

Shapes of Femininity in D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*

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Abstract

D. H. Lawrence provides justice to women's role by highlighting Ursula as a modern woman who explores her identity in the patriarchal society. Through the fictitious tale, *Rainbow*, women can be as men and men can be like women. She performs like a man and that means she has masculine traits. The writer delineates Ursula as a modern woman because she can develop distinct characteristics of her personality. She is an emancipated modern woman. She does not behave according to norms of Victorian society. So, she is a new woman rather than a woman. He emphasizes how a woman can perform like a new woman; this shows new woman is not the private property of a man; it is a social condition that can be practiced in an individual way.

Keywords: New woman, Patriarchal norms, Women issues, Freedom.

D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, focuses on how the novelist declares female protagonist Ursula as a new woman. She belongs to the third generation of Brangwen family. She is delineated as a modern woman with a purpose to describe the changing women in the contemporary society of England. So, the responsibility of the novelist is to explore emancipated woman's traits through characterization of Ursula's personality. Halberstam comments

I do not claim to have any definitive answer to this question, but I do have a few proposals about why masculinity must not and cannot and should not reduce down to the male body and its effects.

(Halberstam 15)

Judith Halberstam's "*An Introduction to Female Masculinity: Masculinity without Men*" introduces the issue of femaleness or female masculinity. She introduces the term "heroic masculinity" which has been generated by male and female bodies. According to Paul Smith

...masculinity or masculinities are in some real sense not the exclusive "property" of biologically

male subject – it's true that many female subjects lay claim to masculinity as their property.

(Smith 8)

Therefore, masculinity is not the property of patriarchal society. Masculinity in the 1990s has recognized as, at least in part, a creation by female as well as male. Halberstam states Female masculinity has been situated as the place where patriarchy goes to work female psyche and reproduces misogyny within femaleness. (Halberstam 6.

Talking about alternative model of gender, Halberstam claims In alternative models of gender variation female masculinity is not simply the opposite of female femininity, nor is it a female version of male masculinity. (29)

Richard Howson's *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity* is an innovative and radical exploration of domination, gender and social justice. Howson contributes to contemporary understandings of men and masculinity, presenting a detailed examination of hegemonic masculinity. Lawrence has been considered as a modern writer since the early twentieth century. And this modernity is reflected in the way he treats his characters. Ursula's assertiveness serves to define her as a modern character. She reflects the intentions which Halberstam has in defining masculinity.

I want to carefully produce a model of female masculinity that remarks on its multiple forms but also calls for new and self-conscious affirmations of different gender taxonomies. Such affirmations begin not by subverting masculine power or taking up a position against masculine power but by turning a blind eye to conventional masculinities and refusing to engage. (9)

Halberstam wishes to discuss about a model of masculinity that defines various classifications of gender and subvert conventional notion of masculinity. Or it does not support conventional idea of masculinity and just takes up a position against what we have understood to be masculine.

Ursula commences lesbian connection with Winifred, one of her schoolmistresses, who later on

marries Ursula's uncle. Anton returns after six years. They spend their time like husband and wife when Anton interrogates Ursula to marry him. She defines that she does not wish to be married and Anton feels hurt later on. He weds a woman and both of them go to India. Soon Ursula feels that she is pregnant and pens to Anton to return and marry her but she does not get any answer. She gets information that Anton has already married with another woman.

In the middle stage of fictitious tale, Ursula is observed as a modern woman and joins University College for higher education and operates as an instructor in a male-oriented society. Therefore, she can protest against patriarchal society. The action of such activities makes her as a modern woman. She questions the patriarchal norms. Through the condition of Ursula, the novelist provides a challenging role to women in his fictitious tale. He shows the relationship between male and female. He also believes that women are not only limited in private sphere but they are also moving to public affairs.

Lawrence clarifies the notion of femininity or modern woman through this novel. In this novel, Tom and Will treat their wives as a counterpart of their body. They thought that they have masculine power to control over femininity. They believe that women are the sexual objects but Ursula boldly revolts against that attitude and behaviour. She is a revolutionary woman who demands for societal change. She gives the message for women in the world to exist as courageous and performs bold action. Her struggle advances her to become as a modern woman. They were only confined within four walls of house. They are believed as submissive and secondary to men. Lawrence highlights women's position rather than objectifying their status. Anna and Will subsequent Brangwen generation, develop a modern mentality

And Anna had a new reserve, a new independence. Suddenly, she began to act independently of her parents, to live beyond them. (Lawrence 110).

Anna is determined by modern views. She also wishes to be emancipated in her life but she did not take any revolutionary step like Ursula. Hans Ulrich Seeber's article "Utopian Mentality in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Lawrence" believes

Ursula Brangwen, in *The Rainbow* totally rejects the role and possibilities offered to her by society's mechanisms. (Seeber 38)

Lawrence talks about Ursula Ursula deny to play the role, which was given to her by her society's mechanisms. Therefore, she considers She was the female ready to take hers; but in her own way. A man could turn into a freelance: so then could a woman. (Lawrence 232)

She was a woman who takes revolutionary action in England.

Therefore, Lawrence's fictitious tale is the symbolic presentation of Ursula's utopian dream for an ideal society and it is more equitable toward gender distinctions in the future.

Women's modernity is an alternative pattern of gender variation; it is not simply the opposite of female. Judith Halberstam's "*An Introduction to Female Masculinity*" claims that far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity. In other words, female masculinities are framed, as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing. She introduces the term "heroic masculinity" which has been produced by and across both male and female bodies.

Richard Howson's *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity* is an experimental and depiction of harassment, gender and fair social order. Howson showed a detailed evaluation of hegemonic masculinity. Lawrence has been accepted as a modern novelist in twentieth century.

She rejects marriage, involves in premarital sex, conducts a homosexual affair and objectified males. Lydia stated Resistant, she knew she was beaten, and from fear of darkness turned to fear of light. She would have hidden herself indoors, if she could. (49)

It means that she understood that she has been harassed by male and is in gloominess but she could not present it. It stands for the submissiveness for her conscious existence. As if he hypnotized her. She was passive, dark, always in shadow. (46)

Her spouse mesmerised her as being passive dark and always in shadow. She cannot try to revolt against him even she knows everything about her position and situation. Thus, Lydia said She would not want him enough, as much as he demanded that she should want him. It was that she could not. She could only want him in her own way, and to her own measure. (78)

Lydia did not feel that she had married him because she has experience of married life and domination of men. It is impossible for a widowed woman at that time to achieve the goal of self-emancipation but it is the biggest effort to start a new beginning of seeking her female self.

Lydia firstly married Lensky who is superior to her financially and typical result of male-oriented society. She is finally won by his supremacy. Therefore, during that time she has no her female self and behaves as a surgical appliance for her spouse. Then she selects Tom

for her second marriage, who is a peasant and seems to be inferior to Lydia. She is a traditional woman in this fictitious tale. She also says All women must have a husband. (63)

It means she is controlled by traditional norms of society. Therefore, she considers that all women must have a husband. That means she is the part of a transition period of British society. Therefore, she cannot completely refuse the traditional role and cannot be very recent part. Leavis claims

The Rainbow shows us the transmission of the spiritual heritage in an actual society, and shows it in relation to the general development of civilization.

(Leavis 173)

So, Lydia has not finally got the goal of self-revelation. Characters Lydia and Anna perform as a pretext for Ursula. Their pursuit is the same; Ursula has obtained the final aim of self-exploration. R. W. Connell states about gender creation

All forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of overall subordination of women to men. For this reason, there is no femininity that holds among women the position held by hegemonic masculinity among men.(Connell 187)

From this statement we can see that gender is created by society. All the shapes of femininity held by masculinity in the patriarchal society before 1960s, as a consequence the feminist movement developed in England. Connell's idea of masculinity that is a social condition, a set of habits because the gender part is created by the society. Ursula was emancipated; she announced that in her protests there was no rule for her. She thinks for herself alone. Gudrun (sister of Ursula) was satisfied at home but Ursula was not. Gudrun was normal in her own house whereas Ursula was not satisfied. So, Connell explains masculinity as

...simultaneously a place in gender, and the effects of these practices on bodily experience, personality and culture. (71)

At first, when together with Anton, Ursula behaves like a traditional woman and when puts great emphasis on her looks. So, the speaker assumes in the fictitious tale

She [Ursula] would fight and hold her place in this state also, in the world of work and man's convention. (Lawrence 406)

She wishes to hold her own place in patriarchal society. She wishes to create a separate identity. Ursula esteems Anton as the Son of God and falls in love with him. During the relationship with Anton, she is not satisfied with romantic feelings. She slowly fulfils her

pursuit of spiritual satisfaction in the society and intends to grow herself into a dutiful modern woman. Therefore, she starts to talk social affairs with Anton including silent role of women. As John Worthen points out

Skrebensky [...] is at first the man limited by his abstention from self, submitted as he is to the power of established society ...(Worthen 22)

During his talk with Ursula, he debates I belong to the nation and must do my duty by the nation.(Lawrence 309)

Later on, Anton has gone to the war in South Africa. Nevertheless, Ursula has hatred for war because she gets to understand the inhumanity of the war. The speaker describes.

The good of the greatest number was all that mattered that which was the greatest good for them all, collectively, was the greatest good for the individual. And so, every man must give himself to support the state, and so labor for the greatest good of all. One might make improvement in the state, perhaps, but always with a view to preserving it intact.(Lawrence 326-327. Anton believes that a man is significant to secure social welfare. Therefore, Ursula refuses his marriage proposal. She could not wish to cease her exploration for fulfilment. She does not hesitate to perform anything I believe there are many men in the world one might love – there is not only one man.(411)

After Anton goes to war, she keeps a lesbian bond with Winifred Inger who is modern and beautiful. They spend a time together very happily. Thus, the speaker states

When they were in the room together [...] almost to the exclusion of everything else. Winifred Inger felt a hot delight in the lessons when Ursula was present; Ursula felt her whole life begin when Miss Inger came into the room. (335)

Inger is typical representative new lady who favours female masculinity rather than femininity. The speaker says

Winifred Inger was also interested in the Women's Movement.(341)

She does not limit herself to family and domestic matters hence she is more opened to the injustices of male oriented society. Ursula dismantles the traditional role of femininity and her protest against norms and her self-revelation created her exemplary. She is an independent and modern woman

Already it was history. In every phase, she was so different. Yet she was always Ursula Brangwen. But what did it mean, Ursula Brangwen? She did not know what she was. Only she was full of rejection, of refusal. Always, always she was spitting out of her mouth [...] and grit of disillusion she could only stiffen in rejection. She seemed

always negative in her action that which she was, positively. (437)

In the long history of women's role, they are believed as meek, inferior and object of males. But Ursula wishes to dismantle the history of society, which has not provided the place for modern women. It only supports the femininity and submissive position of women. However, she creates new history in the British society by presenting herself as new woman. She always rejects the traditional history, which is constructed by society. Holderness argues The novel is a radical novel of criticism and protest against the value of Lawrence's contemporary society.

(Holderness 52)

She [Ursula] made dreams of the new place she would live in where stately cultured people of high feeling would be [...] with her, and she would live the noble in the land moving to a large freedom of feeling.

(Lawrence 419-420)

She has a purpose to create a new place where she may live with freedom. Since the beginning of human civilization, females have been tortured by men and accepted inferior to men. However, Lawrence highlights Ursula not like a traditional woman. She is an emancipated woman because she can perform whatever she needs to do. So, Evelyn J. Hinz remarks She [Ursula] really wants freedom from the compulsion... Liberation, freedom from pursuing the ideals of self-determination, individualism, and independence, the freedom that comes from the recognition.(Hinz 25)

She [Ursula] was no mere Ursula Brangwen. She was Woman, she was the whole of woman in the human order. All-containing, universal, how should she be limited to individuality?

(Lawrence 444)

Ursula is the representative of all women. One person can Change the world. Ursula represents all women of British Society. She gives new message for all females that they can protest against the patriarchal norms and behave like her She [Ursula] wanted to go away, to be free to stand straight up to her own height.

(419)

Ursula is a woman who is determined for herself. She does not take any assistance for growing her conscious existence. Without any help from the male counterparts, she can get success in her conscious existence and fulfil her goal. She can alter the role of woman. She also spreads message for all women to live an emancipated life like a male. Therefore, she is a representative female protagonist for all women. Here, the speaker remarks

She [Ursula] knew that soon she would want to become a self-responsible person, and her dread was that she would be prevented. An all-containing will in her for complete independence, complete social independence, complete independence from any personal authority, kept her dollishly at her studies. For, she knew that she had

always her price of ransom – her femaleness. She was always a woman, and what she could not get because she was a human being, fellow to the rest of mankind, she would get because she was a female, other than the man. In her femaleness, she felt secret riches, a reserve; she had always the price of freedom. (333)

Ursula wants to become independent. She feels proud with her femininity. In this way, she is new woman by nature. She really requires independence

Ursula passed from girlhood towards womanhood gradually the cloud of self-responsibility gathered upon her. She became aware of herself, that she was the separate entity [...] of an unseparated [...] that she must go somewhere, she must become something.

(281)

It needs that she must be obtaining something in her conscious existence. She is very alert of herself that shows her purpose which she needs to dismantle the line of conventional world of society. She completes the crossing the boundary of Victorian role of women as being a masculine woman. Her modernity supports all the women to become new women. Ursula feels that she must have a space in the world as the speaker states She [Ursula] must have her place in the working world, be a recognized member with full rights there.(410)

Here, we can assess that Ursula needs to create her own world and wishes to recognize herself as a modern woman in the society. She performs with intensity because she craves to exist. She is a woman who keeps her individuality as an emancipated woman in the British society. When we discuss about her connection with Anton He [Anton] thought that, because the community represents millions of people, therefore it must be millions of times more important than any individual, forgetting that the community is an abstraction from the many, and is not the many themselves. (327). Anton only provides importance the community rather than the individual. He debates that the community represents millions of people. So, he is not responsible for his conscious existence and his affection for relation. He only gives importance to the community and the country. He does not support for individual self and identity She wanted to fight, to fight the whole world. And these two small hands were all she had to do with.(326)

So, Ursula only protests for freedom of women in the world. She feels that she can perform everything to live her own conscious existence and achieves success. She frankly takes action against patriarchal society. She has her mission in her conscious existence.

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In Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, Ursula acts like a man that challenges masculinity that means women can also perform like men. Even the author attempts to balance the connection between male and female. Ursula has feminine qualities and her deeds show that she is a modern

woman. In this fictitious tale, she is a new woman who behaves like a man. The author gives justice for the women's role by creating Ursula as a modern woman who searches her individuality in the patriarchal society. She wishes to create a new history by highlighting herself as a new woman. She dismantles the male-oriented society. She can perform what man can do. Male and female reflect the identification of gender, which are not different issue of gender.

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