight of the unconscious mind and development of the character through the various stages of the life.

D.H. Lawrence was born at Eastwood, in Nottinghamshire, England, on September 11, 1885. He was born to John Lawrence, a heavy drinker who worked as a miner in Brinsley Colliers, and Lydia, a literate former pupil teacher, who worked in lace factory to meet up her family financial crisis. Lawrence childhood witnessed poverty and friction between his parents. He was educated at Nottingham high school and won a scholarship in the county council. In 1901, He then worked as a junior clerk at Haywood’s surgical appliances factory for three months. Later he quitted his job as he suffered from severe bouts of pneumonia. He often visited Hagg’s farm and there he befriended Jessie Chambers and there he developed intimacy with her but it was pure and spiritual and shared common interests which are love for the books. From 1902-1906, Lawrence taught in British School, Eastwood. After the recovery from Pneumonia, he left his teaching job to become a full-fledged writer. It is after the publication of White Peacock when Lawrence’s mother died of cancer. He was then completely devastated for the time being as he was very close to his mother. This particular incident became a turning point in Lawrence life, just as Paul Morel’s life, after the death of Mrs. Morel in Sons and Lovers.

In 1912, Lawrence fell in love with Frieda Weekley, former mistress of Earnest Weekley. She was six years older than him and by her nationality she was German. It was the time of First World War when Lawrence married Frieda. They were harassed by the officials and accused of spying, got severely persecuted from Cornwell in 1917. Exhibition of Lawrence’s paintings was banned and The Rainbow was suppressed because of the offensive content. His passport was seized but he finally managed to leave in 1919. His wanderlust took him to places which suited his ideals like Ceylon, Australia, Italy, and Mexico, which To Lawrence this was a savage pilgrimage. During those years he wrote Aron’s Rod, Kangaroo, and The Boy in the Bush. Lawrence secretly published Lady Chatterley’s Lover in Florence and France in 1928. This text was banned in the United Kingdom and the United States as obscene and pornographic. In 1930, Lawrence died of tuberculosis at Vence in France.

Works of D. H. Lawrence

Lawrence was the most striking figure in the modern literary world. In the nineteen years of his literary career, he produced over forty volumes of fiction including novels and short stories, essays, poetry, and plays.

White Peacock (1911) was the first novel by D.H. Lawrence which launched him into a writing career. The White Peacock can also be compared with the novel of Thomas Hardy and George Eliot on the basis of the vivid description of nature and industrialism. The Trespasser (1912) was the second novel by D.H. Lawrence.

Sons and lovers (1913) is an autobiographical novel. It is considered as one of the finest work of Lawrence. The novel was written during the time when Lawrence’s mother was very sick. This work is dedicated to his mother and shows a strong natal bond towards her. The novel tells the story of the protagonist, Paul Morel, and his psychological development. Also, it tells about the conflict between his parents, Mrs. Gertitude Morel, literate and married to a lower working class, Mr. Morel, a coal miner and a heavy drinker. Paul witnessed the tension and friction between his parents and sympathizes over his mother’s sufferings. Paul and William, Paul’s elder brother was more inclined towards their mother and develops hatred towards their father. These works was followed by The Rainbow (1915), its sequel Women in Love (1920) which is followed by his next novel The Lost Girl in 1920. Aron’s Rod was published in 1922. It is a picaresque novel. Other work of Lawrence is Kangaroo (1923), The Boy and the Bush (1924), The Plumed Serpent (1926), John Thomas and Lady Jane (1927).

Lady Chatterley’s Lover (1928) is among the most notable works of Lawrence. The first edition of this novel was secretly published in Florence, Italy. This particular work of Lawrence was banned in the United Kingdom because of its erotic genre. The novel tells the story of Lady Constance Chatterley and her husband Sir Clifford, a baronet, who got physically crippled in the great war. The story is about the class difference and adulterous relationship of lady Chatterley with a low-class servant to fulfill her suppressed sexual desires.
and her desire to have a child and ultimately found love in him. This novel is followed by *The Escaped Cock* (1929) and his last unfinished novel is *Mr. Noon*.

The other notable work D.H. Lawrence is his short stories- *Odour of Chrysanthemums* (1909), *The Virgin and the Gypsy* (1930) and *The Rocking Horse Winner* (1926). Lawrence wrote around 800 poems and mostly influenced by the poet, Walter Whitman, wrote in free verse. He belongs to the school of Georgian poets. Lawrence’s poem *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers* (1923) is about the nature based on his experience.

The background of Lawrence’s early life, the work experience and his philosophy of life are important to understanding the development of the novel.

**Characteristic Features of his novels**

Lawrence was more successful as a novelist than as a poet. He explores the unconscious part of human psyche. His works show realism and therefore he is a realist. The theme of love and sex, the conflict between man and woman, industrialism and nature are very common in his novels. Lawrence’s life experience provides the raw material for his novel which runs parallel to his life events. Lawrence uses his novel to presents his own philosophy and his own interpretation of life. The works of Lawrence are based on his fundamental ideas. Having read the works of Sigmund Freud, Lawrence wrote his own ideas and interpretation of life in his non-fiction work *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922). Lawrence was highly influenced by Sigmund Freud, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Friedrich Nietzsche and E.M. Foster. Like Hardy, Lawrence uses his own philosophy. He brings out the issues of human existence, the problems they face in a relationship. He widely explores man’s relationship with man and man’s relationship with a woman, nature, and the universe. Lawrence seems to be fully aware of the religious nature of the human sexual relationship and therefore, the treatment of sex his novel is religious, not animalistic. It is the twentieth century when many a great novelist like Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, and Lawrence started using “streams of consciousness” technique as a tool for narration. It is the flow of thoughts that occurs in the mind of character mostly written in words. With the help of this technique, readers know about the psychology of the character. The characters of Lawrence share his thought and greatly resemble him. It can be said that they are a projection of Lawrence conscious and subconscious mind like Birkin in *Women in love*. R.L. Somers in *Kangaroo* and Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*.

Therefore, Lawrence deeply studied and analyzed the unconscious part of the human psyche and presented beautifully through his works. D.H. Lawrence has successfully used psychology in his various novels including *Sons and Lovers* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

**Psychoanalytic Reading of D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers***

D.H. Lawrence’s third novel *Sons and Lovers* is an autobiographical novel. Paul Morel, the hero of the novel shows much resemblance with Lawrence. This text can be understood by applying Freud’s psychoanalytic approach. The psychoanalytic approach considers conscious and unconscious desires, thoughts, sexuality, romance and repression in the family and psychodynamics in the family members, between husband, wife, and children. Psychodynamics of Lawrence’s family is mostly featured in his novel.

**Childhood of Paul Morel**

According to Anthony Beal, “Sons and Lovers is the autobiographical novel that tells so much about the first twenty-five years of his life, about his family and friends and society in which he grew up” (16). Paul, the protagonist of the novel resembles with Lawrence and most of the incidents in the novel run parallel with the authors’ life events. West (1966) says that:

Paul Morel, the hero of Sons and Lovers, is to some extent a self-portrait, and his adventures and sufferings are based largely on Lawrence’s real and fantasy lives; the truth of the novel’s account of his mother’s death, and of the illness leading up to it, is confirmed by Ada Lawrence in her memoir of Lawrence’s youth, and in the memoir by E.T. (who figures in the novel as Miriam). (14)

Paul was a sensitive child who suffered from cold and bronchitis. His poor health brought him close to his mother. Paul witnessed friction between his parent’s marital relationship as well as poverty in the family. Mr. Morel was a heavy drinker and worked in a coal pit, he used to drink and gamble away the money he earned. The family suffered from the financial crisis and Mrs. Morel completely turned to her sons to seek happiness in her life and this made Mr. Morel more aggressive and he used to remain out for a long time and spent very less time with family. Communication became very difficult between father and the sons. Paul’s childhood was psychologically disturbed and his life was centered on his mother. It is mother whom the child seeks first unconsciously. Paul always noticed how unfulfilled life her mother lives and he consciously tries to bring a smile on her face which further satisfies his soul.

**Mother’s Strong and Abnormal Affections**
Mrs. Morel despised her husband and always complained about him to William and Paul. Friction between parents made Paul and William hate their father. She turned them against their father. They hated their father and empathize with their mother. Beal (1966) observes that, The children see their father with their mother’s eyes, and all unite against him: only occasionally, when he is happily engrossed in cobbling boots or mending a kettle, do the children have any contact with him. His wife’s civilized manners have no effect on him (16-17).

Initially, William was dearer to Gertrude Morel but as he grows and reaches his manhood, left his soul to his mother and seeks pleasure with another woman. After the death of William, Paul took his place and supported his family and mother. Paul had an old soul with respect to his age. He was religious as well as the dark side of the soul. Paul remained a virgin for a long time and repressed his sexual desires and fantasies which then converted into his creative genius. When Paul reaches his manhood, he was attracted to Miriam. His love for Miriam was spiritual. Both Miriam and Mrs. Morel fight for Paul’s soul and it is a mother who wins ultimately by the blood ties and blood consciousness. In a letter Lawrence summarized his third novel, Sons, and Lovers:

It follows this idea a woman of character and refinement goes into the lower class and has no satisfaction in her own life. She has had a passion for her husband, so the children are born of passion and have heaps of vitality. But as her sons grow up she selects them as lovers—first the eldest, then the second. These sons are urged into life by their reciprocal love of their mother—urged on and on. But when they come to manhood, they can’t love, because their mother is the strongest power in their lives, and holds them. As soon as the young men came into contact with women, there’s a split. William gives his sex to a dribble, and his mother holds his soul. But the split kills him because he doesn’t know where he is. The next son gets a woman who fights for his soul—fights his mother. The son loves the mother—all the sons hate and are jealous of the father. The battle goes on between the mother and the girl, with the son as an object. The mother gradually proves stronger because of the tie of blood. The son decides to leave his soul in his mother’s hand, and, like his elder brother, go for passion. Then the split begins to tell again. But, almost unconsciously, the mother realizes what the matter is, and begins to die. The son casts off his mistress, attends to his mother dying. He is left in the end naked of everything, with the drift towards death. (Xii – xiii)

Mrs. Morel wanted their son to take her husband’s place. She seemed to be jealous of her son’s affair. Mrs. Morel once quoted, It’s as they say: “A son’s my son till he takes him a wife, But my daughter’s my mother that Miriam wants Paul’s soul not him. Miriam could satisfy his soul whereas Paul’s love for Clara if he would marry someone in future then it would be Miriam. But somewhere Paul was convinced by his mother that Miriam wants Paul’s soul not him. Miriam could satisfy his soul whereas Paul’s love for Clara was sensuous. Clara had warmth and had womanliness in her character that lacked in Miriam. Clara was married but independent. The love making with Miriam was sacrilegious for him whereas the love making with Clara satisfied his id. Due to Paul’s psychological problems the girls suffered as he has witnessed his

A Psychoanalytic Reading of D.H. Lawrence’s Sons and Lovers and Lady Chatterley’s Lover (Nisha Kumari)
Connie was only 23 then and Clifford was 29, without any children. Though their status had been raised, Clifford became baronet and Constance got the title Lady Chatterley, she had something in her life that remained unfulfilled. She was unhappy in her marital life. Her impotent husband could not love her physically due to his disability. Lady Chatterley was stuck in her married life, initially, she was convinced with the viewpoint of Clifford that marriage is a spiritual bond and physical bond has very less significance. She resisted for another six months during the war. He was badly inflicted in the war and when he returned, he returned more or less in bits, with the lower portion of his body paralyzed. Connie was only 23 then and Clifford was 29, without any children. Though their status had been raised, Clifford became baronet and Constance got the title Lady Chatterley, she had something in her life that remained unfulfilled. She was unhappy in her marital life. Her impotent husband could not love her physically due to his disability. Lady Chatterley was stuck in her married life, initially, she was convinced with the viewpoint of Clifford that marriage is a spiritual bond and physical bond has very less significance. She resisted for a long time because of marriage and the class difference. In order to protect the superego, ego helps us to find a way. That is, according to Psychoanalysis, when a crisis occurs, the ego will find a certain way to protect the superego, “the repository of conscience and pride” (Guerin 130). Connie cannot just leave Mellor as she loves and bore his child, also she cannot elope with him. The only way for their union is the divorce from their respective husband and wife.
4. Conclusion

The text like *Sons and Lovers* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* are needed to be understood with the psychological perspective. Since all literary works are produced with the perspective of author’s mind and what influences them. Many modern writers like Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, etc. use their personal experiences and work experiences to produce their literary work. Modern literature is all about the exploring of the consciousness and the unconsciousness psyche of human beings. In order to understand the psyche of a character and the author’s mind, we can apply Freud’s psychoanalytic theory to interpret the text which is also a kind of therapy and provides a therapeutic effect on the reader as well as on the author. With the help of the psychoanalytical theory, we can trace the psychological development of Paul and Connie. Paul’s childhood experience has inflicted him psychologically. Paul had seen how his mother suffered at the hand of his drunkard father for which she always complained, these experiences remained suppressed in his unconscious mind. Paul suppressed his sexual desires and fantasies so that he could remain close to his mother and empathizes with her. Paul’s unconscious desire turns him into an artistic genius. Mother’s domineering power of love over her children has inflicted the sons’ personality in their later stage of life. Paul could not break the blood ties with his mother and therefore could not love other woman and even if he tried, he could not find the stability in his relationship either with Miriam or Clara. Paul wanted to get rid of his mother and therefore from the Oedipal complex that restricted his life from fully enjoying it. Therefore, Paul killed his mother by giving an overdose of morphine. It is very evident that Lawrence wrote this novel so that the readers could empathize with him and it served him as therapeutic therapy as well as to all those who suffered from such types of incidents in their life.

Similarly, in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, we can trace Connie’s personality development by applying Freud’s structural theory, the tripartite of the human psyche and that is id, ego, and superego. This paper has used psychoanalytic approach to understanding Lawrence’s novel character, her unsatisfied marital life and her affair with Mellor, conflict between her id, ego, and superego due to her social class and society. How her id breaks into consciousness and led to her affair with lower class servant, Mellor. She found love in Mellor and she wants to be with him but she is bound by social norms in marriage. Connie cannot just leave Mellor as she loves and bore his child, also she cannot elope with him. Therefore, her ego finds a way to protect her superego. The only way for their union is the divorce from their respective husband and wife. Therefore, psychoanalytic reading of a text helps us to understand the text and character well.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my special thanks to my mentor, Dr. Geetanjali Joshi Mishra for giving me the opportunity to do this wonderful project on the topic Psychoanalytic Reading of D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Thank you for your constant help and support. This project has enhanced my knowledge. It also helped me to gain deep insight of project with the sample of research that I had done. I am really thankful to my friends and all those who helped me to complete this research paper. Thanking You, Nisha Kumari.

References

Biography of Author

Nisha Kumari is a researcher scholar, currently pursuing B.A (Hons.) English from Amity University, Lucknow. I like to read and research on various topics.