

Representation of *Body* in Postcolonial and Eco-critical context in *Annie John* by Jamaica Kincaid

Dr. Muhammad Ajmal Khan¹, Behzad Anwar², Dr. Khalid Ahmed³, Aadila Hussain⁴, Bisma Butt⁵

¹Assistant Professor, Gift University, Pakistan

²Assistant professor, University of Gujrat, Pakistan

³Assistant professor, University of Central Punjab, Pakistan

⁴Lecturer, Punjab University, Gujranwala

⁵Lecturer, University of Lahore, Gujrat Campus

bisma.butt@ell.uol.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the iteration of body in Jamaica Kincaid's work, and especially how Ecocritical and Postcolonial theories may inform those representations.

This study also looks at the narrator Annie John to explore the embodiment, discussions and order of place, and the different scopes of environment that each narrator must involve with. Both terms, postcolonial and ecocritical are vast and varied, but the main focus is to discuss those features of place that establish each discipline. The study of surroundings and environment is being explored in ecocritical and also how body of protagonist mediates them. In postcolonial, the experiences of the colonial are mainly focused and also tells about how the narrator resettles the search for completeness and source within the shift of colonialism. The study highlights many topics that are sex and smell, death and the figure of the mother and several other topics relevant to the novel as they are narrowed to body.

Keywords: Body, Ecocritical, place, Postcolonial

Article Received: 10 August 2020, Revised: 25 October 2020, Accepted: 18 November 2020

Introduction

Postcolonial is a vast and comprehensive term that covers theory, practical, political and critics. Quayson (2010) defines post-colonialism as a study including an "engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies as well as at the level of more general global developments thought to be after effects of empire". He also says that this "often also involves the discussion of experiences... of slavery, migration... race, gender, place..." Likewise, a wide range of definitions from theoretical studies on ecology is allowed by ecocriticism, to literature's duties in our present time of ecological crisis, to works on the language of nature and all natural things by giving suggestions. Glotfelty (1996) elaborates that as, "Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". The main thing that is common between these approaches is study of *place* and what consequences *place* may have on those people or inhabitants that reside in given environment. Postcolonialism's standard of *place* is generally a function that has displacement, re-placement, and the discussions of the earlier, current, and upcoming *place* of the colonized and the colonizers. For source

through the *body*, the narrator of novel enacts the search—recalling the current longing in postcolonialism and environmentalism—because David Abramson expressively discusses that, "Humans are tuned for relationship. The eyes, the skin, the tongue, ears, and nostrils—all are gates where our *body* receives the nourishment of others". According to Kincaid, both experience and control of her narrator's attachments and discussions of *place* are resourced by *body*. As description and consideration of both *body* and *place*, this study reflects *Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John*. Kincaid made a new ideas of and new ways to inhabiting *place* as well as environment. It is this postcolonial ecology, this *place* of the colonized *body* that the study highlights.

This work is divided into following sections in this way that it first considers how as a whole this novel and particularly the protagonist are located within the colonial. However, the protagonist hails from a minor Caribbean island that is to stand in varying places in relation to their home island and within changing degrees of colonial occurrence. Afterwards, the study explores how the colonialism moves with the natural surroundings, but more significantly how *body* of the protagonist is in negotiation with her surroundings. This expectedly moves by continuously touching back to the phenomenological connection of the *body* to all that surrounds it, environmental and colonial.

2 Methodology

This work is frontloaded with theory, the body of this work is not a theoretical roll-call, rather a deep reading and attention to the primary text. All these said above in introduction needs first a theoretical and critical basis in the disciplines' consideration—this just follows. This contains, but is not limited to: a judgment for any dissimilarity between *place* and surroundings; for distinctions of displacement, travel and immigration; and for what is covered during the *body* and also embodiment. The basic purpose in the introduction of survey is to discover the intersections and commonalities in the theoretical work with respect to similarities and interactions and link them accordingly so that, there comes a coherent and relevant application of the words of Kincaid.

2.1 The Postcolonial

Jamaica Kincaid basically belongs to Antigua, an island of Caribbean; her grandparents belong to Scotland, Africa and Carib Indian origins. She wrote during and after the decolonization. She moved to America in 1965.

Although definition of postcolonial is already given but for deep reading it is stated by Homi Bhabha:

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples.

Bhabha says that the subjects of this study are taxonomy—nation, race, community, personal—and the relationship to that 'authority'. Additionally, the postcolonial involves cosmopolitan subject as it is necessary. This is especially relevant to this work, for it contains, as Robbins (2013) defines, "Instead of an ideal of detachment, actually existing cosmopolitanism is a reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachments, or attachment at a distance". Attachments, conversations of belonging and connection are those that determine and describe the narrators in this novel. These connections—or the deficiency of them—respectively make a cosmopolitan of protagonist.

2.2 The Ecocritical

Much like postcolonial, this study focuses on the sample of the *environmental* that are in direct discussion with postcolonial literature and can be describe through the *body*. David Abram discusses

this connection, this ecophenomenology as a power of *body* that returns back, the senses, and a "recuperation of the incarnate, sensorial dimension of experience...a recuperation of the living landscape in which we are corporeally embedded". It is this embeddedness that allows the appearance of the researcher into Kincaid's novel. There will be negotiations of the overarching idea of spaces and also the natural world. This even gives a wide deal of variety available for study, for as Buell (2005) tells the fact that, "That the concept of *place* also gestures in at least three direction at once – toward *environmental* materiality, toward social perception or construction, and toward individual affect or bond – makes it an additionally rich and tangled arena for environmental criticism".

2.3 Data Collection

As discussion of *body's* importance and *place* is based on theoretical work, so it is the study concerned with Kincaid's *Annie John*. Many foremost themes involve *body* and its situatedness that permeate this novel. The purpose of these themes is to be a substitute for the *place* of origin and also for sense of source that describes each lack. Hall (1994) defines this phenomenon as, "Who has not known, at this moment, the surge of an overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins, for 'times past'? And yet, this 'return to the beginning' ... can neither be fulfilled nor required, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery...". It is these 'lost origins' and the finding for the source, both as an effect of colonization and coming back to nature that will fulfill each and every aspect of this novel.

3 Results and discussion

This study starts with *Annie John* published in 1985 after decolonization of Antigua from British in 1981. It manages openings, changes, endings and the process of self-recognition within the environment of colonization. Annie, the protagonist is aware of her *body* and *environment* around her.

The main focus is on two things, first on mother and second on loss of *place* of plenitude that her mother signifies as the narrator gets mature and some changes occur in her *body*. This affects Annie's search that to find her very own geographically, externally and also from inside. This area considers concept of home, migration and colonial as well. The study focuses the protagonist and tells about academic and domestic effects also. She is educated about the importance and learning of another *place*. In her own home, she is mislaying that *place* where she was born. During this process, her *body* becomes a display of the modification of her individuality. She lies in the process of negotiating

the various spheres and exploring herself that fits into different *places* she comes across. She defines this:

“[My friends] sitting around me, the church in the distance, beyond that the school...the courtyard, beyond that the world, how I wished that all would fly away so that suddenly we’d be in some other atmosphere...”

Annie wants self-exile from the grip of colonialism and wishes to create her own new identity in her place, as colonial saturation is present in all layers consisted of home, social life, school life and also the world.

3.1 The Colonial

Annie within the school setting experiences the imperialism. It is entirely different practice for her as she describes: “a world in which I was not even near the center”. The concept of *Othering* is obvious in this statement. The hierarchy of *place* is best described in a scene (colonial setting) when Annie’s favorite teacher takes part in reading activity of Shakespearean novel ‘*The Tempest*’, she thought that both were claiming for their birthright after being stranded on island. Another, recognition of her *place* is echoed in a scene when Annie was praised for her autobiographical essay. As her class fellows wrote about their islands, traveling and their future plans for moving to England but Annie wrote about the setting in which she and her mother were living. This thing shows that Annie at that time was aware of *self*. School setting in this novel clearly depicts the impacts of colonialism (race, history and slavery) e.g. the protagonist talks to her white class fellow Ruth: “...did not know the answer to many questions about the West Indies...Ruth had come all the way from England. Perhaps she did not want to be in the West Indies at all. Perhaps she wanted to be in England, where no one would remind her constantly of the terrible things her ancestors had done...Her ancestors had been the *masters*, while ours had been the *slaves*...our ancestors had done nothing wrong except just sit somewhere, defenseless”.

On another occasion, Annie felt the same effects of colonialism: “Of course, sometimes, what with our teachers and our books, it was hard for us to tell on which side we really now belonged...for it was all history, it was all in the past and everybody behaved differently now; all of us celebrated Queen Victoria’s birthday...” As it is mentioned above that Ruth was unable to answer about Dominica’s discovery and this thing alerts the Annie for her schoolbook’s defacement. There was an insulting illustration of slaves in her book ‘Columbus in Chains’, Columbus was wearing rich dress in picture. This indicates that one event about European in chains was too much important as its

example was given in the textbook whereas no single description was given for multitude of slaves. Annie took this example very differently and mocked on it by changing the roles and gave the following description in old English calligraphy on this picture: “The Great Man Can No Longer Just Get Up and Go”.

Teacher called the act blasphemous as Columbus was the discoverer of her mother island and she punished Annie to copy parts of an English poem, *Paradise Lost* and she was also forced to rewrite the imperial canon by *Amilcar Cabal*: “The experience of colonial domination shows that, in the effort to perpetuate exploitation, the colonizer not only creates a system to repress the cultural life of the colonized people; he also provokes and develops the cultural alienation of a part of the population, either by so-called assimilation of indigenous people, or by creating a social gap between the indigenous elites and the popular masses”.

The acknowledgement of slavery (colonialism) can also be seen in another event when Annie went through an unexplained illness: “...my father carrying me on his back, my mother walking by his side with her head bent down. The doctor, a man from England...now examined me from head to foot, poking me here and there...” All these events made Annie a colonial subject.

3.2 The Environment

This novel involves language that shows how Annie is too much connected with her home and her island. On the instances of rejection of her mother, she shares her feelings in this way: “the earth swept away from under me” and “the ground washed out from under me”

As soon as Annie makes her new friends, she emotes on this way:

“The earth may have grown an inch or two larger”. On another occasion, she shows her feelings for her mother: “The ground had opened up between us, making a deep and wide split. ‘On one side of this split stood my mother...on the other side stood I’”. Further, once Annie was confused, the imagery of water is used: “...suddenly I felt as if I were drowning in a well...pouring in through my eyes, my ears, my nostrils my mouth”. When she was ill, her dreams also show her attachment with her surroundings: “The sea filled me up, from my toes to my head...[until] I burst open. The water ran back and made up the sea again”

3.3 A Place for Death

Self-discovery is another focus of this novel that extends it through comparison e.g. to her mother, to her fellows and to her father: “had no different ideas of how to be in the world, they certainly didn’t think that the world was a strange place to be caught living in”. This judgment involves past and future of

her that institutes her existence. The element of death is not only used for a condition but also for a spectacle, place and symbol of changes in this novel. Interesting dichotomy is observed in Annie's regard: "Until then I had not known children died".

"I was afraid of the dead, as was everyone I knew...because we never could tell when they might show up again ...sometimes they would show up standing under a tree just as you were passing by. Then they might follow you home...they might wait for you and follow you wherever you went". Being dead is another name for separation of consciousness and also *body*, shows the state of being 'Other'. When Annie experiences the death of a very young girl then to some extent this thing fixes the death for Annie: "died in my mother's arms". She suddenly rejects the *body* of source that is her own mother, after this, she thinks: "My mother had to prepare the little girl to be buried. I then began to look at my mother's hands differently...For a while, though not for very long, I could not bear to have my mother caress me or touch my food or help me with my bath. I especially couldn't stand the sight of her hands lying still in her lap". Annie realizes that *body* is mutable thing that only depends on its status and *environment*: "I tried to imagine her dead. I couldn't. I didn't know what someone looked like dead". She further shows connection between *body* and being by experiencing another funeral: "Lying there dead, she looked the same, except her eyes were closed and she was so still...when I looked at this girl, it was as if the View-Master wasn't working properly"

3.4 The Home place

Annie was used to live near her mother even she worshiped her and her *body*, her believe system and daily routine experiences depict this: "My mother and I often took a bath together...my mother would bathe different parts of my body; then she would do the same to herself. We took these baths after my mother had consulted with her obeah woman..." "I would sit in a corner of our yard and watch her. She never stood still". But with the passage of time, she matures, grows and changes and is "on the verge of becoming a young lady". However still within her mother's domain, Annie feels the development and examines herself "behind closed doors," and thought to be out of the reach and gaze of her mother. When her mother tries to groom her for outer world she feels in this way: "And why was my mother carrying my new state so far? She took to pointing out that one day I would have my own house and I might want it to be a different house from the one he kept"

The fear shows her nervousness for being losing the source and abundance that the *body* was connected

to domestic until this point was in the form of mother and home. Now Annie searches a place for herself beneath the house where all useless things are kept and it was her first step away from her source rule: "I always slammed the gate to our yard behind me when I was up to something"

3.5 Clothing the Body

When Annie was child she used to have same cloth just like her mother but when her body developed, she came across a new experience of separation of clothing: "had many dresses made out of the same cloth, though hers had a different, more grown up style..."

"The summer of the year I turned twelve, I could see that I had grown taller; most of my clothes no longer fit...my mother and I had gone to get some material for new dresses...I immediately said how much I loved this piece of cloth and how nice I thought it would look on us both, but my mother replied, "Oh, no. You are getting to old for that. It's time you had your own clothes. You just cannot go around the rest of your life looking like a little me." Clothing plays a role of transition between *environment* and her *body* as she claims: "I needed new uniforms...I had the skirt of my uniform made to a length that ended just below my calves...I bought a hat whose crown and brim were too big for me, and when I wore it, my head was held down and it was difficult to see my face"

3.6 A Sharing of the Body

Sharing the body is another powerful theme in all novels of Jamaica Kincaid which serves as outward projection for the *body*, sharing her own *place* with others. Annie in this novel also claims that she loves her fellows (Gwen and Sonia) and with them she was: "not touching but feeling as if we were joined at the shoulder, hip, and ankle not to mention heart". Annie discovers her power of body with these fellows. She is lesbian in order to seek the alternative source (mother) in shape of other female fellows. She does not have the chance of social interaction with the boys as she was used to study in girl's school. She narrates a story in this way: "a game we were making up on the spot, I took off all my clothes and he led me to a spot under a tree, where I was to sit until he told me what to do next. It wasn't long before I realized that the spot he had picked out was a red ants' nest. Soon the angry ants were all over me; stinging me in my private parts...he fell down on the ground laughing..."

The event shows the possibility that may be due to this reason (violence) she feels calmness in the same gender. The relationship between Annie and Red Girl can be best described as natural exploration of her own *body*. As she says: "Oh, the sensation was delicious—the combination of pinches and kisses", this passion turned to masochistic turn.

Annie's mother accused her for choosing the partner for sharing her *body* and behaved rudely which was unbearable for Annie: "The word 'slut' (in patois) was repeated over and over until suddenly I felt as if I were drowning...As if to save myself, I turned to her and said 'Well, like father like son, like mother like daughter'"

This act of Annie's mother takes her away from her even she rejects the feelings of nearness with Mother Island. Another reason which strengthens the notion of separation of Annie with her source is when she came across the intimacy of her parents: "I was sure I could never let those hands touch me again, I was sure I could never let her kiss me again. 'All that was finished'. Due to depression, she found a new identity for herself and chose to rub out her source and even her parent's copulation.

3.7 A Separation

Before Annie took last step for her independence, in the narrative chronology, at least, the demand for trunk of her own comes. The second last chapter 'The Long Rain' talks about dreaming and state of flux as Annie claims: "I knew quite well that I did not have the power to make the atmosphere feel as sick as I felt, but still I couldn't help putting the two together". During this state of mind, Annie recognized a new relationship of her *body* with *place*: "My dreams were not unreal representations of something real; my dreams were a part of, and the same as, my real life". She noticed her *body* changes and transforming into unnatural being. All these moments helped the Annie to take herself out from her actual *place*. Her dreams were dark which reflected her self-exile.

3.8 A Situating

Chapter's title 'A walk to the Jetty' indicates the condition of Annie like placing her *body* in her island and search for own self, the first line of this chapter shows: "'My name is Annie John.' These were the first words that came into my mind as I woke up on the morning of the last day I spent in Antigua, and they stayed there...". Lucy has completed the detachment from her mother and now must do the same from her island. There is a sense of obligation to herself that leads Annie away from her home: "I did not want to go to England, I did not want to be a nurse, but I would have chosen going off to live in a cavern and keeping house for seven unruly men rather than go on with my life as it stood. I never wanted to lie in this bed again, my legs hanging out way past the foot of it"

4 Conclusion

Annie John novel has complete beginning and ending as it starts when *Annie* is small and she has strong association with her mother but with the passage of time, her *body* matures and this made a

definite sense, not only because of getting older, but also due to declaration of *body's* power. At the beginning of the novel, *Annie* is connected to her mother but with the passage of time she finds that she has her own *body* in spite of her mother, and goes through the happening the researcher called the '*chrysalisation*,' which is followed by the successive development of her *body* and the formation of a private sense of surroundings. So, in this way, her relationship with her mother becomes worse as she recognizes her own distinct identity. The sense of discovery about herself and her *place* is main focus of this novel.

In relation to the *body*, this novel is a starting note for *Kincaid*. It is also a main expression of her relationship with her home at island, the colonial, and also her left over attachment. *Annie* leaves for London that is called land of colonizers and it shows that she has not detached connections completely either colonial or matriarch. Her understanding at this point has just started. It is the child-*Annie*, just determining separateness and the consequences of that detachment.

References

- [1] Bhabha, & Homi. (1994). *Nation and Narration*. New York: Routledge.
- [2] Greenblatt, Stephen., & Gunn, G. B. (1992). *Postcolonial criticism* "redrawing the boundaries: The transformation of English and American literary studies. Eds. New York: Modern Language Association of America.
- [3] Robbins, B. (1998). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press,
- [4] Buell., & Lawrence. (2005). *The future of environmental criticism: Environmental crisis and literary imagination*. Blackwell Publishing.
- [5] Glotfelty., Cheryl., & Fromm, H. (1996). *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- [6] Hall., & Stuart. (1994). *Cultural identity and diaspora. Colonial discourse and Post-Colonial theory: A reader*. Eds. Patric Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia university press.
- [7] Quayson, A. (2000). *Postcolonialism and postmodernism. A companion to postcolonial studies*, 87-111.
- [8] Robbins, B. (2013). *Is the postcolonial also postsecular? Boundary 2*, 40(1), 245-262.