

Impact of Motherly Affection in Chokher Bali and Sons and Lovers: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore's *Chokher Bali* and D.H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* are two famous novels in the early 20th century from two different social culture. Both these novels have particular important issues in them to be discussed. As in *Chokher Bali* we find Tagore has presented his idea in feminism, man-woman relationship, woeful condition of widow in his contemporary society etc. In the same way in *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence has talked about critical mother-son relationship, social bondage among the characters, description of nature, problems in the lives of working class etc. Though *Chokher Bali* and *Sons and Lovers* are from different social context but they can be compared through the commonly discussed issue in them that is complex mother-son relationship and the impact of motherhood to the sons. This paper is going to discuss the impact of excessive motherly affection to the life of son, similarities and dissimilarities in mother-son relationship in *Chokher Bali* and *Sons and Lovers*.

Keywords: Motherly affection, Tagore, Lawrence, Chokher Bali, Sons and Lovers.

1. Introduction

D.H. Lawrence explores oedipal affinity (son loves his mother more than he loves his father) between Mrs. Morel and Paul which is the central theme of the novel *Sons and Lovers*. Mrs. Morel was not satisfied in her life with her husband and for her emotional fulfillment she turns to her son, first she turns to her eldest son and after his death she turns towards Paul, her second son. Her love for Paul is excessively possessive and also, she dominates and controls his life. Paul on the other hand has similar excessive love for his mother. Mother-son love relationship is very normal and divine but Lawrence presents both Mrs. Morel and Paul by their excessive concern for each other which is very abnormal. Paul is fully controlled by his mother even after he has become adult and this has a disastrous consequence on Paul's practical life. On the other hand, Tagore's *Chokher Bali* (Eye Irritant) is the story of a rich zamindar (landlord) family. The family is maintained by Rajlakshmi, the widowed wife. Mahendra the only son of Rajlakshmi is the sole successor of the zamindar (landlord) property as well as of his mother's love. Mahendra is an apple in his mother's eye. In this novel we find how mother Rajlakshmi influences son Mahendra's perceptions and his future course of action throughout. This paper will show this excessive mother-son relationship in *Chokher Bali* which is a common and well criticized topic in the novel *Sons and Lovers* and also, will show the impact of this possessive motherly affection to the son.

2. Authors in Brief

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the only Indian to get Nobel Prize in 1913, the greatest poet, philosopher, novelist, painter and inventor of short story. Through his writings he pointed the feudal customs which enhanced the miseries of woman, specially the widows in the society and he believed in progress of women and their liberation from feudal bondage. Through the man-woman and mother-son relationships in different stories his target is to give proper position of the women in the society. D.H. (David Herbert) Lawrence (1885-1929), was an English playwright, poet, journalist, novelist. His writings have talked about British working-class people, complexities of

relationships, sensuality and industrialization. He spent most of his life as a vagabond and he searched for cooperative culture and landscape. All of his works recorded that search and reveal its remarkable unity of purpose.

3. Discussion

Mother's love for her son is always divine, special and powerful. Though this love is divine and special but the mother should know when to let go of her son and allow him to face the world. The mother-son relation will last forever but that doesn't mean that one will always control the other. In this regard we find in an article,

"It is not healthy for a son to rely on the help of his mother to make decisions. If a son still considers his mother to be the main priority in his life, before even his partner, the relationship is very unhealthy. This can cause the son to feel regret and guilt if he doesn't stay in contact with his mother but also resent her expectations. As resentment can become guilt and vice versa, a horrible cycle start". (unhealthy-mother-son-relationships, 12.12.18) In another article we find, "Each must let something precious go, but the mother usually feels the sacrifice more because at least her adolescent son has the excitement and satisfaction of growing older to look forward to, while she may mourn the years of easy attachment that have been lost. She will never have her son as little boy again". (the-challenge-mothering-adolescent-son, 12.12.18)

In Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers*, the mother-son relationship is presented in a profound way. Why Mrs. Morel the mother becomes so compulsive in her relation to her son. It is because the problems she has faced in her own life. Her husband Mr. Walter is an alcoholic, abusive man and does not help her in raising her children. Mrs. Morel is very protective to her children and she gives her children the love, self-confidence and ambition that they need in order to grow and be happy. Apparently, these things are very good about a mother's love for her son but it has its bad effect too. Regarding this there is a critical opinion from Chodorow:

"Fairbairn considers the child's relationship with its mother as one foundation upon which all his future relationships with love objects are based. His theory of personality and clinical evidence he discusses elaborate and support this claim. Even Freud whose clinical work and theory provide more insight into later relationships emphasizes the way the mother, through her influence on all subsequent relationships remains as an important inner object throughout her growing infant's life." (Chodorow P.79)

Mr. and Mrs. Morel are representing the cruelty and misfortune of the capitalist industrial civilization. Mr. Morel is a poor miner and Mrs. Morel had a middle class, educational background. After marriage they had also happy time but the poverty of life, hardworking and low quality of accommodation had shocked Mrs. Morel. She was disappointed to her husband and started to pour all her love to her sons. Specially to her second son Paul. As Paul is affected by Mrs. Morel so he started to hate his father and to him his father is brutal and savage. Mrs. Morel's control over Paul was so strong that even when he was a grown-up young man and had relation with Miriam, he was unable to have a normal affection for Miriam. Because when he stayed with Miriam, he always missed his mother. His true love and affection were only for his mother. Even for his mother he decided to separate from Miriam, then she says, "I think it will be best...I don't think she is suited for you," (Lawrence, P. 333) and Paul says, "And I shall never meet the right woman while you live..." (Lawrence, P. 472)

Another woman in Paul's life is Clara who was a married and sensual woman. Though Paul was bewildered in the love affair with Clara but in this case, he also was failed. In this regard Plummer says, "The erotic life of such people remains dissociated, divided between two channels, the same two that are personified in art as heavenly and earthly (or animal) love. Where such men love they have no desire and where they desire, they cannot love". (Plummer: 2002, P. 177)

He could not really love a woman because his mother influences him too much, which makes him worse in love affair. Whenever Paul is with his girlfriend, he started to find his mother's reflection in her. During his relation with the two ladies his body and mind divided into two parts. When he is with his body to his lovers then his mind is with his mother. Mrs. Morel's personal abnormal affection to Paul was the direct reason of Paul's failure in his love affairs. In order to occupy Paul's whole soul Mrs. Morel even said to Paul—"I have never-you know Paul-I have had a husband..." (Lawrence, P.218) Because of Mrs. Morel's abnormal love for Paul, his feeling in love relation with other ladies become abnormal. He was fickle, sensitive; feminine even we find lack of masculinity. Paul had little communication with other boys. This also becomes the reason of his loneliness after his mother's death. To Paul losing mother is losing everything.

So, because of loveless marriage relation between Mr. and Mrs. Morel, Mrs. Morel has to turn to her son for her emotional fulfillment of love. She didn't want her son to be like her husband, she wanted her son to be well established. Her every thinking about her son was positive but unfortunately her over-protective control over her son creates a bad effect on him, which didn't give him proper chance to grow physically and mentally that leads him to a tragic life.

Chokher Bali is a novel of immense sensitivity and awareness of human emotions, weaknesses and wisdom coming in through the way of mistakes. At the same time the novel has presented nice description of man-woman and mother-son relationship. The story of the novel was set around the end of the 19th century and was published in 1903. At that time many women would be widowed at an early age because of the custom of child marriage. Society forced the widows to live in discipline. But Tagore in *Chokher Bali* concentrated the minute attention to mind of the woman characters.

In *Chokher Bali* Tagore relates the story of a rich zamindar family of Kolkata. The family is maintained by Rajlakshmi, the widow wife of late zamindar with the assistance of Annapurna another widow wife of Rajlakshmi's husband's brother. Mahendra is the only spoiled son of Rajlakshmi, who has no care for household burden or other job because he is much loved by his mother. As Rajlakshmi is an early widowed lady and as the life of the widow was so restricted at that time so Rajlakshmi paid her full attention to her son Mahendra.

At the beginning of the novel Mahendra is presented as true child of his mother. Even we find though Mahendra is a matured man but he does not decide to get married because he thinks this could make a break between him and his mother. By hearing this Rajlakshmi pretends that she is very troubled but secretly she feels happy to see that her son is so worried for her. After rejecting so many marriage proposals lastly Mahendra gets ready to see a girl for his friend Behari, who was like another son to this zamindar family and finally Mahendra himself marries that girl. And ironically that marriage was against Rajlakshmi's wish. She didn't like the married girl Asha as she thought that Annapurna her widowed sister-in-law cunningly brought Asha in the house as a bride so that she could take complete hold over Mahendra because Asha was Annapurna's niece. Mahendra after getting married with Asha has completely occupied with Asha. His dedication for his mother vanishes quickly. Asha an orphan girl had been brought up by the care of her uncle so, she did never get any motherly guidance, care and love, now again she suffers that loss of maternal love in her in-law's house because of Mahendra's excessive care for her.

Previously Rajlakshmi was angry to Asha because she didn't agree this marriage and now because of Mahendra's full concentration on Asha she becomes angrier to her. Mahendra forgot everything around him except Asha. His need of physical proximity almost maddened him for this reason he could not tolerate that his mother engaged Asha into household works all the time. To get Asha all the time with him he planned that Asha should learn to read. Mahendra's decision regarding Asha's study and her removal from household chores deeply offended his mother who could not tolerate that her son stood in front of her for his wife's sake. Asha became happy with this behavior of her husband but being a novice, she could not understand about her coming miseries. Mahendra aloof himself with Asha from all of his well-wishers. He never truly understood that love can only give constant happiness to a person if it is not set aloof from the society and reality, otherwise romance and attraction fades away as soon as it becomes a regular practice, instead of a desired and craved for thing. Their unlimited romance was offensive for the family members, where the groom and bride have to respect elders and shy away from display of their affections to each other. Rajlakshmi fully heartbroken on seeing the violation of moral rules of household by Mahendra and his bride so, she decides to leave house for some time so that Mahendra could understand true worth of his mother.

Rajlakshmi after visiting her birth place return to Kolkata by bringing with her a relative widow named Binodini, who was previously selected by Rajlakshmi to get marry with Mahendra but at that time Mahendra refused. Binodini is an educated, beautiful lady soon becomes friend to Asha, whom Asha called Chokher Bali or a constant eye irritant. Binodini's beauty, wit, humor and her efficiency in household works very soon exposed in front of Mahendra. Though Mahendra at first avoids Binodini but soon he falls in love with her because he found in every sector Binodini is higher than timid Asha, now Asha becomes valueless to him. Even Rajlakshmi started to think that her son refused to marry such a gem instead of colorless Asha. Even Rajlakshmi feels happy by finding Mahendra's interest in Binodini just because of her jealousy to Asha but she didn't know this Binodini will be fatal for her.

Binodini was jealous to Asha as she was cared by both Mahendra and Behari and also Binodini thought she could be in the position of Asha. So, Binodini took it as a challenge that Mahendra should desire for her and she did it. On the other hand, Rajlakshmi was also jealous to Asha that her loving son is away from her because of Asha. As a mother-in-law Rajlakshmi should take the responsibility to let Asha know about her household duty rather she feels jealous to her even she because of her anger to Asha was careless about Mahendra's illegal attraction to Binodini. When she comes to know about Mahendra's relation with Binodini she started to rebuke Asha. Even at this time she doesn't find any fault to her son, all faults are with Asha and Binodini.

Mahendra decides to leave the house with Binodini where Asha is nothing to him, then Rajlakshmi again tried to find Asha's fault that Asha is unable to attract Mahendra properly. Mahendra's time of leaving house his mother was very sick but he didn't care about it. Rajlakshmi should think about this fault of her son rather she is searching for Asha's fault because a mother with her motherly affection does never find any fault with her child and for this reason Binodini understood Mahendra much more than Rajlakshmi, she says, "At one time you thought you

were in love with Asha. It was false. Now you imagine you are in love with me. It too is false. You love only yourself.” (*Chokher Bali*) After Mahendra’s leaving of home Rajlakshmi was fully heart broken and becomes sicker, she secretly starts to avoid medicine and was just going to die. In this stage of the story Asha has got a great change and Rajlakshmi started to understand Asha’s innocent love for Mahendra. Lastly after understanding his fault when Mahendra come back to her mother, she forgives her son and prays for a smooth life for her son and daughter-in-law.

Sons and Lovers Mrs. Morel attached with her son because of her unhappy life with her husband who was fully careless for her and the family. Mrs. Morel wanted to get her social status, financial establishment and fulfillment of personal dreams through her sons what she didn’t get from her husband. But Mrs. Morel didn’t understand that because of her unlimited expectation and extreme control over her son she has made a great effect in his life. In her death bed when she was suffering from cancer then Paul himself give excess morpheme to his mother and in her sleep she died. Paul himself is responsible for his mother’s death and after her death he becomes alone and depressed. But at last he decides to turn back towards life and it happens for the first time in his life after his mother’s death. In this regard we can say, “Maternal absence is suffered far more than maternal abuse.” (Chesler 76)

In *Chokher Bali* Rajlakshmi also wants to get full control over her son as she is a widow. She has lost her husband earlier and according to the social law she didn’t marry again so, her only soul-mate becomes her son, who is an apple in her eye, whom she doesn’t want to lose. Up to Mahendra’s marriage his surroundings were covered with his mom, aunt and his sole friend Bihari. But when she gets Asha as his wife he forgot about his surroundings and about his duties and usual behavior. Which becomes tough for Rajlakshmi to tolerate. According to the Irish proverb “A man loves his sweetheart the most, his wife the best, but his mother the longest”. (amazing-quotes, 12.12.18) For this reason at the end of the novel everything becomes satisfactory. Before the death of Rajlakshmi, Mahendra understood his fault about his relation with Binodini and Rajlakshmi also understood the change in Asha, who is now perfect for Mahendra and for her family.

In *Sons and Lovers* Mrs. Morel up to the end of the novel wanted to control her son’s life and wanted to live more with her son. But in *Chokher Bali* Rajlakshmi at the end of the novel becomes very indifferent about her son. Rajlakshmi is now feeling happy by watching her son’s settled life where there is no jealousy and anger. Because according to Honoré de Balzac “The heart of a mother is a deep abyss at the bottom of which you will always find forgiveness”. (amazing-quotes, 12.12.18) This idea of Balzac becomes true for Rajlakshmi.

4. Conclusion

Mother’s love can never be destructive; it is always unconditional, divine and powerful. But excessive everything is bad. Both Mrs. Morel and Rajlakshmi are over-protective mothers. Both these mothers influenced their sons’ future course of action throughout. But every relation has its limitations and if limitations are crossed then obviously it will not bring good result. As Paul at the time of her mother’s sickness hastens his mother’s death by giving her extra medicine. May be Paul has lost his patience though the description is that Paul wanted to release his mother from her death pain. And after his mother’s death though at first, he was depressed but lastly, he is very hopeful about his future because now he is going to get new relations which were denied by his mother. So now he is feeling free from his motherly control. On the other hand, Rajlakshmi’s over-protective attitude to her son, made him self-centered and careless about the family member, family honor and even to his loving mother. As we find Mahendra became careless at the time of his mother’s sickness and went away with Binodini for his own refreshment without thinking about his mother. So Rajlakshmi’s excessive motherly love affection spoils her son’s natural instincts, because from the very beginning of the novel we find Mahendra’s tendency is to get all things whatever he likes, he did never think about another’s problem. Though at the end of the novel both Rajlakshmi and Mahendra understood their fault and turns tolerable even, Rajlakshmi forgives Binodini, she says, “everybody has strengths and weaknesses, but she was fond of me. No one could feign such devoted service” (*Chokher Bali*). So, we find excessive nothing is good. Mother-son relation is divine and it should let divine. Mother should let their child free where it is necessary for building a harmonious family and social life as Rajlakshmi did at the end of the novel before her death by leaving her son free.

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