Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Women studies have recently become a favourite subject for critical scrutiny and interpretation, in the wake of the important movement of feminism. In the post-modern world of fractured self and broken images the ‘woman question’ assumed a unique significance unconceived ever before. The women of the Third World are worse off than women elsewhere in the world in that they are far more marginalized and discriminated against than their counterparts in other countries. Womanism, an offshoot of the feminist movement, is a long invoked concept and is extremely relevant at this juncture in feminist criticism.

Feminist theory with its incursions into postcolonial domain gives rise to topics like ‘post colonial feminism and third world parameters’. On such a nodal point, it is impossible to forget that the post colonial literature is a field in which everything is open to criticism – from the reading of a text to perspectives on personal, cultural, racial and national criteria. Thus the post colonial woman as a mine of critical enquiry provokes close attention. Womanism as a concept engendered a different reading of the Third World woman, particularly the Black African Woman. Preconceived notions of women’s solidarity and universality got fragmented with critics like
Gayatri Spivak, Talpade Mohanty and Trinh-T-Minha raising questions on the variety in the living conditions of women around the globe. In her article “First Things First,” Kirsten Holst Petersen says that universal sisterhood is not a given biological condition and that it is of imminent interest to isolate the problems which are specific to Africa and perhaps to the Third World in general (261). The emancipation of the marginalized woman can be materialized only by means of such specific subjectivity.

If postcolonialism is a disparate form of representation, reading practice and values, feminism involves such diversity in its projection of woman, selfhood and manifestations of being. Both post-colonialism and feminism speak against power structures and the hegemonic nature of authority, but post-colonial feminism has focused on issues like essentialism, particularly in the representation of womanhood. As feminism originates at the conference halls of the white women academia, the pressing concerns of the Black (coloured) woman are ignored and it is this that womanism surfaces to answer. If women are a subjugated second sex, black woman is a doubly colonized race, suffering alike from patriarchal as well as racial stigmatization. Womanism gives the marginalized black woman a platform to proclaim her identity and liberate herself from the shackles of patriarchy.

Though womanism is commonly considered synonymous with Black Feminism, it cannot be cordoned off to refer only to Afro-
American women; the term calls for a global outlook and is a more inclusive one. The usage Black Feminism, though clichéd, is outdated since feminism as a movement failed to air the problems of women as a racialised class. Black women, scattered in different diasporas, have certain global issues unanswered as their focus of interest was on African-American women in the continent. Therefore, women writers in Black Africa, like Emecheta, who asserted that “if I am now a feminist, then I am an African feminist” (Emecheta, _feminism with a small f_ 179) admit to the significance of the new entry in the index-‘womanism’.

Women in Africa are a distinct race and of an ancient civilization. But critical attention has not been focused on them as Black American woman writing has stolen the limelight with names like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. But it cannot be forgotten that the woman in Black Africa falls categorically under the umbrella term of womanism along with the diasporas in different parts of the world, and with other women of colour.

Even though it required a movement like feminism to mouth the need for equality and to establish the specific capabilities of the female in the western world, African woman can boast of a tradition wherein women possessed equal status with men and shouldered responsibilities on a par with them – be it in familial milieu as in Black African households, or in conditions of slavery as in Afro-American ghettos. This reveals the social history of African women in pre-colonial Africa as conducive to the empowerment of women.
The drastic change wrought by the incidence of colonialism can be traced by logging on to the back issues in African history. African literature is a steady pointer in the investigation of the life of the African woman.

As we can see, the African woman has rediscovered her voice in recent literary productions. The social situation of the African woman can be seen portrayed in the literature of the respective countries from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. Recent women writers subscribe to the notions of womanism, where the female of the species stands out as a unique entity without recourse to male support and is able to chart out an unrestricted identity for herself. The qualities of capability, resilience and resourcefulness that build the super power image of the woman of Africa combine in the right proportion to structure issues like womanism and hence the concept. This work intends to utilize this relatively new ‘ism’ in order to study the literary output of one of the most popular African women writers of contemporary times.

This in-depth study of the African woman is based on the works of the Nigerian writer, Buchi Emecheta. Emecheta shares the social role of the African writer as exemplified in her works. A study of the works of Emecheta will give a clear picture of the transformation of the African woman. Her critic, Katherine Frank, gives her the following accolade:
Taken together, Emecheta’s novels compose the most exhaustive and moving portrayal extant of the African woman, an unparalleled portrayal in African fiction and with few equals in other literatures as well. The entire realm of African female experience can be found in these books… Emecheta’s historical and social breadth in the novels is equally impressive, covering the period from 1910 to the present and moving from the small Nigerian village of Ibuza to westernized urban Lagos, and finally to London, the Promised Land. (Frank, *Death of the Slave Girl* 477)

As the most prolific writer in West Africa today, Emecheta has been depicting Africa and its women in all their various facets. Her works invariably speak of the ‘African situation’ or the condition of the black community. Based on the setting, the novel ranges through pre-colonial African tribes, the mixed identity of the Afro-Caribbeans, the migrant blacks in the diasporic communities in England and even to the generation of hybrids suffering from identity crisis due to mixed parentage of black and white. But Emecheta deals mainly with the issues that directly concern with her own self--the Black African woman of Nigeria and her fortunes, before and after colonization and the social transformations therewith.

Emecheta’s works *The Slave Girl* and *The Bride Price* as well as *The Joys of Motherhood* are narratives of Nigeria before colonization or
at the early part of it. *Destination Biafra* is a work on the civil war from the woman’s point of view. *Kehinde, Second Class Citizen* and *In the Ditch* are tales of diasporic black women in London. *Gwendolen* (also titled *The Family*) examines other black communities of the world, whereas *The New Tribe* deals with the dilemma of identity crisis widely discussed in the 21st century. Her teenage fiction like *Moonlight Bride* and *Wrestling Match* are interesting studies of the African customs. But it is while dealing with the problems of the African woman that Emecheta is at her best.

Of the early novels, *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl* and *Joys of Motherhood* cover the period from 1910 to 1960. They draw on the author’s life experiences and her life in Lagos/England. The com mingling of the African values with those of the colonizers occurs in each of the novels. In *The Slave Girl* (1977) the protagonist Ogbange Ojebeta Odi meets the modern world in the market town of Onitsha and thus comes to terms with the white man’s world order. In *The Bride Price* (1976), Aku-Nna and her brother move back to Ibuza after living in urban (colonized) Lagos during their childhood. *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), again, goes back one generation to Nnu Ego who realises the pangs of culture collision as she goes to Lagos to join her husband. *Destination Biafra* (1982) is the voice of an angry, Western educated woman from Oxford University, whereas Nko in *Double Yoke* (1982) is an academician in the Nigerian University of Calabar. Kehinde, in the novel of the same name, is the African woman who beards the lion in its den – she migrates to
England for her living. The heroine of *Gwendolen* (1990) a West Indian African, likewise, realises her destiny in *The Moder Kontry*. *The Rape of Shavi* (1983) is an allegorical account of European colonization in Africa. It is Emecheta’s most unusual work, where a group of Europeans fleeing from some nuclear holocaust arrives in a fictional African kingdom of Shavi, and it develops the theme of the encounter between Africa and the West. The novel shows how the impact of the West on Shavi can take both positive and devastating turns. In the latest novel, *The New Tribe* (2000), Emecheta takes a holiday from women’s problems and speaks of the Africa, ‘the once upon a land dream’ and deals with racist questions involving a Nigerian boy’s search for identity. Again, Emecheta’s teenage fiction upholds the age old Nigerian customs and traditions. Emecheta is a spokesperson of the need for guarding old, communal values in these works.

Emecheta’s works deal with the African woman and her battle with life and society. Most of her works have autobiographical elements in them. The first two works by her, *In the Ditch* and *Second Class Citizen* are explicitly autobiographical. *Second Class Citizen* speaks of the heroine Adah defying all traditional conventions in order to acquire Western education, which was more or less denied to females in the society. Through determination and will power she is able to realize her academic ambitions. The novel projects her husband who considers her a sexual object and a breeder of his children--males preferably. *In the Ditch* takes up where *Second Class Citizen* leaves off. If the latter was about gender discrimination, the
former focuses on the racial discrimination that Adah has to undergo as a poor, black, single mother of a number of children. She is a microcosm of a social stratification based on race, class and gender. Despite all problems, Adah manages to continue with her education, secures a job and climbs out of the socio-economic and psychological ditch in which she found herself, with feminine stamina. *Head Above Water* continues with her autobiography; here she struggles to raise her family, attains her degree and becomes a full-fledged writer with a name and home of her own.

Nigerian writer, Florence Onye Buchi Emecheta was born on July 21, 1944, in Yaba, near Lagos, to Ibo parents—a railroad worker, Jeremy Nwabudike and his wife, Alice Okuekwu Emecheta. She was orphaned in her childhood itself. She studied at a missionary school and at the age of sixteen, in 1960, married Sylvester Onwordi, to whom she was engaged at eleven years of age. During their six-year marriage, she gave birth to five children but her married life was far from harmonious. She supported her family working as a librarian and in 1966 Emecheta got separated from her husband. In 1970, she was enrolled at the University of London, where she received honours in sociology in 1974. She worked as a community worker in Camden, North London, between 1976 and 1978. She raised her children in a hostile and poverty ridden environment. By dint of hardwork and will-power she became an influential writer focusing on the roles of women in both traditional and emigrant societies. Positioned as an African writer from Britain, Emecheta produced a critique of the
postcolonial world – both of the workings of the old empire and of Nigeria, her African homeland.

Much of her fiction has focused on sexual politics and racial prejudice and is based on her own experiences. The first novel In the Ditch (1972) appeared initially serialized in the New Statesman Magazine together with Second Class Citizen (1974). The tales of the women in Nigerian society appeared for the first time in The Bride Price (1976) followed by The Slave Girl (1977), which won the New Statesman Jock Campbell Award. Her television play, A Kind of Marriage was first screened by the BBC in 1976. In 1983 she was selected as one of the ‘Best Young British Writers’ by the Book Marketing Council. She lectured in the United States throughout 1979 as Visiting Professor at a number of universities and returned to Nigeria in 1980 as Senior Research Fellow and Visiting Professor of English at the University of Calabar. She runs the Ogwugwu Afor Publishing Company with her son. It has branches in London and in Ibuza. Since 1979 she has been a member of the Home Secretary’s Advisory Council on Race. She was a member of the Arts Council from 1982 to 1983 and is a regular contributor to the New Statesman, the Times Literary Supplement and The Guardian.

A close analysis of the African woman as projected in Emecheta presupposes an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of the ‘gender woman’. A useful
starting point is to explore the concept of ‘womanhood’, its cultural ramifications and its social connotations.

Womanhood is a term that defies easy definition. As was said earlier, we can see women as the object of study and scrutiny in various strata of human experience. Even so, when one looks into the general history of mankind, one has to accede to the fact that women as the female sex or collectively have been shorn of any heroic proportions in great art and literature. From the earliest instances of masterpieces in literature like the Hebrew Bible or the Greek philosophic writings; in children’s art like Alice in Wonderland and Tom and Jerry, the female is referred to as the second sex, as the other of man, or as a non-man, as lacking in male powers and male character. Thus a female is the negative binary of the male. The patriarchal base of civilization informs the concept of masculine and feminine traits that qualify men and women. Women are taught by means of socialization and conditioning of the mind to materialize the patriarchal ideology. By means of such acculturization or conditioning of a gendered being, the positive binary of the male is identified in society as well as in writing as active, adventurous, dominant, rational and the female in contrast to such traits is depicted as passive, timid, conventional and emotional. Throughout history, women have been reduced to being objects for men; constructed as man’s ‘other’, she is denied the right to her own subjectivity and responsibility for her actions. In Simone de Beauvoir’s existentialist terms, patriarchal ideology presents women as immanence, men as
transcendence. Women internalize this vision of their own self and live in a state of inauthentic identity. To quote Beauvoir, “One is not born a woman; rather, one becomes a woman” (qtd. in Barry 130)

Such acclimatization and socialization to the general worldview have made the girl child develop consciously and unconsciously an acceptance of male superiority and they have conditioned their mind to consider themselves the inferior, ‘weaker sex’ and thus to co-operate in their own subordination. This false consciousness or ‘bad faith’ is the basic foundation of the ruling ideology of male domination.

The androcentric ideology is formed, (according to feminist theorists of the French frame) due to male engendered and male constituted language. Man as the wielder of the pen has brought forth the phallocentric system of language. According to Jacques Lacan, discourse in general is phallogocentric. Lacan takes up Freud’s theory of psyche and gender and adds to it the dimension of language. According to psychoanalytic theory, the child on birth is a sexless, neutral body – it does not realize its sex. Consequently it passes through the different phases like oral, anal and phallic stage during infantile sexuality. The Oedepal stage is significant in Lacan’s theory since it coincides with the child identifying itself with its father and the girl with the mother as the family representative of culture. Such cultural representations on the growing psyche are seen etched in the initial state of mind in Ete Kamba in Double Yoke. The language used
and promoted by the culture is one that reflects the binary logic that polarizes such terms as active/passive, masculine/feminine, sun/moon, father/mother, head/heart, intelligent/ sensitive, phallus/vagina, and reason/emotion since this logic tends to categorize the more dominant terms with masculinity. Therefore French feminists call the structure of language phallocentric, i.e., privileging the phallus or masculinity by associating them with values appreciated by the male dominated culture.

The patriarchal binary exhibited by the dualistic nature of language projects a struggle for a signifying supremacy. Since victory generally colludes with activity and defeat with passivity, the male always emerges the victor. As Helene Cixous says in *Laugh of the Medusa*, “Either woman is passive or she does not exist” (qtd. in Moi 104). The French feminists who proclaim *jouissance* and the need for *l’écriture feminine* make a call to undo this logocentric ideology and to proclaim women as the source of life, power and energy. Such a new writing alone, according to them, could subvert the patriarchal binary scheme where logocentrism conspires with phallocentrism in order to oppress and silence women. Mrs Bulewao in *Double Yoke* is an extension of such a writer of *jouissance* and female redemption.

This stream of subversion and dissidence takes on a definitive note with Kristeva’s theory of marginality. Kristevean postulates came up with a refreshing note of antiessentialism that protests against the essentialising quality of psycholinguistic concepts
whereby women were cornered into a dormant and submissive group. Kristeva takes on the psycholinguistic theory and accepts that in the Oedipal stage, the child enters language and thus the symbolic order. In About Chinese Women she points out that the Law of the Father dominates this symbolic stage. The girl child has to make a choice, which determines her definitive personality. She has the options of mother identification/father identification. Mother identification creates a woman who derives her identify from the symbolic order (Kristeva 28). This refers again to the androgynous qualities projected in women as reflected in the personality of Debbie in Destination Biafra.

Patriarchal world-view defines women as marginal to symbolic order and society. According to it, women represent the frontier between men and chaos. Women are represented likewise in various characters in literature in two antithetical patterns—one as the ideal representations of man’s desires such as the pure and innocent virgin, the ‘Angel in the House’, and the other as the demonic projection of men’s sexual fear and dislike. Also women have taken on the object position in literary representations, as opposed to the active subject or ‘doing’ part played by the male. This has also been inculcated into the social framework of society in most cultures worldwide. Women have been treated as the inferior sector in the gendered population, considerably weaker in power and utility than the male. Though the ‘home-maker’ does all the domestic chores and jobs, it is considered secondary to the work done by the ‘bread-winner’ in the familial unit.
In spite of such categorical degradation, the women are happy in being called Angels and Sacrificers. It is such a psychological fixture that Nnu Ego in *Joys of Motherhood* falls into. Her life devoted to the men in her life ends ultimately in failure. This aspect of man-woman relationship receives a lot of attention at the hands of the Marxian feminists whose analyses are sociologically conditioned.

A woman is the effect of social conditioning or acculturation to patriarchal modes of thought. To borrow Althusser’s term, women imbibe the ‘ideology’ of patriarchy as they grow and develop in society. It is “a system of representation at the heart of a given society” (Goldstein 23). Women take in this ideology or the implicit and unrecognized values and assumptions which pervade the art and culture of the civilization of the period. It is this ideology that projects men as powerful and secures the unknowing psychological consent of women in considering themselves inferior. Adrienne Rich captures all the different facets of the African traditional conditions when she says in *Of Woman Born*, that patriarchy is:

[T]he power of the fathers: a familial, social, ideological and political system in which by direct pressure – or through tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and division of labour—men determine what parts women shall or shall not play and the female is everywhere subsumed by the male. (57-58)
The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is a closely related term, which describes the ‘world-view’ or ‘class outlook’. Hegemony is the internalized form of social control which takes certain views as natural and invisible and maintains the status quo of social structure. *Bride Price*, by Emecheta, which depicts the blatant traditional patriarchal systems, is a case in point. Such attitudinal ‘interpellation’, says Althusser, acts as controlling forces in society, perpetuating a social condition of the powerful and the powerless class-male and female respectively in the case of gender (Moi 171). This is again taken up by Michael Foucault in his term ‘discourse’ which speaks of literary representations that perpetrate such hegemonic control.

As a class, women take on the position of the proletariat and the male that of the bourgeoisie that exercise the power relations in society. Family, as the basic unit of society, according to Engels is a miniature of the existent conditions of the prevalent time period (Firestone 24). If men are the dominant and women the subjugated group in feminist theories, the dichotomy of power relations exists in post-colonial discourses too. Here the ‘self’ in the binary axis stands for the (Western) colonial power, and the ‘other’ for the colonized culture. Edward Said says in his *Orientalism*, that colonization is an emasculating process for the Orient, where the natives are deprived of their masculine prowess and capabilities (Mc Leod 45). Both bodies of thought concern themselves with the marginalization of the ‘other’ within structures of domination. It is a striking point to note that the
civilizations are more often than not referred to in the feminine terms like ‘Mother India’. ‘Mother Africa’; the globe itself is referred to as ‘The Mother Earth’. The history of colonialist struggles like the Kenyan Mau-Mau Rebellion and Indian Struggle for Independence and the Algerian Civil War reveals the prominent role played by women in all these upheavals to free their nation from colonial clutches. The nationalistic spirit exhibited by women is commendable to the degree of branding them as images of the nation. Debbie in Destination Biafra has been hailed so by many critics. African women also act as agents of change, and the status of women is one of the best indices for judging and predicting social change.

The post-colonial condition of the vanquished colonized countries is analyzed by Homi K. Bhabha in his work Nation in Narration. Such colonial discourses explore the ways in which representation and modes of perception worked as colonial weapons to keep the colonized subservient. The superior Occident or Western culture was considered rational, active, ascetic etc as opposed to the Orient, which was generalized as being fantastic, bizarre, superstitious, lazy and sensual. This was upheld by the Social Darwinist concept that assigned the Europeans the superior and others the lower strata. The hierarchical systematization of the Great Chain of Being assigned the Whites to the top of the evolutionary pyramid and the Blacks as being akin to the animal race. Kehinde, which describes the experiences of the blacks in the white world, relates such social circumstances. According to Frantz Fanon in his The
Wretched of the Earth, such an interpretation has caused much psychological damage to the colonized mind. “He (the subjugated individual) is forced to see himself not as a human subject, with his own wants and needs... but as an object, a ‘peculiarity’ at the mercy of a group that identifies him as inferior and less than human, placed at the mercy of their definition and representation” (Mc Leod 20).

Similar to the representation of the second sex, the colonized would take up the position of the ‘other’. This process of othering turns out to be one involving ambivalence in colonial relationships. By being the ‘other’ of the ‘self’, the colonized became a product of the empire itself, an alter ego, which led to complications in fixing the identity of the colonized. This aspect is treated by the post-colonial critic Homi K. Bhabha in his essays, “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism” and “Of Mimicy and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” in his The Location of Culture.

According to colonial discourse, the colonized are stereotyped into certain categories like the mysterious and the wild. But at the same time they try to abolish their radical otherness and bring them into the western fold through education and knowledge. Such a conflicting persona in the subjugated groups occurs through the act of ‘mimicry’ engaged in by the colonized. The hegemony of discourse was powerful to the extent that even the colonized believed in their inferiority. The educated colonized behaved and talked like the
Englishman, ultimately bringing on a threat, to the colonizer which questions the basic founding principles of colonialism, by making the subjects of the inferior race “more English than the English”. This results in the psychological dilemma in the colonized termed ‘dislocation’ whereby the colonized find themselves in an in-between space, neither accepted as pure native nor acknowledged by the colonial masters as part of them. *Kehinde* and *Gwendolen* by Emecheta are case studies of such white/coloured collisions. This ambivalence also generated fear in the colonizers who were alarmed by this new subjectivity of the people they had dominated.

Bhabha also speaks of the concept of the ‘hybridity’ of the colonized. This term is used to “stress the mutuality of cultures in the colonial and post-colonial process in expressions of syncreticity, cultural synergy and transculturation” (Ashcroft et al 119). The cultural studies pertaining to the post-colonial relations noted the gradual inter-linking between physical and psychological contact zones. It is in these cultural borders that the syncretization of cultures takes place in a mutual exchange of traditions, giving rise to the phenomenon of hybridity in the post-colonial world. Thus the concepts of ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity lead to a stage where cultural purity is untenable in colonized people.

This process is even more relevant in the case of women of colour who suffer the calamity of being doubly colonized. The mainstream feminism had more or less ignored the women of colour
and the racial oppression they undergo. The double branding as women and coloured leaves them dangling in an ‘in between’ region of insecure uncertainty. They could not join forces with feminists since they are colonized; and could not join forces with their male colonized counterparts since they are of the second sex. The postcolonial woman’s political stand is not enviable because she is liable to be accused of double treason if she takes sides, with the people of colour against racism and her own sisters in gender rights against men.

All these post-colonial terms not only figure in theoretical parlance, but also form an integral part of the literature of the colonized land. Works of world wide acclaim like those of the Trinidadian-Indian novelist Naipaul, the novels of volcanic eruption like the magic realistic works of Salman Rushdie, the specifically post-colonial subversive tales told by Jean Rhys; the nationalistic spirit unconsciously evocated in Ngugi wa Thiongo’s novels and the post-modern fragmentation in colonial settings as in the Nobel laureate Doris Lessing depict the nation and particularly the transformative role of women characters figuring in the narratives.

The encroachment of the western colonizers into their land and the consequent degeneration of native culture are poignantly rendered in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. This novel is also a striking collection of mini narratives describing the experience of women, *osu* (outcasts) and slaves in the Umuofia community. Similarly Ngugi’s
The River Between is another story about the division in an African community caused by Christianisation. The novel portrays Muthoni from a converted family who rejects what she considers to be the White man’s rule concerning women’s initiation and Waiyaki, the young leader, who starts self-help groups to champion their own culture. The history of a whole section of the national community is reflected in the experience of the characters, Mumbi, in Ngugi’s A Grain of Wheat, and ‘G’ in Lammig’s In the Castle of My Skin. The havoc caused by colonial holocaust that severed the colonized land’s umbilical cord with history and rendered them orphans, mongrels of Creole nature, is pictured in works like Jamaica Kincaid’s A Small Place, Ben Okri’s The Famished Road and Michael Ondaatje’s The English Patient. V.S. Naipaul’s Mimic Men and A House for Mr. Biswas relate the sense of alienation felt by the migrant settler and his lack of identity as a colonial being. Midnight’s Children by Rushdie is another epoch-making work that tries to figure out an alternative history to the post-colonial India in the characters like Salim Sinai and Parvathi.

Bessie Head’s novels embody the lives of black women in South Africa who have to put up with both racist and sexist discrimination, as shown in A Question of Power. Jean Rhy’s The Wide Sargasso Sea, which presents a subversive piece of colonial writing from the point of view of Jane Eyre’s double, is the tale of a woman caught in an oppressive patriarchal society, transplanted from her roots and reveals the subsequent feelings of displacement and
assimilation. The first novel of the Nobel Laureate, Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, analyses against the backdrop of Zimbabwe, the neurosis of white sexuality, and the fear of black power and energy that Lessing saw as underlying the white colonial experience of Africa. Her masterpiece, *The Golden Notebook*, though not a post-colonial work, is a chef-d’oeuvre of a female odyssey depicting women’s struggles and conflicts in work, sex, love and maternity. The post-modern woman in all her kaleidoscopic complexity can be seen enmeshed in the four notebooks of Anna Wolf.

Taking a cross-sectional specimen of womanhood from all these insights, it is a questionable point, if one could define the female as the ‘second sex’ or the ‘gendered subaltern’. Could she be thus systematized and categorized? Does she have a specific representative quality? Could she be sculpted into an essentialised entity? Can she speak? Does she have a voice and an identity of her own?

This project undertakes to find an answer to these questions. The study of womanhood focuses on African literature since here the woman is of particular interest in the postcolonial field. As coloured and of the feminine gender, the African woman invariably becomes a matter of intense interest, demanding to be studied in minute detail. Such a reading requires some background information on African women writing in general.
Women’s writing in Africa, which saw the light of the day only in recent times, has the function of bringing out the history of women and their experiences down the ages. This ‘other’ side of the story reveals information about African women who were silenced by the master-narratives that focused on the canonized racial and sexual ‘superiors’. Only thorough information about these women can one reveal the part played by them. This will allow them to be integrated into standard history and become a distinguishable part of the society.

African woman played a vital role in the moulding of their culture by virtue of their position as bearers of the tradition. They also acted as agents of change since they are the mainstay of the basic societal institution of the family. That women as a group have been subjugated and oppressed has been universally accepted, but at the same time it has been proclaimed that there is no need to free the African woman – that she is already free. Much of African land followed a tradition that worshipped women goddesses and had women priestesses that ensured women a high status in the social sphere. The matrilineal system was followed in many regions of Eastern Africa. Yet the supremacy of the male was undoubtedly accepted. The African male-female praxis gave to the masculine gender prominence in the family hierarchy. The incursion of European values with the binary construct of male-female gender relations gave greater thrust to the status quo.
A survey of African women as agents of social progress shows an interesting graph. The independent precolonial woman descending to mere bodies of the female sex or in general into a lower social standing in colonial times and later striving for emancipation by means of education and economic liberation can be understood by reading the literature of the colonial and postcolonial Africa.

In the initial phase in African literature, which was a period of Western colonization, women were given only secondary status, as we see in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Tutuola’s *Palm Wine Drinkard*, in which women have only a marginal role to play. There was a tendency in the early writing of Africa, mainly of the male writers, of depicting women as sexual objects—as wife or concubine (Amadi’s Ihuoma in *Concubine*) or as prostitutes (Wanja in Nnugi wa Thiongo’s *Petals of Blood*). Jagua Nana is a much hyped character of Cyprian Ekwensi’s work of the same name, who brought in a trope of the prostitute image of the African woman. But later criticism began to focus on the independent nature underlying Jagua Nana even within such a role.

Kenneth Little in his sociological work *African Women in Towns* speaks of the urbanization that resulted in the African woman, liberated from traditional shackles, taking to prostitution or being ‘kept’ by men, as a means of living. This had led to a plethora of women characters of the kind exhibited in the literature of the time like Jagua Nana and Wanja. Another interesting case of a courtesan is
Soyinka’s character Simi in *The Interpreters* which is set in the disillusioned confusion of postcolonial times. Here the woman of Africa can be seen as educated and beginning to assert her own self. During this period we can note the image of the African woman in literature changing visibly from the agents of damnation to being agents of progress. Social changes again shake Africa with the War of Independence making upheavals in the life style. With their male ‘protectors’ at the war front, the women are left to fend for themselves and that again brings out the androgynous qualities underlying the woman. In Ekwensi’s *Survive the Peace*, Udogo, when he returns from war, finds his wife declaring her wish to live her life independently. Again, we see that the African wife who was ready to suffer the beatings rained on her by her husband in *Things Fall Apart* as a matter of the past. Steady progress can be discerned in the stature of the African woman, as reflected in literature, from the silent and passive sufferer towards a liberated and articulate identity.

A particular feature in male writing is that women characters and their transformation are sidelined while it mostly pictured the man in the social vortex. The status quo changed with the times, and with the entry of women writers on the scene, the ‘second sex’ secured a niche and a voice of her own. But their appearance on the literary stage has been slow and hesitant. The situation changed with women soon fighting for their ground and establishing their place in all fields of literature. They speak about their own exclusive conditions in the society, and bring out the multiple oppression the
women underwent in terms of their race and gender, as Kirsten Holst Peterson points out in her article “First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature” (251-254). Writers like Flora Nwapa, Mariamma Ba and Buchi Emecheta write about the woman who is powerfully aware of the unfairness of the system and who longs to be fulfilled in herself, thus bringing out the cataclysmic changes in the situation of the African woman of the contemporary times.

Early African writing was a male-dominated genre, but after the 70’s more women writing is being produced in Africa. Even so, it becomes only nominal compared to the male canon. Under the circumstances, it would be superfluous to state that studies on these women writings have been extremely few and far between. Works like Lloyd Brown’s *Women Writers in Black Africa* have been pioneers in the field and here she speaks in the introduction to her work about the importance of colonization and the Western education proffered mostly to the males of the society. This she cites as one of the major reasons behind the absence of women writers. Brown’s work is commendable in that it has made a detailed study of five of the most popular women writers of Black Africa--Nwapa, Emecheta, Aidoo, Head and Sutherland. Brown’s work is comprehensive enough but Florence Stratton’s *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* is generally considered a better work in that it evaluates the woman writing against the works already present in the literary scene and makes an insightful study of the concept of gender
in African literature. A later work that deserves mention is *The Politics of (M)othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature*, edited by Obioma Nnaemeka. It is an anthology of essays dealing with various facets of African women such as one comes across in both the Anglophone and Francophone writing. Roopali Sircar’s *The Twice Colonised: Women in Africa* is another well-researched study of the African woman wherein the concept of double colonization of the black women by both patriarchy and colonization in some of the major works in African literature is dealt with.

The origin of African literature and the trends it followed would give an insight into African culture and the changing status of women in the society. The earliest of African indigenous literature originated from oral culture. The indigenous literature derived its form and contents from unwritten folk literature. The oral tradition began with the praise poems (e.g. the Dingean praises in Zulu) which were translated during French colonization. Some of these poems are collected in the *Etudes* by Casalis – a literature of the Basotho tribe. Another scholar, Jacollet, produced a study of the tales and narratives at the same time during 1890’s. The oral forms are the first corpus of literature from Africa – which includes folktales, narratives and poems. The fade out of orality signals the fade in of literacy. The missionaries began to compose hymns and transcriptions of the Sotho texts which heralded a new literate poetry. Many collection of proverbs in stories appeared in Yoruba literature later.
The earliest recorded African fiction is E. Casely Heyford’s *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911) which deals with education and Christianity. This was followed by R.E. Obeng’s *Eighteen Pence* (1943) which is an allegorical work. The novel as an art form was imported from the west and began with the education imparted by the missionaries. So the influence of Christianity can be seen in all early written literature. Chinua Achebe, T.M. Aluko, Cyprian Ekwensi, Onuora Nzekwu, Gabriel Okara and Amos Tutuola constitute the second generation of African writers.

The early output in women writing in Africa is negligible. One major factor is the lack of educated females in the African society. Another reason for the non-appearance of female writers is the exclusion of the ‘second sex’ from the literary canon, a habit which the Africans inherited from the western influence. The woman writer suffers from many such literary and social disabilities. She also tried to emulate the male writers, which was one of the initial reasons for her not being successful. Later on, women writers from British colonies began to fare better. Their works in genres like poetry, short story, drama and fiction deserve to be mentioned. A cursory glance at each of these, it is hoped, would be relevant to this project.

Women were considered the mainstay of African oral literature and thus were the transmitters of culture even from those times. This oral literature found its offshoot in poetry and short fiction narratives. They depict the life of the African women realistically and bring out a
new version of African womanhood. It diverges widely from the concept of ‘Mother is Supreme’ and the ‘Wine in the Wilderness’ image of the African Queen, which was upheld by the male writers of the Negritude movement. The women writers picture the African woman as a beast of burden who has to live up to the expectations of tradition which encumbered her with the role of being the backbone of the family. Her insurmountable responsibilities, and the additional insult of male chauvinism which patriarchy subjects her to, are clearly picturised in the works of poets like Noemia de Sousa, Marina Gashe, Medard Kasese and Micere-Mugo.

Efua Sutherland is one of the best poets in the African scenario. It is said that with her African poetry takes a step closer to emancipation. Her poem ‘Redeemed’ is an illustration of it. The poem is about a snake being overcome by the beauty of a woman it wanted to destroy. This implies the man being overpowered by the female beauty.

The three major modern women poets are Nigerian – Mabel Segun whose collection is named Conflict and Other Poems (1980), Omolara Ogundipe Leslie the author of The Old Days (1980), and Catherine Acholonu whose works are ‘The Springs Last Drop’ (1985) and Nigeria in the Year 1999 and other Poems (1985). Mabel Segun in her poem ‘The Smart One’ and ‘Corruption’ deal with the contemporary social problems with irony and macabre humour. Ogundipe – Leslie, the most radical of them, is also a feminist as seen
in her ‘Yoruba Love’. Her ‘Those Rags… My Rags of Time’ is of a different cast and metaphysical in tone. Catherine Acholonu is an orthodox traditionalist and follows the creed that makes man the custodian of woman. In her ‘Springs Last Drop’, she goes uphill, overcoming the trials of modern life to fetch ‘the last drop’ for her children.

The contributions in modern poetry like those of Gladys Casely–Hayford from Ghana are also significant. Her ‘Nativity’ modifies the European white image of the Christian myth and brings in a proper Africanization by converting them into black people. The theme of sexual equality is also brought in by Gladys by incorporating women visitors also for Baby Jesus. Krio or pigdin English becomes an almost established language in her writing. The publication of her *Take Um So* in 1948 strengthened it. English language was used by her only for trite observations (‘Rejoice’), and for patriotic (‘Freedom’) and racial pieces (The Serving Girl). The Mozambique writer of renown Noemia de Souza’s poem ‘Appeal’ is about rebellion against Portuguese colonial rule. She also satirises the idealized picture of womahood by contrasting it with reality in her poems. Woman, according to her, suffers from the double yoke – of patriarchy and colonization. Noemia de Souza was an active propagandist of the cultural nationalism in Mozambique and Angola in the 1950s, and the influence of Negritude poetry is seen in her works. Marina Gashe of Kenya depicts in her poems the deplorable condition of womanhood. She speaks of the drudgery undergone by
the rural woman as ‘beasts of burden’ along with the burden of motherhood. Medard Kasese’s (Zambia) ‘Black Mother’ also speaks of the condition of the black woman with her shiftless insensitive, uncaring husband whose role is later taken over by the children. The Kenyan poet Micere Githae Mugo, in her works ‘Wife of Husband’ and ‘The Village’ also has the same theme of the useless husband heaping the whole responsibility of the household on the women. Francesca Yetunde Pereira, the Nigerian poet’s work ‘Two Strange Worlds’ is refreshing in its candour and unique perspective. Women are restive under the traditional sexual roles and so she exhorts a change in the society that will help men and women to live in a mutually compatible integrated world instead of in two completely disparate set-ups.

Short Story is another genre in which women have expressed their point of view. Barbara Kimenye, the Ghanaian writer, speaks of cultural conflicts in the African village life in her satirical prose collection, *Kalasanda* (1965) and *Kalasanda Revisited* (1966). She speaks also of the impact of Christianity in African villages in her works. Her women characters are satirical portraits of stereotypical nature with no particular individuality. She also touches on the white male perspective which dominates the Christian mythology that percolated into the African village. In her works, she speaks out that henceforth changes should be allowed only if they respect the old tradition.
Adelaide Casely – Hayford, the Sierra Leone writer, in her collection *Mista Courifer*, describes the generation gap in modern Africa in the personae of Mista Courifer and his son Tomas. The son rebels against the father who is a slavish devotee of the English customs. Yet he admires certain qualities of the English, such as the respect accorded to the female sex, and treating them on a par with man, which is absent in the African culture. The Ghanaian short story writer Mabel Dove Danquah’s *Anticipation* is a cynical account of polygamy and male chauvinisms. This writer was the first to get elected to a government assembly and her works reveal her dislike for the orthodox conception of womanhood and its duties.

Women writers have proved their mettle in the dramatic form too. One of the best plays to be produced by an African woman writer is the *Company Pot* (1972) by the Ghanaian playwright, Patience Henaku Addo. The play is about the conflict between the established rural morality and the disturbing lifestyle of the westernized city. The plot is the story of an individualistic young woman, who tries out her career in the city and finds that she has to walk the tightrope between the strict rural code and the lax urban freedom. At the same time, she realizes that a woman’s role in society in essentially based on her sexually defined roles. Many of these early writings can be grouped under ‘protest writings’, the genre which deals with subjects of protest like poverty, chores of motherhood, drudgery of rural life etc.
Of the women playwrights of renown, Efua Sutherland is the first one to be noted. Her *Edufa* speaks of the difference between love and the realities of life. *Floriwa*, a bitter play, depicts the lethargic village people lapsing into the past customs instead of progressing onward. This state is changed by the Queen Mother with the help of her daughter *Floriwa*. The Ugandan playwright Rebecca Njau is another one to be recorded. Her *The Scar* is the story of a young woman who acts as a leading light in the village life among the women. But a ghost from her past arrives in the village which prevents her from doing any more good deeds. Aidoo’s *Dilemma of the Ghost* (1965) has as the heroine a black American, married to a West African with an extended family which becomes problematic for her. The slave origin of the protagonist Eulalie, makes her objectionable to the Africans and Eulali also considers them as savages in turn. The woman caught in two worlds in a state of non-belonging is depicted in the play. ‘Anowa’ (1970) which employs the legend of a wilful girl who defies her parents and selects her own husband and comes to grief over it. In Aidoo’s retelling of it, the stranger-husband is rendered as the white man. The play begins just before the impact of colonial intrusion and ends just when the colonization changes the face of the country. Anowa leaves home since she cannot accept the norms of feminity set by her mother and in the end, her husband commits suicide, because of the fear of emasculation. In this play Aidoo converts the marginalized women and slaves into the centre of the play.
Fiction, which was a modern form of Western import, came in much later. The colonial impact could be felt even in the field of fiction. Though Soyinka calls the novel a “half-child genre”, since it was not originally an African literary form, it soon became an indispensable medium to depict the emotions and conflicts experienced by the masses. Women writers also caught up with the new genre and their tales of double colonization – dominance by their men folk and colonization by the ‘white-folks’ - became prevalent in African women writing. Adaora Lily Ulasi is one among the earliest fiction writers. Her works depict the impact of colonization in traditional Ibo society as in *Many Things You No Understand* (1970) and *Many Things Begin for a Change* (1971). Ulasi says in these works that though they differ in culture and traditions, in patriarchal and chauvinistic values both sides of the colonial divide are the same.

Though writers like Sutherland, Aidoo and Nwapa also were involved with nationalistic developments, later we see a trend of women writing concentrating more on female issues and concerns. The marginalisation and discrimination meted out to the Third World citizen especially to the black races are dealt with in the African literature, since the literature itself is a postcolonial phenomenon. The enumeration of the woes of inequality being similar for the ‘inferior race’ and ‘weaker sex’, the phenomenon of African women writing becomes a platform for airing the conditions of the black woman as being doubly subjugated.
The only known figure in African women fiction before Nwapa is Grace Ogot, the Kenyan writer who focused on the problems faced by women in society. Her novel *The Promised Land* (1966), displays sexual stereotypes in the images of the two protagonists of the novel. The male chauvinism of Ochola and his disregard of the wife’s wishes and Nyapol’s resignation to it are vividly brought out in the novel. Her short story collection *Land without Thunder* (68) is also a depiction of the social conditioning of patriarchy.

In her two initial novels *Efuru* (66) and *Idu* (70) Flora Nwapa, influenced by Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, depicts the rural life untouched by colonical upheavals. Nwapa also sets forth a significant change in direction in her novels, in that it is a distinctly feminine piece of work delineating the village woman and her daily life in the village. In both the cases, though patriarchy is condoned, the female protagonist Idu and Efuru are pictured as being superior to their shiftless and erring male counterparts. But they are given the role of ‘ideal’ housewives which they play to such perfection that it jars on the credulity of the reader. Idu willing herself to death after her husband passes off asks too much of that willing suspension of disbelief. Efuru is more of a credible character in her final decision of being the priestess of Uhamiri, the river goddess, once she realizes marriage is not conducive for her. Nwapa’s *Never Again* (1975), is one among the very few works on Civil War from the woman’s perspective other than Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra*. Her next two works *One is Enough* (1981) and *Women are Different*
(1986) are totally feminist works. These three novels depict African woman in urban situations and she deals with the themes of sexual exploitation, corruption and economic independence. In *One is Enough* Amaka rejects the institution of marriage itself once the traditional taboos over infertility makes her life a hell. Her transportation to the city is the beginning of a new life for the African woman in her. *Women Are Different* traces the lives of four women building up their careers, following their own set of ideals and values. In Nwapa we can trace a gradual change in the African woman, by following the thematic concerns in her works.

Another powerful voice in African woman fiction is that of Bessie Head of South Africa. Her first work, *When the Rain Clouds Gather*, published in 1969, had caught critical acclaim with its clarity of vision about the merging of cultures. Head being a South African writer, her works reflect more than a little of the racist undercurrents that constantly swamp the community. Her work *Maru* is a direct denouncement of such institutionalized forms of racism. But the novel centering on Margaret Cadmore, a girl belonging to the Masarwa (bushman) community, speaks not only of race problems but also of the oppression of women. Her later work, *Question of Power*, which came out in 1974, shows Head to be extremely aware of the psychological effects of racial and sexual oppression of the South African woman. The novel pictures the fragmenting personality of the colonized woman, Elizabeth, under the double oppression and double standards for gender conduct. Finally we see her leaving both her
promiscuous husband and racist homeland. Though in *Maru*, Margaret gets victimized by society and is controlled by the superior power of the male, Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* is able to break the fetters imprisoning her. Thus Head’s works establish the African woman as an evolving entity.

The only writer in West Africa who challenges Buchi Emecheta in the volume of her output is the Ghanaian, Ama Ata Aidoo. She has experimented with all the genres and stamped her name in all with sterling products. Her works also follow the trend of Nwapa and Emecheta. Aidoo’s work *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), a combination of prose and verse, explores the situation of the postcolonial African and the oppression of women who yearn for emotional liberation. Her next novel came out much later in 1991, titled *Changes: A Love Story*. It gives a typical picture of the urban African woman of the present times. The protagonist Esi-Sekyi is a typical example of the modern woman who divorces her husband on the ground of ‘marital rape’ a concept unheard of in traditional African society. She decides to strike out for herself but realizes that it is very tough in the patriarchy ridden society. Aidoo has also brought out some poetical works like *Someone Talking to Sometime* (85) which speaks of the political and feminist problems and *An Angry Letter in January* (92), both on diasporic elements and the problems therein. We can conclude that in Aidoo also the theme varies from racism, sexism and later into a depiction of the contemporary double colonized state of the female and the transition of the African woman through it all.
A study of the various genres in early African woman writing will show the changing shades in the personality of the women folk in Africa. A historical preview of the women as delineated in literary works will reveal a gradual transformation of the old traditional village with colonial takeover, as also the impact of slavery on the society. Later works also delineate women in strange lands and diasporic communities. A study of the women in Africa down the epochs of history is being attempted here:

The idyllic quality of the precolonial African village with its day-to-day activities is depicted in Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* and *Idu* with emphasis given to the leading women characters. Efuru is a selected worshipper of the Lady of the Lake and so does not find success in married life. The novel gives a lot of sociological data and describes all the functions of the village life like marriage, child-bearing and matrimonial relationship in detail. The importance of motherhood in the African society is also understood from this novel. *Idu*, her second novel, develops the theme of childlessness; the village chatter and gossiping of the woman are brought in here also, along with the high concern each villager has for the other. The rural Africa and its women are well brought out in these novels.

The short story collection *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* (1992) by the South African writer Sindiwe Magona, focuses on the relationship between women of the white ruling class and the black
serving class during colonial rule. This is a diversion from the usual, since most literature concerned itself only with urban male servant.

The conditioning effect of colonization on native minds is seen through Aidoo’s story ‘For Whom Things Do Not Change’. Set in urban Ghana, a decade after independence, the story focuses on the middle aged servant of the rest house, Zirigu who still calls his employer ‘my master’ with a slave mentality that is misinformed and reinforced by social, economic and linguistic relations. This shows that colonization has undermined the man’s self-respect with respect to even his masculine identity. But the women are not affected by colonialism to such deterioration in identity. Ama Ata Aidoo’s two plays ‘The Dilemma of the Ghost’ and ‘Anowa’ deal with the impact of slavery. Emecheta’s The Slave Girl is a novel on the condition of slavery in an African woman’s life. The heroine Ojebeta is sold in the beginning of the novel by her brother for some money. Ojebeta is bought by a woman Ma Palageda who circumvents the laws banning slavery by pretending to liberate children. Finally she is ‘bought’ by her husband – her new master.

Bessie Head’s Maru is a much more starkly sociological novel in that it portrays the plight of a low class Masarwa girl, Margaret. The novel is set in the modern era. Margaret is shunned by all in the villages where she comes to work as a teacher, since in the village Masarwas were held as slaves by the elite. Even the man who finally marries her takes her at his own volition without her real consent. But
he also has to pay the price for marrying the low-caste girl by abdicating the position of the uncrowned king of the village. In Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy*, we see a special relationship shared by the two friends, Sissie and Marije. But along with it the novelist tries to open the reader’s eyes to the situation in Africa after decolonization. She calls for a total emancipation of Africa politically, socially and economically. Aidoo hopes that the Africans will uphold their traditional values and at the same time hold their own among any other race of the world. Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* is a study on how the woman in African society is always given a secondary role in the society, always dependent on the father, son or the husband. But the heroine in the story rebels against this custom and seeks her own way which depicts a change in the situations even in rural Africa. Her *The Joys of Motherhood*, set in the city of Lagos, reveals the demeaning power of colonialism in the urban section of society. In this novel, the heroine Nnu Ego is unable to respect her husband Nnaife, who unlike the ‘man in her village’ is lowered so far as to be proud of washing his mistresses smalls and has to go off finally to fight the war to defend her country.

The short fiction ‘Two Sisters’ by Aidoo and ‘Honorable Minister’ by Grace Ogot depict the new woman evolving in the metro cities in Africa. Aidoo uses the convention of the paired woman in the novel – Mercy who uses her sexuality to procure material benefits and Connie the faithful wife. When the politician who favours Mercy is imprisoned, she moves on to the next powerful man. In Ogot’s short
story too, the social pressure makes the housewife decide on trading sexual favours for material benefits such as a house loan. This shows the new urban woman as being dissatisfied with the standard of living provided by their idealistic and hardworking husbands. Flora Nwapa’s *One is Enough* also sports a heroine who does not suffer silently the taunts of her mother-in-law over the state of her childlessness. An alternative to the pretentious ‘joys of motherhood’ is given in the novel through an independent way of life for women. So Amaka, the heroine starts relations with other men, but with no intention of marriage.

Aidoo’s *Changes: A Love Story* is about an educated woman who wants the best out of life. The novel is on the changing outlook at marriage and motherhood in the African society. Esi Sekyi, the protagonist, tries to get emotional satisfaction by becoming a second wife to her lover Ali, but she finds that even he considers her as one of his possessions – an educated young mistress, whereas the wife is one who gave up her job for him. Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* does not mince matters when it comes to flaying people for their hypocrisy and selfishness which is the reason for the nation’s degeneration. She satirises the privileged class and calls those who prefer foreign countries to their native home pseudo intellectuals. But there are women novelists who have presented the situations of woman in the First World in none too amiable a situation. One such writer is the Ghanaian Amma Darko, the author of *Beyond the Horizon*. Mara is the young, innocent village girl who is astonished by the adaptations she has to make on moving to the city and then abroad to Germany. Being
dependent on her abusive husband since she is not economically independent, she has to undergo many humiliations and even is forced into prostitution for the upkeep of her husband’s mistress.

Buchi Emecheta’s first two novels are likewise set in England. In *In the Ditch*, the protagonist faces conflicts as an orphaned black female. The society is built on a hierarchical oppression on the basis of race, sex, class and property. *Second Class Citizen* has an independent young woman as the protagonist. But once she becomes a housewife in London, she finds herself a second class citizen, owing to her race and gender. She finally leaves her husband in order to secure her identity. This is carried on in Emecheta’s later work *Kehinde*, where the protagonist, an economically independent woman working in London, decides to live her own life, after recovering from the double dealing inflicted by her husband.

We see that there is a gradual transformation in the nature of the African woman which is prodded by the socio-historical developments, such as the introduction of imperialism, capitalism and class stratification, decolonisation, immigration etc. in that historical order. But the underlying nature of the African woman remains more or less intact such as her resilience, stamina and social features like woman bonding and autonomous nature, which brooks no subordination. The colonial and patriarchal attributes against which she has to fight are a common denominator in all women writing.

*Bride Price* by Emecheta presents with telling anthropological details, the gradual submersion of a young African girl into the mould set for her by patriarchal tradition. In *Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta deals with both the postcolonial and colonial times in Nigeria and the social situations existing in the African villages, and the cities during colonization. *Destination Biafra* deals with the Biafran War, the Civil War, which had a colossal influence on all the Africans, as is evident from the vast number of war novels and writings, which followed in its wake. It speaks of the neocolonial conditions existing in the postcolonial times along with the experiences of women in the war. *Double Yoke* projects Nigeria and its womenfolk as trying to find their feet after subjugation in the name of colonialism and patriarchy. *Gwendolen* is a searing tale of a West Indian girl of tender years as she struggles to pick up the pieces of her life in her native land and later in England despite harrowing sexual experiences. *Kehinde* is about a diasporic African woman, a First World aspirant who looks towards the economic freedom of the First World to liberate her from the claustrophobic traditionality of her native land. The dilemma of the modern African woman torn between two worlds is clearly depicted in these novels.
These six novels that span a century in African women’s history sport heroines who configure the essence of the period through their lives. AkuNna and Nnu Ego from the precolonial / colonial period represent women who are possessions of patriarchy. Even their names point to this fact. AkuNna, named ‘father’s wealth’ stands for the bride price she was to fetch her paternal figure through marriage. It is the lack of this custom in her life that finally drives her on to death. Nnu Ego meaning ‘twenty bags of cowries’, though representing the great value of the daughter of the Chief, also depicts the girl-child as being considered a priced possession. Nnu Ego which could also be read as ‘new ego’ refers to the streak of illumination and rebellion that characterize this daughter of the colonial times.

Emecheta’s novels of the 80’s, *Destination Biafra* and *Double Yoke* picture two heroines determined to change the nation/society. Debbie in *Destination Biafra*, a member of the Istekeri tribe, has the official name of ‘Oritsha Debbie’ which in Yoruba is ‘orisa de bi’ and means “the deity was here”. Her presence is the only one commanding order in the Nigerian chaos during the Civil War in the novel. In *Double Yoke*, the protagonist named ‘Ete’ meaning ‘brother’ depicts Emecheta as considering the male of the species as joining in brotherhood with the concerns of the female. The final rounded characterization given to Ete projects him in a positive light.

The typical character studies that she makes in the two novels of the last phase focus on the lives of Gwendolen and Kehinde. The heroine in
Gwendolen is given different names such as June-June, Gwendolen and Gwen, which represent the varied personalities she possesses and how differently she is seen by the people with whom she comes into contact in her sudden growth from girlhood to motherhood. Kehinde the “last born of the twins” is portrayed as the lost half of the dead twin sister who is presented as the ‘active’ voice within her living self. Only her final self-assertion unites her with her twin’s progressive self.

The central characters of the novels categorize the novels as falling into three phases – (pre)colonial, postcolonial and immigration period in Nigerian history. They also span three phases of the author’s literary career. The Bride Price and The Joys of Motherhood were published in 1976 and 79; Destination Biafra and Double Yoke in 1982 and 83; and Gwendolen and Kehinde in 1990 and 94 respectively. If the heroines of the first two novels are depicted as succumbing to patriarchy, those of the postcolonial period with the impact of westernization still prominent in them are presented as revolutionary and rebellious in nature. In Gwendolen and Kehinde, the heroines are presented as finally achieving selfhood and liberation. Thus Emecheta could be counted as passing through the feminine, feminist and female phases of her writing career as expounded by Elaine Showalter (13).

Such a case study of the African women necessitates a thorough scrutiny of the socio-historical background of their lives so that the foreground is related to their past and the study is placed in the right perspective.
This introduction which forms the initial chapter of the dissertation is meant to give a background sketch of African writing in English. This chapter traces the emergence of the concept ‘womanism’ from existing theoretical framework of postcolonialism and feminism. The second chapter delves directly into the societal implications involved in the study of the African culture. The next three chapters present the core of this dissertation and they are, as was already mentioned, based on a selection of Emecheta’s novels: *The Bride Price*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Destination Biafra*, *Double Yoke*, *Gwendolen* and *Kehinde*. Of these novels *The Bride Price* and *Joys of Motherhood* are set in the colonial times and *Destination Biafra* and *Double Yoke* in the Civil War and Post Independence time and *Gwendolen* and *Kehinde* during the immigration period. The focus of attention in these chapters is the attitudinal change women exhibit in keeping with the ethos of the changing times. The analysis in these chapters is theory oriented in that the researcher has brought the theories of postcolonialism and feminism to bear upon the analysis. The sixth chapter discusses the theory of womanism, and demonstrates that Emechata’s novels lend themselves to womanist interpretation. The triple axis of gender, race and class that circumscribe the experiences of women in the third world is studied in this chapter. The final chapter concludes the study with a summary of the dissertation.