

Construction of Womanhood: Reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), *The God of Small Things* (1997), *A Golden Age* (2007) and *The Good Muslim* (2011)

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Abstract

Women's social position is effected by patriarchy. This thesis will try to show different aspects of patriarchal society that effect the construction of womanhood keeping men in the superior position. . Three distinctly different societal conditions (a society going through decolonizing process- just after the emancipation act, a society filled with class/caste distinction trying to establish communism and a society going through a war of independence) have been explored here in order to find how all of them have negative impacts on the construction of the women characters. At first it has been explored how a racially and culturally intertwined society, leads to the problem of space and identity along with the problem of patriarchal domination that creates hollowness and madness in the protagonist. Secondly, it depicts the violation of women's rights (i.e. education & inheritance of property) as a form of patriarchal domination in every step of life (girlhood, womanhood, motherhood) of a woman. Thirdly, it demonstrates the violation of women's virtue to establish a power structure in a male dominated society where the woman has no position. Thus the common theme in these three chapters is the social subjugation of women. This has been done through looking at four novels: first, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys; second *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy and third, *A Golden Age* (2007) and *The Good Muslim* (2011) by Tahmima Anam.

Introduction

The bitter purpose of colonization was to take away the lands of comparatively weaker nation and making profit out of it by controlling and exploiting them. And to control, one needs to think of themselves as superior whereas the other or the controlled have to be thought of as inferior in every aspect (social, economical, cultural etc). Colonial power ruled over other nations based on the grounds that the colonizers were socially, economically and culturally superior to the colonized; therefore had the right to dominate them. Edward W Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) writes, “Conrad seems to be saying, ‘We westerners will decide who is a good native or a bad, because all natives have sufficient existence by virtue of our recognition. We created them, we taught them to speak and think, and when they rebel they simply confirm our views of them as silly children...’” (xx) Conrad is one of the authors that Said analyzed in his book. By the mid-twentieth century with the beginning of decolonization this hegemonic relation between colonizer and colonized became ambiguous because of the fluidity of the power binary. The colonized now started to write back to the colonizer from their own perspective. Postcolonialism is a study of this writing back to the colonizers. It examines the process of the creation of stereotyped representations of the colonized or the other, who were different in culture from the colonizers this is similar to feminism that criticizes the process of making women subject to men. In the same way that the colonizer denied every right of the colonized: history, culture, religious beliefs, societal rules and regulations; women were also denied of their right to exist in the society. Moral values, tradition and culture, religion and marriage are some of the means used in colonizing the women. This condition is worse in the case of the third world women, as Gayatri C Spivak states:

If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow¹. –

(Gayatri C Spivak, Can the Subaltern Speak)

Women are doubly colonized: first by the colonizers and secondly by their own people.

¹ Spivak, Gayatri C. “Can the Subaltern Speak”. March, 2010.
<<http://www.google.com.bd/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=10&ved=0CFYQFjAJ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mcgill.ca%2Ffiles%2Fcrclaw-dis> >

Postcolonialism and feminism are discourses that focus on the study of the colonized, marginalized and construction of the other. They also share a common ground that is to re-establish the position of the dominated. The key idea of my thesis is taken from the above mentioned ground. In this paper my focus will be to establish the position of women as colonized beings. I will show how postcolonial and patriarchal society shapes the construction of womanhood.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will try to show the effect of decolonization on women characters who are already insecure in social, political and economical terms. In this regard I've chosen the character of Antoinette from Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Antoinette is a byproduct of colonial society who is torn apart between her two identities, ultimately belonging nowhere and leads her to the experience of madness. The processes of decolonization deny her a space in the society as well as in the mind of the people. And patriarchy dominates and chains her to such an extent that she decides to escape by committing suicide. Here postcolonial society and patriarchy have an equal share in shaping the psychology of Antoinette that leads to her tragic fate. Not only Antoinette, but most of African- American women share the same psychological problem for generations that is also found in other literary pieces like Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970).

The second chapter deals with the problems that almost every women face regarding their position in the society after marriage. Marriage, one of the most influential tools of patriarchy, changes the life of a woman completely; it takes away her own identity leaving her in a completely new world. The focus will also be how class, caste, race and gender distinctions continue after the period of decolonization. Even after the processes of decolonization and reformation, it remains to be seen how women's condition changes. To examine these issues I have chosen the female characters from Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). Almost all the female characters are victims of the patriarchy that claimed to reform their position.

How a woman is expected to behave in the light of culture, tradition and religion while the society is going through a historical change is discussed in the third chapter. This chapter is based on Tahmima Anam's novels *A Golden Age* (2007) and *The Good Muslim* (2011) that portray the struggle of Rehana and Maya, pushing the social boundaries and stereotyped beliefs

regarding women. The changing situation of the society changes these women characters making them stronger. Religion is one of the most important instruments of patriarchy through which it tries to control the women. This is clearly described in the novel. In this chapter I will also try to show how much a woman can contribute to the society by comparing the female characters of the novel to the male characters.

Together these chapters will try to show how women from different nations and societies are bound to the same fate, being denied the rights to live an autonomous and independent life. Being women is the sole cause of the domination they had to go through. Whether half white or black or brown, whether belonging to the upper class or middle class or lower class, whether Hindu or Christian or Muslim, women are subjugated in order to secure the place for the male in the society and to strengthen patriarchy.

Chapter 1

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is considered as a rewriting of *Jane Eyre* (1848) or writing back to *Jane Eyre* (1848) by Charlotte Bronte. It is set in Jamaica during the years just after the emancipation act of 1833. The cultural, economical and historical relationships among the races are entangled here, and the protagonist Antoinette is a product of this cultural/economical tension and conflicts. Through this character Rhys tried to narrate the suppressed story of Rochester's mad wife. Faizal Forrester in an article published in the *Journal of West Indian Literature* in May, 1994 "Who Stole The Soul In "Wide Sargasso Sea?" says that, "Rhys's project of "writing" Bertha Mason a "life," then, is an important one: it gives Bertha Mason humanity. Bertha is no longer that wild haired, hideous monster or creature found in Bronte's fiction. Rhys gives Bertha Mason a childhood, a name, a voice and a history which places Bertha Mason's madness within a socio cultural/economic context."(Forrester, 36)

In this chapter I am going to focus on the construction of womanhood from a postcolonial perspective. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a relevant point of departure. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a perfect example of a text that is infused with colonial and sexual themes. With perfect craftsmanship, Rhys has used these two themes in building the character of the protagonist Antoinette Cosway along with characters like Christophine, Annette and other female characters in the novel. While analyzing these characters my key concern will be to focus on the hybridity, crisis of identity and struggle for space both in the minds of individual people and in the society, the ambivalent and hegemonic relationship between Antoinette and her husband (Rochester), and the processes of domination that rendered Antoinette as the 'other'.

The protagonist of the novel Antoinette Mason, nee Cosway throughout the novel is torn apart between her Caribbeanness and Englishness. From the very beginning she is in search of her identity; she is in search of place in the hearts of people – her mother, her father, her husband and most importantly in society. She does not know where she actually belongs. Some critics found that this situation of Antoinette has some similarities with the author herself. Silvia Panizza in the article "Double Complexity in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" said, "In this novel, in particular, the parallels between herself and her heroine are so extensive, including a

special sensitivity, a troubled childhood and a painful struggle for identity and for a place in society, *any* society, that they brought back to the author memories of a remote but still disturbing past.” (Panizza, 1)²

The issue of place/space has been used very sensitively in the novel. The place where Antoinette was born is plays a large role in carving her identity. The concept of place in postcolonial discourses is well defined by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in the 2nd edition of *Key Concepts in Post colonial Studies* (2007). According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, “The concepts of place and displacement demonstrate the very complex interaction of language, history and environment in the experience of colonized people and the importance of space and location in the process of identity formation’ (*Key Concepts in Post colonial Studies*, 177). They also state, “But if we see place as not simply a neutral location for the imperial project, we can see how intimately place is involved in the development of identity, how deeply it is involved in history and how deeply implicated it in the system of representation- language, writing and the creative arts- that develop in any society but in colonial societies in particular” (*Key Concepts in Post colonial Studies*, 182).

From the very beginning of her childhood Antoinette is ‘used to a solitary life’ (WSS³, 3); no one used to go near them as they were hated by all. After the emancipation act of 1833 everything went wrong as if happiness only belonged to the past. Antoinette stated that her situation and the condition of her birth place Coulibri estate was like their garden which had once been beautifully decorated but now had gone wild. In the novel she states-

Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible- the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. Underneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an

² Silvia Panizza, “Double Complexity in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, Published in 2009, Website <http://www.lcm.unige.it/pub/17/panizza.pdf>

³ Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Penguin Books, 2001) (References to the novel will henceforth be abbreviated WSS and included in the paper).

octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root...All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush...this never saddened me. I did not remember the place when it was prosperous (WSS, 4)

So in her early memories the picture of Coulibri is set as a wreck, as a wild place and she herself was a part of this wilderness. Being a Creole girl she was neither liked by black people nor white people. In the novel we find how Antoinette was treated by a native girl in the road- “white cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you. Go away.” (WSS, 7) Again on the way to her school she was teased by two Negroes; a boy and a girl. In the novel we find the Negro girl started to tease by calling her mad and a zombie like her mother. And the boy also threatens her by saying “One day I catch you alone, you wait, one day I catch you alone.” (WSS, 27) They were not liked by the white people either. In Antoinette’s words, “Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money. They didn’t look at us, nobody see them come near us.” (WSS, 8)

So from the beginning Antoinette suffers from a lack of place in the heart of people of her surroundings and feels rejected. So she grew a fondness towards nature. She likes the natural beauty of Coulibri. According to her nature is better than people:

“Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin – once I saw a snake. All better than people.

Better. Better, better than people.” (WSS, 11)

The reason behind this fondness was the continuous rejection from the people around her- the neighbors, her mother and her only friend Tia. The first rejection came from her mother, Annette who was only concerned about her son Pierre and her social status. When she tried to console her mother regarding Pierre’s illness she pushed her away: “I hated this frown and once I touched her forehead trying to smooth it. But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her.”(WSS, 5) So she tried to find the mother in Christophine, a Martinique woman. This Black woman guided and protected Antoinette throughout her life. M. M. Adjarian talked about it in the article ‘Between

and Beyond Boundaries in *Wide Sargasso Sea*' published in *College Literature* in February 1995. Adjarian said,

...Antoinette never gets to see herself constituted as a whole, autonomous self in her mother's eyes and turned instead to Christophine, a black Martinican house-servant, to find the nurture and sense of personal completion Annette cannot give her. Although Christophine clearly cares for Antoinette, race and class difference keep them separated: Antoinette will always be "béké" (that is, white or white creole), she will always be black. The main character is thus caught between and alienated from two "mothers" who have themselves suffered from the contradictions and cruelties of a cultural system that forces differences together only to break them apart into rigid categories and hierarchies. (Adjarian, 203)

After that, the second rejection came from her only playmate. Antoinette considered Tia as her friend with whom she played, ate the same food and bathed in the pool and who stole her white dress. But she was also rejected by Tia, who threw stones at on her when the natives set fire to their house. When they were leaving the place she saw Tia and ran to her -

As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face...we stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on her. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking glass. (WSS, 23)

By being rejected by the people she had grown an intense love towards, she turns to nature in her childhood. In Part Two of the novel, we find that she had to lose that place along with the nature that surrounded it, because of her husband's illicit relationship with her servant. There is another sense of rejection as Antoinette says: 'But I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it.' (WSS, 95) Her loneliness and state of being separated by everything is clearly seen here. Antoinette is left alone in the middle of nowhere after this incident.

Sometimes she had strong feelings for the Black people and sometimes for the English. In the novel after her mother's second marriage when they started to live the life like English people she says, "I was glad to be like an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophine's cooking." (WSS, 16) Then again she compared the unhappy face of the Black girl Myra who only "smiled when she talked about hell" (WSS, 17) to the happy face of "The Miller's Daughter", a lovely English girl." (WSS, 17) Basically she is unclear about what she really wants. Sometimes she feels a sense of belonging for the islands and the next moment she starts admiring the English; she wants to be like Tia in order to stay in the Coulibri and the very next moment she feels ashamed of her coloured relative Sandy. She was in a state of in-betweenness. And the result of this is obvious later where we find Antoinette to be very silent, cold (like zombies as the Black people had already portrayed her) and afraid of everything most importantly happiness and losing people whom she loved. The place Coulibri had an immense influence in moulding Antoinette's personality; in fashioning her over-imaginative and childish mind. She herself admits in Part Two of *Wide Sargasso Sea*:

"There was no one to tell, no one to listen. Oh you can't imagine Coulibri.

But after Coulibri?

After Coulibri it was too late. I did not change." (WSS, 54)

Throughout the novel she remains frustrated about her position in society. Being a part of the slave-owners family no one around her wants her to stay in the place. In this part of the novel, her frustration gets a voice when she was ill-treated by her own servant Amélie, a Black girl who sings a song portraying her. Antoinette explains that to her husband by saying,

It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all (WSS, 63)

Her wrath and hatred towards people both Black and white was at the peak when she came to Massacre for her honeymoon. Antoinette was very like her mother, so the ultimate end of life for them was quite similar, and like her mother Antoinette would also turn into a mad person. But

the main reason behind this madness that they both experienced in their life was the society. M.M.Adjarian in the article explains this phenomenon: “Christophine claims that Annette was driven to insanity by events she could not control and people who misunderstood her: consequently, Antoinette has not inherited any ‘bad blood’... in this way the writer suggests that a plurality of causes are behind both women’s breakdowns.” (Adjarian, 204) The ultimate fate that they suffer is partly because of the hegemonic relation with both the Black and white people. Both Annette and Antoinette possessed a racial outlook towards the Black people. Though Antoinette had a soft corner for Caribbeanness and the natives, she felt ashamed of their own degraded position in the society because of which they were criticized by the Black people. Being a part of the white (partially) they are supposed to be in the superior rank which they were not. And being penniless they became a matter of gossip among the natives. Antoinette becomes aware of this through Tia, “she hear all we poor like beggar. We ate salt fish-no money for fresh fish. That old house so leaky, you run with calabash to catch water when it rains.” (WSS, 8) The natives used to make fun of them. This situation is well defined by Silvia Capello in the article “Postcolonial Discourse in Wide Sargasso Sea: Creole Discourse vs. European Discourse, Periphery vs. Center, and Marginalized People vs. White Supremacy” published in *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* in Summer, 2009. She said,

Antoinette belongs to the creolized white community which was a minority group and regarded negatively by both British whites and local blacks. Antoinette's position in relation to the blacks is not well defined and is contradictory. She is, in a way, part of the black society for she shares experiences, superstitions, and beliefs with Tia...If to some extent Antoinette is part of black society, she is always aware - and so are the blacks - of the differences and of the distance between them. This is clear when, after a disagreement, Antoinette accuses her friend of being a "cheating nigger" (10) and Tia calls her a "white cockroach". (Capello, 49)

This hegemonic relationship between the classes was responsible for the distance between Antoinette-Tia and Annette-Christophine. Kate Millett in “Chapter 2 of “Sexual politics” Theory of Sexual Politics” stated that “One of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one

woman against another⁴.”(Millett, 18) Patriarchal domination in the form of colonization was successful to set women like Antoinette and Tia against each other. Though Antoinette could see her own self in Tia, Tia rejected Antoinette throwing stones at her in the episode when the natives set fire to their house in Coulibri. Antoinette described it as “we stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass” (WSS, 23). Analyzing this incident some critics find that Rhys tried to establish Tia as the mirror image of Antoinette. Silvia Capello in the article explained the incident likewise:

Both the girls are moved by the touching atmosphere of the moment because they feel that something has been lost. They see each other as in a mirror image. The mirror represents the illusion of two things being the same. As the image in a mirror is not exactly the same as reality, so the two girls are somehow similar but still different, they are separated as reality is separated from its image in the mirror; they are separated by "the ideological barriers embedded in the colonialist discourses of white supremacy" (Brathwaite 64).
(Capello, 49)

At the end of the novel Antoinette tried to cross all the barriers that separated her from Tia by jumping towards Tia. Antoinette’s inner desire to meet and reunite with Tia is depicted as “And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought, why did I scream? I called ‘Tia!’ and jumped and woke.” (WSS, 123)

Apart from the inner conflicts, the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* also embodies the conflicts between Blacks and whites, colonizers and colonized, male and female, rational and irrational. Silvia Panizza in the article “Double Complexity in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*” said about this dichotomy, “On the one side of the “battle-line”, then, there is reason, Europe and civilization, adult age, white skin, patriarchy and masculinity; on the other, passion, the Caribbean and the “exotic” colonies, childhood, black skin, matriarchy and femininity.” (Panizza, 2) In the novel Rochester tried to show himself as the epitome of European civilization (white, rational, masculine, civilized) on the contrary Antoinette as the epitome of the ‘other side’ (creole, irrational, feminine, mad). Polarization or the dichotomies are the result of the two distinct

⁴ Millett, Kate. “Chapter 2 of “Sexual Politics” Theory of Sexual Politics”. <
<https://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/millett-kate/theory.htm>

cultural influences that coexist in a society (i.e. Jamaica) because of colonization. It is also stated by Sivia Panizza that where there are two opposite forces they always try to win over each other, either by means of attraction or repulsion. The relationship of Antoinette and Rochester fits into the latter category. These two opposite forces try to win over each other by the means of repulsion. In Part Two of the novel, where Rochester is the narrator, he continuously tries to perceive Antoinette as his opponent. He can see all the qualities that he lacks in Antoinette and makes her the specimen of the Other. Rochester's first description of his wife appears in the novel in this way: "I watched her critically. She wore a tricorne hat which became her. At least it shadowed her eyes which are too large and can be disconcerting. She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either." (WSS, 37) Antoinette gives him the feeling of discomfort as she was unknown to him because of her acculturation of different culture. He identifies Antoinette with the wild and unknown nature of Granbois (an estate in the island of Dominica) which is equally melancholic. The place appears to him "Not only wild but menacing." (WSS, 39) He thinks that "Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the women is a stranger. Her pleading expression annoys me." (WSS, 39) On the contrary the island appears extremely dear and beautiful to Antoinette. Even Rochester felt natural and simple with her when they reached the boundary of Granbois: "She smiled at me. It was the first time I had seen her smile simply and naturally." (WSS, 40) She felt nostalgic after coming here. She enchanted her past memories and told Rochester, "Don't you like it here? This is my place and everything is on our side. Once." (WSS, 42)

Antoinette also feels distant regarding the place England where Rochester belongs, the way Granbois appears a distant land to Rochester. England appears like a dream to Antoinette, the way the island appears to Rochester, as is revealed in this conversation between Rochester and Antoinette,

'Is it true,' she said, 'that England is like a dream?...'

'Well,' I answered annoyed, 'that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream'.

‘But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?’

‘And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?’
(WSS, 47)

So their points of view regarding these two different places differ from each other. The island appears lonely to Rochester but for Anoinette she loves “it more than anywhere in the world. As if it were a person. More than a person.” (WSS, 53)

Rochester always tries to define Antoinette’s identity: “Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either.” (WSS, 37) He again wants to think of her as English and says, “...she might have been any pretty English girl and to please her I drank” (WSS, 40). He is unable to define and place her. Antoinette can be seen to occupy the position of the colonial mimic. Homi Bhabha in his essay ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The ambivalence of Colonial Discourse’ says that colonial mimicry is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite.*” (Bhabha, 86) In the eyes of Rochester, Antoinette is also ‘almost the same but not quite’. And this unknown trait of Antoinette’s character made Rochester afraid. He compares this unknown trait of Antoinette’s character with the nature of the island, Grandbois which is even more unknown to him. Silvia Panizza in the article “Double complexity in Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea” said that, “The basic frightful force appears to be most manifest in femininity, which draws wider associations with the other themes. Even Caribbean lush nature, in Rochester’s eyes, is female, with its fertile land and overabundant, violently coloured flowers.” (Panizza, 5) To overcome this uneasiness he wanted to know the hidden part of Antoinette. Comparing Antoinette with the place Rochester said, “it was a beautiful place- wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I’d find myself thinking, ‘what I see is nothing – I want what it hides – that is not nothing.’ (WSS, 52)

Rochester is curious about Antoinette, her past and the history of the island which seems related to Antoinette. So to know what she hides from him he seeks out Daniel. M.M.Adjarian in the article ‘Between and Beyond Boundaries in Wide Sargasso Sea’ also made the point clear by saying,

Rochester, for him, the island and its inhabitants are like Antoinette's servant Amélie:

sly, spiteful, malignant perhaps”(65) and far from “civilized”. At the same time, they also seem to possess an understanding of their environment and strong interpersonal bonds that he, a white outsider, does not have. Because the islanders keep what they know and have from him, he desires to gain access to both and take what he feels is being denied him. “It was a beautiful place....And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, ‘What I see is nothing- I want what it hides...’ (87).

Rochester's intense wish to possess Antoinette even after he has gained her wealth, can be likened to the colonial impulse. If he could control her completely, he would be able to control what Antoinette comes to represent for him- the island, its inhabitants and the threat they pose to him and his self-conception as an all powerful, all-knowing European. (Adjarian, 206)

Rochester's suspicious patriarchal mind got to know what it wanted to know- Daniel's letter and speech set the train of suspicion on fire. From the very beginning of their relationship Rochester had known that some information about Antoinette had been hidden from him. “I saw the same expression on all their faces. Curiosity? Pity? Ridicule? But why should they pity me. I who have done so well for myself?” (WSS, 45) When he tried to find out the truth and no one except Daniel told him the truth he felt betrayed and said, “No one would tell me the truth. Not my father nor Richard Mason, certainly not the girl I had married.” (WSS, 64) On knowing the ‘truth’, about the bad blood in her family, he distanced himself from Antoinette. Silvia Panizza in the article “Double complexity in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*” said,

Antoinette's sexuality appears to him at the same time as threatening and enticing, growing more and more disturbing as he comes to connect it not only with womanhood, but also with blackness and madness. After trying hard to reject that sexuality which his puritan ethics condemn as wrong and contaminating, Rochester associates his wife's sensual behavior with her alleged black blood. It was a widespread legend among Europeans at the time

that black women were animated by an unbridled libido, a belief inflated by the stories that circulated exaggerating the illicit relationships between planters and their black servants.” (Panizza, 5)

The Freudian idea of libido associates life drive with sexual desire. In psychoanalytic criticism it is said that, “in classic Freudian theory it has three stages of focus the oral, the anal and the phallic. The libido in the individual is part of a more generalized drive which the later Freud called *Eros* (the Greek word for ‘love’), which roughly means the life instinct, the opposite of which is *Thanatos* (the Greek word for ‘death’), which roughly means the death instinct, a controversial notion, of course” (*Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, 93). Freud associated this life giving instinct or Eros to the male and the death instinct or Thanatos to the female. In the novel we also find how several times Rochester and Daniel tried to portray Antoinette as dead like zombies and a person having no will. Rochester never recognized Antoinette’s individual being, her true self, and her internal beauty. He always considered her only as an object of his passion. He himself states that in the novel, “I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love” (WSS, 56). To Rochester Antoinette was just a body. Antoinette’s desire to die with wantonness also supports this idea. She states her desire in the novel likewise, “You wouldn’t have to kill me. Say die and I will die.”(WSS, 55) Here Rochester finds a connection between Antoinette and black wantonness. Paula Grace Anderson in the article “Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea: The Other Side/Both Sides Now” published in *Caribbean Quarterly* in March-June, 1982 says that, “similarly, with an awareness of male dominated society , as symbolized by male-female struggle, we can see Antoinette/Bertha’s role here as one of symbolic psycho-sexual “primitivism” (the creole/black women as whore)...and Rochester as the symbolic master and maker of the all-male world of power.” (Anderson, 58) Kate Millett also analyses this phenomenon in “Chapter 2 of “Sexual politics” Theory of Sexual Politics”: “There is some evidence that fertility cults in ancient society at some point took a turn toward patriarchy, displacing and downgrading female function in procreation and attributing the power of life to the phallus alone.” (Millett, 6) Many psychiatrists and social scientists throughout the century tried to prove women sick in every sense. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* also point this out:

Hysteria, the disease with which Freud so famously began his investigations into the dynamic connections between psyche and soma, is by definition a “female disease”, not so much because it takes its name from the Greek word for womb, hyster (the organ which was in the nineteenth century supposed to “cause” this emotional disturbance), but because hysteria did occur mainly among women in turn-of-the-century Vienna, and because throughout the nineteenth century this mental illness, like many other nervous disorders, was thought to be caused by the female reproductive system, as if to elaborate upon Aristotle’s notion that femaleness was in and of itself a deformity. (*The Mad Woman in the Attic*, 53)

Rochester had the same notion about his wife. Antoinette’s unusual behavior, her imagination, dreams and fears lead him to think that she was suffering from some form of hysteria or madness. Silvia Panizza in the article “Double complexity in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*” said, “Antoinette’s free sexuality leads her husband to suspect her not only of being a mulatto, but also of being mad. This apparently preposterous correlation was typical of the least advanced but unfortunately most popular fringes of Victorian medicine, which held that all women suffered from hysteria to some extent and that this disease was caused by the movements of the uterus and exasperated by any excess of emotion.” (Panizza, 5) So Rochester wanted to take Antoinette away from the place that was responsible to arouse these emotions in her. He even tried to give her a new identity that would help her to forget her past and make her the way he wants her. Silvia Panizza in the article “Double complexity in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*” explained the matter very clearly,

he imposes on her a European identity and a European name, striving to persuade her that she is the submissive English wife he would want her to be. He goes so far in this as to compare his wife to a zombie, a product of obeah magical rituals, which was characterized by a marked absence of thought and will. A description of a zombie would match with alarming precision Rochester’s portrayal of Antoinette: cold hands, red eyes, a connection with death emerging in her night talks, always revolving around that subject, and culminating in his covering the body of his wife “as if I covered a dead girl”

(WSS, p. 88). By depriving her of her will, as sorcerers do to zombies, Rochester controls and subjugates his wife, just as slave-owners did with their slaves. (Panizza, 10)

Rochester tries to rename Antoinette as “Bertha” as the name Antoinette is close to the name of her mother Annette which reminds him of her madness. Naming or tagging things, places or people are a key concept in the process of colonization. According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, “to name a place is to announce discursive control over it by the very act of inscription, because through names, location becomes metonymic of those processes of travel, annexation and colonization that effect the dominance of imperial powers over the non-European world.” (*Post- Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 183) So the renaming of Antoinette as Bertha is also a process of colonization through which Rochester wanted to have dominance over her. Here Bertha has been used as palimpsest⁵ over which Rochester wanted to inscribe a new identity erasing the previous one. But Antoinette protested every time Rochester called her ‘Bertha’. She says,

“Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that’s obeh too.” (WSS, 95)

Antoinette is aware of Rochester’s intention. As Rochester was unable to dominate her completely in her own land, he had to take her away to a distant land where he could imprison her and make her completely his own. We came to know of his intention and imperial mind at the end of Part Two when he says:

“If she too says it or weeps, I’ll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She’s mad but *mine*, *mine*. What will I care for gods or devils or for fate itself. If she smiles or weeps or both. *For me*. (WSS, 108)

Mary Wollstonecraft in the book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1794) identifies the societal expectations from women:

⁵ Palimpsest = originally the term for a parchment on which several inscriptions had been made after earlier ones had been erased (*Key Concepts in Post colonial Studies*, page:174)

Women are, therefore, to be considered either as moral beings, or so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men.

.....Rousseau declares that a woman should never, for a moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to men, whenever he chooses to relax himself.with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be impressed with unrelenting rigour.

(Wollstonecraft, 175)

From the beginning of the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* the protagonist has been seen as such character who is very submissive and docile. Being rejected by both white and Black societies, she had tried to find a place in her husband's heart. In order to impress him she dressed herself the way Rochester wanted, she even tried to take the help of obeah to make him love her. Mary Wollstonecraft would find a relationship based on emotion only a waste of a lifetime: "I own it frequently happens that women who have fostered a romantic unnatural delicacy of feeling, waste their life in imagining how happy they should have been with a husband who could love them with a fervid increasing affection every day and all day" (Wollstonecraft, 181). Antoinette's passionate and emotional self loses all that she used to be passionate about – first her friend Tia, then Coulibri, then her mother. This constant sense of loss made her lose any sense of self, and ultimately drove her insane. According to Mary Wollstonecraft passions, emotions, fragility and sensibility are the obstacles in developing the female intellect. And this emotion arouses madness and folly in female characters. She said, "the passions thus pampered, whilst the judgment is left unformed, what can be expected to ensue? - Undoubtedly, a mixture of madness and folly!" (Wollstonecraft, 181)

Rhys depicted Rochester as a true representative of the European colonizing mentality who believes himself to be the upholder of pure European culture that is structured by the principles of 'order' and 'reason'. Rochester also possessed a patriarchal mind. First he used Antionette by taking her property then he tried to take away her identity in order to break her completely. But

she ultimately manages to escape from his domination by setting fire to his house. At the end, she takes a symbolic leap towards Tia and the Blackness with which she had felt most safe. Lee Erwin in the article "Like in a Looking-Glass: History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*" published in *NOVEL: A Forum of Fiction* in Winter, 1989 analyzed this last scene as a reunion:

her leap represents a celebration of or fantasized union with a blackness finally seen to have been the desire of her narrative all along. The mirror, "hard, cold, and misted over with my breath," that Antoinette remembers blocking her union with herself in a childhood memory, and which took on an even harder form in the rock flung by Tia, now becomes the pool in which the two girls swam every day, a reflective but welcoming medium into which Tia invites her. (Erwin, 154)

This last incident is therefore a union with the oppressed colonized subject and a denial of patriarchal and colonial domination over Antoinette who is a victim of dual psycho-cultural and racial identification. Through the leap or the suicidal act Antoinette, a person with a Black psyche and a painful mask of white skin tried to get her desired freedom.

Chapter 2

In this part of the dissertation I would like to draw a sketch of the position of women in a society that is filled with class and caste distinctions. While analyzing the issue I would like to focus on how women are colonized, marginalized and confined in their homes by the colonizing and dominating male, how they are deprived of their rights in every spheres of their lives, how their voices are silenced, how marriage as a form of colonization takes away their identity and the creation of bourgeois women through false and impractical female education. The main character of Ammu along with some other female characters like Rahel, Baby Kochamma, Mammachi and Kochu Maria in *The God of Small Things* (1997) fits as the perfect example of this. The life of Ammu along with the two twin siblings is completely ruined due to the boundaries in the map of love drawn by this male chauvinistic society. The theme that dominates through the novel is this map of love: the love law “who should be loved and how. And how much” (*TGOST*⁶, 31) set up by the patriarchy with the categories of class, caste and gender. Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* attempts to destabilize the patriarchal norms that support caste and gender domination through demonstrating its destructive effect on the life of the characters such as Ammu, Estha, Rahel, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and the Untouchable Velutha. This novel Roy tries to portray the social, cultural and political boundaries set by the patriarchy and the utmost desire to transgress these boundaries by marginalized sections.

The novel *The God of Small Things* can be read as an autobiographical novel. Anna Sujatha Mathai in the review of this novel published in *Indian Literature* in July – August, 1997, stated that “The main characters are real, and the story is partly autobiographical.” (Mathai, 188) It is believed that the protagonist is none other than the author’s mother Mary Roy in real life who fought against the unequal laws that made the inheritance law unjust for women.

The time period of the novel in which it was is basically divided into two parts. One is when Estha and Rahel were seven years old that is in 1969. It is the most important time period for the novel as the state of Kerala along with its inhabitants faced rapid changes. The community of

⁶ Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (Penguin Books, 2002). P 31 (References to the novel will henceforth be abbreviated *TGOST* and included in the paper)

Ayemenam started to accept communism that believes in workers and poor classes' empowerment and a classless- casteless society. The older generation Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and even Vellya Pappen were not happy with this change as they were used to people performing their duties according to class and caste. On the contrary the youngest generation Rahel and Estha were not affected by this change as they were not old enough to understand what was happening around them. That is why they felt free to play with Velutha, the Untouchable man and his communist party flag was a play instrument for them. But the life of the middle generation Ammu, Chacko and Velutha was seriously influenced by the change in the society. Chacko being a bourgeois declared himself a Marxist; on the other hand Ammu and Velutha got engaged in a forbidden love affair. Both were influenced by the social and political changes around them. And the second time period of the story is set 24 years later in 1993 when the children were 31 years old. The condition of the society was much calmer, like the serenity in the nature after a destructive storm.

The story is set in Ayemenam in Kerala. Kerala in the first phase of the novel is a postcolonial state that is going through a transformation. It is a state in the south-west coast of India where communism found a strong hold and where the church boasts of a continuous history of 2000 years and more. Communism in India started to spread in the 1920s. Because of the establishment of the organization for workers and spread of peasant's movement, communism became very popular in Kerala. It helped to increase the literacy among the working class and to eliminate poverty. The reason behind this immense popularity of communism was the wide spread class and caste distinction in Kerala. Quoting Lancy Lobo from the essay 'Visions, Illusions and Dilemmas of Dalit Christians in India' (2001) Ajay Sekher in the article 'Older than the Church: Christianity and Caste in "The God of Small Things"' published in *Economic and Political Weekly* in August 16-22, 2003 stated: "Caste is older than the church" (Sekher, 3445). There is no caste system in Christianity, and Kerala was predominantly Christian. However, in reality there exists a vast gap between the belief and practice of every religion. Although Christianity has no caste but Keralan Christians practice caste. So the people who wanted to change their fate by converting to Christianity were entangled further in cultural and identity crisis. Ajay Sekher states: "Unfortunately the Christian intervention in India has produced little to improve the cultural and social status of the Bahujans, apart from evangelist educational efforts, but further deteriorated the cultural crisis and the human dilemma related to identity and

egalitarian dignity. This is not just a lonely voice, but the committed research that has been done in the area also agrees with this human crisis related to caste and conversion in India.”(Sekher, 3445) A perfect example of it was Velutha with whom Ammu, the central character of the novel had a love affair. He is depicted as an Untouchable, a Paravan.

when the British came to Marabar, a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas (among them Velutha’s grandfather, Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability...It didn’t take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire...After independence they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians and therefore casteless. It was a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all. (*TGOST*, 74)

Class and caste driven society set a distinction among who can be touched and who cannot; who can be loved and who cannot. Velutha and his father were among the untouchables. In the novel this distinction is defined:

Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s footprint. In Mammachi’s time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. (*TGOST*, 73)

The caste system in Kerala was deep rooted. When communism came as a revolutionary form fighting for the rights of the lower and working class, it became very popular among them. In

1957 communist reforms like the land re-distribution and education reform to build a classless society, gave hope to the oppressed class. But ironically the leadership of the communist party was taken by some touchable upper castes or savarnas and Syrian Christians like Pillai and Namboodipadu. Though people like Velutha became card holding members of the party, power lay in the hands of upper class people. When Velutha needed the help of this leader he was left completely unprotected. Regarding this Ajay Sekher in the article "Older than the Church: Christianity and Caste in "The God of Small Things"" writes "As caste Christianity became just another caste Hinduism, caste communism was the next to follow. Pillai and Namboodiripadu are typical representations of caste camaraderie in Kerala. The touch-able upper castes or savarnas and Syrians have hijacked the leadership and the decision-making in the party, that has become another brahmanic varnasrama or yet another church along with the dream of revolution and an egalitarian society by exploiting the aspirations and manpower resources of the untouchable masses." (Sekher, 3446) Arundhati Roy also pointed to this matter in the novel:

The real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail revolution. A heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy. (*TGOST*, 66)

In the novel Roy showed Comrade Pillai as a person who pretended to practice Marxism outside but believed in the bourgeoisie inside, as opposed to Chacko, who believed and welcomed Marxism inside and was a practitioner of elitist bourgeoisie outside. This feudal, patriarchal and casteist comrade is also shown as a male chauvinist in the novel. His treatment of his wife, Kalyani is humiliating for her, who "referred to her husband as *addeham* which was the respectful form of 'he', whereas he called her 'edi' which was approximately, 'Hey, you!'" (*TGOST*, 270) He turned away from Velutha in the time of need with a false excuse, blaming his wife: "See her, for example. Mistress of this house. Even she will never allow Paravans and all that into her house... my own wife. Of course inside the house she is Boss." (*TGOST*, 278) Though he said he regarded her as the boss, he continued to humiliate her by making naughty

sexist puns in front of Chacko. As she could not speak English, she had to consent to whatever her husband said. She did not have the power to resist.

Chacko is the seemingly good person in the novel, who has a degree from Oxford University, also held a negative and humiliating attitude towards women. Though he is shown to be a Marxist who believes in a classless society unlike Pillai, he appears to be a male chauvinist like Pillai. His Marxism is mixed with male chauvinism as in the following description: - “Ammu said it was all hogwash. Just a case of spoiled prince playing Comrade! Comrade! An Oxford avatar of the old zaminder mentality- a landlord forcing his attentions on women who depended on him for their livelihood.” (*TGOST*, 65) From the very beginning Chacko consciously discriminates against his sister, Ammu.. Though Ammu did as much work as Chacko in their mother’s factory, he always referred to it as his own. Even though the Paradise Pickle Company was established by Mammachi, Chacko and Ammu’s mother but Chacko has registered it as a partnership where he made Mammachi (the real owner) the sleeping partner. Later on we find how the term ‘sleeping partner’ was made fun of by the Orange- Lemon drink man in the theatre: “And who does she sleep with” (*TGOST*, 103) Thus he pushed the female members of his family into the periphery so that they could not claim ownership, even though they had equal if not greater rights to the enterprise. Before Chacko’s arrival and taking over the control of the factory it was a profitable enterprise, but Chacko transformed it into a losing concern.

Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my factory, my pineapples, my pickles. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property.

Chacko told Tahel and Estha that Ammu had no Locusts Stand I.

‘Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society,’ Ammu said.

Chacko said, ‘What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine’ (*TGOST*, 57)

And then he laughed because he was aware of the fact that he was favoured by the patriarchal society. Although Chacko claimed the factory as his own, it was Mammachi who ran it. She handled all the crises, while Chacko was busy playing *Comrade Comrade*:

Whenever anything serious happened in the factory, it was always to Mammachi and not Chacko that the news was brought. Perhaps this was because Mammachi fitted properly into the conventional scheme of things. She was the Modalali. She played her part. Her responses, however harsh, were straightforward and predictable. Chacko, on the other hand, though he was the Man of the House, though he said, 'My pickles, my jam, my curry powders,' was so busy trying on different costumes that he blurred the battle lines. (*TGOST*, 122)

Despite being not worthy of it, he was given the proprietorship of the company just because he was male and therefore the legal heir. By the continual claiming of *my* factory, *my* pineapples, *my* pickles he tried to remind Ammu of her true place.

Ammu the protagonist of the novel was an ill-fated woman who was despised by almost everyone. She was denied almost every right that a human being needs to lead a happy life. In the very beginning of her life she was denied the right to study. After finishing her schooling she was not sent to college for further education, because it was more important to raise the money of dowry than to raise the money of education for a girl. Her brother Chacko, on the other hand, was sent to Oxford to complete his studies.

Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the house work. Since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposals came Ammu's way. (*TGOST*, 38)

Education and marriage were considered two opposite sides of a coin and a girl could not have both. The example of Baby Kochamma the sister of Pappachi and the daughter of Reverend Ipe

was always given as a warning. She had remained unmarried as she had been rejected by Father Mulligan with whom she was in love. Having failed to marry, Reverend Ipe allowed his daughter to continue with her studies. - “He decided that since she couldn’t have a husband there was no harm in her having an education. So he made arrangements for her to attend a course of study at the University of Rochester in America.” (*TGOST*, 26) But what did she study? She had a diploma in Oriental Gardening. There was a vast difference in the discipline of study in male and female. Kate Millett in “Chapter 2 of “Sexual politics” Theory of Sexual Politics” has talked about it in great detail:

Since education and economy are so closely related in the advanced nations, it is significant that the general level and style of higher education for women, particularly in their many remaining segregated institution, is closer to that of Renaissance humanism than to the skills of mid-twentieth-century scientific and technological society. (Millett, 22)

Education for girls was directed to home and child management. Sujata Patel in the article ‘Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi’ published in *Economic and Political Weekly* in February, 1988, writing about the social concept of female education, says: “To be able to be a good mother, a woman has to be given different education which gives her a training in not only basic domestic needs but also home economics and basic information about the world in which she is living.” (Patel, 378)

Partha Chatterjee in the essay “Nationalist Resolution of Woman’s Question” also discussed the matter of female education that was introduced by the new patriarchy during the reformation that took place in the nineteenth century. Through female education the social reformers claim to empower women without transforming their social position (that was located in the home). Partha Chatterjee writes, “Formal education became not only acceptable, but in fact a requirement for the new *bhadramahila* (respectable woman), when it was demonstrated that it was possible for a woman to acquire the cultural refinements afforded by modern education without jeopardizing her place at home.”(Chatterjee, 246) He also pointed to Radharani Lahiri who wrote about women’s education being different from that of men:, “Radharani Lahiri for instance, wrote in 1875: “Of all the subjects that women might learn, housework is the most

important... whatever knowledge she may acquire, she cannot claim any reputation unless she is proficient in housework”.” (Chatterjee, 247) Partha Chatterjee also pointed to the selectiveness of the social reformation that took no part in redeeming caste, class and gender problems. , “Fundamental elements of social conservation such as the maintenance of caste distinctions and patriarchal forms of authority in the family, acceptance of the sanctity of the *shastras* (ancient scriptures), preference for symbolic rather than substantive change in social practices- all of them were conspicuous in the reform movements of the early and mid-nineteenth century.” (Chatterjee, 235) The problem was acute specifically in the question of the social position of women. Reena Patel in the article “Hindu Women's Property Rights in India: A Critical Appraisal” published in *Third World Quarterly*, in 2006 states that the only issue not be influenced by the westernizing acts of the mid nineteenth-century reform movement was regarding women’s social position. She says:

In the interplay of reformist agendas and the privileging of religion within colonial discourse women became pre-eminent, but problematic, signifiers as the embodiment of 'tradition'. The existing legal framework reflects the postcolonial state's continued engagement with the debates of the past. While independence brought the adoption of a new constitution, a vast body of law, judicial and administrative, continued as before with minor changes. (Patel, 1259)

Women were considered to be the spiritual domain, a keeper of true traditional identity and the marker of the difference between west and east. Therefore they needed to be kept at home safe from the outer treacherous- hideous world which is the domain of the male. And so when in the novel *Mammachi* had to come into contact with the outer world through her playing the violin, the violin lessons were stopped by Pappachi: “It was during those few months they spent in Vienna that Mammachi took her first lessons on the violin. The lessons were abruptly discontinued when Mammachi’s teacher, Launsky- Tieffenthal, made the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented and, in his opinion, potentially concert class.” (*TGOST*, 50) Pappachi stopped her lessons just because it may give her fame which can surpass Pappachi’s fame and therefore may prove harmful and threatening towards Pappachi’s pride as an imperial entomologist.

Ammu wanted to escape this life and so hopped onto the first proposal of marriage that came to her. “She thought that *anything*, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem.” (TGOST, 39) But marriage proved to be a failure, as her husband turned out to be an alcoholic who tried to use Ammu to retain his job. Mr Hollick the English manager of the tea state offered Abbu that if he let Ammu live with him for a while then it would be possible to stop his transfer. Ammu rejected the offer, and was reproached by her husband because of her refusal. This is when he started becoming physically violent. When the violence started to include her children she couldn’t bear any more and returned to Ayemenem, the place she detested the most. Physical violation of women is a common phenomenon in a male dominated society and Ammu was used to it as she grew up seeing Mammachi being assaulted by Pappachi very frequently. In the novel a large passage is devoted to describing the two faced characteristic of Pappachi who

worked hard on his public profile as a sophisticated, generous, moral man. But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father. (TGOST, 180)

Pappachi never dared to show his real face in front of Chacko. So he used to beat Ammu and Mammachi when Chacko was out of the house. Ammu gives a very subtle description of Pappachi’s cruelty in the novel: “Ammu had endured cold winter nights in Delhi hiding in the mehndi hedge around their house (in case people from Good Families saw them) because Pappachi had come back from work out of sorts, and beaten her and Mammachi and driven them out of their home. On one such night, Ammu, aged nine, hiding with her mother in the hedge, watched Pappachi’s natty silhouette in the lit windows as he flitted from room to room. Not content with having beaten his wife and daughter (Chacko was away at school), he tore down curtains, kicked furniture and smashed a table lamp.”(TGOST, 181) It is patriarchy that gave the head of the family (basically the eldest male) permission to treat the women of the family as their property. Therefore they can do whatever they wish with them. Regarding this issue Kate Millett in ‘Sexual Politics’ has said, “Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including the power of physical abuse and often even those of

murder and sale. Classically, as head of the family the father is both begetter and owner in a system in which kinship is property.” (13)

Pappachi was an example of extreme patriarchy that dominated the society. He was a reputed person and respected by others in the society. And so he didn't like Mammachi's pickle-making job because women who earned were not well regarded socially. Sujata Patel in the article 'Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi' talked about the social attitude towards working women: “The most distinct and precious quality of a woman is her purity. To retain this purity, she should not do economic work; by doing economic work her purity and honour is violated.” (Patel, 378)

Though Mammachi was almost blind, Pappachi offered her no help. In the novel the description goes like:

Though Mammachi had conical corneas and was already practically blind, Pappachi would not help her with the pickle-making, because he did not consider pickle-making a suitable job for a high-ranking ex Government official. He had always been a jealous man, so he greatly resented the attention his wife was suddenly getting... every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place. One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi's violin and threw it in the river.

Then Chacko came home for a summer vacation from Oxford... a week after he arrived, he found Pappachi beating Mammachi in the study. Chacko strode into the room, caught Pappachi's vase-hand and twisted it around his back.

'I never want this to happen again,' he told his father. 'Ever.' ...he never touched Mammachi again. But he never spoke to her either as long as he lived. (*TGOST*, 48)

This long passage illustrates the parallelisms between colonial modes of rule and patriarchal power. Pappachi is an Anglophile which “meant that Pappachi's mind had been brought into a

state which made him like the English.” (*TGOST*, 33) He was “Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes”⁷. Being identified with the English he wanted to “doubly colonize”⁸ the women. And the women characters (Mammachi and Ammu) appear here as colonized subjects who never protest against this violation; they seem to occupy the position of the subaltern other who are denied voice. It was another male from the family Chacko who protested against the physical violation not Mammachi herself. Even Mammachi was used to this. In Ammu’s words: “She was used to having him slouching around the pickle factory and was used to being beaten from time to time.” (*TGOST*, 50). However, the signs of jealousy in Pappachi against Mammachi’s increasing success in the pickle making venture also portrays Mammachi in a position of mimicry, as a distorted image of Pappachi. Bhabha in the essay “Of Mimicry And Man: The Ambivalence Of Colonial Discourse” stated that the notion of the colonized as submissive or passive is not the whole picture, they can be a threat to the colonizer also. By imitating the colonizer, the colonized can become a threatening figure for the colonizer as they can see their own partial, perhaps distorted image, in the figure of the colonized other, even as they try to occupy the dominant position. Mammachi was gradually becoming popular and therefore taking the control (partially) of the family, whereas Pappachi had grown old and retired. So Mammachi’s newly-acquired economic position threatens Pappachi, and he is afraid of losing grip within his own colonial space, that is the family. In the novel such incidents are recorded as in the following passage: “In the evenings, when he knew visitors were expected, he would sit on the verandah and sew buttons that weren’t missing onto his shirts, to create the impression that Mammachi neglected him. To some small degree he did succeed in further corroding Ayemenem’s view of working wives.” (*TGOST*, 48) Here it can be compared to the image of the westernized women that Partha Chatterjee has talked about in the article. By coming into contact with the outer world; by meeting, travelling, eating and drinking with the men, women were seen to be losing their spiritual god-like qualities. He pointed to the fact that westernization of the women was strongly criticized:

It was, of course, a criticism of manners: of new items of clothing such as the blouse, the petticoat and shoes ... of the use of western cosmetics and jewellery, of the reading of novels...of needlework...of riding in open

⁷ ‘Minute on Indian Education’ (1835) by Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859)

⁸ Gayatri C. Spivak. “Can the Subaltern Speak”. March, 2010

carriages. What made the ridicule stronger was the constant suggestion that the westernized women were fond of useless luxury and cared little for the well being of the home. (Chatterjee, 240)

Baby Kochamma another female character from the novel actually fits into this characteristic of the bourgeois westernized woman. She is shown as living her life backwards, embracing the material world that she had renounced in her youth in her old age, wearing make-up, kohl, lipstick and jewellery. Her dyed jet-black hair and weight loss gave her a younger look. Baby Kochamma tries to look fragile and marvels at her tiny feet. These are some of the characteristics in women that Mary Wollstonecraft criticized in the book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. According to her fondness for beauty, practicing sensibility, elegance of mind, sweet docility of manners are some of the traits in women cultivated by men in order to subjugate them. She writes, "I wish to persuade women to endeavor to acquire strengths, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love..." (*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 168) Through a narrow mistaken education and many sexual prejudices such weaker sex is created only for man, love and lust not to practice any reason or constructive work in the society. But what will happen to the woman who didn't find any man. Mary Wollstonecraft stated, "How women are to exist in that state where there is to be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, we are not told." (*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 182) In the novel we the readers get a glimpse of the condition of such woman through the character of Baby Kochamma. She herself stated about her fate as, "The fate of the wretched man-less woman." (*TGOST*, 45) She was also partly responsible for the tragic end that Ammu and Velutha had suffered. It was Baby Kochamma who was jealous of Ammu and her fighting spirit. "Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched man-less woman." (*TGOST*, 45) She also hated the twins Rahel and Estha. In the novel we get,

In the way that the unfortunate sometimes dislike the co-unfortunate, Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless

waifs. Worse still, they were Half- Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry. She was keen for them to realize that they (like herself) lived on sufferance in the Ayemenem House, their maternal grandmother's house, where they really had no right to be... she subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parent's home. As for a divorced daughter – according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's courage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage- Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject. (*TGOST*, 45)

This above mentioned quotation is really important to describe the position of women without men in a patriarchal society. The reason behind the jealousy Baby Kochamma felt towards Ammu and her twins is the fear of losing or at least sharing the protection and financial support that she gets from the family. Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* pointed to the facts that as women are financially dependent on the men of the family so it is likely to arouse jealousy regarding the share that each of them get from one. She wrote, “ the wife, a cold-hearted, narrow-minded, woman and this is not an unfair supposition; for the present mode of education does not tend to enlarge the heart any more than the understanding, is jealous of the little kindness which her husband shows to his relations; and her sensibility not rising to humanity, she is displeased at seeing the property of her children lavished on a helpless sister...the consequence is obvious, the wife has recourse to cunning to undermine the habitual affection, which she is afraid to openly oppose...” (*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 190) Not only Baby Kochamma, in the novel we find Mammachi hated Margaret Kochamma for the same reason. Roy pictured the very common problem of mother-in-law and daughter in law, through the characters of Mammachi and Margaret. It is said,

She hated Margaret Kochamma for being Chacko's wife. She hated her for leaving him. But would have hated her even more had she stayed. The day that Chacko prevented Pappachi from beating her (and Pappachi had murdered his chair instead), Mammachi packed her wifely luggage and

committed it to Chacko's care. From then onwards he became the repository of all her womanly feelings. Her man. Her only love. (*TGOST*, 168)

As Mammachi considered Chacko as her savior, she was afraid of losing the only hope of protection and safety from him when his love Margaret Kochamma arrived in the city. Kate Millett has also pointed out the same: "In a money economy where autonomy and prestige depend upon currency, this is a fact of great importance. In general the position of women in patriarchy is a continuous function of their economic dependence. Just as their social position is vicarious and achieved (often on a temporary or marginal basis) through males, their relation to the economy is also typically vicarious or tangential." (Millett, 20) The position of a daughter in a family who is divorced is quite unthinkable in the society like Ayemenem, because as soon as a girl is married off she is separated, becomes someone else, and does not belong to her natal place anymore. Carol Vlassoff in the article "Progress and Stagnation: Changes in Fertility and Women's Position in an Indian Village" published in *Population Studies* in July, 1992 talked about women's position after marriage: "Dyson and Moore highlighted an interesting aspect of women's status or 'autonomy' in India: nearness of kin as a determinant of women's sense of security and power. Women are typically separated, from their families on marriage, and their links with a familiar world over which they have some control are lost. On a regional level, Dyson and Moore observed that the greater the 'marriage distance' (distance from parents that women move when they marry), the higher the infant/child mortality, fertility, and sex ratios (males/100 females)." (Vlassoff, 197)

In India the rights of property for women was not certain. Reena Patel in the article "Hindu Women's Property Rights in India: A Critical Appraisal" talks about the legal rights of Hindu women : "Hindu women have enjoyed independent property rights since 1956, with the passage of the Hindu Succession Act, which granted equal shares to females and males in respect of parental property. Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged in India that legal rights guaranteed to Hindu women have by and large not been exercised by them." (Patel, 1256) So, Ammu's right on property and security was uncertain and the situation of her two children is even worse as they were Half-Hindu Hybrids. It was quite problematic for someone from mixed- community to survive in a society that was already torn between class and caste systems. Rahel and Estha's

lives were thus torn like their hybridity. No one was eager to take their responsibility. In the novel Ammu and Chacko fought over this: ‘Stop posing as the children’s great Saviour!’ Ammu said. ‘When it comes down to brass tacks, you don’t give a damn about them. Or me.’ ‘Should I?’ Chacko said. ‘Are they *my* responsibility?’ he said that Ammu and Estha and Rahel were millstones around his neck.’ (*TGOST*, 85) They were constantly reminded of their true place which was definitely not in the house in Ayemenem. Even Kochu Maria didn’t spare to pass comments on them: ‘Tell your mother to take you to your father’s house,’ she said. ‘There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren’t your beds. This isn’t your house.’ (*TGOST*, 83) The distinction between the three children Estha- Rahel and Sophie Mol is also very vivid in the novel. Just because Sophie Mol was from the male (Chacko) side she was more acceptable in the family than Estha and Rahel who were from the daughter of the family. Patriarchal society considers the children and wife of a son (heir) as part of the family, whereas a daughter and her children are excluded from the family. Quoting Sir Henry Maine, a nineteenth century historian of ancient jurisprudence Kate Millett wrote: ‘Maine argues that the patriarchal basis of kinship is put in terms of dominion rather than blood; wives, though outsiders, are assimilated into the line, while sisters’ sons are excluded.’ (Millett, 13) As a half-English person, Sophie Mol is more acceptable. The novel shows the colonized basis of the society through the respect shown to the old colonizers, especially the colonizer’s language. The biased Pappachi, the incurable British CCP chi chi poach (shit wiper) didn’t believe Ammu’s story of an Englishman who had tried to violate her: ‘he didn’t believe that an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife.’ (*TGOST*, 42) Comrade Pillai despite his Marxism was also enslaved to the colonizer’s language, and was very proud of his son’s English. Baby Kochamma imposed the language of the colonizer on Rahel and Estha in the week before Sophie Mol’s arrival. Chacko who claimed to be a believer of Marxism was ‘a proud and happy man to have had a wife like Margaret. White.’ (*TGOST*, 143) Thus the representatives of the society were mentally chained and restricted with a colonial mindset.

The tragic death of Velutha and Ammu was predictable in this kind of society. Gender is considered to be another class in the society and the love affair between Velutha, the Untouchable and Ammu was considered to be illegitimate. However, a similar affair was

permitted to Chacko, and Mammachi and Baby Kochamma justified this as the fulfillment of a 'man's need'. . . The novel describes these attitudes in great detail:

'He can't help having a Man's Needs,' she said primly.

Surprisingly, Baby Kochamma accepted this explanation, and the enigmatic, secretly thrilling notion of Men's Needs gained implicit sanction in the Ayemenem House. Neither Mammachi nor Baby Kochamma saw any contradiction between Chacko's Marxist mind and feudal libido...

Mammachi had a separate entrance built for Chacko's room, which was at the eastern end of the house, so that the objects of his 'Needs' wouldn't have to go traipsing through the house. She secretly slipped them money to keep them happy. (*TGOST*, 168)

Chacko was allowed to have illegitimate relationships with working class women and also to make them pregnant. And Mammachi, his mother used to bribe those women to keep them happy and their mouths shut. But Ammu's relationship with a working class male, Velutha was not acceptable. According to Baby Kochamma it brought a shame to the family and it was God's punishment on Ammu. She couldn't understand how a woman from an upper class Syrian Christian family could even stand the smell of such paravans. Thus what was permitted as a man's need and part of a feudal libido for Chacko was seen as god's punishment and a threat to the family prestige when his sister was concerned. And so Ammu had to go; leave the family; to die in a grimy room. The whole event was described while Rahel was reading a chapter called 'Little Ammu' in Estha's diary:

Little Ammu.

Who never completed her corrections.

Who had to pack her bags and leave. Because she had no Locusts Stand I.

because Chacko said she had destroyed enough already. (*TGOST*, 159)

Ammu died alone, and only Rahel and Chacko were at the crematorium as the church refused to bury her, as because she had been married to a Hindu person and had engaged in an illegitimate relationship with a paravan.

Ajay Sekher in the article “Older than the Church: Christianity and Caste in “The God of Small Things”” pointed to this fact and wrote: “It is again the woman who is chained as per the love laws. The man has his instinctual legitimate needs! The question of honour of a caste/community is again limited and ascribed to the female sexuality and more precisely her body. When Chacko has illicit relations with untouchable women it is natural, but a similar relationship between an untouchable man and touchable Christian woman is taboo and deadly dangerous.” (Shekhar, 3447) He also said, “Again the patriarchal double standards of this savarna/Syrian morality is exposed in its excusing men’s needs and despising that of women. Thus presenting to us further problematic of caste, that it is not simply purity/pollution and endogamy, but something complex deepened by gender questions as well as by economics of class and capital.” (Shekhar, 3447)

Thus the novel is infused with the gender and caste distinction and their inability to question the social power structure. The powerless or the marginalized try to transgress social boundaries by establishing socially illegitimate relationships- one between the Untouchable Velutha and Ammu and another in the incest between Rahel and Estha. As they couldn’t find meaning of life in the legitimate relationships so they were in quest of life, meaning, happiness through illegitimate relations. Amita Sharma in the review ‘Truths of Memory and Transgression: God of Small Things, The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy’ published in *India International Centre Quarterly* in Spring, 1998 acknowledged these two relationships as private acts of self-expression against the society. She stated, “The refrain of the novel is a questioning of the laws of love that lay down how much and who will love? Legitimate relationships dissolve into dishonesties whether at the Tea Estate or the Pickles Preserves factory or into a convenient connivance of self-interests. These legitimized and institutionalized relationships that destroy individuals contrast with the non legitimate individual acts that forge their own meaning in a private world. The former must destroy the latter, but meaning inheres in the latter...the beginning of a socially illegitimate relationship through the hint of incest—ending with the eternal tomorrow of the illicit tryst. This at one level is the conventionally romantic end where the aura of the dead lovers' passion survives. At another and more significant level, it is an assertion of the only possibility of discovering meaning in life through private acts of self-expression. The eternal recurrence of 'Naaley'—tomorrow.” (Sharma, 168)

Chapter 3

It is over-simplistic to assume, for example, that men are necessarily the perpetrators of war while women are its peace-loving victims. In reality men and women may each be protagonists of war in various ways, and are dramatically affected by it, both physically and emotionally.⁹

- Judy El- Bushra and Cecile Mukarubuga

The third chapter of my thesis elucidates this idea with reference to Tahmima Anam's trilogy *A Golden Age* (2007) and *The Good Muslim* (2011). In this chapter I will show, first, the effect of a historical event on women characters mainly Rehana and Maya: how their characters are shaped and to what extent; secondly the protagonists' stand against the stereotypical ideology regarding women as social and cultural beings; thirdly, religion as a means of domination practiced by the patriarchy in the society and last of all women's contribution as nationalists in comparison to the male characters in the novel.

Tahmima Anam has set the story of the novel *A Golden Age* against the backdrop of Bangladesh's independence war in 1971. The plot circles around a family during the war portraying the passion, hope, faith and heroism of every individual in it. Through the family history Anam tries to animate the grand history of the country. This technique was previously visible in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) which is on the India Pakistan partition of 1947, Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993), Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1996) about the emergency rule in the mid 70s.

The novel is based on the story of the Haque family and their surroundings. The story resembles the life of the author's grandmother. The protagonist of the novel Mrs. Rehana Haque is based on her grandmother's life in 1971. As the author herself had not been born during the 1971 war, she had to rely on the oral story from her grandmother and also on some basic research on the war. That is why the novel does not give a full picture of the war, rather the reader has to assume through hints and references the actual events of the time.

⁹ Judy El- Bushra and Cecile Mukarubuga. "Women, War and Transition". *Gender and Development*, (Oct, 1995). P. 16

The novel opens with the personal battle of Mrs Rehana Haque regarding the custody of her own children Sohail and Maya. At the beginning of the novel Mrs Haque appears to be weak both physically and mentally and most importantly economically, so that it was difficult to keep the children with her. As a mother had to fight to keep her children with her after her husband's death, as their uncle, her brother, wanted to take their custody. Patriarchy forces a mother to prove that she has enough property and means in order to have right to bring up her own children. In the novel we find, "The judge said Rehana had not properly coped with the death of her husband. She was too young to take care of the children on her own. She had not taught them the proper lessons about Jannat and the afterlife." (AGA¹⁰, 5) So Rehana Haque does not fit into the criteria of being a mother. Her irresponsibility as a mother was traced to the fact that she had taken the children to watch the movie Cleopatra, that she protected the children from knowing what had actually happened to their father, and that she was poor and friendless in the city. So Mrs. Rehana Haque had to let both the children go to the Lahore with their Faiz uncle.

Mrs. Rehana Haque did not fit the criteria a society expected of a woman. The stereotyped idea regarding women is that they should be treated like men's slave or that they are to take care of men and children. But the relationship of Mrs. Haque with her husband was quite unusual because of which her brother-in-law didn't like her. In the novel we find,

Faiz had never liked Rehana. It had something to do with Iqbal's devotion to her. Leaving her slippers outside the bathroom door when she went to bathe. Pressing her feet with olive oil. Speaking only in gentle tones. Everyone noticed; Faiz would say, Brother, you are spoiling your wife and Mrs. Chowdhury, who lived opposite their house in Dhanmondi, would sigh and declare, Your husband is a saint. (AGA, 6)

Being a woman Rehana was already struggling with the social barriers and did whatever required to keep her children safe. . Her neighbor, Mrs. Chowdhury advised her to build another house by taking a loan from the bank. But she failed to take the loan. Mrs. Haque says, "But I was just a woman. Without a male guarantor, all the banks turned me down." (AGA, 148) Without finding any way out she decided to go to Mr. Qureishi, an old friend of Mrs. Chowdhury's brother, and

¹⁰ Tahmima Anam, *A Golden Age*(John Murray Publishers , 2007). P 5 (References to the novel will henceforth be abbreviated AGA and included in the paper)

she was treated by him as most single women are. The incident is described in the novel in the following words:

‘That Qureishi man was a fraud. It wasn’t Mrs. Chowdhury’s fault- I should have taken her with me, but I went alone, and I must have looked terrible, lost, and the man tried to take advantage.’

There he was, pressing the gristle of his cheek against her mouth, and his hand was on the sleeve of her blouse, and she could smell the curry breakfast he’d eaten that morning, and the stale old soap, and the sick, brutal need. (AGA, 148)

Mr. Qureishi here is a representative of the patriarchal mind who thinks of women only as a body to be exploited.

After that Mrs Rehana Haque thought about getting married to Mr. T Ali a blind but rich man thinking that this would help to get her children back. But she ended up stealing jewellery that belonged to his dead wife. This incident left a permanent scar on her mind . But all that she did was for the sake of her children, to bring them back to her, to love them, to see them growing up, to protect them from Faiz and his wife who ‘looked hungrily at the children’ (AGA, 6).

This small act of protecting her children leads to the greater cause of protecting her country for her children though at the first stage Rehana was not sure about her position in the revolution. In the novel we find when the political situation around the country was turning bad, and all men and only men did was discuss the war. In the party that Rehana threw on the anniversary of her children’s return, Sabeer, Sohail and Mr. Sengupta (the men) were discussing the war, whereas the ladies Mrs. Akram, Mrs. Chowdhury, Mrs. Rahman and Mrs. Rehana Haque were busy talking about the marriage of Rehana, Biriyani and the love affair of Silvi and Sohail. When Mrs. Akram expressed her concern for Sohail as ‘he was so involved in student politics’ (AGA, 30) Mrs. Rehana Haque tried to defend him by saying ‘He isn’t’ (AGA, 30). Though she defended her child saying, ‘It’s just all in the air...’ (AGA, 30) but she herself believed ‘Her own children seemed a little out of control by comparison’ (AGA, 30). Mrs Chowdhury also had a negative view regarding Sohail’s involvement in student politics. In the novel the reaction of both Mrs. Rehana Haque and Mrs. Chowdhury regarding the participation in the struggle is described as: “He’ll never make a good husband, she heard Mrs. Chowdhury say. Too much politics. The

comment had stung because it was probably true. Lately the children had little time for anything but the struggle.” (AGA, 33)

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) discussed women’s reaction regarding war. She says:

The man knows he can reconstruct other institutions, another ethics, another code; grasping himself as transcendence, he also envisages history as a becoming; even the most conservative knows that some change is inevitable and that he has to adapt his action and thinking to it; as the woman does not participate in history, she does not understand its necessities; she mistrusts the future and wants to stop time” (*The Second Sex*, 727).

Some researches observe that while men see war as an opportunity of taking over power, women perceive it as destructive and a process of violence and violation. In the article “Symposium: Women, War, and Peace in Jewish and Middle East Contexts” published in *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender*, in Fall, 2003 the following words occur:

There have also been discussions of gender differences with regard to the meaning of such concepts as "power" and "security" and to different thoughts that come to mind when discussing war...we found gender differences in people's replies to the question: "what comes to your mind in response to the word war." Women tended to respond in terms of injured and dead, bloodshed and suffering, while men were more likely to respond in terms of weapons and battles, strategy and serving.¹¹ (Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert *et al*, 14)

¹¹ Fonrobert. Charlotte Elisheva *et al*, “Symposium: Women, War, and Peace in Jewish and Middle East Contexts.” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender*. Fall, 2003 ; p. 14

Wherever political chaos or revolution or war happens, women are ready to compromise in order to restore peace. That is why women are known as peace- makers or more compassionate.

However, this is not always the case. In a recent study on war between Israel and Palestine it is found that, “The young women, on both sides, tended to be more militant”¹². In the novel *A Golden Age* the daughter of Mrs. Rehana Haque Maya was not different. In 1970 just after the cyclone hit Bangladesh and the government did not participate in the rescue operation, Maya joined the student communist party to protest against such inhuman neglect. She was carried away by ideas like “*Uprising. Revolution.*” (AGA, 3) Though Mrs. Rehana Haque took pride in Sohail’s leadership qualities and his popularity in every group in the university, she did not like Maya’s involvement and always tried to hold her back at home. Probably Mrs. Rehana Haque also believed in “the myth of “Man the Warrior” and the myth of “Woman as Beautiful Soul.”¹³ Maya is presented as a true activist. From the beginning to the end of the novel and even in the second part *The Good Muslim* she maintained her activist attitude. She was very excited to go to the protests that followed the disrupted cricket match in March 1971. As Sohail was a boy, he could join the procession but for Maya the case was different. Instead we get a picture of a restless Maya dying to see the events in the street. In the novel from the conversation of Rehana and Maya we can see the condition of Maya was like a fish out of water:

Rehana saw Maya reaching for the handle and said, ‘Keep the window up.’

They turned out of the stadium and on to Paltan Road. ‘I want to see what’s happening,’ Maya said.

‘You can see from here.’ ...Maya cupped her hands against the window and shouted, ‘Joy Bangla! Joy Sheikh Mujib!’ ...

Maya tried to identify the people in the crowd. ‘Who is it? Chattra League?’

(AGA, 41)

¹² Ibid, 20

¹³ McElwain, Hugh T. “Rev of *Women and War* by Jean Bethke Elshtain”. *American Journal of Sociology*, 1988. p. 441

Though she could not join the procession, she managed to participate in the protest from home by making some posters. There was a difference between the way Sohail and Maya felt and dealt with the revolution. Though Maya was under the protective eye of her mother, her devotion to the revolution was stronger than that of Sohail. Sohail appeared to be more interested in Silvi, the daughter of Mrs. Chowdhury than the country's situation. In the engagement ceremony of Silvi and Sabeer though both Maya and Sohail were present, it was Maya rather than Sohail who had to be forced to come to the party. She was not at all happy with the indifference that her neighborhood showed to the condition of the country. In the novel it is said that, "She wanted to be on the streets, distributing leaflets and singing 'We shall overcome'." (AGA, 54). She regretted that she was not in the university when the operation searchlight broke out in the country on the night of 25th March 1971. She desperately wanted to be part of history: "She wanted some mark, some sign that the thing had happened to her. A bruise on the cheek. A tear in her blouse." (AGA, 71) Her friend Sharmeen's disappearance after that day moved Maya so much that she started to separate herself from the everyday life. And when Sohail went to the camp across the border she started to go to the university to contribute to the war by training the other girls. But Rehana did not want to lose Maya also. She wanted to protect her. Maya and Rehana had an argument over this matter in the novel when Rehana followed Maya to the University in order to find what Maya was actually doing there, whether she has involved herself in something dangerous. The incident is described in the following words:

'Are you spying on me?' she said. The exercise has made her aggressive. Her braid was coming undone, and the stray hairs clung wetly to her forehead... Maya mounted an attack. 'why did you bring us back here?'

'What do you mean?'

'From Lahore? Why did you bother to bring us back? You have no feeling for this place.'

What did she mean? 'This is my home. Your father's home.'

Then why won't you let me do something?

I just want to protect you. Everything I've done I've done for you and your brother. Now please, get in the car, the curfew's about to ring (AGA, 88)

It is true that Rehana had a different attitude towards her children, as she herself confesses:

Rehana often wondered if she could help loving one child better. She had a blunt, tired love for her daughter. It was full of effort. Sohail was her first born, and so tender, and Maya was so hard, all sympathy worked out of her by the throaty chants of the street march, the pitch of the slogan...suddenly the angels from her face had moved, sharpened, so she was no longer young or pretty. And she wore only widow's white, which was always felt to Rehana like an insult." (AGA, 76)

She sometimes felt guilty because of this: 'Rehana thought of it as her biggest failure. That her daughter had not found a way into her heart.' (AGA, 77). Even the neighbors seem to be aware of this. In the novel Mrs. Rahman said, "But you've always been- a little unforgiving of Maya" (AGA, 93). A Mothers' partiality towards the boy child is a common issue in every society. In *The God of Small Things* Ammu had complained about Chacko being favored by Mammachi. But unlike Mammachi Rehana was aware of her partial attitude and wanted treating both children equally.

Rehana wanted to control Maya. Here Maya's condition was quite like Pauline's in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), who unlike her brothers was not allowed to go to school as she had to take care of the home. Maya was not allowed to go to the university whereas Sohail got the permission to go to the war, to train as a guerrilla. But unlike Pauline, Maya appeared to be a very strong girl with total control over herself. That is why even after her mother's refusal she managed to contribute to the war by writing columns or by collecting blankets for the soldiers.

From Rehana's point of view then her stand is perfectly justified. Being a widow it was not easy for her to raise the children. She had to struggle to keep them with her. Maya was irritated at her mother's unreasonable tendency to keep them at home. She had an argument over it in the novel: Maya turned on her mother and began with a shout:

'You are not so good at this either. You couldn't keep my brother back, and you can't keep me!'

Keep me. The words were poisoned arrows.

'You don't know what you're saying.'

'You've been crazy- ever since- ever since Abboo died, you have this thing

about keeping us at home. You're mad! You want to lock us up!'...

'I mean you could never understand what it's like for me and Sohail.'

'Leave your brother out of it.'

'Sohail,' she said, 'where is he now? Probably dead, killed by one of your Pak soldiers!' (AGA, 89)

It is indeed true that Rehana has always tried to keep the children close to her because they were her whole world. It was not easy to raise the children in a society driven by the males. She had to fight with the society; the society that thinks it is important to have a husband to raise the children. Rehana did everything to protect her children, to prove she did not need any male support to raise her children. It is not only Maya who she tried to protect, she also tried to keep Sohail when he wanted to go to the war. She took him to her husband Iqbal's grave where she felt more strengthened. Even though Rehana raised the children by herself and was responsible for them by herself, whenever there is a serious matter to be dealt with, Rehana always thought about Iqbal. When for the first time she had to let her children go, she thought about what Iqbal would have wanted. And also this time when she had to let Sohail go to war, she thought about Iqbal again. In the article "Symposium: Women, War, and Peace in Jewish and Middle East Contexts" the difference between men and women's views are depicted as: "This difference, like that between the women's compassion and the men's pragmatism, may be attributable to the men's view of themselves as the leaders and negotiators who must deal with the issues and the larger picture, while women deal with daily life, family food, children's needs, and so forth."¹⁴ It is the practice of patriarchal society that makes women feel dependent on men while making important decisions. Even Maya who is shown as a strong character, had to rely on the Major and Sohail to arrange something for her active contribution to the war by writing stories about the war. And as the arrangements were done by Sohail so Rehana could not oppose it, as she trusts her son. But with this incident we also find how much the character of Rehana has been strengthened by the thought of her dead husband's wishes, and she is able to think about losing them by sending them to the war. The war has a great effect on Rehana. During this transition period of the country, she had to meet many challenges to protect her children, but her world also expanded to protect other fighters such as Joy, Aref, and the Major. The refugees who took

¹⁴Fonrobert. Charlotte Elisheva *et al*, "Symposium: Women, War, and Peace in Jewish and Middle East Contexts." p.19

shelter at Shona shaped her into a new person who was ready to deal with the thought of losing her children in the war for the sake of her country. So it was not only the men of the society who fought for their country, housewives like Rehana also contributed to the war. Though a war has always been recognized as an act of men's bravery and courage, women participate in war as well. In the novel we get a common view of society regarding women's contribution to the war in the voice of Mrs. Akram and Mrs. Rahman:

'I tell you, we should all stay here and take a stand.'

'What sort of a stand, exactly?' Mrs. Akram asked.

'We should do something. I'm not giving up so easily.'

'Don't be foolish. You're just a housewife. What on earth could you possibly do?'

'You wait and see. I'm not just good for gin-rummy, I'll have you know.'

(AGA, 86)

And after few days these ladies Mrs. Akram, Mrs. Rahman and Rehana started sewing, making blankets for the refugees to contribute to the war, although for Rehana, it was more to prove to Maya her loyalty to the country. Mrs. Rehana Haque who had her roots in India, who was a native Urdu speaker, who had relatives (her sisters & her brother-in-law) in Pakistan believed this country to be her own, loved this country as it was her husband's Iqbal's and her children's home. In the novel we find Mrs. Rehana had to go through this pain of belonging and not belonging each time Maya used to remind her. There is an event in the novel:

'Don't you know? We're at war, and my daughter says I have to do something. To prove I belong here. So I'm doing something.' Rehana felt a tear crawling out of her eye; she tilted her head, sent it back. 'I'm doing something. Making blankets for refugees.' She felt her lip curling back on to her teeth. (AGA, 92)

And so to prove that she belonged to this country she decided to sacrifice all her gifts that were associated with the memory of Iqbal, her dead husband:

‘Rehana,’ Mrs Rahman said, pointing to the silks, ‘you don’t have to use these. We can find some old cottons.’

Rehana dug in her heels. ‘Why not? Everyone has to make sacrifices, why not me? It’s my country too.’

‘Of course it’s your country-’ Mrs. Akram began.

‘My daughter doesn’t think so.’ (AGA, 92)

Sacrifice is one of the most vital parts of a war, and women indeed sacrificed a lot. Another story of untold sacrifice is hidden under the story of Mrs. Rehana Haque, a story that had been silenced intentionally; the story of Mrs. Sengupta, Sharmeen and also Piya in *The Good Muslim*. Women’s position in war can easily be understood from the following quotation from Judy El- Bushra and Cecile Mukarubuga’s article “Women, War and Transition” talked about it: “In armed conflict, there is a widespread practice of targeting women for particular abuse, precisely because of their association with the identity and well-being of their community”. (Bushra and Mukarubuga, 17)

The perpetrators of the 1971 war included Pakistanis, Bengalis and Biharis (Muslim Urdu speakers and recent migrants to East Pakistan from India after the partition in 1947). As it was a war of both ethnicity and religion, the Pakistani army targeted Hindus and the Bengali ‘traitors’ (Mukti Bahini); Bengalis targeted members of the Pakistani army and Biharies. But one common target was the women. In the novel the picture of the violence was not as gruesome as that of the Hindu-Muslim riots during the partition of India Pakistan in 1947 in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man*. The descriptions of the train to Pakistan that arrived in the station full of dead bodies; of body parts of women was enough to give the whole picture of the war. But in both *A Golden Age* and *The Good Muslim* Tahmima Anam hints at the violence towards women. It was clear that Mrs. Sengupta apart from losing her child and husband, Mr. Sengupta, has also been subjected to violations for a long period but about which she kept silent. Sharmeen the best friend of Maya who went missing after the operation searchlight was found long after that incident. She was found pregnant and was in such a condition that she could not survive. From these few incidents the violence towards women could be traced. In the novel *The Good Muslim* we find a more detailed description of women victims and their suffering, through the character of Piya, who had been held

captive in the army camp and shaved her hair and thought of herself as impure. She was hesitant when Sohail approached her to marry her, because she was carrying a child, a war child. She wanted to get rid of it and so she went to the clinic in Women's Rehabilitation Centre:

She wanted- she wanted to get rid of it. She was afraid of the operation, she wasn't sure. She held my arm like this-'

'And she said, please, I don't want to. And you know, a

'May be she changed her mind.' (TGM¹⁵, 141)

It was not only Piya there were lots more who "had been raped in their villages, in front of their husbands and fathers, others kidnapped and held in the army barracks for the duration of the war" (TGM, 69) and who had now come to the clinic to have the abortions: "But some of them- it was hard, you know, I didn't think so much about it at the time- they wanted to get rid of them, but when it came time to do it they would cry. And then they would wake up and ask us to put the babies back." (TGM, 243). At one moment they wanted to get rid of the memory of those black days in the camps, and at the next, they thought of the unborn child as a part of themselves. . . Though these women were acknowledged as war heroines - their children were not accepted in the country, nor despite the title bestowed on them by the Father of the nation, were they welcomed by their family members. This suffering is well depicted in the novel:

"One stepped forward. 'They said they don't want us. Where are we supposed to go? What do we eat?

'The Women's Rehabilitation Board will make provisions for you'

'What provisions? Will you give us our families? Will you take us into your homes?'

'We will rehabilitate you. Back into society. Didn't you hear what Sheikh Mujib said? He said you were heroines, war heroines.'

Another woman spoke up. 'We don't want to be heroines. We are ashamed.

We want to leave our shame behind, start again.' (TGM, 70)

¹⁵ Tahmima Anam, *The Good Muslim* (Canongate Books Ltd., 2011). P 70 (References to the novel will henceforth be abbreviated TGM and included in the paper)

These victimized women wanted to forget the past but they had to bear its burden throughout their lives. And so they remained silent about this horrible past. Maya wanted to know what had happened to Piya, but Piya did not want to talk about it: “She grew silent, but they could hear her breathing, as though the words were struggling to get out of her and she was struggling to keep them in” (*TGM*, 76). There have not been any efforts to get these untold, silenced stories of victimized women into the national history as even their family members did not want to talk about them.

Yasmin Saikia, an Indian historian, has investigated the victimized women of the war in 1971. She not only interviewed Bengali women but also the Bihari who had been raped by Bengalis fighter during and after the war. In the article “Beyond the Archive of Silence: Narratives of the 1971 Liberation war of Bangladesh” published in *History Workshop Journal* in Autumn, 2004 she writes: “government officials, scholars, and political and religious leaders all restricted women's speech. There was a definite unwillingness to ask difficult questions that could potentially expose and force people to come to terms with the reality of a horrific past in which Bengali men participated, along with Pakistani and Bihari men, in brutalizing women” (Saikia, 277). After interviewing some war victims she found that almost all wanted to tell their untold story. That women do not want to talk about such incidents is only a myth and not true. She also goes on to say that: “Almost all of the women I interviewed confided that sharing their traumatic experiences was therapeutic because someone had cared to listen to them” (Saikia, 279) Yasmin Saikia found that it was the intentional decision of the state to silence them:

It is not the women themselves, but the structures and institutions outside their control that restrict their speech and force them to forget what they endured. Silence serves as a tool to confuse women, and even now, decades later, the women cannot make sense of their horrific experiences nor find answers about why they were targeted in the war that men fought and controlled. (Saikia, 281)

Though the war had been won, the ideals that had established a new nation could not be maintained for long. In the novel *The Good Muslim*, the political condition in 1984 is seen to be

very different from the principles on which the country had fought for its independence. Subsequent dictatorships had renamed places: the Paltan Maidan, which was witness to many events leading to independence, had been made into a children's park. And Gholam Azam, a war criminal had returned to the country and even been given a Bangladeshi citizenship. Religious practices were on the rise, and Sohail, a war hero of 1971, becomes a part of this religious revival. Maybe this was a way to release his mind's burden after killing an innocent person in 1971, the pain of which he throughout his life. There are some hints in the novel about his killing an innocent person and also some unwanted incidents that took place during the war: "I'm saying a lot of things happened during the war, but now it's not wartime any more, and we have to behave like citizens, rather than rebels...Freedom comes with responsibilities, with limits." (*TGM*, 75)

The act of nationalism in 1971 was full of violence, which affected Sohail and in his weakness he took shelter in religion. On the other hand, Maya remained strong. While Sohail turns to religion to perpetrate domination of women and enforces the veil and thinks that women should be confined within the house.

Thus both of the novels represented women's role in the war of 1971: how much they did for the country, how much they had to suffer and sacrifice for the country. The characters of Mrs. Rehana Haque and Maya Haque gain in strength during and after the war, whereas the character of Sohail weakens and takes recourse in religion.

Conclusion

One is not born, but rather becomes, woman.

- Simon De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Throughout this thesis I've tried to prove the above quoted famous statement of Simon de Beauvoir that the construction of women as inferior sex is intentional in order to dominate them. This process is more complicated in case of the third world women who are caught in between social, cultural and political changes. All the protagonists of my chosen novels are good examples of it.

In the first chapter we came to know how intermingling of two different culture, because of colonization a man made process of domination in the society of other, creates dysfunctionality in the character of Antoinette that leads to the madness in her. The torn society between two different race and culture creates a sense of identity crisis in the character. She found her place in the society in nowhere and so tried to commit suicide. Gayatri C Spivak has commented on this vague construction of women due to colonization and decolonization in a society in 'Can the Subaltern Speak'. She said, 'Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject- constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization.' (Spivak, 102)

In the second chapter we found how patriarchal society has constructed its rules and regulations from caste/class construction to the inheritance laws to make women powerless. Ammu, a divorced woman along with her two children had to pay the cost of loving Untouchable Velutha just because she is a woman. The love of Ammu, Rahel and Estha towards Velutha an Untouchable person and the incest between the twins represent a step towards destabilizing the patriarchal rule. This action of crossing the limits set by the patriarchy is a protest of the marginalized on the treatment they received from the society.

In the third chapter we found how a war infused society used women to win the battle by violating women's 'virtue', a vital element of cultural and social identity. In this chapter I've tried

to show even in such social crisis women can contribute equally and to some extent more than men to the war.

Through these three chapters I have tried to show that the construction of women as weaker sex is fabricated by the society. Every stage of the society is designed to marginalized and dominate women. But the dominated are fighting back on the face of the dominant. If women are given equal opportunity then the days are not so far when they can also be equal to the men in every aspects (social, political & economical) of the society.

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