
The Colossal Presence of Sea in the works of Jamaica Kincaid: with special reference to Annie John and Lucy

Dr.J.Lakshmi, Assistant Professor, Department of English, University college of Engineering Tindivanam, (A constituent college of Anna University Chennai), Tindivanam-604001, Tamilnadu, India

Received date: 28/09/22, Revised date: 08/10/22, Accepted date: 09/10/22, Published date: 10/10/22

Abstract: Sea, an inseparable element in the works of Kincaid, is the elixir in the lives of the protagonists. Annie John the protagonist of “Annie John” undergoes a long suffering in which she has a mystic rebirth. The long rain helps her to recuperate from her mental and physical illness and emerge into a new person. The sea helps Lucy to take her dreams to a new land, where she believes to nurture her ambition. This paper attempts to bring out the lives of the protagonists which are inextricably connected with the sea- the protector and provider.

Keywords: Sea, mystic rebirth, ambition and emancipation

Introduction

We are sixty-five percent water...

Our brains are eighty percent water.

We are more water than blood.

So our water ties to one another are

More important than our blood ties!

We carry within us the seas out of which

We came -Albert Wendt, Ola.

Jamaica Kincaid's writings are self-revelatory. All her writings are from her life in Antigua. As an islander her life

was intricately bound with the sea. Annie John a semi-autobiographical novel revolves around the mother daughter theme, one of the strongest obsessions of Kincaid in the island background. In *Annie John*, the protagonist Annie is her mother's pet, her “Little Miss”. The mother and daughter share a beautiful harmonious bond. Annie finds herself as a narcissistic extension of her mother and enjoys perfect sense of security. Annie John experiences the pleasure of bathing together with her mother. She always follows her mother like her shadow and prefers constantly to be in her presence. Her presence provides her with abundant sense of security and value. The elder Annie teaches Annie John various domestic chores. Annie John feels privileged to be with her mother. She takes all the domestic lessons happily to please her mother. The elder Annie and Annie John as a symbol of their union wear dresses made in the same clothes. Using Nancy Chodorow's theory of extension, Diane Simmons calls Annie John a “narcissistic extension” of her mother. She adds that

*both women
experience boundary
confusion, both, on*

some level suffer from the failure to establish a firm sense of the self, one that does not rely extensively on a relationship with the other. (Diane Simmons, 1994)

Annie John is almost the duplicate of her mother Annie. The mother conditions the daughter into a socially accepted model, protects the daughter from curses and bad elements. Annie enjoys perfect sense of happiness, harmony and protection under the powerful mother. The mother-daughter metaphor is the colonial motherland and Daughter Island. The little girl Annie John is very much obsessed with death. Her curiosity towards death and the following funeral ceremonies increases day by day. Death symbolizes separation, the harbinger of future autonomy of Annie John. One day when Annie John returns from school she finds her parents making love in the bed. She loathes the sight of her mother embracing her father. Annie feels neglected and deprived of the special love her mother shared with her father. To announce her presence at home she noisily arranges the table. But nothing disturbs her parents. This point of her life becomes very important as she starts developing a different feel for her mother - hatred. She says, "All that was finished" (AJ, 32) The mother who looked beautiful and powerful now seemed to be small and funny. She now transmuted her love and adoration with

hatred and suspicion. The sense of abandonment got magnified with her and that made her look for a replacement. Annie John was torn between her newly developed hatred and her longing for the original intimacy.

Annie tired and spent coming back home from school, noticed a group of boys standing across the road. They made a show of mockery at her. Annie already filled with despair found it very unfair of them to behave like that towards her. "Annie unable to withstand the humiliation identifies one of those four boys to be the son of her mother's once friend and her playmate Mineu. She approached him in a casual way to ease the situation. She exchanged customary greetings with him which again becomes an element of mockery to the boys. They left the place whispering comments unable to control the burst of laughter. Annie was humiliated and bullied by the boys who were not very older than her. She had greater difficulties in coping up with adolescence which was further complicated by the male of the society. The former self of Annie's searches comfort in the mother's arms. But something completely unexpected happens to Annie. Her mother accuses her for being late from school for which Annie replies in her usual way with reasons like extra classes. Now Annie's mother straight away accuses her for making herself a spectacle before four boys,

She went on to say that, after all the years

she had spent drumming into me the proper way to conduct myself when speaking to young man, it had pained her to see me behave in the manner of a slut (only she used the French-patois word for it) in the street and that just to see me had caused her shame. (AJ, 107)

Her mother a woman instead of sharing the emotions of Annie, a girl troubled with sexual oppression, further intensified her pain by calling her a slut and this word she uttered in French patois, a language of the oppressed. So, this sluttishness belongs to the oppressed particularly the doubly oppressed. The sluttishness and the opposite of it are all ideas, doctrines created by the patriarchal world. The oppressed should follow the doctrines dictated otherwise they would be branded a slut by their own gender. The word slut was a blow to Annie's fragile self.

The word 'slut' (in Patois) was repeated over and over, until suddenly I felt as if I were it was filled with the word "slut", and it was pouring in through my eyes, my ears, my nostrils, my mouth,. As if to save myself, I turned to her

and said, "...well, like father like son, like mother like daughter. (AJ, 102)

Annie wanted to attain self-autonomy. And it was not a desire she developed in due course of her growing. It was something she was forced into. She did not find any other choice, than separating herself from her once very loving and caring mother, which is almost 'death'. So to gain self-autonomy or an independent self would be a rebirth.

Annie John becomes severely ill. Feeling deprived of maternal care she forgoes all sustenance, akin to stressing self-sufficiency and denial. Yet her refusal affirms her impotence, keeps sexual growth at bay, and attracts hyper attentiveness as she becomes temporarily anorexic. (Harold Bloom, 1998)

In this episode of her mystic illness water becomes a symbol. There is a heavy continuous downpour. This downpour suggests rebirth. The water becomes the amniotic fluid in the womb. Annie again goes to the pre-Oedipal stage immersed in the amniotic fluid in her mother's womb. As she is inside the fluid whatever her parents talk become mere

sounds and she couldn't have a clear vision of them. Ma chess, Annie's grandma has become the surrogate mother who took care of Annie John of all her requirements. With the showering of care and love from Ma chess, she slowly gathered strength and power. When the rain stopped, she was out of her illness, the symbolic rebirth happened. After recovering from the mystic illness, she has grown in terms of height, maturity and power. "...my mother and I both silently noticed that I now tapered ever over her." (AJ, 128) The illness has become a metamorphosis in the life of Annie John. She has become sublimated from her former fragile, dependent self to a powerful independent self. At the age of seventeen, she walks to the jetty with her parents and leaves for London to work and continue her nursing education.

Lucy starts where Annie John has left. *Lucy* is the story of a nineteen year old immigrant from Antigua to New York. She arrives to the new place loaded with dreams about her future in that soil. She crosses the ocean to pursue her dreams. She had all troubles experienced by an immigrant from a small island. The unpredictable nature of the new place makes Lucy think of her homeland and it creates a deep sense of nostalgia. Lucy wanted to sever all her ties with her mother, her family, her relatives and her homeland. She strongly believed her separation from her oppressive mother and homeland would bring her calm and peace which she longed for. She was an unhappy teenager who had big dreams

about her future whose dreams were not acknowledged by her parents who failed to see her shimmering brilliance, but with whom she is unable to cut all ties permanently. Her heart in spite of all the bitterness towards them longed for their presence. She looked at a map and saw an ocean dividing her native place from the place she is living now. The water is a powerful image which recurrently symbolizes the amniotic fluid the cut of the umbilical cord.

"An ocean stood between me and the place I came from, but it would have made a difference if it had been a tea cup of water? I could not go back" (Lucy, 10).

Like Annie John, Lucy should also undergo a painful transformation for which she has to sever her emotional ties with her mother. The mother from whom Lucy wanted to break free haunted her in one form or the other. She wanted to completely erase her part and start a new life, free of the past influences because her past was always a perennial source of pain. She wanted to move away from past which was always a deadly struggle for her. Lucy believed moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar would help her to erase her past. The sea which helped her to move away from her past made her long for it. Throughout the work Lucy struggles to forget her past and compromise which her present.

Conclusion

The sea, rain and water – repository of symbols play a pivot role in both works discussed above. To Annie John the long rain a symbol of the amniotic fluid helps her to attain self autonomy through a mystic rebirth. The ocean carries her with her dreams to the new land. In Lucy the same sea which liberated her from her limiting past now reminds her of her past. It connects her to her homeland memories. It the same water which washes all her pains in the form of tears when she undergoes a catharsis, and becomes a stronger individual.

References:

- Ashcroft Bill, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin 1989, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practise in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London.
- Kincaid, Jamaica 1985, *Annie John*, Penguin, New York.
- Kincaid, Jamaica 1990, *Lucy*, Picador, London.
- Simmons Diane 1994, Jamaica Kincaid, *Twayne*, New York.
- Timothy & Helen Pyne 1990, 'Adolescent Rebellion and Gender Relations in At the Bottom of the River and Annie John', in Cudjoe, Selwyn R. (ed.) *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, Calaux Publications, and Wellesley.

How to cite this article?

Dr.J. Lakshmi "The Colossal Presence of Sea in the works of Jamaica Kincaid: with special reference to Annie John and Lucy" *Research Journal Of English(RJOE)*7(4),PP:221-225,2022, DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2022.7.4.24