

The Feeling of Existential Crisis and Alienation in the Character of Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*

Dr. Mirav Patel

Assistant Professor,
U.V.Patel College of Engineering
Ganpat University, Ganpat Vidyanagar
Email: mirav.patel@ganpatuniversity.ac.in

Himani Vyas

Research Scholar
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Ganpat University, Ganpat Vidyanagar
E-mail: himanivyas40@gmail.com

Abstract

Existential crises and Alienation have become very essential parts of human characteristics in the world today. The literature produced years back also talks about these aspects of human life, however, they have seldom been a focus of the study and the theme. Sons and Lovers by D.H Lawrence also include the proper and detailed meanings of both the themes. This study is an attempt to reveal the existence of these characteristics in Paul Morel, who is the central character of Sons and Lovers by D.H. Lawrence. The main purpose of this study is to explore these themes in the novel, which are unexplored till now. Since the time the novel is written, it is read and researched on the perceptions and themes like adultery, Oedipus Complex, religion, physicality, self-destruction, grief, etc. This study explores these new themes especially in the character of Paul and it will also give a scope to connect other characters with these themes.

Keywords: *Existential Crisis, Existentialism, Alienation, Self-actualization, Oedipus Complex.*

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1. Introduction

The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable defines the term 'Existentialism' as:

"A philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of their development through acts of will."(Paul 3)

According to the dictionary of literary terms, the term existentialism is:

"A vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world, and his relationship, or lack of one with god" (Cuddon 251)

In other words, it is an investigation of self-being. Existentialism may also be described as an attempt to reach the inmost core of human existence concretely and individually. Further, it lays stress on the importance of individual freedom which leads to faith in God in the case of aesthetic existentialists and faith in man in the case of religious existentialists. In giving a man absolute freedom existentialism may appear to crown him in a desert and make him the sovereign of an empire of nothingness. But this nothingness is the ground of human existence, of human responsibility, and human action. The terms such as estrangement, identity crisis, anxiety can relate to the existential crisis.

As per various researches carried out on D.H. Lawrence, the themes of these researches are adultery, Oedipus Complex, religion, physicality, self-destruction, grief, etc but no study has been carried out with the perspective of existential crisis, especially in novels of Lawrence. So the purpose of this study is to show that a novel should not be looked at from one approach only, it may have different viewpoints or opinions to look at it also. According to the study that has been carried out so far, most of the works of Lawrence have the same theme in its central characters, which is feeling of struggle existence in their own life, this perception gave a new source, a new idea, a new way, etc to re-read this novel and reach out to a new direction of it. This new angle points out to see that this novel focuses not only on the themes of adultery and religion but also tries to look at the new outlook that is the theme of existential crisis.

Now actually what existentialism means can be divided into various sub-parts, according to the thinking of different people. The feeling of existence in one's own life also shows the solitude of life. The terms such as alienation, aloneness, and identity crisis are directly or indirectly related to the term existential crisis. Such themes are very common in most of Lawrence's works. All the protagonists of his work are suffering from problems in the entire plot. Alienation may be a natural state of mind, but one cannot know that what it leads to, it may lead to a mental state of mind or feeling of existential crises. The main purpose of this study is to bring out a different and hidden theme of this novel, that is Existential Crisis in the protagonist of the novel "Sons and Lovers".

Cambridge English Dictionary defines the term "Alienation" as "The feeling that you have no connection with the people around you or that you are not a part of a group." The term Alienation is a sociological term. In a discussion of the theme of Alienation particularly in the work of D.H Lawrence, it is important to differentiate the term from its more common usage as a sociological term. The feeling of alienation means a person feels alone though he is surrounded by friends or family. The terms such as Existential Crisis and Alienation are interconnected to each other. The feeling of aloneness leads the person to think about his existence in his own life. First, the person feels alone though he is surrounded by everyone then slowly and gradually begins to stay away from society and family. Finally, the feeling of his existence begins to build up in his mind and he starts questioning the meaning and use of his existence. This state of mind is called Existential crises. For example, in the character of Paul, this can be observed. He loves Miriam a lot; she is the first love of his life and also ready to marry her. But due to his mother's dislike of her, he refuses to marry. So, it shows that after all this he begins to stay alone, doesn't like to share his feelings with others and he lives his life for the sake of his mother and his pleasure. Thus, he starts to question himself- "why was I born? Why can't I take my decisions on my own?" Etc.

Review of Literature

1. "Existentialism in Two plays of Jean-Paul Sartre" Mart TugralCagri, 2012, Existentialism in Two plays of Jean-Paul Sartre, journal of English and literature, vol.3, Issue3, p51.

In this journal, the researcher studies both existentialism and absurdity in human life. Through this research, a reader can learn the true meaning of existentialism and existential crisis. In this research, the researcher takes the base of Sartre's views on existentialism and his two plays. The researcher also discussed absurdity in his research. According to him, it can be said that whenever science, religion, or even philosophy tries to make sense of life, it fails. Humans are gifted with life, matter how absurd it is to have a meaning and reason for it. The absurdity of life itself added meaning to life and that's how it goes on.

2. "Existentialism is humanism, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, Develand." Sartre, Jean Paul. (1956) Existentialism is a humanism, Kaufmann Walter. (ed.)

The cited study talks about Existentialism as a part of humanism. It is a lecture of Sartre where he introduces the term existentialism and explains its meaning and characteristics in detail. Existentialism has been reproached in various instances which led Jean-Paul Sartre to give an elucidation title "Existentialism is Humanism" Through this lecture Walter Kaufman gives details on existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre.

3. "Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction." Sartre Jean-Paul. (1956) Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction, New York. Oxford University, p.3.

It is a short book based on the introduction to existentialism. This is helpful to those readers who have just begun to start reading on the theory of existentialism; it gives clarity and a proper idea of the term to readers.

4. La Muhidin, "Characterization in the Novel Entitled Sons and Lovers by DH Lawrence." *Lingua*. 12(2):187-200.

This article includes an in-depth analysis of the characters of the novel *Sons and Lovers*. It is intended to analyze the character from the point of view of the psychological approach. This article is based on two types. One is on the set, plot theme, setting, and atmosphere, and the other is based on the detailed characterization of the main characters. So, from this article researcher gets the proper portrayal of the character and background, setting, etc of the novel. Through this book, the researcher can connect the novel with his main study purpose. By reading this article, a researcher can easily get a detailed idea of all the central characters of this novel. This article assists the researcher in the present research a lot. After this article, the researcher gets proper and thorough information on the characters.

5. Camus, Albert, and Justin O'Brien. "The Myth of Sisyphus": and Other Essays. Vintage Books, 1959.

As per Camus, the essential struggle is what is expected from the universe and what is given by the universe. It could be discovered by the leap of faith or it could be concluded that life is meaningless. This book enlightens the point of what existentialism is and what the existential crisis is. That is how the central characters of the *Sons and Lovers* are connected with this theme.

6. Lawrence D.H, *Sons, and Lovers*. England Penguin Books, 1995.

Sons and Lovers is the main novel of this research article. When a reader reads it for the first time, the primary impression of this novel in the reader's mind is that it is a novel of adultery, a novel based on Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex. But when a researcher reads it deeply, a theme of existential crisis strikes the mind and tries to focus on this novel based on the points and gives a new angle to this novel. This proposed study's main focus is to expose students to this new point of view of the novel.

7. Zalta Edward N., Senior Research Scholar, Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, 2004.

Existentialism, just like "rationalism", is a term that belongs to intellectual history. Existentialism helps in the perception of what being a human is. Such motifs were left out for long but it is becoming more and more protuberant in recent works.

A Critical Study of the Character of Paul Morel

Paul Morel is a central character of the novel. Throughout the plot, Paul is in dilemma and anxiety. After reading the novel the first impression of the character is that Paul is a sensitive and tender young boy. Due to his caring and sensitive behavior, he used to get more attention from his mother than his other siblings. Upon a thorough reading of the novel, one can mark out that, throughout the novel, Paul isn't able to create his own independent identity. The main reason behind this is that his mother always supports him. Though Paul is good at mathematics, algebra, French, he isn't able to make his own decisions in his life; he is always dependent on his mother. He has a great influence on his mother in his life and this is the only reason he is confused and not able to find the meaning of his own life because he always tries to find the meaning of his own life and he always tries to find his personality in the silhouette of his mother. So due to his mother's influence Paul never takes his own decisions, he does whatever his mother wishes him to do.

At the beginning of part two of the novel, we can find that Paul is a religious and spiritual person when he is praying to God for his father. But his father's behavior drives him away from him. He tries a lot to change his father but he never changes. These incidents and situations drag him away from his father and he even starts losing his faith in God. He always blames his mother or father or his lovers for any of his behavior or actions of his life. This shows that he is suffering from the feeling of existence in his life, from this we can say that he is an aesthetic existentialist. This means that for his pleasure he does everything but always blames others for that. Paul and William have great bonding between them; they used to be best friends. But Paul was so jealous when his mother gave more attention to his brother or she was concerned more for William. This is the one reason why Gertrude is attracted to Paul.

When he was fourteen, Paul used to visit the Leavers' farm every day. He had a great bonding with the Leivers family, especially with Miriam. In the initial stage, they are very good friends. Paul starts falling for Miriam but he is unaware of these feelings. And slowly it happens that his love for Miriam becomes very intense and he is unable to live without seeing Miriam once a day. He loves her truly and also wants to marry her. So, Paul shares all his feelings with his mother because he is unaware that his mother would not like it. After all, she is over possessive for his son. Now Gertrude always talks negatively about Miriam against Paul and tries to create hatred in the heart of Paul for Miriam. She is partly successful in this.

Miriam is a purely religious and spiritual soul. She believes in Christianity more. So, she isn't able to give Paul the satisfaction which he needs in his life. So, Paul breaks up with her. Here the feeling of aloofness starts creeping in him. After this breakup, he is attracted to Clara Dawes. He is attracted to Clara because he finds a resemblance of his mother in Clara. So, he thinks if he can have relationships with his mother then why can't he with her. And Clara also gives him what he wants which becomes the major reason for their togetherness. But he has to leave Clara too. This also adds the feeling of loneliness and he starts doubting the real reason for his existence. The reason behind his breakup with Clara is his mother. He has more feelings for his mother, he feels like he is nothing without his mother. So due to all such reasons, after the death of his mother, he feels like he should also end his life. Here the feeling of meaninglessness of life enters his character. After all such insult or cheating, Miriam comes back again to Paul and tells him to get Marry but Paul refuses her proposal because he starts feeling that he is not worthy of any positive feelings in life. By that time the existential crisis starts gripping him strongly. He decides to live alone. This decision of his shows the feeling of alienation in Paul as he starts cutting himself off from the rest of the world.

Due to all incidents and mainly due to his mother's strong influence on him, Paul isn't able to accept his true love for Miriam, even after she comes back again in his life. His mother's over-possessive nature makes him more immoral and makes him attracted to

her mother. Through the plot of the novel and detailed reading make it clear that Paul always has confusion about whether he should stay with his mother or his lovers. Due to his mother's over-possessive nature, one can feel at the end of the story when Paul has a choice that he can marry Miriam and start the new chapter of his life. But he decides to stay alone and starts walking alone towards the church; this seems to be an ambiguous end. This end itself is suggestive of his feeling of existential crisis and alienation. As a reader one can think deeply, and understand the inner psyche of the character Paul. He always feels like, for which reason I exist on earth? For whom I am living this life? For my mother or my lovers. He starts believing that he doesn't have an independent personality. His feeling of this crisis can also be seen in his words: "Why can't I take my decisions on my own, am I a pawn of my mother or others?" These are all the questions that are constantly going on inside the subconscious mind of Paul. In the novel, once we see the glance that Paul is ready to marry Miriam, but due to his mother's dislike, he refuses to marry her and leave her. So, looking at it from a different angle, it can be said that Paul only exists for his mother and her happiness. So maybe this is the reason that he gets a second chance to marry Miriam after his mother's death but he refuses. So, he is lost during the whole plot. He never takes his decisions on his own. It can be said that he is an aesthetic existentialist, as we know that he is a religious person but he also wants pleasure in his life. The term aesthetic means pleasure, so according to this study Paul knows from inside what he is doing for his relation with his mother is wrong but he always blames her mother for her possessive behaviour, her unlikeness for her lover, etc. He never accepts that he likes all this; he also wants his mother's love for his pleasure. In the same way, first, he falls for Miriam, he used to love her a lot. But his needs are not satisfied with her, so again he blames Miriam that she doesn't love her, never gave him pleasure in life, but he doesn't accept that he is greedy for his own needs. So always his mindset, his thinking, his needs, etc changes just like a change in the season. His life is like a circle that has no ends. This is a clear indication of the struggle that is going on in his mind consciously. It has no end. Aesthetic Existentialists are those people who always blame others for the sake of

achieving their purpose in life. So, Paul was suffering from the aesthetic existential struggle.

So, from this point of view, one can say that a reader can't only blame Gertrude. If Paul doesn't want a relationship with his mother then he can deny it to his mother, instead of always blaming her for his satisfaction. Though he is mature enough, always behaves like a small boy. Also, if he needs a conjugal relationship with Miriam then he can accept that, but he never accepts and blames Miriam and his mother too. It cannot be denied that she always stops him to have relationships with other women, but Paul also says no to her mother and accepts the love of his life. But instead of all this he becomes the puppet of his mother and always faces the problem of existence in his own life. The terms such as Existential Crisis and Alienation are interconnected to each other. The feeling of aloneness leads the person to think about his existence in his own life. First-person feels alone though he is surrounded by everyone then slowly and gradually begins to stay away from society and family. After all this, the feeling of Existence begins to build up in his mind. For example, look at the character of Paul: - He loves Miriam a lot; she is the first love of his life, and also ready to marry her. But due to his mother's dislike, he refuses to marry. So, it shows that after all these incidents, he begins to stay alone and doesn't like to share his feelings with others. He just accepts to live his life for the sake of his mother and his pleasure. Thus, he always creates a question to himself: - "why was I born? Why can't I take my decisions on my own?" Etc.

Conclusion:

After the discussion of the theme Existential Crisis and Alienation in the novel Sons and Lovers and especially in the character Paul Morel, one can say that these are the important themes in the novel. This study gives new points and angles to the readers and mainly students of literature. Since when this novel is written it is taken as a novel of adultery, based on the Freudian theory of Oedipus complex and greatly

autobiographical novel. Lawrence's other novels also had themes of alienation which is similar to the term existential crisis. The researcher had read many articles about Lawrence's novels including this theme accept this novel. The Researcher read this novel twice to find something different or just the hidden theme which doesn't come to light. For this study and better understanding, the existential crisis is divided into two terms, one is Aesthetic Existentialism and the other is Religious Existentialism. In simple words, Aesthetic existentialists mean, a person who relies on others or blames others for pleasure in his life, and on the other side, Religious existentialist means, a person who relies on God or blames God for his deeds or the sake of pleasure. This study insisted the researcher input the same themes in the rest of all the characters of the novel *Sons and Lovers*. The main purpose of this study is, explore these themes which are unexplored by the readers. And in the light of the points discussed and stated above in the character of Paul, the said point of characteristics can be seen and felt if looked from a tilt angle. There are surely the trials of existential crisis and alienation present in the character of Paul Maurel.

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