CHAPTER V
CRUELTY AND BRUTALITY IN NATURE

According to Lawrence, the world of nature is not a world of pure joy, innocence and simplicity. It is a world of stark reality where incidents of violence and brutality figure from time to time. In his novels, Lawrence gives us glimpses of the struggle for survival which goes on in this world. The incidents of violence are a part of this struggle. Whenever there is a scuffle between man and other gestures, it is always man who comes out victorious in this uneven tussle. The weaker creatures who happen to be at the mercy of man, are naturally the victimized. In ‘The White Peacock’, a cat is caught in a trap by both force-feet.

On the bank before us lay a back cat, both hind-paws torn and bloody in a trap. It had no doubt been bounding forward after its prey when it was caught.¹

The injured cat is saved from the trap by Cyril and Lettie. Cyril brings her home. However, George comes there and thinks of rowing her as the only way out to relieve her of the extreme pain. Much against the wishes of other persons, George drowns her into the pond. The novelist observes:

He smiled and dropped the poor, writhing cat into the water, saying, ‘Good bye, Mrs. Nickie Ben.’²
Being a farmer, George is directly affected by the grim struggle in the midst of nature. He does not seem to have any feeling of mercy. Killing of creature appears to be a normal practice with him. Nothing troubles him. However, the other characters reacts very strongly to the cold and callous attitude of George and condemn his brutal action, There is something so loathsome about

‘Callousness and brutality, said Emity.

‘He fills me with disgust. 3

Then the killing of some rabbits is described carefully. At one place, we see how some mice are dug out of a hole and their slaying pictured. A chicken that falls into the fire and a wood-pigeon that lies on the ground on its breast are other examples of violence in the midst of nature.

The effect of Darwin’s ‘The Origin of Species’ could not be averted. According to Darwin, there is a continuous struggle for survival in the universe, resulting in the survival of the fittest.

A young and sensitive person like Lawrence seems to be deeply influenced by the idea of the age and specially by Darwin’s theory of ‘The Origin of Species’, propounding a new and revolutionary principle which caused a furroce. It appeared that the permanent link with nature -
the umbilical cord has been cut. Man became a part of a cold passionless universe. The whole conception of nature underwent a radical change. It was no longer possible to subscribe to the Greek or Christian view of nature. Darwinian nature had nothing to do with human conduct or moral dilemenans. This theory was a frontal attack the popular belief of the time that nature was a source of moral teachings and prescriptions. It put forward an altogether different principle - the principle of ‘survival of the fittest’. In his introduction to ‘The Origin of Species’, J.W.S. Burrow remarks: It was also, like the work of Dalton or Faraday, a permanent contribution to our understanding of the natural world.4

This theory made a deep dent in the thinking of the people. The ideas put forward by Darwin caught the fancy of the people and a sensitive young novelist like Lawrence could not escape the powerful effect of these revolutionary ideas. The latter finds that in nature, one creature devours another. This process is an essential part of all existence of all existence of all being. Indeed the chapter entitled The Scent of Blood’ in ‘The White Peacock’ might be treated as a gloss on ‘The Origin of Species’:

We behold the face of nature bright with glandness; we often see super-abundance of food; we do not see, or we forget
that the birds which are idly singing round us mostly live on insects or seeds, and are thus constantly destroying life: or we forget how largely these songsters, or their eggs, or their nestlings, are destroyed by birds and beasts of prey.\textsuperscript{5}

The view of Darwin brought into focus the grim struggle of existence. The writers realised for the first time that life - human as well as nonhuman enjoyed no sanctity and that everybody was exposed to the strife in the midst of nature. Often these scenes of torture and tyranny go unnoticed. However, sometimes, they attract our attention through their painful cries. In ‘The White Peacock’, it is Lettie who is compelled to notice the cruel pitiful crying of a hedgehog caught in a gin ... the traps for the fierce little murders, traps walled in with a small fence of fir and baited with the guts of a killed rabbit.\textsuperscript{6}

Thus a fierce and ruthless struggle for survival goes on. Sometimes Lawrence, especially in the context of Darwin’s, theory of evolution, would condemn man’s conception of God’s creation. While discussing this view of man, Lawrence would say that nature is red in tooth and claw. In this struggle for survival of the fittest, man as the most powerful creature in this universe, gets an upper hand. It is he who dominates and dictates terms to weaker creatures. Their survival depends on his sweet
will. In ‘Women in Love’, the rabbit struggles long and hard to attain its freedom, but in vain. The novelist remarks:

And then quite suddenly it settled down, hobbled among the grass, and sat considering its nose twitching like a bit of fluff in the wind. After having considered for a few minutes, a soft bunch with a black, open-eye, which perhaps was looking at them, perhaps was not, it hobbled calmly forward

The struggle for existence continues unabated in this strife-torn universe, very often causing unnecessary violence. In ‘The White Peacock’, we see how one creature overpowers another. The sheep fall a victim to the fierce dogs:

About the end of September, our countryside was alarmed by the harrying of sheep by strange dogs. One morning, the Squire, going the round of his fields as was his custom, to his grief and horror found two of his sheep torn and dead in the hedged bottom, and the rest huddled in a corner, swaying about in terror, smeared with blood.

The terror-stricken sheep remind us of the cruelty, brutality an violence which are restored to by one creature against the other. Now it is the turn of the dogs to face the consequences of their violence activities:

As I came near the farm I heard the yelling of dogs. Running, I reached the common, and saw the sheep huddle and scattered in groups, something leaping round them.
George burst into sight, pursuing. Directly, there was the bang, bang of a gun. I picked up a heavy piece of sand stone and ran forwards. Three sheep chaptered wildly before me. In the dim light I saw their gray shadows move among the gorse bushes. Then a dog leaped, and I flung my stone with all my might. I hit. There came a high-pitched howling yelp of pain; I saw the brute make off, and went after him, dodging the prickly bushes, leaping the trailing brambles. The gun shorts rang out again, and I heard the men shouting with excitement.²

Here it is not an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity which is generally associated with nature and her surroundings. On the contrary, it is all surcharged with feeling of brutality and violence. In ‘Women in Love’, which trying to control the mare at the railway crossing, Gerald lets loose all the brute force within him against the helpless mare:

He bit himself down on the mare like a keen edge biting home, and forced her round, she roared as she breathed, her nostrils were two wide, hot holes, her mouth was apart, her eyes frenzied. It was a repulsive sight. But he held on her unrelaxed, with an almost mechanical relentlessness, keen as a sword pressing into her. Both man and horse were sweating with violence.³
The struggle for supremacy between the man and the beast continues:

… the mare pawed and struck away mechanically now, her terror fulfilled in her, for now the man encompassed her; her paws were blind and pathetic as she beat the air, the man closed round her, and brought her down, almost as if she were part of his own physique.

‘And she’s bleeding : She’s bleeding : Cried Ursula, frantic with opposition and hatred of Gerald. She alone understood him perfectly, in pure opposition. Gurdon looked and saw the trickles of blood on the sides of the mare, and she turned white. And then on the very would the bright spurs cam down pressing relentlessly.¹¹

The ordeal of the poor mare does not ends here:

…. The heavy painting of the half-stunned mare sounded automatically, then man seemed to be relaxing confidently, his will bright and unstained.¹²

Ursula who is a witness to this scene of torture and fomentation cries:

Does he think it’s manly, to torture a horse?

It’s a living thing, why should he bully it and torture it?¹³
The killing of animals figures prominently in the novels of Lawrence. In ‘The Plumed Serpent’, Kate goes to watch the spectacle of fierce bullfight. The bull attacks the horse with full force and ferocity. The novelist describes the scene thus;

Down went the horse, collapsing in front, but his rear was still heaved up, with the bull’s horn working vigorously up and down inside him, while he lay on his neck all twisted. And a huge heap of bowles coming out. And a nauseous stench…. Most of the people were on their feet craning to look down over the edge to watch the conclusion of this delightful spectacle. Kate knew if she saw any more she would go into hysterics.\(^{14}\)

Obviously, Kate is unable to repress her sense of disgust and revulsion. A little loater, she expresses here sonse of shock:

Oh, they killed two more horses. And five bulls

Yes, a regular butchery.\(^{15}\)

In fact, she develops hearted for human beings:

Ugh, how I detest them : The longer I live the more loathsome the human species becomes to me. How much nicer the bulls are.\(^{16}\)
Kate can never imagine that human beings can stop so low:

It’s just a performance of human beings torturing animals, with those common fellows showing off, how smart they are at hurting a bull. Dirty little boys maiming flies - that’s what they are.17

Moreover, in this grim struggle, no creatures - not even the poor, petty bees - are spared. Man becomes ruthless and callous with no sense of pity, sympathy or compassion. Quite early in ‘The White Peacock’, we find how George captures and then kills a small been with utmost callousness:

‘Oh, dear-pity: said he and crushed the little thing between his fingers.18

The incident proves beyond doubt that cruelty towards weaker beings is an essential part of existence in the universe. As we have already related, there are a number of episodes of animal suffering which form a part of the significant chapters, ‘Mino’ and ‘Rabbit’ in ‘Women in Love’. Drowsing a cat, the rabbit hunt, throwing stones at the rates in a pool are all part of the destructiveness that is visible all around. The rabbit episode in ‘Women in Love’ is a classic example of the brutality towards animals. The rabbit struggles for freedom while Gudrun holds on to it. The Gerald
takes over and the struggle for mastery continues. In fact, it is cruelty at its climax. While the animal screams, the reaction of Gudrun and Gerald is seen in the efforts at subjugation. The animal is in a state of frenzy. The scene is woefully shocking and tearing. Thus all these episodes involving violence and brutality fit into the scheme of grim and ruthless struggle that goes on in the universe.

In fact, Lawrence was influenced by the principles of evolution and Darwin’s theory of the origin of species. He had read ‘The Origin of Species’, Huxley’s ‘Man’s Place in Nature’ and Haeckel’s ‘The Riddle of the Universe’. These books left an abiding impact on his young mind. The tragedy of George Saxton or Gerald Crick is the tragedy of individual within the evolutionary process. The characters are cut off and uprooted from the nourishing and reviving life of nature. In ‘The White Peacock’, Cyril, Lettie and George are in the midst of a fast-changing atmosphere. A new awaking is discernible, but it will mean separation from the landscape and growth will mean uprooting. In ‘Lady Chatterley’s Lover’, Clifford Chatterley faces a unique kind of tragedy. He losses all living contact with people. The novelist observes:

No breath entered him from any other living being or creature or thing. He was as it were cut off from the breathing contact of the living universe.19
Here Lawrence emphasizes the fact that in nature, man can experience a sense of potency and liberation. The introduction of Annable, the gamekeeper, is to show that man cannot depend totally on materialism and has to acknowledge the power of nature. This fact is proved by another incident also. In ‘The White Peacock’. Cyril goes on potato-picking with George. In the drenched grass, he finds a lark’s nest occupied by two young ones, their tiny bodies rising and falling in quick unison. He envies them their warmth and safety, his hearth heavy with vague longing. It is obvious that even the most helpless creature is quite safe under the protective arms of nature.

Again in ‘The Trespasser’, Lawrence focuses his attention of man’s relation with nature. The lovers stay at the Isle of Wight. The impression we gather is that it is a place of unbounded fertility of the natural world. There is an effort on the part of the human beings to connect themselves with this fertility. However, tensions persist, ultimately leading to suicide. If there is domestic tragedy, it only proves that the human response to the redemptive power of nature is not adequate. The novel makes a strong plea for the reunification of man, woman and nature.
In ‘The Rainbow’, Ursula feels interested in the study of Botany at College. While other subjects appear dull and monotonous, it is the world of nature which fascinates. The novelist comments:

She was fascinated by the strange laws of the vegetable world. She had here a glimpse of something working entirely apart from the purpose of the human world.\(^{20}\)

Nature is vast and inexhaustible, the source of vitality; man on the other hand, is puny, dispensable, a decaying mortal. Annabel is killed and his funeral is held on a splendid morning in early spring:

The upper air was woven with the music of the larks, and my whole world thrilled with the conception of summer. The young pale wind flowers had arisen by the wood-gate, and under the hazels, where perchance the hot sun pushed his way, new little sun dawned, and blazed with real light. There was a certain thrill and quickening everywhere, as a woman must feel when she has conceived. A sallow tree is a favoured sport looked like a pale gold cloud of summer dawn; nearer, it had polished a golden, fairy busy on every towing, and was voiced with a human of bees, like any sacred golden bush, uttering its gladness in the thrilling
murmur of bees, and in warm scent. Birds called and flashed on every hand; they made off extant with streaming strands of grass, or wisps fleece, plunging into the dark spaces of the wood, and out again the blue.21

The above lines suggest, ‘that the life of a man is in itself a small thing: It is only an expression of force that is everywhere, quick, tender, and strong.22 Here Lawrence seems to echo Hardy. Regarding the latter, the former in his Study of Thomas Hardy, Keeping in view man’s puniness and insignias, characteristically writes:

This is constant revelation in Hardy’s novel: that there exists a great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it. Against the background of dark, passionate edgon, of the leafy, apply passion and sentiment of the woodlands, of the unfathomed stars, is drawn the lesser scheme of lives: ‘The Return of the Native’, ‘the Woodlander’s or ‘the return of the ‘Two on Tower’ Upon the vast comprehensible pattern of some primal morality greater than ever the human mind can gaps, is drawn the little, pathetic pattern of man’s moral life and the little pattern of man’s moral life and struggle, pathetic, almost ridiculous.23
Lawrence was horrified to see the unnatural and sapless picture of the new and emerging industrial world. This world was devoid of beauty, charm and freedom. Lawrence saw with his own eyes the every tightening grip of industrialism which was synonymous with squalor and dirt and which was quite wide-spread in the mining towns of Lawrence’s home district. Big cities were a devitalizing and denigrating encroachment on Nature. While on a visit to London, Will Brangwen in frightened and awed by the massive ugly super-structure of the world of man upon the world of nature. He remarks:

Sweep away the whole monstrous superstructures of the world today, cities and industries and civilization, leave only the bare earth with plants growing and water running.\textsuperscript{24}

Lawrence holds the view that industrialism in the chief emery of man today. He observes:

The real tragedy of England, as I see it, is the tragedy of ugliness. The country is so lovely: the man-made England is so vile…. And the promoter of industry, a hundred years ago, dared to perpetrate the ugliness of my native village.\textsuperscript{25}

It is obvious that industrialism is mainly responsible for the unhappy and tragic condition of life. Human beings have been reduced to the status of
rats and their plight is really wretched and miserable. The growth of industrialism has brought about a change in the life style of the people in general and the working class in particular.

Lawrence favours close and harmonious relationship between man and nature on which a healthy civilization could flourish. In ‘The Rainbow’, he describes the quality of human life when it is not divorced from, but is unison with nature:

The Barangwens had lived for generations on the Marsh Farm, in the meadows where the Erewash twisted sluggishly through alder tress, separating Derbyshire from Nottinghamshire. Two miles away a church tower stood on a hill, the houses of the little country town climbing assiduously upto it.²⁶

However, it was clear that man’s close link with nature could not remain intact for a longer period. Various characters in the novels of Lawrence and deeply attached to their homes and surroundings. It is through these surroundings that they are linked with the soaked in nature. So when they are cut off from these surroundings, they express their sense of regret, rootlessness and subsequent helplessness. Lawrence presents one very significant aspect of Cryil’s personality and it is his intense and unerring
attachment to his home and surroundings. When the novel ‘The White Peacock’ was being written, Lawrence was taking the first steps away from the country of his growing up. Hence it reflects the pangs and throes of seeing the intimately familiar sights with the freshness of a last look:

I thought of the time when my friend should not follow the harrow on our own Snug Valley side, and when Lettie’s room next mine should be closed to hide its emptiness, not its joy. My heart always clung passionately to the hollow which held us all; how could I bear that I should be desolate.  

As the novel ‘The White Peacock’ progress, we find that human beings fail to find any purpose in the countryside. The beautiful valley of Nethermere is now seen as a lost paradise. The decision to leave the place of one’s belonging is always hard and painful. In ‘The White Peacock’, Cyril remarks:

It was time for us all to go, to leave the valley of Netheremere whose waters and whose woods were distilled in the essence of our venis.
The uprooting from the ‘happy valley’ is a painful experience and it ultimately disintegrates the human psyche as George comes to realise. He confesses:

I dread above all things this slow crumbling away from my foundations by which I free myself at last.\textsuperscript{29}

Lawrence’s views about the cruelty of nature comparatively are similar like Hardy’s. Both are satisfied with the statement of Tennyson that nature is red in tooth and claw, and full of rapine and plunder. According to Hardy it is clear that it is not we, but others who are responsible for our suffering. Environment, Milieu, Society, Nature, Woman, Economic distress and other interests, all come into violent collision with the cherished goal of man’s self-determination. For obvious reasons, then, there is no escape from suffering. If there is an escape, it is only in the denial the will to live.

Moreover, in the world of Hardy the prime mover of the plot remains unseen, but is deeply known as felt. The struggle between the microcosm and the macrocosm is noticed in all the great works of Hardy. This struggle goes on between the circumstantial will and the individual will with all the passions and prejudices. Tragedy is inherent in such a conflict. And there is no sense of justice to redeem the tragedy.
Hardy creates fictional words like Lawrence in which forces control men. It is natural for him to investigate these forces of heredity and environment, and describe how they affect his characters. Hereditary traits often play an important part in determining a character’s behaviour. Hardy in his fiction describes the importance of heredity as a determining force in an individual’s life. The entire environment is hostile to the happiness and well being of man. Conditioned as he is, man simply can not live in harmony with his environment. So natural aim or desire is bound to remain unfulfilled, resulting into tragedy and pathos.

The basic formula of the plot of the major novels of Lawrence is the inevitable tragedy springs from the forces within and without of the characters, over which they have no control. The inherent will to enjoy and the circumstantial will against enjoyment are the prime movers of the plot, necessitating disappointment and death. Through a chain of events leading to the frustration of a natural aim or desire Lawrence brings home the truth that the assertion of the will to live must lead inevitably to ruin and death. So the characters are slowly leading to the conviction that only a denial of the will to live can bring any peace in this troubled world. This is a harsh truth of life.

In the process he comes face to face with an opposing environment. And, ultimately he realizes that the world is so constituted that there is
some thing inherent in the very universe and his surroundings that goes against his desires and aspirations. Consequently, he is subjected to an all-consuming, all embracing sorrow, mistakenly called divine despair. Ultimately, after a grim struggle with the opposing environment, man at last realizes the vanity of existence and the futility of his life. The assertion of the will to live leads to a denial of the will to live through sheer necessity of helplessness and hopelessness. This is the key-note of Hardy’s Naturalism.

The arch-enemy of persons and plants is the environment, the scene or situation by which one is involved in a position that threatens to thwart and kill those very prospects and well-being which are most desired and cherished. This is the eternal tragedy of existence. So, throughout his works, Hardy is at pains like Lawrence to bring home to the readers, the permanent truth of suffering bestowed upon man by such ever-opposing situation and environment. For some of the scenes and environments the situations and circumstances become so unbearable that they are compelled to take rash steps which further complicate the matter and drag them to further trouble of suffering. In short, world is hostile towards man. Here suffering begets suffering and there is no escape from it.
Temperamentally, Lawrence was against all violence and brutality in the world of nature. He was very much attached to birds and beasts. In fact, he could not kill any living, being and least of all a bird. So hunting did not appeal to him at all, especially as practised in Italy. In ‘Man is a Hunter’, he satirizes mildly the idiotic doings of the Nimrods of Italy. When ever he eard the cry of a rabbit tracked by a weasel, he would shiver in pain. Lawrence identifies himself with birds and beasts. He tries to see them from the inside. In fact, he presents human emotions from the point of view of animals. The rabbit and the cat in ‘Women in Love’ have been presented with an understanding that is almost nonhuman. In ‘The Fox’, the young man and the fox have been so subtly identified that it is very difficult to distinguish between the human and the animal. In ‘St. Mawr’, a similar identification can be seen. In this way, Lawrence is very sympathetic to birds and beasts. In ‘The White Peacock’, George’s acts of brutality have been condemned by Cyril, Lettie and Emily Similarly Ursula in ‘Women in Love’ comes down heavily on the ruthless way of Gerald. In ‘The Plumed Serpent’, while it is true that there is a grim struggle for survival in the universe as confirmed by Darwin, Lawrence’s sympathes are with the victims of this struggle. He sides with the weaker creatures - the birds and the beasts – who ultimately lose this battle for existence.
REFERENCES


22. *The Dark Sun*, p. 47.


