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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### The Creation of Women: A Feminist Reading of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*.

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#### Abstract

A struggle against the male-dominated society which mistreats women has been promoted by feminist critics of the feminist movement. The suffragette movement of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century led rise to the feminist voices like Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir who fought against the social degradation of females by the domineering males. In *The second sex* French Simone de Beauvoir focuses on how the society as a whole creates females. It was followed by American Kate Millet who in her *Sexual Politics* criticizes many male authors for depicting males reigning over females. Coupled with these, Indian Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay "Can the subaltern speak" throws light on the subaltern suppressed females of British ruled India who had no voice to express their thoughts. In accordance with these opinions, this paper aims to analyze David Herbert Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* from the perspective of these three feminist critics.

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Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The second sex* (first published in 1949) points out that the society leads to the creation of women. According to her "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (296). In the chapter called childhood, Beauvoir mentions that there is hardly any dichotomy between a three or four years female or a male child till the individuals of a society forms it. On the one hand, girls play with dolls which represent a beautiful fragile thing. The dolls make girls from the very beginning of their lives desire that they will be as beautiful as a doll which is nothing except a symbol of vulnerability. On the other hand, boys not only fight but also become aware of their bodies as "weapons" (307). It exhibits that from the childhood, boys think about power, possession and they engage in rough games to prove their strength. This can be seen that Miriam is a victim in her home in *Sons and lovers*. Her brothers treat her without any respect and make fun of her. They consider Miriam as a baby who has no status in their lives and at the home. As boys are given more rights and held in high esteem at their house than females (313), they scorn females as non-entity. Boys behave harshly with Miriam when she burns the potatoes and her mother instead of blaming them suggests Miriam to accept their humiliation without any fight. As the boys have more privilege than Miriam in the home, her brother Edgar can easily mock her saying "what is she kept at home for?" (Lawrence 177).

Furthermore, Beauvoir claims that mothers want to fit their daughter in the feminine world (308). We can see that Miriam does household chores in her house. The mother regard her as the other cheek and wants her to accept her subjection without any combat. She will obtain joy in the after life if she embraces all the misconducts of this world. As a result of her mother's strict religious upbringing, Miriam lacks the spontaneous flow of life. We can figure out that Miriam is extremely frightened to make the bird eat from her hand. Brought in a hostile environment where her

brothers always criticize her and her mother always advises her to be submissive, Miriam can neither swing like bird Paul nor she can eat the cherries like lively Paul who is brought up in a friendly ambience where his mother wants him to work at offices and gain upward mobility in the society. Beauvoir expresses that all girls desire of a prince who will save them from confinement. (318). Thus, Miriam becomes as princess in bondage dreaming of a Walter Scott Prince to rescue her. In the chapter where Beauvoir talks about the sexual initiation of a girl, she explains that the strict conditioning of a girl in the family makes her consider physical relationship as a sin (400). She feels that Paul is a serpent in her Garden of Eden who will devastate her virginity and therefore she develops spiritual love with Paul for fear of God.

Aside from these cases, Beauvoir in her chapter called “The Married Woman” declares that marriage is a contact between two living bodies. It happens that the wife takes care of her husband as he is providing the economic advantages to the family. As Beauvoir has noted, “She takes care of the house for her husband, but she also wants him to spend all he earns for furnishings and an electric refrigerator” (474). In the novel, Mrs. Morel is always demanding a better financial life from her husband and she does not approve of Morel’s going to the pub or drinking in it as these are wastage of money to her. Although neither drinking nor going to the inn is disrespected by the mining society, Mrs. Morel cannot appreciate the spontaneous, instinctual and sensual flow of life of her husband who is happy with his base or monetary condition. On the contrary, his wife desires for the superstructure, the education of her children which depends on base. Thus, the conflict stems out from the union of the two classes- the collier society and the burgher family position with the desire for social aspirations.

Turning to women as mothers, Beauvoir examines that women always takes the title of their husbands. The name of Gertrude Morel appears only twice in this novel and she is always called Mrs. Morel. To the mother the son is always the hero (529). Mrs. Morel thinks of William as her Knight. Women prefer male child than female child is what Beauvoir writes in her book. Although Mrs. Morel appreciates her daughter Annie to study, it is seen that the thought of being the mother of sons warms her heart. Although she has a lot of fights with her husband, she cannot separate from him as her young children are dependent on their breadwinner father. The thought that William is obtaining social advances fills her with happiness as she can turn to her son if Morel fails. These represent the traditional mothers who depend on their sons as they are not working themselves. However, mothers of daughters often make their daughters their “double” (601) by imposing their own fate in them as we can see in the case with Miriam’s mother who wishes Miriam to nurture religion and do household works just like her.

Another feminist critic called Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (first published in 1969) focuses on the power dominated relationship between a male and a female. To her, “Politics” refers to relationships where one group of people is controlled by another (23). There is always a power struggle involved in relationships between members of opposite sex where males always become the subject and women, the object. She defines that each sex learns a different set of rules for behaviour deemed appropriate by society, which connects “aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy” with masculinity, and traits such as “passivity, ignorance, docility, “virtue,” and ineffectuality” with femininity (26). All the terms of masculinity carry positive connotations as they embody someone who has intellectual ability as well as physical force or energy. In contrast, females or the weak fair sex are believed as someone who must maintain grace and virginity and must tolerate the aggressive demeanor of the men. This means that gender is learned through socialization, and is not innate (29). It implies that men are those in authority and women are the nonessential ones. That is why Mrs. Morel declares “If I were a man, nothing could stop me” (Lawrence 16) to evince the society which bestows men with power.

In addition, Millett regards Lawrence as a “ruthless user of women... the mother, Miriam and Clara”. (49). It can be seen that Paul acts quite barbarously with Miriam. He throws pencil at her when she fails to understand his French lessons. Even he uses Miriam to satisfy his carnal pleasure only to reject her later. He never thinks about the chastity of this girl whose virginity he destroys only for his desire of consummated love. It is a matter to note that the character of Miriam has been portrayed from Lawrence’s adolescent sweetheart Jessie Chambers. In the language of this novel, we can always see Miriam as a shy girl who soaks out Paul’s life but in reality it is an effort by Lawrence, the son, to emphasize on the downsides of Miriam whom his mother disliked. Ironically, when Paul is doing this, he is showing the positive qualities of maiden Miriam who not only appreciates the artistic talent of Paul but also inquires about the health of sick Mrs. Morel and loves Paul till the very end of this novel. Moreover, Paul treats his mother cruelly. Paul is conscious about the age of his mother who went with him to Jordan’s Appliances to encourage him or who cared about him during pneumonia. Finally, he kills her with the overdose of morphia pills. This heinous murder exhibits Paul as a sinful son. Along with these, Paul treats Clara coldly. This relationship is

based on passion only. Lawrence the writer thinks that relationship between a male and a female will last if it is a communion of spiritual as well as physical but in the case of Clara, Paul forgets Clara's birthday and later declines to marry her. Even throughout the novel, women are oppressed by men. Mrs. Morel's mother is victimized by her husband. Mrs. Morel is rejected by John Field who marries his forty year old land lady for wealth. William misbehaves with Gyp as she is "shallow" (Lawrence 163) and at last Paul treats the three women of his life viciously.

However, it can be seen that these three women are also using Paul. The mother, especially after the death of William, loves Paul to such an extent that the boy Paul began to compare the women of his life with his mother and thus he can never love any women in his life successfully. For instance, he draws a parallel between Miriam and his mother and so a physical relationship with Miriam is like defiling his mother. The objection of his mother also destroys his love affair with Miriam. As far as Clara is concerned, Paul attains physical lust but lacks emotional bonding with her. We can notice that both Miriam and Clara are with Paul for personal benefit. Miriam seeks liberty from her secondary and incomplete position of a swine-girl and that is why she becomes a disciple of Paul to study French and Mathematics in order to escape from the trappings of the male world and independent Clara is with Paul to satiate her lechery.

Besides these feminist critics, Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" observes that the subaltern are voiceless human beings who are suppressed and marginalized. They cannot cry out against any injustice. For example, the Africans in *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad are never discoursing and they cannot resist the whites from ruling them. In the context of *Sons and Lovers* we can find that Mrs. Morel's mother is a subaltern who faced the overbearing nature of her husband. The character of Miriam is a subaltern here, especially at the beginning, where she does not react when Paul throws the Pencil on her face. She does not misbehave with Paul who has deprived her from marital rights. Her virtue is ravaged by Paul but still she does not confront him harshly or reproach him with anger. She is to Paul as a nun singing to heaven, the other, when he develops his lust with Clara. Spivak explores the sati ritual of widow women where they were burnt alive with their dead husbands in her essay. Here, Miriam associates sex with sacrifice and self-immolation. She is the symbol of the doll Arabella who is annihilated by Paul. Also, Spivak notes that one woman plots against other women (28). Here Mrs. Morel detests Miriam and tries to break Paul's relationship with Miriam. Gyp treats Annie like a servant and makes Annie wash her clothes. Not at all subaltern Clara is a very independent suffragette woman who has got separated from her husband. She is bold enough to engage in a passionate relationship with Paul. Even Mrs. Morel is not subaltern as she is fighting with her husband and at places, Morel is afraid of her. She is denying the sensuous flame of life of Mr. Morel. At the end of the novel, Mr. Morel hardly discourses with anyone. We do not hear about him. So he is compartmentalized. The office women like Connie and others are also liberated strong women. In fact, all the women whom Lawrence met in his life like Jessie Chambers and his wife Frieda are all powerful women.

All in all, the first generation of Mrs. Morel displays a change in the lives of females when she began to read, write, join the women's Guild and provide Annie the opportunity to study. The second generation which consists of the office workers, Miriam as well as Clara is enjoying emancipation at the end of the novel. The subaltern Miriam, despite her rigid and unfavorable house ambience, becomes a teacher in a farm. This shows that now she will have economic stability which is needed for women to construct her status in the society. Lawrence desires to build up a stable relationship by the bonding of the body and the mind to fight against industrialization and mechanization of human relationships in this cathartic novel where he is examining the reasons for the failure of relationships between a male and a female. As Clara is also now settled with Baxter after both remaining unfaithful towards each other, we can think of this harmonious union as a spiritual and sensual bonding. So, women emerge as powerful figures at the end of this novel.

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