

An Ethnographic Study of the Shifting Cultures in the Select Works

of Jean Rhys

R. Abirami

(16PEN001)

Thesis Submitted to

Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education

for Women, Coimbatore – 641043.

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Master's Degree in English

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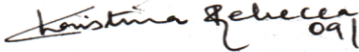
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Chapter I

Introduction

“It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature.”

Henry James.

Literature is an archive of the human society. The origin of literature dates back to thousands of years earlier in the form of oral tradition and antique texts. It is one of the major cultural wealth of any society. Further, it depicts the society in which it is born. Therefore, the society and literature are inter-connected to each other. A literary work is based on information as well as imagination. Although literature renews itself along with the time, the influence of the bygone age can be seen in the works of literature.

The long-established world of English literature in the eighteenth century is believed to be originated by men. Cahill in the review titled, “British Women Novelists,” mentions, “The influence of men is so strong that it becomes heavy obstacle for women writer to overcome their established literary tradition” (128). The works of eighteenth century male novelists concerned themselves with complex, middle-class characters and their struggle with morality and circumstances. Such instances can be seen in the works of Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson. Richardson’s work, *Pamela*, a series of fictional letters written in 1741, is considered as the first real English novel. These early novelists have free will in expressing their thoughts in social and private matters.

However, the social condition of England during that time emphasize that women are supposed to stay inside a stereotypic social circle. Women have accepted their role as wife, mother, nurse, or teacher to their children. However, when it comes to writing, they are not given any proper education. They are not allowed to establish themselves as a writer because of the differences between ‘man-made’ sexes. This factor leads them to depend upon men even in private matters.

The status of the women has taken a turn when they made their debut in writing novels in the beginning of the eighteenth century. They realised that the novel can be utilised as a medium of literary expression. Frances Burney, Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood, Maria Edgeworth, and Mary Wollstonecraft are the first and foremost writers, who have set the foundation for women in British literary canon. These women have changed the face of literature by overcoming the challenges that prevented them from becoming successful writers primarily by creating their own style for writing.

The eighteenth-century novel has become distinguished due to the contribution of its forbearers—works like Aphra Behn's *Oroonokoo* ' *the History of the Royal Slave*, the novel has more influence on the development of the English novel and it is considered as her best-known novel. Aphra Behn is regarded as one of the first novelists and she has written plays for London Restoration theatre in order to earn her living. Frances Burney's novels are popular due to its treatment of women's roles and their identity in British aristocratic society. Her first novel *Evelina* (1718) has become a challenge to the male contemporaries of her time and. Her writings have influenced Jane Austen and many other women writers.

The first voice in favour of women's right is raised by Mary Wollstonecraft who is an English writer, philosopher, and advocate of women's rights. She demanded equal

opportunities for women in the field of education, economics and politics in that century. However, it is undeniable that in terms of quantity more novels are written by women than by men in the eighteenth century.

The nineteenth century literary world has developed a pleasant atmosphere for women. During this time, the female activists demanded an equal status of men and women. As a result, the position of women in society and their rights have been discussed and debated. The women writers have also demanded a place along with men in order to make their own contributions to the society. It is because they believed that their writing might alter their positions within society. Therefore, Feminism as a genre has been introduced in order to make their opinions heard and to record their lives and also to tackle political and social issues that hinders women from achieving recognition as serious writers. It is the reason why much of the feminist literature has more social significance than literary significance.

Nevertheless, during this period the demand for novels and more number of female readers has increased. The works by Jane Austen, George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Anne Bronte, Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Elizabeth Gaskell, Margaret Oliphant, Eliza Lynn Linton, Harriet Martineau, Mary Kinsley, Annie Besant, and a range of other women writers who belonged to the period between 1800 -1900, challenge the stereotypes of nineteenth century women.

Jane Austen is the most distinguished writer of nineteenth century. She has received worldwide admiration for her novels *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) which are landmarks in the history of English novels. Her writings have become a challenge to the traditional perceptions and her female characters challenge the stereotypic

women of the Victorian era. She is best known for her other novels such as *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Persuasion*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Emma*.

George Eliot, also known as Mary Ann, or Marian Evans, is another leading novelist of the nineteenth century. Her novels have received attention from the readers for its character development and deep psychological insight employed in her works. She is recognized for her novels such as *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Middlemarch* (1871-72) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Her novels are embodied with teachings that are essential for life.

The three Bronte sister Anne, Charlotte, and Emily Bronte have revolutionised England of their time with their writings. Unfortunately, all of them died of Tuberculosis at a very young age. Among them Charlotte Bronte is considered as more influential than her sisters. She is best known for her much-loved novel *Jane Eyre*. Emily is a poet as well as novelist and she is best-known for her most famous novel *Wuthering Heights*. The Bronte sisters have presented their heroine as a woman of virtue with passionate feelings.

Elizabeth Gaskell is another Victorian writer. Her novels are actual representation of life filled with social consciousness. The novel *North and South* is a social novel about the rise of industrial North. De in his blog, "AD's English Literature," has written that "Being herself a resident of Manchester, she witnessed the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution in the lives of people." The novel dramatizes the clash between traditional Southern and industrial Northern worlds and it explores the hardships of the factory workers.

Mary Shelley is the most renowned British novelist and she is the daughter of famous Mary Wollstonecraft. Her first novel, *Frankenstein* (1818) is regarded as one of the best-

known horror novel in English fiction. Her other novels such as, *The Last Man and Matilda* are also regarded as works of literary significance.

Many women writers have published their works anonymously or under male pseudonyms because of the rigid gender roles. The famous writers like Jane Austen's first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), is named 'By a lady'. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is published anonymously; some critics have believed that it is the work of her husband Percy Shelley, because he has written the introduction to that novel. Marian Evans has published as George Eliot and the Bronte sisters Charlotte, Emily and Anne published under the androgynous pseudonyms Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell.

The twentieth century novels are influenced by the changes in beliefs that have been raised after the destruction caused by the First World War. One of the interesting developments in the twentieth century literature is the remarkable increase in the number of women novelists. Prasad in the book titled, *A background to the study of English literature* says, "The post – war years also saw a number of publication by women writers" (221). The World Wars I and II and the severe economic depression have led the writers to explore several themes like destitution and loss, alienation, isolation and fragmentation.

Further, the new styles of writing are introduced by writers of the twentieth century. These are: post-colonial literature, gay and lesbian literature, realist fiction, detective novels, historical lesbian fiction, children's writing, travel writing, magic realism and satire. This has expanded the realm of British literature worldwide. Along with these genres, feminist writing is considered as one of the most interesting developments in fiction during this century.

The feminist writing has been made famous by Margaret Drabble, whose novels are based on feminist themes. Her novels present women as main characters and it expose the social inequalities and the necessity for justice in the lives of women. . Her women characters, in search of their identity, have to cope with the professional, sexual and social conflicts. Further, her later novels – *The Needle's Eye*, *The Realms of Gold* and *The Middle Grown* show her attempt to expose her feminist concerns into a more universal one.

Doris Lessing is another major writer of the mid twentieth century. Her novels are also concerned with the women's problems. These explore how the pressures of the social and political events have been put on women. The *Golden Notebook* is one of her famous novels that deals with women's lives, beliefs and problems with great courage. This novel is considered as a classic of feminist fiction. In the area of science fiction also Lessing gives interesting pictures of a future world in her works such as *Shikasta* (1979) and *The Sirian Experiments* (1980).

Angela Carter is one of the unique writers of the twentieth century. Her works deal with variety of themes ranging from Gothic fantasy to traditional fairy tales. Her writing breaks down the myths around gender and sexuality. Her famous works are *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and *Night at the Circus* (1984). By the time of her early death Angela Carter has established herself as one of the most individual voices in British.

The stream of consciousness novels breaks away the so-called traditional literary styles in fiction. The technique has been first used by Dorothy Richardson. Later, it has been refined by Virginia Woolf. Virginia Woolf is recognised as one of the most innovative writers among twentieth century novelists. She belongs to the group of writers known as the Bloomsbury school along with famous writers such as E.M. Forster, Lord

Keynes, Roger Fry and Lytton Strachey. Most of the women novelists' novels are concerned only with women's experience within confined domestic space but, Woolf attempted to observe through the mind of her characters. Besides, she is the one who led the way to modernism in the early twentieth century.

The twentieth century is divided into two phases of literature--modern literature (1900-1945) and contemporary literature (1945 to the present), also referred to as postmodern. The characters in modern and contemporary novels questioned the existence of God, the supremacy of the human reason, and the nature of reality. The novels from this era reflect the great events such as The Great Depression, World War II, Hiroshima, the cold war and communism. For instance, Jeanette Winterson's novels represent contemporary issues of her time. Her best-known novel *Written on the Body* (1992) breaks down the traditional concepts of gender, love, sex and sexuality at that time.

The historical writing as a genre is developed by the notable writers of twentieth century. Helen Dunmore is a famous historical novelist of twentieth century. Writing historical novels has been a trend in the twentieth century. Her war novels *Zennor in Darkness*, *The Siege* and *The Betrayal*, look at the war from social point of view rather than military point of view. These deal with the lives of war survivors and their personal feelings under extraordinary circumstances. Her famous historical novels are *House of Orphans*, *A Spell of Winter* and *Counting the Stars*. Patricia Barker in her *Regeneration Trilogy*, explores the history of the World War I by focusing on the aftermath of trauma. The novel highlights the theme of sexual anxiety as a result of war.

The crime novels have also received attention from the readers since twentieth century until now. Agatha Christie is an English crime novelist, best known for her

detective novels. In addition to that, she remains as a best-selling author of all times. She has written totally 66 detective novels during her lifetime including the famous *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Partners in Crime* and the world's longest-running play, *The Mousetrap*.

Fay Weldon is another notable writer among the twentieth century novelists. Her novels focus upon the plight of women and it exposes the exploitation of women by men in the name of marriage and the partial responsibility of women for their own situations. The notable novels of Weldon are *Down Among the Women* (1971), *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983), *Praxis* (1978) and *Wicked Women* (1995).

Close to the end of twentieth century immigrant literature has gained popularity. Women writers of African origin have started writing and have received a worldwide acclaim for the works they have produced. Joan Riley, a woman of colour is the first African-Caribbean woman to focus on the lives of Blacks in England. Her famous novels are *Unbelonging* (1985), *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987), *Romance* (1988), and *A Kindness to the Children* explore the lives of the black Caribbean immigrant women in Britain. Other immigrant writers like Meera Syal, Amryl Johnson and Beryl Gilroy have also produced accountable works for black British literature. Along with these writers, several important women writers of twentieth century such as Elizabeth Bowen, A.S. Byatt, Anita Brookner, Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch, Kate Atkinson, Ivy Compton – Burnett and Daphne du Maurier have also made notable impression in their profession during their lifetime.

The twenty-first century has been regarded as golden age of writing by women in Britain. Zadie Smith is a well-known British writer of twenty-first century. Her novels are based on realism and postmodernism. Her first novel, *White Teeth* (2000) deals with

themes such as history, the search of identity, the ethics of science and multiculturalism through the examination of the interaction between the members of three London-based central families. She received popular acclaim when her debut novel, *White teeth* is shortlisted in Time Magazine's illustrious list of best English-language novels from 1923 to 2005. Some of Smith's famous works are *The Autograph Man* and *On Beauty*.

J.K. Rowling is one of the most famous British writers of modern times. She has received worldwide popularity and acclaim for her series of Harry Potter novels. The series tells the tale of the young wizard and his battle to save the world from the evil wizard Voldemort. A series of films have also been adapted from Rowling's books. She often makes use of magic realism as a theme in her novels.

Hilary Mantel is one of the most acclaimed British novelists. Her novels are mostly set in contemporary and historical context. The two novels, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*, both have won the Man Booker Prize for fiction. She is the first British author to have won two Booker prizes for two consecutive novels, followed by another novel which forms a trilogy. She attempts to provide an alternative portrait of Thomas Cromwell, one of the most controversial figure in British history. Mantel has also written a number of historical novels using real-life figures.

Sarah Waters is another great writer of historical fiction who is best known for her first novel, *Tipping the Velvet* and *The paying Guests*. Her area of interest is upon Lesbian and gay historical fiction and the London life of the nineteenth century. For instance, her debut novel is set in Victorian England with a lesbian love story at its centre. Her famous novels include *Affinity*, *Fingersmith*, and *The Night Watch* brings seriousness into the realm of British Historical fiction.

Multiculturalism in modern Britain has paved the way for another genre in writing, i.e. 'Immigrant British Literature'. The term 'migrant literature' implies that subject matter is about migration and the culture of the host nation. This genre focuses on the marginal individuals i.e. the migrants. The style has emerged after the demise of British colonisation and the postcolonial literature has more influence and it gives rise to this kind of literature.

The writers from Caribbean, India, Pakistan and Srilanka have produced works that reflect their experience as the bi-cultural citizens. Monica Ali is one such writer whose novel, *Brick Lane* (2003) is about a Bangladeshi family living in the UK and the novel explores the British immigrant experience, identity crisis, relationship conflicts and generation gap between parents and children. Another work, *Small Island* by Andrea Levy is a novel about the immigrants from Caribbean in search of better life in post-war Britain. The novel captures the encounter between newly arrived Black Caribbean immigrants and the resident White British population. Along with these contemporary writers, Naomi Alderman, Leila Aboulela and Ali Smith have also produced best-selling novels and great literary works to the world of literature.

Jean Rhys is an immigrant writer; whose literal transcriptions are the felt experiences of her in an 'alien' land. Her writing also depicts the perception about England and the indifferences she perceives between her own culture and migrant culture. She is born on August 24, 1890 in Roseau, Dominica, in the West Indies. Jean Rhys is a pen name and she was originally called Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams. She has belonged to an elite family in the colonial Caribbean. Her father, William Rees Williams has been a Welsh doctor and her mother, Minna Lockhart Williams has been a Creole i.e. a White West Indian. Dominica is a colony of British with a long history of slavery and a white English

hegemony. Rhys's childhood experiences in Dominica has been an important shaping force in her life.

Rhys has come to England in 1907 to find her future. In England, she struggled for basic shelter and daily necessities. To earn for her living, she tried series of jobs like as a chorus girl, but she did not succeed. Her life took a turn after the death of her father. Another notorious event in her life has been the devastating end of her first serious love affair. Throughout her life, she has longed for the love, belonging and protection in her relationships with men.

Ford Madox Ford introduced her into the literary world. He is also known for helping and publishing promising writers like D.H. Lawrence, Graham Greene, and Wyndham Lewis. Her first book is a volume of short stories, *The Left Bank* (1927). Rhys's second book is a novel, *Quartet* (1928), in which she fictionalises the affair with Ford. Rhys's work is deeply informed by the experiences of her own life.

Rhys is a writer of many identities and aspects. She has a Caribbean upbringing. She accepted her Celtic ancestry, however, she resisted England. Migration is a key element in most of her fiction for she witnessed the flow of immigrants from former colonies into Britain during the fifties and sixties. She represents these Anglophone expatriates and migrants in her works. Almost, all her migrants are marginalised within their new culture, particularly a creole woman trying to cope with the sexism, racism and class divisions of early twentieth century Britain.

The form and technique of all her novels is like 'modernist.' Her novels render a sensitive portrayal of the loneliness of modern life, conveying the emotional depression caused by loneliness through the lives of female protagonists. Lalla in the article titled,

“Discourse of Dispossession: Ex-Centric Journeys of the Un-Living in ‘Wide Sargasso Sea’ and the Old English ‘The Wife’s Lament’” says, “In the Old English world view, exclusion from civilization is consignment to outer darkness, the ultimate dispossession possible,” (56) this is happening to the Rhys’s heroines.

Rhys has been inactive for few years due to her personal problems. However, she resumed when the shift from colonial to postcolonial writing happened and a new literature emerged in the mid-twentieth century called ‘Anglophone Caribbean literature.’ This has become a significant new canon in the world of literature. Her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* has been published during this period and it has been enormously successful. Her final work is her unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please* (1979). She lived long and died in May 1979, after a fall which broke her hip and resulted in operation.

Rhys is a Caribbean writer, but she is also a cosmopolitan, and her works often protest borders and separations. Her works are appealing to the kind of readers who are interested in the exploitation of women, in race and in colonialism, all important issues in the mid twentieth century (1960’s). It has been a time of West Indian immigration to Britain, which has brought the Caribbean literature more into the view of the reading public.

Rhys’s reclusiveness has prompted her to write down the events of her life in notebooks. Therefore, all her works are autobiographical. Besides, the characters employed in her novels represent the different stages of her life. Rhys is not like the post-colonial writers of her time. Ann Hulbert, a reviewer for the *New Republic*, describes Rhys’s style of writing. He says, “The style of her novels is pristinely pared down in describing

depravity and excess, perfectly balanced in evoking instability; she is a master of dialogue between characters for whom communication is mostly a lost cause.”

The major themes employed in all her novels is survival. It is generally about the survival of a single woman in a hostile culture, especially marginalised woman. Besides, all the woman in her novels have unhappy relationships with men. It is because, these women depend themselves on men which makes them feel powerless and they are taken for granted by men. It results in conflict between gender relationships among the characters. In addition to that, the pressure of modern life transforms the original self of her protagonists. It results in loss of identity which is another major theme dealt in her works.

The works of Jean Rhys reveal her perception of women at that time. Though she has written only few works during her lifetime, the experiences of Jean Rhys as a woman prompts her to write about isolation, alienation, dependence and loss. Leigh quotes Simon de Beauvoir in the journal article, “Mirror, Mirror: The Development of Female Identity in Jean Rhys’s Fiction,” that “One is not born, rather one becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure the human female presents in society; it is the civilization as whole that produces this creature.... Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an *Other*” (271).

Jean Rhys’ first novel *Quartet* can be called as a documentation of her own life events. The protagonist Marya Zelli suffers from poverty and unemployment, which makes her to accept the marriage proposal from Stephen without much thinking. When he was arrested for some illegal activities, the feeling of insecurity and loneliness made her to go and stay with Heidler for social security. Heidler takes advantage of Marya’s situation and compels her to be his ‘kept woman.’ Meanwhile, Stephen is released from the prison and

the two men impose isolation on her. The passivity of Marya facilitates the men to label her as an illegitimate woman which allows them to abandon her. Rhys' unhappy involvement with Ford Madox Ford, while her husband Jean Lenglet was in Jail, is too familiar to offer as an illustration of a parallel in *Quartet*.

In *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, the protagonist Julia longs for human intimacy to identify herself in the society especially after Mr. Mackenzie's desertion. Mackenzie represent society's indifference and alienation on individuals. Horsefield pities on Julia, but he withdrew from her when his concern for her becomes personal. Hence, Julia's relationship with men lasts for a short span of time. However, Julia agrees with the fact, she still longs for human contact, so she goes back to her sister and mother. Unfortunately, she is not allowed to place herself even among her 'family.' Thus, her last sign of hope vanishes towards the end.

Jean Rhys's famous *Wide Sargasso Sea* is published in the year 1966. The narrative is split between two first-person narrators, Antoinette narrates the first and final part of the novel and her husband Rochester narrates in the middle. Though, he offers the longest narrative part in the novel. The initial idea for this novel is incorporated from the brutalised depiction of Bertha, the mad wife of Edward Rochester, who is kept locked up in the attic at Thornfield hall, in *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Bronte.

The defaced image of Bertha Mason as a person and as a woman, from *Jane Eyre*, has prompted Rhys to give a 'voice' to her unsaid part, suppressed under her savage, snarling sounds and fearful shrieks, in *Jane Eyre*. As a result, *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be called a prequel to *Jane Eyre*. Therefore, Dorothy Jones has rightly mentioned in the article titled, "Decolonizing Women's Romance," that "*Wide Sargasso Sea* counters *Jane Eyre*

not only by presenting a colonial viewpoint but also by challenging the romance plot which so often pairs the demure and consciously virtuous heroine with a rival for the hero's affections who is usually more sophisticated, socially superior and sexually assertive" (394).

Wide Sargasso Sea is set in Jamaica and Dominica, during the 1830s, in the years after the Emancipation act, which abolished slavery. In the initial part of the novel, Antoinette Cosway narrates her childhood in Coulibri Estate with her widowed mother, Annette, and her younger brother, Pierre and some faithful black servants like Christophine, Godfrey and Sass also live with them, but the other black natives are against them. Part two is narrated by Edward Rochester who arrives from England to marry Antoinette. He knows little of Antoinette, but accepts to marry her when Richard Mason, the son of Mr. Mason offered him 30,000 pounds to take Antoinette's hand.

Part three is again narrated by Antoinette, from within Thornfield hall. Antoinette's narrative is preceded by that of Grace Poole, who is Antoinette's jailer, on Rochester's behalf. Antoinette dreams that when Grace Poole was asleep, she let herself out of the room with a candle in her hand and set the house ablaze. As the dream ends, Antoinette wakes up and waits for Grace Poole to fall asleep and then unlocks the door, holding a candle. With these lines the novel ends. And it indicates that Antoinette is going to accomplish her final act to make her dream true.

Rhys's third novel *Voyage in the Dark* is written in the year 1934. It is a Bildungsroman novel and the story is about a very young woman, Anna Morgan, and the love affair that causes her great emotional and ultimately physical damage. Anna's despair and loneliness after desertion, entraps her into meaningless relationship and prostitution.

Rhys's original ending was to have Anna die, but her publisher thought this is too dark and prompted her to change the original ending into something more positive. The novel is narrated into four parts in first-person by eighteen-year-old Anna Morgan, who comes to England to earn for her living, which she finds difficult.

Among all the novels, *Good Morning, Midnight* is considered as the darkest and depressing novel that Jean Rhys has written. Her unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please* depicts her sense of lost and longing that is aroused primarily out of her fear and distrust on everything. In all of Rhys's novels, romantic hopefulness is inevitably followed by disappointment in love, which is a primary and recurrent theme. The resultant agony and loss of direction experienced by the women protagonists, provides Rhys's with the theme of loneliness in most of her novels.

In the contemporary world of globalisation, the cultures of all communities undergo changes. It is important to record the ethnographic patterns of all cultures. A literary text also provides a good scope for exploring the ethnographic patterns of a culture. The present study, titled, "An Ethnographic Study of the Shifting Cultures in the Select Works of Jean Rhys" makes a modest attempt to examine the ethnographic patterns in the socio-cultural context of Jean Rhys' two novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*.

An Ethnographic study deals about the social and cultural aspects found among a particular social group. It is usually done by analysing their day-to-day life for a particular period of time. It is often used to study a particular group, organisation and communities of a complicated society. Hallett quotes Michael Burawoy in the journal article titled, "Ethnographic research in a Cyber Era," who defines Ethnography as "the study of people in their own time and space, in their own everyday lives" (307). It is emphasised that

studying people along with their habitat helps in analysing their daily routine. Besides, multi-level studies about a particular society helps in understanding the individual relationships, identity problems and cultural elements found among the people living in that particular social context. Likewise, Ethnography helps in studying a culture of any society in a specific period of time.

An Ethnographic approach provides all sorts of cultural information such as religious beliefs, language, marriage patterns, occupation, dietary practices, gender relations, and power relations. Therefore, ethnography can be defined as the comparative and analytical study of cultures. By studying Jean Rhys works, an unexplored culture called 'Creole' culture, that is emerged due to migration and isolated due to the impact of colonisation is brought into light through her narratives.

The isolated Creole protagonist, who is uprooted from her motherland and its culture, tries to retain her original identity in an alien land. In that process, the self of the Creole women is deteriorated in her attempt to parallel her identity with a new culture. Through Ethnographic research the cultures in remote geographical areas are studied. Antoinette and Anna, reflect on their respective cultural background through their own words, stories, and narratives, and they make sense of their presence in alien land by comparing cultures.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the native culture is portrayed as a complex society, whereas, the other novel, *Voyage in the Dark* gives the picture of twentieth century England, where the English culture is portrayed as composed and civilised society. Anna's interpretation of everyday routine in England, gives accounts of the rules that underlies in everyday activity, which is a part of their social order. Likewise, both novels provide an objective depiction of a cultural reality in early twentieth century England and its former colonies.

The objective of the present study is to examine the socio-cultural elements in Jean Rhys' two novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*. The study aims at evaluating the cultural background of the two selected novels; and analysing the three different cultures, namely, Native, Creole, and English. Further, the attempt is to discover the ethnographic patterns of the said cultures and discuss the subtle changes in them.

The research study, titled, "An Ethnographic Study of the Shifting Cultures in the Select Works of Jean Rhys" is divided into four chapters including introduction and conclusion. The first chapter titled, "Introduction" provides an overview of the British women novelists since the beginning. It furnishes details on Jean Rhys as a writer and her place in the history of British Literature. It also includes the relevance of the study, thesis statement and the objectives of the study. The second chapter, titled, "Colour and Culture" discusses the three different cultures, Native, Creole, and English in the *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

The third chapter, titled, "Class and Culture" focuses on the English culture foregrounded in the novel, *Voyage in the Dark*. It examines the difference between the cultural practices of working class English and the middle-class English. The last chapter, titled, "Conclusion" consolidates the findings of the research.

CHAPTER II

Colour and Culture

A culture is always associated with the nation or the state which is characterised by their difference in geography, traditions and customs. The cultural diversity in the Caribbean countries is the result of colonisation which has left its by-products in the island. The different languages, people, food and traditions of the island is due to the influences of European culture, African slave culture and indigenous Native Indian culture which constitutes the lifestyle, habits and beliefs of the people. As a result, each of the Caribbean islands has a unique and distinct cultural identity. Accordingly, culture becomes a source of identity in the Caribbean islands.

The novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a narrative from multicultural perspective. The novel deals with three cultures at large. The Natives of the Caribbean Islands represent the culture of the colonised. The Creole – the White Caribbeans represent the culture of the in-between population, who are neither the Natives nor the outsiders. They dwell in the in-between world where they are antagonised by the Natives and loathed by the English. The English represent the culture of the coloniser.

The novel's title comes from a very large area of sea lying between the West Indies and the Azores. It is bordered by the Gulf Stream and the surface of the sea is covered with large floating mats of Sargasso, a yellow weed. Jean Rhys uses the 'Sargasso Sea' as a metaphor for a barrier stopping the passage of her characters between the West Indies and

England. It impedes their geographical transition from one place to the other and it represents a barrier in understanding between the values and attitudes of these two different cultures.

The two different settings, England and West Indies are often contrasted by their geographical location, landscape and culture. The novel is set primarily in West Indies, a former colonial island. The naming of the island, 'West Indies' indicates the mistake of the explorer Christopher Columbus. He found the Bahamas Island on his expedition and believed that he has found the goal of his exploration, 'the Indies' or Asia, reached by sailing westwards from Europe. The Caribbean setting of the novel emphasises the lively and vibrant lifestyle of the people. However, the colonial intrusion in the island brings drastic effect in both economy and racial status of the people.

The novel is mainly set on two Caribbean islands namely, Jamaica and Granbois. These are just two from the group of islands which are united together as the 'West Indies' or 'Caribbean.' These islands have been colonised by Spain, France, Portuguese, Dutch and England, so it is called 'the cockpit of Europe.' The colonisers fought over themselves for the ownership of individual islands. Daniel Cosway refers to these wars for possession of islands in his letter to Rochester. He mentions, "for French and English like cat and dog in these islands since long time. Shoot, Kill, Everything" (80).

The colonisers exploited the Caribbean islands for economic reasons and they imported slaves from Africa to work on their plantations. Further, they exterminated the Natives who rebels against them. Besides, the colonisers possessed and renamed many parts of these islands and the names of some places has some historical associations with it. Each island has its own colonial histories and a resultant culture. For instance, the main

setting of the novel is Jamaica, which was a Spanish colony but the British gained control over the island in 1655. However, the name of its capital 'The Spanish town' reflects its earlier possession by Spanish colonists.

Similarly, Martinique is the hometown of Annette and Christophine, which has been a French colony. The capital of this place, St. Pierre is compared to the French capital in the novel due to its Parisian style. The Jamaican people are Protestants whereas; the inhabitants of this island are largely Roman Catholics. Hence, the Martiniques' are regarded as foreigners by people on the estate at Coulibri. The hatred they express towards Annette and Christophine is due to their Roman Catholic background. In the beginning of the novel, Antoinette expresses the hostility of Jamaican people in the novel. She says, "The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother" (15).

Likewise, the names of the places carry historical significance along with the time. The history behind the names of their estates emphasises the conflict between cultures in the island. The naming of the estate, 'Nelson's rest' refers to the threat of invasion by the French in the early nineteenth century. 'Nelson' is a naval hero of the British wars against 'Napoleon' and the French. The naming of the convent 'Mount Calvary' signifies the hill on which the crucifixion of Jesus occurred. Another place 'Massacre' reminiscences the killing of group of Caribs, which is a result of conflict between English and Carib culture. Rochester expresses his shock regarding the name of the place, soon after he arrives Granbois. He asks Antoinette, "And who was massacred here? Slaves?" (55).

The broad cultural diversity in the island is the persuading factor behind the conflict among cultures. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the narrative begins with Antoinette's childhood. Initially, she lives in her ruined estate in Jamaica with her mother Annette, her brother

Pierre and a group of coloured man and maid servants. The dominant 'Whites' and 'rebellious' Blacks go on a row while the 'muted' Creoles are not recognized due to their identity. The clash between the White aristocracy and the Black slave community of Jamaica intensifies more after the Emancipation act is passed.

The Emancipation act outlawed slavery in Britain and all its colonies. However, it insisted seven years' apprenticeship for the slaves before they could have full freedom. In practice, the condition of the slaves becomes worse than ever before under this apprenticeship scheme. This provoked the former slave community to develop hatred towards the Creole slave owners because of their cruel treatment towards them. Christophine gives a hint about this cruel manoeuvre of slave owners in the novel. She criticises, "They got magistrate. They got fine. They got jail house and chain gang. They got tread machine to mash up people's feet" (23).

The colonisers maintained their dominance by controlling the slaves with legal and military force. Consequently, the Black Natives hate the English law, magistrate and the jail house. The vengeance they have developed against the slave owners is exhibited in their act of setting fire to the Coulibri estate. The enmity of the Black people is obvious in the way they address Creoles as "white cockroaches" (20).

Being a Creole, Annette is well aware of the hatred of the Black people. It is mainly after her marriage with Mr. Mason, the Natives despise her more. Therefore, she warns Mr. Mason about the Black Natives of the island. When he refuses to believe her, she reproves, "They are more alive than you are, lazy or not, and they can be dangerous and cruel for reasons you wouldn't understand" (28). However, Mr Mason ignores her warning and says that the Black people are too lazy to cause any kind of harm. Although, his conception is

proved wrong in Aunt Cora's words which expresses the enmity and sufferings of the slaves due to colonisation. She chides, "Unhappily children do hurt flies" (30).

The major ethnic groups in the island are: The Black people who are the Natives of the island. The Europeans who often visits the island are the invaders and their purpose of conquest is to extract the wealth from the region they colonise as a rule. Mr Mason's marriage with a White Creole is an act of money making. It is clearly established when one among the women who attends the marriage says, "One unfortunate's loss is always a clever man's gain" (25). The Creoles are another prominent community long ago in the island. They do trade by staying in the island for generations. The Protagonist of the novel Antoinette and her mother Annette, belongs to this Creole class.

The term 'Creole' originally defined White people of British and European descent who are born in the Caribbean. The Creoles are not English rather, have English ancestry. They are born and brought up in the Caribbean island which is noted for its vivid beauty, mountains and dense rain forest but also for violent hurricanes, heat and poverty. They are limited in number when compared to the Black people in the island. They are taught the language and the customs of a culture, they are not used to. Despite the fact that, the Creoles are considered as 'alien' by the Natives, they are rather welcomed into the English culture.

The arrival of the Europeans to a wild place like Jamaica seems strange to the Black people, nevertheless, a relief to the White Creoles. However, the Black Natives are always looked down by the Europeans. The rape of the slave women by their White male owners is never questioned and the children are often abandoned by their fathers. Many White plantation owners like Alexander Cosway have fathered many illegitimate children by their

Black female slaves. Besides, they segregate themselves socially from the Blacks to ensure that they preserved their own cultural identity. Children born to White father and Black mother are called 'Coloured' people, who are the intermixture of Anglo-European and African racial origins.

The term 'Black Creoles' describes people who are the descendants of Black Africans but born in the West Indies. The White people born in the West Indies are known as 'White Creoles.' However, originally the term 'Creole' is used to denote Anglo-Europeans to signify their racial purity. Whereas in English context, the term 'Creole' is used to mean mixed race i.e. the intermixing of White and Black.

The interracial marriage and mixed parentage is a very common quality of the postcolonial Caribbean Islands. In the latter part of the novel, Rochester calls Antoinette as 'Bertha' meaning 'doll' which signifies her passiveness to infidelity in her infamous ancestry. He examines everything with such intensity that sometimes leads him to confusion. Rochester describes Antoinette's eyes shows traces of a non - White/ European influence and that emphasises his belief in her ancestry may include Black people. Further his wife Antoinette and Amelie seems alike to him in the middle part of the novel. He observes, "For a moment she looked very much like Amelie. Perhaps they are related, I thought. It's possible, it's even probable in this damned place" (105).

The Caribbean culture looms in the background posing menace to the outsiders. The strangeness that Rochester feels in the new environment and alien culture is apparent from the beginning. He is bedridden for almost three weeks after he reaches Spanish town for his marriage. In addition to that during his honeymoon trip to Massacre, he feels uncomfortable with the wild nature of Granbois. He feels annoyed when he says, "The rain

began to drip down the back of my neck adding to my feeling of discomfort and melancholy” (57). He perceives the landscape as malevolent. He feels that the place is ‘menacing’ and the smell of flowers is ‘strong’ and the trees are a ‘green menace’.

The Native culture is rich with the musical quality of song. The Natives sing, not just to amuse but also at times to taunt others. All this make the outsiders uncomfortable and more interlopers. Rochester feels alienated because the people and the servants in Granbois, makes his stay difficult by creating stories about his marriage with Antoinette. Amelie sings a song about Antoinette, mocking she has bought Rochester with her money. She sings,

The white cockroach she marry

The white cockroach she marry

The white cockroach she buy young man

The white cockroach she marry. (83)

The English culture represents the culture of the coloniser in the novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The superiority of the English culture is explicit in the characters of Mr. Mason who is a pure English man with an appetite for wealth. Similarly, Rochester is in no way inferior to him in exploiting their wife’s wealth in the name of law and male dominance. The native English individuals consider themselves socially and racially superior to White Creoles. However, when it comes to the former slaves they consciously bring them under the category of ‘uncivilised’ individuals.

The English deem themselves very superior to the Caribbeans. They look down on all the Natives as servants and handmaidens. They expect nothing less than regal treatment. In the novel, Rochester disapproves the way people in the island treats him. It is because he

is infected by a sense of racial and cultural superiority. Rochester feels that Baptiste is not showing enough respect for him. He observes, "I noticed that he did not call me 'sir' or 'master'" (117).

Jean Rhys has given due importance to the language of her fictional characters. It becomes evident that the language spoken by the Native Caribbean is different from that of the In-between Creoles and the outsiders. The language sense is often confused by the characters in the novel. Rochester feels the language of the natives always has some deep sense which he fails to understand. In one instance, a Black native woman offers coffee for him and tells him, "Taste my bull's blood, master" to which, he understands its contempt later, "Meaning that will make you a man" (138).

The marriage is a very important social institution. The novel, *White Sargasso Sea* portrays a very important marriage which is between a Creole and an English. This marriage is a very important part of the plot. The marriage between Rochester and Antoinette is an act of trade. Rochester is compelled to marry Antoinette for economic reasons. The marriage itself is not a 'typical' one for it involves two different cultures. Contradictorily, in Native culture marriage is not a customary. In fact, the Natives have free will to choose their way about in relationships. Polygamy is accepted in the Native culture; therefore, it is not considered as a crime.

There are no traces of marriage found among the Natives. It is evident in the novel when Antoinette tells Mr. Mason, "There is never a wedding" (28). Besides, the Native way of living is unrestricted and unquestioned. When Christophine tells Rochester, "This is a free country and I am a free woman" (131). It indicates the lack of control over human behaviour in the island. Similarly, in another instance while talking with Antoinette,

Christophine reveals, “Three children I have. One living in this world, each one a different father, but no husband...” (91). It proves the lack of morality among the Natives.

Antoinette is born and brought up among this kind of community. Hence, often she oscillates between morality and desire in her relationships with men. She even suppresses her natural attraction towards Sandi after she is being accepted into English culture. Though, she enjoys the advantages of English culture, she doesn't want to become the part of that culture. When Mr. Mason foretells her that, she has to get married soon after she leaves convent, Antoinette feels insecure to enter into that culture. However, she is convinced by Rochester who promises her security throughout her life. Unfortunately, it turns into an irony when he locks Antoinette into a room in order to keep her away from the outside world.

The novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* renders a piece of English law as well. The English law facilitates men, especially those who are not given any inheritance, the rights to inherit their wife's wealth. The English law permits the first son to inherit his father's property and the others are forced to seek their fortune by themselves. Rochester is the second son to his father. So, his father considered Rochester as a disgrace to his family for being dependent on him before marriage. Rochester feels humiliated because of this and decides to marry Antoinette, a rich Creole heiress for a sum of thirty thousand pounds. However, when Antoinette refuses to marry him, again the feeling of humiliation and rejection permeates his heart. He declares, “I did not relish going back to England in the role of rejected suitor jilted by this Creole girl. I must certainly know why” (65).

Christophine, as a free woman, mocks this English law which permits husband as the beholder of his wife's wealth. She criticizes, “Law! The Mason boy fix it, that boy worse

than Satan and he burn in Hell one of these fine nights” (91). When Christophine enquires about Antoinette’s property, she says, “And you must understand I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him.” On hearing this Christophine is shocked and asks, “What you tell me there?” to that Antoinette explains, “That is English law” (91).

The holy institution of marriage is projected as a shop of trade where money is exchanged. Rochester convinces Antoinette into marrying him. Though, Rochester was paid thirty thousand pounds for the marriage, he feels that he has sold his soul to own that fortune. However, it is Antoinette who is being sold by her step-father and her brother. Still, Rochester feels he is being dependent on Antoinette’s fortune. He says:

I have not bought her, she has bought me... The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to) I have a modest competence now. I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love. No begging letters, no mean requests. None of the furtive shabby manoeuvres of a younger son. I have sold my soul or you have sold it, and after all is it such a bad bargain? (59)

The position of women in any culture is of great significance. Rhys evokes feminist sensibility in the novel. Richard Mason, Antoinette’s half-brother takes up the responsibility of marrying Antoinette to Rochester, after Mr. Mason’s death. The settlement made by Mr. Mason to Antoinette is given to Rochester without question. The so-called English law permits these men to exploit their women as a commodity. In fact, a wife’s legal position in England was worse than that of a slave in other countries.

At this point, the novel makes a careful contrast in this respect between the newly married Antoinette and Christophine who, despite being a former slave, is free and independent, with a house and garden of her own. She can take her belongings and turn her back on any relationship with a man. However, Annette and Antoinette are the only powerless female victims in the novel. Annette is subjected to ridicule by the Black Natives and gossiped by other White women, on top of all that she is sexually exploited by her caretakers. Similarly, Antoinette is accused for infidelity which facilitates Rochester to manipulate her property by labelling her as a 'mad woman.'

Agriculture is one of the most important occupations in the Caribbean Islands. The influence of English culture over the other cultures give authority to the plantation owners to employ slaves in the work of growing crops like sugar and cotton plantations. It is the prominent occupation in the Caribbean island before the execution of Emancipation act. However, after the implementation of this law, the British Caribbean plantations suffered an economic slump. The British government does not pay sufficient compensation to plantation owners and the price of sugar fell by half.

Jean Rhys begins her novel with this background information. The former plantation owners are deprived off their wealth because the slaves refused to work in their plantations. In her first dream sequence, Antoinette walks past the remains of old sugar-making machinery which signifies that Coulibri was a sugar estate. The planters who often had quite small estates are bankrupted. Antoinette's mother expresses her agony aroused by the decaying status of Creoles who are former slave owners in the initial part of the novel. She laments, "Now we are marooned" (16).

Antoinette, on her part expresses the feeling of rejection imposed on Creoles. She states, “Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger” (21). In addition to that, their only neighbour Mr Luttrell commits suicide in the initial part of the novel. Antoinette’s family is even worse off because her mother has been widowed. They are reduced to an economic level on a par with the Black community around them and are subject to their mockery. However, their estates are then bought by wealthier people from England, like Mason whose marriage with Annette is a rescuing factor in restoring their lost fortunes. Coulibri estate is completely changed from a wild, savage place into an admirable mansion. In Antoinette’s words, “Coulibri looked the same when I saw it again, although it was clean and tidy, no grass between the flagstones, no leaks” (26).

The Natives work in other capacities as well. The former slaves, who are economically deprived than the Creoles are appointed as servants in European houses and estates. Baptiste, a local Native is appointed as ‘overseer’ by Mr. Mason to look after their estate in Granbois. The rest of the Natives are fisherman, some of them do retail businesses like selling cakes, sweet drinks (bon sirop) and sweets. Although few people like Christophine have their own land to support their living.

The plight of the Black Creole is bad. They are the discarded lot. They are fatherless and brought up in sheer poverty. At times, they are unaware of their mothers too. Even the Natives scorn them. The ‘coloured’ people are doomed for they are made no provisions to support for their living from their illegitimate fathers. Daniel Cosway is a ‘coloured’ man in the novel, who calls himself half-brother to Antoinette.

The religion has an important role to play in a culture. Daniel Cosway becomes a priest with the help of an anonymous man in Barbados. 'Barbados' was a British colony from the start where the slaves are being converted to Christianity. It is where Daniel Cosway is influenced by the doctrines and teachings of Christianity. He is even baptised and changes his real name from 'Esau' to Daniel.

The English are highly Protestants and they imposed their religion among the slave community of the island. However, the Natives of some islands are Roman Catholics except in Jamaica and Barbados because of their colonial background. Antoinette is not fond of any particular religion in the novel. Only after she goes to the convent school in Spanish Town, she encounters a form of religion called Roman Catholic which is very different from the one she is accustomed to at home. The convent school is represented as a refuge for Antoinette. She feels the surrounding is calm, sunlit and colourful. There, she learns about Roman Catholic saints and about the appropriate behaviour for a girl of her class and race, and makes particular friends – Louise, Helene and Germaine. Antoinette associates the characteristics of the place with peace and sensual pleasure rather than fear or punishment. It exists in contrast to the Protestant work ethics espoused by Rochester.

There are many Biblical allusions throughout the novel. These allusions are associated with the cultural belief of the people in the island. The mention of cock crowing is a biblical reference which raises the idea of betrayal. It refers to an episode in the New Testament that is before the Crucifixion of Jesus, one of his disciples called Peter denies three times that he knew Jesus Christ. Similarly, Antoinette quotes a phrase from the 'Hail Mary', a Roman Catholic prayer that alludes to 'the hour of death.' It reminds the image of the framed text, 'the prayer for a happy death' hanging in Christophine's room, who is a

Catholic. Christophine's associates Rochester with 'Satan' who is called 'the father of lies' which is another biblical reference found in the novel.

The images of England and West Indies and the places where people inhabit, have some associations with their cultural and religious traits in the novel. The cultural differences between the islands are enhanced by religious differences seen among people. Catholicism is associated with French and Spanish influences in the islands. Christophine is a Roman Catholic. The image of the Holy Family is pinned up inside her house along with the text of a prayer. Christophine's Catholicism distinguishes her from the Black people. The Coulibri estate, before the arrival of Europeans has been wild and dense. However, Mason's wealth has been used to repair the house and estate. The picture of 'The Miller's Daughter' which hangs on the wall in Coulibri estate represents the dominance of English customs imposed in that place. The framed text image 'Vengeance is Mine' that is hanging on the wall of Daniel Cosway's home refers to the part of a famous biblical teaching i.e. God's words which insists humans should not take revenge into their own hands but rely on the justice of God. It indicates that he is a non-conformist.

The beliefs of a culture are as important as the culture itself. These define the basic cultural patterns of the individuals. There are some notable beliefs which pervades throughout the novel. Christophine repeats an old idea that the moon can induce madness. Antoinette's reference to 'The Emerald drop' which is a green flash or line occurs during sunset which is believed to bring good fortune to the people who witness it.

In another instance, a Black woman offers coffee to Rochester. He observes her leaving the place by trailing her dress to the floor. This habit of the woman annoys Rochester and he makes a comment on her. He condemns, "she might hold her dress up. It

must get very dirty, yards of it trailing on the floor.” Hence, Antoinette tries to explain him to change his notions about Natives. She says, “When they don’t hold their dress up it’s for respect.” However, he simply dismisses the reason which is explained by Antoinette and tells her, “Whatever the reason it is not a clean habit” (71).

The practice of ‘Obeah’ is one of the most important beliefs of the Caribbeans. The religious belief in the novel often contradicts with the superstitious practices and beliefs of the Black community. ‘Obeah’ is a system of beliefs which originated in Africa. The practitioners of ‘Obeah’ carry out a form of witchcraft in rituals to bring a client health, love or money. They may also be paid to bring bad luck to the client’s enemies.

‘Obeah’ practitioners were believed to be able to turn people into zombies by stealing their spirits or souls. Such people would then be left as the living dead. However, White planters regarded ‘Obeah’ as a subversive practice and punished it through the law. The peculiar beliefs and customs of the Natives is the persuading factor for Rochester to explore more about the culture and people. He spends his time in reading the book called *The Glittering Coronet of Isles*, which is a travel book about West Indies. From that book he is provided with an account of information about ‘Zombies’ and ‘Obeah.’ He reads:

A zombie is a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead. A zombie can also be the spirit of a place, usually malignant but sometimes to be propitiated with sacrifices or offerings of flowers and fruit. [I thought at once of the bunches of flowers at the priest’s ruined house.] ““They cry out in the wind that is their voice, they rage in the sea that is their anger”” (88-89).

Rochester investigates further about the past of Christophine, the only person in the novel is to be associated with 'Obeah.' When Rochester inquires Mr Fraser about the practitioners of 'Obeah,' he gives him a hint that Christophine was arrested once for practising black magic and she was put into jail. She is an exceptional character created by Jean Rhys and an idol of Black humanity. The indifference shown by Annette towards her own daughter and the rejection that Antoinette feels is atoned by Christophine's presence. Though, Antoinette feels afraid of 'Obeah', she is fond of Christophine. She expresses her shock about practicing 'Obeah' in the novel. She narrates:

Yet one day when I was waiting there I was suddenly very much afraid. The door was open to the sunlight, someone was whistling near the stables, but I was afraid. I was certain that hidden in the room (behind the old black press?) there was dead man's dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly. Drop by drop the blood was falling into a red basin and I imagined I could hear it. No one had ever spoken to me about obeah – but I knew what I would find if I dared to look. Then Christophine came in smiling and pleased to see me. Nothing alarming ever happened and I forgot, or told myself I had forgotten. (26 - 27)

The concept of 'Obeah' is recurrent and the characters are all under its charm. The People around Christophine make stories about her part in Annette's marriage with Mr Mason. They spread rumours like Christophine has bewitched Mr Mason into marrying Annette. It is said, "... the whole thing is a mystery. It's evidently useful to keep a Martinique 'Obeah' woman on the premises" (25).

Antoinette's belief in 'Obeah' intensifies after her mother's marriage with Mr. Mason, which she thinks will help her to save her marriage with Rochester. Her firm belief in 'Obeah' is evident when Antoinette tells Christophine, "You can make people love or hate. Or . . . or die,' I said" (93). This shows Antoinette's belief in 'Obeah', despite her education and cultural background. Further, Antoinette says to Rochester that his act of renaming her is a form of 'Obeah', an attempt to take her soul away and make her someone else.

The Caribbean culture mystifies the Europeans. The English and other Europeans are very curious about the Caribbean culture. In the novel, since the English are not accustomed to the culture and beliefs of the Natives, they believe everything which is said to them about the alien culture. However, the beliefs of the Natives are highly superficial. For instance, the inherent madness in Antoinette's family is a rumour spread out by the Black people. Though, this belief is not a concrete one, it is as strong as their belief in 'Obeah'.

The Natives are very curious about Creoles and Europeans. Annette expresses her disgust about this tendency of Natives in spreading gossips and inventing stories. She says, "They talk about us without stopping. They invent stories about you, and lies about me. They try to find out what we eat every day" (27).

One of the positive aspects of the Natives' culture is that they value the lives of animals. They oppose the killing of animals. Animal sacrifice is not encouraged in their culture, which they believe will bring bad luck into their lives. Therefore, some of their beliefs and customs are not a threat, rather a rescuing means for Creoles to survive in the island along with them.

For instance, the novel opens with the evidence of hatred between the Natives and the Creoles. The Natives set fire to the family house of the protagonist. The family manages to escape from a dreadful night only because their parrot Coco gets caught in the fire. It made Black Natives to put an end to their riot. The death of the parrot is considered as a very bad omen by the Black people. It is said, “that it was very unlucky to kill a parrot, or even to see a parrot die” (36).

Gossiping is a recreational activity for Natives. They enjoy spreading and circulating rumour. Especially, the servants are interested in chitchat. On the contrary, it is criticised in English culture. The English desire discretion and privacy. Rochester, on his part expresses his annoyance in having untrustworthy servants around him. He criticises, “However much I paid Jamaican servants I would never buy discretion. I’d be gossiped about, sung about...” (134).

Rochester’s distrust on servants increases more after the failure of his marriage with Antoinette. Before going back to England, he writes a letter to his father confirming that everything about his marriage must be confidential. In the letter, he insists, “I am certain you will believe that the less you talk to anyone about my affairs, especially my marriage, the better” (133). Rochester disapproves everything regarding the Caribbean culture, their customs, beliefs, landscapes and people all at once primarily after the failure of his marriage.

Language is a very important constituent of the culture. The language used by the characters in the novel is another impeding factor between the two cultures. The French dialect of Patois, which is widely used by the Natives in the island, is looked down by the English language speakers. The superiority of the English language reduces other Native

languages into the category of degraded languages. Antoinette herself speaks 'Patois' which shows her association with Black culture. Rochester mocks the language of the Natives during his honeymoon trip to Granbois. He observes, "The two women stood in the doorway of the hut gesticulating, talking not English but the debased French patois they use in this island" (57). It is because in English context it is used to refer to any dialect that develops out of contact between colonisers and the colonised.

The word 'Patois' is related to Creole. It is a French word meaning a local dialect, which is used for communication by people who are other than English. Christophine sings songs in Patois for Antoinette. Even Annette's parrot 'Coco' has been taught to speak in French. It asks, '*Qui est la*?' which means, 'who is there?' and answers by itself saying, '*Che` Coco*' in Patois which means 'it's me' (35). However, Rochester expresses his dislike when Antoinette asks him that whether he likes Christophine or not, he tells her, "She is a very worthy person no doubt. I can't say I like her language" (71).

The language of the island reflects its history and experience of colonisation. It is the colonisers who introduced English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and African languages among people of Caribbean island. Some specific words used by the characters in the novel have its origin from some other language. '*Ajoupa*' is a French word for summer house in English, '*La belle*' is a French word meaning 'beautiful one' for fireflies in English, and the English word "Mountain is an ugly word," to the people of West Indies, for them it is called '*Morne*' which is a French word.

Similarly, the words that are used for addressing people are found in number in the novel. The word '*Beke*' refers to the first White settlers i.e. Europeans in West Indies. The word which is fondly used by Christophine to address Antoinette is '*Doudou che*' meaning

‘dear darling.’ The influence of French language is seen more throughout the novel. The names of some Black Natives like Amelie and Emile signifies the influence of Parisian culture.

The geographical differences between the two places influence the attitude of its characters. It is evident that the images of the landscapes are voiced out by the characters with the different cultural background. Antoinette’s picture about England is only a perception which she acquires from her textbooks. According to her, England will be like:

England, rosy pink in the geography book map, but on the page opposite the words are closely crowded, heavy looking. Exports, coal, iron, wool. Then Imports and Character of Inhabitants. Names, Essex, Chelmsford on the Chelmer. The Yorkshire and Lincolnshire wolds. Wolds? Does that mean hills? How high? Half the height of ours, or not even that? Cool green leaves in the short cool summer. Summer. There are fields of corn like sugar-cane fields, but gold colour and not so tall. After summer the trees are bare, then winter and snow. White feathers falling? Torn pieces of paper falling? They say frost makes flower patterns on the window panes. (92)

Similarly, the Caribbean island and its people and landscapes are viewed through the eyes of Rochester. To him, the landscape is dangerous, alien and disturbing. Whereas Antoinette feels that England is cold and unbelonging. These two characters value the newly introduced culture from their own cultural perception. Everything that is associated with the Caribbean island is colourful, vital and lively. In contrast to this dazed impression of Rochester, Antoinette notices the absence of colour in cardboard-like England.

However, the oppressing nature and the hidden histories of the landscape threaten Rochester though he is attracted by its charm. He says:

I hated the mountain and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was the part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before. (141)

The Black Natives in the island imitate the fashion of the colonisers. Rhys makes references about the fashion of people which represents their respective cultures. Christophine's physical appearance is made different from other women of Black community. "She wore a black dress, heavy gold earrings and a yellow handkerchief – carefully tied with the two high points in front. No other Negro women wore black, or tied her handkerchief Martinique fashion" (18). Similarly, Antoinette tells Rochester that the dress she wears is made in Martinique. "They call this fashion '*a` la Josephine*'" (67). It indicates the high-waisted style of dress in French fashion.

The 'tricorn hat' which she wears on the first day of her arrival to Granbois, is a three-cornered brim hat. This was a fashionable style in the eighteenth century which is retained in the islands into the 1830s. 'The blue cloth', used by the Native Emile to carry heavy loads recalls the style of African people who carry loads in the same way. Besides, the Natives used to wear handkerchiefs around their head, which is a part of their fashion. Christophine, Myra and other Natives women wear kerchiefs in different colour and in a way, which signifies their association with some particular fashion in the island.

The food plays a vital role in indicating the imbalance in the cultural and economic differences throughout the novel. The food practices in the island are more appetising when compared to the English foods. Rochester himself admires their food habits during his stay at Granbois. He is served a Native dish called 'Coralita Coralita' by the Natives. He says, "The food, though too highly seasoned, was lighter and more appetizing than anything I had tasted in Jamaica" (67).

It also refers to the inequality in their social status. 'The salted fish' is a food for slaves whereas wealthier people eat 'fresh fish.' However, at the start of the novel Antoinette's family eats the salted fish which ultimately indicates their loss of fortune. However, to their great relief, Annette's marriage with Mr Mason brings fortune back into their lives. Antoinette expresses her excitement of becoming English girl in the novel. She delightfully says, "We ate English food now, beef and mutton, pies and puddings. I was glad to be like an English girl" (30).

In fact, Mr. Mason's lack of interest in adapting to Native culture is the reason for opting English foods rather than locally prepared foods. Contradictorily, Antoinette's affinity to the Natives' food habits can be found in several instances in the novel. Though, Antoinette relishes for being a part of English culture; she expresses her craving for Christophine's cooking. She says, "I was glad to be like an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophine's cooking" (30).

Besides, most of their foods are nature-based. The Natives prepare their foods using naturally available materials. For instance, one day when Antoinette goes to bathing pool with Tia, a local Native, they prepared some food for themselves in this manner. Antoinette says, "We boiled green bananas in an old iron pot and ate them with our fingers out of a

calabash...” (20). After Antoinette has been locked by Rochester, she makes comments on the lack of essence in their food habits. She mocks, “I have tasted the drink without colour in the bottle. The first time I did this I wanted to spit it out but managed to swallow it” (147). Likewise, often their eating habits are contrasted in the novel. The ‘Coffee’ prepared by the Natives is contrasted with the ‘tea’ drunk by Europeans and it is compared to the horse piss by the Natives.

These are some ethnographic patterns which can be found in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* that reflects the influence of culture exerted in the lives of individuals. This plays a prominent role in shaping their thoughts and beliefs about the respective cultures they come across. These cultural idiosyncrasies and system of beliefs also explain the historical significance of the three different communities. These cultures are created by historical circumstances.

Chapter III

Class and Culture

The English culture is deemed as the extremely civilised culture which is remarkable for its characteristics. The cultural norms and the people, their language, religion, cuisine, social etiquette and so on constitutes the characteristics of English culture. The English culture is historically a century old culture, yet their traditions are handed over from one generation to another since from the time of its emergence. This culture is spread all over the world as a result of English imperial rule. Griffith in the article, "Discourse and Domination: Euro centrality, Selfhood and the West Indian Novel," refers briefly about this influence of English hegemony over other cultures. He states, "One of the significant features of European expansionism is the way in which the coercion and control of non-European peoples were morally justified by the force of racist and patriarchal stereotypes, established within Western discourse" (92).

The novel, *Voyage in the Dark* is set in the twentieth century England, a time when number of immigrants from different countries has entered England after the decline of English colonisation. The British Nationality Act is passed in the year 1948, which allowed all Commonwealth citizens to enjoy British citizenship. As a result, in the beginning of 1950s the individuals from the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean began to immigrate to England. These immigrants marched largely towards the urban areas of England and they settled in parts of London, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Merseyside.

The protagonist of the novel, Anna's displacement from her own country to the cultural centre of the world, throws light upon the experiences and trauma of an immigrant in an alien land. Anna is born in the West Indies to a Creole mother and an English father. However, she is

introduced to English culture by her step-mother Hester. She is cut off from her mother's culture when she is forcefully migrated to England after the death of her father. Anna encounters two opposing cultures which contradicts each other in its geographical setting, landscape and traditions. The dilemma faced by Anna is marked by contrasting cultures and sometimes contradictory roles taken by Anna to participate in social life.

Therefore, the novel's title, *Voyage in the Dark* refers to the journey of a West Indian Immigrant into the post-colonial England. Anna perceives England as an inevitably dark and an unwelcoming place. Throughout the novel, Anna's mind oscillates between England and West Indies i.e. the sense of place juxtaposes between imagination and reality. This abrupt shift between places is explicit through the use of images of England and West Indies. When Anna arrives to England for the first time with her step-mother Hester, her impression about the place is:

...This is England Hester said and I watched it through the train-window divided into squares like pocket-handkerchiefs; a small tidy look it had everywhere fenced off from everywhere else – what are those things - those are haystacks – oh those are haystacks – I had read about England ever since I could read – smaller meaner everything is never mind – this is London. (15)

Jean Rhys portrays the England from an outsider's perspective. Sometimes, the outside viewpoint is clearer than from that of inside. In fact, it is larger and more complete. On the other hand, the insider might not be able to see beyond his or her own perception. Therefore, the novel is written from the point of the view of the protagonist, who is undergoing a transitional phase. Therefore, it becomes natural for her to compare her homeland and host land.

The indifference that Anna feels in English culture is intensified by the sameness and dullness of England which is notable for its monotonous setting throughout the novel. The row houses are seen in most of the parts in England. If the houses are joined together in long rows which run over the streets, it is called 'row houses.' Likewise, the geographical characteristics also constitute a culture. From an outsider's perception, England feels very quiet. The indifference Anna feels in England is due to its physical setting. The rooms, the streets and everything in England appear exactly alike for her. Anna represents the observer who observes and participates at the same time. She observes:

...the towns we went to always looked exactly alike. You were perpetually moving to another place which was perpetually the same. There was always a little grey street leading to the stage-door of the theatre and another little grey street where your lodgings were, and rows of little houses with chimneys like the funnels of dummy steamers... (8)

Anna's perception of England and the places from her early life is worth mentioning. In her reference to the physical setting of the West Indies, she contradicts by saying, "There is never one moment of stillness – always something buzzing" (129). Although, she is adaptable and finds a place for herself in an alien land, she is unable to detach herself from her Caribbean identity. Anna finds the difference between the landscapes of England and West Indies soon after she arrives to England. At the beginning of the novel, she says, "The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you right down inside yourself was different. Not just the difference between heat, cold; light, darkness; purple, grey" (7).

The absence of colour in the England indicates the lifelessness of the culture. Besides, it also emphasises the strict codes prevalent during that time. Anna associates the dull colours with

the natural atmosphere of England. She links the colours like, “smoke the same colour as the sky; and a grey stone promenade running hard, and naked and straight by the side of the grey-brown or grey-green sea” (8). However, not all parts of England are dreary. When Walter takes Anna to the countryside, she experiences a totally different weather which appears in contrast with the one that she is acquainted to, since from the day of her arrival to England. She expresses her awe when she says, “I like it here, I didn’t know England could be so beautiful” (67).

The first and foremost reason given by Anna for her rejection of England after her arrival is due to its climate, which is excessively cold for her. From an outsider’s perception, England is depicted as a place where Anna does not feel comfortable and warm. Therefore, Anna says, “I got used to everything except cold” (8).

Therefore, the climatic condition is an important factor in creation of the culture. Even, it is not uniform throughout the country. The different parts of Britain have different types of weather. When Anna is in London, the weather is hostile to her. She even becomes ill very often in the novel, especially in winter. In fact, the London weather is not comforting to Anna and it has its own effects in her physical and psychological state. It is obvious when she says, “It’s no life, not in winter it isn’t” (16). However, during her visit to the country with Walter, she feels that the place is rather appealing to her senses. She experiences a different atmosphere and notes, “A cool smell, that wasn’t the dead smell of London, came in through the window” (66).

The variations in English landscape are due to its geographical setting. Geologically, the UK is surrounded by sea. The archipelago formed by Great Britain and the numerous smaller islands is irregular in shape which is the underlying factor behind its geology and landscape. The Britain lies in the temperate climatic zone. Hence, the weather is affected by the Gulf Stream, a

large Atlantic Ocean current of warm water from the Gulf of Mexico. This North Atlantic Drift keeps Britain warmer and wetter than places in continental Europe.

The nature of the people always has some associations with the landscape. Therefore, the attitude of a community is as much as important as its habits and its practices. The post-colonial England holds a view about women which is highly attributed to men's perception. It allocates specific behaviour for individuals based on gender, especially for 'women.' The conduct codes for women are strictly emphasised during that period. Ethel emphasises the necessity of this attitude for English women. She says, "An English girl would have respected herself more than to let people laugh at her..." (94)

However, Anna, being an outsider finds it difficult to maintain her 'ladylikeness' only through which she receives admiration from people in an 'alien' land. The English, especially, the young men marvel at her unique conduct. She carries herself in a very carefree and unacceptable way. As a result, she moves from place to place and everywhere she is thrown out by the landladies. Her first landlady condemns Anna for her unethical way of living and forces her to leave her house without prior notice. She shouts, "I don't hold with the way you go on, if you want to know, and my 'usband don't neither. Crawling up the stairs at three o'clock in the morning. And then today dresses up to nines. I've got eyes in my head." However, when Anna demands the landlady for reason, she tells her, "I don't want any tarts in my house, so now you know" (26).

The urban England's strict etiquettes condemn immorality among women. It insists limitation over women's dressing, their behaviour and their desires. Anna's first land lady disapproves of her arriving home late one night and threatens her to leave the place. She blames Anna and Maudie's mannerisms. She condemns Maudie's way of dressing when she comes

down for dinner. She criticises, “Showing yourself at my sitting room-window half naked like that,’ ‘And at three o’clock in the afternoon too. Getting my house a bad name” and insists Maudie, “When you come downstairs for your dinner you’ve got to be decent. Not in your nightclothes” (8).

The British class system is at its peak in early twentieth century. It divided the society into classes by grouping of people by occupations. The working-class people are refused education and respectable job in that period. Anna has stopped her education because of her poor economy and taken the job of a chorus girl which affect her relationships with men who are willing to have physical relationship with Anna; however, denies marrying her because of her profession. Likewise, the class system prevents the working-class from entering into a respectable position in society through marriage.

The struggles of White-working class women are explicit throughout the novel. The working-class women have to bear discriminative discourses of landladies and the society they live in, that labels them as morally degraded women. The landlady, who criticises Maudie for her clothes represents English conservatism. Her perception symbolises an overall ideology of the English society.

The novel portrays the devastating effects of poverty, imperialism, racism and sexism in the lives of the marginalised working-class women. As a working-class woman, Anna lives at the margins of the society. The way chorus girls are constantly disrespected and manipulated because of their profession is evident through the treatment of landladies. These landladies insist the norms of middle-class feminine codes upon the chorus girls who are deprived of homes, financial security and education.

It is also significant that the area in which one lives reveals one's class because people in the same social class are usually grouped together in certain areas. Thus, Housing becomes a measure of social class, and is related to income and occupation. In England, the upper class and the middle class own their own houses. While, the working class live as tenants. Generally, the system of landlords and land ladies is prevalent in the country. A lower-middle class individual rents out his or her portion of the house to an individual who belongs to the working class. This mode of accommodation is cheaper and a source of income for the house owner. Anna represents such individuals who look for a room or a couple of rooms. She finds it difficult to find a place for herself.

Most of the people in England, those who live with their families own their homes whereas the individuals, especially those who are economically deprived like Anna, Maudie and other chorus girls rent rooms or they are given accommodation in their workplace. Therefore, owning a place to live is another restraining factor found among the working-class. However, it is not possible for them with their meagre income. Therefore, the institution of marriage and love are used as tools by women to gain prosperity. Maudie warns Anna, after she finds her love affair with Walter. Further, she advises, "You ought to make him give you a flat" (41).

The constructed social behaviour is pleasing on the surface; however, Anna as an outsider thinks that this tendency is nothing but 'masks.' When Anna goes to buy an outfit for her in a shop, she feels that the woman in the shop treats her like a lady, despite her profession to sell their products. She says, "There were two Miss Cohens and they really were sisters because their noses were the same and their eyes – opaque and shining – and their insolence that was only a mask" (24). Anna feels that these masks hide the person behind them.

The position of women in England is rather restricted to societal norms which allow the people to weigh them primarily on the basis of their profession. The series of profession undertaken by women in the novel is either fruitless or it is considered as immoral. Anna, Maudie and Laurie work as 'chorus girls.' Their living is very poor. When they go in search for a room they are refused because of their profession. Anna refers to this rejection in the novel like, "The landlady had said, No, I don't let to professionals" (8). As a result, they pretend themselves as 'lady' to accommodate themselves. In an attempt to get accommodation Maudie pretends herself as 'lady.' Anna refers to this false pretension of Maudie in the novel. She comments on her efforts to convince the landlady like, "making her voice sound as ladylike as possible" (8).

In fact, Anna's 'ladylike' appearance is admired by the landladies which helps her at times of adversity. Maudie refers to this ladylikeness of Anna, which is a helping factor for her to get on in England. She tells Anna, "There's something about you. You always look ladylike" (10) Despite, the fact that their profession is always less respected by the landladies. Besides, Anna's profession is disapproved among the upper-class community. Walter enquires Anna about her family's approval regarding the nature of her job. He asks Anna, "Doesn't she approve of your gadding about on tour? Does she think you've disgraced the family or something?" (19).

The idea of women working is unconventional in the early twentieth century England. However, there has been a progress in the beliefs. Later, the nature of work is considered. The women find job like waitresses, chorus girls, and so on which do not require university degree. Initially, women are made to earn their living by pleasing men who ultimately leads them into prostitution. Anna finds a sense of meaninglessness in everything about England. Hence, she distances herself from being manipulated into that culture. However, the need to survive without any financial support leads Anna towards prostitution. People like Ethel makes use of Anna's

youth in order to gain profit in her business. She involves Anna in prostitution in the name of manicure. Ethel, for instance teaches Anna how to do manicure in a pleasing way. She teaches:

About manicure, the main thing is to have a nice set of manicure things. I'll lend you those. You get them all spread out nicely on the table with a white cloth and a bowl of soapy hot water and you push one of the armchairs forward and smile and say, "Please sit down." And then you say, "Do you mind?" and you put his hand into a bowl of hot water. (120)

The profession of men is also given importance in the novel. The women in the novel make a division between those who have power and position and those who do not. Maudie comments that, "men who have money and men who haven't are perfectly different." However, most of the men in the novel are business professionals. Walter, Vincent, Carl and Joe all are doing some fruitful business in the novel in a way or another. So, when compared to the profession of women, men's profession is always respectable in the society.

In *Voyage in the Dark*, the clothing style of characters has close association with their economy. Anna self-pities about her clothes when she is working as a chorus girl. Her choice of black colour in most of her dresses is an advantage for her to hide her poverty. The torn kimono that Maudie wears during her stay with Anna indicates her poor status. The clothes, then becomes the symbol of class division in England. Anna and Maudie find that Walter and Vincent are 'money' sorts through their clothes. Likewise, the clothes represent the status of the person who is wearing it.

The English middle-class codes put the working-class women in the unfair position by insisting socially-approved appearance and mannerisms especially for those who live in urban spaces. Hence, the women are judged and evaluated by these constructed appearances. Anna's

inability to buy new clothes for her leads her to depression. She laments over her poor clothing when she says, “When I thought about my clothes I was too sad to cry. About clothes, it’s awful. Everything makes you want pretty clothes like hell. People laugh at girls who are badly dressed” (22).

Therefore, it is necessary to display their clothes to maintain their socially approved images. As a result, women tend to buy clothes to keep in track with men. As a result, Shopping becomes an important leisure activity for upper-middle class women during that period. The working-class women like Anna and Maudie are aware of this necessity of shopping to improve their status. Anna doesn’t actually want to become a lady, even though she wants to present herself as one.

The necessity of clothing is emphasised in the novel when Anna quickly spends all the money which Walter gave her on clothing. Hence, Anna has been trying to gain access in English culture through clothing. By doing so, Anna masks her own identity by trying to be what others expect her to be. In the latter part of the novel, Maudie implies the necessity of good clothes in acquiring attention from a man, whom she likes to marry in the novel. She laments, “But I’m so damned shabby and, you know, when you’re shabby you can’t do anything, you don’t believe in yourself. And he notices clothes – he notices things like that” (136). At this point, Clothing becomes the persons’ identity without which they are not considered as a part of cultural society.

In fact, women are forced to define their self on the basis of their clothing style. It is in fact their self-confidence which is associated with their outlook. Therefore, the need to be fashionably dressed becomes a life determining force among working-class women. It becomes a prerequisite for them to ‘get on’ into the society. Therefore, they can enjoy the privileges of ‘a

lady' which is considered as a respectable position given to a woman in England. Anna feels, "People laugh at girls who are badly dressed" (22). So, she pretends to behave like a 'lady' though she doesn't want to become one. She expresses her lack of interest when Maudie praises her ladylike outlook. She says, "Oh God,' I said, 'who wants to look ladylike?" (10). Here, the idea of being a 'lady' is associated with the socially constructed behaviours for women.

The qualities of a lady are emphasised more in the novel. Anna says, "A lady always puts on her gloves before going into the street" (30). And a lady always tends to speak and behave in a decent manner. Anna's English stepmother Hester is the first person to introduce her to the restrictive norms of England that emphasises some stereotypic roles for women. Hester embodies the class ideologies and racism which is uprooted in English culture. Anna perceives Hester as an emblem of English culture. During her visit to Hester's place, she describes the physical features of her step-mother. She comments:

She had clear brown eyes which stuck out of her head if you looked at her sideways, and an English lady's voice with a sharp, cutting edge to it. Now that I've spoken you can hear that I'm a lady. I have spoken and I suppose you now realize that I'm an English gentlewoman. I have doubts about you. Speak up and I will place you at once. Speak up, for I fear the worst. That sort of voice. (50)

It shows Hester is more conscious about her mannerisms. She also tries to teach Anna to behave like a lady. However, Anna's cultural background makes the process rather difficult for Anna. Hester says, "I tried to teach you to talk like a lady and behave like a lady and not like a nigger and of course I couldn't do it" (56). Hester feels that she has fulfilled her duty by bringing Anna to England. It is because the people in England hold a view that England is a land of

opportunities. When Hester brings Anna to England, she advises Anna to adapt herself to the culture to lead a proper life. Hester believes that Anna can get a better education in England.

Hester as a typical English woman representing Britain, by exercising power over Anna's life. She voluntarily takes decisions and manipulate Anna into accepting them. She tells Anna, "you ought to have some sort of decent education if you were going to earn your living" (54). Here, she emphasises the civility which lies in the educational system of England. However, Anna's lack of manners and accents are the only things, which prevent her to become a part of English culture. She dismays about Anna's reclusiveness to English culture and her affinity to the Caribbean culture. So, she remarks:

...Impossible to get you away from the servants. That awful sing-song voice you had! Exactly like a nigger you talked – and still do. Exactly like that dreadful girl Francine. When you were jabbering away together in the pantry I never could tell which of you was speaking. But I did think when I brought you to England that I was giving you a real chance. (56)

Hester wants Anna to act and talk likes 'a lady.' Therefore, ladylikeness is also associated with proper accent of speaking. The proper language is emphasised by contrasting the language of the Caribbeans, which is termed as uncivilised. It delineates the foreign language from the civilised category. Being an outsider, Anna is lectured about the proper etiquette and mannerisms of 'a lady' by her friends and family throughout the novel. Likewise, the people around Anna push her to adapt into the socially approved image of herself in England.

Unlike Anna, despite being an outsider in the novel, Germaine refuses to convert her 'self' into an English woman. She says, "I wouldn't be an Englishwoman, for any money you

could give me or anything else.” At this point Vincent says, “Opportunity’s a fine thing” (70). The statement again insists the idea of ‘England’ as the centre of superior culture.

Culture has an effect on language too. The official language of Britain is English. However, England has several dialects. Further, the accents vary from one place to another in England. Accents are the social indicators to determine a person’s class. In England, different regions still have different accents. For instance, working-class people speak English with regional accents, whereas Middle-class people often speak RP (Received Pronunciation) the standard form of British pronunciation.

The people who belong to different parts of England have their own way of speaking English. Therefore, it is easy to identify the cultural background of a person through their accent. One of such famous accent referred in the novel is ‘cockney.’ The cockney dialect is spoken mostly in East London. Maudie speaks in cockney with the men whom she meets in the streets. However, the men speak very politely with the ladies which are considered as the proper means of communication.

In the twentieth-century England, having a good accent is considered important among classes. Likewise, it is undeniable that a persons’ working-class or regional accent becomes a social disadvantage at that time. It is required to possess a good accent to rise in the society. Even the working-class individuals coach themselves in speaking like the middle and the upper class in order to secure a job. For instance, G. B. Shaw’s *Pygmalion* is another literary example portraying the variation in English pronunciation.

The importance of pet-keeping has long history of association with the English culture. The pets are considered as stereotypes of wealth in English culture. Raising pets and displaying them in the society is an act of showing off their power and status, especially dogs. The practice

of pet-keeping in Victorian England is common among aristocratic class than in working class. The image of Hester stroking her pet Scamp by sitting in a long canvas chair refers to the practice of a lady carrying lapdogs in her arms and stroking it most of the time. She advises Anna, when Anna says that she hates dogs. She tells her, “Let me tell you that you’ll have a very unhappy life if you go on like that. People won’t like you. People in England will dislike you very much if you say things like that” (61). Here, Hester indicates the strong hold of cultural ethics on an individual.

The norms for appropriate behaviour articulated by the elite and the middle class are practically gender based. Anna is made aware of this gender bias when she and Maudie go out for a walk, they saw a man delivering religious discourse in a park. When Maudie laughs at the man, he starts to bawl back at them. He passes judgement on them though he knows nothing about them. Maudie feels offended and she tells Anna, “Insulting us just because we haven’t got a man with us. I know these people, they’re careful who they’re rude to” (42). It shows how individual working-women are abused in the public spaces which reinforces gender discrimination.

Religion is not given much importance in the novel. The holy institution of religion becomes the centre of rituals rather than a place for communal union. The act of attending prayers in churches is a regular practice among English people, particularly on Sundays. The churches are viewed as the centres of charity for the needy people. However, after the decline of British Empire, the church becomes the centre of hypocrisy where the rich are praised for their benevolence and the poor are taught of loyalty. This practice can be seen widely in post-colonial countries.

Anna refers to this kind of Sunday mass that she attends in the novel. The address goes like, “To the Memory of Doctor Charles Le Mesurier, the Poor of this island were Grateful for his Benevolence, the Rich Rewarded his Industry and Skill” (37). Anna's reference to the Royal family in the church hints about the monarchs, who rules England. It is because the Queen is the head of the churches in England. She is the power who appoints the bishop and archbishop of England.

Among the places where Anna goes around in parts of London, the hotels, the bars and clubs are worth mentioning. The clubs are an important part of British life. The English people get acquainted with each other in these kinds of public spaces. On their first date, Walter invites Anna to dinner at one of an ‘awfully swanky club’ in London. Besides, visiting ‘swanky’ clubs is considered as a way of showing up their wealth. The working-class are restricted to enter these kinds of clubs which is made for ‘elite’ class.

Recreation is a very important cultural component of life. The method of recreation also tells about a community. The recreational activities of the working-class individuals are – watching television, playing Bingo at Bingo halls and going to a local pub where they have drinks, play darts, snooker and cards, enjoy karaoke. In fact, it is very important for the working-class individuals as they toil all through the day, they become edgy and irritant. They look for an outlet to vent out their feelings. Anna goes out with her friends in order to break the boredom of her life.

Another recreational activity is sport. In the novel, *Voyage in the dark*, the class differences are established through the sports people choose to watch and play. The working-class people’s sports are football and boxing, while among the middle classes, swimming, walking, mountain climbing, sailing, football, rugby, cricket, tennis and golf are the popular

sports activities. It is the middle class who played a greater number of different sports at that time.

The food constitutes the culture too. The typical English breakfast consists of eggs, bacon, sausages, fried bread, baked beans and mushrooms. Anna is offered this kind of typical breakfast by her landladies in the novel. The vegetables grown in England, like potatoes, carrots, peas, cabbages and onions also find a place in English breakfast. Though, for an immigrant like Anna, the British cuisine like its landscape, is monotonous in nature. Anna finds no difference in its flavour. In fact, she finds no flavour in their food habits. During her visit to Hester she remarks that the stew tastes of nothing at all. She comments,

The stew tasted of nothing at all. Everybody took one mouthful and then showered salt and sauce out of a bottle on to it. Everybody did this mechanically, without a change of expression, so that you saw they knew it would taste of nothing. If it had tasted of anything they would have suspected it. (50)

In fact, there is a trace of English food habits seen in former colonies, which is introduced by the colonisers at the time of their rule. When Anna describes about the Market Street in West Indies she makes a reference that the black women used to sell Salt beef and sardines in their basket. This kind of food belongs to English culture and it emphasises the affiliation of English mores with other culture.

The cultural mores of England can be found in several instances in the novel. For instance, while paying visit to someone's home, people used to buy some gifts like a bottle of wine and bunch of flowers to them. In the novel, Walter sends a bunch of violets as a gift to Anna. Secondly, when it comes to communication in early twentieth century, Walter and Anna communicates mostly through letters in the novel. Sending letters, telegram and telephoning are

the only means of communication in England at that time. For instance, the news of decreasing affection of Walter comes to Anna not through him directly but through a letter from his cousin Vincent Jeffries.

Besides, shopping and visiting clubs, one of the most favourite pastimes found among English people is going to theatres. Ethel suggests Anna to come along with her to theatre for a change. Another leisurely activity found among the British people is their habit of drinking tea in the afternoon. When Anna pays visit to Ethel's place, Ethel tells her that she is just having some tea and asks her to join.

Anna feels that the people in England possess animal instincts which reveal their nature. The corruptive nature of the English people is compared with that of woodlice. The symbolism of termites is that they are group of colonial insects which feed upon natural resources for food. Similarly, the Europeans colonise other countries to exploit their resources. Anna compares the swarming of woodlice with the rushing of thousands of white people. Similarly, the impermanency of her relationship with Walter is paralleled with the image of lovers who are compared with the beetles that is clinging to the railings. Again, Anna's reference to her uncle's 'false teeth' and Vincent's letter has some connection in terms of responsibility over Anna. The false teeth indicate Uncle Bo's negligence after her father's death and Walter's abrupt renunciation of responsibilities towards Anna.

The patriarchal hold of England is explicit in the names of some places referred in the novel. For Instance, Duke Street and Lord Street are named after men's possession at that time. The restricted atmosphere of 'respectable' England could be said to symbolise masculinity. The restraining atmosphere of England is further repressed by the presence of images inside the rooms which ultimately conveys the codes of living to Anna. It oppresses human actions and

emphasises the need for control over desire. As a result, Anna feels ashamed of her reaction during her sexual intercourse with Walter. She feels like, “When he kisses me, shivers run up my back. I am hopeless, resigned, utterly happy. Is that me? I am bad, not good any longer, bad” (49). Thus, by confirming to the codes of England, the real self is rather manipulated due to approved societal structures.

The presence of the portrait ‘Cherry Ripe’ in Anna’s room is significant because it recalls the wishes of Anna’s family that she should embody the positive attributes of English culture just like the girl in the portrait. ‘Cherry Ripe’ is just one of many advertisements and pictures referred throughout the novel that represent the culture to which Anna is supposed to aspire to belong and the portrait is popular in homes across England. Similarly, the biscuit advertisement reads as ‘fresh in the tropics as in the motherland’ which brings back Anna’s West Indian memories. The term ‘fresh’ is associated with Anna’s family’s expectation that she wears wool stockings in the Dominican Summer heat without sweating. Anna embodies this cultural instinct and she is conscious about it. She says:

While you are carefully putting on your gloves you begin to perspire and you feel the perspiration trickling down under your arms. The thought of having a wet patch underneath your arms – a disgusting and a disgraceful thing happen to a lady – makes you very miserable. (36)

An outsider feels difficult to adapt to the English ways. The perception of England from an outsider’s view is clearly expressed in the poem written by an anonymous man who resides before Anna in one of her room. It mocks the nature of English people, the pallid landscape and the socially constructed etiquettes in England:

‘Horse faces, faces like horses,

And grey streets, where old men wail unnoticed
Prayers to an ignoble God.
There the butcher's shop stinks to the leaded sky;
There the fish shop stinks differently, but worse.
And so on, and so on.'
Then there were a lot of dots. And then it went on:
'But where are they –
The cool arms, white as alabaster?'
'Loathsome London, vile and stinking hole...' (41)

Being an immigrant, Anna is unable to make sense of her identity in England where she has to bear with the hostile landlords, dreadful weather and monotonous landscape and above all self-centred people. Over the course of the novel, Anna is made aware of the racism, sexism, and classism which lie under the ordered and respectable surface of British culture. According to her, it is a world that degrades her in almost in all areas of her life.

The journey that Anna undertakes in England is a purposeless exploration of self in another culture. Therefore, the Voyage that Anna takes to survive in England is represented by her constant displacement from one place to another. In England, Anna has gone through several friendships and she has travelled many places, however her life is perpetually moving in a circle without any change like the atmosphere of England. Though, English culture is praised for its glories, the biased cultural norms and the restraining social order gives a despotic image to the culture. The ethnographical study of English culture ultimately conveys its exercises of imperial power within their own territory.

Chapter IV

Conclusion

“No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive”

Mahatma Gandhi.

The culture is an amalgamation of so many different elements like history, art, cuisine, language along with some striking aspects. It forms the basic foundation of our life and behaviour. Therefore, studying any culture gives accounts of the overall way of life of a group of individuals. Every society has a different culture, which gives it an identity and uniqueness. The different cultures of the world are the result of various human civilizations, which is determined on the basis of each nation's core beliefs and traditions.

When different societies come into contact with each other, they adopt some aspects of other cultures and it leads to a cultural change. Moreover, long-term exposure to different cultures leads to the exchange of certain cultural aspects. Therefore, culture is cumulative and dynamic. It is undeniable fact that the culture of any particular group is constantly evolving and undergoing slow changes.

Migration and globalisation are the major factors that lead to mixing of cultures. When individuals from different parts of the world come together, they influence each other effectively as well as each other's cultures. These factors contribute to the formation of a multicultural society and it also leads to the development of new cultures. Hence, all cultures change in time although their rate of change varies. It is often seen that the politically or economically stronger countries influence cultures in other parts of the world,

and lead to social changes worldwide. Colonisation is considered as the biggest conquest that has ever happened in history and has made a huge impact around the world.

As a result of colonisation, a new culture called 'Creole culture' is developed in Commonwealth countries. It is one of the most diverse and most vibrant cultures to have developed from the pre-twentieth century. It can be defined as a mixture of almost all cultures around the world. It is because when two communities are exposed to each other, usually the culture of the predominant community influences the individuals who live in subordinate level of the society.

The Creoles are born out of sexual domination of a powerful group over the subservient people. They are not claimed as the heirs of both groups and they are racially discriminated. As a result, the Creoles are unable to place their identity and, have emerged as an individual group. In Creole culture, the traces of European, French and African influences can be found. Therefore, being a Creole means having a multiple identity. These mixed-race individuals have emerged as an individual ethnic group who occupy a middle ground between Whites and enslaved Blacks.

An Ethnographic study of any culture captures the society as a whole. The change in culture can be identified with the change in their beliefs, customs, traditions, fashion and lifestyle. In chapter two, the intermingling of West Indian culture and English culture is explicitly examined through the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The food habits, the landscape of the former culture influences the other. At the same time, it reciprocates by resisting the ideologies of the latter culture, which is also discussed. The discretion in West Indian culture lies in contrary with the refined ideas of English culture. Whereas, in chapter three, paradoxically, the influence of English culture over the other is examined through the

novel *Voyage in the Dark*. It shows how the Native ideologies habits are rejected as a whole in England. However, the need for survival forces the West Indian protagonist to embrace the English cultural ideologies.

In Rhys's novels, the psychological division is made in the self-image of her heroines. Their self is rather split into two; social self and the private interior self. The social self is governed by the cultural pre-occupations about their identity which is determined by their habits. It is because a person's cultural background has a major role to sustain and gain social support. One's private self is rather governed by one's desire which is often suppressed by the codes of society they live in. Annette for instance, becomes one whose self is split into two because of the unfortunate series of events happened in her life. She retreats into madness after Pierre's death. Her sufferings are misunderstood with 'madness' in the novel. Besides, her daughter Antoinette is claimed to have inherited this 'madness' from her mother.

In the novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the Creoles are considered 'White' only in their appearance. However, they are degraded by the Europeans due to their sexual relationship with the slaves. Besides, the slaves reciprocate the cruelty of the Creole slave owners by isolating them from the locality they live in. Likewise, the Creoles are left into an ambiguous position. Due to the impact of colonisation, the 'White privilege' is widespread in the attitude of the individuals. In contradiction, though the Creoles are partially English they are not allowed to enjoy the privileges of 'White.'

Besides, the Creoles are the products of fusion between the indigenous Native culture and materialistic European culture. They often represent these two cultures or try to associate or build a bridge between these two cultures. It is an irony that Antoinette uses

‘Obeah’ to make her rational husband to fall in love with her again. It expresses her desire to participate in the modernist culture without hiding her identity.

The Creoles as a whole are refused any kind of civil and property rights. As a result, poverty and suffering becomes consistent throughout their life. This life-driving force turns them into the lonely and powerless beings. As a result, these women rely upon their sexual power to attract men, which facilitates them to gain some economical support from the men. In the novel, *Voyage in the Dark*, the impact of urbanisation on Anna forces her to satisfy her material goals. At the same time, she is not allowed to misuse her freedom in an immoral way, which is strictly restricted in Christianity. Her survival in an alien land becomes difficult due to her in-between cultural position. In Western societies, women make sense of themselves by serving men’s carnal desires. The superficiality of gender relationships and ideologies of Western culture contradicts their understanding of love between man and woman. It makes the heroine of Jean Rhys to estrange herself from the society.

The indigenous Native culture restricts itself against progress. It is not exposed to the material aspects of the modern world. The Natives reject the idea that progress is natural to man. In the novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is evident that the former slaves resent the existing legal order of Europeans which infuses exile and physical punishment. The colonists have attempted to exploit the Native culture by instilling racist doctrines, which gives authority to the colonists over Native culture. Their efforts to remove the Natives’ identity in terms of development is collapsed due to the Natives’ stronghold to superstitions.

According to the Natives, '*Obeah*' gives the power to protect themselves from their enemies. It is more like a threat which creates mental fear among individuals to go against norms. These superstitions become a part of the Natives identity. Though, this kind of practices are opposed in the Modern societies, it is still carried out in many parts of the world. These ritualistic acts are carried out to sustain their cultural characteristics which are fundamentals to their culture.

The Natives refuse anything which is the products of modernity. Besides, the Natives in order to sustain their identity, retained and transformed African customs and beliefs by developing music, songs and stories. The moral values are also inculcated through proverbs and folk-tales. They have also developed a distinctly Afro-Caribbean form of Christianity, as opposed to the colonialists' conventional European style of worship.

Before the arrival of Europeans, the Natives had their own societies. The Arawaks and the Caribs are the original inhabitants of the island. The Arawaks welcomed the arrival of Europeans into their region, unaware of their intention. However, the Caribs resisted against the settling of Europeans in their territories. The colonists make use of the Natives who favoured their stay in the island by employing them to work in the fields and mines in the name of development. Besides, the Natives are affected by European diseases like measles and flu which is brought into the island by the colonists. Likewise, the colonists exploited their island through war, disease, exploitation and racial absorption.

Culture influences occupation of an individual or a particular group in the society. The different occupational groups in England are due to the division of labour between classes. The class is determined by the status and economy of an individual in the society. The professions of Middle class are always looked upon in the society. They hold up

professions like, Doctors, Lawyers, Teachers, Clerks, Mechanics and successful Merchants. The Middle class are provided with proper education to become successful in their personal and social life.

However, life has been hard for the working-class at the beginning of the twentieth century. The structure of the labour for the working class itself has been biased. The working-class men and women are made to do physical labour to earn their living. They have no choice about their profession because they have just enough money for food, rent, fuel and clothes and they could not spare money for their education. Above all they are unable to afford an adequate diet for themselves. Therefore, the main cause of poverty among working-class is due to low wages and it becomes an inseparable element in the lifestyle of the working class.

The idea of a family is inherited from its culture. The families are institutions of care and the level varies across cultures and its function changes over time. The structure of family in the nineteenth century England consists of the Father, who is the head of the family and his wife and children respect him and obey him. The father economically supports his family and the mother involves her in household activities and takes up the responsibility of looking after their children. Besides, a married woman is not allowed to go for a job and the property of the wife is claimed by her husband. Therefore, a married woman is totally under the control of her husband. This family system is a big disadvantage for the homeless individuals who are deprived of mental and economic support from the society.

The novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark* have further scope for study. In fact, all the works of Jean Rhys have great scope of research. A postcolonial study of

Jean Rhys' novels can be carried out. Further, a Post World War study is also possible in both the novels. The works of Jean Rhys can be studied in the light of new historicism, ecofeminism, and modernism.

The civilization of human race is fuelled by the cultures – a set of values and habits. In fact, the term, 'a cultured individual' is used to mean 'a refined individual.' It is evident that a culture is prone to changes. It is transient. Consequently, an Ethnographic study is most essential to record and preserve the cultural relics. It interrogates the factors that manipulates any culture when it is exposed to changes due to external factors over time. The culture which adapts itself to these changes evolves over time whereas the cultures which is confined in nature extinct gradually.

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