Chapter 6

The Plumed Serpent and the Cosmic Power of Phallus or Maha Kundalini Shakti

In The Plumed Serpent Lawrence's phallic consciousness assumes cosmic dimensions, as it takes the form of Maha Kundalini Shakti or the cosmic serpent power. Although on the surface the novel extends the question of leadership dealt earlier in Aaron's Rod and Kangaroo, at bottom it explores the essences or the roots of leadership-qualities. In Aaron's Rod Lawrence focuses his attention on male solidarity, that he eventually dramatizes through the relationship between Lilly and Aaron. In Kangaroo he goes on to fix his gaze on politics. But in The Plumed Serpent he turns his attention on the fusion of politics with religion especially with a religion which is esoteric as well as mystic.

However, this surface meaning is not the whole truth. Lawrence aims at achieving something deeper. According to John Worthen the real theme of the novel is the theme of transformation of the individual and his submission to a superior authority. "The Plumed Serpent" he writes, "would work out what it would be like for the individuals to be radically transformed into beings both cosmically and humanly submissive to 'impersonal power'..." Nevertheless, Lawrence's vision is not limited only to shoots and outgrowth of religion but goes deeper, as Worthen writes, "to the roots of things: the roots of religion, the
roots of the forces which affect men in society, and the very bases of sexual
relationship." He seeks not only apparent meaning of things but also analyses
their symbolic undertones. In this process he, for the first time in his literary
career, exploits the abstract and the symbolic form of marriage and sexual
engagement.

It is no wonder that Lawrence's journey to Mexico is a journey, in the
words of Graham Hough, "to find something" i.e. "some esoteric life secret,"
possessed by "the aboriginal inhabitants of America" Hough believes that
"Lawrence undertook the journey almost in the expectation of a revelation." In
Mexico, or for that matter, in America Lawrence finds a perfect setting for his
philosophical beliefs. The old country appears to him as an embodiment of the
remnants of the historic humanity. The world of Mexico is still for Lawrence
the world that existed before the Flood or the world before the Fall. It is the
world entirely different from "the mental- spiritual world" that we find in the
Western hemisphere. In the ancient world of the Indians (Red Indians) "the
mind and the power of man was in his blood and his backbone, and there was
the strange, dark inter-communication between man and man and man and
beast, from the powerful spine."  

Lawrence's interest in Mexico is not the interest of an antiquarian but
that of a true historian. For he visualizes the possibility of a new humanity
emerging from the fusion of the old and the new. For him this possibility can
come only after the death of the old one. He writes: "A great death come. And
after that, the living results will be a new germ, a new conception of human
life, that will arise from the fusion of the old blood – and – vertebrate consciousness with the white man’s present mental – spiritual consciousness. The sinking of both beings, into a new being” (The Plumed Serpent 373). Lawrence’s references to power in the backbone, the powerful spine, the dark inter-communication vertebrate consciousness, means that he is aware of Kundalini consciousness found in Mexican people. It is no wonder that he becomes a keen observer and devoted student of the primitive rituals. Indeed, “it is still in the surviving Indian rituals that the core of religious experience, the bare recognition of the numinous, is revealed to him.”

In these rituals we find a strong possibility for an escape from the materialism and the monotony of modern religions. More importantly, the Red Indian rituals are closely akin to those of Indians. William York Tindall, while writing about the animistic tendencies of The Plumed Serpent, finds the novel most theosophical. “Its theme,” he writes, “is that of Mme Blavatsky’s ‘Secret Doctrine’: The recovery of lost Atlantis by means of myths and symbols.” It is well known that the modern theosophy of Blavatsky is based on Indian occultism which is rooted in yoga especially Kundalini yoga.

But all these scholars seem to be oblivious of the symbolism of the snake or the serpent that dominates Lawrence’s creative world. As for The Plumed Serpent, the figure of the snake is so pervasive that it surfaces in almost every chapter. These scholars seem unwilling to appreciate the symbolic meaning of the title itself as well as the emblems of the serpent power scattered throughout the novel. In reality Lawrence sums up the central theme of the
novel in the title itself. The phrase, the plumed serpent, is used for Quetzalcoatl which is a combination of two words Quetzal and Coatl. While Quetzal is a name of a mountain bird, Coatl is a hideous fanged and feathered serpent. Explaining this meaning Lawrence writes:

The name Quetzalcoatl, too, fascinated her. She had read bits about the god. Quetzal is the name of a bird that lives high up in the mists of tropical mountains, and has very beautiful tail feathers, precious to the Aztecs. Coatl is a serpent. Quetzalcoatl is the Plumed Serpent, so hideous in the fanged, feathered, writhing stone of the National Museum.

(The Plumed Serpent 48)

Here it is relevant to recall the first title of the novel Quetzalcoatl. It is through these titles Quetzalcoatl and The Plumed Serpent that Lawrence symbolizes the central theme of wedding of the sky above and the earth below. To quote Tindall:

Quetzalcoatl’s name, meaning bird – serpent and twin indicates duality, the bird serpent standing for the above, the snake for the below, and twin, for their union. He was the god of the fertilizing contact of wind and rain with fire and earth... Kate’s marriage to Don Cipriano in the rain is a symbolic treatment of this marriage of water and earth.¹⁰

The intended unity of the two words is not again the entire truth. It is something more than the combination of the two words connotes. Lawrence’s chief aim is to find a modern metaphor for the phallic power or the serpent power appearing in its individual and the cosmic forms and energizing each and every operation. His statement in the seventh chapter, entitled “The Plaza,” goes a long way to underscore his central motive of updating the ancient version of the serpent power and its stirrings in the human body:
The man on the hill said: I am Quetzalcoatl, who breathed moisture on your dry mouths. I filled your breasts with breath from beyond the sun. I am the wind that whirs from the heart of the earth, the little winds that whirl like snakes round your feet and your legs and your thighs, lifting up the head of the snake of your body, in whom is your power. When the snake of your body lifts its head, beware! It is I, Quetzalcoatl, rearing up in you, rearing up and reaching beyond the bright day, to the sun of darkness beyond, where is your home at last. Save for the dark sun at the back of the day-sun, save for the four dark arms in the heavens, you were bone, and the stars were bone, and the moon an empty sea-shell on a dry beach, and the yellow sun were an empty cup, like the dry thin bone of a dead coyote’s head. So beware!

(The Plumed Serpent 108)

Phrases like the snake “round your feet,” “your legs and your thighs,” “snake of your body, in whom is your power” make it crystal clear that Lawrence is making a direct reference to the serpent power. Elsewhere in the eleventh chapter, entitled “Lords of the Day and Night,” again he describes the coiling and uncoiling of the snake, the far-reaching Snake and Eternal cosmos and the dreams arising and fading in the sleep of that snake. Mysteriously he goes on to speak of man “as a dream arising” in the sleep of the cosmic snake:

The great Snake coils and uncoils the plasm of his folds, and stars appear, and worlds fade out. It is no more than the changing and easing of the plasm.

'I always am, says his sleep.
'As a man in a deep sleep knows not, but is, so is the Snake of the coiled cosmos, wearing its plasm.
'As a man in a deep sleep has no to-morrow, no yesterday, nor today, but only is, so is the limpid, far-reaching Snake of the eternal Cosmos, Now, and forever Now.
'Now, and only Now, and forever Now.
'But dreams arise and fade in the sleep of the Snake.
'And worlds arise as dreams, and are gone as dreams.
'And man is a dream in the sleep of the Snake.
'And only the sleep that is dreamless breathes I Am!
'In the dreamless Now, I Am.
‘Dreams arise as they must arise, and man is a dream arisen.
‘But the dreamless plasm of the Snake is the plasm of a man, of his body, his soul, and his spirit at one.
‘And the perfect sleep of the Snake I Am is the plasm of a man, who is whole.

(The Plumed Serpent 156)

The aforesaid passage underscores not only the centrality of the serpent power but also its symbolic meaning. In Shaivism and Tantrism, Kundalini Shakti stands precisely for three things, individual phallic power, cosmic power, and the source of creation and dissolution.

Before identifying the different aspects of the serpent power, let us find a working definition of Kundalini Shakti. “Kundalini”, writes Sir John Woodroffe in the ‘Introduction’ to his The Serpent Power, “is the static form of the creative energy in bodies which is the source of all energies, including PRANA.”¹¹ This creative energy or Shakti is identified as the Shakti of the Supreme Shiva. Elaborating this idea, M.P. Pandit writes: “Now this Sakti coiled round the Supreme Siva is termed the Maha Kundali to distinguish it from the same Sakti in the individual bodies – called the Kundalini. Just as the Maha kundali lying around the Siva (before manifestation) is static potential, similarly the Kundalini Sakti in each body is ‘the power at rest or the static centre round which every form of existence as moving power revolves’.”¹²

Kundalini is an aspect of the Eternal Brahma. When this power moves to manifest itself, it becomes the universal power. When Kundalini resides in the individual bodies, it becomes the individual Kundalini. Interestingly at the
time of dissolution the individual Kundalini dissolves in the cosmic Kundalini. The individual Kundalani resting and sleeping lies in coiled form. When it rises, it moves in the spiral form. M.P. Pandit explains that as a creative principle it functions as the power of the Lord: "Thus far regarding the creation of the universe which is, as we see, a projection put forth by the Sakti. When the Universe is to be dissolved, it drops back into the Shiv Bindu. The Sakti is conceived as coiling round the Siva Bindu. This Sakti thus coiled round the Siva is the Kundalini Sakti. ‘She is spoken of as coiled; because She is likened to a serpent (bhujangi), which, when resting and sleeping, lies coiled; and because the nature of the power is spiraline, manifesting itself as such in the worlds – the spheroids or ‘eggs of Brahma (brahmanda), and their circular or revolving orbits and in other ways."\(^{13}\)

Obviously the concept of Kundalini is too difficult to comprehend and too elusive to grasp in its entirety. Tentatively it is related to a power which energizes the whole cosmos and to a consciousness which illumines everything. In its cosmic form it is a source from which everything originates and in the end of the creation dissolves into it. On the cosmic level this power is known as Maha Kundalini, whereas on the individual level it is known as Kundalini.

The movements of Kundalini Shakti can be traced in two ways, descend and ascend. In the first form Maha Kundalini or the cosmic power descends in man through the top of the head identified as Brahmaramandra where it makes its first centre. Then descending farther below, it makes another important centre
in the forehead. In its downward march it goes on to make several centres, the important ones being, mid-eyebrows, throat, heart, naval, rectum etc. These are identified as Chakras or plexuses. Interestingly Lawrence gives a graphic description of the movement of their power, descending from the unknown to the human body. In chapter XXI, entitled “The Opening of the Church” he describes the ritual in which four men consecrate Ramon. The operations of this ritual give us an exact idea of the Kundalini-movement. To quote from the novel:

“For save the Unknown God pours His Spirit over my head and fire into my heart, and sends his power like a fountain of oil into my belly, and His lightning like a hot spring into my loins, I am not. I am nothing. I am a dead gourd.

‘And save I take the wine of my spirit and the red of my heart, the strength of my belly and the power of my loins, and mingle them all together, and kindle them to the Morning Star, I betray my body, I betray my soul, I betray my spirit and my God who is Unknown.

‘Fourfold is man. But the star is one star. And one man is but one star.’

(The Plumed Serpent 306)

The second movement is the upward movement in which after awakening, the Kundalini power rises up. Kundalini can be awakened by physico-spiritual exercises. When it rises up, it proceeds upward in a spiral form and fills the whole body with unprecedented energy, light, and consciousness. In nutshell the power can be conceived in two aspects, as the principle of creation and dissolution and as Maha Kundalini and Kundalini. Here we can also take the cognizance of the methods of awakening the
Kundalini power. Furthermore, we can also understand it as a phallic power concerned with enjoyment.

Although Lawrence is not supposed to be the master of Kundalini yoga he, by all means, possessed the quintessence of the mystery of Kundalini Shakti and used it in his own way to prop up his world-vision. In the image of Quetzalcoatl he seems to have found a Mexican, or to be precise, Red Indian objective co-relative of the Kundalini Shakti in both of its forms, cosmic as well as individual. In chapter XXI, titled, "The Opening of the Church," Ramon gives a poetic sketch of Quetzalcoatl, as an eagle coming from the depth of the sky and as a snake coming out of the bowels of the earth. He also describes him as the invisible inward star as well as the star lamp in the hand of God, the Unknown Mover. Quetzalcoatl is also present inside the loins and the bowels of human body. To quote from the novel:

'I am the Living Quetzalcoatl.
Naked I come from out of the deep
From the place which I call my Father,
Naked have I travelled the long way round
From heaven, past the sleeping sons of God.

Out of the depths of the sky, I came like an eagle.
Out of the bowels of the earth like a snake.

All things that lift in the lift of living between earth and sky, know me.

But I am the inward star invisible.
And the star is the lamp in the hand of the Unknown Mover.
Beyond me is a Lord who is terrible, and wonderful, and dark to me forever.
Yet I have lain in his loins, ere he begot me in Mother space.

Now I am alone on earth, and this is mine.
The roots are mine, down the dark, moist path of the snake.
And the branches are mine, in the paths of the sky and the bird,
But the spark of me that is me is more than mine own.

And the feet of men, and the hands of the women know me.
And knees and thighs and loins, and the bowels of strength and seed are lit with me.
The snake of my left-hand out of the darkness is kissing your feet
with his mouth of caressive fire,
And putting his strength in your heels and ankles, his flame in your knees and your legs and your loins, his circle of rest in your belly.
For I am Quetzalcoatl, the feathered snake,
And I am not with you till my serpent has coiled his circle of rest in your belly.

And I, Quetzalcoatl, the eagle of the air, am brushing your faces with vision.
I am fanning your breasts with my breath.
And building my nest of peace in your bones.
I am Quetzalcoatl, of the Two Ways.'

(The Plumed Serpent 308-309)

Like Indian Shaivism and Tantrism, Lawrence believes that the Kundalini power is the source of creation and dissolution. In his beautiful "long song," he praises "oblivion and the life-forms thrown out from the oblivion and their return to the very same oblivion." With master touches he structures the whole thing like the seers of the Upanishads using the analogy of the four states (waking, dream, dreamless, and perfect absorption) of the human existence. His song assumes mystical dimensions. This song of Ramon is really marvellous for its Upanishadic flavour. It becomes all the more astonishing in the view of fact that Lawrence had not read the Upanishads. In the song Ramon says that worlds arise as dreams and dissolve as dreams in the sleep of the snake of the eternal cosmos. All the objects of the world have their
origin in this very snake. The whole song makes a wonderful reading. To quote some relevant excerpts:

‘When the plasm of the body, and the plasm of the soul, and the plasm of the spirit are at one, in the Snake I Am.
‘I am Now.
‘Was-not is a dream, and shall-be is a dream, like two separate, heavy feet.
‘But Now, I Am.
‘The trees put forth their leaves in their sleep, and flowering emerge out of dreams, into pure I Am.
‘The birds forget the stress of their dreams, and sing aloud in the Now, I Am! I Am!
‘For dreams have wings and feet, and journeys to take, and efforts to make.
‘But the glimmering Snake of the Now is wingless and footless, and undivided, and perfectly coiled.
‘It is thus the cat lies down, in the coil of Now, and the cow curves round her nose to her belly, lying down.
‘In the feet of a dream the hare runs uphill. But when he pauses, the dream has passed, he has entered the timeless Now, and his eyes are the wide I Am.
‘Only man dreams, dreams, and dreams, and changes from dream to dream, like a man who tosses on his bed.
‘With his eyes and his mouth he dreams, with his hands and his feet, with phallos and heart and belly, with body and spirit and soul, in a tempest of dreams.
‘And rushes from dream to dream, in the hope of the perfect dream.
‘But I, I say to you, there is no dream that is perfect, for every dream has an ache and an urge, an urge and an ache.
‘And nothing is perfect, save the dream pass out into the sleep, I Am.
‘When the dream of the eyes is darkened, and encompassed with Now.
‘And the dream of the mouth resounds in the last I Am.
‘And the dream of the hands is a sleep like a bird on the sea, that sleeps and is lifted and shifted, and knows not.
‘And the dreams of the feet and the toes touch the core of the world, where the Serpent sleeps.
‘And the dream of the phallos reaches the great I Know Not.
‘And the dream of the body is the stillness of a flower in the dark.
'And the dream of the soul is gone in the perfume of Now.
'And the dream of the spirit lapses, and lays down its head, and is still with the Morning Star.
'For each dream starts out of Now, and is accomplished in Now.
'In the core of the flower, the glimmering, wakeless Snake.
'And what falls away is a dream, and what accrues is a dream. There is always and only Now, Now and I Am.'

(The Plumed Serpent 156-157)

Furthermore, like the exponents of the Kundalini yoga, Lawrence conveys the Kundalini yoga in two forms: cosmic and individual. He begins with the cosmic form and relates it to the individual form. In a number of passages he shows how the serpent of the universe becomes the serpent of the body. In chapter XIII, entitled, “The First Rain,” Ramon exhorts the snake of the fire lying at the heart of the world to coil round his ankles. Likewise, he also urges the snake of the deep to kiss his feet, ankles, knees, and inner thigh and rest his head on his finger-basket. To quote from the novel:

'Serpent of the earth,’ he said; ‘snake that lies in the fire at the heart of the world, come! Come! Snake of the fire of the heart of the world, coil like gold round my ankles, and rise like life around my knee, and lay your head against my thigh. Come, put your head in my hand, cradle your head in my fingers, snake of the deeps. Kiss my feet and my ankles with your mouth of gold, kiss my knees and my inner thigh, snake branded with flame and shadow, come! and rest your head in my finger-basket! So!’

(The Plumed Serpent 175)

Ramon continues to describe the serpent, sleeping at the heart of this earth in the midst of the fire in glowing terms. He mentions its hugeness, with
the rocks appearing as his scales and the lake appearing as a drop of rain in the folds of this sleeping rattlesnake. To quote another excerpts:

‘I tell you,’ he said, ‘and I tell you truly. At the heart of this earth sleeps a great serpent, in the midst of fire. Those that go down in mines feel the heat and the sweat of him, they feel him move. It is the living fire of the earth, for the earth is alive. The snake of the world is huge, and the rocks are his scales, trees grow between them. I tell you the earth you dig is alive as a snake that sleeps. So vast a serpent you walk on, this lake lies between his folds as a drop of rain in the folds of a sleeping rattlesnake. Yet he none the less lives. The earth is alive.

(The Plumed Serpent 175)

This snake of Lawrence is a Western version of Indian Sheshnaga, the cosmic serpent, who appears in many forms and roles. As a winged reptile it has two forms while it lives on earth, it is dragon but when it flies, it becomes a bird or the eagle of the sky. Inside the human body it assumes the form of mental consciousness. As a dragon it sleeps in the middle earth. As a phallic power it resides in the loins of the human body and as a bird it perches on the eye-brow. Obviously the man who possesses this knowledge is transformed into a new man. In chapter XV, entitled “The Written Hymns of Quetzalcoatl,” the following passage gives us an idea of this unique power:

‘He said: Oh, Quetzalcoatl! They have forgotten thee. The feathered snake! The serpent – silent bird! They are asking for none of thee.

‘I said: Go thy way, for the dust of earth is in thy eyes and on thy lips. For me the serpent of middle-earth sleeps in my loins and my belly, the bird of the outer air perches on my brow and sweeps her bill across my breast. But I, I am lord of two ways. I am master of up and down. I am as a man who is a new man, with new limbs and life, and the light of the Morning Star in his eyes. Lo! I am I! The lord of both ways. Thou wert lord of the one way. Now it leads thee to the sleep. Farewell!

(The Plumed Serpent 203-204)
A close perusal of the imagery of *The Plumed Serpent* shows that Lawrence is not only aware of Kundalini and Maha Kundalini forms of the serpent power but also has a fair idea of the experience generated by it. In his book, *Kundalini Yoga* M.P. Pandit quotes excerpts from the experiences of an adept describing the awakening of his Kundalini. We have already quoted these excerpts while discussing *Women in Love*. Here we can recall some of the images used to describe its awakening. "I saw a triangular pit near the hip-bone, much below Gana pati. Furious flames of fire were darting out of it. I felt a burning sensation in various parts of the body and my whole body was perspiring. I had previously seen flames twice or thrice but they were not so extremely hot as these."\(^{15}\) We can also quote a few lines more: "If it is awakened and its mouth is not turned upwards, a man will not live. Hence the person who awakens it must have great power. As the Kundalini proceeds upwards through the Susumna nerve, the man gets more and more powers."\(^{16}\)

The images of light, motion, and heat are also used by Lawrence to describe the awakening of the snake of the body. In chapter VII, entitled "The Plaza," Lawrence writes: "When the snake of your body lifts its head, beware! It is I, Quetzalcoatl, rearing up in you, rearing up and reaching beyond the bright day, to the sun of darkness beyond, where is your home at last" (*The Plumed Serpent* 108). In chapter XIII, titled "The First Rain," Lawrence uses fire, thunder, lightning, and sun images to describe the Great Bird which
symbolize of Kundalini. Ramon “wildly” calls the Bird to come on and to invest with the power of the sky and wisdom:

‘Come then, Bird of the great sky!’ Ramon called wildly. ‘Come! Oh Bird, settle a moment on my wrist, over my head, and give me power of the sky, and wisdom. Oh Bird! Bird of all the wide heavens, even if you drum your feathers in thunder, and drop the white snake of fire from your beak back to the earth again, where he can run in, deep down the rocks again, home: even if you come as the Thunderer, come! Settle on my wrist a moment, with the clutch of the power of thunder, and arch your wings over my head, like a shadow of clouds; and bend your breast to my brow, and bless me with the sun. Bird, roaming Bird of the Beyond, with thunder in your pinions and the snake of lightning in your beak, with the blue heaven in the socket of your wings and cloud in the arch of your neck, with sun in the burnt feathers of your breast and power in your feet, with terrible wisdom in your flight, swoop to me a moment, swoop!’

(The Plumed Serpent 177)

The images of lightning are again used to suggest the new power and wisdom gained by man after the awakening of the serpent power. Men become the Men of the Morning Star and women become the Women of Dawn-Star. They achieve the peace not only of the serpent but also of the sun. They go on sharing the power and wisdom of the snake and the eagle. They have added to this tally, the power of “the innermost earth” and “the outermost heaven.” Ramon says:

‘How shall we men become Men of the Morning Star? And the women the Dawn-Star Women?
‘Lower your fingers to the caress of the Snake of the earth.
‘Lift your wrist for a perch to the farflying Bird.
‘Have the courage of both, the courage of lightning and the earthquake.
‘And wisdom of both, the wisdom of the snake and the eagle.
'And the peace of both, the peace of the serpent and the sun.
'And the power of both, the power of the innermost earth and the outermost heaven.

(The Plumed Serpent 178)

Lawrence, while developing the idea of Kundalini Shakti, uses the typical Indian concept of Ardhanarishvar. He interprets this notion in terms of the male and the female elements residing in one and the same body. He believes that neither man nor woman are complete in themselves. They are the embodiments of the serpent power. That is they are only half made. In chapter VI of The Plumed Serpent, titled “The Move Down the Lake,” Lawrence writes:

In this county she was afraid. But it was her soul more than her body that knew fear. She had realized, for the first time, with finality and fatality, what was the illusion she laboured under. She had thought that each individual had a complete self, a complete soul, an accomplished I. And now she realized as plainly as if she had turned into a new being, that this was not so. Men and women had incomplete selves, made up of bits assembled together loosely and somewhat haphazard. Man was not created ready-made. Men to-day were half-made, and women were half-made. Creatures that existed and functioned with certain regularity, but which ran off into a hopeless jumble of inconsequence.

(The Plumed Serpent 92)

The idea of the incompleteness of humanity is emphasized again in chapter XIV, entitled “Home to Sayula” in which Ramon says:

'Quetzalcoatl is just a living word, for these people, no more. All I want them to do is to find the beginnings of the way to their own manhood, their own womanhood. Men are not yet men in full, and women are not yet women. They are all half and half, incoherent, part horrible, part pathetic, part good creatures. Half arrived. – I mean you as well, Carlota. I mean all the world. - But these people don’t asset any righteousness of their own,
these Mexican people of ours. That makes me think that grace is
still with them. And so, having got hold of some kind of clue to
my own whole manhood, it is part of me now to try with them.'
(The Plumed Serpent 187)

The male and the female elements in human body are complementary to
each other. They unite to complete the human personality. Lawrence
contemplates this unity on every level including natural and cosmic.

According to Lawrence if a woman has only the female elements, she is an
embodiment of evil. Likewise if a man has only the male elements, he is also
an embodiment of evil. Only the combination of the two elements makes a
person a complete whole. In chapter XXIV, entitled “Malintzi,” Lawrence
writes:

Yet she could not be purely this, this thing of sheer
reciprocity. Surely, though her woman’s nature was reciprocal to
his male, surely it was more than that! Surely he and she were not
two potent and reciprocal currents between which the Morning
Star flashed like a spark out of nowhere. Surely this was not it?
Surely she had one tiny Morning Star inside her, which was
herself, her own very soul and star-self!

But he would never admit this. The tiny star of her very
self he would never see. To him she was but the answer to his
call, the sheath for his blade, the cloud to his lightning, the earth
to his rain, the fuel to his fire.

Alone, she was nothing. Only as the pure female
corresponding to his pure male, did she signify.

As an isolated individual, she had little or no significance.
As a woman on her own, she was repulsive, and even evil, to
him. She was not real till she was reciprocal.

To a great extent this was true, and she knew it. To a great
extent, the same was true of him, and without her to give him the
power, he too would not achieve his own manhood and meaning.

With her or without her, he would be beyond ordinary men,
because the power was in him. But failing her, he would never
make his ultimate achievement, he would never be whole. He
would be chiefly an instrument.

(The Plumed Serpent 348)
It is significant to note that Lawrence clothes his versions of Kundalini power and Ardhanarishvar in an imagery and symbolism which are characteristically Indian. As we have pointed out earlier, the Kundalini is the power of Shiva or God. This notion is supported by Shiva’s image of the master of the snakes. They are part and parcel of his personality. We find a snake forming a garland round his neck. On the cosmic level the whole world is permeated by the Ardhanarishvar form of Shiva and Shakti, the central metaphor of which is heaven and earth. In this metaphor, Shiva is represented by sky or heaven, whereas Shakti is represented by earth. This metaphor is a pervasive figure in *The Plumed Serpent*. Lawrence uses it in various forms, the most important form being the treatment of man, the representative of male power or Shiva as the Morning Star, and woman, the representative of female power or Shakti, as the Evening Star. To cite some of the instances in the poetic form, from the novel:

When you turn to your wives as brave men turn to their women
The Morning Star and the Evening Star shine together.
For man is the Morning Star.
And woman is the Star of Evening.
I tell you, you are not men alone.
The star of the beyond is within you.

*(The Plumed Serpent 305)*

But the Morning Star and the Evening Star
Pitch tents of flame
Where we foregather like gypsies, none knowing
How the other came.

*(The Plumed Serpent 397)*

Lawrence images sky and earth as an eagle and as a dragon respectively.

In chapter XIII, “The First Rain,” Ramon says:
‘Yes, even as you sit upon the earth this moment, with the round of your body touching the round of the earth, say: Earth! Earth! You are alive as the globes of my body are alive. Breathe the kiss of the inner earth upon me, even as I sit upon you.

(The Plumed Serpent 179)

In chapter XXI, “The Opening of the Church,” Ramon tells us how Quetzalcoatl, the supreme symbol of Kundalini Shakti, appears as an eagle coming from the depth of sky and also as a snake coming from the bowels of earth:

Out of the depths of the sky, I came like an eagle.
Out of the bowels of the earth like a snake.

(The Plumed Serpent 308)

Furthermore, Lawrence images sky and earth as the sources of human energy.

In chapter XIII, “The First Rain,” Ramon tells us how earth puts strength in his belly and sky sends its power into his breast:

‘The earth is alive, and the sky is alive,’ said Ramon in his natural voice, ‘and between them, we live. Earth has kissed my knees, and put strength in my belly. Sky has perched on my wrist, and sent power into my breast.

(The Plumed Serpent 177)

Sky and earth are not only the sources of power but also the phallic symbols. The marriage of heaven and earth is one of the central concepts of The Plumed Serpent. This form of marriage is represented by the ritual mating of Kate and Cipriano. Kate feels the phallic mystery rocking inside her. She expresses her experience in the images of violence taken from the elemental world. To quote from the novel:
She could see again the skies go dark, and the phallic mystery rearing itself like a whirling dark cloud, to the zenith, till it pierced the sombre, twilit zenith; the old, supreme phallic mystery. And herself in the everlasting twilight, a sky above where the sun ran smokily, an earth below where the trees and creatures rose up in blackness, and man strode along naked, dark, half-visible, and suddenly whirled in supreme power, towering like a dark whirlwind column, whirling to pierce the very zenith.

The mystery of the primeval world! She could feel it now in all its shadowy, furious magnificence. She knew now what was the black, glinting look in Cipriano’s eyes. She could understand marrying him, now. In the shadowy world where men were visionless, and winds of fury rose up from the earth, Cipriano was still a power.

(The Plumed Serpent 277)

It is remarkable that the eagle and the snake partake the same colour. Both are blue and both are treated as the signs of Quetzalcoatl. They are, writes Lawrence, “the circling blue snake and the blue eagle upon a yellow field, at the centre, like a great eye” (The Plumed Serpent 254). The serpent is also imaged as a dragon of the cosmos hissing with anger. Although it is sleeping, it is lashing its tail in sleep with other elements of nature. The stirring of its tail forebodes death and destruction:

Lo! The universe tangles its great dragons,
The dragons in the cosmos are stirring with anger again.
The dragon of the disappointed dead, that sleeps in the snow-white north
Is lashing his tail in his sleep; the winds howl, the cold rocks round.
The spirits of the cold dead whistle in the ears of the world.
Prepare for doom.

(The Plumed Serpent 230)

Both snake and eagle (as Garuda) are sacred to Indians, in as much as snake is associated with Shiva and Garud is associated with Vishnu. Both are phallic symbols and are associated with Kundalini Shakti in some way or the
other. However, it is not sure whether Lawrence in his treatment is influenced by the Indian concepts. Nevertheless, there is a close affinity between his images and the Indian images of the legendary figures. His effort to sketch snake and eagle as elemental forces provides an extended cosmic dimension to his phallic consciousness. Lawrence’s attempt was certainly a pathbreaking attempt, since such cosmic dimensions are really unprecedented in the Western realm of literature. Indeed, he was a great genius who found in his own way. But Indian influence in the development of his phallic consciousness and the imagery to express it cannot be ruled out. Thus in the symbols of snake and eagle we find a strong Indian vein.

In The Plumed Serpent Lawrence arrives at his full and final version of togetherness, union, and centralized sexuality, materialized in marriage. Throughout his creative career Lawrence was engaged with the question of relationship, especially man to woman and man to man relationships. After projecting and analyzing these relationships from various angles and in various forms, he comes to the conclusion that it is only through man to woman relationship that man fulfills himself and experiences peace and contentment. It is only through this togetherness man becomes a perfect whole again:

Yet Kate herself had convinced herself of one thing, finally: that the clue to all living and to all moving – on into new living lay in the vivid blood – relation between man and woman. A man and a woman in this togetherness were the clue to all present living and future possibility. Out of this clue of togetherness between a man and a woman, the whole of the new life arose. It was the quick of the whole.

(The Plumed Serpent 358)
Along with togetherness Lawrence also gets his final notion of the oneness of humanity. This oneness he conceives of in terms of primal oneness. Lawrence expresses his opinion through Kate’s understanding of Ramon’s ideas. He writes: “Man is a column of blood: Woman is a valley of blood. It was the primeval oneness of mankind, the opposite of the oneness of the spirit” (The Plumed Serpent 375). In his final view Lawrence goes beyond his philosophy of blood as he ceases to regard blood as the source of individuality. The real source for him is now the star within his interior dark sea and the star which unites the universal blood and the universal spirit:

Not in the blood nor in the spirit lay his individuality and his supremacy, his godhead. But in a star within him, an inexplicable star which rose out of the dark sea and shone between the flood and the great sky. The mysterious star which unites the vast universal blood with the universal breath of the spirit, and shines between them both.

(The Plumed Serpent 376)

This mysterious star is beyond his reach. It is the innermost of man which rules over both the body and the spirit. It transcends everything including knowledge and underscores the divinity of man:

Not the rider on the white horse: nor the rider on the red. That which is beyond the riders and the horses, the inexplicable mystery of the stars whence no horseman comes and to which no horseman can arrive. The star which is a man’s innermost clue, which rules the power of the blood on the one hand, and the power of the spirit on the other.

For this, the only thing which is supreme above all power in a man, and at the same time, is power; which far transcends knowledge; the strange star between the sky and the waters of the first cosmos: this is man’s divinity.

(The Plumed Serpent 376)
Thus for Lawrence the ultimate aim of the union is to realize divinity in man. In his aims and objectives he is just-like an Indian seeker of divinity in himself.

Now let us take the theme of marriage. Kate’s second marriage emphasizes that sex is the chief factor which gives meaning and substance to marriage. Symbolic or abstract marriage is an exercise in futility. Such true sexuality, marriage becomes a sacrament. It is precisely what Kate feels in the end of the novel:

She walked across the beach to the jetty, feeling the life surging vivid and resistant within her. ‘It is sex,’ she said to herself. ‘How wonderful sex can be, when men keep it powerful and sacred, and it fills the world! Like sunshine through and through one! – But I’m not going to submit, even there. Why should one give in, to anything!’

(The Plumed Serpent 392)

With the realization of true sexuality and its consummate experience she feels in her a sense of triumph:

Sex, sexual correspondence, did it matter so very much to her? It might have mattered more, if she had not had it. But she had had it – and very finally and consummately, with Cipriano. So she knew all about it. It was as if she had conquered another territory, another field of life. The conqueress! And now she would retire to the lair of her own individuality, with the prey.

(The Plumed Serpent 394)

The physical feel of Cipriano transforms her body into a flower. The whole world appears to her filled with lustre and her ego like a bird spreads her wings. The whole body looks wonderful. However, the feeling evaporates soon leaving her empty for the time being. Through the experiences of her new life Kate seems to have found the possibility of returning to her old self
i.e. to the self of her childhood. She experiences a sort of revelation, as she thinks “that there were more ways than one of ‘becoming again as a little child’” (The Plumed Serpent 398). In her return to childhood, she regains a state of innocence which culminates into an experience of divinity.

Lawrence’s conception of togetherness, oneness or union, and centralized sexuality realized through marriage can be understood in terms of the Indian view of life as regulated by the values of Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. In this way the questions which puzzled Lawrence throughout his creative career find their relevant answers in The Plumed Serpent.

To recapitulate, The Plumed Serpent marks an important landmark in the career of Lawrence. Thematically it revolves round the phallic consciousness imaged as Kundalini Shakti. In Mexico Lawrence finds a land with a background reminding of the world before the Flood. In the aboriginals of Mexico, he finds people of vertebral consciousness who are still aware of the power of the backbone that is Kundalini Shakti, which is imaged as Quetzalcoatl. This term is a combination of two words “Quetzal” which means a mountain bird or eagle and “Coatl” which means a hideous fanged and feathered serpent. While eagle lives in the depth of the sky, the snake lives in the bowels of the earth. If eagle represents sky, snake represents the earth. In their united form, they symbolize heaven and earth and their union in form of marriage.

The Plumed Serpent projects Kundalini in both of its forms, Kundalini and Maha Kundalini or Kundalini as individual power and Maha Kundalini as
cosmic power. As a cosmic power it descends from the top of the head to rectum forming several centres or plexuses or Chakras where it remains in its dormant form. Kundalini can be awakened through physio-spiritual exercises. When it rises, it moves upward and finally arrives at the highest point from which it had entered into the human body. In its awakened form it fills body with immense heat, light, and energy and brings enlightenment. Lawrence in his characteristic way projects these states in The Plumed Serpent mostly through Ramon and Kate. Along with the projection of Kundalini he also uses his version of Ardhanarishvar by highlighting the male and the female elements in human body. He emphasizes that modern man is necessarily half male and half female. Both of them are incomplete. He suggests that they can attain wholeness only if they recognize the reality of the elements of the opposite sex. The Plumed Serpent is also important in the sense that it embodies Lawrence’s notions in their final and complete form. These notions include man to woman relationship in human life, togetherness, union, centralized sexuality, marriage, etc.
Chapter 6 - Notes


2 Worthen 91.


4 Hough 142.

5 Hough 142.

6 Hough 142.

7 D.H. Lawrence, *The Plumed Serpent* (Hertfordshire, Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1996) 373: hereafter cited as *The Plumed Serpent*. All the subsequent excerpts are from this book and are mentioned with chapters and paginations.

8 Hough 144.


10 Tindall qtd. Dr. Singh 130.

11 Sir Woodroffe qtd. Dr. Singh 139.


13 Pandit 22-23.

15 Qtd. Pandit 61.

16 Qtd. Pandit 61-62.