CHAPTER II

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The present chapter attempts to make an exhaustive study of Jean Rhys's private life and her extraordinarily strange and curious literary career- her obscure and mysterious Caribbean origin, her childhood days spent on the exquisitely beautiful island of Dominica, her abrupt transplantation into the shabby and sordid hotels of London and Paris and her aimless wanderings in these cities, her unhappy involvements with certain men including Ford Madox Ford. This chapter focuses light on her literary works published between two world wars and sudden disappearance after Good Morning, Midnight in 1939, and her spectacular re-emergence with the publication of Wide Sargasso Sea in 1966.

There has never existed any fixed standard of research methodology. Modern trends in research studies, however, do not approve of a detailed biographical sketch of a literary artist selected for critical evaluation. But the inclusion of Jean Rhys' private life in the present research project is necessary for two reasons: first, Rhys's obscure and complex Creole West Indian identity in itself sufficiently justifies the inclusion of her biographical sketch. Second, almost all of Rhys' novels are autobiographical in mood and, it is indeed very difficult to understand and appreciate her heroines' existential struggle without a thorough knowledge of their creator. It is, therefore, necessary to know something of Rhys's unusual life and especially of the formative influences in order to appreciate more substantially her literary achievements.
I. Jean Rhys’s Life

Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams, popularly known as Jean Rhys, was born on 24 August, 1894, at Roseau, into the colonial society of Dominica, one of the West Indian islands, a place that was, as she herself describes it, sensual and repressive, tantalizing and claustrophobic. Jean Rhys was the fourth of the five children and the second daughter of William Rees Williams, a medical doctor of Welsh origin who had a government post on Dominica and his creole West Indian wife Minna Lockhart of Scottish and Irish descent, whose family had been the sugar planters on the island for several generations. The family lived on the corner of Cork and St. Mary’s streets in Roseau, and also maintained an extra-ordinarily beautiful house in the mountains where Jean Rhys spent a great deal of her childhood. Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams used several names before she settled on Jean Rhys at the instigation of Ford Madox Ford, her friend and protector. There has been some confusion about Jean Rhys’ date of birth because she disliked revealing it. The date 1894, which appears in Who’s Who, was supplied by her. But an old passport gives 1890 — and a cousin of hers once told Diana Athill, Jean Rhys’ friend and biographer, that as children they often used to comment on her being “ten years older than the century.” It is customary and safe, at least for the convenience of analysis, to accept the dates provided by literary artists themselves as real. The date 1894 is, therefore, now confirmed as Jean Rhys’ year of birth.

Rhys’s mother’s creole identity was a constant and most dominating influence on Jean’s sensitive mind during her early childhood days in the
West Indies. The passivity and turbulence, the racial mixture, the cultural contrasts between colonial and native life, the deadly hostile attitude of the blacks and the white Europeans towards each other, all fuelled her imagination and shaped the restlessness of her identity. Jean Rhys's first hand knowledge of her oppressive, colonialist society led to adolescent fears resulting in her feelings of insecurity and passivity. Although Rhys's attitude to her birthplace remained ambivalent throughout her life and she never returned to West Indies except a short visit to Dominica in 1936, the Caribbean culture and creole characteristics shaped her sensibility. Out of her psychological loneliness and physical isolation from both the white and the black communities, Jean Rhys began to write poetry at an early age. As a child she was lonely and wrote poetry and plays to escape the effects of physical and psychological isolation, a process which was to continue into her maturity.

Dominica, Jean Rhys's West Indian island, was a British colony, and English was the language of her home and education. Yet the popular language, and one she used with servants and friends, was the French dialect of the island. The friction of the two languages is felt throughout her work. During her early years on the island of Dominica Rhys's family found her to be very private, very much to herself, removed from those of the other children. While still a young girl, Jean attended a convent school where Roman Catholic nuns taught her a great deal about the church. Her religious training at the school and her first hand knowledge of the West Indian culture became formative influences on her childhood. But Jean's fervent devotion to the Christian faith was in sharp contract to her father's religious
beliefs who often said that "Buddhism is a far more beautiful religion than Christianity." Jean Rhys escaped the effects of a disciplined religious upbringing because her parents had two different religious beliefs—her mother was a strong Christian devotee whereas her father was irresistibly inclined towards Buddhism. In spite of their religious views, neither of them was serious about formal religion. This lack of proper religious training or commitments is vividly reflected in Rhys' novels in which her views, attitudes, and religious concerns oscillate between atheist and theist Existentialism, finally belonging to neither of these faiths. Jean Rhys's early awareness of inherent conflicts of cultural and racial mixtures, sex, religion, and her fascination for colonial history were important to her development as a writer. Jean Rhys grew up on the island of Dominica amidst the feeling of being surrounded by alien and antagonistic people whose social, economic, and cultural conditions constantly threatened her cultural identity.

Jean Rhys remained in Dominica until she was sixteen. As a white girl in a predominantly black community, Rhys felt socially and intellectually isolated; and in 1910 she left Dominica with her aunt Clarice Rhys Williams for education in the Perse School, Cambridge, England. The consequences of this sudden transplantation in an alien British society have been clearly depicted in each of Rhys's novels in which her disoriented and uprooted heroines struggle to establish their social and cultural identities. Jean was physically overwhelmed by the British climate and was psychologically isolated from the city of 'Stock Exchange' due to her pitiable financial condition. Moreover, her creole characteristics were a constant barrier in her communication or interaction with the new society in
which she was forcibly plunged. Although the Perse School was a good one, Rhys left it after a short term as her interests laid elsewhere. Jean persuaded her father to let her go to the ADA in London, and in 1908, she joined the Academy of Dramatic Art [ADA], not then known as Royal Academy of Dramatic art [RADA] because it was not yet Royal. Jean left the RADA soon and joined a musical chorus travelling troupe. She travelled with the troupe extensively for two years. Prior to World War I, Jean left the musical chorus troupe and took a number of theatrical jobs and played as a chorus girl in light operas such as Maid of the Mountains and Count of Luxembourg. Rhys had all the appealing features of a young, promising theatrical personality: young, attractive, beautiful green eyes, an indefinably exotic face, a delicate and well-proportioned figure. Unfortunately, Jean found little glamour in this tawdry show business world and also began to lose confidence in her theatrical abilities. Jean didn’t have a strong voice, and besides this, she was private, shy and timid, especially before an audience. As Jean realized her talent in dramatic activities was limited and her chance for any success terribly slight, she switched on to modelling and also posed for advertisements. Posing, dancing, modelling, moving from place to place and hotel to hotel, and meeting men of all sorts became her routine in London. Life was, indeed, tough and difficult for Jean during her early years in London and she did all cheap and odd jobs in order to keep bread on the table. The survival strategies of young, displaced, alienated women, their fears and anxieties, their insecurities and helplessness, which all characterize Rhys’s own life, are predominantly depicted in all of her novels. Jean’s life in the unfriendly, frightening, and hostile conditions of
London and Paris was sharply in contrast to her peaceful and protected existence in Dominica. The contrast between these two worlds is effectively portrayed in her novels like *Voyage In The Dark*, *Good Morning, Midnight*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

In addition to accepting the challenge of finding a sense of belonging in what had turned out to be an alien country, Jean’s sense of suffering was further intensified by enormous changes in her family in Dominica. Jean’s father, William Rees William, died in 1908, shortly after her arrival in England. The death of her father was a devastating experience which left Jean completely on her own. Jean Rhys’s mother was not happy with Jean’s decision of leaving the Perse School and joining Academy of Dramatic Arts, but she was too ill to prevent Jean. Meanwhile in England, Jean’s first love affair with a wealthy Englishman, Hugh Smith, which lasted for eighteen months, eventually came to an end in 1913, she underwent an illegal abortion, i.e. she dropped the baby. For the next six years she lived mainly on her first lover’s allowance. In short, her family misfortunes in Dominica and her own precarious struggle for survival in the antagonistic, indifferent city of London left young Jean completely bewildered and confused. During her early days in London, she was a helpless, unlucky immigrant, untrained and unqualified to develop a survival mechanism.

It was during the First World War [1914–1918] that Jean Rhys met Jean Lenglet, a Dutch-French poet, writer, and journalist. In 1919, Jean Rhys went to Holland to marry Jean Lenglet, who was at the time twenty-eight. She viewed this opportunity as a way of escaping from the despair
and frustrations experienced in Britain. Jean Rhys and her Dutch husband then moved to Paris where Rhys stayed for a few years and began to write short stories. For the next ten years, Jean Rhys lived a dislocated, rootless, and bohemian life on the continent, mainly in Paris and Vienna. Jean Lenglet wrote under the Pen name of Edouard de Neve; he was associated with the Paris Herald- Tribune and the Daily Mail. The years immediately following the World War I were chaotic, exciting, and nerve-breaking for Jean Rhys and her Dutch husband. Amid all the chaos, sense of rootlessness, and anxiety over money, Jean discovered she was pregnant. The pattern of the couple's life from the day they arrived in Paris was uncertain and one of constant movement from one cheap hotel to another and from friend to friend for a little money. A baby boy, whom they named William Owen, was born on 29 December, 1919, who died three weeks later of pneumonia. In 1920, his fabulous command of languages secured Jean Lenglet a post as interpreter with the Interallied Disarmament Commission in Austria and Hungary. Jean Rhys soon joined him, and they spent some happy months in the Central Europe. In 1922, on their way to Paris, a daughter, Maryvonne, was born in Ukkel, near Brussels, Belgium. On their return to Paris in 1923, Jean Lenglet was arrested for his involvement in some sort of offence against currency regulations, his financial transactions in Vienna and his illegal entry into France. In Jean Rhys's view, these charges were "really very unfair because every one was doing it." After his arrest, Jean Lenglet twice escaped the death sentence: first, because he was declared clinically insane and was sent to a German Institution for psychopath criminals, and the second time, because his dossier got lost after he had been sent to a
concentration camp. Jean Rhys and her husband Jean Lenglet got separated in 1924. However, they agreed to share the responsibility of their daughter’s upbringing. In 1932, the Lenglets were legally divorced.

II. Jean Rhys’s Literary Works

Jean Rhys, meanwhile, had become emotionally entangled with the British writer Ford Madox Ford and his common-law wife, the Australian painter Stella Bowen, both of whom physically and psychologically exploited her. Ford Madox Ford, who was famous for spotting and helping young authors, made Jean Rhys into a writer and was the most dominant literary influence on Rhys. Ford Madox Ford, who had helped many promising young writers in the past, was obviously impressed by Jean’s potential as a short story writer. Ford carefully went through Jean Rhys’s short stories which she wrote after her husband Jean Lenglet’s arrest in 1923. ‘Vienna’, Jean’s first short story, was published and later included by Ford in the Transatlantic Review in 1924. Three years later in 1927, Jean Rhys’s *The Left Bank and Other Stories*, a collection of 22 stories, was published with an enthusiastic preface by Ford Madox Ford. The stories which appeared in *The Left Bank* are mainly vignettes based on her experiences in Central Europe, chiefly in Paris and Vienna. Rhys’s stories depict her experiences as a child growing up in Dominica and as a young woman living in Paris and London. *The Left Bank*, which shows Rhys’s period of apprenticeship, was a successful beginning, for it introduced an important artist at the formative stage of her literary career. But it does offer something more than just a beginning: it explores Rhys’s major questions
concerning identity, belonging, survival, and death which were to preoccupy her later mature works. In his enthusiastic preface to *The Left Bank*, Ford appreciated Rhys's "terrifying insight and a terrific - an almost lurid! - passion for stating the case of the underdog," coupled with her "singular instinct for form." Ford also praised her sensitive ear for dialogue and her careful eye for form in fiction and her stylistic qualities that reveal Rhys's conviction that one must write from within life in order to portray the reality of existence. Rhys herself stated in an interview in 1968: "I am the only truth I know."

Ford's interest in Jean gradually became more private; her suffering appealed to his generous human instincts and he got physically attracted towards her. Jean Rhys's unhappy sexual involvement with Ford became the source for her first novel, *Quartet* [1928], originally titled as *Postures*. In *Quartet*, Jean Rhys depicts Stella Bowen and her husband Ford as cruel, invulnerable people. Ford Madox Ford was in love with Jean Rhys but "he was really only oiling his emotional and artistic machinery. It was a horrible game, in which everyone except Jean behaved very crueller"

In the end, she lost Ford and she lost Jean Lenglet too. In 1932, the Lenglets were legally separated. She was once again left as drifting, lonely, insecure, and moneyless as before.

Ford Madox Ford's immoral, sexual relationship with his mistress Jean Rhys lasted for just three years from 1923, the years of her Dutch husband's arrest, to 1927, the year of publication of *The Left Bank*. After the publication of her collection of short stories under the title *The Left Bank*
and Other Stories, Jean Rhys broke off her association with Ford Madox Ford and his wife Stella Bowen, both of whom are bitterly condemned in her first novel *Quartet* [1928], originally labelled as *Postures*. There is a kind of irony in the Jean Rhys -Ford Madox Ford relationship. Ford obviously launched Jean’s literary career, taught her a great deal about the art of writing, and introduced her to the contemporary literary circle in Paris; but it was also Jean’s relationship with Ford that created in her a sense of suspicion, distrust, and disgust about the male dominated world. *Quartet* is the fictional depiction of young Marya Zelli’s sexual exploitation by Mr. and Mrs. Heidler. The novel attempts to explore the villainy of the Ford-Heidler who, for his sexual gratification, befriends the destitute, moneyless Marya when her husband Stephan is arrested for trafficking in stolen goods. The novel reads like Jean Rhys’s real life story, her first marriage, and her exploitation following the imprisonment of her Dutch husband, Jean Lenglet. Mr. and Mrs. Heidler are the fictional representations of two brutal and inhumane devils in Rhys’s own life – Ford and his Australian wife Stella Bowen. Rhys’s devastating portrayal of Ford has been transformed into a universal parable of the male exploitation of young women. In the character of Marya Zelli, Rhys introduces what was to become the recognizably Rhys’s heroine- sensitive, sexually attractive, vulnerable, with a tendency to assert her identity and always involved in a search for peace, happiness, and above all, money. *Quartet* is Jean Rhys’s autobiographical presentation of a bewildered expatriate whose marriage to a foreigner robs her of her own sense of belonging and nationality and later her husband’s
imprisonment forces her into the arms of yet another stranger. *Quartet* is, thus, broadly based on Jean Rhys’s liaison with Ford.

In spite of her early literary achievements in Paris, Jean Rhys left Paris for London in 1927, mainly because of her disillusion with male experiences. Jean Rhys and Leslie Tilden Smith, her literary agent, started living together in London in 1928 and eventually married in 1934 after Jean’s divorce from her first husband in 1932. Meanwhile, Jean Rhys’s second novel *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* was published in 1930 in Britain and in 1931 in USA. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* boldly depicts Julia Martin’s relentless struggle for survival in male oriented, capitalist society where one’s human dignity is determined only by one’s economic condition. Julia makes some desperate efforts to define her life in a hostile society where individuals and institutions are placed in opposition to her individuality threatening the very foundation of her existence. Julia, Rhys’s protagonist in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, is anxious to review and renew her old ties with her friends and family, thus, trying to attempt a kind of rebirth. But her desire to re-establish her old connections is defeated by the hostile attitude of the people who, instead of participating in the process of connecting, prefer to disassociate themselves. The novel is intended to suggest how the cautious and defensive attitude adopted by the people fails to felicitate the process of communication and prevents the real development of intimacy. The theme of money, which is the permanent anxiety of Jean Rhys, has been exploited by the novelist to the fullest extent in the novel. Julia’s survival hugely depends upon her efforts to construct a new private world independently of the rest of humanity. This quest for
human dignity, authenticity, and identity is made abundantly clear throughout the novel. Towards the end of the novel, Julia convinces a policeman that she has no intention to commit suicide – this is not a plain promise made in lighter moments, but must be viewed as a serious and honest existential commitment that Julia makes to herself.

Though Jean Rhys’s writing can not be categorized, she belonged in the twenties to the Left Bank group, which included James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and Ford Madox Ford who encouraged her with her writing. In the 1930s, Jean Rhys published extensively, including three novels, short stories, autobiographical reminiscences, and the first version of Wide Sargasso Sea, called Le Revenant. Voyage in the Dark, Jean Rhys’s third novel was published in 1934 immediately after her marriage to Leslie Tilden Smith. It is the story of an isolated, frustrated, and unfulfilled young Anna Morgan who struggles for survival and harmony in a world dominated by values to which she is fundamentally opposed. The dominant themes like identity, freedom, economic dependence on men, need for emotional and psychological security, and struggle for individuality are explored by the novelist in Voyage in the Dark. The novel aims at pointing out that a sense of ‘selfhood’ and self – knowledge can be achieved only by passing through the process of anguish or suffering, only by making a voyage in the dark. The novel demonstrates Anna’s remarkable commitment to survival in spite of all the odds posed against her. Voyage in the Dark also demonstrates Anna’s struggle for physical and psychological existence independently of the world.
In 1936, Jean Rhys and Leslie Tilden Smith paid a short visit to Dominica. This was the first and only time that Jean returned to her native island since her transplantation in England in 1910. This visit provided Jean Rhys with further background for her last novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Jean's return to her birthplace recalled to her mind the days of early childhood and filled her mind and heart with nostalgic longing for her Caribbean identity which was threatened by the urban artificial life in the commercial cities of London and Paris. Rhys's short but extremely meaningful and fruitful trip to the island of Dominica really worked wonders; it revived her early childhood memories of the Caribbean island and inspired her to write *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Jean's last novel written before World was II appeared in 1939 with an attractive title, *Good Morning, Midnight*. The novel is set exclusively in Paris and obviously makes Rhys's French literary affinities abundantly clear. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha Jansen attempts to develop a survival mechanism in order to reaffirm her humanity and her faith in existence. Sasha gives herself to life, regains her identity, and returns to her most promising self. Sasha's final positive and healthy assertion saying, 'yes, yes, yes....' is her qualified affirmation of her own personality and her recognition of life and its meaning, and forces. Sasha Jansen is Jean Rhys's most balanced, intelligent, and controlled heroine - she achieves balance, cool, and sanity towards the end.

After the publication of *Good Morning Midnight* in 1939, Jean Rhys stopped writing; she completely disappeared from the public attention and was forgotten. All her novels published between the two world wars received very little critical notice, as a result of which, they went out of
print. At the beginning of World War II Jean Rhys was forced into a state of oblivion due to the failure of her novels to achieve considerable critical recognition. Meanwhile, Jean's husband Leslie died on October 2, 1945, upon which, she married, for the third time, his cousin Max Hammer in 1947. In 1949, Max Hammer was caught embezzling, was tried and sent to Maidstone Prison. In May 1949, Jean herself was convicted of assault and spent five days in the hospital wing of Holloway Prison. The years following the World War II and Leslie's death were bad times for Jean. Her health deteriorated, there were serious financial problems, and she lived a quiet, isolated life. After 1939, Jean lived in obscurity and alcoholic state and published little. No one heard from her and her publishers supposed that she was dead. After her marriage to Max Hammer, she constantly changed her home and started living in London, Devon, Beckenham, Maidstone, and Cornwall. Jean broke off all her connections with the outside world and was declared 'dead'.

The year 1949 is very significant in Jean Rhys's literary career. An advertisement was placed in a literary journal soliciting information about Jean. She answered it herself. In November 1949, Jean was 'rediscovered' by Selma Vaz Dias through an advertisement in the New Statesman. In 1957, Selma Vaz Dias again traced her and the BBC broadcast a dramatised version of Jean Rhys's novel, Good Morning, Midnight. Jean Rhys could not listen to Salma Vaz's presentation of her novel into a dramatic monologue as there was a power failure in her village. The performance of Good Morning Midnight was excellently received in England which encouraged Jean to start writing all over again after a long gap of nearly 20
years. Diana Athill of Andre Deutsch was introduced to Jean’s works by Francis Wyndham, a long time enthusiastic admirer of Rhys’s novels. Rhys’s husband Max Hammer died on March 7, 1966 and Jean Rhys finally released her master piece *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966. It is the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966 that earned for Jean Rhys the recognition of a first class creative writer. *Wide Sargasso Sea* was so enthusiastically received and admired by the readers in Britain and USA that, in 1974 A. Alvarez was inspired to pronounce Jean Rhys as “quite simply, the best living English novelist.” *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a book about being a woman and a sensitive human being, a particular type of woman, in a particular cultural environment and at a particular time in history. It is the story about a Creole West Indian woman whose black psyche is trapped behind the painful mask of her white skin. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is Jean Rhys’s West Indian novel, one major work on which her reputation as a creative writer hugely depends. The novel brilliantly portrays the struggle of an individual woman, Antoinette Cosway, for her original cultural identity, human dignity, freedom, and solidarity which she achieve by an aggressive and assertive act of committing suicide—an act that is positive, creative, and affirmative. Antoinette Cosway’s act of throwing herself into the clouds of fire is symbolic of her escape into greater realms of freedom and self-knowledge. Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* is perhaps the best English novel of the second half of the twentieth century—one which shows sensitive young woman’s struggle for self-preservation and self-liberation in a dangerously hostile and inimical environment. Two years later, *Tigers Are Better Looking*, a collection of short stories was published in Britain in
1968. A volume of short stories, Tigers Are Better Looking includes nine stories from The Left Bank and eight additional stories all of which had been published in various periodicals throughout the 1960s. Most of Rhys's stories are set in the Caribbean island of West Indies and depict the gloomy and dark side of the human life. Jean Rhys's genius as a short-story teller is praised by Paul Bailey in the following fashion:

Jean Rhys has been accused unjustly, I think of sentimentality. Tigers Are Better Looking, like her novels, is the work of a detached artist: self-pity, she compassionately makes it plain, is a vice necessary for survival as far as her women are concerned.

Jean Rhys's literary ability remained totally ignored or unappreciated in the first half of her career. However, recognition and admiration came her way only after her impressive re-emergence with Wide Sargasso Sea in 1966. Jean Rhys was awarded W.H. Smith Literary Award in 1967 for her brilliant portrayal of a white creole in Wide Sargasso Sea; the same year she was given away William Heinemann Award and was also selected for Royal Society of Literature Prize. Queen Elizabeth II honoured Jean Rhys with a commander of the British Empire designation in 1978. Among all these awards, the best one that really does justice to her creative sensibility is given by A. Alvarez who proclaimed her as 'the best living English novelist.' It was A. Alvarez's generous appreciation of Jean Rhys's literary talent that helped revive the readers' response to and interest in Rhys's almost forgotten works. As a result of Jean Rhys's widely increasing critical recognition, all her novels were reissued by Andre Deutsch during 1967-1973, and published in paperback by Penguin. Sleep It Off Lady, Jean Rhys's third collection of short stories appeared in 1976. In this collection
of short stories, Jean Rhys triumphantly delineates life with an amount of splendid clarity and artistry that remain unparalleled. *Sleep It Off, Lady* testifies to her significance as the only woman writer to emerge in the second half of the 20th century. Jean Rhys’s new stories published in *Tigers Are Better-Looking* and *Sleep It Off, Lady* represent her full development as a narrator of short-stories. These stories also reveal Rhys’s mastery over technical aspects and her marvellous artistic intelligence. Jean Rhys’s new collection of stories gives the impression of poetry, even though it is written in prose. *Tigers are Better Looking* and *Sleep It Off, Lady* have the intensity and concentration of poetry, and most importantly, they express a vision of life. Like her early novels, these new writings blend the autobiographical with the imagined. Rhys told Mary Cantwell in an interview in October 1975: “I start to write about something that has happened or is happening to me, but somehow or other things start changing.”

The themes of personal agony and survival, which figure dominantly in Rhys’s novels, also appear in her short stories with the same dynamism and powerfulness. These stories are remarkable for their artistic genius, intensity of feeling, and for shocking conclusions. The sad endings of her heroines’ existence and their self-destructive sensibilities achieve great meaning in the end.

Rhys’s short stories, like her novels, attempt to portray the existential issues of sensitive women who fail to comprehend the ways of the world, but finally succeed in maintaining identity amidst extremely inimical conditions. Women in Rhys’s fiction are disintegrated, dependent, vulnerable, and lonely; but the psychic consciousness of their existence eventually liberates them from their existential anguish.
Jean Rhys spent her last years in the Royal Devon. She was now more frail and utterly in despair. Jean Rhys had two weapons against despair—drinking and writing, of which only drinking remained and writing vanished. The last years of her life were intensely painful as she was leading an isolated life despite three marriages and several friends. Rhys's life is a sad story full of suffering, anguish, and isolation. Hers was an existence constantly tortured, tormented, and defeated by mysteriously cruel human forces and ill-luck persistently working against her. Rhys died on the afternoon of 14 May, 1979. In old age, Jean Rhys often told her biographer Francis Wyndham that, given the choice, she would have preferred a life of an average happiness to the greatest literary triumphs. Carole Angier confirms Jean Rhys's longing for peace and happiness and writes: "all she wanted to be was an ordinary, happy, passive, and protected woman,"¹⁰—a personal and passionate desire vividly reflected in her all fictional works.

Jean Rhys's unfinished autobiography Smile, Please was published posthumously in 1979. The idea of writing an autobiography did not attract Jean Rhys because most of the events of her life had already been used up in the novels. Her novels were not autobiographical in every detail, as her readers sometimes consider, but their therapeutic function was the purging of suffering and existential anguish. She was sometimes deeply hurt and angered by what other people said and wrote about her. She, therefore, wanted to get the facts down in order to present a real picture of her hard and miserable life in the West Indian, London, and Europe. Phyllis Rose wrote in her Writing of Women that Jean Rhys "has written a bad
autobiography” and that “her autobiography has little to add.” It is true that Jean’s autobiography has nothing to add as many of the events of her private life, i.e. her childhood days spent on the Caribbean island, her abrupt disorientation and transplantation into London, her unsuccessful relationships with several men, her illegal abortion, the three marriages, her aimless wanderings in London and Paris, were already used up in her novels and short stories. But to say that Jean has written ‘a bad autobiography’ does injustice to Rhys’s creative genius that is so extravagantly appreciated by A. Alvarez. *Smile, Please* was left unfinished, and if this means ‘bad,’ then it is definitely a bad autobiography. Jean Rhys’s *Smile Please* narrates the story of her childhood Caribbean memories, her experiences of exile and alienation, the plight of the Caribbean girl in the dark, different, and cold England, and her longing for escape. *Smile, Please* is definitely not a bad autobiography. On the contrary, it indicates Jean Rhys’s exemplary style, her love of perfectionism, and her greatness as a superb storyteller. *Smile, Please* is a must for those who love her works and it certainly provides an exciting introduction to those who wish to explore the literary development of Jean Rhys.

Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly, Jean Rhys’s biographers, edited her letters and published them with a title *Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-1966*. The writer of the letters is passive, fragile, angry, helpless, depressed, and alcoholic- very much like the heroines of the first four novels published between the two world wars. Jean Rhys’s letters are an index to her private life of suffering and darkness, with some occasional intervals of a few
happy and peaceful moments. One can know from her letters how near she had been to despair and how triumphantly she prevailed over it. Some of the best letters are to her daughter [by her first husband Jean Lenglet], Maryvonne Moerman. Maryvonne lived for a while in Indonesia, and Jean Rhys wrote to console her on her suffering from heat and complaining about her own suffering from the coldness of England. In one of her letters she advised her daughter how to kill insects and cockroaches by mixing sugar with boric powder. Rhys's letters once and for all establish her seriousness as a writer; even in the letters she is an artist. In her letters Jean Rhys has left us an unsparring self-portrait, and the illuminating story of her 25 years of mysterious silence, the circumstances which led to that silence and her struggle against heavy odds of live, and her extraordinary art of writing novels.

Literary recognition came to Jean Rhys very late, perhaps due to her secret escape into a long period of inexplicable silence. The publication of Wide Sargasso Sea in 1966 proclaimed Jean Rhys a first-class creative writer. Francis Wyndham, her admirer and biographer, suggested in an introduction to her work that Rhys's novels were "... ahead of their age, both in spirit and style ... the novels of the 1930s are much closer in feeling to life as it is lived and understood in the 1960s than to the accepted attitudes of their time."12 Truly, Jean Rhys's works have great emotional and literary appeal to the modern sensitive individuals who are irrevocably concerned with the modern themes or problems like homelessness, displacement, alienation, survival, identity, and existential dilemmas. Jean
Rhys's private life of suffering and anxiety and her extra-ordinarily splendid literary achievements are perhaps best described by no one else than her contemporary critic-writer, V. S. Naipaul:

Out of her fidelity to her experience, and her purity as a novelist, Jean Rhys thirty or forty years ago identified many of the themes that engage us today: isolation, an absence of society or community, the sense of things falling apart, dependence, loss. Her achievement is very grand. Her books may serve current causes, but she is above causes. What she has written about she has endured, over a long life; and what a stoic thing she makes the act of writing appear.\textsuperscript{13}

In one of her diaries, Jean Rhys is believed to have said: "I must write. If I stop writing my life will have been an abject failure."\textsuperscript{14} Jean Rhys writes about herself, as a means of escape, but she also writes about modern hyper-sensitive women who confront the problem of identity and existence with exemplary courage; sensitivity, and positive affirmation of individuality. Jean Rhys's novels and short stories are based on her private experiences in Dominica and Europe – the two places that irresistibly go into the making of Jean's literary sensibility. Rhys's portrayal of young women is, in fact, a bold and courageous expression of modern young women's sensitive relations and sharp responses to the unpleasant conditions of life in which they are inevitably placed. The greatest strength of Rhys's women is their passion and sensitivity. Discarded off by the society of which they desire to be an indispensable part, Rhys's women lead isolated lives and establish their individuality and humanity independently of the insensitive and indifferent world. Rhys's principal characters in the early novels are homeless, passive, helpless, dependent and depressed heroines longing for money, security, and emotional satisfaction; but when
they discover that their 'authentic self' is being assaulted, they rebel and hit back with electrifying rapidity in order to assert their independence, survival, and human dignity. Whenever they fear an assault on their very existence, they immediately adopt the art of 'survival mechanism' the art of living dangerously passionately — in the hope of achieving self-respect and authenticity. The rebellious nature of Rhys's heroines ultimately helps them get rid of humiliation and leads to a totally different approach to life— it creates in them the psychic awareness of the necessity of their existence. This rebellious confrontation leads to the positive act of reconstruction of the true 'self'. To sum up, it can be now fairly said that the concern for survival, identity, authenticity, human dignity and 'wholeness' remained Jean Rhys's central preoccupations in her private life as well as in her fictional works. Jean Rhys's novels and collections of short stories explore the possibilities of a good life, by which we mean love, passion, security, happiness, freedom, emotional fulfilment and dignity.

III. Criticism on Jean Rhys

Jean Rhys's early novels published before World War II received very little attention of the reading public; however, a curious interest in her literary works was aroused in the early 70s when a flood of literary reviews and research articles appeared in appreciation of her artistic excellence. Success or failure of an artist hugely depends upon the quantity and quality of criticism that his/her work receives. Jean Rhys was, indeed, very unfortunate to have been ignored by literary critics in the first half of her career. However, great recognition came her way with the publication of
Wide Sargasso Sea in 1966, and Jean Rhys became famous world-wide overnight when A. Alvarez declared her as 'the best living English novelist.' The fiction of Jean Rhys received considerable attention of literary scholars and researchers over the last two decades; yet several themes and aspects in her novels have remained unexplored and without a critical investigation. Jean Rhys's novels became increasingly popular in U.K. and U.S.A. in the last 2-3 decades of the twentieth century as her admirers began to acclaim her works lavishly. Yet, Jean Rhys remains a lesser-known writer in India and so many other countries.

Traditionally, critics of Jean Rhys concentrate on five spheres of interests, i.e. autobiographical elements in her novels, the colonial and racial background of her heroines, psycho-analytical interpretations of her principal protagonists, a structuralist analysis of her style, language and narrative technique, and a feminist evaluation of her women characters. A detailed survey of the Rhysian criticism would help to point out that an existentialist examination of Rhys's novels has been largely ignored by critics and that such a response to her fiction is long overdue. The present dissertation does maintain that any critical assessment of Jean Rhys's novels would remain incomplete or inconclusive without a profound existential investigation.

Jean Rhys wanted no biography written of her after her death. Contrary to her desire, a good number of scholars and critics engaged themselves in the task of tracing Jean Rhys's private life. Ironically, large number of Jean Rhys's biographies appeared after her death. Carole
Angier's *Jean Rhys* [1985] is a moving and beautifully written study of Jean's own search for self-knowledge, her early Caribbean experiences which appear in her novels and short stories, her constant fight against unhappiness and isolation, and her extraordinary gift for writing. According to Carole Angier, Jean Rhys was not a modern feminist writer because "modern women want their own independent lives and independent souls-and these were the last things Jean wanted. From beginning to end, dependence was her way of life." Carole Angier further writes: "Her life was unbearably sad: only her art was triumphant." Readers of Jean Rhys come to know every detail about her private life and literary development in London and Paris through the writings of her friend-biographers and literary agents such as Francis Wyndham and Diana Athill. In her introduction to *Jean Rhys: The Early Novels* published by Andre Deutsch in 1984, Diana Athill describes Jean Rhys as an honest and deeply self-absorbed person and a conscious and dedicated artist. Jean Rhys was stuntless, and this 'stuntlessness' is the great beauty of her style, Diana Athill maintains. Jean Rhys's letters edited by Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly also provide glimpses into her sad, isolated, and unhappy world and into her views on life and the art of writing. Since her death in 1979, several reviews and biographical sketches of Jean Rhys have appeared in journals and magazines. Some of them include- *The Best Living English Novelist* by A. Alvarez in New York Times Book Review [March 17, 1974], *Jean Rhys* by Todd Bender in Contemporary Literature [Spring, 1981], *Jean Rhys and the Dutch Connection* by Martien Kappers-Den Hollander in Maatstaf [Amsterdam, 1982], *Jean Rhys: A Descriptive and Annotated Bibliography*
Several full-length critical studies on the novels and short stories of Jean Rhys appeared in the last two decades of the 20th century. Arnold E. Davidson’s book *Jean Rhys* [1985] is a brilliant account of a wide range of themes discussed in her novels. Arnold Davidson reads Jean Rhys’s novels from the Marxist point of view and describes her heroines’ search for love and money as the relationship between ‘eros and economics’. The bond between love and money, rather between sex and money, in Rhys’s novels has been made amply clear by Arnold Davidson. Davidson’s book offers a systematically and carefully carried out analysis of each one of Rhys’s novels and it is, indeed, one extra-ordinarily written account of a variety of themes covered by Jean Rhys. Helen Carr’s *Jean Rhys*, published by Northport House in association with British Council in 1996, concentrates on Jean Rhys’s increasing popularity and on the re-examination of gender and colonial power relations which are central to her fiction. Helen Carr’s study draws on both recent feminist and post-colonial theory, and places her work in the context of modernist and post-modernist writing. Helen Carr’s book *Jean Rhys* devotes one exclusive chapter to point out indispensable struggle of an individual human being against the huge machine of law, the establishment world, and respectability. The book also makes some comments on Rhys’s style, narrative technique, and her ‘struggle for the sign.’ Thomas F. Staley’s *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study*,
brought out by Macmillan in 1979, is perhaps the most penetrating examination of the writer’s personal life and her grand literary achievements. Thomas F. Staley’s study not only illuminates Jean Rhys’s novels, it reveals those qualities in her art that have special relevance for modern readers. Staley’s book, published shortly after the death of Jean Rhys in 1979, is the first comprehensive analysis of her work to appear. The author explores with depth the strange and curious literary career of Jean Rhys, and traces the shaping literary influences on her career and her debt to Ford Madox Ford and presents her portrayal of the modern feminine consciousness. The book is, indeed, a must for the readers of Jean Rhys.

However, Staley’s study is just a starting place rather than a definitive study of the author. Staley’s focus is on characters and themes. Paula Le Gallez’s *The Rhys Woman* published by Macmillan in 1990 is the first reader-based textual analysis of the work of Jean Rhys. The book examines each female character in depth and demonstrates the complexity of the personality and attempts to view them in terms of their own individuality. Paula Le Gallez’s book focuses on “the unconscious feminism of a consciously non-feminist writer.” This critical study makes an investigation into each one of Rhys’ novels, concentrating on the character’s principal concerns and preoccupation.

There appeared several book-length critical works on Jean Rhys over the last two decade, and some of them deserve a mention here: Louis James’ *Jean Rhys* [1978], Peter Wolfe’s *Jean Rhys* [1980], Helen Nebeker’s *Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage: A critical study of the Novels of Jean Rhys* [1981]. Helen Nebeker’s book is the first full-length feminist account of Rhys’s
work. Louis James's text remains a fine introduction to Rhys's fiction; it points to some important areas that still need more investigation. James Louis reads Rhys's work as simply autobiographical and suggests further modes of critical analysis. Kenneth Ramchand's The West Indian Novel and Its Background [1970] has a chapter devoted to three white West Indian novelists, one of whom is Jean Rhys.

A large portion of the Rhysian criticism is devoted to the analysis of her major thematic concerns and preoccupations. The central themes in her work like suffering, insecurity, search for money, homelessness, quest for love, happiness and personal relationships, and a deep longing for belonging and individuality are particularly stressed by the critics of Jean Rhys. Rhys's heroines belong to the middle-class world with which money is the permanent anxiety. Money is the decisive factor in classifying people, and many critics of Jean Rhys including A. Alvarez, Kristien Hemmerchts, Thomas F. Staley, Paula Le Gallez, and Arnold E. Davidson have written exhaustively on the aspect of money and its relation to survival. In his article 'The Art and Economics of Destitution in Jean Rhys' After Leaving Mr Mackenzie,' Davidson illustrates how money is important to Julia who wants money as money and not as a sign of love or concern. Julia's attempt at a kind of rebirth by rejecting Mr. Mackenzie's cheque of monthly allowance is observed by Davidson as an assertion of a woman's self-respect. Paula Le Gallez demonstrates how the arrogance of economic power is reflected in the act of paying for sexual favours and how this act devalues the emotional significance of sex. All of Rhys's heroines are constantly in search for financial security; but in their search, they are
reduced to a mere commodity by the world that puts a heavy emphasis upon the equations of economics. In an article entitled 'Character and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys', Elgin W. Mellown deals with the principal characters and themes in the work of Jean Rhys and concludes, "Her five novels are models for any one who wants an original understanding of life and of human nature." Judith Thurman's 'The Mistress and the Mask: Jean Rhys' Fiction' published in Ms [vol. IV, No. 7, Jan 1976] observes that Rhys's women are passive victims without will and ability to survive. The article points out the crisis of response and failure of the desire for self-preservation - a moment which occurs regularly in Rhys's novels. Judith Thurman also attempts to point out Rhys's heroines' yearning for lost warmth, for a place, especially for the warmth of birthplace. Dennis Porter's article, 'Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and Jane Eyre' published in The Massachusetts Review [vol. 17, autumn 1976] presents Rhys's heroines as alienated, solitary victims in a modern setting, dependent on and abandoned by men, and tormented by a sense of homelessness and worthlessness of socio-economics. Elizabeth Nunez-Harrell's article, 'The Paradoxes of Belonging: The White West Indian Woman in Fiction' published in Modern Fiction Studies [Vol. 32, No. 2, Summer 1985] presents Jean's personal quest for belonging which is reflected in her all fictional characters. Rhys was an outcast, a sort of freak rejected by both Europe and England, whose blood she carried in her veins, and by the black West Indian people, whose culture and home she shared. The article indicates how Jean Rhys's personal experiences of colonialisation, imperialism, and cultural conflicts resulted in themes like physical isolation,
psychic alienation and homelessness. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivok in her scholarly article ‘Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism’, published in Critical Inquiry [Vol. 12, No. 1, Autumn 1985] points out how personal identity and human dignity are determined by the politics of imperialism as revealed in Wide Sargasso Sea. Helen Tiffin’s article ‘Mirror and Mask: Colonial Motifs in the Novels of Jean Rhys’ [WLWE, Vol. 17, 1978] also indicates the impacts of colonial politics on the work of Jean Rhys whose heroines are double outsiders condemned to homelessness and isolation. Martin Heidegger once declared that the problem of ‘homelessness’ is coming to be the destiny of the world, and the theme of ‘homelessness’ is the terrain of Jean Rhys’s fiction. Carol R. Haley’s research paper titled ‘Ageing in the Fiction of Jean Rhys’ [WLWE, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1988] focuses on the process of ageing which must be seen as an integral part of the wider theme of psychological alienation and exile. The article points out that Rhys’ heroines are extremely conscious of growing old and a fear of ill-treatment and neglect that it brings. V. S. Naipaul’s popular article entitled ‘Without a Dog’s Chance’ published in The New York Review of Books, views Rhys’s women as dependent, passive outsiders thrown off by organised society. V.S. Naipaul thinks that they are schooled by their society in the art of survival. Rosalind Miles’ critical book The Female Form [1987] attempts to show that Rhys’ heroines are autonomous individuals who fight for the rights of liberty and work with traditionally masculine weapons of courage and self-assertion. To sum up, it can now be said that, traditionally, critics of Jean Rhys paid exclusive attention to the writer’s thematic concerns like homelessness, struggle for
identity and money, physical and psychological alienation etc. The present thesis maintains that this focus is only on a superficial level and that a wider and deeper analysis of Rhys's heroines' existential dilemmas should be carried out.

An individual's efforts to achieve a little happiness, love, money, freedom, and security in life are often defeated by an established hostile society which inevitably forces him into physical and psychological alienation, eventually leading to mental breakdown. Rhys's heroines desperately attempt to gain a little bit of happiness, and in their efforts, they always feel a threat to their psychic equilibrium. Jean Rhys's women are often found on the verge of losing sanity as they persistently try to achieve authenticity, cool, and self-hood by preserving human dignity. Several critics have made physiological and psycho-analytical investigations into the women characters in Rhys's novels. Notable among them is Elizabeth Abel's study titled, 'Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys' published in Contemporary Literature [Vol. 20, No. 2, spring, 1979]. Elizabeth Abel considers Rhys's heroines as split personalities who create their own mental worlds and completely fail to reconnect their world with the external one. Rhys' heroines view the world as unreal and hostile, and therefore, they detach themselves from family and friends and this intensifies their inner divisions, maintains Abel. Like schizophrenics, they lead lives of isolation by declaring the world as a hostile environment. Elizabeth Abel suggests that Rhys's women are like children, torn between their sense of self and their inability to control their lives. Elizabeth Abel adopts a psycho-analytical method to study Rhys's women and finds that
they are divided-selves who manifest several specific symptoms of schizophrenics. Elizabeth Abel's article is a brilliant and penetrating interpretation of Rhys's heroines' psyche. Carole Boyce Dories and Elaine Savoury Fido in their preface to *Out of Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* [1990] think that Rhys' women represent disfigured and damaged West Indian psyche. Rhys women often become the island, cut off, marooned, and dislocated who undergo varying and complex levels of psycho-social dislocation due to colonial stresses. Evelyn O'Callagham's study *Interior Schisms Dramatised: The Treatment of the "Mad" Women in the Work of Some Female Caribbean Novelists* makes some startling and completely new suggestions. The article maintains that madness is a kind of liberation from false attitudes and values and, therefore, it may be a breakthrough as well as a breakdown. This psycho-analytical study puts a great deal of importance on the significance of madness, death, and suicide, without ignoring or devaluing the eternal value of sanity, survival and existence. Evelyn O'Callagham also believes that an attempt at suicide is, in fact, an escape into wholeness. Thus, it is observed that psycho-analytical interpretations of Rhys' art make an interesting reading.

Kristien Hemmerechts' *A Plausible Story and a Plausible Way of Telling It: a Structuralist Analysis of Jean Rhys' Novels* published in 1987 is the first full-length-book to take into account the methods of analysis developed by the structuralist. The book discusses in detail the specific theories and metalinguistic terminology and applies them to Rhys' five novels. The book also deals with Rhys' handling of narrative technique, style, and language. Numerous articles and reviews which focus light on her
language, style and technique continue to appear in journals and books regularly. Writing about Jean Rhys's artistic genius and technique, A. Alvarez comments that "there is no one else now writing who combines such emotional penetration and formal artistry or approaches her unemphatic, unblinking truthfulness."¹⁹ Thomas F. Staley's *The Emergence of a Form: Style and Consciousness in Jean Rhys' Quartet* illustrates Jean Rhys's distinctive style which was realized after the publication of *Quartet* in 1928. The article concentrates on Rhys's sparse style, her gift for irony and metaphor, her artistic vision, the economy of language, and directness of style. Judith Thurman's article designated as *The Mistress and the Mask: Jean Rhys's Fiction* also concentrates on Rhys's technical genius: "Jean Rhys' prose is spare, haggardly elegant. It has the intensity of four o'clock in the morning when the stars are setting and the light of lamps seems coldest. Her self-discipline, one suspects, has been refined painfully from a former and cruder habit of self-punishment."²⁰ Diana Athill, Rhys's biographer, appreciates her style in a more appropriate language. She writes, "The 'stuntlessness' of her style is its great beauty. She fell in love with words when she was a child, but she never used them rhetorically, to show them off ...... Her language does what it needs to do with elegance and economy which is perfectly natural and easy ..... or rather, easy-seeming."²¹ Some other articles on Jean Rhys's style and technique include - Le Gallez Paula's *The Rhys Woman* passes some illuminating comments on Rhys's narrative strategies, and Hite Molly's *Writing in the Margins: Jean Rhys*. To sum up, it is observed that the number of literary critics who have
concentrated on the modernist, colonialist, and structuralist analysis of Rhys's work is considerably great.

Much of the most illuminating criticism on Jean Rhys has continued to come from those who have focused on her as part of the feminist tradition, who have recognized her themes and concerns as central to the feminist writing. There has been considerable uncertainty whether Jean Rhys could be called a feminist writer. Many critics agree with Helen McNeil that Rhys "was feminine rather than feminist." Jean Rhys’s novels might depict male brutality, domination; and patriarchal oppression, but Jean Rhys herself disliked being called 'a feminist writer.' Paula Le Gallez’s *The Rhys Woman* is devoted to describe "the unconscious feminism of a consciously non-feminist writer," i.e. Jean Rhys. One of the strongest impressions one gets from her novels is that Jean Rhys mistrusts women. Most writers in the feminist tradition write about the humiliation and exploitation of women by young, rich, cruel and sexy men. But Jean Rhys is the 'other women' – and from her otherness, she "perceives women as even more treacherous than men." Therefore, to think of Jean Rhys as a feminist, or a socialist, or a modernist, or any other 'ist' – except a subjectivist – is to miss her central and most tragic point, writes Carole Angier in her book entitled *Jean Rhys*. Carole Angier, Rhys’s biographer, further writes: "...... whenever she read a review that was even mildly feminist, she laughed and tore it up. Her solipsism and her pessimism combined to make her writing exactly what she said it was: a quest for self-knowledge, and nothing to do with anyone else."
Ironically, considerably large portion of the Rhysian criticism is devoted to the feminist analysis of her five novels. There have appeared several book-length studies and numerous reviews and research papers on Jean Rhys which attempt to make an investigation into her young, modern women characters from the feminist point of view. Thomas F. Staley’s *Jean Rhys: A critical study*, published shortly after the death of Jean Rhys, is the first comprehensive study of the author’s unique portrayal of the modern feminine consciousness that emerges in her work. In his book Thomas F. Staley presents Rhys’s subtle, distinctive and radical portrayal of the female experiences in the metropolis cities of London and Paris.

Feminist criticism can speak out from the gaps in texts to subvert traditional ways of reading. Jean Rhys deliberately disrupts her novels with ellipses to hint at the disrupted psyche of her heroines, maintains Maggie Humm in *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism*. Breen Jennifer in her book *In Her Own Write – Twentieth Century Women’s Fiction* writes that in Jean Rhys’s fiction the male characters are the active, moneyed participants of patriarchy and the female characters are the passive un-moneyed dependants. Caryl Phillips’s edited book *Extravagant Strangers: A Literature of Belonging* is a unique demonstration of Rhys’s heroines’ grappling with the difficulties of belonging. Elaine Showalter in a *Literature of Their Own [British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing]* observes that there is a new frankness in Rhys’s novels about the body and about such topics as adultery, abortion, sex, and prostitution. Rosalind Miles in her *The Female Form* writes that Rhys’s fiction shows her preference for masochistic and damaged heroines who fight with courage for freedom,
liberty, and independence. The list of books, articles, and reviews which attempt to study the five novels of Jean Rhys from the feminist viewpoint is, indeed, very exhaustive. Some of them deserve a mention here—Abruna Laura Niesen de’s *Jean Rhys' Feminism: Theory Against Practice* [WLWE, 28: 2, 1988], Hagley Carol in *Ageing in the Fiction of Jean Rhys* [WLWE, 28: 1, 1988] points out that women are not the sole victims in Rhys’s novels, and Helen Nebekar’s *Jean Rhys: Women in Passage: a Critical Study of the Novels of Jean Rhys*.

To say that Jean Rhys is a ‘feminist’ writer, merely because all her principal characters are women, would be a critical failure. Jean Rhys’s modern, young, sensitive heroines should not be considered as mere women, but they must be regarded as solid individual human beings capable of fighting for the human rights of liberty, identity, authenticity, and dignity. Although Jean Rhys’s novels treat feminist themes in a very effective manner, we need to see her heroines in a broader light as dignified human beings seriously engaged in the existential quest for happiness, security, and self-assertion.

This detailed survey of the Rhysian criticism makes it abundantly clear that the critics of Jean Rhys have failed to notice her heroines’ survival struggle and their intense desire to establish their own existence. Henric Mossin’s article titled “The Existentialist Dimension in the Novels of Jean Rhys” [Kunapipa, 3, vol.1, 1981] is perhaps the only article appeared so far which analyses Rhys’s novels from the existentialist point of view. There has been no full-length study of Jean Rhys’s novels, either in India or
abroad, that attempts to establish her recognition as an existentialist writer. The present doctoral thesis has arisen from the awareness that an existentialist analysis of Jean Rhys's work has largely been ignored and that such a critical response to her novels is long overdue. This thesis is inspired by recognition that a proper critical evaluation of Rhys's novels would remain incomplete and inconclusive without making an existentialist investigation into her fiction. And therefore, an urgent need for such a critical perspective has been intensely felt. The primary objective of this doctoral dissertation is to present Jean Rhys's specific view of human life and existence, as revealed in her heroines' existential dilemmas. It does not, however, exclude, doubt or challenge the validity of alternative critical theories and interpretations of her art. The succeeding chapters are devoted to an exclusively existentialist examination of each one of Jean Rhys's novels.

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References:


3. As quoted by Diana Athill in her introduction to Smile, Please.


10. Carole, Angier, p.15


15. Carole, Angier, p.15.


23. Paula, Le Gallez, p.08.


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