

**ANTIFEMINISM IN *THE LOST GIRL*****AVDHESH YADAV**

(Research Scholar)

Dept. of English &amp; MEL

University of Allahabad.

Allahabad UP (INDIA)

**ABSTRACT**

*Apparently following the pattern of the 'New Woman' novels that were popular at the turn of the twentieth century, *The Lost Girl* is believed to focus on a woman's struggle to break free of the constraints of Victorian austerity and to achieve fulfillment according to the dictates of her own desires. Originally titled as *The Insurrection of Miss Houghton*, It chronicles the heroine's revolt against the stereotype middle class feminine values in pursuit of a more sensual freedom. But how earnestly this goal is pursued is revealed by a close reading of the novel. Though superficially it appears as if the novel were written in accordance with the concept of the New Woman, Lawrence's real motives can be easily traced out. Alvina's transgression of social conventions, though aimed at a pure freedom, becomes in a way to suppress her individuality in a male dominated world. As the novel progresses the antifeminist tendencies start working.*

**Introduction:**

The novel begins with the description of Woodhouse, a part of industrial England, where James Houghton, Alvina's father, owns a drapery shop. A 'dreamer' and 'something of a poet' by nature, he diminishes his fortune on various unsuccessful business ventures. Being a man of 'elegant' taste and a 'romantic commercial nature' he is not in accord with the dreariness of the industrial order and, thus, is ruined by the same. In that way he is able to draw attention and sympathy as well from the readers does not blind the latter towards his indifferent attitude for his wife, who causes the poor woman suffer great agony:

But the poor, secluded little woman, older than he, must have climbed up with a heavy heart, to lie and face the gloomy Bastille of Mahogany, the great cupboard opposite, or to turn wearily sideways to the great cheval mirror, which performed a perpetual and hideous bow before her grace. Such furniture! It could never be removed from the room. (5)

However, the novelist, being an antifeminist does not see any fault of the man in the whole affair. Rather, he tends to justify his action by blaming his wife:

Yet why! Why was James guiltier than Clarissa? Is the only aim and end of a man's life to make some woman, or parcel of women, happy? Why? Why should anybody expect to be made happy, and develop heart-disease if she isn't? Surely Clarissa's heart diseases were a more emphatic sign of obstinate self-importance than ever James' shop-windows were. She expected to be made happy. Every woman in Europe and America expects it. On her own head then if she is made unhappy: for her expectation is arrogant and impertinent. (3)

For Lawrence it is man who ought to be pitied, for he has to live with, "these exigent and never-to-be satisfied women." (4) What a cruel arrogance, which always demands silent submission on the part of woman!

But it is Alvin who desires to reject the suppression, forced on Victorian women. Following the line of Ursula she determines to make her individual identity; and the germ of revolt is felt to be there since the beginning. Though brought up in a very traditional and refined manner by her governess, Miss Frost, she sometimes behaves in a very unusual way:

For twenty years the strong, protective governess reared and tended her lamb, her dove, only to see the lamb open a wolf's mouth, to hear the dove utter the wild cackle of a daw or magpie, a strange sound of derision...she remained for twenty years the demure, refined creature of her governess' desire. But there was an odd, derisive, look at the back of her eyes, a look of old knowledge and deliberate derision. (17)

When Alvin becomes twenty three, she decides to marry an Australian doctor, Alexander Graham, in spite of every one's protest. But no pressure makes her will dwindle unless she herself realizes the shallowness of Graham's love and breaks her engagement with him. However, it does not take long before she outrages her family with her decision to become a maternity nurse. With this decision on her part she signals her rejection of the way considered proper for the daughters of the bourgeois class.

After the completion of her training, she comes back to Woodhouse but the stagnant, bourgeois life now repels her with more force. However, a visit to her father's coal-mines gives her a chance to apprehend the dark knowledge possessed by the miners-"Knowledge humiliated, subjected, but ponderous and inevitable". (37)

The mere idea of this knowledge changes her life and makes her crave for knowing more. The miners seem to him the saviors of mankind, who would change the existing order of false lights by their true knowledge of darkness.

However, the chance to escape from the sordid bourgeois life comes to her in the form of her father's last endeavor- a theatrical company, where she is to help him in looking after the whole affair. A manager, Mr. May, is also appointed to manage the business; an effeminate

person who always condemns his wife, who lives far away from him in America, for being extraordinary dominating. But the more important thing we are told about this man is his fear of women:

Nothing horrified him more than a woman who was coming-on towards him. It horrified him, it exasperated him, it mad-e him hate the whole tribe of women: horrific two-legged cats without whiskers. If he had been a bird, his innate horror of a cat would have been such.(92) However, the reason of his fear comes out in the form of his homosexual interest. It is remarkable that Miss Pinnegar, the manageress of James Houghton's fabric shop, warns Alvina from being very intimate with Mr. May as it may cause people 'talk' about her.

Being 'not physical' Alvina stands apart from the class of women, thus, not rousing in him any fear. How remarkably parallel is Mr. May's case with that of the novelist himself, whose effeminate nature always prevented him from establishing normal relations with the opposite sex, and who always blamed females for that.

Alvina's involvement in her father's cinema venture, gives her a chance to come in contact with the lower class:

On the whole, Alvina enjoyed the cinema and the life it brought her. She accepted it. And she became somewhat vulgarized in her bearing. She was declassee: she had lost her class altogether. The other daughters of respectable tradesmen avoided her now, or spoke to her only from a distance.(104)

But the live performance by the artistes in the theatre, which stands in close contact with the instinctual life, is rejected by the public in favour of films. And this rejection is rejected is interpreted by Lawrence. The story takes a curious turn when an 'Indian' troupe of travelling players-' Natcha-Kee-Tawara- visits Houghton's theatre. These artistes are the bearers of primitive instincts and values, so different from the 'severe and materialist' English people, as Alvina is told by Madame Rochard, leading figure of the troupe. Of course, the purpose of bringing this theatrical troupe into picture is to introduce Alvina to Ciccio, the Italian representative of Lawrentian blood-conscious male and the native of darkness Alvina so desirously craved to meet. He is shown as a strong upholder of the primitive animal instincts Lawrence found so predominant in the rural Italy and even mentioned in his travelogue in Twilight in Italy.

Embodying such animal spirit, Ciccio is described as a 'hefty brute' whose eyes are 'animal' and not 'intelligent'. Throughout the novel his character is explained by using such animal phrases as 'muscular slough', 'great beast', 'cat-like look', 'the low canaille', 'quick-eared animal', 'brutal' and so-on.

Influenced by great 'instinctive good-naturalness' of Ciccio and moved by the desire for individual freedom Alvina makes contacts with Natcha-kee-Tawara. However, the thing she does not realize is that the freedom she has craved for all her life is going to be a mere fallacy. Ciccio's influence overshadows her will in a dramatic way:

His face too was closed and expressionless. But in his eyes, which kept hers, there was a dark flicker of ascendancy. He was going to triumph over her. She knew it. And her soul sank as if it sank out of her body. It sank away out of her body; lift her there powerless, soulless....She moaned in spirit, in his arms, felt herself dead, dead. And he kissed her with fineness, a passionate finesse which seemed like coals of fire on her head.(158)

Her submission to Ciccio's will is symbolically described in the scene where Alvina becomes a member of the troupe and is christened anew-'Alvina becomes Allaye'. Here we see Allaye crouching under the wings of he-bird Pacohuila (ciccio), and falling into a 'dazed submission'. The spell of 'the dark Southerner', as Ciccio is described by Lawrence, is efficacious enough to make Alvina his slave.

Ciccio's domination and Alvina's helplessness become more obvious when she is compelled to have sex with him during their short stay at Manchester House. And what shocks us more is that immediately after this experience Alvina goes back singing to the scullery to wash-up utensils. Thus, a woman's will is made totally passive even in the act of sex. In fact, it is the flaw in the mental and physical make-up of the novelist which makes him derive a perverse satisfaction in creating such situations in his novels, which he could never experience in his novels, which he could never experience in his real novels, which he could never experience in his real life- a woman enslaved by an animal-like man having a magical potency.

Moreover, Ciccio, who is epitomized as a man of pure instincts, is not empty of material lust as is obvious from his curious interest in Alvina's belongings. And his conversation with Geoffrey, also, reveals this aspect of his personality.

But, very cleverly, Lawrence presents the picture in a different light to justify Ciccio's intentions. We are told in the chapter "The Fall of Manchester House" that Ciccio's little modern education has partly dimmed is old instincts, which had always warned him against the meaninglessness of the material world. The modern vulgarities have given him the knowledge that to be poor is a humiliation; hence for vanity's sake he should have possessions. Thus, according to Lawrence, Ciccio's desires for material possessions are not to be mistaken with any kind of lust or avarice. He is a male God who has come to deliver Alvina out of the dreary grubbiness of her surroundings.

However, the search for a sensible and respectable position, which can redefine her identity, still pursues Alvina and leads her to leave Natcha-Kee-Tawara and join a hospital in

Lancaster as a maternity nurse. There she comes in contact with Dr. Mitchell, a middle-aged, wealthy man, who always wears navy-blue clothes. Here, the color of his clothes is specifically mentioned to suggest his lack of warmth and feelings. We are also informed about his harsh behavior with his patients which sets them 'scurrying like chickens'.

In fact, Lawrence has introduced Dr. Mitchell as a complete foil to Ciccio in every respect; Ciccio's natural beauty and instinctual grace is juxtaposed with the material power and intellectual capabilities of Dr. Mitchell. And this contrast becomes sharper, when Dr. Mitchell is presented as a rival to Ciccio in the matter of love. He offers Alvina a cozy domestic life, which a man like Ciccio can never provide. But as we know, Lawrence has always found traditional domesticity ruinous for the independence of the individual, and that is the reason he does not approve of Dr. Mitchell's desire for a homely life. Rather, he presents him as a dominating man who would crush Alvina's identity to a sheer nothing. Dr. Mitchell persuades Alvina, first forcibly and then solicitously, for an 'honorable Engagement'. But the disaster lurking beneath this engagement is presaged as Alvina wears the engagement ring of Dr. Mitchell bore the mourning ring of Miss Frost.

The sense of freedom keeps on pricking Alvina's conscience, for "Apart from Dr. Mitchell she had a magic potentiality. Connected with him, she was a known and labeled quantity".(259)and she decides to flee from this 'intruding' connection and marry Ciccio, who would provide her a space of her own though at the expense of all material comforts. But how far this hope of her gets true is to be seen with the passage of time. Her decision to marry Ciccio is strengthened by Mrs. Tuke's exclamation, which goes as follows.

Indeed, by making a woman his spokesperson, Lawrence very manipulatively tries to hide his male chauvinism or antifeminism. And the way Ciccio prevails upon Alvina to accompany him to Italy as his wife is a remarkable instance of his male power:

She had to be the quiescent, obscure woman, "She felt as if she were veiled. Her thoughts were dim, in the dim back regions of consciousness- yet, somewhere, she almost exulted. Atavism! Mrs. Tuke's word would play in her mind".(274)

She feels as if her will has been numbed by some 'dark poison fruit' she has eaten. And, significantly, this poison fruit is no other than 'Marasca'(Ciccio's surname) which means 'bitter cherry', and which always reminds Alvina of a white liqueur-'maraschino'-which is made from cherries and has got a mesmerizing effect.

Further, Alvina's journey to Italy with Ciccio is described as a process of transformation in which her soul is purged out of all the evil influences of industrial England. This is first suggested by the symbols of 'sunshine', which stands for the warm and fresh life of south, and that of ash-grey 'fog', which represents the cold and dismal civilization of England.



However, the symbol of 'snow' contains two contradictory meanings at one place, to suit the purpose of the novelist. Whereas snow of the English mounts stands for the dead and unilluminated life of the place, the 'deep. White, wonderful, snow on Alps represents the vitality of south. Thus, very manipulatively, one symbol is used in two opposite senses to impose upon readers the so-called mystery of Italian life.

When after journeying through Alps Alvina reaches Italy the magic of Italian beauty charms her amazingly, and, in spite of comfortless austerities she has to face there, she completely gives herself up to the mysterious grandeur of the place. Now her 'looseness' changes its meaning and turns into a sacred perseverance.

The oriental idea of woman's surveillance now becomes supreme to her. As far as her old ideals of freedom are concerned they are crushed to such an extent that she is not allowed to go alone in the fields as she is a stranger in the village. Her life becomes confined to her home, where she sews, spins wool, and reads and learns Italian. At moments, she feels strongly dejected, and, idea of escape is the only comfort to her tormented soul. But the natural magic of the place overcomes her revolt.

However, the cruelest part of Alvina's fate lies in Ciccio's decision of joining war and leaving her in the mountain solitude, where her only job is to rear his child and anxiously wait for his return. Here the novel ends. In fact, now Alvina's position is far worse than it would have been the home of Dr. Mitchell as his honorable wife. But the novelist condemns that state because that typifies the suffocating domesticity which ruins one's individuality. However, after marrying Ciccio, Alvina has accepted a sentence of life imprisonment which puts a full stop on her so-craved freedom.

Alvina's experience can best be apprehended when it is correlated to the Greek myth of Persephone as Carol Siegel has done. Persephone, the daughter of Demeter-goddess of agriculture, had been abducted by hades, the god of the underworld of the dead, who made her his queen. Like Persephone, Alvina has also been taken by Ciccio to the world of darkness, from where no escape is possible. But the most crucial part of the story is that Lawrence describes this state of surveillance as the sacred one, as it saves Alvina's soul from the existing disintegration of modern England and establishes her contact with the true primitivism of the rural Italy.

But Alvina's struggle for liberation, which is said to have found its end with her marriage, is actually begun. However, the novelist does not leave any scope for that as Alvina's wills to strive has been crushed under male-tyranny. The situation has been aptly described by Graham Hough who points out that "Lawrence's imagination is fired by plunging one of his characters into the depths of a situation in which he himself has only dipped his toe. The

Lawrence's fled to Capri in a fortnight, Alvina is left in the mountains to work out her destiny."(94)

Thus, the whole novel manifests Lawrence's deep-rooted antifeminism and inability to appreciate women's feelings. What he wants to convey is that a woman's efforts for freedom can be fulfilled only through her subjection to a man. And the only code followed by him is suppression of a woman's desire under the name of a sacred submission to the natural power, which is embodied in masculine brutality. After an initial description of a woman's revolt against traditional patriarchy he returns to his old ethic-a submissive female and a triumphant male.

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