

## Thematic Analysis of Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and *Lucy*

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### Abstract

Jamaica Kincaid is one among the prominent writers of the Caribbean literature. Her main themes are innocence, racism, power, colonial education, exile and return to the motherland, family bond, domination and Mother-daughter relationship. In the novel *Annie John*, she deals with Mother-daughter relationship. It also shows the psychological depression that the characters undergo especially after Annie attaining puberty. Finally, Annie in order to get away from the depression decides to leave home to England for higher studies. In the novel *Lucy*, Lucy feels that her mother loves her brother more than her and this feeling hurts her a lot and so she decides to isolate herself from her family. Kincaid's two protagonists harbor their love for her mother in the hopes of better understanding the rest of her character's development. In her both novels, Kincaid provides an intimate portrait of her characters, their joys, their pains, their hopes, and their despair. Thus, both the novels beautifully portray the life of women characters from

childhood to adult age. Women suffer in the hands of men in all context of life. Kincaid brilliantly depicts the life and sufferings of women. Being a woman writer Kincaid understands the psyche of women and their mood swing which changes often according to the situation. Both the heroines manifest a strong desire of escaping. Escaping from their homeland; escaping from the adherence to British values, traditions, and customs; escaping from the role prescribed to them by society. Kincaid presents Annie 's, Lucy's and her own immigration as both as an opportunity for a better life and as an escape from her past.

**Key words:** Jamaica Kincaid, Caribbean literature, *Annie John*, *Lucy*, suffering of women, social restrictions for women.

### **Caribbean Literature**

Among the literatures of the world, Caribbean Literature has attracted widespread interest and it is frequently referred to as West Indian Literature. Caribbean writers have produced some of the most enduring literary pieces by any standards in the world. The most significant features of the Caribbean writing are that it is deeply rooted in its culture. A noteworthy function of the Caribbean novel is that it aims primarily at investigating and projecting the inner consciousness of the Caribbean community.

*Caribbean literature* is the term generally accepted for the literature of the various territories of the Caribbean region. Literature in English specifically from the former British West Indies may be referred to as Anglo-Caribbean or, in historical contexts, West Indian literature; although in modern contexts the latter term is rare. The literature of the Caribbean is exceptional, both in language and subject. More than a million and a half Africans, along with many Indians and South Asians, were brought to the Caribbean between the 15th and 19th centuries. Today, their descendants are active in literature with strong and direct ties to traditional African expressions. This literary is connection, combined with the tales of survival, exile, resistance, endurance, and emigration to other parts of the Americas. It makes for a body of work that is essential for the study of the Caribbean and the Black Diaspora and indeed central for the understanding of the New World.

## **Ideal Meeting Point**

Caribbean literature is an ideal meeting point, assorted cultures of two boundless Continents and the ghosts of four colonial empires come together. The Caribbean writers describe the world in terms of their own personnel relationship in the world. They experience their own consciousness and the reality. Many Caribbean relationship, resistance and endurance, engagement and alienation, self-determination authors in their writing switch liberally between the local variation now commonly termed nation language and the standard form of the language. Main themes of Caribbean Literature are innocence, exile and return to the motherland, mother-daughter relation and domination,



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## **Jamaica Kincaid**

Jamaica Kincaid is one among the prominent writers of the Caribbean literature. She was born on May 25, 1949 in the capital city of St. John's on Antigua, a small island in the West Indies. She is a popular novelist, essayist, gardener, and gardening writer. An extremely versatile author, her works include few novels, few non-fictions and short stories. Her novels are *Annie John* (1985), *Lucy* (1990), *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), *Mr. Potter* (2002), *See Now Then* (2013). Kincaid's novel reveals a close bond in mother – daughter relationship than father – daughter relationship. Psychologically daughters will have close bond with their fathers

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than their mothers, but Kincaid novel brings out the reasons for the close bond in mother – daughter relationship. Since her novels are semi – autobiographical, she brings out her childhood memories through the main characters in her novels.

### ***Annie John and Lucy***

Kincaid's novels *Annie John* and *lucy* reveals a close bond in mother – daughter relationship than father – daughter relationship. Annie grows up emotionally tied to her mother that, at times, separate cultural identities appear unnecessary. Annie seem not to know where her body begins and her mother's ends, as is symbolized by mother and daughter wearing dresses cut from the same cloth. (AJ26)

Jamaica Kincaid expresses the domination of men over women in her novels. Because of the domination, after a certain period of time the protagonists in the novels feel much protected by their mothers than their fathers. Being women in the patriarchal dominant society, the protagonists of the novels feel that mothers are their source of love and care. And they consider their father as 'male chauvinist' who is trying to take control over them. And so mother – daughter relationship is well bonded than father – daughter relationship in patriarchal society.

### ***Annie John***

The protagonist of the novel *Annie John*, have more love for her mother than her father. She always admires her mother in many ways. In *Annie John*, Annie loves her mother a lot and she enjoys whatever her mother does for her. Annie also has an expectation that her mother's love is only for her. When Annie is a little girl, her mother is like a goddess. Annie adores and idolizes her mother to the extent that she will do things to imitate her in every aspect. "I spent the day following my mother around and observing the way she did everything." (AJ15) Even when her mother punishes her for doing something wrong, Annie does not take it too seriously because she always has a belief that her mother punishes her as she has more love. This feeling is highlighted in the novel thus: "That night, as a punishment, I ate my supper outside, alone under the breadfruit tree, and my mother said that she would not be kissing good night later, but when I climbed into bed she came and kissed me anyway".

Annie usually absorbs whatever her mother is doing. As her father goes away for work, she spends most of her time with her mother. When her father comes home, she spends some time with him but she does not feel any close attachment with him. Annie describes her mother's beauty inch by inch, such as how beautiful her mother's face, eyes, mouth etc. she describes her mother's beauty as "too hot", it is very unusual word used by a daughter to describe about mother's beauty. She stares her mother wondering how beautiful she is and she sees how her mother makes her father to laugh all the time. Annie at times remembers seeing the pictures of her mother in her young age. Annie describes the beauty of her mother during young age as "I had seen picture of her at that age. What a beautiful girl she was!." (AJ 69) She thinks that her mother's beauty is so perfect which makes her to think that she would have been at the same age of her mother to love her at the time. She imagines if she is there at the time of her mother's young age she would have loved her for her beauty and admired her a lot.

### **Unable To Be the Mirror Image of Her Mother**

Annie is unable to be the mirror image of her mother because her mother is light-skinned with European features and Annie has darker skin with more Afro-Caribbean features. Annie's mother failing in her duty to say exactly what it was that made her daughter on the verge of becoming a young lady and how this will alter their relationship, instills hope in Annie so she asks her mother to engage in the trunk ritual again and "a person I did not recognize answered in a voice I did not recognize, 'Absolutely not! You and I don't have time for that anymore'" (AJ27).

### **Love for Her Mother Changing**

Kincaid reveals the reason for the protagonists' love for her mother changing after her cross various situations in her life. The important change she reveals in her novel is after attaining puberty. Mrs. John has not bothered to forewarn Annie of the more important aspects of the process of "becoming a young lady." (AJ26) Thus, the first sight of separation comes as a shock to the girl. Annie begins to feel that her mother is not caring for her any more. Annie and her mother dress alike during her childhood. As she grows Annie's mother says her to dress

differently because as a growing child her mother feels Annie should have individual identity. The mother admonishes and encourages the child thus: “Its time you had your own clothes. You just cannot go around the rest of your life looking like a little me.” (AJ26) But Annie feels hurt and she feels weird that her mother is avoiding her.

Annie misunderstands that her mother has stopped loving her and so she tries many ways to get her mother’s attention. Once she gets prize in Sunday school for reciting the verses. She feels happy and goes home to make her mother to feel proud of her. But Annie feels depressed by seeing her mother and father having physical relationship. She sees her mother’s hand on her father’s back. In the novel, she expresses my mother’s hand making “circular motion.” (AJ30) From that moment she starts hating her mother. Annie feels every bond with her mother is over and she will not allow her mother to touch her with those hands.

The moment Annie saw her mother’s hand on her father back she realizes that the relationship with her mother will never be the same again. Annie feels uncertain, betrayed and angry at the prospect of splitting up with her beloved mother. At this point, Kincaid is presenting to the reader the genesis of the tension of mother-daughter relationship in *Annie John*.

### **Gwen**

Annie finds a girl named Gwen in her school and she feels she should stop worrying about her mother’s love and starts loving Gwen more. This is revealed in her self-reflection thus: “I told her that when I was younger I had been afraid of my mother’s dying, but since I had met Gwen this didn’t matter so much.” (AJ51)

### **Recover Mother’s Love?**

The gap in the bond of mother – daughter relationship occurs after the changes and hatred. As the protagonist tries to replace the love they have for their mother, they feel the gap in their bond is increasing eventually. Kincaid brings out the changes that occur in the protagonist’s life mainly after they attain the age of puberty. In *Annie John*, Annie feels she will not able to get the love of her mother anymore and she longs for happiness with her mother perfectly. Annie recalls the time she used to spend with her mother during her childhood days. She and mother doing all

the household works together, bathing together, kisses and hugs she got from her mother are no more because of her adolescence. Darryl Pinckney in his article “In the black room of the world”

Closeness to her mother, of bathing together, of leaning against her and smelling rose or bay leaf in her hair as she talks, of feeling shattered by and included in her parents’ laughter at meals, ends with adolescence. (28)

Annie's mother trunk reveals how she loves her daughter. When Annie is a young girl, her favourite pastime involves looking through her mother's trunk. Annie uses the stories about the objects in the trunk to define who she is. At that young age, Annie shares her mother's trunk because she has no separate self of her own. Annie's mother trunk came all the way with her from Dominica and therefore seems to be the object that contains all the family history.

Though the gap in the relationship is clear, Annie does not like to show that to others. She and her mother pretend to care about each as usual. But when they were alone, they avoided their presence as much as possible. They also pretended in front of Annie’s father, they seemed to care for each other as same as in the olden days. Annie and her mother are very conscious that Annie’s father should not find the difference in their relationship. So they act normal in the presence of their father. As long as they pretend, Annie was sure that there is something missing in their relationship. The pretention is stressed thus: “We did our best to keep up appearances, for my father’s sake, but our two black things got the better of us, and even though we didn’t say anything noticeable it was clear that something was amiss.” (AJ106).

### **Annie’s Studies and Behaviour**

Annie is good in her studies and every teacher likes her for the knowledge she has even as a child. But being a class perfect, her behaviour is very bad and she likes the way she actually behaves. She had her own friends with whom she spends her time after school. Annie also likes to mingle with girls who are not good in studies. She hates the students who were good in studies. She usually got first place in studies and she hates the girl who scores second place in her class. . She likes the girl who is poor in her studies and she admires her beauty too. This idea is vivid from her disclosure thus: “Ruth I liked because she was such a dunce.” (AJ 73)



Annie also has strange thoughts after the changes. She feels that her mother will kill her some day or she will kill her mother someday. She has these kinds of thoughts as she is depressed psychologically. The feeling of Annie does not mean she is angry on her mother. It shows how she possessive of her mother. Kincaid loves her mother more than her father. So she really is concerned or rights and equality of women in the society. Usually girl children have more affection towards their father's than their mother's but her novels gives contrast idea girl child having more affection on mother. Her ideas are most likely justified in her novels. Because of this context, the protagonist Annie also loves her mother compare to her father.

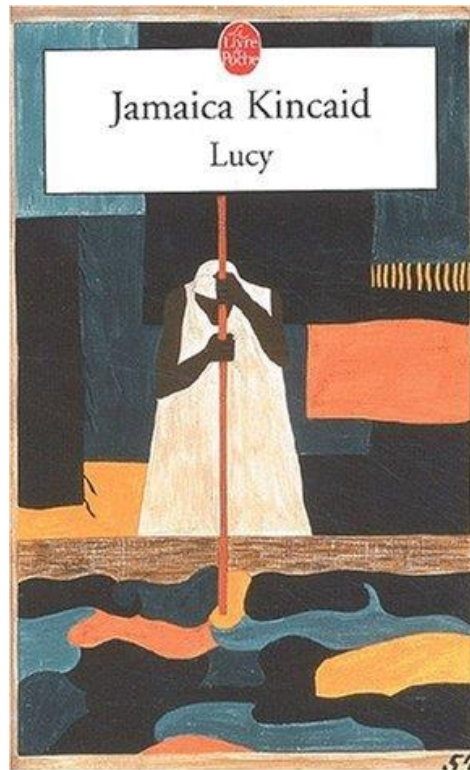
### **Wants Her Own Trunk**

Eventually when Annie decides that she has a separate self, she wants her own trunk. It, in turn, will become her history and a representation of her self, as her mother's was for her. When Annie leaves Antigua for England, she brings her trunk with her. Her trunk bears a label that reads, "My name is Annie John," (AJ 132) a strong affirmation of Annie's new sense of self. Annie John's self created solution is a desire for escape from the physical, maternal and sociopolitical world she has grown up in. Her desire is to relieve herself from the "Unbearable" burden of her life. This space reveals how the protagonist feels their mother's love is important.

### **Escape and Reformation of Identity**

Jamaica Kincaid has explained the phenomenon of escape and reformation of identity, attributing the characters and Kincaid's need for such escape to the complicated and intertwining relationship between mother and daughter. The tension occurring between mother and daughter is captured in a similar way in Jamaica's novel, *Lucy*.





### ***Lucy***

The main character Lucy Potter, a nineteen-year old girl from the West Indies, immigrates to America to escape the dominance of a suffocating mother. Kincaid places her protagonist between an Antiguan black mother and U.S. white surrogate mother, creating a globalized intersection of race, gender and culture through which self-hood is negotiated. Lucy is, however, preoccupied with stripping away the elements that constructed her post-colonial self-family, community, education-and is determined not to put in its place an American self. Lucy is known as the girl from what is assumed to be Antigua, who has spent her entire life in mental and physical bondage because of the cultural norms that her society imposed on her gender.

### **Lucy and Her Mother**

Lucy enjoys her mother's love during her childhood days but when she was nine years old, her mother bears male children and Lucy finds her mother does not love her anymore. Her feeling of alienation from her family is obvious in her self-reflection thus: "I was not only child, but it was almost as if I were ashamed of this, because I had never told anyone." (L 130) Lucy feels betrayed by her mother because she identifies herself to her mother. It doesn't bother her

when her father cared for her brothers but when her mother neglected her she almost felt heartbroken.

Lucy's anger at her mother, however, goes beyond a disagreement about life choices and principles. Lucy calls her mother the great love of her life, and much of her temper is derived from what she sees as her mother's rejection of that love with the birth of her brothers. Women within Caribbean societies are compelled to take on domesticated careers such as nursing. This influences Lucy's decision to stop attending school to become a nurse. She states "Whatever my future held, nursing would not be a part of it...I was not good at taking orders from anyone, not good at waiting on other people." (L92) That is to say Lucy's understanding of her femininity through her mother as they are identical influences a desire to break away from her mother's uncompromising standards of life.

### **Lucy and Lucifer**

She feels humiliated when her mother says why she has been named 'Lucy'. Though her mother says in anger when she keeps on asking about her name Lucy and asks her mother to change her name. she imagines the possibilities of other names-Emily, Charlotte, Jane and Enid. Lucy embraces the oppositional name whole heartedly. Lucifer is configured, after all, as the perfect western villain. Lucy feels hurt and her hatred for her mother is fixed in her mother's callous statement thus: "I named you after Satan himself Lucy, short for Lucifer. What a botheration from the moment you were conceived." (L 152) Lucy feels that

It was the moment I knew who I was ...Lucy a name for Lucifer. That my mother would have found me devil-like did not surprise me, for I often thought of her as god-like and are not the child of god's devils? (L 152-153)

### **Works as a Maid – Running Away from Home**

Lucy is also taught to behave well by her parents but she hates that kind of life when her mother cares more for her brothers than for her. She moves away from them and works as a maid in Lewis and Mariah family taking care of their four children. Lucy's mother says when Lucy is leaving to a western country thus: "You can run away; but you cannot escape the fact that I am

your mother, my blood runs in you, I carried you for nine months inside me.” (L 90) Lucy feels like heaven when her mother says “My blood runs in you”(L90) though Lucy’s mother does not cares about her, it makes her feel happy that she has made her mother to realize how important. Lucy, as she lives away from her mother after a certain period, she thinks of her mother always, she recalls how beautiful her mother was during her childhood days. Kristen Mahlis in his article : Motherlands, Mother Culture, Mother Tongues Women’s writings in the Caribbean”, has suggested Lucy experiences the duality of her relationship with her own mother-closeness and distance, love and betrayal through Mariah.” (L 175) Lucy at a particular situation compares Mariah, to her mother. Lucy feels so amused when Mariah treats her with good care. She says “Mariah was like mother to me, a good mother.”(L 110)

### **Longing for Her Mother’s Love**

Lucy still longs for her mother’s love. She is still the child painfully separated from her mother by something that seems to have nothing to do with either of them. Kincaid is inscribing the mother-daughter relationship in the larger context of colonialism. Happiness is as far from Lucy's reach as it is from the reach of all people in the third world doomed to cope with “too little”. (L 87)

### **Fear of the New World**

Away from home, Lucy receives numerous letters from her mother, however in those letters Lucy’s mother tries to instill in her fear of her new world:

The letter was filled with detail of horrible and vicious things she had read or heard about that had taken place on those very same underground trains on which I travelled. Only the other day, she wrote, she had read of an immigrants girl, someone my age exactly, who had had her throat cut while she was a passenger on perhaps the very same train I was riding. (L 21)

### **Trying to Block Out Old Memories - Assumption of Responsibility**

Lucy blocks out memories of her own mother, and refuses to read letters from her. The tension of the protagonist's relationship with her mother profoundly affects her and is reflected in her life in America. Lucy struggles to find her own identity in her mother's absence, to avoid her mother's mistakes.

Lucy's mother sends a visitor to Lucy, as she does not reply to any of the letters. When the visitor tells Lucy that she looks like her mother, Lucy gets frustrated that she is not like her mother who has betrayed her after the birth of male children. Lucy feels love for her mother not changed unlike her mother's love which changes. Lucy shows off the possessiveness she has on her mother as, "She should not have married my father, she should not have had children, she should not have thrown away her intelligence. Lucy decides to write a letter to her mother but she says to herself that it will be the first and last letter she is writing to her mother. Lucy's letters from home illuminate her difficult relationship with her mother. And she also burns the entire letter her mother sends her before, she feels by burning she is rejecting her mother's love for not concerning her. Lucy when writing says "I did not say that I loved her, I could not say that." (L 140)

While Lucy's assumption of responsibility for her own plight may mark a positive step for her, this quote ultimately casts a dark mood over the conclusion of Lucy's journey toward independence. Lucy gets comfortable when she thinks of an incident when her mother expresses the love towards her.

### ***Annie John and Lucy***

*Annie John* also illustrates how the history of the west Indies is treated lightly. Regarding Christopher Columbus, the colonial school teaches the children that "On the third of November 1493, a Sunday morning, Christopher Columbus discovered Dominica." (AJ 25) Annie's education tries to inspire in her a worshipful reverence for Christopher Columbus by presenting him as the great discoverer of Annie's home Island. However, Annie decides to educate herself. By examining her present situation in life and that of ancestors she says: "I could now see how Ruth felt from looking at her face. Her ancestors had been the masters while ours had been the slaves." (AJ 76)

Lucy conveys strong contempt towards her British-style education. Antigua is a postcolonial society who was once under the British rule, thus their entire culture and society was constructed from British colonial ideologies. Hence, Lucy is forced to learn about things, such as daffodils, that she could not relate to. For this reason, her sense of two facedness comes from having two identities in her own country.

Marriage is a thing which binds men and women as a family. In Kincaid novel, she expresses that women are being trapped in family in the name of marriage. In *Annie John*, the protagonist's mother is very young and father was very old at the time of marriage. Kincaid reveals the suppression of the women in marriage. Because of this reason Annie mentions her father's name at the end of the novel. In the novel *Lucy*, Lucy mentions that her mother is married to her father at a very young age and she expresses that her father had married her mother only to take care of his health in his old age. "When my mother married my father, he was an old man and she a young woman." (L 81)

Men always suppress women because they want women to be under their control. Men usually can't take if women come high in position than them. Male domination in all society is their weakness. The dominating attitude of men shows they are afraid of women. Kincaid's novel focuses various themes but in all her novels she brings out the suffering of women in the Caribbean society.

Annie thinks of her childhood days after meeting a boy in a street on her way home. She thinks of playing with her mother's friend son who is three year elder than her. She enjoyed in her childhood days playing with him. But when thinking of these moments, Annie recalls how the boy used to dominate her even while playing. "His name was Mineu, and I felt pleased that he, a boy older than I by three years would play with me. Of course, in all the games we played I was always given a lesser part." (AJ 95) On recalling, Annie feels very inferior because of women and she gets negative attitudes of herself.

Lucy feels bad of being born as women in the society where male children alone are given importance. I was an only child, until I was nine years old, and then in the space of five years my

mother had three male children; each time a new male child was born, my mother and father announced to each other with great seriousness that the new child would go to university in England. (L 130)

The theme of mother- daughter is not solved. The void by the mother's loss is never filled and this shapes the individual identity of Kincaid's protagonists. Annie and Lucy must overcome memories, anger, and despair to recognize that the one thing they cannot change about their life is the past or their heritage. The tension in mother-daughter relationship in Kincaid's works is evidently shaped by memories that the author carries within her, from her childhood and youth growing up with an authoritarian and tyrannical mother.

### **Escaping**

All the heroines manifest a strong desire of escaping. Escaping from their homeland; escaping from the adherence to British values, traditions, and customs; escaping from the fixed role prescribed to them by society. Searching continuously other ways of being, other places, other names. Jamaica Kincaid presents Annie's, Lucy's and her own immigration as both, as an opportunity for a better life and as an escape from her past. As the protagonists in her first two novels, Kincaid left home on angry terms when she was still quite young, moving from her Caribbean island to a foreign country to get a better future. In exile she cut off the communication with her mother. This act of rebellion, followed by years of a distant family relationship, was her way of shaking loose from a strong, controlling mother and home life.

### **Extreme Efforts to Prevent Childbirth and Motherhood**

Instead of bearing children and taking the roles their mother's life figures, each of these two protagonists goes to extreme efforts to prevent childbirth and motherhood, believing the state as one of the main betrayals each mother has committed against herself. Freedom and independence are important in Kincaid's novels because so much of her work reflects the plight of women in the Caribbean society.

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