
CHAPTER VI : CONCLUSIONS

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The study of mother-child relationship in George Lamming's first three novels - In the Castle of My Skin, The Emigrants, and Of Age and Innocence - offers a valuable structure of meaning in view of his primary concern with the Problem of identity in the West-Indian context. The validity of the particular perspective is justified by the sociological as well as political background of the country.

Sociologically, the Caribbean community inherits the distinctly mother-centred family pattern of the period under slavery, emphasizing mother-child relationship. Politically the West Indian colonial history can be conveniently divided in the three periods. The earliest period of passive acceptance of the colonial rule is followed by the period of political awakening. During the third period, the colonial society's revolt against the colonizers manifests itself through its fight for political independence.

On the psychological level, the political history is investigated by George Lamming as the West Indian psyche's search for identity. Symbolically, it is

the West Indian child confronting the problem of choice between the two mothers : the illusory mother - England, and authentic mother - the West Indies. The problem of identity is, hence, the problem of overcoming the disastrous relationship with the illusory mother so as to gain space for building creative relationship with the authentic mother. The West Indian psyche's process of evolution of a distinct West Indian identity may be seen as a process in three stages of the child's relationship with his illusory mother - 'Within the Mother,' 'With the Mother,' and 'Away from the Mother.'

In the Castle of My Skin shows the West Indian child's life. 'Within the illusory Mother,' - the phase of symbiotic unity between the child and the mother. It scrutinises the child's personal growth as an individual on that background. The Emigrant marks the second phase - 'With the Illusory Moter,' - the child being 'with' and not 'within' the mother in the sense of its awareness of being separate from the illusory mother - England. Of Age and Innocence celebrates the third stage of the child's assertion of a distinct identity as an adult, now 'Away from the Illusory Mother,' and actively engaged in the struggle for political independence.

In the Castle of My Skin represents the first phase of the Caribbean child's relationship with his illusory mother. The child G belongs to Mr. Creighton's village in Barbados where the community experiences symbiotic unity with the illusory mother in their belief in white masters as gods. G's mother is dedicated to the imperial value system and prepares her child laboriously for the survival in the colonial society.

G's relationship with his mother evolves through three phases. During childhood he lives 'Within his Mother.' For instance, while being bathed by his mother, the naked boy waits for the mother's order in spite of being viewed by the whole neighbourhood. As a nine-year old child, he shows absolute obedience to his mother who has 'fathered' him.

During the second phase, G gains awareness of his separate existence. Still supervised, guided and economically supported by the mother, G is gradually exposed to the world of school during his primary and high school education on the one hand, and to the village - world around him on the other. The primary education given to him as a student of Groddeck's Boy School is a part of the ideological strategy employed by the colonial masters to implant the illusory English identity within the children. G's exposure to the village

world includes his life with the children who amuse themselves in public bath; enjoy swimming at the seaside; acquaint themselves with the superstitions of their motherland while peeping into the British culture through their secret visit to Mr.Creighton's house.

The primary and high school education alienates G from his roots. Although it is his mother who sends him to school and thus becomes an unconscious cause for his alienation, she is herself the victim of the imperialistic strategy of the colonizers. G, as a growing child, is further exposed to the world of his village through the traumatic experience of the tragedy of his village. Mr.Slime proves to be the most cruel betrayer of his own people as an agent of the colonizers through his fake 'Friendly Society' and 'The Penny Bank.'

G's decision to leave the village to work as a teacher in Trinidad marks his journey in search of 'something' which his friend Trumper had found in U.S.A., His agonising awareness of being uprooted from his culture, land and people culminates in his painful awareness of his inability to help the villlage in the hour of need. G is prevented from the instinctual response to his land - his authentic mother-because

of the lessons implanted on his child consciousness about England as the mother country. Alienation becomes essential for him to discover his roots.

The Emigrants concentrates on the second phase of the relationship between the West Indian child and the illusory mother, England. It marks his realization of the separateness of his existence concretised through his emigrant experience. The theme of the novel is rejection as discovery through disillusionment. Lamming explores the experience of rejection in terms of social economic and man-woman relationship. The traumatic experience on all these levels results in the psychological derangement followed by the most painful discovery of his being a different creature from his illusory mother.

The novel offers the experience of disillusionment on the background of the illusion fostered by the West Indian emigrants which is presented by Lamming in the first part of the novel 'Voyage.' Lamming analyses the complex pattern of illusion in terms of the emigrating West Indian's hope as combined with his fear, doubt and distrust.

The experience of disillusionment proves shocking for the West Indian emigrants trying to enter social relationship with the British. They begin to search

for rooms but find that they are treated as garbage. The lack of healthy social contact on the level of equality forces them into isolation and loneliness.

The dehumanizing social relationship is intensified by the West Indian emigrants' failure to establish economic relationship with the British. Economic stability is the main cause of their emigration, but their life in England is reduced to miserable struggle for the bare survival.

The experience of disillusionment proves most deteriorating in terms of man-woman relationship. In almost all man-woman contacts, the emigrants are hopeless failures in getting the genuine experience of love. Miss Bis - Peggy - Frederick relationship is both immoral and Perverted . John Reginald Dickson is used by his landlady as 'he - prostitute.' Philip lives with Julie but is unable to have a bastard child at the cost of his scholarship although he himself is a bastard child of his mother.

The disillusionment leads to the wounded psyche's helpless struggle to survive itself through insanity as is witnessed in the tragedies of Dickson, Collis, Higgins, Miss Bis and Tornado. 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. Higgins' optimism during his voyage to England in the beginning turns into presecution mania so that he wants to return to his home even as stowaway. The enthusiastic response of all characters turns into retreat. Everybody wishes to go back to his home because they realize that England is fraud. For Lamming, disillusionment is an inevitable stage for the discovery in the life of the West Indians.

In Of Age and Innocence the West Indian psyche reaches the third stage of its evolution - the stage of adulthood. In its hero, Issac Shephard, an emigrant, the colonial child separates itself from the illusory mother and comes back to the authentic mother. The novel focuses on the activities of three important characters - Shephard, Ma Shephard and the boys. Through the relationship of Ma Shephard with the two generations, Lamming unfolds his ultimate vision of the West Indian identity. The relationship between Ma Shepard and her son, Shephard, marks the phase of early adulthood while that between Ma Shephard and the boys perfects the process of the West Indian psyche's arrival at the full adulthood.

Ma Shephard's relationship with her son involves her role as a healer for Shephard, the child, as well as Shephard, the emigrant, returning to his homeland in the state of trauma. Ma Shephard anxiously supervises her son's emotional growth through his period of hatred for the merciless father. Ma saves him from total insanity with her protection, affection and love. Her role as a mother proves far more vital in surviving Shephard after the double betrayal by his white beloved and by England. Ma fulfils the emotional need of her son during his life as a political leader of San Cristobal. However, she can not comprehend her son's ambition to liberate his country, which according to her, is also 'evil.' The tragedy of madhouse fire strengthens her distrust in the political movement for change. As a colonial mother, she inherits a faith in the religion of 'acceptance.'

Ma Shephard's relationship with the boys has crucial significance is Lamming's definition of the West Indian identity. For the wounded emigrant generation coming home, she is the healer, while, for the generation of the boys, she is the spiritual guide and mother-culture. Under her guidance, the boys overcome the weaknesses of the elder generation of Shephard. The boys, inheriting the emigrant experience of the elders, have sufficient stamina to offer themselves to Ma Shephard's spiritual guidance. She introduces the

children to their cultural roots. She tells them the legend of 'The Tribe Boys and Bandit King' which connects them indirectly to the freedom struggle. The boys include Bob a Negro, Lee a Chinese, Singh an Indian and Rowley a Britisher. Under Ma's guidance, they achieve a solid multi-racial identity through mutual trust and dedication to the cause of Secret Society.

If unchallenged acceptance of Ma Shephard's authority is the first stage of the relationship between Ma and the boys, their vehement rejection of Ma marks its later stage. They worship her as their spiritual guide but reject her when they find that she betrays their trust by providing false witness against Singh although through ignorance.

The rejection of Ma Shephard, however, is metaphoric. She stands for the creative principle as the mother-culture and the boys have gratefully drawn their sustenance from her. However, she represents the destructive principle for the boys because of her limitations as the representative of the oldest generation. She is dominated by the destructive Christian ethics which makes her interpret the freedom struggle as irrelevant. She is ignorant and hence innocent. The boys, on the other hand, are 'innocent' but represent 'age' in their capacity to see beyond.

Unless the boys emancipate themselves from her destructive influence, they can not advance towards future of the political independence of their country. Hence their rejection of Ma on behalf of the boys is a symbolic revolt against the destructive element in the mother culture and religious faith that prevent their role as the initiators of change.

In his vision of the boys, Lamming offers his definition of the authentic West Indian identity. They are the successors of the first generation of the boys presented by the novelist in In the Castle of My Skin. The West Indian psyche's search for identity which begins in the novel, passes in The Emigrants through the trauma of disillusionment with England culminating in this novel in their achievement of full West Indian identity ready and ripe to lead the country to its final stage of this independence.

George Lamming thus contributes meaningfully, as a commonwealth writer, to the understanding of the colonial psyche's journey from colonialism to independence in his treatment of mother-child relationship .