

# **Subaltern Echoes in the White Creole: A Postcolonial Feminist Study of Jean Rhys's "Wide Sargasso Sea"**

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**Abstract:** This study has examined the novel Jean Rhys's "Wide Sargasso Sea" in the context of Postcolonial Feminism, particularly Gayatri Spivak's Subaltern Theory. The novel portrays the marginalization of White Creole women in the British Caribbean after the slavery abolition Act (1833). The novel "Wide Sargasso Sea" was selected as a sample of study and textual analytical techniques were employed to analyze the main themes of the novel. Two main characters, Antoinette and her mother, Annette, embody the subaltern experience. They faced severe hardships due to their racial and gender discrimination in a society ruled by colonialism and patriarchy. The analysis explores how colonial ideology worsens the situation for subaltern women. The interplay of race, wealth, and power maintains social and economic inequalities, leaving Creole women marginalized and dependent. Marriage is depicted as superficial and exploitative, offers no solace, and is driven by factors beyond genuine love or choice.

In conclusion, The study sheds light on the plight of subaltern women in a colonial setting. Through Antoinette and Annette, Rhys exposes the harsh realities faced by White Creole women, their voices lost amidst colonialism and patriarchy. The novel is a powerful critique of unequal power structures in postcolonial societies, resonating with the ongoing fight for global gender equality.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial Feminism, Marginalization, Subaltern Experience, Racial Identity

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## **1. Introduction**

The concept of 'subaltern,' originating from Antonio Gramsci's Marxist philosophy, encapsulates the marginalized and unrepresented voices within society Gramsci, [1]. However, it is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a prominent Postcolonial Feminist scholar, who particularly employs this term to shed light on the plight of women, asserting that they have long been the true subalterns. Spivak, [2] Through her insightful social and critical analyses, Spivak scrutinizes societies and

cultures oppressed by colonialism, dissecting the enduring impacts of colonial rule on social, political, and economic structures, particularly on women's lives. Colonialism, far from being solely about political domination, was deeply intertwined with racial and cultural hierarchies. European powers justified their colonization of Asian, African, and Latin American peoples by asserting cultural and racial superiority, perpetuating the notion of 'othering' towards indigenous populations. This colonial mindset not only shaped power dynamics but also led to the exploitation and subjugation of the colonized, exacerbating pre-existing social hierarchies.

The legacy of colonialism lingers in postcolonial societies, manifesting in the continued subalternity of marginalized groups, particularly women. This recognition has given rise to Postcolonial Literature and Criticism, with scholars like Spivak pioneering the exploration of postcolonial societies and the subalterns within them, focusing particularly on the plight of women.

Jean Rhys, a Caribbean writer, intimately understands the repercussions of colonialism, hailing from Dominica and experiencing firsthand the complexities of colonial identity. Her novel "Wide Sargasso Sea" delves into the struggles of its protagonist, Antoinette, navigating her subaltern position within patriarchal-colonial structures, mirroring Rhys's existential dilemma as a White Rhys's narrative underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by women in colonial and postcolonial contexts, highlighting the intersections of gender, race, and power dynamics.

### ***1.1 Background of the Study***

The background of this study encompasses several interconnected themes, including feminism, postcolonialism, colonialism, and the specific context of the White Creole experience.

Feminism, as an ideology and movement, seeks gender equality, advocating for women's rights in various spheres such as education, work, property ownership, and protection from harassment and violence, de Beauvoir, [3]. The feminist movement has evolved through distinct waves, each addressing different aspects of gender inequality Humm, [4]. Postcolonial Feminism, arising as a critique of Western Feminism's homogenizing approach, highlights the intersectionality of gender, race, and colonialism, particularly focusing on the experiences of non-white, non-Western, and underprivileged women Moraga & Anzaldua, [5], Ali, [6]. Colonialism, characterized by the domination and exploitation of other peoples and territories by European powers, has left lasting socio-cultural and economic impacts, creating hierarchies based on race and culture. The colonial legacy includes the subjugation of Indigenous populations, imposition

of cultural norms, and perpetuation of racial and cultural hierarchies, leading to the emergence of racial and cultural subalternity Sartre, [7].

Postcolonialism marks the end of formal colonial rule but acknowledges the enduring effects of colonialism on culture, identity, and power structures Ashcroft, [8]. Postcolonial literature and theory reflect on the complexities of colonial experiences, reclaiming voices long suppressed by colonial powers Spivak, [9].

Jean Rhys, a Caribbean writer, occupies a unique position within postcolonial literature, exploring themes of identity, displacement, and colonial oppression, particularly through the lens of feminist critique. Her novel "Wide Sargasso Sea," a prequel to Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre," delves into the experiences of White Creole women in the Caribbean, shedding light on their marginalization within patriarchal-colonial structures Carr. The concept of the White Creole represents a nuanced identity situated between the colonizer and the colonized, grappling with issues of race, culture, and privilege within the Caribbean context. While much postcolonial literature focuses on the experiences of Black Creoles and Indigenous populations, the study at hand examines the unique subalternity of White Creole women, highlighting their marginalization within colonial and postcolonial societies Hill, [10]. By contextualizing the study in the broader frameworks of feminism, post-colonialism, and colonial history, we gain a deeper understanding of the intersections of race, gender, and power dynamics, particularly within the Caribbean context.

The main objectives of this study are listed below: -

- To analyze how Jean Rhys portrays the subaltern position of women within the colonially -ridden patriarchal society of the Caribbean.
- To explore the intertwining of colonial and patriarchal norms, exacerbating the oppression experienced by subaltern women and rendering them voiceless.
- To investigate the socio-cultural, economic, and ethnic factors contributing to the failure of marriage, particularly for women, in a patriarchal-colonial society.

The scope of this study is large because it raises awareness about the global plight of women and contributes to creating space for their voices and struggles. It focuses on the specific context of postcolonial societies, shedding light on the shared experiences of women in these contexts.

It provides insights into the workings of patriarchy and colonialism, highlighting the detrimental effects on both men and women. It will also contribute pedagogically by elucidating Gayatri

Spivak's Theory of Subalternity and its application in feminist literary analysis, particularly in understanding "Wide Sargasso Sea" from feminist perspectives. Additionally, offers a critical examination of autobiographical elements in the protagonist's story.

This study contributes to the field of postcolonial literature and feminist scholarship in the following ways. First, it highlights the plight of White Creole women: It brings attention to a previously under-examined group, White Creole women, who despite their race still face marginalization within a colonial system. Second, it connects Subaltern Theory to specific characters: By applying Spivak's Subaltern Theory to Antoinette and Annette, the study demonstrates the theory in action and offers a clearer understanding of the subaltern experience. Third, it reveals the complexities of postcolonial oppression: The analysis goes beyond a simple race-based understanding of oppression. It shows how factors like gender, social expectations, and economic dependence all contribute to the marginalization of Creole women. Fourth, the study exposes marriage as a tool used to exploit women within a colonial power structure, not a path to social mobility. Fifth, this research enriches the understanding of power dynamics in postcolonial societies and adds depth to the ongoing conversation about gender equality.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Postcolonial Feminist Theorists***

Postcolonial Feminism emerges at the intersection of Postcolonialism and Feminism, addressing the lacunae in both theories and offering a comprehensive understanding of gender issues within the context of colonialism. While Postcolonial Theory traditionally focuses on the economic and political impacts of colonialism, it overlooks gender dynamics. Similarly, Western Feminism often fails to account for the diverse experiences of postcolonial women, reducing their struggles to mere sexism. Postcolonial Feminism bridges these gaps by scrutinizing the entire spectrum of colonization, including the mental and physical subjugation experienced by colonized individuals, particularly women.

#### ***2.1.1 Audre Lorde***

Audre Lorde's [11] seminal work, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House," challenges Western feminism's tendency to homogenize women's experiences, neglecting the unique struggles faced by Third World women. Lorde advocates for recognizing and celebrating the diversity among women, urging the formation of inclusive communities

where differences are embraced as strengths rather than liabilities. She emphasizes the importance of acknowledging her identity as a woman of color and rejects the notion of assimilating into a generic "womanhood."

### ***2.1.2 Chandra Talpade Mohanty***

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship & Colonial Discourses," highlights the Western feminist tendency to essentialize Third World women as homogeneously victimized, overlooking the intricacies of their diverse experiences. Mohanty critiques the Western savior narrative that portrays Third World women as passive recipients of liberation. She argues for a nuanced understanding of the intersecting factors, such as race, class, and religion that shape the lives of postcolonial women, rejecting monolithic portrayals in favor of contextualized analyses.

### ***2.1.3 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak***

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" challenges the Western scholarly tendency to marginalize subaltern voices, particularly those of Third World women. Spivak explores the structural constraints that silence subaltern women, emphasizing the complexity of non-Western patriarchal societies and their resistance to Western feminist frameworks. Her concept of the "subaltern" illuminates the multiple layers of oppression faced by marginalized women, reframing postcolonial feminist discourse and emphasizing the importance of amplifying their voices.

### ***2.1.4 Gloria E Anzaldua***

Gloria [12] E Anzaldua's work, particularly her book "Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza," examines the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, particularly within the Chicano community. Anzaldua critiques the restrictive gender roles and sexual violence prevalent within her community, advocating for a new consciousness that transcends traditional barriers. She emphasizes the importance of embracing differences and fostering inclusivity to challenge oppressive systems.

### ***2.1.5 Homi K Bhabha***

Homi K Bhabha's contributions to postcolonial theory, including concepts like hybridity and mimicry, offer insights into the complexities of colonial discourse. Bhabha challenges Spivak's

notion of the silenced subaltern, arguing that with the desire and opportunity to speak, subaltern voices can emerge and disrupt hegemonic narratives. He emphasizes the transformative power of dialogue and exchange in breaking down walls of silence, fostering understanding, and building Solidarity.

### ***2.1.6 Ethel Crowley***

Ethel Crowley's [13] essay "Third World Women and the Inadequacies of Western Feminism" critiques Western feminist approaches for their theoretical reductionism and failure to address the multifaceted oppression faced by Third World women. Crowley advocates for ethnographic studies to understand the lived experiences of these women comprehensively. She highlights the importance of recognizing that freedom means different things for different women, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies to address their diverse needs.

In short, the contributions of these postcolonial feminist theorists have reshaped the discourse on gender, colonialism, and feminism, offering nuanced perspectives that challenge traditional Western frameworks and highlight the diversity of women's experiences in postcolonial contexts. Their insights pave the way for more inclusive and intersectional approaches to feminist theory and activism.

## ***2.2 Postcolonial Feminist Writers***

Postcolonial feminist writers emerged as powerful voices within the literary landscape, predominantly belonging to regions like Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Their narratives reflect the intersectionality of colonialism, sexism, and racism, portraying the lived experiences of women of color. This review explores the works of notable postcolonial feminist writers, their thematic concerns, and their contributions to feminist discourse.

**Affinity with Black Feminism:** Postcolonial feminism shares close ties with Black feminism, both emerging in response to historical injustices and advocating for the rights of marginalized women. Black feminism, rooted in the Civil Rights Movement, highlights the intersectionality of sexism, classism, and racism, echoing the multifaceted oppression faced by women of color. Similarly, postcolonial feminism challenges Western feminist paradigms, offering alternative perspectives on global gender issues.

**Maya Angelou:** Angelou's autobiographical works, notably "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings," provide a poignant portrayal of the Black American woman's journey towards self-

acceptance and empowerment. Through her poetry and prose, Angelou amplifies the voices of marginalized women, advocating for equality and resilience.

Audre Lorde: Lorde's poetry, particularly in "Coal," expresses her fierce resistance against racial injustice and celebrates the strength of Black feminism. Her work delves into the intersectionality of race and gender, offering a powerful critique of societal norms and systems of oppression.

Toni Morrison: Morrison's novels, such as "The Bluest Eye" and "Beloved," confront the legacy of slavery and the complexities of race, gender, and identity. Through rich storytelling and nuanced characterizations, Morrison amplifies the voices of Black women, reclaiming their agency and dignity.

Alice Walker: Walker's concept of "Womanism" encompasses the struggles of women of color, challenging patriarchal norms within both Black and white communities. Her novel "The Color Purple" explores themes of oppression, resilience, and female solidarity, offering a transformative narrative of empowerment.

Flora Nwapa: Nwapa's pioneering work in African literature, particularly in "Efuru," celebrates the strength and resilience of African women. Through her portrayal of Igbo women, Nwapa challenges patriarchal structures and advocates for female autonomy and empowerment.

Chimamanda Adichie: Adichie's novels, including "Purple Hibiscus" and "Americanah," navigate themes of race, identity, and feminism in postcolonial Nigeria. Her narratives offer a nuanced exploration of gender roles and societal expectations, highlighting the complexities of the female experience.

Nawal El Saadawi: Saadawi's radical feminist perspectives, reflected in both her fiction and non-fiction writings, challenge patriarchal norms within Arab society. Her work critiques the intersectionality of gender, class, and imperialism, advocating for women's rights and liberation.

Shashi [14] Deshpande: Deshpande's novels depict the struggles of Indian women navigating the clash between tradition and modernity. Through characters like Sarita in "The Dark Holds No Terror," Deshpande explores themes of gender inequality and female agency in postcolonial India.

### ***2.3 Critical review of "Wide Sargasso Sea"***

In this section, we will see how this novel has been viewed by different critics, especially by postcolonial feminist critics.

Jean Rhys, as we know, is a writer whose birth & earlier upbringing took place in the Caribbean. She has first-hand experience of colonialism & its impact on the socio-cultural life of the colonized lands. She has been a victim of the norms developed in colonial times and she knows very well how the victimization of a woman is almost doubled when the already existing patriarchal norms are hybridized by the colonial norms. Being a White Creole, she faced the segregation & alienation that was common lot of the whole community in the Caribbean lands. They were owned by neither the White nor the Black. Besides, family circumstances of Rhys further enhanced this alienation as she remained constantly in search of her mother's love and the search continued, more or less unconsciously, throughout her life Pizzichini, [15].

Another aspect of Jean Rhys's life is that she was raised under Victorian cultural paradigms that were predominantly patriarchal and that considered women a 'domestic angel'. The character of Antoinette, though, is quite contrary to the Victorian model but, somehow, the inner workings of the Victorian patterns do appear in her thoughts & actions. Her consistent effort to save her marriage even when her husband is grossly estranged from her shows it considerably. The creator of Antoinette, in her personal life too, cannot shed off the influences of her formative years. Throughout her life, she remained dependent on many men and could not truly emancipate herself. There is certain complexity & contradiction in Rhys's character and the same we find in Antoinette too.

The earlier critical views of Rhys's fiction in general & of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in particular were simplistic and usually one-dimensional but with time, critics came to recognize the complex multi-positional status of her work Qawas, [16]. Gardiner, [17] points out the modernist qualities in Rhys's novels; Abel, [18] sees culturally & socially induced 'schizophrenia' of the female subjects of Rhys; Miles, [19] notices the power politics of gender throughout her fiction; Nunez-Harrell (1985) talks of Rhys's exploration of the anomalous position of the white West Indian woman and postcolonial critics like Tiffin, [20] Ramchand, [21] explore the power-relations between the colonizer & the colonized, male & female and black & white in Rhys's fiction. An account of the various critical views about the *Wide Sargasso Sea* is given in the following.

### ***2.3.1 As a Prequel to Jane Eyre***

Walter Allen, a credible English novelist & literary critic, best known for his "The English Novel: a Short Critical History", viewed *Wide Sargasso Sea* as "a triumph of atmosphere which does not exist in its own right as Mr. Rochester is almost as shadowy as Charlot Bronte's Bertha

Mason". Allen's comment reflects an earlier question that has been asked about the novel since its emergence whether it can stand on its own if not linked with Jane Eyre and Allen's answer comes not in the positive. This kind of view shows Jean Rhys under some moral obligation to vindicate Bertha Mason the stereotyped 'mad woman in the attic' and even this vindication, according to critics like Allen, is not convincing because of the weak portrayal of the Rochester figure. The madness & suffering of Bertha Mason is not, thus, compellingly established as linked with the ill-treatment of her husband. This is typically an English view that sees it merely as a weak prequel to Jane Eyre and, surprisingly, it does not take into account even the representation of English identity & history in the novel which is quite forceful & convincing.

Such a view certainly ignores the larger social, cultural & political merit of the novel. We must, however, keep in mind that the real strength of the novel is not Rochester but Antoinette whom Rhys brings from the extreme marginality of Jane Eyre to the very Centre of this novel. She had a difficult task because she was dealing with a Victorian English classic. But she does not seem worried. She focuses less on what has been said & more on what has not been said or what has been said falsely Gardiner, [17].

### ***2.3.2 As a Modernist Text***

Jean Rhys has long been regarded as a modernist fiction writer dealing with the themes of "isolation, absence of society or community, the sense of things falling apart, dependence and loss" Carr. These & others too, were the new subjects for the writers mostly of the 20th century and they looked for new ways to talk about them. The use of poetic images in prose, non-linear narrative, more than one point of view, etc were some of the new techniques that they envisaged. Under the influence of Freud, they were more & more interested in exploring the inner life of their characters, and, for this, they developed the 'stream of consciousness' technique.

Jean Rhys follows the modernist themes as well as the modernist techniques very powerfully to achieve her purposes, especially in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. For instance, the use of several narrators gives different perspectives on the relationship of Antoinette & Rochester. Another favorite technique of the modernists used by Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the consistent patterns of imagery that highlight certain ideas & themes. Gardiner, [17]. Rhys, however, may be appreciated for her modernist themes or techniques but the purposes these serve are predominantly feministic and this aspect has been focused on by the critics only quite recently Carr.

### ***2.3.3 Autobiographical & Confessional***

The autobiographical element of a literary text has always been a matter of keen interest for critics but in modern times, especially in the context of the female writers of the 20th century, it has got a special significance since it reveals nothing but the misery of their life. Confession or self-disclosure, in this context, is just another name for female distress and, as liberal feminists believe, it inspires a broader female identification & solidarity and, in this way, becomes a liberating step for women Craps, [22]. Much of the suffering of Rhys's heroines reflects the life experiences of Rhys herself. The pain, the rawness, and the wounds become the material out of which her fiction is generated, Carr.

### ***2.3.4 As a Feminist Text***

Rhys, in her lifetime, was not recognized as a feminist writer though the so-called Second Wave was in progress. The feminists of that time focused mainly on sexual oppression, so Rhys's fiction could not fall into that. She was years ahead of time and took a broader & substantial view of things. She questioned the economic, racial, class & colonial oppression of women of which sexual oppression was only a part, Carr. It was through the eighties, then, that she was widely appreciated as a valuable feminist writer.

Rhys's first four novels, all, are about women who suffer in their lives because they have been abandoned by men. These are based on Rhys's own emotional life that is her various love affairs with various men at various times. Throughout her life she remained dependent on men emotionally & financially too since all through her life she remained impoverished. For a short period, she indulged even in prostitution. Her three marriages also proved disastrous. All this was not, at all, easy for it brought pain & despair. Exile, loss & alienation have been the characteristic feelings of her life from the beginning to the end and are very powerfully reflected in her fiction. The sorrowful conditions of her life made her take refuge in alcoholism. And writing was also a big refuge & a source of catharsis for her. Her writing was her true companion Pizzichini, [15]. She knew what a woman has to face in a world that is, by & large, the world of men and she wrote about it from the depth of her heart. The feminist value of her work, thus, is extraordinary. Gilbert, Sandra M. & Guber, Susan, [23]. So, this is an uphill feminist task that Rhys sets before herself and achieves triumphantly through the *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

### ***2.3.5 The Postcolonial View***

Critics, since about the end of the 20th century, have been giving more & more attention to Rhys's cultural origins and her identity as marked by ethnicity, gender, class, displacement & religion. They see an intersecting colonial framework of race & gender in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Voyage in the Dark*, and many of her short stories from her later collections "Tigers are Better Looking" & "Sleep it off Lady" Qawas, [16]. The said pieces of Rhys's fiction are now referred to as Postcolonial and more specifically West Indian since they focus on the in-between & indeterminate status of the Creole & the colonized and this is a major concern of the Postcolonial theory & fiction i.e to evoke new identities that are invariably subaltern and bring them from the margin to the Centre. The postcolonial writers, for this, go into history and analyze the complicated social, economic & psychological forces, linked with colonialism, that created gross marginalities. Postcolonialism, in this way, humanizes the previously dehumanized and gives 'new ways of seeing the world' Emery, [24]. In telling the story of Antoinette, Rhys redeems not only Bertha Mason, the original 'mad woman in the attic', but also redeems all Bertha Masons in history and literary history to Qawas, [16].

The language of Rhys is also typically postcolonial. She uses English that is hardly English. It is, to a large extent, fragmented and evokes associations. There are echoes of conversations, songs, poetic lines, quotes, dreams, letters & prayers, etc. These are the least commonly used phrases & expressions. Then, there are multiple narrative voices. By using all this, Rhys, in a way, reinvents & transforms language to achieve her purposes. The language representing the empire is disallowed. Similarly, the language related to class & morality is avoided. Rhys 'unpicks and mocks language by which the powerful keep control'.

### ***2.3.6 The Postcolonial Feminist View***

The examination of the postcolonial feminist perspective, particularly about Jean Rhys's reinterpretation of the character Bertha Mason from Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre" in her novel "Wide Sargasso Sea." It begins by outlining the central tenets of postcolonial feminism, which emphasizes the dual oppression faced by women in colonial and postcolonial contexts, where colonialism and patriarchy intersect to subjugate them. This perspective highlights the silence and absence imposed on colonized women by Western literary traditions, rendering them subaltern. The text further discusses the intersectionality of various forces such as race, culture, economics, and religion, which exacerbate the oppression faced by colonized women,

necessitating different modes of resistance and recompense compared to white Western middle-class women. The analysis then shifts to Rhys's portrayal of Bertha Mason in "Wide Sargasso Sea" as a powerful example of postcolonial feminist intervention in the Western literary canon. It contrasts Rhys's depiction of Bertha with Charlotte Bronte's portrayal in "Jane Eyre," arguing that Rhys gives voice and agency to the marginalized character, challenging the colonial and patriarchal narratives that marginalized her. The text highlights Rochester's colonial mindset and his mistreatment of Antoinette (Bertha) as emblematic of the broader dynamics of colonial exploitation and oppression.

Furthermore, the text critiques Western feminist interpretations of Bertha, particularly those presented by Gilbert & Guber in "The Mad Woman in the Attic," which overlook the colonial context of Bertha's confinement and oppression. It praises Gayatri Spivak's analysis in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," which situates Bertha's oppression within the broader context of colonialism and argues for the restoration of her humanity and sanity in Rhys's reimagining. Gilbert & Guber, [23].

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

As mentioned earlier, the theoretical or conceptual framework of the present study comes from the wider spectrum of Postcolonial Feminism and, if singled out & specified, it rests on Spivak's Subaltern Theory that is developed, mainly, in her much-credited essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?". The theory talks about the most suppressed & marginalized groups of a society. Such groups are called 'subalterns' and this is a term that has recently got its way into the intellectual & critical discourse of the West and it owes its origin to the Marxist scholars of the 20th century. Spivak also has strong Marxist leanings. She self-defines herself as a "practical Marxist-feminist-deconstructionist". She is an active member of the Marxist Literary Group which is an affiliate organization of the Modern Language Association (MLA) of America. The term 'subaltern' was coined by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher, while he was in prison (1929-1935) and working on his theory of 'cultural hegemony' which tells us how the ruling capitalist class maintains its power by propagating a certain ideology through the various cultural institutions of the society. He used this word to denote the social groups that, in a capitalist or bourgeois society, are excluded from the socio-cultural & political institutions and are denied to have any voice whatsoever in the society. Scholars like Spivak say that Gramsci used this word only as a code word to mean the proletariat Morton, [25] while others claim that it was a novel concept in

Gramsci's political theory Green, [26]. The word, then, came to be used in Western historiography to denote the non-western nations of Africa, Asia & the Middle East i.e. the nations that stood out of the hegemonic power structure of colonialism. As such, its origin was Eurocentric. But since the 1970s, with the establishment of the "Subaltern Studies Group" at the University of Sussex which comprised postcolonial scholars, mostly from South Asia, the term 'subaltern' came to signify the colonized people with their perspective of colonial experience. The history of the colonized was, thus, retold by these scholars with the view of the colonized and not of the colonizer. It was a novel trend since traditional history dealt with the so-called great individuals or monarchs or families. The new history was a 'history from below', a term first used by E. P. Thompson, a socialist British historian, in 1966. It was now a 'people's history' talking of the Indigenous mass movements & of the outsiders and including the disenfranchised, the oppressed & the subaltern. From the postcolonial historical context, the term 'subaltern' came to the general humanities. It is now used in such academic disciplines as sociology, anthropology, literary criticism & art histories, etc to represent, generally, the lower classes & the marginal social groups who do not have any 'agency' i.e. any capacity to act or to interact with the society they are living in. Spivak defines 'subaltern' as: "In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern- a space of difference" de Kock, [27]. The concept, today, has become a topic of vigorous critique in postcolonial studies. In the colonial context, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.

The very crux of Spivak's theory that 'the subaltern cannot speak' made it a good deal controversial among the critics who thought that the subaltern, at least, could speak. Spivak, sometime later, argued that her critics took the word "speak" for the word "talk" while there is a big difference between the two The Spivak Reader, [28]. The act of speaking, we understand, is interactive & interpersonal whereas the act of talking is passive & intrapersonal. In the case of a subaltern interacting with a socially privileged person, there is no communication possible.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The methodology employed in this research aligns with the qualitative tradition, focusing on exploration and interpretation within the framework of a specific critical theory. The qualitative approach has been followed and exploratory and interpretive research design has been employed.

Close reading and Textual analysis techniques have been applied to analyze the text. Techniques utilized in this study are close reading and textual analysis. Attention is directed towards language techniques, particularly word choice, adjectives, and adverbs, to unveil underlying meanings and effects. Moreover, Narrative Technique Analysis has been used to examine the non-linear narrative structure in "Wide Sargasso Sea" as a modernist technique, emphasizing its role in revealing complexities of human character, motives, and relationships. The research tools include Primary text ("Wide Sargasso Sea"), secondary texts, literary journals, and online resources utilized for comprehensive analysis. The sample of the study is the novel "Wide Sargasso Sea" by Jean Rhys, chosen for its depiction of the subaltern position of White Creole women in Caribbean society. Different themes such as such as oppression, entrapment, dependence, deprivation, isolation, desertion, madness, racial animosity, shattered identity, and the futility of marriage, particularly in the context of Creole women were explored in this study. The Additional Method and Technique employed in the study was Intertextuality utilized to analyze the relationship between "Wide Sargasso Sea" and its inspiration, "Jane Eyre," for reference, explanation, and interpretation. Instances of Discourse Analysis are incorporated to uncover underlying ideologies, particularly patriarchal and colonial, affecting the female protagonists and other characters within the novel.

## **5. Analysis of the Text**

"Wide Sargasso Sea" has been divided into three parts with each part further subdivided into sections varying in number. Quite innovatively, the narrative voice keeps changing. Part-1 & Part-3 are narrated by Antoinette, the female protagonist, and in between these, Part-2, which is the longest of the three, is narrated by her husband, the Rochester figure of Jane Eyre & the male protagonist of this novel. Another innovative technique adopted here by the writer is that his name remains omitted throughout the novel. It is only in connection with "Jane Eyre" that we recognize him as Edward Rochester. The fact of his anonymity, being a part of the writer's plan, is important. It makes him less an individual & more a representative of the system, of patriarchy and, of course, of colonialism, that makes the innocent marginalized women suffer to the end. Though his narrative voice in Part 2 brings his point of view, also, to the forefront and some amount of understanding & sympathy is created for his position too yet, for the most part, he only stands exposed and the feminist purposes of the narrative are quite effectively fulfilled. As the novel progresses, especially towards the end, our sympathy for Antoinette increases and, at

the very end, we are almost immersed in our pity & regret for her calamity. Besides this, the technique of using 'multiple voices' serves some other important purposes as well. It tells us that there are always two or more sides to any given truth. Then, it helps in understanding the two cultures that are quite opposite to each other and forewarning of the disharmony that is bound to develop between Antoinette & her husband. Furthermore, it gives a deep insight into the psychological set-up & motivations of both the characters in a very convincing manner.

### ***5.1 The White Creole Women Viewed as Subaltern***

The subaltern position of White Creole women in the Caribbean focuses particularly on the characters of Annette and Antoinette from Jean Rhys's "Wide Sargasso Sea." The term "subaltern" refers to those who are socially, politically, and economically marginalized, often unable to assert their rights or have their voices heard. The subaltern status of White Creole women stems from their mixed racial heritage, descendants of both White colonial settlers and Black slaves. Despite being racially mixed, they are neither fully accepted by the White nor the Black communities, thus occupying a marginalized position. This marginalization is exacerbated by their gender, as women are traditionally relegated to the margins of society regardless of their ethnic background.

The narrative begins with Annette and her children facing hardship after the Emancipation Act of 1833, which resulted in the loss of their financial security and social standing. Their Creole identity, neither fully White nor fully Black, leaves them isolated and vulnerable to societal hostilities.

Annette's beauty and her status as a Martinique woman further contributes to her alienation from both White and Black communities. Her struggle to maintain her family's dignity and stability is depicted amidst racial tensions and economic challenges. Antoinette, Annette's daughter, grows up feeling neglected and isolated, particularly after her mother's marriage to Mr. Mason. Her marriage to Rochester, arranged only for financial gain, further highlights the power dynamics and exploitation within patriarchal and colonial structures. Rochester's inability to accept Antoinette's Creole heritage and his eventual betrayal deepen her sense of isolation and despair. Rhys's narrative challenges conventional portrayals of marginalized women, offering a nuanced exploration of their experiences and struggles. By giving agency to her characters and highlighting their resilience, she subverts stereotypes and encourages readers to reconsider

notions of power and privilege. The comments made by Godfrey; an old Black servant are worth noting:

“When the old times go, let it go. No use in grabbing at it. The Lord makes no distinction between black and white, black and white is the same for Him. Rest yourself in peace for the righteous are not forsaken.” (p. 2,3)

The lines may show his wisdom & faith but these do also reflect the newly-risen consciousness among the Blacks that they are equal now with the whites. There is a considerable amount of irony too in Godfrey's words. The ex-masters, now, should realize that they are no more the masters. This is also reflected in the following sentence uttered by Tia, a negro girl:

“Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger” (p. 08).

### ***5.2 Patriarchal Suppression Enhanced by the Colonial Ideology***

“Wide Sargasso Sea” reflects the insidious working of the colonial ideology in the social fabric of the Caribbean as it is captured after the Emancipation Act of 1833. The Blacks may have been the subaltern before that time but now they are free & asserting themselves & getting powerful. The real subaltern, at this point, is the Creole. They are identified neither with the White nor with the Black. They are highly vulnerable to the colonial ideology that talks of the clearly-cut racial identity. The same ideology is embraced by the newly-freed Blacks also who become more & more hostile to the Creole. The victimization of the Creole, thus, is essentially due to the racial factor. But it is due also to the other factors that stand important in the colonial ideology i.e. it's selfish & money-oriented values and its insensitive exercise of power. Rochester's sole purpose of coming to the Caribbean is to get himself socially & financially established. This is a purpose that always remains in the forefront in a colonially-nurtured mind. Since he is married to her, he is bound to live with her but everything around him remains alien to him as is reflected in Rochester's feelings about his wife:

I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did. (p. 69)

Rochester's play of power in the last part of the novel is ruthlessly inhuman. It is less patriarchal & more colonial. It shows what limits patriarchy may have when it comes under the influence of colonial ideology. Rochester, here, appears as a stone-hearted colonial ruler whose sole aim was to maintain his rule in a foreign land, and, for this purpose, he can go to any limits of barbarity.

He brought here wife Antoinette to England as a captive and kept her in prison in an attic for probably months. For day & night, she is confined within the four walls of that room. She has no contact whatsoever with the world outside. She, thus, becomes the worst example of a subaltern who suffers in the worst possible manner and who is deprived of any right whatsoever to speak, and, behind all this, we see a colonially-modified patriarchal mind operating in an utterly unfeeling & unsparing manner. This is then, right to believe that patriarchy, wherever it came under the influence of colonial ideology, became more sharp-teethed for the poor subaltern women.

### ***5.3 Marriage Brings no Consolation to the Subaltern Women***

Marriage, in a patriarchal society, has always been seen, by women, as something that will provide them security & solace & some social recognition & status. It is taken by them as a means to get out of an insignificant position in the 'margin' and to move, with some respect, to the 'Centre'. It is a natural as well as a socially acceptable bond between a man & a woman.

Marriage that takes place in a patriarchal society is naturally bound by patriarchal laws that, sometimes, operate more destructively for women and bring only an increase in their suffering. The situation is worse in the case of subaltern women belonging to marginalized communities.

The novel "Wide Sargasso Sea" describes Annette and Antoinette, two Creole women who suffer after marrying White men. Annette's first husband, Mr. Cosway, takes her only as a second wife because she is Creole. Her beauty holds no value compared to a White woman's. After his death, she marries Mr. Mason, who isolates and mistreats her. Antoinette's husband, Rochester, only marries her for her money and property. He never accepts her because she is not fully White. He imprisons her in an attic and she dies in a fire.

Rhy through the characters of Annette & Antoinette, seems to disapprove of the institution of marriage as it works in a patriarchy. We are reminded, here, of the view of Simone de Beauvoir who considers marriage as a tool of patriarchy for the suppression & exploitation of women. However, it must be kept in mind that the feminists do not revoke marriage altogether; they only want to reform it, and reforming it means to give awareness to women & to make men realize where they just overstep into the territory of being inhuman.

## **6. Discussion**

The analysis of "Wide Sargasso Sea" through the lens of Postcolonial Feminism, specifically Spivak's Subaltern Theory, reveals the profound subalternity experienced by White Creole

women in the British-controlled Caribbean post the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Antoinette and her mother, Annette, epitomize the subaltern condition, facing oppression and marginalization in a society dominated by colonial and patriarchal ideologies. Antoinette's trajectory illustrates the silencing of the subaltern voice. Despite her attempts to assert herself, she is ultimately crushed by the selfish desires of her husband. Similarly, Annette's life is marked by passivity and silence, constrained by her racial identity and societal expectations. The analysis further delves into the operation of colonial ideology, which exacerbates the oppression faced by subaltern women. The intersection of race, money, and power perpetuates social and economic inequality, leaving Creole women socially marginalized and economically dependent. The institution of marriage, depicted as shallow and exploitative, offers little solace, as it is often based on superficial factors rather than genuine affection or choice.

## **7. Conclusion**

"Wide Sargasso Sea" illuminates the plight of subaltern women within the colonial context, highlighting the complexities of race, gender, and power dynamics. Through the characters of Antoinette and Annette, Jean Rhys exposes the harsh realities faced by White Creole women, whose voices are drowned out by the dominant forces of colonialism and patriarchy. The novel serves as a powerful critique of the unequal power structures that persist in postcolonial societies, resonating with the ongoing struggle for gender equality worldwide.

### ***7.1 Limitations and suggestions for further research***

The analysis provides valuable insights into the subaltern condition in "Wide Sargasso Sea," it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The focus on Spivak's Subaltern Theory may overlook other critical perspectives that could enrich the understanding of the text. Additionally, the study primarily examines the experiences of White Creole women, potentially overlooking the intersectional ties of race, class, and gender within the Caribbean context.

In the light of above limitations, the following suggestions are made for further research: -

- Further research could delve into the intersectional experiences of subaltern women in the Caribbean, considering how important factors such as class, ethnicity, and nationality intersect with gender and colonialism.

- Comparative studies may be conducted because they could compare the portrayal of subaltern women in "Wide Sargasso Sea" with other postcolonial texts, shedding light on common themes and variations in representation across different cultural contexts.
- Reader Response Analysis may be conducted to investigate reader responses to the novel and it could provide insights into how its themes resonate with contemporary audiences and contribute to ongoing discussions on gender, race, and power.
- Examining Jean Rhys's biography and authorial intent could offer deeper insights into the socio-political context that influenced her portrayal of subaltern women in the novel, enriching the understanding of her thematic concerns and literary strategies.

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