Chapter VI: Conclusion
Rhys’s women, as evident from the discussion in the last three chapters, lead an ‘unhomely’ life, residing as they do on the borderlines of families, cultures and states. In the Introduction, the metaphor of travel was invoked to suggest that Rhys’s female protagonists are restless in their quest for a ‘stable’ destiny and destination. Such, indeed, is their urge that we also referred to Clifford’s use of the phrase ‘dwelling-in-travel’ (2) in his book Routes. This travel, he proposes, is not only a movement from one place to another, from one country to another, but is also socio-cultural in nature. The dwelling of the Rhysian protagonists, which is in a state of flux, however, creates for them an ‘in-between’ space that crisscrosses several cultural domains. They reject the conventional role of domestic homemakers living in ‘the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation’ (James 360). The characters, during the entire span of their lives, get acquainted with men and women belonging to different social, cultural, linguistic backgrounds. As they negotiate diverse lands and cultures in the course of their travel, they become acutely conscious of their own distinct identities – black, white, Creoles, biologically hybrid individuals, and above all women. In Chapter II, Wolff’s contention that travels for women are invested with more intensity and significance than they are for men has
been discussed. While for men travel is a part of their lives, it is quite within the
norms of this normative travel that it is undertaken for various reasons – for earning
livelihood for the family, to avoid boredom in the household, to seek pleasure and
adventure in the public space, to discover the undiscovered in the wide open world
and so on. But, for women, travelling is often considered to be a ‘taboo.’ Travelling,
for them, is an act of deviance and defiance. Women are culturally constructed to be a
mainstay of the interior space of home. The entire structure of home depends upon
their activities of taking care, nurturing, offering hospitality, performing all kinds of
domestic service, giving birth to children and taking their responsibilities. So
women’s movement, even if temporary, threatens this very structure. Moreover, the
public space is a forbidden one for them as there is every possibility of their being
corrupted, polluted, abducted and appropriated by others. As a result, generally
speaking, travel and exploration of the outside world are restricted only to the male.
But Wolff, as has been seen, shows that it is very much emancipatory for them for
gendered reasons. In the process, they regain much confidence and achieved strong
personalities and stable identities. Hence, it becomes evident that women have great
stake in travels.

Rhys’s women, as has been seen in Chapter III and Chapter IV, move out of
home for different reasons. First of all home, domestically speaking, is absent for
them. In the novels, as had been seen, there is a stunning silence in the domestic life
of the women protagonists. Not much visibility of the interactive family relationship
is found in the small domestic sphere of the novels. There are no strong mother
figures there; the father figures roam about in the public sphere. Their presence in the
household is defined by their absence or by their exploitative presence. For instance,
in Voyage in the Dark the father appears only marginally and the death of the father
upsets the domestic home space after the Estate is sold away by the stepmother. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* the real father dwells in absence and the step-father disrupts the domesticity of the household. *Quartet, After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Good Morning, Midnight* show the complete absence of the father. Even sibling relationship is either absent or deformed in some sense or the other within the family structure. There is a total lack of emotional attachment among them. Two such instances can be found between the sisters Julia and Norah in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and the sister-brother relationship between Antoinette and her brother in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the former, there was some emotional attachment in the character of Julia but since she is the one who leaves home, disobeys the uncle and becomes a deviant woman, her approach is rebuffed by her sister. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette’s brother is always sick and bedridden. This generates tremendous anxiety in her mother. She becomes obsessed with the child and neglects Antoinette. There is a failure in the mother-daughter relationship as there is a lack of communication. The creation of the character of a stepmother like Hester in *Voyage in the Dark* introduces disruptive elements in the domestic space. Such a situation is juxtaposed with the happy family and community lives of the black people. The Creole protagonists have only limited access to their lives. But the knowledge they gather about the black community further intensifies their sense of absence and pain. As both her Caribbean and European novels demonstrate, they live on the borderlines of conventional families. Secondly, the women protagonists live on the borderlines of cultures as well. Creole culture itself, as has been seen in the Introduction, is problematic. It is implicated in an imperial history. The Creoles carry the history of imperialism and colonialism in their bodies, minds and language. The members of this community are hated for being colonizers and for their exploitative activities – political, social, economic and sexual.
The sudden disappearance of the structure of power and pelf with the dissolution of the colonies rendered the Creoles helpless. They incur in the contemporary situation the social wrath of the exploited black people. The young women protagonists who grew up in such humiliating situations or environments naturally develop a split within them – a cultural schizophrenia that continues to haunt them throughout their life. The vigorous, carnivalesque life of the blacks and the energy contained in their language – patois – creates a contrast to the repressed and depressed Creole characters who live in the shadows of the crumbling structures of history. It is because of such a situation of disparity and frustration that they feel a sense of familial and cultural homelessness. This homelessness prompts them to take journeys in search of family formations and identity reconstructions. They move out of the Caribbean islands and take cartographic journeys to England and other European countries. Chapter IV, which is on Rhys’s European novels, elaborates their experiences in these countries and shows how the search for home remains unfulfilled. The home that they get is only through memories and dreams.

In the Introduction, some background information has been provided which can be helpful in assessing the nature of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’ in Rhys’s novels. Rhys had, as has been seen here, her upbringing in a Creole culture and had been excluded from both the worlds of the black as well as the white culture. Her own in-between position resulted in multiple identities – she had the white English ancestry; her Creole culture of the Caribbean; and also the bohemian traits of a woman traveller journeying around Europe. Although the theories of antillanité or ‘Caribbeanness’ advanced by Edouard Glissant, and of créolité by Jean Barnabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, as have been discussed in the Introduction, underline the aspect of an synthetic Caribbean identity, the real life experience for Rhys was more
complicated. She herself was divided between an unmistakable longing for the pristine Caribbean life and distaste for a Creole identity that had been fragmentary in nature. Tiffin writing on Rhys declares, “The white Creole is, as a double outsider, condemned to self-consciousness, a sense of inescapable difference and even deformity in the two societies by whose judgements she always condemns herself” (328). The duality and multilocality of her existence are also reflected in her representations. Since her novels are often interpreted as the camouflaged versions of her own life, some biographical information have been provided which underline the schizophrenic tendency in the character and personality of Rhys herself. Rhys’s protagonists are in constant engagement with the problem of arrival and acculturation. They sometimes have dual or multiple identities but also transcend their ‘national’ boundary and ‘community’ culture. Cultural dilemma where the protagonists are caught make them homeless, they are caught in an in-between position.

Since the term ‘home’ is ambiguous in its usage, attempts have been made to define and theorize it in Chapter II entitled “Theorizing ‘Home’ and ‘Homelessness.’ It has been seen that the term operates at different levels of connotations embracing within its scope the spheres of domesticity or household, family, community, country and nation. Homelessness has also been discussed from a woman’s point of view. Changing contours of home, in different senses of the term, have also been analyzed through the terms ‘home’, ‘unhomely home’ and ‘non-home.’ ‘Home’/ ‘unhomely home’ dichotomy, as has been interpreted in this study on Rhys, is rather overlapping and fluid. They are contrary pairs that might coexist even within the interior ‘home’ space depending on the experiences and ease of an individual. Familiarity of ‘home’ can transform into an unfamiliar space of ‘unhomely home’ with the beginning of a psychological crisis. Thus, although residing within the interior space of ‘home’
individuals suffer from the anxiety of ‘homelessness,’ the homing desire virtually remaining elusive for them. ‘Home’ space which has the potentiality of becoming a cordial space degenerates into an ‘unhomely home’ with the disillusionment of the protagonists. The concept of ‘unhomely home’ as is found in Rhys is a space which is generally identified with a home but the barriers or the restrictions present herein results in the disenchantment of the protagonists. ‘Non-home’ is an extreme opposition to the idea of ‘home.’ While there is a clear distinction between ‘home’ and ‘non-home,’ comparatively, the demarcation between ‘home’ and ‘unhomely home’ is blurred. ‘Home’/‘unhomely home’ encompass all the anxieties, the turmoil that the women protagonists face in search of its definition within the atmosphere of cordiality. ‘Home’ for them is not an ideal home resting in complete absentia, nor is it totally imaginary; it has a fragmentary exposition in the re-living of their past happy experiences through memory. Moreover, ‘non-home’ or homelessness in fact determines the environment or the course of action in the Rhysian fictions. The true image of ‘home’ is concealed in the subtext of the fictions and ‘homelessness’ becomes the facet that occupies the forefront. Discourse of ‘home’ or ‘home’ serves as the background to the sense of ‘non-home’ or ‘homelessness’ that pervades her works. Rhys’s texts highlights ‘home’ as an interior space denied to the western whites and the Creole and ‘non-home’ as a facet, which is alien to the black culture. Although, the blacks faced the turmoil unleashed by the colonial brutality, and even after they appropriated the colonial culture, they could still preserve this homely space. But for the colonialist, they won the battles but lost the war fighting against the spiritual crisis that occurred in the early twenties. ‘Homelessness’ in Rhys becomes more acute when it is measured against her vision of ‘home,’ as found in the black community. Familial warmth, domestic activities of homemaking or those of domestic
politics are absent in Rhys. In Rhys, Adorno’s homeliness of the traditional homes is absent and the deteriorated modern homes of Adorno as depersonalized container without emotional attachments is partially revealed in the failure of her women protagonists to establish relationship. The period house, nostalgic in time, is latent in the house/home space of ‘Morgan’s Rest’ in *Voyage in the Dark* or the ‘Coulibri Estate’ in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. However, with their destruction they relapse into the fantastical past, unattainable. One has to live in the present with this sense of unattainability of, and estrangement from, the past. Past, into which the women protagonists relapse, gives only a temporary consolation. It does not provide them with the satisfaction and happiness they desire. By acting as a temporary substitute, a surrogate for them, the past intensifies their problematic relationship. Hotel space, the reference to which is abundantly found and which suggests their present condition, solidifies the feeling of estrangement and homelessness. The concept of home itself is displaced from the present. Absence of home, rather than a sense of repentance, haunts the protagonists’ psyche. The theorization offers proper perspective to critically analyse Rhys’s novels.

Problem of cultural assimilation of the Rhysian women has been discussed in Chapter III and IV of the thesis. Rhys’s location in a Creole culture itself demonstrated its schizophrenic propensity. Rhys’s novels, as had been found, cannot be contextualized without these background details. Her novels have been divided mainly into two classes on the basis of their geographical affiliation – Caribbean and European. Chapter III entitled “‘Home’ and ‘Homelessness’ in the Caribbean Novels” shows the picturesque Caribbean islands and traces the geographical and cultural displacement of the women protagonists in Europe which wreaks havoc in their lives. Both the characters are Creole characters and are culturally not accepted by the black
natives. Subsequently, when Europe was in despair and in dissolution, the black
culture managed to retain its solidity even during crisis. Home gets associated with
the cultures of the natives, their sense of belonging to the land, the warmth of their
homes where things are in order, where children and women are happy and secure,
where even at crisis there is no loneliness. Caribbean portrayal of characters and
situations in her fictions are those light-hearted folks standing unanimously –
Francine maintains (*Voyage in the Dark*) the domestic space – she cooks, she serves,
she nurses. For Anna (*Voyage in the Dark*), she becomes her lost mother. Tia (*Wide
Sargasso Sea*) is protected by her mother. Christophine (*Wide Sargasso Sea*)
nourishes affections for Antoinette. She protects her as Antoinette’s own mother
never could. An ideal home is closely associated with the mother and the father.
Andrienne Rich, emphasizing the significance of the mother, comments: “the first
knowledge any woman has of warmth, nourishment, tenderness, sensuality, mutuality,
comes from her mother” (218). Even Terkenli associates ‘home’ with the mother: “…
home is [a]… social component. It becomes salient in the development of the idea of
home by establishing a circle of social relations that validate an individual as a human
being…. The word family… as “people in house,” emphasizes the connection
between home and family. The first home is the mother” (326). For Rhysian women,
such figures are either absent or too weak to make their presence. Juxtaposed to this is
the ‘unhomeliness’ found in a white family, which is revealed in her European novels.
There is a lack of mother figures who with their strong determination could ensure the
sense of home. No white women, as is evident, are the nurturer of family spirit, none
to maintain the home space with emotion and sympathy.

Simultaneously, we find that her European novels display ‘unhomeliness’ in
the white families. In Chapter IV entitled “‘Home’ and ‘Homelessness’ in the
European Novels,” it is found that the concept of home as a topographical location is different in the European novels from that of the Caribbean. In the Caribbean narratives home can be located on three planes – land, family and memory. Rhys being more impressed by the picturesque beauty of the islands differentiates between the islands and Europe by making the islands more colourful topographically. In the European fictions home as a land or home that can be familial is absent. The women protagonists gain some consolation through their memorable experiences. Aura of the islands is absent in the European novels. The female activity of ‘homemaking’ is also absent here. Home as a female interior space is deliberately questioned and the women protagonists usually become objects or accessories here. It is also noteworthy that European women portrayed as the mother characters such as Marie Hughes (Quartet), Lois Heidler (Quartet), Norah (After Leaving Mr Mackenzie), Aunt Hester (Voyage in the Dark) are cold and calculating. Antoinette’s mother, a white Creole, rejects the daughter. White Men like Heidler (Quartet), Stephan (Quartet), Mr Mackenzie (After Leaving Mr Mackenzie), Uncle Griffiths (After Leaving Mr Mackenzie), Rochester (Wide Sargasso Sea), Walter (Voyage in the Dark), Enno (Good Morning, Midnight) are dominating and are unfeeling. They make the lives of their female companions miserable. Other white male characters use and forget them. Strangely, no domestic lives of these white males are disclosed apart from that of Heidler who is but an unfaithful husband and lover.

In Chapter V entitled “‘Home’ and ‘Homelessness’: A Journey through Images,” our attention shifts from the themes to the patterns in Rhys’s novels. A systematic reading of the symbols and images reveals the anxiety for home found in the texts. Among the symbols/ images predominant are those of journey or travel (sea routes, land routes explored through streets and labyrinthine passages), those relating
to settlement or the lack of it (discovered through rooms, hotels, prison, attic, and cell), and those bearings on identity (mask, dress, and mirror). The vacillating minds of the protagonists and their experiences of crisis or that of belonging is unravelled by the same image becoming infused with positive and negative connotations accordingly. ‘Home’/ ‘unhomely home’ binary is seen to operate in the symbols of settlement. ‘Home’/ ‘non-home’ binary is exposed through the images of journey and the symbols of identity reveal their psychological fluctuation between ‘home,’ ‘unhomely home’ and ‘non-home’. The women protagonists’ identification with their selves is the ‘home’; the breaking down of self/I relation during insanity, schizophrenia, psychosis places them into ‘unhomely homes.’ Complete non-identification of the characters with mistresses, prostitutes, and deviants of the society transforms the social space into ‘non-homes.’ Home for the protagonists exist in their selective memories of their happy experiences that are transitory and non-reachable; unhomely home resides in the definition and confinement of the traditional homes; non-home exists in the streets, attics and at times in the rooms of hotels.

Contrapuntal reading of Rhys centring on the importance of ‘home’ uncovers the two domains – homely and the unhomely. In Rhys, home ceases to be a material dwelling place and it is identified more to with the abstract categories of belonging. For her protagonists home is neither cultural nor a national identity. When the exiles and outcasts, who live individually as flotsam and bohemians, are treated with hostility and confined to social heterotopias, home, for them, becomes the memory – the recollection of the pleasant memories helping them in their survival. Both topographical place and psychological space are explored through relationships and these become more graphic in her insightful exploration than the incidents her novels unfold through fragmented narration. The novels narrativise the whole range of
threats that destabilize the attempts of constructing home, identity, community. They expose the underbelly of social ugliness. The keen desire for home, for synchrony, for sameness encounters an uncanny realization of the repressions and violence that pervade the way. Rejection that the protagonists suffer from is twice, as it is not only the rejection by their family but also the potential loss of a second family, the women's community. Rosemary Marangoly equates the feeling of homeliness with an acceptance within the greater community. She describes it as

A place that is flexible, that manifests itself in various forms and yet whose every reinvention seems to follow the basic pattern of inclusions/exclusions. Home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to all. Home is a desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of the few. It is community. (9)

When in *Voyage in the Dark* and *The Left Bank* it is a lost Eden, 'an innocent sensuality in a lush, beguiling land', in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys 'returns to the spiritual country...and discovers it, for all its beauty...to have been a nightmare' (Savory 201). Rhys's 'home' rests in the idyllic and caught between binaries it was impossible to realize in the actuality. In her letter to Selma Vaz Dias she writes: "I still work but write mostly about the vanished West Indies of my childhood. Seems to me that wants doing badly – for never was anything more vanished or forgotten. Or lovely –" (133).

The traditional female activity of 'homemaking' is also absent in the novels of Rhys. Home as a female interior space is deliberately questioned and the female protagonists usually become objects or accessories here. In these fictions, Rhys
negates the domestic space and the women’s ideological roles reappropriating the normative gender discourses of their homelands. It becomes evident how the home within each society functions subversively as a space of socio-political-historical contention. Home and the theories of domesticity are internally related when taking into consideration the role and position of the home in the processes of personal identity formation and social gender construction. Home as a socially constructed site generates and constructs identity for women. Any particular location designed to preserve patriarchal values functions in such a way. This is true not only about a cultural location but also about a geographical location. Oaks observes: “Identity is produced in relation to place, as location layered with individual and cultural meaning” and as “the geographical expression of the intersections between individual action and abstract historical processes” (510). The production and sustenance of identity for women at the home front is problematical because home produces homelessness more than anything else. “Homelessness at home” nurtures the feeling of unease, nervousness, dissatisfaction, restlessness, shame, frustration, and resignation experienced by the protagonists in their existence inside the home and their dislocation within. It captures, almost in existentialist terms, the inauthentic self-identity normatively conceived, understood, imposed upon, accepted, and played out at home by the female protagonists. Home appears to engender traditional roles, standards, and expectations of socially ascribed female and immanent behaviour. Women engage in domestic activities, actively redefining their daily existence, expression, and representation. The Rhysian female characters struggle to reconstruct their definition of homes intending to deconstruct their personal and socio-political-historical identities. Gender identity which is grounded in the institution of the middle
class home is inherently unstable and attempts to redefine it interrogating identity formation and memory function.

Rhys's women protagonists are often seen as passive. As Dash suggests:

Rhys's heroines are overwhelmingly vulnerable. The women are so sensitive to the whims of their male acquaintances and so at the mercy of their society and environment that they seem to have no will. One heroine after the other succumbs and becomes ultimately self-destructive. (197)

Their passivity and vulnerability arouse the feeling of homelessness. Rhys deliberately sympathizes with the 'bad' women who are psychotic, neurotic and insane resisting the society which is representative of sanity. It has already been discussed in Chapter IV that acts of opposition, even if feeble, are evident in the novels. Carr contends: "'Passive victim' is... as inadequate a description for her heroines as for Jean Rhys herself, and not only because she shows them frequently as angry and as badly behaved as she was" (6). Rhys fought her depression and destitution, battled for space, and established her identity as a writer. Her protagonists too seek self-definition, keep up their resistance. In Chapter IV, we have seen how they react, often violently, to provocations. They give in to drinking in public places because the society forbids excessive drinking; they step outside the bonds of marriage; their protest against the society ultimately marks them as insane or deviant. Johnson asserts:

...Rhys's creation of (self-) portraits of heroines who defy nationalist, sexist, and racist models of identity characterizes her oeuvre in which Caribbean points of reference underpin themes of
resistance and rebellion. Her heroines refuse to be subsumed into
others’ narratives... *they assert, time and again, that they come from a
different place, a place fraught with conflict but which signifies home
in a way that Europe never can.* (29 - 30; emphasis added)

Even if the females of Rhys are sometimes vulnerable to circumstances, they do resist
the machine of law, order and respectability, and struggle to find a self-definition with
a firm rejection of social labels, such as the ‘deviant,’ imposed upon them.

While speaking of ‘homelessness’ it is also necessary to probe into the
narrative technique used by Rhys to heighten the psychosis and the turmoil faced by
her victimized women. She employs the technique of heteroglossic dialogism or the
“multiplicity of tongues” through which subjectivity is enunciated. Through this she
tries to capture the anxiety, experience and victimization of all women in general.
This technique explores different experiences encountered in the wider field and is
conveyed through the use of more than one language. English is the language in
which her fiction is written and other languages and dialects like French, German and
Patois are also used in her texts. We find an admixture of French and German with
English which gives them an added dimension. Little verses are found in *Quartet* to
display the distress of Marya:

As she lay in her bed she longed for her life with Stephan as one longs
for vanished youth. A gay life, a carefree life just wiped off the slate as
it were. Gone! A horrible nostalgia, an ache for the past seized her.

*Nous n’irons plus au bois
Les lauriers sont coupés...*(70)
The people passing were like some wavering reflections seen in water, the sound of water was in her ears. Or sometimes she would feel sure that her life was a dream – that all life was a dream. ‘It’s a dream,’ she would think; ‘it isn’t real’ – and be strangely comforted.


Monsieur Bernadet chanted with sarcasm:

\[
\text{Oh!} \\
\text{Que c’est beau,} \\
\text{Mon village-} \\
\text{Mon Paris...} \quad (131)
\]

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, one simple sentence in French, “*Qui est Là?*” (155) i.e., ‘Who is it?’ becomes more poignant as it gradually gets connected to the parrot that burns with Coulibri estate. The significance of the utterance has been discussed in Chapter III of the thesis. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, apart from the French that she writes, Rhys also uses German to express the psyche of the perturbed protagonist Sasha:

Salvatini puts his head out of the door behind me and says: ‘Mr Blank wants to see you.’

I at once make up my mind that he wants to find out if I can speak German. All the little German that I know flies out of my head. Jesus, help me! Ja, ja, nein, nein, was kostet es, Wien ist eine sehr
schöne, mein Herr, ich habe meinen Blumen vergessen, aus meinen
großen Schmerzen mach ich die kleinen Lieder, homo homini lupus
(I've got that one, anyway), aus meinen grossen Schmerzen homo
homini doh ré mi fah soh la ti doh.... (24)

The German lines that she writes above are equally meaningful and meaninglessness.
Sasha’s reflection can be translated into English as, ‘Yes, yes, no, no, what cost it,
Wien (Vienna) is a very beautiful city, Budapest is also a very beautiful, very
beautiful, my gentleman, I have forgotten my flowers, because of my great pain I
make small songs, men is a wolf to man, out of my great pain...’. ‘Homo homini
lupus’ is not German. It is a set of Latin phrases. Rhys’s use of language is
essentially polyphonic. Interfaces between languages manifest in self as sites of
interdiscursivity and of a dialogue between cultures. Consequently, heteroglossic
dialogism, as used in Rhys’s works, communicates specific socio-political-historical
context of women’s travels and their implications. It is found that the character
reflects “not only a relationship with the ‘other(s),’ but also an internal dialogue with
the plural aspects of self constituting the matrix of [marginal] female subjectivity”
(Henderson 344). The internal dialogue is also reinforced by the metalanguage of
dream that transplants the character to places of desire.

To conclude, as has already been discussed, the issue of ‘homelessness’
thematically unites all the Rhysian novels. Her protagonists find themselves trapped
in the opposition of cultures. They long intensely for an idyllic state where they can
either return to or arrive at. She concentrates essentially on the ‘homeless’ victims of
the society, detailing more specifically the anxieties of the derelict women. The
Caribbean culture with all its plurality and complexities had influenced her works as
greatly as did the unconventional life in Europe