CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION

The five preceding chapters were devoted to the existentialist analysis of Rhys’s novels. Following the themes proposed by the existentialists, the study endeavoured to investigate into the nature of existential struggle confronted by each one of Rhys’s protagonists. The last chapter of the thesis proposes to gather up the various threads and to establish, by way of conclusion, the recognition of Rhys’s protagonists as strong, real and existing human beings worthy of appreciation and respect. In the first place, the conclusion focuses on the various themes recommenced by the existentialist thinkers. In the following paragraphs the major existential themes such as subjectivity, Being and Becoming, freedom of choice, the other, passion, suffering, existential anguish, struggle for human dignity, and self-realization are considered in brief. In the second place, attention is devoted to the existential predicament faced by Rhys’s characters. This chapter begins with a short summary of what has already been said in the seven preceding chapters and it proposes to focus attention on Rhys’s protagonists’ struggle for identity, authenticity, and self-realization. This chapter intends to point out that Rhys’s protagonists are unique individuals capable of establishing their own universe independent of the rest of humanity through a proud exercise of the free-will, self-discipline and self-involvement. The principal objective of this chapter is to present Rhys’s specific view of human existence as revealed in her characters’ existential pre-occupations and engagements.
Existentialism, a philosophical tendency emphasizing individual existence, freedom, choice, and self-transcendence, emerged in the nineteenth century in the writings of Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, and Jean Paul Sartre. Existentialism is a term applied to a group of attitudes current to philosophical and literary thoughts during and after World War II. Because of the diversity of themes and positions associated with Existentialism, the term is impossible to define precisely. Any attempt to define the term remains futile apparently because Existentialism is not an object of scientific investigation; but it is strictly a philosophical tendency concerned with man and his profoundly personal experiences. The term ‘Existentialism’ cannot be defined in the sense that it is a philosophy of man, and man, by his very nature, is indefinable. Certain themes common to nearly all existentialist writers can, however, be identified. The term itself suggests one major theme: the emphasis on concrete individual existence and consequently, on subjectivity, freedom of choice, suffering, self-assertion, individual dignity and authenticity. Existentialism is, as Kierkegaard asserts, a philosophy capable of being lived precisely because it focuses on the individual’s own life, his emotions, passions, human values, experiences and his existential quandaries. The existentialist thinkers argue that existence is a reality in which the individual is personally and passionately involved to find the essence or meaning of his ‘being.’ The first chapter of the thesis attempted to express that the thought and concept of Existentialism has an enormous
and profound philosophical significance, for it is in essence a philosophy of man.

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, the acknowledged father of Existentialism, contends that it is neither possible nor desirable to define or think of the reality of human condition systematically. Kierkegaard, who was the first writer to call himself existential, revolted against the entire Platonic tradition which maintained that the essence was prior to existence. Kierkegaard in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* launched a legitimate attack against Hegelian and Platonic tradition by way of focusing on the irreducibility of the subjective, personal dimensions of human life. Existentialism is a rejection of all purely obscure and abstract Platonic thinking, and of objectivity and scientific thought. It is, in short, a rejection of the omnipotence of reason. The existentialist thinkers hold that objectivity is the worst of all illusions, for human life is neither form nor matter; it is rather the process of transforming ‘potentiality’ into ‘actuality’ or ‘authenticity’. It is in the name of human dignity that the existentialist writers refuse to regard man as an object of scientific investigation.

The existential philosophy attempts to know man in totality by way of eliminating the illusions of objective scientific truth. The existential thinkers take up ‘pure subjectivity’ as the basis of their philosophical foundations. All existentialists have followed Kierkegaard in emphasizing the significance of passionate individual action in deciding questions of existence and morality. They have insisted, accordingly, that personal experiences and acting on one’s own impulses and convictions are essential
Existentialism is basically a philosophy of unbound hope and optimism, for it persuades man to action by teaching him that he can become what he intends to become. For the existentialists, the commanding value in life is the passionate involvement in the acts of self-realization and re-affirmation of life. Existentialism, with its stress on subjectivity and individuality, is a pre-dominantly liberal philosophy with a strong belief in human action and subjective truth. The existentialist thinkers concentrate on a sense of human dignity to be realized by rigorous self-discipline and active self-involvement in the act of existence. Sartre in his *Existentialism and Human Emotions* stresses on the significance of action and self-involvement. He writes: "... man's destiny is within himself; ..... Action is the only thing that enables a man to live. Consequently, we are dealing here with an ethics of action and involvement." The existentialists also recommend an energetic and enthusiastic pursuit of independence and passion and assertion of individuality through a proud exercise of human will. The originality of the existential doctrine lies primarily in the existentialists' emphasis upon the human condition and in their sensitivity to certain human values to which they can attach themselves. The existentialists claim to have an adequate understanding of the human situations in which individuals are inevitably plunged with no one to help or guide them except themselves. That man is personally responsible for what he is, what he does, and what he becomes; that man chooses his values and principles and defines himself and may, therefore, desire to be a different person – this is the essence of the existential philosophy. Existentialism is made up of individual dignity,
exclusion of the objective world, quest for love, happiness, freedom and self-protection, and free choices made intentionally, continual desire for self-enhancement, and difficulties in achieving human dignity and authenticity. The existentialist thinkers maintain that the individual is condemned to alienation which is an inevitable reality of his situation, and that he has to depend solely on his own actions for self-fulfillment.

According to the existential philosophers, subjectivity is not a truth that 'I have,' but a truth that 'I am.' Truth is subjectivity, inwardness, active freedom and eternal becoming where as the objective world is an illusion, a mere shadow, deceiving the concrete subjects. Subjective truth, asserts Soren Kierkegaard, is creativity which is experienced by the individual in his progressively maturing situation. To exist, Kierkegaard tells us, is to participate in the process of attaining the subjective truth; the abstract does not exist; and to be the individual is to choose for oneself freely. Existence is, thus, the moment of free and passionate decisions consciously made to achieve authenticity and self-realization. The existentialist thinkers focus more on subjectivity than anything else because the objective world, they think, is unreal, illusory, and misleading. They cannot adopt the stand point of the whole, for they believe in the existence of the individual human being, not in humanity that is abstract. In her unfinished autobiography, Smile, Please Rhys explicitly states that she believes in human love, but not in humanity. Sartre repeatedly declared that the other is the hell, the unreal, threatening my existence, and Kierkegaard describes the other as 'a monstrous nothing.'
For Kierkegaard and his followers, existence is the process in which an individual’s passion for subjective personal truth becomes most intense resulting in the realization of his own ‘subjectivity’ or ‘inwardness.’ Subjectivity is, therefore, what a man is required to be, in order that he may be a subject proper. According to the existentialists, man is not a mere physiological structure of scientific inquiry; but he is a concrete and conscious existent with a continual passion for self-transcendence. The existentialist contention is: every human being is a subject par excellence and not merely an object of knowledge; man is not a mere logical concept, but a special private individual with all his peculiarities and potentialities. They assert that each individual has his own ways of defining his subjectivity and has his own peculiar devices and existential strategies of making his own essence. The essence of the human life is existence. Man first exists and then becomes what he wants to become; essence is not created by God. It is rather earned by the existent involved in the act of living. ‘Existence precedes essence’ is, therefore, the foundation of Existentialism.

Existence is the act of translating ‘potentiality’ into ‘actuality.’ It is the creative process of making one’s own essence, of defining one’s own individuality, and of Becoming what one wants to become. Man is always in the making and there is nobody to guide or help him except his own free-will and choices that determine the nature of his existence. Existence, according to Kierkegaard, is a movement or a continuous process of constant Becoming. Man has to actively participate in the act of living and has to project himself towards a better future. The concept of ‘projection’
is of extremely wide extension. It involves free-choices, knowing, perceiving, feeling, planning a future, acting and struggle for achieving ‘essence’ or meaning of life.

The existentialists maintain that man is not responsible for his coming into being; yet he alone is responsible for making up what he actually is. No man is born with a ready-made essence; he has to make it himself by consciously plunging into the act of living. Existence is neither form nor matter; it is rather the act of transforming ‘potentiality’ into ‘actuality.’ The capacity inherent in some one to become what he is not at present is its ‘potentiality,’ and ‘actuality’ is what the existent originally is. And between ‘potentiality’ and ‘actuality’ there is a passage—the process of Becoming. This process of ‘Becoming’ is at the heart of the existential philosophy. Swami Vivekananda in his *Paper on Hinduism* presented at Chicago also emphasizes the significance of Becoming. He spoke:

> The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realizing— not in believing, but in being and becoming.  

Karl Jaspers considers man as ‘a projection,’ because Being is always in the creative process, is always in the ‘flight.’ According to Sartre, Becoming is the process of proving one’s Being. In his philosophical writings, Sartre upholds the supremacy and primary of Being [existence] over Becoming [essence] and asserts that man first has to exist in order to prove his essence by participating in the process of Becoming. The existentialists do not consider man as an end because he is always in the making.
Sartre’s declaration that man is condemned to freedom is central to the existential philosophical writing. Freedom of choice is perhaps the most prominent theme in the philosophy of Existentialism. Humanity’s primary distinction, in the views of most existential thinkers, is the freedom to choose. Choice is central to human experiences and existence, and it is inescapable; even the refusal to choose is a conscious choice. According to the existentialists, freedom of choice implies responsibility and commitment. Individual human beings are free to choose their own direction, and therefore, they are conscious of the risk and responsibility involved in the act of choosing. For the existentialists, freedom of choice is the supreme value of human existence. The existentialists stress the importance of the anguish of freedom, which means an individual’s anguish over the fact that one must choose. In sartrean term, the consciousness or anguish of freedom is the means by which the external world dissolves and ‘being-in-itself’ is revealed. The anguish of freedom arises only with the realization that one must always decide for oneself and that any effort to shift the burden of responsibility upon others is necessarily humiliating and self-defeating. It is only by making choices that an individual can hope to define his position in the world, and thus, achieve admiration and dignity.

In the writing of the existential thinkers, freedom signifies an act of creation, transformation, and responsibility. Antoinette’s flight into the flames in Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* is her conscious choice as she turns inward in order to transcend the given situation. Antoinette’s leap into the fire is viewed as a clearly positive and creative act of transformation.
Existentialism is not an escape into quietism or escapism, as many critics imagine, but it inspires the individual to undertake conscious actions and self-commitments. It is basically an optimistic philosophy that inspires man to act by teaching him that there is no possibility of his survival except by making decisions and choices. In short, it can be said that Existentialism defines man only in his relationship to involvements and commitments. Heidegger and Jaspers think that the act of choosing is so vital and central to human existence and that the human reality can be transcended only by making conscious choices. A man exists by being conscious that he exists and he becomes conscious of his existence by being conscious of the responsibility of choosing. The existentialist thinkers concentrate on intensifying consciousness and commit the individual to the acts of making choices that will engage his total mental and emotional energies.

Though Kierkegaard and Heidegger condemn the crowd as a monster and an illusion, the other existential thinkers like Jaspers and Marcel acknowledge the existence of the others. The early existentialists believed that the other is a constant threat to the individual’s existence, but the later existential thinkers focussed on the significance of reconciliation and inter-personal human relationships. The theme of human relationships has once again started engaging the attention of the existential philosophers who had, for a short interval, abandoned this most precious aspect of human existence. Sartre, for instance, in his *Being and Nothingness* describes the human situation in relation to hopes, plans, aspirations, passion, desires and wishes. The existentialists do recognize the inevitable
opposition between the individual and the other; they also acknowledge that the reality of human relationships is conflict and not co-operation. Kierkegaard describes the other as 'a monstrous nothing' and as an abstraction, an obstacle in the assertion of the individual's personality. The existentialists unambiguously talk about the 'separateness' of worlds in which individuals live — the separateness that ultimately leads to physical and psychological alienation of individuals.

My original fall, says Sartre, is the existence of the other. But Karl Jaspers argues that the individual alone cannot become human by himself and that self-being is real only when in communication with the other human beings. It is only in communication with the other that my real 'self' is revealed, says Jaspers. One of the most prominent features of the twentieth century existentialist philosophers is their growing preoccupation with the problem of human relationships. Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, for instance, believe that harmonious interpersonal relationships can be established between individuals. According to Jaspers, man preserves his identity by getting involved in both outward social activities and inward mental activities that together make up his essence. In his philosophical work *Reason and Existence* Jaspers strongly affirms the existence of the objective world. In his *Existence and Being*, Martin Heidegger concentrates on the position of the individual in the whole scheme of the universe. Heidegger, like Kierkegaard, does not denounce the crowd as inconsequential or unreal. Heidegger thinks that man is not a being condemned to isolation, but he is a 'being-in-the-world.' Heidegger believes that man is open to being— the beings of the other people.
Heidegger's *Existence and Being* is, thus, a warm acceptance and recognition of the concept of inter-subjectivity. Jaspers in his *Man in the Modern Age* describes the individual as 'a situational being' – this recognition of the other shows Jaspers' concrete affirmation of the reality of the external world. Marcel looks upon the presence of the other in 'my' life as a working hypothesis. It can, thus, be concluded that the views of the existential thinkers on human relationships radically differ. The early existentialist philosophers denounced the other as mere 'obstacle', depriving the individual of his environment and individuality, while the others think that man can achieve his essence or authenticity only through meaningful interpersonal communication. It is to be noted here that all the Rhysian characters long for the warmth of the human touch; but conflict is at the core of their relationships. Rhys's protagonists are condemned to alienation. The other's hostility and inhumane attitudes, social disorder, and viciousness of institutions damage their sensitivity, forcing them into the realm of consciousness.

The existentialist thinkers maintain that the pursuit for peace, freedom, and happiness is the goal of an ordinary man. This pursuit, for the existentialists, includes a perpetual quest for identity, meaning, authenticity, transcendence and self-realization. This quest is not free from dread, anguish and suffering, which are the inseparable aspects of the human condition. For the existentialists, it is impossible to think of human existence without anguish and suffering. The search for the subjective truth and authenticity cannot be pushed forward without a feeling of general apprehension, dread, and anxiety. The twentieth century German
philosopher Martin Heidegger believes that anxiety leads to the individual’s confrontation with nothingness and with the fear of the impossibility of finding ultimate justification for the human life. The originality of the existentialist writers lays primarily in their sensitivity to certain human values like passion, intensity, suffering, anguish etc. The existentialists boldly depict the bloody, darker side of the human life, for they believe that the tragic sense of life leads the individual to value salvation. The existentialists reaffirm the values of life while boldly depicting the moments of suffering, misery and horrors. The secret of achieving the best moments of self-fulfillment and self-realization consists in enlarging our perspective on human life and suffering, the existentialists maintain.

The sense of tragedy haunts all the philosophical systems that have evolved in the world. The existentialists, as a matter of necessity, mock the notion of a complete and fully satisfying life. They assert that gain and loss, fears and frustrations, pleasure and pain, are the inescapable facts of the human condition, and that man’s real worth lies in boldly confronting the phases of suffering and not in running away in fear. There has been perhaps no other philosopher in the world who took the problem of despair or anxiety so seriously as Kierkegaard did in modern times. Kierkegaard advises man to be anxious and despair and he holds that suffering has great religious and spiritual significance. It is only after passing through phases of anguish and suffering that the individual is spiritually purified and more refined and humane, ready to know the human life in the right perspective. The existentialists discover human values and meaning in suffering and
struggle and recommend the establishment of a new world carved out of the tragic sense of life. Tears and suffering make us more humane, refined and sensitive to human values, heightens our perspective and understanding of the human situation and enrich our consciousness. The existentialists never recommend the act of renouncing suffering.

For Kierkegaard, the life of intensity, passion, emotions and feelings is the only authentic life. The existential writers believe that passion is the expression of subjectivity and that man must learn to live dangerously and passionately, for passion is man’s true value. A large position of Gabriel Marcel’s philosophical discourse focuses on the discussion of feelings. He argues that man is seized by varied emotions of pleasure, pain, despair, joy, and therefore, it can be said that man and his feelings are one. Passion and suffering tell man that he exists. The existential philosophers, thus, lay considerable emphasis on passion, emotions, suffering, and anguish without which man cannot achieve authenticity and transcendence. They affirm that the human life without rich and varied human emotions is difficult to imagine. V. I. Lenin writes in his Collected Works: "...there has never been, nor can there be, any human search for truth without ‘human emotions.’" ³ Karl Jaspers claims that man is ‘a feeling being’, and therefore, his existence can be described as ‘a feeling act.’ The existentialists caution man against the manipulative operating of the intellect and recommend a life of passion, intensity and feelings, for they believe that the heart has its own logic which the manipulative mind can not comprehend. All the Rhysian characters live intensely and
dangerously; they are all guided by instincts, emotions, and passion, not by 
logic or the intellect.

The existential philosophers prominently focus on such themes as 
the apparent absurdity and futility of life, the indifference of the universe, 
and the necessity of existential commitments and of self-involvement. The 
phenomenon of death, which has pre-occupied the human mind for 
centuries together, is the existentialists' principal obsession. They focus on 
death as much as on the varied conditions of the human life, or rather, 
death itself is one of the conditions or inescapable aspects of man's 
existence. Their mental obsession with death shows how immensely they 
value life and its inescapable problems and intricacies.

Existence is the act of projecting life towards death by taking a leap 
of faith, say the existentialists. They fully concentrate on life, its enigmas 
and quandaries and on finding out solutions; but, at the same time, they 
acknowledge the inescapable reality of death and recommend a courageous 
way of facing it. The responsibility of being-in-the-world cannot be 
avoided at any cost and, therefore, man must face the consequences of 
death with courage and dignity. For the existentialists, man's dignity lays 
in facing death, and not in running away from it in fear. It is the fear of 
death that intensifies man's passion for and loves of life, inspiring him to 
live intensely.

The existentialists have written exclusively on the theme of death. 
The consciousness of death is a permanent feature of some deeper level of 
consciousness. The existentialist conviction is that the affirmation of life
and its meaning is impossible without realizing the value of the consciousness of death. Any attempt to escape from death, or rather from the consciousness of death, is an instance of cowardly flight. The theme of death is central to existential writing: Jaspers believes that the function of philosophy is to teach man to learn to die. Camus holds that suicide is the only genuine philosophical issue; and Unamuno was incapable of writing a single page without referring to death at least once. For majority of the existentialists, death is an indication of man’s invincible will and suicide is an act of noble triumph over suffering or adversity. While human life becomes a tormenting hell, death provides a healing touch, liberating man from the agony of existence. The fear of death is a crucial factor in producing and determining man’s individuality. According to the existential thinkers, the fear of death creates the sensation and excitement of existence in the individual involved in the act of Being. Death intensifies man’s inner strength and self-awareness and liberates his anguished soul from the agony of being. Nietzsche in his Thus Spake Zarathustra describes death as ‘free death’ and praises it – death comes because the individual wants it. It is out of love for life that the existentialists want a different death: free and conscious.

Kierkegaard says that death is a personal phenomenon and nobody can choose it for me, except myself. Life consists of innumerable projects and flights, and death is the final projection of the individual, it is the ultimate possibility of an authentic life. In his Being and Nothingness Sartre opines that authenticity and individuality can be earned intentionally by launching oneself towards death. In Wide Sargasso Sea Antoinette
regains her lost dignity and earns authenticity and personal honour by taking a leap into the flames. It is in the flames at the Thornfield Hall that Antoinette’s true self is revealed to herself. Death is either an external event, or the individual’s own projection, as is revealed in Antoinette’s act of suicide. Some existentialists maintain that death is an event that robs all meaning from life, and therefore, it should be scared. Heidegger, on the contrary, maintains that death is a natural event in the life of man and it is inevitable and necessary that one must die. The phenomenon of death is natural and inevitable and man must accept it as a logical and necessary culmination of life, for every beginning has an end. The fear of death can, however, be escaped by intensifying our quest for human values which can cure the world and, of course, the individual. One of the romantic traits found in the existentialists is that they adopt a positive and affirmative attitude towards death.

II

The second chapter of this doctoral thesis has presented an extensive survey of Rhys’s private life, her extraordinarily strange and curious literary career and her criticism. The chapter has focused considerable attention on Rhys’s Caribbean sensibility and how it shaped and fashioned Rhys’s literary and artistic talent. It has been pointed out that Rhys’s condition as an outsider, her homelessness, and social and existential marginality provided a powerful edge to much of her writing. The chapter does not provide a detailed biographical sketch of Rhys’s life events. The need to include a short account of her life experiences was, however, felt
precisely for the reason that almost all the novels of Rhys are autobiographical. It is, indeed, difficult to understand and appreciate Rhys's characters' existential struggle without a thorough understanding of Rhy's own life events. It is, therefore, felt necessary to know something of Rhys's unusual life and of the formative influences in order to appreciate more substantially her literary success. This chapter brings out the details of Rhys's Caribbean childhood, her transplantation in England, her wanderings all over Europe, her three marriages, and her solitary life. The second chapter has also presented an account of Rhys's emotional entanglement with Ford Madox Ford who provided her the initial inspiration to write short stories. Then a brief account of Rhys's literary achievements is provided. And lastly, an exhaustive survey of the Rhysian criticism is offered. It has been pointed out that the critics of Rhys are preoccupied only with her themes, her feminist concerns and her racial and cultural commitments. The second chapter of this thesis is intended to point out that the critics of Rhys have, in their obsession with certain themes and methods of analysis, ignored a more comprehensive philosophical discourse like Existentialism. The Rhysian criticism revolves around a wide range of interpretative options for an analysis of her writings: West Indian, British, Common wealth or European, feminist, post- colonial, structuralist etc. The second chapter concludes with the conviction that any critical study of Rhys's novels would remain incomplete and inconclusive without a profound existential philosophical investigation.
The themes of homelessness, uprootedness, lack of ‘necessary fixed background,’ displacement, and journeying are the constant and central themes in Rhys’s writing. “...Who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I over born at all,” [WSS, 64] as Antoinette says in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is the enquiry that haunts all the characters in Rhys’s novels. Jean Rhys was preoccupied with the loss of identity wrought upon the individual due to the loss of home, cultural roots and nationality. Jean Rhys establishes the theme of uprootedness of her characters in the very opening of her novels, emphasizing the intensity of their struggle for survival and identity. Jean Rhys’s protagonists live in two worlds, in- between two cultures, and in that horrible excluded-middle, trying to find out who they are. Rhys’s protagonists are used to ‘a lack of solidity’ and of ‘necessary fixed background’ which robs them of their identity and human dignity. Martin Heidegger once declared that homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world and this theme of homelessness and lack of ‘necessary fixed background’ is the terrain of Rhys’s fiction.

The depiction of modern, vulnerable and uprooted individuals is central to the fiction of Rhys. All of Rhys’s characters live in abject, dislocated conditions and move from place to place trying to find out some background to which they could affix themselves. They are outsiders, expatriates, and thrown off by the organized society. Disorientation, the reality of the condition of Rhysian women, is deeply rooted in their consciousness and later becomes a dominant trait of their sensibility. We find the Rhysian characters walking, wandering and travelling through the
streets in Paris and London. Each one of Rhys's characters is on a voyage, a
mysterious voyage called life, trying to seek liberation and the essence of
existence. Travelling is an effective and exhilarating metaphor for finding
escape from alienation, as well as it is a means of self-development or soul-
making. The metaphor of journey also expresses the process of the
discovery of love, happiness, identity and the true 'self'. Kierkegaard, the
father of the school of Existentialism, underlines the spiritual significance
of journeying:

Above all, do not lose your desire to walk; everyday I
walk myself into a state of well-being and walk away
from every illness; I have walked myself into my best
thoughts. Thus if one just keeps on walking, everything
will be all right.4

The Rhysian characters' search for solidity, home and necessary
fixed background shows their existential striving to raise themselves above
the ordinary patterns of the human condition. Their search for home,
nationality, and identity signifies their longing for spiritual growth. Rhys's
protagonists' wanderings in quest of roots and national and cultural identity
can, thus, be recognized as creative acts of the imagination and the free
will.

In Rhys's novels, the absurdity and complexity of existence in
revealed in the protagonists' struggle to achieve the protection of a place of
their own. Each one of Rhys's protagonists has a mysterious past; they
come from no society, no family background, and no nationality, have
roots in no society and are adrift in the metropolis cities of Paris or London
or on the islands of the West Indies. Rhys's heroines lead their lives in
hostile surroundings, disconnected from family and friends, and are pushed into the cold darkness of physical and psychological isolation. Homelessness or loss of roots, a key issue in modern literature, is Jean Rhys's primary concern in all her novels. The loss of nationality creates serious psychological and emotional complexities, thereby preventing the overall growth of the individual. All of Rhys's principal characters such as Marya, Julia, Anna, Stephan, Sasha, Mason, Rochester, Antoinette suffer in alien places where they are condemned to social, mental and cultural alienation. This thesis has attempted to delve into the psyche of Rhys's detached, uprooted, alienated characters, who are torn between two world, two selves, two cultures, two homes, two backgrounds, two nationalities, yet they belong to neither. The fact that homelessness is the destiny of Rhys's characters is substantiated by the reality of their wretched existence that they lead in dirty and cheap hotel rooms and in streets in London and Paris. Rhys's characters are deprived of the security, comfort and luxury of home.

Rhys's *Quartet* is the account of Marya's abrupt transplantation into an alien and hostile environment of Paris soon after her marriage to a Polish picture seller, Monsieur Stephan Zelli. Rhys establishes the mechanical, monotonous and miserable nature of Marya's existence in the opening of the novel and informs that her existence is haphazard and lacks "solidity" and "the necessary fixed background." [Quartet, 08] The sense of rootlessness and loss of British nationality creates in Marya the existential restlessness for establishing her identity. In her attempts to define herself in a foreign soil, she tries to attach herself to certain
individuals who promise her help and financial co-operation. Marya’s marriage to Polish Stephan Zelli and her stay in Paris rob her off her British identity, leaving her bewildered in a new, socially and culturally threatening environment. Marya’s existential anguish or anxiety assumes greater significance the moment she realizes the absurdity and meaninglessness of living into the other people’s background, which is fundamentally in opposition to her survival. *Quartet* concludes with Marya’s realization that one cannot live in the other’s background for ever and that one has to create one’s own background independent of the rest of humanity. Marya is thrown into a meaningless, hostile world; she is torn between two nationalities, two males, and two identities, without ever belonging to either; yet she struggles to assert her survival and human dignity.

*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* depicts Julia Martin’s confrontation with the organized society for the preservation of her individual dignity and survival. Julia’s journeying in the central Europe; her aimless wanderings in the sordid streets of Paris and her solitary life spent in shabby hotel rooms all indicate the absurdity of Julia’s existence. The lack of home, nationality and family and social background creates in Julia a craving for establishing her human dignity by means of self-preservation. Julia wants to go away from her wretched existence and she marries, not for love, but to get away form the dreadful place she is hurled into. In an apparent attempt to get away from the tragic situation of her existence, Julia is thrown into physical and psychological alienation. Alienation helps Julia in a significant way as it intensifies her consciousness and introduces her to
her inner real 'self'. Julia's mother was also transplanted from South America into England and calls England as a "cold, grey country." [ALMM: 76] Julia is one of Rhys's toughest and most assertive heroines and she has the courage to define her individuality "independent of the rest of humanity." [ALMM: 13] *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is an exploration of the existential doctrine – man alone, and not humanity, exists. Rhys in her unfinished autobiography, *Smile, Please*, also explicitly states that she believes in human love, and not in humanity which is an abstraction.

Rhys's first West Indian novel, *Voyage In The Dark*, explores the troubled conscience of Anna-Morgan who is transplanted into the alien soil of England after the death of her father. The novel is a stimulating account of Anna's struggle to define her in a new world to whose rules she is foreign. The novel forcefully depicts the theme of perennial conflict between nature and culture as represented by two diverse countries – West Indies and England. The supremacy of nature, as presented in the character of Anna, is stressed throughout the novel. The novel depicts the deep-rooted conflict in Anna's consciousness – the conflict for the liberation of her 'self' from the corrupting influences of the English civilization. The title's voyage symbolically suggests Anna's passage into her Caribbean self-hood which she now attempts to regain in the darkness of England. The loss of the Caribbean home and the necessity of survival force Anna to take up the challenge of a spiritual journey into self-consciousness.

Soon after her father's death, Anna is taken to England by her English step-mother, Hester. Hester persistently attempts to impose her
English value system and life style upon Anna, trying to deny Anna her Caribbean identity. Anna’s transplantation into England is a kind of destructive rebirth as it closes the West Indian past dear to her. The transplantation was “as if a curtain has fallen; hiding everything I has even known” [VD: 07] Anna likes hot places and she thinks of England contemptuously whereas her friend-lover Walter Jeffries prefers cold places. The memories of the Caribbean island cause nostalgia and the life-denying conditions in England affect her sensitivity and mobility. Anna’s mind oscillates between two worlds, rendering her incapable of reconciliation and reconstruction of her ‘self’. Anna is physically transplanted into the English society, but she emotionally and psychologically remains affiliated to her Caribbean memories. She lives in-between two worlds – the West Indian and the English, the result of which is dangerously depressing as it splits her ‘self’ into two halves. Anna, towards the end, however, succeeds in asserting her Caribbean identity and in liberating her ‘self’ from the cultural bondage of England. The novel suggests the triumph of Anna’s Caribbean vitality over the brooding darkness of cold England.

Good Morning, Midnight portrays Sasha Jenson as ostensibly English and irretrievably insecure and isolated outsider. Homelessness and isolation, the fate of Rhys’s early heroines, is also the destiny of Sasha. Sasha moves between London and Paris continually, without settling down in either city. Sasha’s sense of displacement, and disillusionment resulting out of it, are effectively revealed when she complains that she has no name, no face, and no country. Sasha, like the early protagonists of Rhys, does
not belong anywhere. Sasha is constantly vexed by a tragic sense of uprootedness, displacement and alienation, all resulting out of the rejection of her human identity by the others. The novel is created out of Rhys's own struggle to comprehend the predicament of existential isolation and despair. The novel is largely autobiographical as it presents some of the personal life events of the novelist. Sasha is shown as an island, cut off and stranded with no life lines. Her journey to Paris, however, is a journey within, to self-awareness. The novel depicts Sasha's struggle to liberate her 'self' from the dark nothingness of isolation. Sasha has her own survival strategies: she escapes the monotony and isolation of her existence by undertaking a series of transformation acts which keep her engaged. Nicolas, Sasha's friend, holds the existential fact that man is not responsible for his being in the world. But once thrown into the world, he must confront the perennial questions of life with audacity and dignity.

Rhys's masterpiece, *Wide Sargasso Sea* contains a brilliant study of a Jamaican plantation owner's daughter facing the existential problems after the social upheaval of emancipation. The novel primarily deals with contradictions, ambiguity and absurdities inherent in human situations. *Wide Sargasso Sea* depicts young Antoinette's struggle of cultural and racial identity and a sense of belonging in a post-colonial, racist, oppressive society. The novel focuses on Antoinette's loss of her family house, her brother, her sanity, and on the loss of her racial and cultural characteristics amidst chaotic social and political changes at the time of emancipation. Antoinette and her mother Annette are cut off from the white Europeans by culture and from the black West Indians by their colour. They are alienated
from both the worlds: the blacks jeer at them and the white Europeans reject them—they are double outsiders, condemned to homelessness, imprisonment and insanity. Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* portrays Antoinette's cultural and sexual exile to which she is condemned by her step-father Mason, her husband Rochester and the freed slaves. Even the British male characters in the novel—Mason and Rochester—confront the problem of uprootedness and alienation in the alien culture of the Caribbean islands. Mason hates the West Indian island and the inhabitants and Rochester describes the island as dark, grey, cold, and God-forsaken. England is, for Antoinette, quite unreal, like a dream, made of cardboard. Both the male and female characters in the novel are the victims of social, cultural and sexual exile. Annette and Antoinette are uprooted in their own land where as Mason and Rochester lead lonely lives on the menacing island, cut off from their English homes. The novel poignantly shows how the emancipation act ironically brought in the imprisonment of the former plantation owners. The novel depicts the existential conflict between two societies, two cultures, two sexes i.e. males and females. As a general principle, the philosophy of Existentialism is applied to the existential dilemmas confronted by the individual human being. Existentialism is, however very valuable as well “in its explanation of social conflicts, especially in clashes between cultures,” opines Paula J. Smith Allen.

Conflict, and not co-operation, is at the foundation of human relationships in Rhys's novels. Though Rhys's protagonists crave for the warmth of the human touch, they know that the other is in competition with and opposition to their existence, always threatening the possibility of their
dignity and survival. The Rhysian characters do well understand the importance of harmonious and meaningful inter-personal relationships; but they never sacrifice their honour and individual humanity at the altar of human relationships. They rather believe in establishing their individual private humanity independent of the rest of mankind. Rhys's protagonists exhibit unusual courage and strength of character by asserting their personal honour whenever it is assaulted by the others. They, however, sincerely try to find out the essence of their life by way of establishing a line of meaningful communication with the external world. The Rhysian characters warmly acknowledge the presence of the other; but when their own survival is threatened, they rebel ferociously and assert their position in the scheme of the universe.

Marya in *Quartet* establishes her link with the external world by accepting Stephan Zelli's marriage proposal. The acceptance of Stephan's marriage proposal is Marya's conscious choice made in order to establish contact with the outer world. Soon after the arrest of Stephan in Paris, Marya goes with the Heidlers to live with them in their shabby apartment where Mr. Heidler sexually exploits her. Marya is soon disillusioned by the seemingly helpful attitude of the people, because cunning and hypocrisy are concealed beneath their smiling, charitable faces. Marya knows that the world is cruel and horrible to unprotected people and that man must have the mettle to take up the challenges of the unfriendly world. Marya's passionate longing for the warmth and softness of the human touch is badly frustrated when both the males — Stephan and Heidler — abandon her, leaving her at the mercy of hostile environment. Marya's experiences with
the others, though sad and disappointing, teach her to be scared of the 'good Samaritans' — this is definitely a valuable lesson that Marya learns through her interaction with the others. Marya affirms her individuality at the end, and communicates a serious message — the others must be feared and carefully watched. Marya's abortive, unfulfilled relationships with Stephan, Heidler and Lois teach her a valuable existential strategy: the individual must solely depend upon his own free choices, actions and plans for the realization of his true 'self' and dependence of any sort whatsoever on the others is essentially self-destroying and frustrating.

After Leaving Mr Mackenzie is a devastating critique of the joint forces of the others and the institutions that operate in collaboration against the individual. The novel points out the viciousness of the institutions that work against sensitive individuals, robbing them of their basic human and existential rights. It is because of the hostility of the others that Julia Martin withdraws from the society and plunges into deeper introspection. Mackenzie and his lawyer work in collaboration as a team to destroy Julia’s hopes, dreams and aspirations. Institutions are necessary, but Rhys knows that they are no guarantee against evil and viciousness, because they are governed by men. If Mackenzie is the member of the organized society, Julia’s sister Norah and Uncle Bo are his counterparts within the family structure. Rhys’s protagonists are the victims of hostility directed towards them by their mothers, sisters, daughters and landladies. In Rhys's novels, males are not the only victimizers. Women also actively participate in victimizing other women. The novel depicts Julia’s confrontation with the huge machine of law, respectability and organized society that are
continually engaged in the task of crushing her sensitivity. Julia finds that
the other is merely 'a shadows', 'an illusion', and therefore, she endeavours
to construct her own world 'detached, independent of the rest of humanity.'
Julia is aware of the others' joint powers of defeating and hurting her, and
yet she valiantly asserts her own power of creating a new world
'独立 of the rest of humanity.'

The novel offers one positive relationship: the Julia- Horsfield
relationship is a successful one as both long for the warmth of the human
touch, as Horsfield says. Horsfield is definitely not one of the others; he is
on the side of Julia, or rather on the side of love and humanity. Julia does
not care the slightest for the organized society that tries to squash her
sensibility. Julia's overwhelming contempt for the organization of society
is revealed in her final denunciation of the others when she says: 'Hell to
you! Hell to the lot of you.' The novel ends with Julia's realization that the
individual can feel complete in himself only when he is detached from the
vast, unreal crowd. The novel explores Julia's existential realization – man
alone, and not humanity, exists.

Rhys's third novel Voyage In The Dark shows Anna Morgan's
passage into the darkness of England via her association with her English
step-mother Hester. Soon after the death of her father on the West Indian
island, Anna is taken to England by her step-mother Hester who imposes
her British civilization upon her and wants to make her 'a lady'. Anna,
however, retains her West Indian identity by refusing to participate in the
non-natural process of education and civilization. Anna is one of those
protagonists of Rhys whose subjectivity is assaulted and maimed by the presence of the others'. Hester attempts to conceal Anna’s Caribbean identity beneath the influence of the English civilization. For Rhys, to deny one’s own history is to deny one’s capacity for individual and spiritual growth; it means to commit the ‘self’ of the other to an abstract system of value that is distinct from the existential dimensions of human personality. Anna’s refusal to follow the British way of life is her passionate attempt to explore her own sources of Caribbean creative energy. Anna’s entire being and sensibility are rooted in the past that she once spent on the Caribbean island. Anna sees her friends and Hester as shadows and ghosts with whom any real communication is unattainable. Such a depersonalization of her friends and relatives into mere worthless objects emphasizes the difficulty which Anna experiences in establishing inter-personal relationships. Anna’s refuge in the recesses of Caribbean recollections is the proof of her exceptional sensitivity which marks her out from them and establishes her as a wholly individual human being. Anna’s increasing withdrawal from the external world plunges her ‘self’ into a deep-seated sense of alienation. Anna’s sense of personal isolation lies at the root of her failure to develop positive human relationships. Anna’s involvement with the external world is not a happy one as it multiplies her suffering. Anna’s only gain is the realization that the world is so-and-so and nothing can change it, except man’s own inner potentiality for self-affirmation.

*Good Morning, Midnight* also demonstrates how the unfeeling others frustrate Sasha’s dream of arranging her curious existence. The
ending of the novel, however, shows Sasha’s affirmation of the warmth of humanity. Sasha’s triumphant ‘yes...yes...yes.’ affirmation at the end of the novel is her acceptance of the warm glow of humanity. It is the acceptance of the reality of inter-subjectivity. Sasha’s experience with the outer world makes her believe that the external world is essential for the individual’s self-realization. It is through the acceptance of the others that Sasha seeks to achieve her true, individual subjective truth. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia seeks to establish her existence independent of the rest of humanity whereas Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* affirms her faith in the warm glow of humanity – this is a surprising shift in Rhys’s views on the world of inter-personal human relationships. This change in the outlook on human relationships is an indication that Rhys’s protagonists are spiritually maturing. *Good Morning, Midnight* is the account of Sasha’s painful striving to achieve reconciliation between the external world and her private ‘self’. Sasha’s understanding of the human existence is: the reality of human relationships is not merely negative, but creative and self-enhancing. Sasha’s vision of the human relationships is different from that discovered by Marya, Julia, and Anna. Sasha’s final act of embracing her neighbour and putting her arms around him signifies Jaspers’ existential faith – man is the future of man.

Rhys’s protagonists do condemn the organization of ‘the whole bloody human race’ while boldly affirming their right for human dignity, individuality, and for emotional fulfillment. Human relationships involve conflict at different levels in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: the blacks and the whites, the slaves and the masters, the white West Indians and the Europeans, the
black West Indians and the white West Indians, the colonized and the colonizer, males and females, and wives and husbands. The novel is a comprehensive statement on the ambiguities, absurdities and intricacies involved in human relationships. Antoinette and Annette feel the pangs of separateness in their own land – the blacks jeer at them, denying their right for survival and the white Europeans exploit them. Culturally trapped, both Annette and Antoinette’s psyche deteriorates and are mentally disintegrated. Annette and her daughter Antoinette are cut off from the West Indians by their colour and from the white Europeans by their culture; they are alienated from both the worlds, living in the excluded middle trying to make a sense of life out of chaos and disorder. They are double outsiders, condemned to self-consciousness and a sense of inescapable hostility of the others.

Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* deals with the problem of failure of communication after the Emancipation Act of 1833. The focus of the novel is on the failure of meaningful communication across racial, cultural and national barriers. Annette and Antoinette suffer deep personal agony at the hands of the freed slaves who call them ‘white nigger’ and ‘white cockroach’ and say ‘go away, white cockroach, go away.’ The white Europeans, Mason and Rochester, also hate their wives Annette and Antoinette respectively and leave no opportunity to exploit them. The freed slaves burn down Antoinette’s family estate, Coulibri, they label her as ‘mad,’ ‘white nigger,’ ‘a white cockroach,’ and the final shock comes from her own husband who renames her ‘Bertha’ in an attempt to deny her Caribbean identity. Antoinette is split between two cultures, two
nationalities, two identities and between two images — the image thrust upon her and her own knowledge of herself. This theme of the failure of human relationships adds to the tragic intensity of the novel. Antoinette’s link with her Caribbean identity survives through her contact with Christophine and Tia who have a perfect and sympathetic understanding of Antoinette’s situation. Antoinette’s final act of suicide is her condemnation of the others and, moreover, it is a plea to put an end to so much of suffering of the sensitive individual human being.

Rhys’s outstanding ability as a novelist lies in her acute understanding of the problems involved in developing human relationships. Though the problem of human relationship is at the very foundation of human existence, it is lamentably the most ignored one in our attempts to over-emphasize debates on religion, politics, economics etc. Rhys’s commitment to certain existential themes is revealed in her act of acknowledging the complexities and absurdities inherent in human relationships.

Rhys’s five novels suggest that one of the notable things about the human existence is its dependence on money, as is revealed in the survival crisis of Marya, Stephan, Julia, Anna, Rochester, Daniel and Antoinette. Rhys’s protagonists are ‘situational beings’ trying to define their position in the world, and while being-in-the-world one has to respect the world’s central recommendation i.e. ‘put money in thy purse.’ Rhys’s characters live in a world in which they—both men and women—compete for money. Theirs is a world, indeed, from which spirit has been drained and the
individual’s worth is determined by his financial position. Money is the all rigmarole in the lives of Rhys’s characters. Having money or not having money determines their fate and this is exactly what makes people strangers, hostile or cruel to each other. In all the novels, money rules supreme and the economic value system is at the centre of their social relationships. Rhys’s novels present human beings who struggle for money because they hope to have a share in the life of happiness and security guaranteed by the presence of money. The novels are, nonetheless, aimed to point out that the over-emphasis on money annihilates the very spirit of living. Rhys’s novels present an explicit criticism of the human societies that lay undue stress on the significance of money. Rhys’s novels point out how the inexorable demands of money destroy all human warmth and joy in the act of being-in-the-world.

Money is a permanent anxiety with the Rhysian characters. They understand something about the difference that money makes to their lives. The Rhysian protagonists do not over-emphasize or exaggerate the power of money; but they, at the same time, never close the eyes to its value in the money-orientated social set up in which they have to survive. They very proportionately gauge the significance of money. Rhys’s characters certainly value money; but they do not adore it as their respectable organized society does. 'Money' says Antoinette in Wide Sargasso Sea, 'is the idol they worship.' For Rhys’s central characters, money is a mere object, and objects are, however valuable, trivial and insignificant.
In *Quartet*, Marya's struggle to seek financial security is stressed throughout the novel. During her association with Mr. Albert's No. 1 touring company, she accepted the role of an ordinary chorus girl in order to keep bread on her table. She later accepts Stephan's marriage offer as he guarantees a financially secured existence. Marya's acceptance of Stephan can be viewed as her survival strategy and not as an exchange of love and emotional fulfillment. Stephan Zelli sells and buys stolen pictures in order to earn money, Marya goes with the Heidlers after Stephan's arrest because they assure her of financial assistance, and Mrs. Heidler promotes the Marya-Heidler sexual game because she very much depends on her husband's money. Marya asserts her individual dignity by slapping Heidler publicly when he says that he is willing to give Marya 'the traditional sum.' The act of hitting Heidler is, in fact, sensitive Marya's slap in the face of the organized society and respectability that adore money. Marya's act of slapping Heidler shows her indomitable spirit that emerges even in moments of crisis. The novel suggests how the rich, wealthy, arrogant males devalue the significance of sex by paying for it. Marya is baffled and hurt by the precise economic calculations that keep the society engaged all the time, diverting them from certain higher human ethics.

*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* focuses on Julia Martin's confrontation with the organization of economic forces that try to crush her individuality. Mackenzie and his lawyer work in collaboration as a team, trying to destroy Julia's possibility of survival. Julia is awfully aware of the power of money that reduces or raises one's status. Julia has an uncanny ability to perceive the importance of money which is at the core of all human
engagements. When Julia earns money, she feels like a super human being; and when money slips from her, all her life becomes an illusion. Julia, her mother, and her sister Norah are all members of the vast crowd labelled as "No money’ from the cradle to the grave." [ALMM: 42] Julia and Norah are also labelled as ‘middle class, no money’ and are, therefore, doomed to so much suffering and exploitation. Julia, like Marya, is fully aware of the magical charms that money possesses; but she never overvalues its supremacy in her life. Julia’s act of returning Mackenzie’s cheque of weekly allowance is both – a condemnation of the organized society as well as an exemplary instinct of preservation of human dignity. Julia bravely denounces money as ‘bloody money’ and also the society that worships it. For Julia, the commanding value in life is intensity, not money.

The spell of money over human beings is a major theme in Rhys’s *Voyage In The Dark*. Anna Morgan’s transplantation into England’s world of commercial values puts an end to the romantic fantasy which she once enjoyed on the exotic Caribbean islands in her childhood. In the world of England’s economic value structure, Marya depends on her sensuous charms and sexuality for survival. The English world of material prosperity, comfort and luxury never comforts Anna; it rather constantly reminds her of her miserable, poverty-stricken condition. Anna feels that ‘money aught to be everybody’s’; but she never holds it. Anna longs for economic independence and she, therefore, sells her body to men who can provide her some money for sexual favours. Jean Rhys here once again points out how wealthy men diminish the emotional significance of the act
of sex by paying for it. Vivian, Maudie's boyfriend, unashamedly says that "a girl's clothes cost more than the girl inside them?" [VD: 39] This attempt to compare a living human being with her clothes is an act of masculine madness and viciousness. Anna's step-mother Hester and Uncle Bo shirk their responsibility of Anna's financial security. They promise to help Anna in whatever way they can. Their promise, of course, excludes any financial support. When Walter Jeffries gives Anna some money to gain her sexual favours, she burns his hand with the end of a burning cigarette. Anna is deeply hurt by Walter's act of flaunting money at her, and therefore, she feels an urgent need to preserve her honour and human dignity. Anna's act of burning Walter's hand with the end of a blazing cigarette is the form of the sensitive individual's violent reaction against cruelty. She prefers dignity and honour to money.

Rhys's central characters are engaged in the dual struggle for emotional fulfillment and financial support for which they have to depend upon wealthy, ageing men. The issue of survival is a central preoccupation with Rhys's individuals, and they all know well that their survival largely depends upon their economic condition. Rhys's characters live and struggle in a basically merchantile society whose economic rules and values they are initially ignorant of. Society as represented in Good Morning, Midnight is a consumerist community in which anything and anybody can be bought and sold and everything has a market value. Sasha's anxiety over money matters is suggested throughout the novel. Sasha fantasizes that money would provide her peace, happiness, and security. Sasha launches a fanatical pursuit of money, and thereby
eventually loses even the small amount of happiness and peace that she previously experienced. Relationships in the novel are dominated by economic equations: Sidonie gives Sasha some money to undertake a voyage to Paris in order to reinvigorate her fading spirits, Rene miscalculates Sasha as a rich lady by her fur coat, and both Enno and Sasha think that the other has money. Sasha soon realizes that all the money that men are spending on her is not a sign of love or concern but only "the sprat to catch a whale." [GMM: 65] She realizes that Rene’s interest in her does not extend beyond her purse. Sasha asks Lawson for money and he, in turn, asks for a long, passionate French kiss. Rhys’s protagonists are completely thwarted by the others’ huge emphasis on money which is, for them, not more than an object.

Money is at the core of conflict between individuals and cultures in Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea. The novel deals with Annette and Antoinette’s quest for economic protection after the Emancipation Act of 1833. As Marya in Quartet accepts Stephan Zelli’s marriage proposal during the period of her poverty and unemployment in England, Annette in Wide Sargasso Sea also marries Mason precisely for the same reason. Annette feels unprotected and unsafe after the death of her first husband Cosway and the freed slaves is a constant threat of her existence. The emancipation of slaves and the death of her husband compel Annette to seek financial assistance by marrying an English expatriate Mr. Mason. Mason has come to the West Indian island, not to dance, as Antoinette says, but to make quick money. It is the pursuit for money that governs all the characters in the novel: Annette marries Mason to seek financial protection, Rochester
marries Antoinette for her money, Amelia and Daniel betray Antoinette for money, Rochester is dispatched by his parents to the West Indies to make money, and Daniel Cosway, Antoinette’s illegitimate step-brother, asks for his share of money in Antoinette’s property. It can be vividly seen that money operates in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as an activating evil, engaging all the energies of the characters involved in the pursuit. *Wide Sargasso Sea* explicitly shows the social significance of money, its power to control and motivate people’s lives.

The Rhysian character long for economic security as much as for love, happiness, dignity, and emotional fulfillment. Money, at times, becomes an obstacle in their quest for love and emotional fulfiments. They, however, at no point of time sacrifice their honour and self-esteem for monetary gain. The lack of any Property Act for married women drags Antoinette into financial ruin after her marriage to Rochester, an English outsider. Money, which is basically an English commodity, is the major factor of corruption in the West Indian society as well. Amelia and Daniel betray their cultural and racial heritage for the sake of money. It is for a petty amount the Amelia sleeps with Antoinette’s husband, it is for money that Daniel Cosway instigates Rochester against his wife, Antoinette. Antoinette’s contempt of the English economic value system is revealed in her final violent act of burning down her English husband’s cardboard home, the Thornfield Hall. “Gold is the idol they worship,” [WSS: 122] says Antoinette about the English society. Antoinette, like the early protagonists of Rhys, has no regard for those who worship objects. For Rhys’s protagonists, the quest for love, happiness, liberation, dignity, and
self-realization is more important than the pursuit for money. They earn their subjective 'truth' by denouncing the objective world absorbed in money matters.

Rhys's protagonists believe in passion and intensity, and are torn between conflicting emotions and desires. They are human beings with an irresistible passion for freedom, happiness, love, and understanding. They believe that the critical problems concerning the human existence cannot be solved by intellectual explorations but only through emotional responses to the situations. The Rhysian characters have absolute faith in the human instincts which alone can, they think, solve the critical dilemmas of the individual's life. The reality of their existence emerges from their inwardness, and not from anything found in the external world. Their only hope lies in the full realization of their inner strength and they do triumph over every adversity through acts of imagination, free choice and will. It is through the consciously made choices that they show great existentialist insights into the perennial problems of the human existence. They are not born with individuality automatically – they create it for themselves by making choices. Rhys's protagonists' conflict with the others increases their interest in the act of being and it sharpens their own focus on life. They reject objectivity, conformity, mediocrity for the sake of valuable human principles like dignity and understanding, which can be won only at the price of comfort and respectability.

Marya Zelli in *Quartet* has a deep longing for peace, harmony, and happiness. The recurring imagery of merry-go-round symbolically
suggests Marya’s passion for a life of joy and happiness. Marya, who is rightly described as Rhys’s autobiographical projection, wants to experience the blissful moments of happiness and freedom. Rhys’s own life oscillated between periods of depression and brief moments of happiness. What both Marya and Jean Rhys passionately long for is a few moments of happiness, and they are always prepared to do anything for achieving those precious moments. Jean Rhys said in 1974: “When I was happy, I had no wish to write.” Marya in Quartet expresses one desire to be happy and protected. Marya Zelli’s irresistibly obsessive quest for freedom, happiness, protection and necessary fixed background has great autobiographical significance. For Marya, life is a continual quest for happiness and joy. The pursuit may be at times frustrated, but it is all the same exciting, stimulating and worth while.

Marya is honest, sensitive, and introspective and knows clearly what she is placed against. She is thoroughly disillusioned by her experiences with Heidler and Stephan. She passes through a painful phase of anguish and suffering, lives through a different kind of experience and at the end achieves her true, ‘self’ by affirming her identity in a new way. Marya is a strong, aggressive, and determined individual who believes that only ‘the will to stab’ the others will solve her survival problems. Marya’s instinct for survival and self-preservation is revealed in her act of hitting Heidler hard in his face. It is a positive and supreme moment in the whole process of her Being and Becoming.
It is only after her rejection by both Stephan and Heidler that Marya understands her position as an outsider in the lives of men with whom she is emotionally caught up. The novel concludes with Marya's realization that one cannot live for ever in the others' background and that one must create one's own independent background. Marya is clear, honest, sensitive and perspective: She refuses to follow the pattern of the society as represented by Heidler and Lois. Marya, in Sartre's term, reacts negatively to the formulations of her society and affirms her individual dignity and honour by living intensely. Marya's abandonment by Stephan and Heidler opens up the possibility of the growth of her individuality. It is the awareness of the necessity of being-for-itself that makes Marya's existence stimulating and meaningful. Marya's realization that the individual must create his own universe without the others' help is a decisive part of her growth.

*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* depicts the confrontation of Julia's conscience against the huge machine of law, respectability, and organized society that work as a team to crush Julia's sensibility. The novel present Julia as a strong, tough, and aggressive human being who feels complete in herself only when she is detached from the rest of humanity. The novel communicates the existential thought that each individual has to define his own life without any help from the external world, because the individual alone, and not the crowd, exists.

Julia is continuously preoccupied with the process of making herself. Julia's act of visiting new places and people should be viewed as
part of her maturing and Becoming – a vital part of her inner growth. Julia’s longing to establish her existence and dignity is revealed in her aggressive and assertive acts of self-defence. Julia seeks to safeguard her dignity, rights, and autonomous personality against oppressive law and the organized others, represented by Mackenzie and his lawyer, sister Norah and Uncle Bo. Julia slaps Mackenzie publicly in a restaurant for showing his money impudently to her and rejects Mackenzie’s cheque for 1500 francs – the acts of preserving her honour and dignity. When an unidentified young man follows her muttering some indecent proposals, Julia rushes hurriedly into her hotel room and pushes the swing-door into his face and shouts, “You are ignoble.” [ALMM: 45] Julia knows that she is not finished yet, and therefore, she refuses to be cowed down by the outside forces relentlessly operating against her. Julia knows that “everyday is a new days everyday you are a new person” [ALMM: 101] and therefore, man must live dangerously and intensely. For Julia, the commanding value in life is intensity, which is manifested in her acts of free choice, self-assertion and rebellion against the established society. Julia’s promise to the policeman that she does not have the slightest intention of committing suicide is her affirmation in the prospects of life. Julia realizes that the act of being-in-the-world is a stimulating exercise of self-enhancement and self-realization. Julia’s acts of self-assertion show her potentiality for the realization of her authentic and integrated self. Being-in-the-world is a movement forward, which cannot be given up midway. Julia’s promise to the policeman is her existential commitment of participating in the exciting progression called life. Rhys’s *After Leaving*
Mr Mackenzie concludes with Julia’s existential realization that ‘life must go on’.

In *Voyage In The Dark* Rhys establishes the primacy and supremacy of nature over culture through the character portrayal of Anna Morgan. The title’s voyage symbolically shows the uprooted Anna’s passage into her Caribbean-self-hood from which she is displaced after the death of her father. The loss of the Caribbean home and identity and the necessity of survival in an alien country inevitably lead Anna to take up the responsibility of a spiritual voyage into her consciousness. All of Rhys’s characters are involved in the process of Becoming, that is, in the act of refashioning, reordering, restructuring, reframing their world out of disorder and chaos by way of self-assertion and self-involvement. Anna courageously accepts the existential challenges of the racial, materialistic, masculine and sexist society of England and asserts her position in a dignified way. Anna lives in the present and has no sense of future. She fears the passing of time so that the present becomes all important. For Anna, the present is the best of all because its demands intensify her existential struggle for transcendence. Anna understands the reality of the human existence that one can achieve one’s true self only by making oneself available to the present.

Anna is so thoroughly involved in the act of living that she, in spite of her suffering, never thinks of death or suicide. Anna knows something of the destructive power of death and thinks that death puts an end to all possibilities and promises of life. Anna is determined not to think of death,
but to confront the issues concerning her survival. Anna’s voyage in the
darkness of the English civilization is the symbolic representation of her
quest for knowledge and the essential meaning of life. She tells herself that
she is just nineteen and has got to go on living and living without despair.
Anna shows overwhelming intensity for life, even when it turns black and
offers no hope of a better situation. Anna’s life of intense emotional
suffering and agony spiritually purifies her, and then she assures herself
that she can do anything.

*Voyage In The Dark* concludes with Anna’s rebellious, yet
conscious and free, act of aborting the baby she conceived from an English
man, Walter Jeffries. The act of abortion is Anna’s free, conscious choice—it is the act of asserting her Caribbean identity and of liberating her inner
'self' from the cultural bondage of England. The choice to drop the baby
shows Anna’s courageous refusal to support the growth of anything that is
even vaguely associated with Englishman. The act of abortion
symbolically reveals the triumph of Anna’s Caribbean vitality over the
brooding darkness of England. Anna can not be labelled as a passive
victim because she takes her revenge upon those who try to exploit her.
Anna’s acts of burning Walter’s hand with the end of a cigar and aborting
the baby are the acts of self-assertion and self-preservation. Anna
Morgan’s attempted abortion shows her bold refusal to support the English
civilization that is growing up in her Caribbean womb. Anna lives
dangerously in order to reaffirm her Caribbean identity, sensibility and
sensitivity.
*Good Morning, Midnight* portrays ageing and lonely Sasha's existential struggle to arrange her small, curious life amidst hostile circumstances. The novel brilliantly depicts Sasha's acts of transformation undertaken for the realization of her true authentic self. Sasha's process of transcendence begins with her free and conscious choice of a change in her name – from Sophia to Sasha – an act of hope, new beginning and transformation. Sasha undertakes a voyage to Paris which also shows her desperate attempt to make a fresh start. Sasha, exactly like the early protagonists of Rhys, has a passion for life's forward movement. Passion characterizes her struggle for being-in-the-world. Sasha's predicament of isolation and her feelings of despair intensify her inner consciousness, teaching her the significance of unity and reconciliation with the outer world. The climatic scene of the novel in which Sasha embraces her neighbour reveals Sasha's positive and optimistic attitude towards human relationships. Sasha's acceptance of her neighbour is, in fact, her recognition of Jaspers' doctrine of inter-subjectivity. When her neighbour enters her room, Sasha takes her hands away from her eyes, symbolically showing her desire to view the others / the external world in the right perspective. Sasha's acceptance of the reality of the others' presence is an indication of the emergence of Rhys's maturer and wiser characters. Sasha's moment of realization is accompanied by her conscious decision to stop running away from the others and from her 'self'. Sasha's final 'yes...yes...yes.' expression shows her realization of the significance of involvement, order, unity, and reconciliation. Sasha establishes her authentic, integrated self in communion with the others. Sasha's 'yes' is as
much for the external reality, as it is for herself. From the existentialist point of view, Sasha is Rhys’s most committed existent. Sasha’s existential commitments are revealed in her acts such as – her voyage to Paris, her decision to change her name from Sophia to Sasha, her desire to be different than the other people, her occasional denunciation of the others, her act of pushing a man backward and banging the door in his face, and her final affirmative expression ‘yes-yes-yes.’

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is Rhys’s exploration of psychological dimensions of race, violence, sex, slavery, and survival in the post-emancipated society of Jamaica. The novel is a brilliant study of the existential problems experienced by Annette, Antoinette, Rochester, Daniel Cosway and Christophine in the racist, oppressive, colonialist West Indian society. Annette-and Antoinette experience the tragic loss of home and cultural identity in their own country. The theme of “having no home, no society, nowhere to go, and essentially, being non existent, is integral to the story line.”

There are several incidents in the novel that demonstrate Antoinette’s struggle for achieving social and cultural identity, personal love and freedom, and human dignity. When Amelia teases Antoinette, she hits Amelia hard in her face, Antoinette threatens Rochester with a broken rum bottle and bites his hand, and at the end, sets her husband’s ‘cardboard’ house on fire. These are all courageous acts indicative of her inner strength that inevitably rebels against sexual, psychological and cultural exploitation.
When Rochester changes her Caribbean name and gives her English name ‘Bertha’, she flies into fury and demonstrates her strong disapproval to the new label. Antoinette’s act of burning Rochester’s Thornfield Hall is her revenge upon the external world which once destroyed her family estate, Coulibri. The act of setting fire to the Thornfield Hall is Antoinette’s act of total self-liberation and self-fulfillment. Antoinette carries keys and candles in her hands - the keys symbolically suggest her quest for liberation from the life of imprisonment in Rochester’s English house, while the candle metaphorically suggests her quest for knowledge, self-realization and self-affirmation. Annette and Antoinette lose sanity and lead lives of physical and psychological alienation. In the present context, madness can be viewed as a kind of liberation from false attitudes and values represented by an unreal society. Madness truly leads Antoinette towards the reconstruction of her ‘self’ which she finds in the shooting flames. Antoinette’s madness, seen in this perspective, is not a breakdown, but ‘a break through,’ leading her towards her true, authentic self. Rhys reveals Antoinette’s schizophrenic condition as having a creative aspect as it provides her an escape from the harsh realities of life. Madness could also be viewed as a retreat for self-preservation to use available resources to make one final effort to express her individuality and independence.

Antoinette triumphs over her surroundings by plunging herself into the flames. It is not an act of despair or frustration, but a consciously chosen act of self-affirmation and self-liberation. Antoinette’s leap into the fire is a positive and creative attempt at self-preservation as she finds
"the tree of life in flames." Rhys, along with Emily Bronte and Charlotte Bronte, tries to give a faithful portrait of the human life which benefits a lot in "teaching women the importance of self-awareness and identity." Antoinette's madness and her attempt at suicide may, thus, be interpreted in the novel as an assertion of her free will and an escape into wholeness. Rhys's *Quartet* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are interrelated: the movement from Marya Zelli to Antoinette Cosway is an emotional and spiritual progression in Rhys's individual from passive suffering to passionate self-affirmation. While Marya in *Quartet* abandons the worlds of Stephan and Heidler and begins to live separately, Antoinette finds her individual dignity and honour in the flames. The violent ending of Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is future-oriented, for Antoinette finds "the tree of life in flames." In Antoinette's death, is her triumph.

The story in Rhys's novels is that the individual should learn to assert his rights, dignity, identity and individuality, and should earn a position for himself which will allow him to develop a compassionate understanding of the human situation. All of Rhys's principal characters assert their intensity, spontaneity and passion for life and establish their autonomy as concrete individual beings. Rhys's novels champion the existential commandment- Be yourself at all costs!

Rhys's principal protagonists are often indiscreetly labelled as 'passive victims' of the others' hostility and external forces working in opposition to them. 'Passive victims' is, in fact, an inappropriate description of Rhys's characters, because they show themselves as angry,
as rebellious and aggressive as their victimizers. They are rather creative human beings; creating, making, re-inventing, re-constructing themselves is their permanent existential anxiety. Marya hits Heidler in his face, Julia burns Makenzie’s hand with the end of a burning cigarette and returns his cheque of weekly allowance, West Indian Anna aborts her baby in order to avert the growth of English civilization in her womb, Sasha too rebels against the hostility of the others, Daniel asks for his share in Antoinette’s property, Stephan Zelli struggles for economic betterment in Paris, Rochester is suffocated in the West Indies and leaves the island, Antoinette bites her husband’s hand, threatens him with a broken rum bottle and finally sets the Thornfield Hall on fire. These are definitely not the acts of ‘passive victims’ but of those spirited and creative human beings who are set out to define their existence. None of Rhys’s protagonists bow their heads to their society’s harsh rules. They long for a life of spontaneity, passion, adventure, and excitement, which results in the positive affirmation of their individuality. All of Rhys’s novels present her specific view of the human existence. We need to see Rhys’s protagonists in a broader light as dignified human beings seriously engaged in the existential process of self-transcendence. Rhys’s novels are, indeed, models for anyone who wants to explore the existential dilemmas of life; her novels offer an original understanding of life and of human nature. Characters in All the characters in Rhys’s novels are first and foremost dignified human beings, to be treated as individuals involved in the existential process of Becoming, not to be categorized, grouped, and labelled. We need to see Rhys’s characters as ‘solid human beings’, and not as ‘passive victims’ or
'representatives of the insulted and injured.' Rhys's central characters in all the five novels are passionately involved in the process of Being and Becoming. Rhys's novels are not the sad tales of ordinary human beings with sound and fury signifying nothing, but these are the novels which portray intensely passionate human beings capable of asserting their individuality, authenticity and human dignity.
References:


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