

## **WIDE SARGASSO SEA: ANTOINETTE'S BURNING DESIRE**

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### **Abstract:**

The paper 'Wide Sargasso Sea: Antoinette's Burning Desire' focuses on the theme of Abomination. The title character Antoinette gets treated as an abomination throughout the novel by her family, neighbours, fellow citizens etc. This paper highlights the instances that ignited her desire to be accepted as a fellow human being. The racial discrimination created an incurable scar that made her hide from the vicinity. The broken marriage has made her insane. The amalgamation of those painful pasts has ignited the urge for freedom. The paper studies her past, which has pushed her to do anything to earn her freedom at any cost. The outburst of all those pressurising pasts will be examined. The emergence of Bertha from Antoinette will be analysed. Finally, the paper answers whether she has attained her burning desire to seek freedom.

**Keywords:** abomination, racial discrimination, amalgamation, desire, freedom.

### **Introduction**

Jean Rhys 's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* symbolises the state of the title character, Antoinette, who has been treated as an abomination since childhood. Antoinette was born into a family of people of different races. When she was young, she lost her father, so her mother, Annette, and her sick brother, Pierre, took care of her. She has to endure great suffering because she is the offspring of two distinct ethnicities. People who reside near her frequently address her by name. She was not considered to be one among the creole community. Despite all those hatreds, she happened to befriend Tia, a neighbour. Later it turns hurtful because her mother is getting married to Mr. Mason from the elite society. The tension of racial injustice and class segregation heightened, and suddenly, a group of black people burnt down Annette's house. In the meantime, Antoinette ran towards Tia to escape the fire, but Tia threw a stone at her, leaving her unconscious. Later, she learns that her brother is dead and her mother has gone mad due to losing her son. From then Antoinette could not get along with her mother, who could not recognise her daughter. Years

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later, she was married to an Englishman who was not given an until the end of part two. Antoinette hoped that her life had changed for a better cause. But she was unaware that she had entered into a hell loop.

Since her childhood, Antoinette has been seen and treated as an abomination. Her family ignored her presence and never bothered about her discomfort. She had high hopes for her next new life, i.e., her marriage, which eventually became a misery. Antoinette's husband has felt uninvited into their marriage life. He gave her a name and made her believe she had become strange to herself. He named her Bertha, which she refused to accept initially, but he ensured that she got used to the name and the identity he had imposed on her. Antoinette started to sense that she had been juggled between people. She has questioned her identity and her security. Their marriage gradually became bitter. Adding to it, Mr Rochester, Antoinette's husband, receives a letter saying that Antoinette carries madness in her blood as her mother did. From then, he monitored insanity in her behaviour.

Mr Rochester had already given her a name, and then he treated her as a madwoman. He distanced himself from her. Antoinette sensed the gap in her marriage and feared it might fall apart. She begged Christophine to present a love potion she used on Rochester. But it made him sick the next day, and he became aware of the potion, so to take revenge against her, he slept with his

maid Amelia by having his wife in the next room. Antoinette was drunk and raged against him. She begged him not to call her Bertha, which he did. Immediately, she pounced on him and bit his hand, which left him bleeding. This incident made Rochester put her in a dungeon with a woman named Grace Poole guarding her. Since then, Antoinette became Bertha, the woman Rochester wanted to be away and aside from his life.

### **Antoinette's Bertha**

The series of incidents that Antoinette encountered has made her give birth to her newer version, i.e., Betha. She was made to live in a room, eventually creating a world. The agony of being invisible, unrecognised, ignored and dismissed prompted Antoinette to seek attention, love, and respect and to be treated as a human being. She fought for it in all possible ways for the long term. Since her childhood, she has become the victim of others' sin. She was ignored after her father's death and became invisible after her brother's death. She was ill-treated in her marriage and lost herself in the revenge.

Antoinette's queries were left unattended she could not find the reason behind Tia's behaviour against her. Antoinette saw a friend in Tia, whereas she saw an alien, an outlander, a coloniser and a rival in her. Antoinette chose friendship, but Tia chose violence against her. Likewise, she wanted her husband to accept her as she was, but he moulded her as she desired. Instead of

receiving affection, she was given betrayal. She desired recognition and respect but was instead labelled a madwoman. She had nothing but denial and disapproval. The torment of being a prisoner and labelled as a madwoman made her become one. She often made threatening howls. She tried enough to escape from misery but ended up in vain. She thought of bringing doom upon Rochester. The dream of taking revenge has become a burning desire that ends up burning the house. She had a recurring dream where she took out the keys from Grace, lit the candles, and set the house ablaze. One night, she woke up from this dream and felt she must act on it. The novel ends with Antoinette holding a candle and walking down from her upstairs prison. The suffering that Antoinette made her incarnate as Bertha.

### Conclusion

The title *Wide Sargasso Sea* represents Antoinette's position, similar to the Sargasso Sea, which has four currents forming an ocean gyre. The sea is bounded on the west by the Gulf Stream, on the north by the North Atlantic Current, on the east by the Canary Current, and on the south by the North Atlantic Equatorial Current, the four together forming a clockwise-circulating system of ocean currents termed the North Atlantic Gyre. Likewise, Antoinette pleaded with her husband not to give her a name. But he did, which has become a practice and made her doubt her identity. She got tossed between her past and present, her

younger self and older self and between illusion and reality as the Sargasso Sea whirls around. Antoinette gets tossed between people and made to suffer for their actions.

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