

## Lawrence's Ideology of Education

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### Abstract

D. H. Lawrence was not only a novelist, poet, short story writer and essayist but also a philosopher, sociologist and educationist. His contribution in the field of education is not less than a milestone. In this article my approach is to analyze his ideology of education which was child centric. Through his novels, poems and essays Lawrence always propagated his vision of education.

Keywords: Child-centric, Educationist, vision, ideology

People know Lawrence for his bold, descriptions of sex, body organs, obscenity and above- all hostility to female existence. Critics in the previous century referred him to be 'demon', 'insane', 'sexist' and 'lunatic'. Yet others called him prophet of sex. People did not heed on other works of Lawrence. They summarily rejected his works on classic American Literature, non- fiction *Fantasia of the unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis and the unconscious*, his essays on topics, such as 'Democracy' Education' 'Environment' and above all his books, essays and novels focusing 'Education'. Even the publishers, the administration and the British government were all hostile to him. They all had a prejudiced notion that Lawrence

could vision nothing beyond 'sex' and 'obscenity'. It was a grievous injustice against the great philosopher, psychoanalyst and a visionary educationist. So, I rever D.H. Lawrence as a great educationist who, through his works – fictional as well as non-fictional, always demonstrated his idea of Education. In this article I am trying to bring forth his ideology of Education which he envisaged to be England's need of the hour.

Born on September, 11 1885, in the atmosphere of late Victorian era, to an unlettered Collier Arthur John Lawrence and Lydia nee Beardsall, a former school teacher and a lady of vision. Lawrence was the fourth child in his family and his parents did not enjoy a conjugal family relation. Almost every day there was a family feud. Lawrence's childhood witnessed this tragedy and so his early life was full of agony and storm which marked his hostility towards his father first and then his mother. His poems, novels and short stories justify this.

It was Lawrence's mother who decided to educate him otherwise the tradition at Eastwood did not have any concept as such. Children after growing up to teen were supposed to accompany their fathers to the coalmines of Eastwood. But Lawrence's mother did not allow it and she sent him to a nearby school at Eastwood 'Beauvale Board School' in the year 1891. Lawrence got his primary education for eight years at the local school. He won a scholarship to enter the Nottingham High School. It was a great achievement for him as he learned a lot at the Nottingham High School.

In 1901 he stopped his education and went out to work in a factory of J.H Haywood. He fell seriously ill and suffered from pneumonia and tuberculosis. He read Charles Dickens' David Copperfield for the first time in 1901.

In 1902 a turning point came in Lawrence's life. He met Jessi Chamber and developed a friendship with her. He went on to work as a teacher at Eastwood High School. He worked until he got awarded in the King's Scholarship examination in 1905. This paved ways for his admission to Nottingham University College from where he received teacher's

certificate. His literary journey began in 1907 when he wrote his first short story ‘Prelude’ which was published in *Nottinghamshire Guardian*. Lawrence worked as a teacher at Davidson Road School, Croydon for three years from, 1908 to 1911. His teaching experience at Croydon’s Davidson Road School provided an opportunity to know the pros and cons, ups and downs, fallacies and follies of the prevailing education system in England during his time. From there only he developed his own vision of education especially primary education. He studied extensively and came up with his own ideology of education. He took to writing novels, poems, short stories and essays to propagate his ideology of education.

Lawrence’s ideology of education and his response to it uptight with a huge intricacy which brings forth a never-ending saga of love - hate relationship. No other writer of his age has written as extensively and with frequency as Lawrence has. He was concerned with the developments taking place in the field of education towards the end of nineteenth century. The scene in chapter III of his famous novel *Women in Love* entitled “Classroom” reveals his paradigm of thought – provoking concern about education system:

“At the end there was a little haste, to finish what was in hand. She was pressing the children with questions, so that they should know all they were to know, by the time the gong went. She stood in shadow in front of the class, with catkins in her hand, and she leaned towards the children, absorbed in the passion of instruction” (Lawrence 46).

But leaving me apart, Rupert; do you think the children are better, richer, happier, for all this knowledge; do you really think they are? Or is it better to leave them untouched, spontaneous. Hadn’t they better be animals, simple animals, crude, violent, *anything*, rather than this self-conscious? [...] ‘You are merely making words’, he said; ‘knowledge means everything to you. Even your animalism, you want it in your head. You don’t want to be an animal, you want to observe your own

animal functions, to get a mental thrill out of them. It is all purely secondary – and more decadent than the most hide – bond intellectualism. What is it but the worst and last form of intellectualism, this love of yours for passion and the animal instincts? Passion and the instincts – you want them hard enough, but through your head, in your consciousness” (Lawrence 55-56).

All the above descriptions in *Women in Love* reveal Lawrence’s concern. He wanted education to be child centric. He was disgusted with the primary education system during his time. Although he was one of the beneficiaries of the welfare state education system of England, he wanted to stop crowding the schools. *The Rainbow* reflects his concerns with the issues of education. He himself, as a teacher at Croydon School had experienced everything related to education. So, his presentation of Ursula and the way she grew up and established her existence from childhood to adulthood is what his ideology was about education.

“It was this, this education, this higher form of being, that the mother wished to give her children, so that they too could live the supreme life on earth” (Lawrence 12).

Sheila Lahiri Choudhury has written an analysis of Lawrence’s idea. In her book *An Alternate Gaze: Essay on D. H. Lawrence*. she has elaborately presented his concept of education. She writes:

“Obviously Lawrence incorporated a great deal of biographical material in this account of his experience of learning as also his gradual dissatisfaction with the entire system. Further in the novel, Lawrence presents Ursula’s harrowing experiences as a school teacher at Brinsley Street School. Here she learnt the hard realities of teaching in a school where education meant nothing, neither to the children nor to the teachers. It appeared to be a battleground of power, domination: the headmaster. Mr. Harby dominating the teachers and the teachers exercising brutal force over the children” (Choudhury109).

Lawrence has depicted Ursula's character as a teacher of a Common English School during his time. My observation is that Lawrence has endeavoured to present his own experiences as a teacher, through Ursula. His teaching experience for three years at Croydon's Davidson Road School has been replicated in his novels especially in *Women in Love* and *The Rainbow*. His idea was to bring a revolutionary change in the education system as he believed a novelist's duty was to bring social changes through his novels.

“Her heart was so black and tangled in the teaching, her personal self was shut in prison, abolished, she was subjugated to a bad destructive will” (Lawrence 357).

Thus, Ursula gets disillusioned and disgusted with the way education system has affected her life. She is an epitome of the outcome of prevailing education system of England during Industrialization. One must read Lawrence's two great nonfictional books to understand his ideology of education and its different spheres. I feel bold to mention that he has proved himself not only a fiction writer of different genre but more than that – a Biologist, a psychoanalyst a sociologist and ultimately a great visionary educationist. Chapter six, seven and eight of *Fantasia of the Unconscious* are full of Lawrentian vision of Education. These essays are a blueprint of the character of Education as envisaged by Lawrence. Here, I would like to quote few of the passages from these chapters. Chapter six entitled “First steps in Education” signifies the degree of psychoanalytical knowledge Lawrence has propagated with respect to his ideology of Education. He elaborately describes:

“The process of transfer from primary consciousness is called sublimation, the sublimating of the potential body of knowledge with the definite reality of the idea. And with this process we have identified all education. The very derivation of the Latin word education shows us” (Lawrence 69).

“Education means leading out the individual nature in each man and woman to its truthfulness. You can't do that by stimulating the mind. To pump education into the

mind is fatal. That which sublimates from the dynamic consciousness into the mental consciousness has alone any value. This, in most individuals, is very little indeed. So that most individuals, under a wise government, would be most carefully protected from all vicious attempts to inject extraneous ideas into them. Every extraneous idea, which has no inherent root in the dynamic consciousness, is as dangerous as a nail driven into a young tree” (Lawrence 76-77).

The above passages are enough to understand the vision of Lawrence with regard to Education. But the dilemma is that human psychology does not allow positive and constructive aspects of any great being who takes to reforming his surroundings. Rather, his negative and weak aspects are propagated to annihilate and defame his personality. And so it happened with Lawrence. Here I would like to juxtapose Mark Antony’s funeral speech which he delivered at the funeral of Julius Caesar. He speaks thus:

“The evil that men do lives after them;

The good is oft interréd with their bones;”

(Shakespeare —Act III, sc. II)

So, in my opinion critics have unjustly and prejudicially treated Lawrence and demonized his existence in the literary world which has been now acknowledged by the people at large. That’s why there has been a surge in reading and analyzing Lawrence’s works with an opened approach. The more people read him the more they appreciate him. Lawrence has elaborately signified the role a mother plays in a child’s first steps in education. Thus, he entitled seventh chapter of *Fantasia of the Unconscious* “First Steps in Education”. His approach is to create an instinctive ambiance for a child to learn. And a mother has to play a pivotal role in the education of her child.

“And this is the way to educate children: the instinctive way of mothers. There should be no effort made to teach children to think, to have ideas. Only to lift them and urge

them into dynamic activity. The voice of dynamic sound, not the words of understanding. Damn understanding. Gestures, and touch, and expression of the face, not theory. Never have ideas about children—and never have ideas for them [...] A child must learn to move blithe and free and proud. It must learn the fullness of spontaneous motion. And this it can only learn by continuous reaction from all the centres, through all the emotions” (Lawrence 78-79).

Thus, Lawrence’s ideology of Elementary Education is crystal clear that it should be imparted by the parents at home until the child attains the age of ten. He wants parents to groom their children as per their socio-economic and cultural strata. He further goes on to mention that elementary schools should be turned into either public workshops or gymnasia. Lawrence goes on to explain the intricate relation in education and sex. The eighth chapter of the book is entitled “Education and Sex in man, woman and child”. In this chapter he has talked on a serious issue related to child’s education process. He asks the parents not to artificially stimulate anything in the mind of a child.

“The one thing we have to avoid, then, even while we carry on our own old process of education, is this development of the powers of so-called self-expression in a child. Let us beware of artificially stimulating his self-consciousness and his so-called imagination. All that we do is to pervert the child into a ghastly state of self-consciousness, making him affectedly try to show off as we wish him to show off. The moment the least little trace of self-consciousness enters in a child, goodbye to everything except falsity” (Lawrence 89).

It is believed that Lawrencean ideology of education influenced Rabindranath Tagore so much so that he established Vishwa Bharti Shanti Niketan. Lawrence’s approach towards a child’s education was to grant optimum liberty to the child. He was of the opinion that the

contemporary education system was responsible for a new hierarchical foundation of social order:

It is obvious that a system of education...briefly sketch out... will inevitably produce distinct classes of society. The basis is the great class of workers. From this class will rise also the masters of industry, and probably, the leading soldiers. Second comes the clerkly caste, which will include elementary teachers and minor professionals and which will produce the local government bodies. Thirdly we have the class of higher professionals, legal, medical, scholastic. Finally there is a small class of supreme judges” (Choudhury 117)

Lawrence suggests various ways and approaches of as to how to start educating a child. He has a simple and instinctual answer. He speaks about the rules of beginning. “First rule,leave him alone. Second rule, leave him alone. Third rule, leave him alone” (Lawrence 89). He is of the opinion that leisure and physical activities must be made mandatory in school education. He is highly opposed to the corporal punishment and coercion as he believes that these impositions affect the fragile and dedicate mind of children thus hampering the natural growth of growing up children.

My conclusion is that the world, today is following the concept of Lawrencean ideology of Education especially in the elementary education process. ‘Learn with Fun’,‘Learn while play and play while learn’ etc. are all Lawrence’s charter of Education which he perceived nearly hundred years ago. Again, I would like to say that there is a need to acknowledge Lawrence’s contribution in the field of education he proposed through his writings.

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