
CHAPTER V : OF AGE AND INNOCENCE

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In Of Age and Innocence, the West Indian psyche reaches the third stage of its evolution, the stage of adulthood. The novel begins where The Emigrants ends. Its hero, Issac Shephard, is an emigrant, returning back to his homeland. In him, the colonial child has separated itself from its illusory mother, and has come back to the authentic mother. Historically, Lamming's novel traces the psyche's journey in the period which immediately precedes political independence.

The novel focuses on the activities of three important characters - Shephard, Ma Shephard and the boys. The two generations of Shephard and the boys share the novelist's ultimate vision of the West Indian identity. The West Indian psyche is found to achieve adulthood in the relationship between Ma Shephard and her son Shephard. The relationship between Ma Shephard and the boys perfects the process of the psyche's arrival at the full adulthood.

MA SHEPHARD AND SHEPHARD

Shephard's childhood and youth mark the period of trauma through which he survives only because of his mother's love. During Shephard's childhood, Ma Shephard is very careful about his emotional growth because his father was very strict who was always angry with Issac and beat him mercilessly. It is Ma who always sheltered him from his wrath. She gave him protection, affection and love. His father created a permanent hate in his mind. Ma says, 'That man, was a ram with horns in makin' up his min', a bull without blinkers or a dangerous dog let loose .--- An' perhaps from the very, start they hate each other- An' the chil' begin early walking with an evil ambition.'¹ His ambition makes her afraid of an unknown fear, and she knows that it would remain till his father is alive. 'T was only when my husband lay down dead that the chil' soften his heart to his father. In death he was meak.'²

In his childhood he behaves odd by talking with chairs and calling them 'the children of darkness,' preaches them like his father 'or eats worms because they looked like spaghetti and must taste like spaghetti. Mark, his childhood friend says, 'It was only the old woman who could get him to stop.'³ She treats him like a psychiatrist and heals his wounds of insult.

Her 'love' is her strength. She takes every care that he must not be the object of laughter, and always tries to keep him in balance.

Ma Shephard's role as a mother proves far more vital in surviving Shephard after his traumatic experience as an emigrant. He is jilted by his beloved and England. The experience leads to his nervous breakdown. On his way to San Cristobal Shephard creates sensation on the plane with his neurotic behaviour by humiliating Penelope before the passengers by calling her 'beautiful bitch,' and collapses by nervous breakdown. It is Ma Shephard who bows before the will of her child to go to abroad. After a long period he returns in disturbed mental condition. He empties his mind before Ma Shephard of his worst experiences of discrimination and worst treatment in London, Ma says, '...sail all the way up to England'tis what bring final ruin to him ... he came back here, full up with a great hate for that England.'⁴ Her care and love sustains his sanity. She fulfils the emotional need of adult Shephard. She is the 'healer' because she knows her child is psychologically wounded. Shephard is afraid of 'the eye.' According to Viney Kirpal, 'Shephard the colonized psyche manifests itself in the obsessive fear of "the eye' of the other". The fear had begun in England with his isolation as a colonial with a

black skin.'⁵ Ma knows his fear which turns into nightmare and becomes vigilant when he is asleep and gets disturbed in dreams. The eye of the other becomes for him 'a kind of public prosecutor.'⁶ Ma Shephard is then the source of consolation and solace for Shephard.

Ma, the midwife, self-sufficient woman has given full freedom to her son. Her love does not fetter him. She states, 'I never ferret out his ways from a child upwards to when he was a tall an' strappin' man, and I withdraw an' leave him to himself.'⁷ She is like G's mother In the Castle who has given him freedom to choose. Ma Shephard is the advanced stage of Caribbean mother.

Ma Shephard could comprehend his mood of despair and his jolly mood just by reading expression on his face. When Singh tells him about the double crosser spy of Mr. Crabbe, the chief of the police San Cristobal, is keeping watch on him and on his movements when he has activated political struggle, that distrubs Shephard, 'She knew that he was in trouble. Ma Shephard was growing restless on the chair ... It was her son who occupied her attention.'⁸ She knows he needs support. Whenever she finds him in trouble she wants to stand firmly behind him and tries to remove that cause which bothers her son.

Ma Shephard is unable to comprehend Shephard's role as a freedom fighter. Her son joins 'The Indian Freedom Party' started by Ali Singh, its name is changed to 'People's Communal Movement.' It is led by Singh, an Indian farmer, canecutter on sugar estate and their other member Joseph Lee, a Chinese, a retired school teacher, who becomes a merchant, decide to free their community from the colonial rule. Shephard proves successful leader, 'He rules thousands with promise. His word is like the last refuge of the unfortunate in San Cristibal.'⁹ He could create 'general hysteria' by his speeches among the people. Mark Kennedy and Bill Butterfield also join his freedom movement enthusiastically. But Shephard's overnight popularity worries Ma Shephard. She remains neutral to his freedom movement and want to prevent him, '... let the worl' go its way, for God in his own good time will give you the life you deserve.'¹⁰ The political activities take place rapidly in San Cristobal. Shephard holds a rally at 'Sabina Square Shephard who had suffered from an assumed identity in England, now wants to bring about racial revision of his attitudes. Jeff Robinson commnets, 'The personal discovery is translated into political terms as he can no longer accept colonial status imposed on him.'¹¹ Shephard raises the slogan of basic West Indian identity which goes beyond narrow communal loyalties. His slogan of 'unity in diversity' is hoisted the flag of rebellian and it unites the people against the colonial forces. One thing is common

among them, although they belong to different races they are all colonized people. And his 'Charishma' of this logic works. Thief comments, 'T is first time every son o' man goin' vote in San Cristobal. Education or no education, property or no property ... The vote is key...'¹² Shephard's philosophy turns him into Messiah.

Ma Shephard's disbelief in the significance of her son's ambition to liberate his country strengthens with the tragedy of mad house fire. Shephard proclaims the strike of the electricians. It ends in madhouse fire, where Marcia, Penelope and Rowley, along with other patients are dead. Ma thinks her son to be responsible for it, because after that incident he goes underground. She is silenced by the grave bewilderment. He looks defenceless to her. Her knowledge about religion is absolute but knows nothing about politics. But Shephard still needs her support. When he learns about the plan of his assassination, he becomes restless. But he decides firmly to come out of his hide to hold an important meeting at 'Paradise Point', for the declaration of their participation in the coming election. Before going out, he wants to talk with Ma, but the incident of madhouse fire is tired her. She falls asleep, 'He needed someone to save him from the danger which was luring him slowly beyond control.'¹³ He is her son for ever and ever he is hers. Ma loves her son but does not love his movement and condemns the strike

which creates inconvenience and calls his freedom struggle 'an evil ambition.' Sandra Paquet calls her, 'disapproving mother of major political leader.'¹⁴

MA SHEPHARD AND THE BOYS

Ma Shephard's relationship with the boys has crucial significance in Lamming's definition of the West Indian identity. Her life as a mother, is spanned between two generations. For the wounded emigrant generation coming home, She is the healer, while for the generation of the boys, she is the spiritual guide and the mother-culture. The young generation is ready to carry on the freedom struggle of the elder generation because, under the guidance of Ma, they overcome the weaknesses of that generation.

Shephard's generation is still in early phase of adulthood. Emigration has damaged their psyche and unless that is cured they cannot be the right fighters for the freedom struggle. Emigrant experience disables them to combat colonial rule. They will recover from the shock of emigrant experience in the next generation. The emigrant psyche is not yet ripe, for the succeeding generation, 'ripeness is all.'

In the case of Shephard he tries to diverse his personal revenge to political struggle. He wants to revolt against his father's punishment by diverting

his energy of his desire to destroy, towards independence movement. It is sublimation of the destructive desire.

Shephard's generation fails to integrate the white natives like Bill Butterfield and Mark Kennedy on the one hand and the racial distrust among the members to his group on the other. Lee and Singh disbelieve Shephard because of his connection with Bill and Mark who are white, and Shephard suspects Lee. Their disbelief collapses the movement. Baboo distrusts in the leadership of Shephard, who trusts Indian leadership of Ali Singh, murders Shephard at Paradise Point and fulfils the plan of Crabbe. After the mad house fire where Penelope, Marcia and Rowly died, Mark Kennedy who is loyal to the movement turns disloyal - thinking that Shephard is responsible for it. Bill also thinks like that, and their personal attitude changes into personal revenge. As Sandra Paquet puts it, 'Mark's inability to act and commit himself to any person or place stems, from his own alienation and discrimination from community.'¹⁵ Mark decides to murder Shephard. Bill has motive too. Their liberal attitudes proves negative. They are incapable to understand the depth of the movement. They share the British colonial sense of racial superiority. All the emigrant characters also remain alien in their own land, in the sense that they fail to connect themselves once

again with their own soil, the main cause of this is, they are not culturally rooted in San Cristobal.

The intensity of Ma - boys relationship is justified by the sociological background of the West Indies. Caribbean society is matricentric society. Either mother or grandmother is the head of the family. From the time of slavery, the older woman plays an important role. When the child was separated from the mother, it was the older woman, the grandmother surrogate who took care of it and taught it the techniques of survival. Emancipation does not change the vital function of the older woman. Now it is not only older woman but maternal grandmother takes up the responsibility of looking after the child. Fernando Henriques states, that is called grandmother family type C, '....the grandmother or some female relative perhaps a sister, usurps the function of the father and at times, the function of the mother ... the grandmother or other female relatives fulfils the function of both father and mother.'¹⁶ Ma Shephard is grandmother of younger generation of San Cristobal, Rowley, Lee, Singh and Bob. She plays important role in the life of the children. She has unusual power of healing, she is best story teller, and so, popular among children. She converts their love into the love of motherland by telling them the stories of island and involves

in the native culture by telling them about their cultural heritage. She represents past and tradition and culture as well.

Ms Shephard is first seen with children, Singh Lee and Bob, who are eager and credulous. Bob, butcher's son, a Negro, Lee, the Chinese, Singh, the Indian and Rowley, the Britisher, son of the police commissioner Crabbe, come to offer their propitiatory gifts to the sea, an important West Indian rite, it is the ceremony of communal togetherness. The boys obey Ma and offer gifts to the sea. Ma and the boys, the beautiful combination of age and innocence.

Ma Shephard is receptive. There is no malice in her mind for other races. Through her remarkable reception she introduces to the children the liberal attitude. The boys accept Rowly because of the special favour of Ma. The boys love Ma Shephard very much. They follow her whenever she goes, because she is the oral document of the history, culture, legend and stories and has art to tell them in fascinating manner. She is an, 'unlettered artist.'¹⁷ She reconstructs the history of her people largely by drawing on myth and legend. She tells the boys the significance of propitiatory gifts, '... the earth need a rest an' he put San Cristobal to rest for a while under the

sea ... the islan' that rise from the water on that Day of Deliverance which we come here to celebrate was renewed with riches.'¹⁸ She wants to protect the boys from every evil. She nurtures them by telling them the rich traditions and customs of San Cristobal.

'Ma Whose head holds a lot of history - an' Prophecy too' tells them the legend of 'The Tribe Boys and Bandit King' and indirectly connects them to the freedom struggle. They get the inspiration from that story and form the 'Secret Society' in order to mimic their parents. The game has begun out of mere sport but acts seriously afterwards. The story itself is an essence of the freedom struggle.

Lamming has followed the oral tradition to tell the story of 'The Tribe Boys' with catchy rhythm which Singh, Lee and Bob pick up easily. It is the story of the proud young boys who died respectfully instead of surrendering before Bandit King. The Tribe Boys had given the empty land of San Cristobal, 'a human shape.'¹⁹ Bandit King invaded them with 'Warrior ants.' They denied the complete sublimation before the Bandit King., 'An' there they kiss the cliff for ever, an' then lean their heads down in a last minute dive to their own funeral.' 'They all down' said Lee.'²⁰ Boys who are completely taken by the legend, form the

'Secret Society' and decide to behave like 'The Tribe Boys' who were truthful, loyal and brave. Out of innocence, first they imitate their parents, who they know are doing something beneficial to San Cristobal. Ma Shephard tells them the story of the first revolt by the natives by burning the fields to oppose the landlords' and masters' exploitation. She is one of the older woman about whom Pradipkumar Rao says, 'Older women have potential in transmitting accumulated knowledge and wisdom of their communities and to maintaining the traditions and conventions of their cultures.'²¹ Motherhood is the chosen role of Ma Shephard like Miss Jane Pittman who is the main character of Earnest Gains novel, 'Miss Pittman's role as Mother is strengthened by the absence a biological motherhood.'²²

Lanning's scrupulousness in handling Ma and boys relationship reflects his anxiety to project the boys as the West Indian psyche coming to its own. He prevents any interpretation of the boys in terms of inexperience or ignorance typically associated with young age. Bob, one of the boys rejects the conventional linking of age with the number of years, when he says, 'Like me and Singh and Lee. And talk of age, talk of age : age is only numbers. ... Age is nothing if there ain't no doing. Age is me and Singh and Lee. Age is the society start young and behaving old without

any show of numbers.'²³

The 'little' 'Secret Society' works in secret and the unity which the elders are urging San Cristobal to achieve, is for them a fact. It seems that they have in the some way surpassed their elders, So that they during the expeditions of their elders as though they are no longer dependent on the decisions which others are making for them.

The activities of the boys and the elders go parallel in the novel, but their loyalty and integrity are undoubtful, their 'complete trust' in each other is the solid foundation of their secret society. Marvyn Morris Comments, 'Age is all the adults. Innocence is a small multi-racial group.'²⁴ In the elder's group Singh distrusts Mark and Bill because they are white and suspects their loyalty but in little society the boys first hesitate to accept Rowley in their group but once he takes an oath to keep the society secret they merge him in their group. Their 'trust' is beyond the experience of the elders. It is made their age irrelevant compared with the wasted experience of those who are so much older. Shephard's generation wants to examine ~~the~~ → their personal achievements in the freedom struggle and there^{they} lack the strength. The 'adulthood' doesnot achieve 'an age,' still they are immature in their capability. Taken their

individual incapability together they limit the validity of the freedom struggle. They are weak in will and so they remains in minority.

Sometimes the boys feel that the other would have to catch up on what they have already accomplished. Their 'Secret Society' which they have formed is different, it as though they have transformed the legend of the 'Tribe Boys' into reality which no one could question. Their secret experiments are so secret that nobody could give the attention to it. They do not find any need to change their names or choose any occupation like elders. Above all, the 'Secret Society' is directly connected with what is happening in San Cristobal. Their behaviour is no longer a boy's imitation of his wish to be different, for the society has achieved the secrecy, loyalty, and trust which each has pledged at the beginning. Inevitably, it has given them a new sense of power. They agree on their own rules of conduct and duty. Bob's reflection on this matter is remarkable. He talks like an adult and feels misfitted in the group because his father has not contributed to the independence movement and thinks it is his failure to be like others. The society has made his father irrelevant, 'He would have liked his father to be like Shephard himself.'²⁵

The boys want to raise some fund for their society, so they plan 'Penny for the Society.' They want to sell the sacred sand of Paradise Point to Penelope where 'The Tribe Boys' used to come for bath before they confront war. Their plan to sell sand and to show cock fights to Penelope, does not work because her life comes into danger in the swift currents of the sea, but is saved by Shephard, their ideal leader.

Their game of little society resembles with the two boys, one is black and other is white, who played the game of master and slave in A.C. Henrick's Jamaican Fragment. The narrative reflects the innocence of childhood which is pictured through the game. S. Ramaswamy comments, 'What we find in the world of innocent children and the adult's complex attitude towards that innocence in the light of experience.'²⁶

The boys attend the rally holds by Shephard at Sabina Square where Mark Kennedy explains the relevance and significance of the legend of the 'Tribe Boys.' He explains to them that it was not pride which carried the Tribe Boys on the cliff or it was not fear or cowardice, it was their last act of homage to the spirit which gives life meaning, and they saw even in the death which they choose that spirit which feeds man with a will to overcome. And the Tribe boys won .

He says, 'The legend of the Tribe Boys is being enacted again in the history of this Movement for freedom... it will be a death which choose freedom as it was an instinct for freedom, that made the Tribe Boys choose death.'²⁷

The boys are completely taken by the new meaning of the legend, decide to act more seriously than ever. It never seemed real to them what those Tribe Boys did, now they want Rowley's assurance which is very important for them,

'You think you could ever prove your freedom the way those Tribe Boys prove it?' Singh asked. 'I could,' said Rowley, 'If a time come to prove it in the name of the society, I could.'²⁸

Rowley warns the boys about the appointed spy named Baboo, by his father to keep watch on the movements of Shephard, and proves his loyalty to the Society.

During electricians' strike, Rowley's grandmother's inconvenience increases when the shopkeepers refuse to sell oil to them. Out of innocence the boys want to help Rowley's grandmother and decide to supply the oil secretly in order to raise money for the society. By Singh's influence they get it and hide it in the

Crabb's car, where a madman gets the 'lighter' of Rowley, the symbol of their society, which bears the name of Ali Singh, and causes the mad-house fire, where they sacrifice their dear friend Rowley and now they realize the society they began on the footsteps of their parents needs power of endurance and patience. Sandra Paquet states, 'The boys represent an innocence that has not yet been schooled to a fixed way of looking at the world.'²⁹ The boys do not have glimpse of the disaster in their life. Death of Rowley shocks them. They could not explain their innocence to Ma Shephard who takes them away to the safe place from the fire.

Ma Shephard accuses Ali Singh for putting madhouse fire by presenting an evidence of a lighter in the court. The boys shout out of shock that whatever the old woman said is not true because they know the truth, but nobody believes them and are driven away. It is a hard blow for the boys, that they do not believe it is the same Ma Shephard who is their ideal of trustworthiness. Singh's mother worries to see horrible expressions on her son's face. She says, 'He swear 'fore he leave home he could murder ol' Ma Shephard.'³⁰ They deny her and her guidance which is old and irrelevant to the present time.

The rejection of Ma Shephard is metaphoric. The boys do not reject Ma as the creative principle but reject the whole way of seeing represented by her as the destructive principle. The boys' rejection of Ma is symbolic of their protest against her refusal to understand their adult wisdom. She does not - take new order and new knowledge seriously and stick to her views of ethics. The reaction of the boys of Jamaican Fragment a novel by B.L.Henricks, discloses what they think about adults, 'How silly grown-ups are, how clever we are, how wonderfully able we are to impose deep motives to childish action.'³¹ Her generation forgets that the children have their own way of growing up, Mr.Crabbe's comment is remarkable, '...what they understand is always different from what their parents had imagined.'³² Their innocence is proved by their power of understanding.

Ma cannot sleep peacefully for nine nights, She asks god, 'Where my faith fall down, was it the doing of my son that turn their heart or was it me... why the boys deny me now?'³³ But she does not understand that love is not enough. For Shephard's generation, love was the urgent need to heal them from the wounds of emigrant experience. But for the boys' generation love, rooted in knowledge and understanding, could only guide them to future. Marvyn Morris comments,

'...innocence seems in the end to see more accurately than age.'³⁴ The murder of Shephard and death of Rowley bring them to realization that to bring social change is not easy task. They take collective decision to die in protest against colonizer's suppression of the movement. It is an affirmation of the national integration that Shephard has dreamt. S. Ramaswamy comments, 'This is the triumph of "Innocence" over "Experience."³⁵ Ironically it is Ma Shephard who has taught the lesson of equality, it is she who leads them to freedom struggle by telling the legends of 'The Great Fire' and 'The Tribe Bouys.' It is she who tells them the meaning of true patriotism, it is she who has introduced and rooted them to West Indian culture and it is she who has given them integrated identity.

Ma Shephard represents the destructive principle for the boys because she is dominated by the christian ethics. She thinks the whole business of freedom struggle is irrelevant, improper and thinks that it is an 'evil ambition.' When Shephard is murdered she thinks that at last the evil ambition has come to an end, and feels relieved. She confesses in the court, '...it is the end o' a long long worry for me...' he bring in his time much botheration to my life.'³⁶ After her testimony

even natives think that her guiding force is diminished and so their faith in her begins to quiver. She does not allow children to listen to Mark Kennedy's speech at Sabina Square and even feels them not to follow the message, because she lives by the ethics of civil obedience. She wants to resist them by using her authority of age. She does not want the boys to get involved in the freedom struggle at this tender age and wishes that they should respond to her authority. Sandra Paquet comments, 'She is in fact an instrument of anarchy in her allegiance to colonial rule and a betrayer of the revolution.'³⁷ Paquet holds Ma responsible for the failure of the freedom movement but in fact she is not, because she represents the generation of G's mother which still continues in Of Age it is that generation which is blissfully ignorant under the 'paternal benevolence' of Mr. Creighton, the white colonial master and which takes even the rain with cats and dogs as 'showers of blessing.' She is terribly religious the victim of religious I.S.A., which has cocooned their wisdom and invaded their, 'reasoning capacity.' She is 'ignorant' hence 'innocent' still in that 'age' which can not 'see beyond.' Lamming explains the different ways of 'knowing thyself' which are available to the boys Of Age and Innocence, maturity (Understanding) and age (experience). The

result of this exploration is shown by presenting three generations first is of Ma Shephard's, second is of Shephard's and third is of the boys, Lee, Singh, Bob and Rowley.

The level of understanding of each generation is different. He has an idea of distinct West Indian identity which he introduces in In the Castle and explores it thoroughly in Of Age. Lamming is sure that the boys will achieve true multi-cultural identity as the West Indian in future. They share easily without any prejudice. He wants to change the 'social conditioning' through the boys. Rocky's comment is significant in this matter, 'But tomorrow is more than me and you', said Rocky, 'Tomorrow is the children who continue long after we die down like the dead.'³⁸

West Indian identity is the fundamental challenge and his scale of understanding this problem is different from other writers. He states, 'For the West Indies-African, Chinese and Indian by mixture - the boys Singh, Lee and Bob belong to that massive peasant majority whose in the twentieth century has shattered all the traditional calculations of the West, of European civilization.'³⁹ The success of the 'Secret Society' depends on their integrity. The game played by the boys is really a serious matter for them. According to Viney Kripal, the 'Secret Society' of the boys

is, '--- a satire on the immaturity and naivete of those who fail to see that political and social change is serious business, calling for sacrifice, dedication and edurance.'⁴⁰ However, Lamming has not presented the boys' 'Secret Society' as satire mimicking the activity of the elders but proves that the boys have perspective which the eders have not, of course they begin society out of mere sport at first but as soon as they listen to Mark Kennedy's speech of 'The Tribe Boys' and the significance of the legend, their sport turns into 'serious business.' They vow complete secrecy and loyalty to it, even Rowley keeps silence till his death Even at the end they decide to do suicide in order to oppose injustice to their fathers. This decision is not 'childish' but shows the full dedication to their 'secret society,' So Viney Kirpal's statement is disagreeable.

Lamming wants to continue the thread of the story which he has begun in In the Castle of My Skin by presenting the boys Bob, Boy Blue, Trumper and G who are unable to understand the happenings around them, but at the end feel injustice against the natives in Barbados, and suffer from identity crisis, So expatriate themselves to London in search of identity where the experience of exile brings them on the verge of madness. They decide to search their own roots

in Of Age and Innocence. Lamming has achieved the authentic West Indian identity through the boys of different races and thus fulfils the dream of Pa in In the Castle of My Skin, who has given the message to G,

'Not only black or white but all the colours that gives credit to the skin in these islands of the West. Let sack cloth be the flag.'⁴¹

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