



Vol.5. S1., 2018

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

PSYCHOLOGICAL REPRESSION OF ANTOINETTE DUE TO SOCIETAL CONSTRAINTS IN
WIDE SARGASSO SEA

R. LATHA

M. Phil. English Literature, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women

Jean Rhys wrote under the pen name Ella Gwendolyn Rhys Williams. She was born in Dominica on 24th August 1890. Ford Madox Ford has inspired Jean Rhys to write short stories. She has stopped writing for a particular time span and this made the public to think that she was dead. She died on 14th May 1979. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is her famous novel and this has made her a popular literary figure. It is a prequel of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

She has written six novels such as *Quartet* (1929), *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), *Tigers one Better-Looking* (1968). She has authored three short stories like *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (1927), *My Day: Three Piers* (1975), and *Sleep it off Lady* (1976). *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* is her only autobiography.

Her novels have autobiographical touch. She has won WH Smith Literary Award for the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Gender inequality, Identity crisis, alienation are the major themes found in the novel. Ford Madox Ford has introduced Jean Rhys to Hemmingway thereby helping her in her literary career. In this novel Jean Rhys deals with the plight of the woman protagonist, Antoinette who undergoes depression and slips into insanity due to social constraints.

As the novel unveils the protagonist, Antoinette indulges in a conversation with her mother and their conversation proves that their bonding is not strong. The protagonist grows under the care of Aunt Cora and Christophine. Her mother dies due to psychological depression and this leads Antoinette to grow up as a foster child in a convent. Once she attains seventeen years of age her family arranges for her wedding. Though she refuses to marry the English suitor she gives in and enters her family way. The English man marries Antoinette for her wealth and abandons her later. The disturbed Antoinette consults Christophine to regain the love of her husband. Her husband's illicit relationship evokes indignation in Antoinette. Her weird behaviour makes her husband sick and leads him to deserts her. Left in a secluded room, Antoinette moves down the steps with a candle and ends her life.

Gender equality belongs to the mainstream Gender Studies. Gender equality is defined as the distribution of power equally for men and women in society. Gender equality would be attained when feminine and masculine genders enjoy equal rights in terms of education, employment, economy and self-expression. In the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette, the protagonist is financially dependent on her husband. Antoinette's husband asserts his rights on Antoinette's wealth after their marriage. This is transparent when Antoinette says, "I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him." (WSS 69). Due to financial instability Antoinette develops inferiority complex. From her stance, her husband would approach her only if she possesses wealth. This suggests that Antoinette's husband has no concern for her. If she had attained economic independence she would have had confidence to survive.

Racism is one of the many difficulties faced by the protagonist. Antoinette has been exposed to racism since her childhood and this has affected Antoinette's social behaviour. Antoinette expresses her agony caused by racial discrimination as:

It was a song about white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I have heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why I was ever born at all.(WSS 64).

These above lines signify that Antoinette feels depressed due to lack of proper identity. Her hyphenated identity induces the inhabitants of the Coulibri society to express contempt towards her.

Antoinette's husband considers Antoinette as a commodity which is evident when her husband's thoughts are expressed as, "I have not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks,"(WSS 42).This also suggests that marriage is regarded as a trade. Chen points out, "Rochester accepted the marriage just for the money rather than love."(21) This signifies that Antoinette's husband is a materialist and he has no true bonding with Antoinette.

Antoinette has no freedom of choice. Deprivation of money makes her powerless and her husband dominates her in all circumstances. Christophine advises Antoinette to depart from her husband. To this Antoinette says, "Even if I got away (and how?) he would force me back. So would Richard. So would everybody else" (WSS 71).These lines suggest that Antoinette is denied the right to choose what she wants. Her words signify that Antoinette's husband would never go in search of her rather he would compel her to return. This proves that her husband is devoid of love for Antoinette and she is under the clutches of her husband. Antoinette's deprivation of economic freedom has made her depend on her husband completely. If she had possessed little money, she would have had enjoyed freedom of choice. Antoinette declines the idea of abandoning her husband because of the social restraints. She says, "No, I will not, then everyone, not only the servants, will laugh at me". (WSS 68).This shows that even if she wants to leave her husband her social constraints prevent her from doing so.

Self-expression is not encouraged by Antoinette's husband. This is transparent when he says, "Never be afraid. Or if you are tell no one"(WSS 59). Antoinette expresses her connection with nature but this annoys her husband. He thinks, "Always this talk of death" (WSS 57). Her pessimistic view of life disturbs her husband. Antoinette's husband wants her to hide all her negative emotions and express positive thoughts. Since she has voiced out her problems, her husband moves away from her. Antoinette strives hard to regain the affection of her husband but all her efforts go vain. Antoinette feels depressed and becomes insane. If Antoinette had freedom and independence she would have lived happily. Societal constraints have made her lose her senses. Dr. Margaret Chan says, "Thirty years after the adoption of the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), many girls and women still do not have equal opportunities to realize rights recognized by law..." (Anup).This shows that women have gained rights in theory and it has to be realized practically for the betterment of women in particular and society in general. Power relations are deeply rooted in social conventions. Power relations have to be evenly distributed in order to attain universal gender equality.

Works Cited

Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. London: Penguin Group, 1997. Print.

Chen, Lijuan. "The Analysis of Antoinette's Tragic Fate in *Wide Sargasso Sea*". *Open Journal of Social Sciences*.2014.Web.18 June. 2018

Shah, Anup. "Women's Rights".*Global Issues*.14 Mar. 2010. Web. 15 Jul. 2018.