CHAPTER - II

GEORGE LAMMING AND HIS WORKS

George Lamming was born in Barbados, had his early education at a grammar school and started reading extensively. Lamming did not bother about his career and started writing at an early age. Lamming comes from a poor family, that regarded education most and pinned hopes on education to rescue people from total disgrace. Education meant then was joining the best school. Lamming was awarded a scholarship by which he prosecuted his studies further.

At school, Lamming came in contact with Frank Collymore who was his English master and also the editor of the magazine Bim. While at school, Lamming started writing verses for the Bim. Lamming was greatly fascinated by Collymore who used to write a great deal in private. Collymore's fine, big library also impressed Lamming very much. He preferred to read H.G.Well's "Outline of History" and "The Science of Life" to school curriculum which he considered absolute nonsense. Lamming was influenced by many writers whom he read at his early age. He was impressed by Conrad and developed a great passion for Hardy - particularly for Hardy the poet.
Later Lamming evinced interest in translations. At seventeen he read the voluminous novel Wilhelm Maister of Goethe. Later he also read Andre Gide’s The Money Changers, and had shown great interest in Jane Austerlitz’s works.

He wrote his first novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*, shortly after arriving in England in 1950 when he was twenty-three. It was awarded the Somerset Maugham Award for Literature in 1958 and was followed by the *Emigrants*, *Of Age and Innocence*, *Season of Adventure*, *The Pleasures of Exile* (a collection of essays) and *Water with Berries*. *Natives of My Person* is his most recent novel. George Lamming received a Guggenheim Fellowship to go to U.S.A. in 1955, a Canada Council Fellowship in 1962, and was Writer in Residence at the university of West Indies from 1967-68. From 1971-73 he was lecturer at other universities. He has edited *Canon Shot* and *Glass Beads*, an anthology of modern Black writing for Picador.

Barbados-born George Lamming is the most outspoken nationalist of the generation of West Indian novelists who grew to maturity in the turbulent 1930’s and 1940’s. His six novels chronicle the sweep of West Indian History, from the colonial setting of *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) through the achievement of independence in *Season of Adventure* (1960) to a post-independence uprising in *Water with Berries* (1971). His later
novel, *Natives of My Person* (1972), is the culmination of his work, going back to the beginnings of Colonialism and, allegorically suggesting the underlying, recurrent patterns of Caribbean History. Each of his novels is complete in itself and is a part of continually developing vision of the changing political scenario and of the psychological crisis of the Caribs going through the process of decolonisation, as perceived by Lamming.

"The literary track/tract person is the individual whose role is essentially a pioneering one he/she has to first survey the territory and then begin to cut tracks through the trees, vines, tendrils and undergrowth towards a meaningful direction in the journey to both self-understanding and consciousness both for him/herself as well as on behalf of the group."  

Lamming's first novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*, (1953) as Ngugi aptly describes it, "is a novel of colonial protest." It traces the maturation of an adult sensibility against the backdrop of a disintegrating society. It is set in a Barbadian Village of 1930's and charts the awakening of the hitherto apathetic village into a mild resistance. Lamming elaborates the trauma of growing up of an unstable Society through the predicament of boy G and his friends. The gradual collapse of the old order is symbolized by the eviction of 'Pa'
the oldest member of the clan, who is the symbolic time keeper and custodian of the traditional heritage.

"The further we move from home, the more strongly rooted the particular becomes, the more distinctive and describable those things that are true to their time and place, whether they are the indigenous components of a novel, a play or a recipe." 

In_the_Castle_of_My_Skin is the best-known of his works and perhaps is the most widely read West Indian Novel. It is Lamming's autobiographical work, covering nine years in the Life of G., the artist-hero, from his ninth birth-day to his departure for Trinidad. Interwoven with G's story is that of his village, which also undergoes dramatic changes during the course of the novel. From the outset, G.'s sensibility is distinct from that of the other villagers. His birth day coincides with a flood which threatens to wash Creighton's village into the sea. The villager's resistance to the flood is signified by a song sung by all until 'the whole village shook with song on its foundation of water.' But the song also signifies something else. The singing is initiated by G's mother to suppress the boy's inquiry into his past '(this) Always happened when I tried to remember.' His attempt to know himself by probing into his family's history poses another threat to the village, since the past, with slavery and oppression,
does not exist. Even teachers at the village school know nothing of it and the villagers believe, that Barbados has always been a junior Partner of England, 'Little England' - not a subservient colony. It is not the curiosity which separates G. from the village, but his mother's ambition. Education gradually separates him from his friends like Bob and 'the gang at the corner.' The long poetic chapter describing G.'s day at the beach with his friends opens with a quarrel between G. and Bob, and it speaks mainly of the change, as perceived by the boys through games, stories and symbols. 'You never know as you yourself say, 'Says Boy Blue, 'When something go off pop in yuhhead an you ain't same man you thing you wus.'

G.'s transition to manhood coincides with the fundamental changes in village life. In the opening chapters of In the Castle of My Skin the village is united by common values, a deep attachment to the land and faith in the landlord, the 'Great.' Lamming through the school inspection scene, ironically shows that their faith is based on illusions about England and ignorance of the slaves in the past. He also shows, through the periodic appearances of Ma and Pa, the quietude and continuity of peasant consciousness.

G. reappears in the novel just before his leaving for Trinidad. To cleanse himself for a new life ahead, he wades into the sea. His imagination focuses on a pebble he had hidden
earlier and the disappearance of which reflects the loss of the sense of communal life because of his high school education. Though a part of his sensibility remains in the village, 'It was as though my roots had been snapped from the centre of what I knew best.' The uprooting of the village itself begins, as the land is sold to outsiders, middle-class men with legal deeds of claim to the estate that Mr. Creighton had sold them through Slime's company. Like Slime himself, they are rootless men, 'intransit passengers,' who want to own property. For the villagers, whose life is governed by feudal customs, the law is irrelevant. Change is recorded throughout the novel. But the dispossession of the villagers is reported towards the end of the novel when the three central characters become dispossessed - first, the shoemaker, who had earlier defended the change but without involvement, next, Mr. Foster, who at the opening of the novel had refused to leave his home during the flood and finally, Pa. G. and the village too have similar experience of displacement and breaking with the past, though for different reasons. Both the events, G.'s departure and the destruction of the semi-feudal system of creighton's village are inevitable. G. as a writer is forced to leave the source' of his creativity and is divided in his attitude towards them.

In the Castle of My Skin G.'s new maturity is suggested by his use of a diary to record his thoughts and by an ironic, affectionate distance from his formerly dominating
mother. Yet he is struggling for identity he had sought after nine years ago, and the ideas of his boyhood friend Trumper about black pride and political struggle he could not understand. He leaves for Trinidad bewildered and rootless as the society he leaves behind. Although the artist-hero plays a less important role in Lamming's subsequent novels, his quest for his roots remains a recurrent and significant part of the struggle of West Indian Society for Freedom.

In the Castle of My Skin depicts a society that is well nigh feudal in its order; but somewhat uneasy and mechanical order, partly imposed, governed by ignorance, fear and unbecoming authority of the overseer, lackey of the "massa," distrusted and hated by his own people. The much-vaunted concepts, traditions and ceremonies are imposed from outside, alien to the majority of the people. They merely mimic those traditions blindly and sometimes with reverential awe out of ignorance. The novel also evolves a process to question the boys, and the society rejecting the old order, in an attempt to find a new order, more genuine true to the prevailing conditions of the time in West Indies.

Lamming's second novel, The Emigrants (1954) begins where the earlier book ends. Those Four years in Trinidad the novel's first-person narrator recalls, seemed nothing more than an extension of what had gone before, but for this
important difference, "I had known a greater personal Freedom."

But the artist-narrator plays a minor role in the novel. He soon merges into Collis, a young poet whose experience cannot easily be separated from that of the other emigrants. "We are all in fight, he thinks and yet as Tornado says we have not killed we haven't stolen." Lamming in the novel is more concerned with the powerful myth of Colonialism than with his personal experience. During the Colonial period people migrated to England. This myth, Lamming writes in his book of essays The Pleasures of Exile (1960), begins in the West Indies from the earliest stage of his education .... It begins with the fact of England's supremacy in taste and judgement: a fact which can only have meaning and weight by a calculated cutting down to size of all non-England. The first to be cut down is the colonialist himself.

Tornado calls England "the land of the enemy" and this view is shared by the other emigrants as well. And the emigrants become closer to each other as the ship reaches England. They feel the need of it and seek a basis for establishing West Indian unity. But their "ship-board nationalism" lacks substance and remains mythical as England is to them. To be in England was all that matters to the emigrants. Once they land, the emigrants disperse to struggle and their existence and living in new country. And the episodic narrative documents
the disintegration of the society of emigrants and their faith in England.

For Lamming, emigration is a phase of discovery bringing them back rejuvenated to the spiritually moribund West Indian society. In his next two novels, his characters struggle to create what Tornado in exile in London could only dream of "some new land where we can find peace," a place where they can be without making false pretences.

In the four years before the publication of his third novel, _Of Age and Innocence_ (1958), Lamming travelled widely in Europe, the United States and the Caribbean Islands. His travels broadened his artistic concerns. At the first Congress of Negro writers and artists in Paris in 1956, he argued that the black colonial experience of being, partly defined in terms of racial and cultural conflict with the white 'other' is but common in contemporary situation. It is the universal sense of alienation and abandonment, frustration and loss and above all else, of some direct inner experience of something missing. Nationalism is one form of the human effort to participate in close fraternity with other individuals.

The setting in the novel is San cristobal, Lamming's fictional island, with its multi-racial population and place names and geographical features. Sancristobal is the Caribbean World in miniature in _Of Age and Innocence_ published in the year when West Indies Federation was formed though for a short period,
Prophesied in the failure of Issac Shephard's multiracial people's communal movement.

"The act of moving beyond racism may be a limitation of perception (Innocence) or a deepening of it (Wisdom). However, wisdom which sees beyond racially given attributes to the human being beneath is sometimes slower than innocence that has not yet learnt to attach false significance to those attributes. The achievement of the boys who are loyal to each other and to the memory of a white friend, is in the second category 'a blind understanding'. Ma Shephard's vision, like that of Ma in the earlier novel, is finally a limited one."

But the leaders of such movements, like Shephard Sing and Lee, have also failed to escape from the unpleasant conditions prevailing in the country. The Future ideal of community is represented by the four boys of the secret society, inspired by a legend of the island's premordial harmony and spirit of resistance. Like the Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris, Lamming reaches back to the aboriginal past for a model of community in which west Indian consciousness has its roots. Of Age and Innocence testifies to Lammings' conviction that political change is possible through some radical change in people's look.

It is, according to Kenneth Ramchand,
"Not unique for novelists to be regarded as having something special to say to their societies. But the West Indian novelists apply themselves with unusual urgency and unanimity to an analysis and interpretation of their society's ills, including social and economic deprivation of the majority: the pervasive consciousness of race and colour, the cynicism and uncertainty of the nature of bourgeoisie in power after independence, the lack of history to be proud of and the absence of traditional or settled values."  

Lamming writes in *The Pleasures of Exile* that the West Indian must change the very structure, the very basis of his values and that the failure of which would lead to violence and killing as presented in the madhouse fire in the end. 'The Fire's red wall ... transparent and impenetrable' parallels the vengeful wall of hostility the leaders create.

Interwoven with the public political drama is a private one, the story of four English visitors to San Cristobal who have only a tangential involvement in the political struggle. They too have an ideal of community, a little world, created by the four people in the tranquility of the Balearic islands. But in the turbulent milieu of San Cristobal each undergoes a crisis of identity which divides him from the others. England, for the quarter, is the oldworld of established self-designed concepts
and relationships. Sancristobal is a new world, an abrupt break with the settled past and a confrontation with the realities of existence. Penelope Butterfield's concept of herself is jeopardised when she discovers her lesbian desire for Marcia and is afraid of revealing it to others. She becomes isolated from them by her awareness of the stigma she bears. 'The negro, the homosexual, the Jew, the worker,' She realises, suffers from a similar stigma and through the realisation she understands the motives behind the shepherd's rebellion.

In *Of Age and Innocence* Lamming becomes concerned with the private search for identity - focussed in the problem of understanding between Men and Women which he expands into a universal quest. The novel ends with Sancristobals' occupation by the British troops. When *Season of Adventure* (1960) opens, the island gets its political freedom, but power is vested in the hands of a few elite whose minds are shaped and nourished by colonialism and who have alienated themselves from the working class and peasants of the society. As *Of Age and Innocence* proved prophetic of the failure of the West Indies Federation, *Season of Adventure* anticipated the fall of the 'First Republic,' a society controlled by an elite with acquired alien values.

The tug between the elite and the masses in the novel is but the ceremony of the souls, an African orientation. The Vodun ceremonies which Lamming witnessed in Haiti in 1956, became
suitable metaphor to establish communication between the present and a buried past. The ceremonies also remind of African slavery in the past which the middle class West Indian would like to forget. In San Cristobal, the Ceremony is practised only by those living in wretched areas like Forest Reserve, and who are the guardians of the steel bands, and Symbols of the Survival and continuity of West Indian peasant consciousness. The ceremony of the souls at the tonelle, the canopied space where vodun ceremonies take place, is the route which drives fools, and the middle class mulatto heroine back to her roots. Her quest leads her not back to Africa but to the common folk of the West Indies still preserving traditional values. As she witnesses the ceremony of the souls at the beginning of the novel, Fola becomes conscious of a part of herself, 'her forgotten self, which her upbringing has concealed. Her subsequent quest for her father forms an important strand of the narrative of Season of Adventure. It is intertwined with the conflict between the inhabitants of the forest Reserve and the elite who attempt to supress the steel bands and the tonnelle.

Thus Lamming's first four novels trace the evolution of West Indian society from the disintegration of tradition bound colonial society through the dispersal of the displaced West Indians by emigration, to the struggle for a still unrealised form of community. Lamming later commented, "There was no further
point for me to go without in a sense going beyond what had actually happened in the society". For Lamming, novel is a 'Way of going forward by making a complete return to the beginnings.' It is so with In the Castle of My Skin, The Emigrants and Season of Adventure. The novels dealing with the effects of colonialism and tracing the four centuries long history within a span of six months, from Europe to the Guinea Coast and thence to the West Indies. The narrative of the novels moves freely forward and backward in respect of time and place to record in essential patterns of West Indian history from the subjugation and looting of its Indian civilisations to the terrifying monstrosities of slavery, and the exploitation of the islands under various forms of European colonialism.

     Europeans believe that non-Europeans lack humanity and exploit the poor. To the ship's carpenter, pierre and his fellows, Africans are less than human - 'they go 'naked everywhere like beasts' and are possessed of unusual sexual powers. Pierres' view and indeed much of the section of the novel describing the Guinea coast, is adopted from Hakluyt's Voyages. As early as 1960, when he was writing The Pleasures of Exile, Lamming's imagination had got inspired by Hakluyt's narratives, recording the traumas of British Colonialism and exploitation of the people in the country. In the attitude of Hakluyt's adventures toward carib, Indian, and African slaves he discovered
the cultural besides socio-political and economic crises that affected the conscience of both the coloniser and the colonised. The slaves, identified as human flesh wild fruits of nature, symbolized human bondage, exploitation and the spirit to revolt against the tyranny. Like Hakluyt's English men, both the commandant in his persecution of the tribes and the crew in their treatment of African slaves are morally blind and fail to perceive the 'stubborn spirit of revolt of the oppressed.'

Lamming's Limestone represents England and Europe, its house of trade and justifies the spirit of rebellion against economic exploitation during colonial period lasting seven centuries. The slave trade and trade house brought with them wealth and immorality and social ills to the kingdom, symbolised by the severn asylum, the hell like repository of the nation's ills. The commandant, a philosopher - adventurer like Shakespeare's Prospero, visualizes a new society in San cristobal, cleansed of the Kingdom's corruption. But he himself is a veteran of the extermination of the tribes, and his vision of a new world in the Caribbean society is based on the tainted model of the old.

The determination of the men, under Bapitiste, in alliance with the painter Ivan, to continue the expedition without proper leaders, stands for the consciousness of common man to perform his role in shaping a better future for West Indian
Society. Like Lamming's other novels, the ending in *Natives of My Person* is inconclusive, without resolving the crises. The women wait alone and isolated in a cave in San Cristobal, 'unaware of their future they must learn', as the lady of the house observes. *Natives of My Person* draws together the complex themes of Lamming's previous works, such as quest for identity, the enduring myth of colonialism, and the problem of human misunderstanding because of the distortions in relationships created by colonialism.

*Water with Berries* is the story of the three impoverished artists from San Cristobal living in London. The narrative within a span of two weeks covers, the West Indian past when they had rejected encroaches on the private, and routine worlds. Roger, a musician of East Indian descent, repudiates his pregnant wife Nicole, imagining fearful radical mixing, arising from his childhood horror at the creolised 'impurity of West Indian society'. When Derek impelled by his Christian upbringing reveals Roger's accusations of infidelity to Nicole, his idealism ends in her suicide. And Teeton, a painter, learns that his wife has committed suicide in San Cristobal. He abandons her after she becomes wife to the American ambassador in order to get Teeton released from prison after an uprising.
The suicides of Randa and Nicole mark the collapse of the isolated lives and aesthetic values the three have had created for themselves. In their Quest for artistic freedom they have betrayed the love of women for whom self-sacrifice is the only virtue. The suicides assume wider significance, however, on an allegorical level, with the introduction of motifs from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, which Lamming treats in his non-fiction work, *The Pleasures of Exile*, to make it an allegory of colonialism.

Lamming's use of *The Tempest* provides a framework for his argument that the experiences of slavery and colonialism have left a lasting mark on the coloniser and the colonised alike which can only be exorcised through some collective ceremony of the souls of the sort Teeton envisages on the health before events overtake him. 'Sometimes they argue all through the night', he tells myra: 'For hours the living and the dead.' It will go on until they reach a point of reconciliation, which is the end, the end of all complaint from the dead, and the end of all retribution for the living.

Lamming's concern with the function of the imaginative contact with and purgation of the past, goes backward to his poem, 'The Illumined Graves' published twenty years earlier, and forward through his methodical treatment of the struggle for independence and decolonisation in his first four novels, to his
realisation, in *Natives of My Person*, of the process Teeton envisages. *Natives of My Person* is a journey into the souls of both the coloniser and the colonised by a writer who feels himself a part of both the worlds, in search of a new, imaginative vision of human community. For Lamming, Political change in the Caribbean society must be accompanied by a profound psychic transformation which is the artist's responsibility to articulate at the deepest levels of Caribbean reflective self consciousness.' The imaginative journey into the psyche, the symbolic drama of redemption, of cleansing the society with a sense of commitment towards a better future, is as vital to Lamming's Creative purpose as the drama of political struggle and change. The situation in Lamming's fiction has been a means of exploration into the self, and an important artistic argument of necessity and through imagination to shape a new vision of human freedom and uniform national character, leading to Caribbean unity.

Lamming's earliest writings, poetry and short prose works he wrote before emigrating to England in 1950, express displeasure at the prevailing conditions in West Indian society and politics. His 'artistic personality' developed with his poetry composed while in Trinidad in late 1940s. Romantic and ethereal qualities of his early poems, conflicted with the social consciousness of West Indian colonial society. In 1948, Lamming describes a Trinidadian "Dutch party" with the poet on oneside, brooding
on the 'permanent disease of society,' and the 'glittering chatter' of the party on the other. The West Indies in Lamming's poetry is a spiritually sterile prison for the creative spirit: 'islands cramped with disease no economy can cure.' In the short story 'Birds of a Feather', his young protagonist dreams of a "way of escape". The colonial politics of the time are seen as an exercise in futility:

"Contestant and on looker
The leading and the led fusing danger and delight. In an original pattern, an automatic violence."

In a later poem, Lamming speaks of retreating from 'the multitudes' monotonous cry/ for freedom and politics at the price of blood to an aesthetic world where the spirit can "Live every moment in the soul's devouring flame."

Emigration to England marked a turning point in his attitude towards the West Indies. A black West Indian in an unfriendly city discovered not creative freedom, but alienation. His feelings are best expressed in his poem 'Song for Marian,' about a concert given in London by the black American Marian Anderson. Her songs awaken him to their common experience as blacks confronting white civilisation:

Now I venturing from scattered islands
to rediscover my roots
Have found an impersonal city
where your tales are incredibly true.

His experience in Lamming showed Lamming the need
to define himself not only as an artist but as a West Indian.

The poems Lamming wrote before *In the Castle of My Skin*
returned to the society he had earlier rejected. 'The Boy and
the sea' celebrates the freedom of boyhood and 'The Illumined
Graves' introduces a central motif of his later work: the living
seeking communion and reconciliation with the dead on All soul's
Day:

To renew the contagion of living
so these by similar assertion of love
promote their faith in flame,
Remembering the ceremony of undying souls
with a meek congregation of candles.
REFERENCES


3. Ibid., pp. 32-33.


6. George Lamming, Birds of a Feather, Bim, 9, Dec. 1948, p. 34.


9. George Lamming, A Dedication From Afar, Song For Marian, B.B.C. Caribbean Voices, 1 April, 1951.