

# Gender Advocacy in Lawrence's Women in Love

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## Abstract

This research work makes an attempt to explore how patriarchal ideology exploits the female characters in D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*. It uses the perspective of Marxist Feminism which advocates for the end of economic exploitation of women. In *Women in Love* Ursula and Gudrun struggle to liberate themselves from the Capitalist patriarchal domination they suffer from at the hands of males in the contemporary British patriarchal society. This research stays significant within the context of scholarship in the sense that it attempts to impart a deep insight regarding how the effects of patriarchal ideology exploits the female characters and finally how they struggle to liberate themselves from patriarchal domination. Similarly, I have used D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* as a primary text to show how Ursula and Gudrun struggle to liberate themselves from the male domination. Marxist Feminism focuses on the ways that women are oppressed through capitalist economic practices. According to this theory, women are exploited in the home and in the workplace because much of their labor is uncompensated.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, Dialectical Relation, Feminist Perspective, Capitalism, Domination

## Introduction

She criticizes the society for the inequalities. Ursula is strictly against the male domination; she shouts, and raises her voice against this inequality. The women are in search of their own identity. They have to struggle against different obstacles. They challenge the obstacles encountered in their own family circle as well as in society. In spite of numerous difficulties, faced by them they go on struggling to achieve their goals. Lawrence has shown their success – even though Gudrun and Ursula both become mistresses. Through different scenes Lawrence has shown Ursula as a person who is against male superiority and domination. In *Women in Love* Gudrun wants the kind of freedom that a man like Gerald practices in the British society. She protests against the male domination in that society. The women are in search of their own identity. They struggle against different obstacles. They challenge the obstacles encountered in their own family circle as well as in society. In spite of numerous difficulties faced by them, they try to achieve their goals. So, they try to establish their identity, distinct from the patriarchal dominance of men.

## Literature Review

In course of their relationship, Ursula and Gudrun become much aware of the inequality prevailing in their own society and they have a desire for liberation. They oppose male domination

and male superiority. Ursula and Gudrun as females are concerned with preserving separate roles from males. Regarding the theme of domination in Lawrence's novels, Harry T. Moore says that Lawrence has been called a 'male chauvinist'. He disagrees with this view and claims that "Lawrence was aware of his urge to dominate, but he fought against it" (342). I agree with Moore because in Lawrence's fiction it seems clear that this urge to dominate is present in several stories but one cannot say that the author's male doctrine is finally victorious. Moore points out the example of Ursula and Birkin of *Women in Love*: "even in all their 'therapeutic' quarrels Ursula was his equal" (p.343). Ursula never fully succumbs to Birkin's domination.

I only disagree with Moore's idea of Birkin's "consistent plea for 1star-equilibrium". Birkin says that he wants a communion in which he and his partner are "two equal stars balanced in conjunction" and in fact this is not what he really wants (as Ursula perceives). Moore forgets to mention Ursula's protest that what Birkin wants is a 'satellite'. This idea is perfectly proved in the chapter "Mino" in which a male pet cat chases a wild female cat who is described in submissive terms. The male cat (who stands for Birkin) is 'royal' and domineering. Ursula sees this and questions Birkin's theory of 'star-equilibrium' as being a theory of male supremacy not of a 'balanced conjunction'. It seems clear that, despite my disagreeing with Moore, Lawrence really fought against his "urge to domination" otherwise Ursula would not question the Lawrence- like Birkin. Lawrence the writer is composed of both Birkin, the ideologue, and Ursula.

Homosexuality has always been a controversial theme in Lawrence's fiction. Some critics tend to see homosexuality in Lawrence as a feature of his character which he could not project into reality and, therefore, he attempted to portray in fiction by means of his idea of blood brotherhood, as presented in *Women in Love* through Birkin. Moore, in several passages of his book, defends Lawrence from this attack. Here, he puts forward some of his arguments:

Lawrence does not seem to have been a homosexual; at least not a complete or continually practicing one. Frieda Lawrence used to insist that her husband was not in any way a homosexual, but towards the end of his life she changed her tune somewhat; as she wrote in 1949 to Edward Gilbert, who was studying Lawrence, 'Murry and he had no 'love affair'. But he did not believe in homosexuality. (84)

Although many critics have written about the theme of homosexuality, Lawrence has explored women's relationship with other women. He has contributed to the understanding of the inner bond among women. Another critic R.E., Pritchard reads the novel from the perspective of psychoanalysis as he regards the theme as psychological. Pritchard explains Lawrence's homosexuality in the following way: Lawrence had initially feared his father's passionate nature, confusing violence with sexuality. His inability to achieve the necessary relationship and identification with his father led — as is common in such cases — to a homosexual desire to submit and to be possessed by father-figures of male potency. So in Lawrence, savagery usually implied a fierce, dehumanizing passion or mindless sensuality, often with guilty homosexual overtones; something he desired as a release for his sexual energies. (23)

This passage again explores the misunderstanding, complication and conflict between the same as well as opposite sexes in *Women in Love*. Pritchard helps us to understand sexual inhibition, energy and desires in women.

T. A. Smailes studies the novel from the perspective of mythology. His study of "The Mythical

Bases of Women in Love" suggests allusions to the ancient Greek and Norse traditions. He feels that Lawrence closely modeled Gerald upon an archaic form of Hermes. In the "Death and Love" chapter, Gerald wears a cap like that associated with Hermes. Like Hermes, "the herald of Hades", "he has singled out Gudrun for death. Smailes also suggests Gudrun and Gerald in the roles of Proserpine and Pluto in the "Threshold" chapter, where Gudrun is presented with flowers. While Smailes may be correct in postulating that Lawrence was alluding to these myths, they refer only to limited portions of the novel (Smailes 129-136). Thus, on the surface, the destructive nature of -the world and its effect on the characters of Women in Love is self-evident because the novel contains elements of death, emotional annihilation and cruelty.

Although several critics have made attempts to depict women's relationship, psychological problem, and mythic allusion and plight in bits and pieces, they have not interpreted the novel from the Marxist feminist perspective. The present proposed research attempts to analyze the novel from Marxist feminist perspective.

### **Dialectical Relationship with Male Counterpart**

Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen are two sisters from the Midlands, who try to find individual fulfillment in the early years of the 20th century British society. They are portrayed working at households in the opening scene of the novel. They both become involved in intense relationships—Ursula with school inspector Rupert Birkin and Gudrun with colliery owner Gerald Crich. Birkin's relationship with Ursula is, from the first, difficult in its own way. Much of the reason has to do with Birkin's hatred of women.

In Women in love, the females try to resist males. According to Kate Millet, the role of women in this novel is to destroy men. She writes: "Ursula's main quest is what the critic calls "big want", i.e., a husband. As Skrebensky is only an empty shell, Ursula destroys him and will wait for the real 'son of God' personified by Birkin, the protagonist of Women in Love" (261). Millet also considers Ursula's initiation into the 'man's world' as repellent and says that

Lawrence can only sympathize provisionally, stipulating that the moment Ursula "proves herself" (he will allow her to survive but not to succeed), she must consent to withdraw from his territory on the instant she has satisfied her perverse little desire to try the water.) (261)

This shows how women are looked down upon by men and this occurs because Ursula is not looking for her independence as a woman.

What Marxist Feminism points out is that in capitalist economies, reproductive labor is usually considered to be exclusively women's labor. This creates a system in which women's labor is separated from men's labor, and is considered to be less valuable because it does not earn monetary compensation. In this regard, Rosemary Hennessy writes:

Feeding and caring for children, attending to the sick and the elderly and providing between one of the main sources of cheap labor in waged work have been women's longstanding contributions to capital accumulation across the globe. Women perform most of the world's socially necessary labor, and they are far more vulnerable to poverty than men. (3)

Supporters of this theory believe that because women's labor is devalued, women as a group are devalued and oppressed. In order to overcome this system of economic oppression, Marxist

feminists support a radical reconstruction of the capitalist economy.

Marxist feminism refers to a set of theoretical frameworks that have emerged out of the intersection of Marxism and feminism. Marxism and feminism examine forms of systematic inequalities that lead to the "experiences of oppression for marginalized individuals" (Ehrenreich, 17). Marxism deals with a form of inequality that arises from the class dynamics of capitalism. It understands the class inequality as the primary axis of oppression in capitalist societies. Feminism understands gender inequality as the primary axis of oppression in patriarchic societies. The goal of the Marxist feminist framework is to liberate women by transforming the conditions of their oppression and exploitation.

Adorno and Horkheimer view that women have no personal part in the efficiency on which the civilization is based. It is a man who has to go out into unfriendly world, who has to struggle and produce. Women are not beings in their own right, a subject. She produces nothing but looks after those who do. They position women as "part of second nature—a specialized 'object' not a subject capable of synthesizing a different reality via her different relationship to work and in respect to her role a 'carer' of man" (qtd. in Battersby134). Thus, Ursula becomes an object, who serves the man as a caretaker.

Mitchell focuses on the spheres she initially slighted, reproduction, sexuality, and child-rearing, but by placing them in the ideological realm, she continues the fundamental weakness of her earlier analysis. She clearly presents patriarchy as the fundamental ideological structure, just as capital is the fundamental economic structure "To put the matter schematically we are. . . dealing with two autonomous areas: the economic mode of capitalism and the ideological mode of patriarchy" (20) Although Mitchell discusses their interpenetration, her failure to give patriarchy a material base in the relation between women's and men's labor power, and her similar failure to note the material aspects of the process of personality formation and gender creation, limits the usefulness of her analysis.

The Marxist feminists see the contemporary gender inequality as the ultimate outcome of the capitalist mode of production. To him the gender oppression is class oppression and the relationship between man and woman is similar to the relations between the proletariat and the bourgeois. They believe the elimination of the capitalist profit driven economy would remove the motivation for sexism, racism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression. In the social sphere it generates unhealthy relations between men and women. Therefore the roots of women's oppression in the current social system lie in capitalism.

### **Research Questions**

- 1- How do Ursula and Gudrun fight against patriarchy ?
- 2- In what way do they succeed to achieve their goal ?
- 3- How do they sustain their dialectical relation with their male counterpart ?

### **Research Objectives**

- 1- to point out the way they fight against patriarchy.
- 2- to explore how they achieve the goal.
- 3- to measure the dialectical relation with their male counterpart.

### **Methodology**

This research article is a qualitative research method since it exploits nonnumeric data and uses purposive (deliberate) sampling. Similarly, this article uses D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* as a primary text to show how Ursula and Gudrun struggle to liberate themselves from the patriarchal domination. It uses the Marxist Feminism perspective which advocates for the end of economic exploitation of women. This research stays significant within the context of scholarship in the sense that it attempts to impart a deep insight regarding how the effects of patriarchal ideology exploits the female characters and finally how they struggle to liberate themselves from patriarchal domination.

### **Research Tools**

Marxist feminism is a branch of feminist theory which study the different ways in which women are crushed through systems of capitalism and private property. It combines principles of Marxism and feminism to find out how economic systems contribute to gender inequality. Key features of Marxist feminism include: Legal equality or access to the workforce does not dismantle the deeper structures of exploitation. A comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing systemic gender inequality. Marxist feminists advocate for the breakdown of capitalist systems and the establishment of socialist or communist economies.

### **Gender Advocacy of the Two Ladies**

This study examines D.H Lawrence's *Women in Love* from the perspective of Marxist feminism as it explores female characters, Ursula and Gudrun's miserable condition, their exploitation, struggle and resistance against male supremacy in British society. Marxist feminism is a sub-type of feminist ideology which focuses on the dismantling of capitalism as a way to liberate women. It states that economic inequality, dependence, political confusion and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women are the root of women's oppression in the society. The patriarchal ideology confines them to household activities, which deprive them of direct economic gains. This is the exploitation of women. In this situation, Ursula and Gudrun try to dismantle the capitalist ideology of exploiting women through their activities. Gradually, they try to become independent, strong-willed women who do not like to be told what to do or what not to do. They prefer to make their own decisions under any circumstances and situation and in economic issues as well, which is the concern of Marxist feminism.

### **Ursula and Gudrun through a Marxist Feminist Lens**

The novel *Women in Love* opens with two sisters Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen chatting about marriage one morning, while they are sewing at their father's house in Beldover. The sisters are presented in typical feminine roles as everybody would expect women to be presented in the novels in the nineteenth century capitalist British society. The cultural practices portrayed in the novel effectively push the masses into passive, docile, accepting the deceptions of a capitalist system that might otherwise be oppressing them economically. Mariarosa Dalla Costa advocates that "women should demand wages for housework rather than allow themselves to be forced into the traditional labor force, where, doing a 'double day, women would still provide housework services to capital for free as well as wage labor" (6). But, in the novel, *Women in Love* Lawrence draws the picture of Ursula and Gudrun who are engaged in household activities:

Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen sat one morning in the window-bay of their father's house in Beldover, working and talking. Ursula was stitching a piece of brightly-coloured embroidery, and

Gudrun was drawing upon a board which she held on her knee. They were mostly silent, talking as their thoughts strayed through their minds.

'Ursula,' said Gudrun, 'don't you REALLY WANT to get married?' Ursula laid her embroidery in her lap and looked up. Her face was calm and considerate. (7)

Marxist feminists who have looked at housework have also subsumed the feminist struggle into the struggle against capital. Marxist feminist discourse contends that all wage earners are exploited by capitalism. Within Marxist feminist discourse, capitalist hegemonic dominance is the root oppressor of women. So Ursula and Gudrun are portrayed along this ideology as they are confined within household chores without pay.

Ursula is not the traditional types of woman who is submissive and docile. This is shown through the discussion about marriage between herself and Gudrun. For Gudrun, a traditional marriage is an "experience of some sort" (7) that could relieve her boredom and ultimately provide self-fulfillment. Her sister, Ursula, however, questions this and asserts that the experience of marriage could be "the end of experience" (8). They are not the kinds of women who are searching for romance as other women in the nineteenth century did. Instead, they use reason and authentication and try to escape from a barren and outdated life. This change in their attitude becomes evident when Ursula contradicts her sister who expresses her dissatisfaction with modern life because, "Everything withers in the bud" (9). Ursula is unwilling to define herself and behave according to traditional patriarchal guidelines; so, she thinks that marriage is more likely to be the "end of experience". "The questioning nature of Gudrun and Ursula reveals their feelings of emptiness, fear and loss in patriarchal society. Their dialogue becomes a radical question to the patriarchy as they raise the question that whether the desire for marriage is essential to female nature or a social construction. This ultimately raises the question of modern women being isolated from marriage and its affirmations.

From the very beginning, Gudrun and Gerald are engaged in a power struggle. Their relationship is problematic. Her nature is such that she can only be satisfied complete dominance. Gerald, however, although he exerts total mastery over his workers, shows less strength of character in personal relationships with Gudrun because of her rebellious nature. She gradually succeeds in establishing supremacy over Gerald. As a result, he gives in, "By her tone he could tell she wanted to have him in the boat to herself, and that she was subtly gratified that she should have power over them both. He gave himself, in a strange, electric submission" (216). Gradually, she comes out of the narrow household chores and challenges patriarchy. This proves that Lawrence has presented Gerald as Gudrun's masculine parallel. Moreover, Gudrun emerges as a dominant character in most of the cases.

The relationship between men and women in *Women in Love* does not move ahead smoothly. As Ursula, Birkin, Gudrun, and Gerald struggle to gain knowledge of themselves through contact with each other, they reevaluate gender roles, raising questions regarding the contradictory impulses of domination, submission, and equality and their links to human sexuality. In the monotonous, industrialized atmosphere of England, Ursula, Gudrun, Birkin, and Gerald all face the emptiness of modern existence and turn toward relationship with others for salvation. As Stephen Mike views that the process of discovering their own needs as they explore unions with others involves complex questions like "a struggle for consciousness, a search for definition" (216). In Adorno's terms, these women, Ursula and Gudrun do not want to remain just as "the guardians of a patriarchal order vacated



by the patriarch, or as "figures of historical regression and oblivion" (Heberle 89), rather they are ready to sacrifice their relationship with their lovers/husbands.

Through the study of love affair between males and females in this novel, we find out that Lawrence wants to draw the attention of his readers to the importance of women in males' life. He reveals and exposes women as a destructive factor in our life. He exposes the successful relationship as a reflection of the positive woman in the case of Ursula and Birkin, while he exposes the negative relationship as a reflection of the destructive woman in the case of Gudrun and Gerald. Lawrence in *Women in Love* wants women to be like Ursula positive, aware of their decisions, fully liberated, intellectual, independent, and respectful to others.

### **Ursula and Gudrun's Action against Status Quo**

Ursula studies and gets out into that man's world to discover her individuality, she rejects the social and familial restrictions in her society, and her mother generations way of life, she wants to discover the world of men and to free herself spiritually. Also Ursula is depicted a passionate young woman, who is whose most important demand is to be proud, free like man but at the same time. She is aware of being submissive to men will threat her independence and self-freedom.

In the chapter named "Sunday Evening", the image of the drowned couple provides another problematic relationship between man and woman in British society as it is shown how one partner in a male/female relationship may dominate and possibly destroy the other. To Ursula, Birkin seems "a beam of essential enmity, a beam of light that did not only destroy her, but denied her altogether, revoked her whole world. She saw him as a clear stroke of uttermost contradiction, a strange gem-like being whose existence defined her own non-existence" (244). As she becomes aware of male/female relationship in society, Ursula has to struggle to strike a balance. She gradually becomes successful to convince Birkin that "the old way of love seemed a dreadful bondage" for women (245). As a result, Birkin also embraces a specific "conjunction where man had being and woman had being, two pure beings, each constituting the freedom of the other" (191). This becomes possible only at the struggle of Ursula.

The relationship of Birkin and Ursula is complicated by the fact that Ursula is forced to lead a routine and mechanical life which is bereft of equality and understanding. As a woman, Ursula's fate is limited to the routine habits of her work in particular. Ursula describes her feeling after her first sexual intercourse at 56 Water Party with Birkin as "obliterated in a darkness that was the border of death." (235) Ursula feels that her life is full of routine and repetitions. She describes her depressed life as "to die than live mechanically a life is repetition of repetitions.... There is complete ignominy in an un replenished, mechanized life" (357). For Ursula, her depressed life is a result of her work. She mentions:

Another shameful, barren school-week, mere routine and mechanical activity. Was not the adventure of death infinitely preferable? Was not death lovelier and nobler than such a life? A life of barren routine, without inner meaning, without any real significance. How sordid life was, how it was a terrible shame to the soul, to live now. . . . One could not bear any more of this shame of sordid routine and mechanical nullity. (237)

The destructive future of the relationship between male and female is caused by the misunderstandings between the characters in the novel. Ursula is compelled to lead a barren life

without any significance. Her relationship with Birkin brings no relief in her life; rather she becomes a machinelike creature repeating the same thing daily. This shows how man or women for that matter have become an object in the view of Horkheimer.

Although the two often come to agreement on a course of action to take after they argue, it is not because they are the same. That Birkin and Ursula maintain different roles is demonstrated by the argument they have after buying the antique chair. Birkin's ultimate rejection of it is motivated by his desire that he and Ursula "avoid having things of our own" (357). Though Ursula agrees not to take the chair, it is not so much because she does not want to own anything, she in fact expresses concern over the idea that they "are never to have a complete place of [their] own," but rather because she is "sick of old things" (357). By "old things" she means the old patriarchal values. Though Birkin and Ursula are intimately connected, they maintain distinct personalities based on their individual selves. In this way, it is clear that there is a difference between Ursula and Birkin because they maintain individual identities; it is also true that those differences arise because of their gender roles in patriarchal society.

In the chapter, "Rabbit", Gudrun declares her supremacy over Gerald when she slaps him and says that she would strike the last blow in their relationship as well as the first. Gerald tends to have dominance over the employees and miners, so Gudrun would not win her battle for supremacy. Lawrence describes difficulties of their relationship, their struggle for violent possessiveness. Gudrun and Gerald express their "mutual hellish recognition" after they are both clawed by the rabbit, Bismarck (297). Gerald's desire for domination and its link to violence emerges when Winifred decides to "frame" another animal by drawing it. When Gudrun tells Gerald, "We're going to draw [the rabbit]," Gerald replies, "Draw him and quarter him and dish him up" (299). Gudrun smiles at Gerald's mockery and their eyes meet in the knowledge of their inherent cruelty. They symbolically engage themselves in framing the animal which gives expression to their mutual attraction to such power plays when they try to remove the rabbit from its cage. In reality, they are trying to frame each other so as to be dominant. Gerald responds with similar outrage when he tries to control the rabbit and, like Gudrun, is scratched.

In this way, this study looks at the female characters, Ursula and Gudrun's miserable condition, struggle and resistance against male supremacy in British patriarchal society. They are independent, strong-willed ladies who do not like to be treated as submissive and subservient women. They prefer to make their own decisions under any circumstances and situation. Moreover, Lawrence through this novel seems to encourage women to speak out against the dominance and control of men that were imposed upon them by patriarchal and society too. I think that Lawrence wants women to be able to decide their destinies and be able to choose what they find mentally and spiritually acceptable.

### **Conclusion**

In the novel, Ursula and Gudrun struggle to liberate themselves from the capitalist patriarchal domination they suffer from at the hands of males in the contemporary British patriarchal society. In course of their relationship, the female characters resist to fixity of socio-cultural barriers as they become dominant in their approach towards males. They oppose every kind of domination which ultimately reflects their search for freedom. In *Women in Love* Gudrun wishes for the kind of freedom that Gerald enjoys in the British society. She raises her voice against the capitalist patriarchal domination. The novel centers on the parallel courtships of Ursula by the intellectual Rupert Birkin and Gudrun by the industrialist Gerald Crich. In Lawrence's narrative, Gudrun, without any job in



that society, comes in contact with a rough manager without artistic sensibilities. Gudrun with her aesthetic sensibilities fails to maintain sound emotional relationship.

Similarly, Ursula is a dynamic school teacher, falls in love with Rupert Birkin, who is professionally sound and maintains a higher social status than that of his female counterpart. Ursula and Gudrun attempt to reject the status quo which Birkin and Gerald try to live with. In course of their relationship, the female characters become much aware of the inequality prevailing in their own society and they have a desire for freedom – longing to come out of it. They oppose male domination and inevitably they reject the male superiority. Ursula and Gudrun as females are concerned with preserving separate roles from males. Gudrun as a romantic young girl falls in love with Gerald, who is mechanically trained in the industrial society. Gudrun with her aesthetic sensibilities fails to maintain sound emotional relationship. Similarly, Gudrun's sister, Ursula, a dynamic school teacher, falls in love with Rupert Birkin who is professionally sound and maintains a higher social status than that of his female counterpart. These two sisters fall apart emotionally not because of their disinterestedness of their physical structures but different career and economic orientations, and thus, Lawrence's heroes and heroines in *Women in Love* stop communications with love and passion in the contemporary capitalist British society. Hence, with female characters, Ursula and Gudrun and their lovers, this research work argues that the male domination over female results from different career and the unequal material/economic status of the capitalist British society.

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