

A Significant Voice in Contemporary Caribbean Literature, Jamaica Kincaid- A View

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ABSTRACT

Caribbean literature is the literature of the various territories of the Caribbean region. Through the themes of innocence, exile and homecoming, resistance and endurance, participation and alienation, self-determination and domination, Caribbean literature provides a powerful new tool for post-colonial studies and the importance of Caribbean literature in the context of all literature. Jamaica Kincaid is a very important figure in contemporary Caribbean literature. Kincaid who also caused a silent revolution in contemporary literature. Among Caribbean women writers, the prominent novelist, essayist, and gardener, Kincaid has clearly established herself as a spokesperson of the politics of gender equality, colonialism, racism and sexuality through her numerous works. Her works speak of feminism, depict mother-daughter relationships, and describe the effects of colonialism. Her works reveal how Caribbean family relationships are existing and the importance of family relationships. She places a different view on society among the contemporary writers. Black Caribbean writers expressed their anger, jealousy, rage and frustration in books, articles and anthologies in their own way. Her works focused contemporary problems, familial relationships, importance of motherhood. The article intends to evaluate some of Kincaid's important works from this point of view.

Key words: Caribbean, family, relationship, racism, and colonialism

Introduction

Caribbean literature only has to be true to itself. It doesn't need colonialism or imperialism. It's always been vibrant.

– From Marlon James, Jamaican Writer.

Literature in English from the former British West Indies may be referred to as Anglo-Caribbean or, in historical contexts, as West Indian literature. Most of these territories have become independent nations since the 1960s, though some retain colonial ties to the United Kingdom. They are united, in addition to the English language, by a number of political, cultural and social ties, which makes it appropriate to consider their literary works within the same category.

The more wide-ranging term "Caribbean literature" generally refers to the literature of all Caribbean territories regardless of language—whether written in English, Spanish, French, Hindustani, or Dutch, or one of numerous creoles. The literature of Caribbean is exceptional, both in language and subject. Through the themes of innocence, exile and homecoming, resistance and endurance, inclusion and alienation, self-determination, Caribbean literature provides a powerful platform for post-colonial studies and Caribbean literature, which is important in the context of all literature.

A Significant Voice in Contemporary Caribbean Literature

Writing the first half of the twentieth century African- American writers particularly male writers like Wright, felt compelled and obligated to advocate resistance on the basis of race. The whole machinery of American base and superstructure dictated that kind of protest writing. However, the latter half of this century has seen a drastic shift in American particularly African American, culture and literature. One major shift has been from the focus on race to that of gender. (32)

African- American Literature forms a major part of the twentieth century. Critics have defines the term ‘African- American Literature variously’. The argument mainly revolves on the issue whether it means the bulk writing produced by those living in the continent irrespective of race creed and nationality or whether it relates to the work of the writers of black origin only. It has however, been conclusively agreed upon that African American literature in the final analysis represents the writings of American of African ancestry. At the beginning of the twentieth century the way of African American writing is only dominated by the male writers. Later the second half of the twentieth century there were many women writers began to start their writings. This shift caused by the feminist movement in the 1970s. With the increase of Black female voices gender marginalization and oppression became the target for destruction.

Alice Walker was the first in that category and launched the first major and full attack on patriarchal domination through her writings. Toni Morrisson, J. California Cooper, Terry McMillan, Bebe Campbell Moore, Gloria Naylor, and Sherley Anne Williams -all of these women are Black Writers. Particularly Rebecca Beckles, Edwidge Danticat, Claire Adam, Krystal Seetal, Caroline McKenzie, and Candice Carty-Williams and Jamaica Kincaid all of these women are Caribbean women writers. Their literary work is currently undergoing a renaissance. Unlike the Harlem Renaissance, which largely showcased the writing of Black men, the present renaissance is reserved for women of color. Readers around the world look to these women for new literary styles and themes.

Jamaica Kincaid as a Novelist

"Cool and fierce..... the toughness and elegance of Kincaid's writing is all that one want".

-Susanna Moore, the Washington Post Book World

Kincaid is one of the world's finest contemporary novelists. She is a part of a continuous tradition-the writing of Black women- a tradition that exposes through an art

form, the lives of Black men and women. She is known for her lyrical use of language. Her stories and novels have a hypnotic poetry that results from her use of rhythm and repetition. Her images, taken from her childhood in the West Indies, are reminiscent of Antigua with its tropical climate, Caribbean cuisine, local customs and folklore riddled with superstition. Many of her stories move seamlessly from realism to surreal fantasy, like a Caribbean folk tale. She has also been praised for her exploration of the strong but ambiguous bond between mother and daughter and for her depiction of a girl's transformation into a woman.

Kincaid is openly critical of the post-colonial British rule of his homeland of Antigua. She is also a deliberate Caribbean American novelist. Jamaica Kincaid started her first writing is an anthology of short stories and subsequent written novels firmly established Kincaid as a significant voice in Antiguan American Literature. Using a lyric prose style, Kincaid examines and dissects the daily challenges of growing up as an underdog in oppressive environments. In thirty years of writing, her novels, collections of essays, and even gardening books, demonstrates a unified view of the world.

Kincaid's first novel, *Annie John* (1985) was chosen as one of three finalists for the 1985 international Ritz Paris Hemingway Award. The first of her books set completely outside the Caribbean, *Lucy* (1990), like most of Kincaid's writing, has a strong autobiographical basis. Her novel, *the Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), won The Lana Literary Award. The memoir, *My Brother* (1997), which chronicles her brother's battle with AIDS, won the Prix Famine Etranger and gained a nomination for a National Book Award for non-fiction. In 2002, Kincaid returned to writing about her family in the novel, *Mr. Potter* (2002), a fictionalized account of her father's life. After a decade without any new fiction work, she is back with a new book, *See Now Then* (2013), a novel about a marriage that is narrow-minded by both love and hate.

Significance of her Titles

All works of Kincaid bear appropriate titles. One of the main reasons why a work becomes one of the best is its title. The title is a very important thing in her novels; because they are appropriately juxtaposed with the story. Basically, the name of the main character is the title of her novels for example *Annie John*, *Lucy* and *Mr. Potter*. Kincaid, a genius, borrowed the elements from the novel in her Caribbean life and turned it into something immensely likable by her contemporary readers.

The novel *Annie John* (1985) it is also 'a coming of age' novel whose title is significant to the content and development of the novel. Being a bildungsroman, the novel's title is very suggestive. We all like something good and the novel is almost ideal in this context. The novel begins with the protagonist's childhood to her puberty. *Annie John* by Kincaid is a autobiographical novel with innovations and complexities. It is one of such novels that are written on the themes of colonialism. The novel depicts the post-colonial scenario of Caribbean and the effects that followed it. It is all set the background of the familial relationships and the bonding between the mother and daughter. The novel is constructed on the memories and experiences of a young girl growing in Caribbean land.

Kincaid's second novel, *Lucy* is a short novel, which the story begins in, mediocre: the eponymous Lucy has come from to the United States to be au pair for a wealthy white family. The scheme of the novel closely mirrors her own experiences. The novel focuses on a dispute between mother and daughter. Lucy moves to America to work as an au pair for a well-off family. She is initially in love with their seemingly perfect life and she grows disenchanted with their lifestyle and feels alienated from the family. Despite this, she does grow close to the mother Mariah, who reminds Lucy of both good and bad in her own mother. Throughout the novel, Lucy's strained relationship with her mother drives her quest for independence and the ability to create her own identity against that of her mother.

Kincaid's third novel, *the Autobiography of My Mother* is a disturbing, haunting story of one woman's journey through a cruel and loveless life on the Caribbean island of Dominica. Xuela Claudette Richardson, the narrator of the story and protagonist of the novel who is seventy years old. It reveals a world divided by the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, and the powerful and the powerless. Her fourth novel, *Mr. Potter*, Kincaid contemplates a character who resembles her biological father a man who did not participate in her upbringing and remained steadfastly absent from her life. Kincaid's fifth novel, *See Now Then*, explains about painful diagnosing of the different ways in which the passing of time operates on the unfold gracefully, human consciousness.

All the works of the novelist and its titles are exactly matched with the story. The title of Kincaid's novel is symbolically significant as well as highly suggestive of the message that Kincaid seems to have intended to convey through the novel. There are two important aspects of the novel, which the title directly points to and the protagonists' names also in the title.

Jamaica Kincaid's Themes

Motherhood is a central theme in contemporary women's writings. Because, the significance of motherhood for women is the one value that societies, in spite of their differences, share. In Kincaid's novels we find that a mother daughter relationship is the main theme of her writings. Jamaica Kincaid also presents the other themes like feminism, cultural identity, alienation, racial discrimination, and gender issues by focusing on the black women's identity in her novels.

Jamaica Kincaid's Characterization

Kincaid conscientiously and expertly manipulates language the way a photographer adjusts a camera's lens bringing her characters into clear focus and accentuating their profiles against their natural backdrop a lush- often perplexing-island milieu.

-Liza Weisstuch, the Boston Globe

Kincaid's novels like the novels of the traditional novelists give due importance to characters. Jamaica Kincaid is considered to be the best novelist even today in African American literature. The subject in her novels is the tragic consequence of the colonialization. Limited range of characters, though there is some variety in Kincaid's characters, by and large, her characters are limited in scope. They can easily be put under two broad categories- mothers and daughters or parent and child. The physical and the psychological dimensions of her characters are well-built and well-organized. Kincaid expresses the externals as well as the internals of a character.

Kincaid follows both the traditional and modern techniques of developing a character. Like the modern psychological novelists, Kincaid's characterization, describes the intricate working of the human-mind with its noble and base motives, and lays bare the human-heart in a new and frightening way. Kincaid gives the psycho-analysis of her characters on the basis of the concepts of modern psychology. Kincaid has made a masterly study of various emotions in her works. Kincaid's novels are based on the black American experience in the Caribbean society and the United States from various perspectives is illustrated. Kincaid's women figures are as lively as men. They are very much exciting and attractive. But they are all figures of love and affection. Annie John and Lucy are personally emotion based figures. They very much bonding with their mother's. They are easily bonding with others. The character Xuela also is quite charming and longing about her mother. Kincaid's central characters are many a time her mouthpieces representing her views and conflicts.

Kincaid's collective work is a journey through the life of one black woman. *At the Bottom of the River* (1978), *Annie John* (1983), *Lucy* (1990), and *the Autobiography of My Mother* (1996). All the above works characters are female protagonists. The story is based on their journey, their life, struggle and the hatred on the relationships and society. Mostly autobiographical, Kincaid's work is centered on the experiences of female protagonists.

Kincaid's writing has attracted a large popular audience with critical acclaim. In particular, her singular, incantatory style and her remedy of the complex and universal mother-daughter relationship have captivated readers and impressed critics. Kincaid style is the most regarded as a particularly feminine, in its use of strong rhythms and refrains to get beyond the imposed rationality of the "father" and male-dominated culture.

The novels of Kincaid's show the author's deftness and literary skill in the portrayal of characters. We are struck with the livingness of Kincaid's characters in her novels. The principal characters though they symbolize certain qualities of character. The principal characters though they symbolize certain qualities of character, are not shadows, mere abstractions, but impress us as living persons. Through *Annie John*, Kincaid has expressed her deep conviction that mother daughter relationship as an important one. Through the novel *Lucy*, she has expressed the young woman who starts a new life way from home and has to cope with painful memories and new power relationships threatening her sense of self.

Conclusion

"For centuries, Black women have been called the mule of the world and slave of a slave and had a status of the wretched on the earth". (25) Kincaid breaks those words through her writings. She is one of the greatest post-colonial writers. Kincaid's work is considered unique among the various schools of Caribbean writing—neither entirely feminist nor Afro centric—and she is one of the region's most respected female authors. Her writings focused on the awareness of the Caribbean culture and tradition. Also depicts the values of relationships among the family members. Each of her works depicts the effects of colonial domination. She has incorporated feminist ideas through the character of her protagonists. Her writings fit into the Caribbean literary tradition in many ways. moreover, Kincaid's writings develop tropes and themes characteristic of the Caribbean experience and Caribbean literature, such as the childhood of alienation and exile, the transition to adulthood, the centrality of female figures, and the conflicts generated by a history of abuse and cultural

domination. As is typical of most Caribbean literary works, her work is largely autobiographical and at the same time has great political significance; Kincaid successfully blurs any clear division between fictional and non-fictional narrative, and between political and non-political writing. Kincaid's utilization of the influence of childhood experiences, memory psycho-analysis, association of ideas, heredity, dreams, etc in the interpretation of his characters and their actions testifies to her very deep knowledge of modern psychology. Thus, Kincaid is the most significant voice in the contemporary Caribbean literature.

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