
CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

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The West Indian Literature originates in the West Indian Writers' need to give expression to their distinct experience of colonisation.

The West Indian community came into existence about the 16th century as an indentured labour force brought primarily from their original land by white plantation owners through slave trade. The period of slavery led to the traumatic experience of being reduced to the condition of non-identity. Gerald R. Leslie states, 'Strong healthy males were used as studs and the formalities of marriage often were dispensed with completely.... fathers were sold or traded without their wives and children, and vice versa.'¹ The slave system, in spite of its end in the 19th century, left the society with the eternal burden of stratification due to the mixture of races and colours which was to harden further into a political, cultural and economic stratification. The colonial political systems transformed the ex-slave community from the condition of non-identity to the condition of the illusory English identity. According to Fernando

Henriques, 'This is an illusion which is the result of a curious historical circumstance, a circumstance which dictated that their education should be the quintessence of things English.'²

The novel is the most important means through which the West Indian novelists have encountered the challenge of destroying the illusory English identity as an essential pre-requisite for restoring the authentic West Indian identity. The West Indian novels are significantly the novels of childhood. The writers like Michael Anthony and Geoffrey Drayton attempt to explore the West Indian community's process of self-awareness leading to their fight for political independence through the metaphorical journey of the child towards maturity.

George Lamming is one of the West Indian novelists to discover, 'as a way of investigating and projecting inner experiences of the West Indian community.'³ He tries, in his novels, to comprehend the psychology of the West Indian community underlining its political history of colonialism. Critics have focused on various aspects of Lamming's thematic concern in his novels, the mother-child relationship being one of them. But there is no attempt to study Lamming's first three novels in the light of mother-child relation-

ship. For instance, Sandra Pouchet Paquet has registered G's essential separation from his mother and Barbados in her comment, 'For G this separation from his mother and Barbados is a matter of necessity.'⁴ She regards The Emigrants in another chapter as a paradoxical journey to the 'Mother Country' and away from self and homeland.'⁵ There is, no doubt, an attempt on her part to link G's mother from In the Castle of My Skin and Ma Shephard of Age and Innocence when she points out, 'Like her predecessor in the In the Castle of My Skin, Ma Shephard lives by an ethic of civil obedience.'⁶ She has assessed Ma Shephard's relation with Shephard and with the four boys. However, Paquet does not synthesize Lamming's concern in the first three novels and does not interpret the gradual process of evolution of mother-child relationship in them as a metaphor of colonial history. She is concerned with the mother figure in the three novels mainly as independent characters.

Kenneth Ramchand points out that in In the Castle of My Skin, 'Lamming's intention is to suggest the essential outlines of typical boyhood in a West Indian community that is growing painfully ... into political awareness.'⁷ But there is no reference to the significance of G's relationship with his mother in total pattern of meaning of the novel.

In a significant attempt to study colonialism in In the Castle of My Skin, Marry E. Donnelly interprets the, '..... tension that places these children of colonialism in a bind not unlike that of a child facing the Oedipal conflict, forced to choose between the motherland or the father culture.'⁸ However, it should be noted that the West Indian psyche was trained to regard England especially as a Mother Country or a Mother Culture. Lamming himself has explained how, 'a foreign or absent Mother culture has always cradled'⁹ the judgement of the West Indians. Even Fernando Henriques notes that the West Indians are, 'unique amongst the coloured nations of the commonwealth in regarding England as a welcoming mother from whom they can draw sustenance.'¹⁰ Donnelly regards Britain as father culture which appears to neglect the psychological significance of the West Indian child's relationship with England as his mother. Her theory of Oedipal conflict is also limited to the analysis of In the Castle of My Skin only.

Fritz H. Pointer focuses on mother-son relationship in three novelists including George Lamming. According to him, in In The Castle of My Skin, 'we see the protagonist/author, faced with the travail,

the difficult labour of creating a separate identity away from mother and mother-land.'¹¹ His interpretation also does not try to synthesize Lamming's first three novels.

In her comparative study of In The Castle of My Skin and Swami and Friends, K.T.Sunitha tries to pinpoint the significance of G's mother's strong influence on him which, 'proves disastrous and excruciating.'¹² However, there is no attempt to link the mother and child relationship in this novel to that in other novels of Lamming.

The Caribbean child's tragic experience of being, 'subjected to the lessons of history'¹³ is noted by Craig Tapping. Yet he does not discuss the important dimension of child's growth - his relationship with his mother.

Edward Baugh is one of those major critics who register significant awareness of mother-child relationship in Lamming's In the Cattle of My Skin. He refers to 'the deep and intricate relationship between G and his mother, a relationship which is

entral to the novel, and which is a microcosm of his relationship with the community or the island as a whole.¹⁴ Unfortunately, he explores as an illustration of his view only one scene from that novel - the last scene of mother's feast for the son.

Jeff Robinson¹⁵ is one more critic who attempts to study the mother and child figures in Lamming's novels. However, he does not evidence a sufficient critical stamina to study the mother child relationship as an organizing principle of meaning.

This dissertation proposes to study the mother child relationship in the first three novels of George Lamming - In the Castle of My Skin (1953), The Emigrants (1954), and Of Age and Innocence (1958) - as a valuable means of exploration into the three phases of West Indian colonial history. The colonial West Indian mother child relationship involves, from psychological point of view, the problem of relationship of the West Indian child with two mothers - England, the illusory mother and the West Indies, the authentic mother. Hence the West Indian Child's relationship with the two mothers is proposed to be studied as a process of growth in three stages - 'Within the Mother', 'With the Mother', and 'Away from the Mother'.

The chapter division is as follows -

The second chapter defines the sociological significance of the mother-child relationship in the West Indian context. Sociologically, the matricentric West Indian family pattern belongs to age of slave trade and plantation system. Psychologically, the West Indian child grows in the colonial environment with the image of England as his mother, Mother Country and Mother Culture.

The third chapter studies the first stage of colonial history as concretized through G's relationship with his mother in Lamming's first novel In the Castle of My Skin. The relationship between G's mother and G is analysed as the process of G's growth from childhood to adulthood in three stages - Within the Mother, With the Mother and Away from the Mother.

The fourth chapter studies The Emigrants, as the second phase of the West Indian psyche's evolution, its realization of its separateness from the illusory mother. The relationship between the West Indian emigrant child and the illusory mother - England, is studied with reference to Voyage, Social relationship, Economic relationship, Man-Woman relationship, the Psychological impact and Discovery of homeland.

The fifth chapter focuses on the third stage of West Indian psyche's evolution - the stage of adulthood as shown in Lamming's third novel Of Age and Innocence. The chapter argues that in Ma Shaphard's relationship with Shephard, the West Indian psyche reaches the early stage of adulthood, while in her relationship with the boys it reaches the later stage of adulthood.

The last chapter summerizes the conclusions which emerge from the detailed study of the mother-child relationship in Lamming's three novels.

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