
CHAPTER IV : THE EMIGRANTS

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The Emigrants begins where In the Castle of My Skin ends. It marks the second phase of colonial relationship between the West Indies and England. In terms of mother-child relationship, it is the phase of separation of the colonial child from his illusory mother, concretised through his emigrant experience. The theme of the novel is rejection as discovery through disillusionment.

Lanning describes the traumatic experience of rejection on behalf of the colonized child through projection of the experience of disillusionment in terms of Voyage, Social relationship, Economic relationship, Man Woman relationship, Psychological impact, and Discovery. The simultaneous impact of rejection on all the psychological derangement of the emigrant. It leads to the most painful discovery of his being 'a different creature', from the illusory mother : 'And if there was a God in heaven or any possibility of justice on earth the revelation of this new difference would have been a justification for this existence. To be a different kind of creature.'¹

. The novel ends with the illusion of England, as the mother, destroyed and the discovery of the West Indies as the authentic mother.

The study in the experience of disillusionment in the second and the third parts of the novel, 'Rooms and Residence', and 'Another Time', is preceded by the study of illusion in the first part 'Voyage.' Lamming analyses the complex pattern of illusion, in terms of the emigrating West Indian's hope complicated by his fear, doubts and distrust, while being driven towards the illusory mother, as symbolized by the voyage. He experiences, for the first time a vague sense of nostalgia for the authentic mother.

VOYAGE

The West Indian's hope is rooted, primarily in sense of liberation from the cage-like existence within his own country. The major characters - Collis, Dickson, Governor, Tornado, Lilian, Miss Bis, Philip and Quennie - set sail in a ship. Emigration offers them the golden opportunity to break free from the colonized environment of the islands of the West Indies. In his case Collis's reaction is more important. He says : '.... perceiving the meaning of a boy's enslavement, I said farewell to the climate that caught me at birth.' 2

Eager and anxious West Indian migrants gather in dormitory and begun to anticipate the bright future, 'We were all going to wait to see what would happen.'³ England is Mecca for the migrants. They voice their ideals, motives, ideas and aspirations by expressing their desire to go to her : 'The New World was a place of new fortune, new hope, new identity, where new ideas could be put into practice with minimal impediment. The past could be scuttled.'⁴ They hope Britain will provide them better shelter, food and means for better life. They need improvement in qualification to elevate their life style and for that, they need certificates.

But hope of bright future is paralleled by fear of uncertainty of its fulfilment when Tornado and Governor warn the emigrating group. Now they begin to think seriously about their flight. Tornado says: 'England going to teach all O' we is that there ain't no place like home no matter how bad home is. but you get to pay to learn.'⁵ Their hopeful anticipation turns into confusion : 'Everybody is in flight and no one knows, what he's fleeing to. A better break. A better break. That's what we say. And suppose this break doesn't come What next?'⁶ Even the Strange Man, on boat warns them, 'All you like men goin' to dig your own grave.'⁷ Dickson wants to know the prospects of teachers in England but the English woman's remark

is scornful. She comments, 'But it's strangest thing to me such people leaving their people to go to England to do what's most needed in their own home.'⁸

The minds of the voyagers linger in the gullies of their native place. Everybody feels very proud about his homeland. The Jamaican sees his Jamaica as : 'A pure son O' de soil ---- A r' al Kinstonian by name an' nature.'⁹ Trinidad is the best place in the world according to Tornando. As the ship is coming closer to the shore of England their anxiety grows. They are uncertain about their performance on the stage of England. All of a sudden the fear envelopes them. They are bewildered and confused. They are not sure about the happy confrontation with England, 'Each suffered in his loneliness the fear of disaster. That was real.'¹⁰ As they go away from their roots their minds take them back and they suffer from the feeling of losing something important : 'Stretch of land over yonder reminds so much of home.'¹¹

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

Migrants begin to search for rooms after their arrival, but the response of English people is negative. They look at them with scorn as if they are the garbage. Tornado Lilian and Jamaican with his girl friend find two rooms at the basement of the building, which is

damp, dark and cool, without electricity. Collis arrives at Mr. Pearson's house. He brings with him a letter of Mrs. Pearson's brother Arthur. But their attitude of scorn towards him, a black West Indian, clearly noticeable. They want to maintain the distance, a distance of quality and status! Collis can not breathe in their house, which is richly decorated and everything is placed in order. Their discipline and sophistication express 'touch-me-not' attitude.

Colour is the major discriminating factor in the social contact between the British and the West Indians. The parlours for men and women who are black, are either in the basement or at the dark places, as if the whole business is fishy and illegal. The parlours visited by Tornado, 'a hole which had lost its way in the earth, and they put their hands out along the wall and over the floor like crabs crawling for security.'¹² Lamming has used a symbol of crabs whose entire life is insignificant. Queenie and Miss Bis have confronted the same kind of discrimination in beauty parlour run illegally by Mrs. Dorking at secret place. She keeps Queenie waiting for a long time without dressing her hair. She neglects Miss Bis and tells her she can not dress her hair.

The rooms, the meeting places, parlour and barber's shop of the West Indians are the places of darkness, similar to their colour, as if they are hiding places of the refugees or culprits.

The lack of healthy social contact on the level of equality forces them into isolation and loneliness. Their rooms and flats are small where they live 'alone.' The middle class emigrants like Tornado, Dickson, Philip can not enjoy the comfort of bigger rooms because of their 'uncomfortable existence' in London. Their rooms and meeting places are, 'both prison and hell in the novel. The basement barber's shop is described as confining and barred like jail.'¹³

Through Higgins Lamming has shown the hopelessness of any genuine social exchange between England and the migrants. Such hopeless social exchange, he experiences in the Readhead's party. He goes there in search of Collis and begins to ask Mrs. Pearson about him. But she collapses as if she has been a fearful thing.

Dickson finds a room, actually it is, provided by a white woman. It is 'an offer' to him. Dickson has to enter the perverse bargain with the white woman to secure a room. Tornado experiences same kind of

treatment by Mrs. Readheads, the couple of their own kind. They invite him in the party with his saxophone which he plays well, to entertain white invitees in their party. Tornado takes it as an insult, and rejects it. He says, 'I wasn't goin' to be no servant for any o' them.'¹⁴

The West Indians are always fascinated by the British culture. Collis, Higgins, Philip and Governor Miss Bis and Queenie imitate the British ways in 'Mozamba,' the hotel run by Governor and Azi. They celebrate parties with drink, dance and dishes. Bordon Rohler calls it, 'ape standards of pseudo Whiteness.'¹⁵ Miss Bis avoids all other West Indians. She was jilted by Frederick, the white man and Calypso had made her the object of ridicule in her own village.

The group thus experiences the attitude of English people towards the West Indian emigrants, often bordering on contempt and ridicule. But somehow they settle in England.

ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP

The hopelessly dehumanizing social relationship between the emigrants and the British become a worst experience in the field of economic relationship. The main reason of emigration for the West Indians

is economical stability. They try hard to get it. Governor warns the fellowmen about the British way of life and tells them to take precaution on the ship. But England reduces him into machine. He is more and more interested in minting money.

Collis, before being a successful writer, wants to settle economically. Through Mr. Pearson he tries for jobs, but, unfortunately, he cannot concentrate on any. he goes on doing grave mistakes in his works, first in the yeast factory, second in the chemical factory and third in tire factory, as if he is not fit for these jobs. He needs a job for his survival in England but she makes fun of him, and he is unable to get the, 'fitness certificate,' from her. Instead of facing the problems he retreats and find the way of escape from frustration, drinking. His ambitions for writing career are reduced to write verse notes for record albums. He proves to be unlucky and incompetent in England.

Lanning wants to tell the one phase of emigrant artist's experience in exile through the character of Collis. Sandra Paquet says, 'The Emigrants actually begins and ends in time with the recurring cycle of disconnection that is the artist / narrator's personal dilemma.'¹⁶

Lilian, Tornado and Jamaican begins to live together for the 'contact comfort' and mainly because they could no longer afford separate rooms. Sometimes the migrants are penniless, for three-four pounds they pawn their clothes or things to the pawn-broker. England teaches them the law of the New-World, 'Survival of economically stable ,' which they can not achieve, 'All life became an immediate situation from which action was the only escape.'¹⁷ Miss Bis and Queenie are very conscious about their status because they want to live like English ladies by imitating their ways of life but that needs a constant supply of money. Queenie has a solution, she introduces Miss Bis alias Una Soloman - a new name given by Queenie to lead a new life, to man of status, in the parties. Queenie becomes 'the media,' for Una, she wants to give her a clean . break,' by unclean way. She introduces Peggy, the evil woman, to her, who tries to provoke Fredrick to win his impotency, before Una.

MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP

The experience of disillusionment with England proves to be most barren and deteriorating in terms of man-woman relationship for the emigrants. In almost all man-woman contacts, the emigrants are miserably prevented from the genuine experience of love.

Miss Bis, Peggy and Frederick relationship is immoral as well as perverted. Sex for provocation goes on in the mid-dark room, where nobody feels anything but feels each other's body. The way of metropolis turns them to animals. Immoral life changes Miss Bis tremendously beyond recognition, 'Two years of loneliness and promiscuity_ had ravaged her body. Sometimes she looked at her naked reflection in the mirror and felt sure that she would be hardly recognizable to parents or who had travelled with her to England.'¹⁸ Collis does not recognise her at all, even Fredrick, who had jilted her, does not recognise her. England has given her nothing but ravaged life. Now she is unable to take revenge on England she takes it on Queenie by murdering her, and feels nothing at all. Her failure to win white man's attention leads her to prostitution. England has failed to fulfil her dreams of glorious life. She ruins her physically and morally.

The worst kind of exploitation takes place in the case of John Reginald Dickson, who is very proud of his own race. He is caught in the snare of white woman who annoyed by blistering skin on the ship, she uses him like a 'he-prostitute.' She offers him a room on rent and it is the 'bargain' between them. Dickson vividly remembers how change comes and

how one thing grows out of another, from Mr. Dickson to Reginald and Reginald to Reg. It is the step by step downfall of Dickson. England has no objection to their illicit relationship.

The case of Philip is different. he begins to live with Julie a married woman, whose husband is a serviceman. She is the secretary of the hostel. Philip is young and very sensitive. Julie's love gives him comfort and mental peace and it works like a balm on his loneliness. Julie gets pregnant. Philip earnestly wants to raise his child but Governor and Azi advise him to abort it because if he gives birth to an illegitimate child, his scholarship will be seized by the university. Philip, himself an illegitimate child of his mother, remembers her and feels proud of her for refusing to listen to the villagers' advice of abortion. He takes the risky decision of keeping the child but Azi secretly aborts the child, just to avoid further consequences. He wants to save Philip from Julie's husband who comes searching in order to kill him, and he also wants to save his scholarship on which his mother's hope is rested.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

The trauma of disillusionment on the levels of social and economic relationship combined with that on the level of man-woman relationship inevitably leads emigrants to psychological break down. The wounded psyche helplessly struggles to survive itself through insanity.

The psychologist Harry F. Harlow¹⁰ and his associates have proved by experimenting on baby monkeys, separating them from their real mothers and substituted them with wire mother-surrogate, that the baby monkeys, raised on wire-mother-surrogate, barely survive because she fails to give them 'contact comfort'. The surrogate mother England also fails to give them the treatment as human beings.

The trauma of intellectuals in England, who are constantly humiliated is both unexpected and shocking. Collis who is writer/poet does the jobs one after another and fails to concentrate on any because he always feels that he is ^{an} alien and cannot adjust himself with the climate of England. The disciplined but horrible peace of Mr. Pearson scares him. He behaves like a trapped monkey, 'He looked at the photograph and clenched his fist against it as though he were going to wipe out the nose.'²⁰

His response to London is like that of a baby monkey who runs rapidly from object to object screaming and carrying all the while in the presence of wire-mother-surrogate. He is very sensitive who feels alone and strange in the crowd. In Mr. Pearson's house he goes to the lavatory not, '...to relieve himself but to rescue his sanity..'21

Dickson, the proud self-respected man, who comes to complete his course in England, falls prey to the white ladies who treat him like an object. They want to scrutanize his body. His fiancée says, 'they only wanted to see what he looked like. ... They devoured his body with their eyes.'22 And from that day onwards he wanders in the street with lost consciousness, he does not recover from the shock. His life becomes hell. In the case of Torando, the search of a good room frustrates him. He wants to make a successful man of himself, but it does not seem possible to him, because the dream of England proves imaginary and a total failure. A sense of disconnection disturbs him. His own image in the mirror, he thinks, is alien, 'Torando was still regarding himself in the mirror a distant, impersonal stare as though his eyes didn't really see their reflection in the mirror.'23 His sense of emigrant community survives him. So Lilian, Jamaican and he live together

and they feel the necessity of integration in alien country.

The mercurial change of mood is recognised as a feature of the emigrant West Indians abroad. They do not feel suitable for the English life. It is the class and colour neurosis which teaches them to consider themselves inferior to the whites. Cheddi Gagan's autobiography, 'The West Indian on Trial' and Donald Hind's 'Journey to a Illusion' represent two different aspects of emigrants. Hind's novel concerned with the situation of emigrants in England. His book deals with his own experiences and those of his friends confronted by the 'Opaque hostility of English People.'²⁴

Higgins the most charming, confident young man is caught in the police racket as soon as he steps on the ground of England. Azi and Governor help him and rescue him but he cannot overcome the fear and behaves like a mad man. He proves his innocence to everyone, 'I ain't bad man. I never do nothin.'²⁵ He is afraid that somebody is chasing him. He never has faced such kind of misfortune in his own country. His first confrontation with England concludes in disaster.

Dickson's agony is different. After the scrutiny of his body by the white ladies, he, 'sleeping in

a dungeon by day and slipping out at night for a breath of air.'²⁸ He just wants to run away from the dangers of metropolis, England, who proves to be the skeleton mother, laughs at night and she threatens him terribly. Through Collis Lamming wants to show the disoriented West Indian society. This disorientation is extreme in Collis, he fails to connect visually and emotionally with anybody although he is not blind. '... The organs kept their forms but somehow lost their reference. They became objects.'²⁷

The West Indians are reduced to the extent of 'an object', which they no longer tolerate and behave like mad persons. Their individual existence has no value. Their frustration turns into confusion about themselves. They do not recognize their own faces in the mirror. Collis sees faces without their attributes. He loses his control on himself. His temporary blindness rejects his own people. When Azi and Governor ask him what does he think about his people, he retorts, 'I have no people.'²⁸ The same kind of inferiority like that of Collis, disturbs Bernice, the heroine of Austin Clark's Meeting Point. In V.S. Naipaul's The Mimic Men, Ralph the protagonist wants to escape from his frustration because he has confronted with reality of chaos in London, 'Ralph

felt he was ship wrecked, cut off physically from his ancestral landscape, - so his escapes were always physical.²⁹ His other two novels, The Mystic Masseur and A House for Mr. Biswas, examine in more detail the psychological features of placelessness, exploitation and the search of identity.

DISCOVERY OF HOMELAND

The trauma of rejection by the illusory mother with the resultant psychic breakdown shocks the West Indian child into the discovery of his own separateness from that mother. It is marked by his instinctual urge to return to his own country - the authentic mother. Collis and Dickson want to take flight from England. Higgins does not want to live any more in England because he feels uneasy and suffocated. His optimism on voyage turns into 'persecution mania.' He at once wants to return to his home. He requests Governor to send him by hook or crook, 'I gotta make it back home some day, if it cost me a sentence in de gaol.'³⁰ Everybody wishes to go back to his home, they realize that England is fraud, they do not need England, instead England needs them. Their enthusiastic response turns into retreat. Not only Frederick is the victim of mental impotency, but all the characters of The Emigrants. Even his fiancée Miss Bis Ursula alias

Una Soloman, suffers from 'moral and physical disintegration.'³¹ She takes the killing of Queenie normal because she thinks, 'here in England where it didn't matter, because I didn't really belong to it.'³² Nobody feels now that he belongs to England.

West Indians have difficulties in adjusting to metropolitan England owing to the restraint, reserve and introversion of the English attitude which is confronted with natural and broad minded nature of the West Indies. The comment of the official in London is remarkable in this matter, 'How could sane men leave to the sun and sea where it was summer all the way --- to gamble their last-coin on a voyage to England.'³³ In various ways each of the emigrants undergoes a similar experience of disillusionment and loss of identity. They are alienated by the society of England. Most of their time passes indoors, as if they are taking sentence in gaol. They were outdoors in In the Castle of My Skin, free from any fear. In the West Indies they were in majority and now in England they are in minority, and so they are helpless before majority. Their search for better existence is reduced to struggle of survival only. The lessons of exile have taught them to know their 'Castle' and 'respect' it as well. Bruce Macdonald comments, 'His symbolic

search is not an escape but an ordering of the chaos and recognition that fulfilment comes only through time and change and not outside time.'³⁴ All characters somehow confront their exile without losing their hope. They are eager to find it in their homelands, because their emigration has exploded the colonial illusion about England. For Lamming migration is an important phase of discovery in the life of the West Indians. This discovery leads them back to their homelands.

Thus the child separates himself from the illusory mother through discovery of his distinct identity. The West Indian psyche's assertion of an adult identity is the next stage of its evolution. It concretizes through its resolution to fight for the political independence of his authentic mother - the mother land - West Indies. It is the theme of Lamming's next novel, Of Age and Innocence.

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