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CHAPTER II : MOTHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP  
IN THE CARIBBEAN CONTEXT

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In order to create critical space for the study of mother-child relationship in first three novels of George Lamming, it is essential to refer briefly to Lamming's life and works as well as the sociological and political context of that relationship.

George Lamming was born in Barbados one of the Caribbean islands in 1927. His mother was a woman of strong character. He attended elementary school and then won a scholarship for Combermere High School, reading and cricket being two objects of his love. He left Barbados at the age of 18 to teach in Trinidad at a Venezuelan College for boys. Lamming was especially encouraged by Frank Collymore, editor of the Literary Magazine 'Bim' and Jimmy Coizer. In fact he could stay at Combermere Secondary School at Barbados mainly because of Frank Collymore. Collymore, his teacher, put at his disposal an extensive library, and provided him with a refuge. It was for Lamming the beginning of a new life. He began his career as a writer.

Lamming migrated to London where he experienced the policy of discrimination of the British people. He has expressed his traumatic experience as an emigrant in his collection of essays The Pleasures of Exile (1960). He then travelled abroad while he held the visiting professorship. Lamming is one of the writers who left the West Indies and publish in London. He was long had his centre of operation in London, and this perhaps has added to the feeling of alienation to some of his work. He has presented all his experiences in his work, in an effective manner. He received 'Maugham Award' in 1957.

Lamming's first novel In the Castle of My Skin (1953) is an autobiographical narrative in which the novelist describes G's growth from childhood to youth on the background of the political and economic changes in Mr. Creighton's village. The novel ends with G, ready to depart from the village which faces the tragedy of extinction. In his second novel The Emigrants (1954) he narrates emigrant West Indian psyche's traumatic experience with the group of emigrants who are created most barbarously by the British and victim of nervous breakdown. In his third novel Of Age and Innocence (1958) he narrates the story of the fight for political independence of fictitious island San

Cristobal under the leadership of Issac Shephard, the disillusioned emigrant. The prophecies that the fight will continue in spite of Shephard's murder, in the next generation of the boys. In Season of Adventure (1960) the theme of heroine's hesitant finding of a genuinely West Indian identity is well interpreted with her desire to know who her real father was. In Water with Berries (1971) - Lamming applies his novel theory Caliban-Prospero relationship between the colonized and colonizer to a group of artists in London who try to interpret their metropolitan present with their colonial past. His Natives of My Person (1972) presents the search for roots. The theme holds four hundred years of West Indian history which involves a survey of slavery and the various forms of European colonialism. The metaphor of the journey holds the complex plot together. His collection of essays The Pleasures of Exile (1960) presents his Caliban-Prospero interpretation variously. Lamming has also edited an anthology of modern black writing Common Shot and Glass Beads (1974).

The mother-child relationship offers a specific critical dimension to George Lamming's novels because of its sociological and political significance in the Caribbean context.

SOCIOLOGICAL BACKGROUND :-

Sociologically the major population of blacks in the West Indies has its origin in the slave trade. Slave were work force for the plantations of the white owners that helped to sustain the British economy. They came from different parts of Africa and were regarded as chattles to be bought and sold and resold and even mortgaged at the will of the masters. Their masters were Spanish, Dutch, French and British. Thus the slave was an 'economic asset', 'an animate tool' and a part of 'agricultural machinery'. Constant supply of Negroes constituted the actual labour force both in the fields and in the homes. The men were called 'field hands' and women were called 'mammys'. Men slaves were forced to live in barracks. At the slave might be sold at any time to another local owner or into the American colonies, they didn't have any security, Naturally his domestic life and behaviour was affected. The owners would often encourage his female slaves to breed more children from number of men, even female slaves were offered prizes for this purpose. It was believed that intercourse with number of men increased fertility. Fernando Henriques states, 'Slaves were not permitted to form permanent union on either on African or American model. Family life under this conditions has impermanent. Thus the emphasis in the

contemporary slave family was upon the mother-child relationship.'<sup>1</sup>

There is no family life either for male slave or female slave. They were deliberately deprived emotionally, and constantly transferred on plantation works. Mammys were often 'wet-mothers' for White master's babies. Their own children were also sent on plantation work at the age of eleven. The female children quite often became the mistresses of their masters or owners. It was common practice among them to take concubine from 'better looking' of the female slaves, and the two patterns of concubinage were formed, one was setting up of an independent household for the concubine and children, the other was for the concubine to be temporary lodged in the plantation house, when she became old she had to return to her barracks with her children. Upon such practice Lamming comments sarcastically in his book of essays, The Pleasures of Exile, 'Some masters didn't think the female slaves unfit for bed, and commanded them to have intercourse whenever they choose. Sometimes a slave's dexterity under the sheets might earn her status of a regular mistress.'<sup>2</sup> Some owners literally considered slaves as they did live stock and sought to breed them.

It was generally among field hands that the husband and father became a shadowy figure in the family and the emphasis was placed on the mother-child unit, and when the families were split up there was a tendency to keep small children with their mothers. Men were not encouraged to assume responsibility for wives and children.

The practice of concubinage has a great effect not only on the family but the whole class colour hierarchy of the West Indian Society.

There was a change introduced by emancipation in 1834. The freed slaves immediately dispersed as far as possible from plantation. Fernando Henriques states, 'Although the freed Negroes could remove himself from the plantation in a physical sense, he was unable to destroy the patterns of plantation slavery. This is strikingly seen in the contemporary family structure.'<sup>3</sup>

Slaves migrated to different places in search of work or a job. The two major migrations of this period were, United States of America, or Panama or Great Britain. For the first time West Indians learned the relation of labour and capital in modern industrial world. It also brought them into contact with the American version of racial prejudice. Floyd Martinson

comments, 'Cultural patterns from the mother country patterns that would have helped to keep the family intact, were destroyed. .... Memory of the homeland was effaced, and the slave system gave the slaves little freedom to develop a social system of their own.'<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that West Indian family pattern is matriarchal. Melville J. Herskovits attributed it to a carry over from Africa. Many of the scholars maintain that this mother centred family is a legacy of slavery which continues to exist even after emancipation in a form of female headed families. Sometimes the matricentric household was made up of several women and their children with a grandmother, to hold the family authority.

#### POLITICAL BACKGROUND

If the Caribbean mother-child relationship is embeded in the sociological history of the islands on the one hand, it is also embeded in the political history, on the other. The stage of passive acceptance of the white colonial masters by the West Indian community lasts for generations even after the emancipation from slavery. The educational, social and cultural myths trained the children to accept everything English as the only valid context justifying their existence.



As Lamming states, 'The students whole development as a person is thwarted by the memory, the accumulated stuff of a childhood and adolescence which has been maintained and fertilised by England's historic ties with the West Indies.'<sup>5</sup>

Nurtured on the myth of England as the mother country, the young West Indian generations emigrate to England and to the countries to the whites, in search of educations and jobs. But racial and cultural discrimination leads to their dehumanizing, experience as emigrants. It gradually strengthens the sense of barbaric victimization at the hands of the colonizers. It results in the awareness of their distinctness as the West Indians.

The third stage of colonial history finds the West Indian community after their discovery of the status, as the colonized, engaged in active revolt against the colonizers for political independence.

George Lamming regards literature as a vital means of search for identity for the West Indies. He desires to investigate the process of colonization from this point of view. He classifies, 'our duty is to find ways of changing the root and perspectives of that background, of dismantling the accumulated myth, both cultural and political, which an inherited

and uncritical way of seeing has now reinforced.'<sup>6</sup> Lamming approaches colonial history as his community's voyage from childhood to youth distorted by, 'the politics of colour and colonialism.'<sup>7</sup>

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

Lamming's primary concern with the search for identity emerges as an attempt to organize the psychological structure underlying the political experience of his country. His treatment of mother-child relationship provides a meaningful framework for understanding, his exploration into the Caribbean colonial psyche's process of evolution during colonialism. He projects the Caribbean community's experience in terms of its relationship with two mothers - the illusory mother - England, and the authentic mother - the West Indies. The psychological development of the child from childhood to youth is divided between two mothers. Historically, his process of growth is a metaphoric journey of the community from the illusory mother to the authentic mother.

The psychologists like Norman Cameron in their study of child development divide the growth of a normal child in five major stages. During the first stage, from age of 6 months to age of 2 years, there is symbiotic unity between the mother and child. The

edipal phase occurs between the third and fifth years of the child. Between fifth and twelfth years the child passes through the phase of Latency which evidences the process of his individuation. It is followed by the phase of adolescence. About the late twenties, the child reaches the stage of adulthood.

However, the growth of the Caribbean child during colonialism may be supposed to pass through three stages in particular - 1. the stage of symbiotic unity 2. the stage of an individuation through realization of the separateness from the mother 3. the stage of adulthood. They mark his development as an individual. In terms of his relationship with the mother these phases can be described as - 1. Within the Mother 2. With the Mother 3. Away from the Mother.

On the political level, the Caribbean community represented through the Caribbean child who also passes through similar state of development in its relationship with the colonizers. The Mother Country England may be described as the surrogate mother for the Caribbean child. The psychologist Harry F. Harlow<sup>8</sup> and his associates experimented on monkeys by separating them from their real mothers. They substituted real mothers by surrogate mothers in the form of wire-mothers. They found wire mothers fail to give them 'contact

comfort', so the monkeys barely survived. For the Caribbean child, England is the surrogate mother, although he is nurtured in the illusory belief of accepting her being a real mother. Lamming projects this crucial relationship through the Caribbean child's relationship with the illusory mother - England. The colonial child passes through three phases of this relationship with the (illusory) mother - 1. Within the (illusory) Mother 2. With the (illusory) Mother, 3. Away from the (illusory) Mother. The first phase of 'Within the Mother' is the phase of symbiotic unity between the illusory mother and the Caribbean child. It is the Co-relative for the phase of passive acceptance of the colonial rule. The second phase of 'with the Mother' finds the Caribbean child emerging from the state of 'Within the Mother' because of the traumatic experience as an emigrant. It marks politically, the phase of disillusionment. The third phase adulthood finds the colonial child asserting an independent identity from the illusory mother. It is the phase which represents the colonial community engaged actively in revolt against the colonizers.

On the deeper level, the three phases of mother-child relationship represents the three phases of the West Indian psyche's search for identity. The first phase 'Within the Mother' restructures the psyche's

existence with the illusory identity. The second phase 'With the Mother', marks the stage of its evolution; its realization of the separateness - which marks the beginning of its belief in the possibility of a distinct identity. The third stage, 'Away from the Mother', celebrates the psyche's discovery of its authentic identity - a phase which sees the illusory identity destroyed at last.

Lanning's first three novels, In the Castle of My Skin, The Emigrants, and Of Age and Innocence are Lanning's exploration into the above three phases. In the Castle of My Skin unfolds the first phase 'Within the (illusory) Mother', The Emigrants investigates the second phase 'With the (illusory) Mother', and Of Age and Innocence defines the third phase 'Away from the (illusory) Mother' - it celebrates the psyche's achievement of distinct West Indian identity.

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