



D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* as a Quest for the Vision of a New World

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of Industrialisation in England, the existing social order began disintegrating, resulting in many changes. This caused confusion, bewilderment, hopelessness, indignation, and anger in the people who were deeply affected by this transition and were caught between the old and the new order. Human energy was reduced to a race for competition. This disturbed the smooth and harmonious flow of life. Society is now no longer a cohesive unit, but a group of individuals caught up in their individual pursuits yet are confused about them. There are no longer any communal feelings and the community is slowly disappearing and dissolving. In such a situation all relationships suffer. The greatest casualty is the man-woman relationship which forms the crux of family, the smallest unit of society. D.H. Lawrence believed that in order to salvage the family, the fulcrum on which society stands, the relationship between man and woman must be strengthened. Satisfying physical intimacy and an understanding of the partner would bring conjugal bliss which in turn would lead to spiritual union and peace.

Keywords: Confusion, Intimacy, Spiritual progress, Self-awareness.

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Introduction

Novelists of all ages have been trying to depict the reality of life. But most novelists were concerned only with the portrayal of external realities. Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, and others did not have the benefit of modern theories of psychology, nor did they ever realise the importance of the subconscious mind in determining human behaviour. Hence, they concentrated on the depiction of external reality only. In contrast, the modern novelists expressed the inner realities of their characters. In the modern novel the story seems to have died out. There is no set pattern, no well-defined formula. The modern novel does not have any traditional hero who could manipulate the world by his strong will power. In fact, they cannot even be called heroes in the true sense. This was largely due to the scientific advancement of the nineteenth

century particularly Charles Darwin's 'The Evolution of Species' which destroyed man's pride and ego, making him realise that he is only a dot in the universe, an insignificant figure in the evolutionary process. Hence, modern novels are about characters who are isolated from the outside world and stress is laid by the novelist on the way in which the minds of the characters function and not on incidents which are described. This technique is psychological interpretation as Sigmund Freud and Jung had given their theories of the three-fold division of the mind into the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious. As such, typically modernist novels have only one or two significant characters and are not crowded with incidents.

It was an age in which all established forms of faith, religion, values, traditions were breaking down mostly because of the huge influence of the Industrial Revolution and the concept of materialism and

'progress' that it introduced. Consequently, the agricultural depression of 1870-1902 signified the end of the rural way of life and all that it encompassed. This decline in the rural way of life is reflected in the poetry of the age and particularly in the novel under discussion *The Rainbow* by D. H. Lawrence. In fact, except for poets like W. B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and W.H. Auden, the twentieth century is dominated by novelists like Henry James, H.G. Wells, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, Aldous Huxley, and D.H. Lawrence, and others. These modernist novelists were more concerned with depicting the inner turmoil that their characters were undergoing, as such they experimented with a number of styles. Another distinctive feature of their work was the frank treatment of sex. *The Rainbow* is said to be a revolutionary novel not because of characterisation but because of a new awareness of the changes in human relationships because of the spirit of competition and materialism. As such human relationships were disintegrating, dissolving, eroding. Hence, it was felt that the best hope for man lay in searching for and establishing a strong relationship between man and woman. If man and woman could come closer, many moral and intellectual problems could be solved. In fact, Matthew Arnold in his poem 'Dover Beach' too expresses the same belief that firm loyalty between man and woman is important in the present scenario of total chaos, confusion, loss of faith and moral depravity.

Discussion

Written in 1915, the original title of *The Rainbow* was 'The Wedding Ring'. Hence, marriage is an important theme, and through this theme, the theme of love and self-discovery follow. In one of his letters written in 1913, Lawrence tells us about this philosophy – the discovery of the existence of the body leading to the discovery of the self which in turn, leads to spiritual development. For him, physical intimacy is the way to attain spiritual union with God. Blood intimacy and spiritual development are two opposed concepts, but Lawrence believed in a distinct collaboration between the two. It is a complex theme and he treated it in an equally complex manner. There is nothing direct or simplistic about *The Rainbow*. Foremost in his scheme of things are his women characters whom he accords a position more important than that given to his male characters. So powerful is the woman that "without

her he was nothing." (The Rainbow, pg 35) He repeats this later on in the novel when describing another major female character, Anna, Lawrence says that "She was the Arch, and the rest of the world was flood." (The Rainbow, p165) Similarly, the third and the most important woman character Ursula is also described in the similar fashion, "... he could not bear to think about Ursula... She was the darkness, the challenge, the horror." (The rainbow p 408)

For Lawrence... "The woman is the symbol for that further life which comprised religion and love and morality. The men placed in her hands their own conscience... They depended on her for their stability Without her they would have felt like straws in the wind". (The Rainbow, p 13)

In the conception of his women characters, Lawrence was guided by the primary 'quest' theme. His women characters are always 'looking beyond' which is indicative of the fact that they are refusing to stay in the restrictive life that they were leading. They were aware that there is a world beyond them which they have to understand and achieve.

"The women were different. On them too was the drowse of blood-intimacy...the women looked out...They were aware of the lips and the mind of the world speaking and giving utterance, they heard the sound in the distance, and they strained to listen." (The Rainbow, p 4)

They are also asking several questions which indicates their spirit of enquiry and search. "Why should the curate's children inevitably take precedence over her children, why should dominance be given them from the start? It was not money, nor even class. It was education and experience, she decided". (The Rainbow, p 5)

Hence, there is very little dialogue but longer passages of reflexion, looking inward. Since he was concerned with something abstract, he away with dialogue. He also places his characters in the context of the quest theme and explore whether they succeed and to what extent.

Lawrence deals with three generations to cover a wide range to test his philosophy which he believed materialised over a time-period. He takes one representative from each generation to show the development. He takes us from one generation to another to show the development of his philosophy. To the first generation belong Tom Brangwen and

Lydia Lenksy, the Polish widow. The Brangwens represent an old civilization and they are isolated among themselves. There is no communication between the people of the Marsh Farm and the colliers. They are almost unaffected by outside changes. Some changes are however, entering their world imperceptibly, that they are not aware of. The man-woman relationship should be harmonious. There are no facile generalisations. He tries to avoid the moral distortions. So, he presents people who represent true values. The Brangwens lack the sensibility to develop, to acquire fulfilment in life. Relation between Tom and Lydia is initially happy but later they drift apart. This pattern is repeated in all the three generations, but the response is different in each generation. There is a general sense of dissatisfaction. They wished to merge into one but realised that they are different. Consequently, Tom becomes attached to the daughter, he dies with dissatisfaction and fear of the unknown. Therefore, in the case of the first generation, there is no fulfilment, only struggle to reach a point that becomes elusive.

This pattern of fluxes, estrangement, bitterness, dissatisfaction is common to all the three generations. Any pursuit of spiritual aspiration is invariably connected to sense of fulfilment in sensual relationship between man and woman. If they fail to attain sexual bliss, they cannot move to spiritual aspiration. For Lawrence, man's life is a quest for identity, self-realisation. A close understanding of the other partner in marriage will lead to fulfilment in life and eventually to spiritual fulfilment.

The Second generation is represented by Will and Anna Lenksy. They also belong to the same background but there is a subtle change in their perspective. Though they belong to the primitive civilization, they have become more complex and nearer to their goal. They are conscious of their "purposive self", that is, creative self and they try to establish it through their relationship. Lawrence uses a particular symbol – church when he talks of the relationship between Will Brangwen and Anna. Their response to the church tells us about their natures. Anna is more intellectual towards her religious values and spiritual concerns. She sees the church as a piece of architectural beauty rather than a place of worship. Whereas Will lacks the sensibility and for him the edifice itself is important -he takes the building to be sacred. He is also orthodox in his views.

So, we get the indication that they both are sharply divided and hence will not attain fulfilment. Initially they are happy but Anna drifts apart after the birth of her first child- she isolates herself and is complacent with her motherhood. Will feels neglected. After the birth of her second child, she feels restless, wonders if this is the life she wants or should she aspire for creative needs.

"Anna loved the child very much ...Yet she was not quite fulfilled. She had a slight expectant feeling, as of a door half opened... She was straining her eyes for something beyond... A faint, gleaming horizon... a rainbow like an archway, a shadow door with faintly coloured coping above it. Must she be moving thither?"
(The Rainbow, p 163)

They share intimate physical, sensual experience but drift apart mentally. Both feel disillusioned and that leads to ultimate search for fulfilment. Since, both have limited sensibility, the quest remains unfulfilled. Anna looks for intellectual pursuits. Will tries to teach woodwork to people which saves him from complete degeneration. Will and Anna come together again, both try to move towards the goal of fulfilment, but again fail. Fulfilment is not achieved. Hence, there is frustration, bitterness and dissatisfaction like in the previous generation. But Anna and Will have moved one step further than their parents.

The third generation is represented by Ursula Brangwen and Anton Skrenbensky. Ursula emerges from the working class and yet symbolises the concept of the new woman who has broken away from all old values. There is hardly anyone to help her. New way of looking at things makes her stand out. She comes out of the primitive marsh farms and feels the necessity of a man who will help her to attain fulfilment, it is her religious aspiration because she feels that the man who will help her will be the authentic son of God. There is nothing vague or uncertain about her. She meets Skrenbensky who is related to Lydia of the first generation. He represents primitive civilization with values of romance, chivalry, and rigidity. Once again, there is the difference of nature. They fall in love with each other, but Ursula realises that they have to separate because of the basic difference of their natures. They have an intensely passionate experience in a moonlit night after which Ursula plans to part because she feels

bitter and dissatisfied. This forms the separation of identities.

Conclusion

The novel ends with Ursula left all alone. But this is only physical loneliness. She is standing on the threshold of a new world. The two central symbols in the novel are the church tower and the rainbow. For her the rainbow becomes an explicit symbol of spiritual awareness and beauty. It connects the new world with the old world of Christianity, hopes and aspirations. The church is rooted firmly on the ground and looks up to the sky, while the rainbow looks down upon the church, thus complementing each other. (The Rainbow, p178) The church has the power to take an individual to a higher life. (The Rainbow, p179) The rainbow bridges the gap between heaven and earth. The rainbow becomes a prophetic vision of life. It gives her an insight as to how she will achieve her goal while the other two generations failed.

"She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven." (The Rainbow pg 418)

The novel explores the constant attempts to break the shackles of this world and reach out to the other, more perfect world. Lydia is naïve and had no knowledge at all while Anna felt the need but could not attain it. Only Ursula succeeds and clears all confusion. But to do this she has to break all ties with the past world and look forward to the new world. She is faced with a choice. If she makes the drastic choice of moving forward, she would be left all alone. This is the predicament before the modern man. If man had remembered the communal bond of the past, then there would have been harmony and no upheaval. The cycle of progress comes to an end in the last line of the novel with Ursula stepping into the world beyond to find fulfilment. She is aware of what she has to achieve - the truth, the true self and a richer life. Her journey does not end here but is about to begin. The novel ends on a distinct note of optimism.

The language of the text is vibrant, especially in places where Lawrence describes man-woman relationship. The close sensual bond is described in poetic and symbolic language. The images show his religious zeal, and he refers to The Bible frequently.

The theme of the novel, as we gradually discover is not so much as the man-woman relationship but the separateness of identities that could unite to seek a conclusion, two human beings closely attached would attain spiritual bliss. This constitutes his concept of the proper basis of the relationship of marriage which he explores with great subtlety and power in the novel.

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