

**A STUDY OF DISPLACEMENT AND VICTIMIZATION IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF JEAN RHYS****Dr. BHAGAVATHI**

Assistant Professor

RBVRR Women's College

Narayanguda

Hyderabad

drbhagavathiputcha@gmail.com

Abstract

Women writers from the English-speaking Caribbean, those who were born and grew up in the former British colonies in the West Indies live in societies of extreme diversity of both European and African cultures. The insecurity in human relationship, particularly between woman and man, woman and woman as well as the uneasiness about personal identity are the most common concerns of Jean Rhys's novels. Overcoming these obstacles, Jean Rhys has created characters who are self-supporting and who have strength and endurance. The characters struggle and survive because of their respect for life. Jean Rhys's fiction is an exploration of the disempowerment of women at the hands of the male oppressors and this victimization serves to make them self-conscious in their roles.

Key words: Jean Rhys, Feminism, European and African cultures, insecurity, Endurance, survival.

Introduction

Women writers from the English speaking Caribbean live in societies of extreme diversity, undergo insecurity in relations, uneasiness about personal identity and search for the definiteness of life. These issues became the most common concerns and themes of the prominent women writers like Phyllis Shand Allfrey (Dominica), Zee Edgell (Belize), Merle Hodge (Trinidad), Jamaica Kincaid (Antigua), Paule Marshall (Barbados), Jean Rhys (Dominica), Sylvia Wynter (Jamaica). Jean Rhys is one of the most important writers of the Caribbean Literature. Rhys was born in Dominica in 1890. She was named Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams. Her mother was white Creole of Scottish ancestry a Lokhart and her father was Welsh and had come to Dominica in 1881, to practice medicine. Most of the Dominican people are of African descent and had in 1890, the year of Rhys's birth, still vivid memories of the slavery, which had ended in 1834. Rhys comes to England in 1907, where she lived until the end of the First World War. In 1919, she moved to Europe, marrying Jean Lenglet. Rhys's movement from Dominica to England and Europe from the colonial margins to the metropolitan centre, has been described by her fellow Caribbean expatriate, V. S. Naipaul, as both a relocation and a dislocation, effecting a cultural and psychological break in Rhys's life.

Setting her fiction within the psychological realism of woman's emotions, Jean Rhys explores and evaluates the intimate rendering of the complex social frustrations of undervalued, unrecognized and lonely women. All her novels revolve around women protagonists who silently live in their accepted roles that are imposed upon them by the society. Critics have viewed Jean Rhys's fiction as an exploration of the empowerment of the women in the hands of male oppressors. Dominica is also of central importance in reading Rhys's life and work. Her childhood was in the small white community of Dominica, but nevertheless gave her

experience of different races (black, white, mixed, Carib), languages and cultures. But as a white West Indian, Rhys spent most of her wandering life in Great Britain and other European countries. Rhys's movement from Dominica to England and Europe from the colonial margins to the metropolitan centre has been described by her fellow Caribbean expatriate, V.S Naipaul, as both "relocation and a dislocation, affecting a cultural and psychological break in Rhys's life". Such a sense of fracture also characterizes the life and works of Jean Rhys. Breaking finite limits and authoritarian formulae, Jean Rhys coins a new idiom, a rhetoric of feminine, an entirely a new way of writing about the female characters and their struggles to live in the society.

The theme of displacement:-

After leaving Mr. Mackenzie, Jean Rhys's second novel, chronicles the failures of a forty-year-old divorcee to rediscover the value of human engagement. Living an enclosed and restricted existence, the protagonist simultaneously fears and desires companionship and her reckless behavior functions as a response to male dominated interaction between the sexes. The central figure of this novel is Julia Martin, who is thirty three years old, who leads the life of a schizophrenic. Her life is filled with despair and rejection. Rejected by the title character, Julia leaves Paris for London, where she visits her sister Norah and enters into a failed relationship with Mr. Horsfield. Norah's role as the dutiful caretaker for their dying mother is contrasted with Julia's reckless drinking promiscuity. Returning to Paris, Julia finally confronts Mr. Mackenzie whose cruelty towards her reflects the contemptible status of women in a patriarchal society. Through a series of painful experiences, Julia gradually loses confidence in her and begins to accept the fact that she is ageing. At the age of thirty-eight, she reacts to the prospect of ageing by developing an obsessive-compulsive neurosis. In the character of Mackenzie, the true self is to be found beneath his posture as a respectable gentleman. The mask of respectability serves to hide a potentially destructive vulnerability. It is through the character of Mr. Mackenzie that Rhys develops a major theme. That is, the seeds of man's essential hatred and fear of woman lie in the financial and emotional demands which she makes upon him. In the end Mackenzie feels that she is a dangerous person and hence she does not deserve any pity.

After leaving Mackenzie, Julia is observed by Mr. Horsfield, an Englishman, vacationing in Paris, who soon becomes Mackenzie's successor and who almost immediately provides Julia with the same sum that she thrown away. The character of Horsfield has a great deal of Leslie in him. Leslie was Jean Rhys's husband and her publisher, who gave the protection care she needed, although Horsfield is shown as having only a short-lived relationship with Julia. Sooner he acts like Mackenzie, when he realizes the dangers of such relations with Julia, he frees himself of her and leaves her.

The former lover W. Neil James is a predecessor of Mackenzie and is obvious in his age, his attitude and his affluence. For Neil, money is a way of securing his emotional peace and distance from Julia. For Julia, James represents the system which corrupts and the sex which exploits, the male capitalist who has created her reality, who controls her vision of herself. As Julia come to London, she finds her mother dead, her sister Norah suddenly betrayed by life. She is faced with the reality of having fed with the drug of praise and the loss of her youth. Julia's trip to London from Paris, is more of a journey in time than in space. She wishes to get back in



touch with an old lover, her sister, her mother, her uncle, her childhood and so on. But her mother's death leaves a gap beyond repair, the gap that can never be filled. She is left with disoriented present, present that cannot really take shape. She is totally dejected after leaving her lovers, and after facing much turbulence, found her life with no hope.

By the end of the novel, she realizes the nothingness that which is pervading her life throughout. More specifically, she knows that her role in her family is nothing; that her dreams of her first love were nothing; that her hopes for her next affair have already come to nothing. Nothingness has occupied more space in her life than.

Theme of Victimization

Voyage in the Dark, another novel of Jean Rhys, was composed from exercise book series kept by her when she lived the desolate life of a chorus girl touring minor theatres in England. When Rhys was very young, living as an impoverished chorus girl in England, Jean Rhys fell in love with an older man, a lower-rung aristocrat with whom she had a brief, somewhat one-sided intense affair. When he broke it off, she was disconsolate; when he subsequently offered to provide her with a weekly stipend until she could support herself, she was doubly distraught. In her emotional turmoil, she impulsively bought four school girl notebooks and some pens and in a kind of white heat, spent days pouring the story of her great love and its demise onto the pages.

In the novel, Anna's life after Walter leaves her is precipitously downhill. In an effort to preserve her dignity, she drops out of sight so that Walter cannot send her any money. But then she gives into despair, shuffles from one dreary London bed-shit to another and finally ends up sharing a flat with an older woman, a self-styled masseuse who sets her up as a manicurist for men, with the suggestion that she might offer clients a little extracurricular service to earn additional cash. The depiction of Anna's alienation in England begins and for Anna, going to England is not just going to another country, but rather an experience of being born again. The feeling of rebirth gives her a kind of solace to the already broken heart and tries to patch them up by restarting her life.

It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything i had ever known. it was almostlike being born again, the colors were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you right down inside yourself was different.....(p1)

While Anna stops short of such cynical self-debasement, she does give into a string of men she meets through her chorus friends as well as others whom she picks up on the street. She sleepwalks or drinks her way through the encounters, numbed to emotion, drained of hope. The theme of exile and inner homelessness emerges more prominently in this novel, as Anna who finds temporary security in an affair with an older English man, and casted off by him, finally descends into a vagabond existence and prostitution, resulting in life-threatening abortion. She is warned by her friend Maudie, older and also in Vaudeville, she makes the tragic mistake.

Don't get sappy about him (Maudie) said. That's fatal. The thing with men is to get Everything you can out of them and not care a damn (P38)



Anna wanders through a world of men and rented rooms to find a right space of her own. Nothing assuages her grief. She is in search of a shelter which gives her a permanent identity but in vain. There is a contemporary sense of alienation—a distance and detachment from any social mosaic, except that the men and the money are the social mosaic. Even there is no hope at all for survival, just going on and on, the same but poorer and older. The journey continues in search.

Conclusion

Jean Rhys's female characters have a divided consciousness and a self-destructive attitude. The apparent reason for male dislike of women in Rhys's fiction is the connection between money and gender. Money seems to make her women the passive property of their lovers creating a humiliating bond. None of them has the belief that she owns herself or that she could work for some independence. They feel lost and betrayed yet hopeful that the right male will rescue them; on the other hand, they realize that their submissiveness and passivity are essentially wrong, even though they feel powerless to change their situation. They are displaced and victimized in the hands of the male oppressors.

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