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## Antoinette and Cho-Cho: Struggle and Challenges for Emancipation of Self

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### ABSTRACT

Antoinette's story is what is of Bertha Mason's story. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a re-writing of *Jane Eyre* but *Wide Sargasso Sea* lay superior in the manner the female character, Antoinette is depicted. The one who lay in the sub-plot in *Jane Eyre* gathers a free vein of study at the hands of Jean Rhys. Rhys talks about the Otherness felt by the lady in a male-dominated society, the rejection, dejection, suppression, exploitation she feels. She feels an outcast, be it a class, race, sexuality, religion and nationality. Rhys's re-writing of *Jane Eyre*, that is, writing about the story of Bertha, a white Creole heiress from the Caribbean, Rhys talks about the powerlessness of woman with its effect from the colonial power and slavery. How a lady's rights or suppressed rights leads to her insecurity and can lead to mental trauma and madness is dealt in by Rhys. On the other hand, Antoinette's husband, Rochester marrying her, finds himself sole owner of her body and her property. And a married woman appears as powerless economically, socially and psychologically. Her position appeared more worse than a slave and she lay like a captive, a lonely being devoid of any voice of her own. While Lee Langley's character Cho-Cho in *Butterfly's Shadow*, though appeared more or less the same with Antoinette in terms of Otherness but is more positive and stands high up for women's rights and propagates a multicultural dimensions to a female life. She being a Japanese nourishes in her child American cult like his father who later becomes a hybrid. Langley projects a new modern woman unlike Antoinette who stands a suppressed soul. The paper will research into the condition of Antoinette and Cho- Cho and will talk about a woman's at par condition in the society as it should be like this.

**Keywords:** Otherness, women's rights, emancipation of women

Woman is female to the extent that she feels herself as such. It is not nature that defines woman, it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life-(Beauvoir,65)

Likewise, both Jean Rhys and Lee Langley have caricatured their female characters of Antoinette and Cho-Cho respectively. A human, be it a lady or a man should have equal status in society. But

despite of the reaffirmation of equal rights for both men and women, the gender differentiated structures have only succeeded in perpetuating disparities.

Rhys's Antoinette appears as a lady who stands helpless in the society, being a Creole, a hybrid and that to a lady. She is the one who searches for identity, trying to come out of the crisis. As she is a Creole woman residing in the

English colony of Jamaica, stands mix- in with the English and the Caribbean culture, is considered as an outsider and experiences the in-betweenness. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is "a reconceptualization of the very concept of identity"(Emery,167). Antoinette and her family faces discrimination and disrespect by the black majority since Britain's Emancipation Act freed colonial slaves. She was labeled as 'white cockroaches' and 'white niggers' by the black revengeful mob.(*Wide Sargasso Sea*,25)Her life does not give a nice turn after her marriage to Rochester. The society has always been a male-dominating, leading to or suppressing the emancipation of woman. If the very man could be helping the other sex, the very sex attains happiness and reaches to new heights. But Rochester strictly dominates Antoinette so much so that she becomes insane.

Veena Jain opines:

If such men have the power to support, fulfill, disorient, render hysteric, ruin, blackmail or even exchange a woman, an analysis of their relationships, motives, desires, passions and power structures becomes necessary. Their lives need to be examined closely when relationships between men and women deteriorate into the master-slave or oppressor-oppressed relationship.(57)

A closely examined background, thereby, is needed when a woman stands lonely, dejected and mad. Antoinette's rights as a woman were negligible, she just lay like a doll and powerless. V.S.Naipaul in his article 'Without a Dog's Chance', expresses his views on the male presence in Rhys's novels. He writes:

Men and money are connected: in this half world men are the only people with money and at once predators and prey, sexual partners, arbitrary providers of dinners, rooms, clothes. Their job remains vague, their larger legitimate lives unknown.(29)

Even Mr. Mason, stepfather of Antoinette stands as patriarchal system personified, made her feel the sense of bondage. She is made to feel her

inbetweenness as Christophine tells Rochester 'She is not beke like you, but she is beke, and not like us either' (*Wide Sargasso Sea*,95)

Even Rochester after knowing Antoinette's Creole identity, calls her as having 'long, sad, dark alien eyes.'(39).The manner of the man is shown as contradictory, loving and hating the lady alike, is himself in a dilemma. But such an attitude shouldn't be prevailing in society. Inter-racial marriages should be propagated to make the contemporary society as healthy socially and psychologically. Describing the ontological insecurity of a person, R.D,Laing in *The Divided Self* says:

Here man as person, encounters non-being in a preliminary form, as partial loss of relatedness with the other and in an ultimate form, in the hypothetical end state of chaotic non-entity, total loss of relatedness with self and other.(51)

No doubt, it is correct to say that man and woman are inseparable. It means both of them depends on one another, but why should there be degradation of woman in society and upgradation of man. It should be equal as the law states. How a woman is perceived depends upon her own psychology as well. John Berger in the work *Ways of Seeing* says:

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relationships between men and women but also the relation of woman to themselves. The surveyor of man in herself is male, the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object of vision: a sight.(Berger, quoted by Miller,91)

Likewise, Rochester tags and labels Antoinette as doll, Bertha, temptress, witch, insane and ghost, trying to control her view of herself and gaining power over his own insecurities. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the novel projects the deep psychological expression of a caged lady, mentally, physically and emotionally.

Baha'i International Community's Statement to the 59<sup>th</sup> Commission on the status of women and on the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Fourth world Conference on women in New York, 2015 states:

... The equality of men and women is a facet of human reality and not just a condition to be achieved for the common good that which makes human beings human-their inherent dignity and nobility- is neither male nor female. The search for meaning, for purpose, for community, the capacity to love, to create, to preserve, has no gender. Such an assertion has profound implication for the organization of every aspect of human society.(L 12-16)

With regard to the above statement, Antoinette's character stands as a contrast. She suffers male domination, isolation, Otherness, lacking identity of her own, inbetweenness, lack of real love, no motherly love and appears as a remorseful doll uptill the end. Be it her mother Annette, her maid Christophine, her childhood friend Tia, her stepfather Mr. Mason, her parrot CoCo and she herself, stands at far distance from her, making her life sorrowful, weird, haunted and in trauma. Rhys does not depict a character who recovers her sense of self and identity but who is engulfed in the clutches of unjust society. Other than that women writings reveal that women write about women accurately and to say that a work from a lady writer has imprints of being autobiographical is very much correct. Jean Rhys's life itself was alienated, with she being a Creole, is a Welsh, Scottish and Irish. She emitted out her anger and bitterness. Carole Angier says about her:

Like Hemingway or Fitzgerald, Jean was writing about drink and dissipation, adultery and violence. But it was even more shocking when she did it, because she was a woman writing about a woman. And because hers was a harsher, uglier world., she described not just vice and immorality but poverty, prison and crime.(177)

As history repeats itself and the past becomes past only to teach the lesson. Jean Rhys's portrayal of Antoinette inspires human or rather a female to stand firm to one's own rights and besides not becoming mad like Antoinette but becoming at par with men in the society like Langley's character Cho-Cho in *Butterfly's Shadow*. Langley quoted William Faulkner in an email sent to me who says:

'The past is never dead, it's not even past.'(Email to Kajal Sharma,L 8)

So, Cho- Cho, Langley's character, though at first trying to kill herself because of her child, Joey being taken away by her stepmother and father, but very soon stands up as a powerful businesswoman. Though she feels alienated like Antoinette but is not driven mad like her. Cho-Cho, a Japanese word for a butterfly, positions herself as a doll like Nora Helmer(Ibsen) and Antoinette (Jean Rhys), as Langley depicts her connection with a doll:

She had sewn clothes for the doll, a kimono from a scrap of discarded silk, tiny beads binding the stiff black hair. But she had never undressed the doll completely... Between the legs was nothing... The doll could not be entered. The doll could feel no pain.(*Butterfly's Shadow*,25)

Life is not a bed of roses. So, an American navy man , Mr. Ben Pinkerton comes to Japan, meets Cho-Cho, in the spirit of merry-making marries her and leaves her who bore his child, Joey, afterwards. She becomes a teacher, teaching English language to Japanese ladies, propagates a multi-cultural identity to herself and her child. Society is the one, that should give ample space to the woman to grow, with bias and prejudice disregarded. Baha'i International Community's Statement asserts:

It is not enough to create space in the current social order for woman to play their rightful role. Rather, the goal is for woman and man to work shoulder to shoulder, each as the helpmate of the other- in the context of family, work, community and international affairs- to construct a society which allows for the flowering of all.(L78-81)

As was said about Rhys that she emitted out her anguish in her writings, likewise, Langley's works too lay as autobiographical. Lee Langley, born in Calcutta, is now residing in Richmond, London. She, like Antoinette and Rhys felt isolated, alienated and inbetween, sandwiched between the Indian and British culture .But depiction of Cho- Cho as a lady with multicultural prospects gives strength to Langley and she too emits out, not anguish but love for her birth land and even love for her existing

living land. Cho- Cho marries an American with the pretext that after marriage she'll be visiting the place of her dream, a brightly coloured America, but Pinkerton leaves her and goes away. The idea of a women's right after marriage lay defeated with Cho-Cho, only as a mother rearing the child and father being irresponsible and feeling male superiority. Nancy Chodorov in *Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender* says:

The sexual division of labour and women's responsibility for child are linked to and generate male dominance. Psychologists have demonstrated unequivocally that the very fact of being mothered by a woman generates in men conflicts over masculinity, a psychology of male dominance and need to be superior to women.(214)

It should be as 'sexual division of labour' should be same and equal with both the sexes. Cho-Cho's portrayal asserts a self-earned, independent and powerful lady as Langley herself is. She is multicultural, modern and her ideas adds to globalization. Veena Jain says:

Lee Langley's work seems to advocate multiculturalism. We may even call her transnational or international to borrow Gayatri Spivak's phrase. She makes a passionate plea for a more humane existence where her work rises above nation or culture.(217)

The idea behind a study of Rhys's Antoinette and Langley's Cho-Cho was from the fact that the past should not be forgotten wholly but should be made in the imprints of present happenings so that the present be made like a scented rose emitting out not anguish but fragrance all around. A lady could learn, not be like Antoinette, submissive and lonely but being like Cho-Cho, self-independent at par with men, socially, physically, emotionally and becoming a breadwinner like men. Women should come forward to speak for their rights. Educated women stands more powerful as does Cho-Cho. Education is important for the proper emancipation of women.

Aung San Suu Kyi's quote will be apt to conclude who says:

'The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.'(1)

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