At the outset, a question that immediately spurts in our mind is what is Gender and what is Empowerment? An understanding of the concept of 'gender' and 'empowerment' is very much relevant, before undertaking a study on the women's assertions for gender equity and empowerment. The term ‘gender’ refers to the different roles, responsibilities, obligations, attributes and expectations ascribed to females and males by society. These vary from culture to culture, are learned through various socialization processes, and systems; and are continuously changed to suit the needs of society. Gender differs from sex, which is biological, God-given, unchangeable and universal. Learner (1986) defined gender as:

"the cultural definition of behaviour defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time. It is a set of cultural roles. It is important to make a distinction between ‘sex and gender’. Sex refers to biological features that differentiate males from females; and gender refers to the ways in which
masculinity and femininity are constructed, shaped, and expressed."

The term 'empowerment' derives from the word power, which is defined as the control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. According to Kreisberg (1992):

“Empowerment embodies the idea of self-determination, a process through which individuals and communities increasingly control their own destinies without imposing on others. The link between controlling one's own life and valued resources while simultaneously respecting others' rights to do the same is crucial to empowerment theory.”

Miller (1982), observed that “empowerment is the capacity to implement change”, that is becoming able.

Presently the question of gender inequality and empowerment has arose as a global phenomena and the search for gender equality has become a global movement. However, many factors make it difficult for women throughout the world to join together in

this fight. In Western nations, the women's movement has been around for half a century whereas in several regions of the world, it has just begun and in some, it has not yet started. History; social and economic conditions; religious community standards; tradition; access to technology, communication and education are all factors which influence the process of the women's movement. Different regions of the world are at different stages of women's empowerment. Some international progress has been made in the forms of treaties and human rights agreements to better the condition of women worldwide.

Three extreme worldviews regarding how the problem of gender inequality arose are conservative, liberal, and radical. Each worldview also has differing solutions for the problem. We present these as examples, although they are not always exact representations of people's views; few people are completely of one view.

Each one has different views on how inequality came about, and also different prescriptions in solving the problem. In discussing the possible origins of the problem, it is important to consider the fact that no one is solely of one worldview. Most people
are a mix of all three views, so these suggestions of origins may seem very one-sided.

Throughout history, in most societies, women have been discriminated against. Men are often seen as the stronger of the sexes, and are therefore considered superior. They have been responsible for earning wages, taking care of the family, and dealing with social and political problems. This is why in many societies women were not allowed to hold jobs, vote, or manage a family on their own until very recently. Because this is the status quo in many places, many conservatives, who are interested in preserving order, would say that the problem of women's inequality is not really a problem.

Liberals are interested in liberty and the rights of individuals. They would see the problem as arising from societies where individuals (in this case women) were not listened to or treated equally. In these societies, the feeling was that as long as the society was thriving, individual cases did not matter. They would also see these societies as places, which deny basic human liberties to all of their citizens.
Radicals would have many of the same views as liberals as to the origin of women's inequality. The main difference might be that they would see the discriminatory societies as guilty of putting individuals (in this case men) before what was best for society. Radicals believe that society should come first and they would see the oppression of half of the population as extremely detrimental to the population as a whole.

Those Conservatives who believe that women should be equal have several solutions to help end inequality for women. They believe that states should be the actors in social and political reform; therefore would favor change by making treaties and passing bills. These changes would be gradual, but also they would believe them to be effective over a long period of time. Since conservatives believe in putting society before individuals, they would make changes that would benefit the entire society. Order is the most important ideal to them.

Liberals also have several solutions to stop or lessen gender discrimination. Since they believe that states should be actors in social and political reform, they would favor the use of treaties and women's liberation bills. Changes would come more rapidly, though, than it would if conservatives were implementing change,
because liberals are in favor of change and the most important ideal to them is freedom. In order to bring about this change, liberals are willing to change the existing power structures in place and possibly add new structures. Freedom for women from oppression and such norms as lack of birth control and family planning education in Kenya would be a major issue for them. They favor changing structures and would implement many programs and organize many non-governmental organizations to alleviate the situation as soon as possible. Organizations of individuals, as opposed to governmental organizations, would be favored because they put individuals rights before society. An example of reform liberals might implement is organization of a group that will distribute condoms and birth control pills and educate the women of Kenya so that they may be free of oppressive norms of the past.

Lastly, radicals would propose many solutions for this global problem. They believe in changing structures, even to the point of throwing out all the old norms and making completely new structures. They would favor major, and sometimes even drastic, change in order to alleviate the problem. Their main concern is justice; therefore, they would be interested in doing what was fair. They would see the oppression of a large group of a country's
population as incredibly unjust and would use many tactics to end the oppression. Deliberate lack of education or options for women in Kenya would be seen as extremely unjust and in need of change. Radicals feel that as long as justice is served, the ends justify the means. The change they implement will be fast and immediate, though maybe not effective in the long run.

Gender equality issues have been the forefront of action in most developed countries for the past few decades and have led to the increase in the status of women. One reason why this is true is because of the development and availability of information technology to women in first world countries. Women were and are able to organize activities and support groups to help women financially, emotionally and through education, to help them gain equality. Though this seems as if it is a natural trend in the progress of women's rights, it is far from being this simple in most third world or underdeveloped countries. Countries such as those in Africa and Asia require assistance from those that are developed and from world organizations in order to create the technology needed to organize support to oppressed women. In Africa gender inequality are to a large extent results of the social/cultural distinctions between what women and men can or cannot do, and
what they may or may not have. Women play an important role in society as procreators of the coming generation as well as producers of goods and services. However, with the modernization process in Africa, women are gradually becoming aware and conscious about their rights and struggling to achieve them.

In many traditional African societies, there existed differences in treatment and attitudes towards boys and girls. As children grew, the immediate family, peer group and the community at large socialized them into the acceptance of gender roles, rights, responsibilities, etc. Since these societies were patriarchal, preference was given to sons, and girls were marginalized through the socialization process. Such as Construction of division (e.g. labour, work space, power); construction of symbols and images that articulate and reinforce these divisions along gender lines and gender stereotypes in occupational or organizational identities (e.g. men are leaders, women are nurturers).

Spencer and Podmore (1987) identified ten factors, which contribute to the professional marginalization of women. The ten points are:

- Stereotypes about women, that they are unstable, emotional, and not decisive enough;
• Stereotypes about the nature of professions and professionals, that women are unsuited to the demands of the job;
• The sponsorship system, the lack of older women to support younger women;
• The lack of role models and peers;
• Women being excluded from informal relationships and networks;
• The concept of professional commitment, and the assumption that women will not be committed enough;
• The unplanned nature of many women's careers;
• The assumptions made about "women's work";
• Clients' expectations – that women are unacceptable in certain roles;
• Fear of competition, that women will reduce the prestige of the profession.4

Promoting gender equality and the improvement of the status of girls and women has been a major pre-occupation for UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA and other agencies of the United Nations for many years. Recognizing the role of female education as a tool for sustainable development in Africa, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, 1994) stated;

The empowerment of women and improvement of their status are important ends themselves and are essential for the achievement of sustainable development. The objectives are: to achieve equality and equity between men and women and to involve women fully in policy and decision-making processes and in all aspects of economics, political and cultural life as active – decision makers, participants and beneficiaries, and to ensure that all women, as well as men, receive the education required to meet their basic human needs and to exercise their human rights.\(^5\)

Despite modernization, traditional gender relations of dominance and subordination are still promoted. In this relationship, the female is the disadvantaged. Many studies indicate that girls are usually less valued than boys in most African societies. This preference has been known to result in discrimination against girls and women and assignment of low status to women. Substantial inequalities between gender still persist in modern Kenyan societies. The girl child is still disadvantaged in education and career opportunities, regardless of

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education achievement. Women are dominated by men within marriage. Even the few women who have reached high-level positions in politics, business and other professions, command little respect in their households.

On the political front, only nine out of two hundred and twenty-two members of parliament are women. There is no woman cabinet minister or national or branch or sub-branch chairperson of a national political party. Male dominance is exacerbated by the economic dependence of women on their parents, husbands or cohabiting male partners.

Our purpose in this study is to present the condition of women and the goals of gender equality and empowerment in Kenya. Kenya became independent of European colonialism in the 1960's. Due to this recent independence, Kenya is far behind in development, especially in the women's movement. Nevertheless, modernization process in Kenya has provided new ways for women to share knowledge, experience, and resources to further the women's movement.

It is relevant in this context to study the background in order to understand why women living in Kenya are granted very few
rights and are economically marginalized, holding few jobs other than those centered around childrearing. Male dominance is exacerbated by the economic dependence of women on their parents, husbands or cohabiting male partners. Women essentially have no voice. Women have also had little voice in the political arena. There have been only six female members in the Kenyan parliament and the first woman cabinet member was only recently elected in May of 1995. The Parliament of Kenya only has nine women members out of two hundred and twenty two members, five of which were nominated by their parties rather than elected. Women occupy only 1.7 percent of the seats in the National Assembly—they never have held more than 4 percent—and no woman has ever served in the full cabinet. There is no woman national or branch or sub-branch chairperson of a national political party. This is despite the fact that the skill levels for Kenyan women are relatively high when compared with many other countries in the region. Such gender imbalance in the political sphere is a paradox, for the majority of farmers in this agricultural economy are women, virtually all women are economically active, and women's organizational activities flourish. According to the census of 2000 in Kenya, women

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account for 52% of the total population and 60% of the voting population so why haven't women gained at least some civil and political equality? Why is Kenya one of the weakest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa for representation of women in positions of political power? The answer partly lies in the political and social structure of Kenya.

First of all, the state of Kenya is fairly new. Before gaining independence in December of 1963, Kenya was primarily agricultural. During the 1940s, there was a decline in soil fertility as well as an increase in taxation. The British however draw Kenyan territorial boundaries at the beginning of the twentieth century and with their “thin white line” of force, law, and resources, gradually began the massive colonial social engineering project. Key elements in colonial control included squeezing taxes and low cost labour from inhabitants, setting aside land (known as the White Highlands) and subsidies for white settlers in areas of high agricultural potential, building transport infrastructure to facilitate extraction of trade, and establishing a public-private distinction in which men were viewed as breadwinners and public spokespersons, and women as domestic helpmates. Christian
missionary work, in its ideological, social welfare, and educational dimensions, also reinforced this public-private distinction.7

Kenyan people initially reacted to the structural grid of colonialism in diverse ways, resisting, cooperating, or ignoring new dictates. While women worked extensively in agriculture, trade, and household activities, working-age men increasingly migrated from rural areas in search of wage labor in the cities, on large farms, and on the coast. These factors withdrew many men from their homes and into labor for wages. Women, instead of taking on the impossible task of managing crops, took on jobs that were involved in trade. Soon, education and employment replaced agriculture and ownership as a source of status and economic security. As stated above, this was not an easy task.

Under Colonial alliance, politics was a male affair, except for several attempts to place a token women (to "represent women") on local councils. The colonial state had captured large number of men, sanctioned male control over women labour's and interacted with kinship authority. Yet some space still existed for women to exercise their considerable economic influence in ways that

thwarted official and male goals, given widespread male out-migration and female dominance in farming.

As the colonial state consolidated itself, protests occurred in growing urban centres like Nairobi, beginning in the 1920s. Women were involved in the disturbances, shouting taunts, cheers, and ngemi (high-pitched cries) and agitating in the large crowds. Women sometimes demonstrated more courage than men in resisting colonial rule, as in the 1922 Harry Thuku riots. But much of Africans’ political voice was raised within internal territorial boundaries, at the provincial level and especially in district-level units and below—boundaries that loosely corresponded with the previously fluid ethnic and kinship boundaries: This internal territorial grid, along with tic co-optation of "chiefs," helped give a lasting ethnic cast to politics. Moreover, what was to become a patron-client orientation of goods and services based on regional or ‘ethnic ties’, ignoring gender equity. Even today, such "cultural" politics frequently strengthens male dominance and pits ethnic localism against progressive nationalism.

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In most of Kenya's ethnic groups, both historically and currently, women marry outside their lineage and join that of their husband. A husband and his male relatives have important material stakes in their control over female labor. They acquire rights to the wife's labor and custody of their children, a relationship solidified with the exchange of bride wealth from the husband's to the wife's family. In her husband's home, a woman produces and reproduces on land to which she acquires user rights as a wife and mother. Structurally, this puts a woman in a tenuous position, dividing her loyalties between her own family and other women. Women's access to land in the post-independence period remained the same as the colonial period. Not surprisingly, land reform was largely focused on men, dispossessing all but a miniscule number of women.\textsuperscript{10}

In 1963, Jomo Kenyatta became the first president of the newly formed state of Kenya. There was nonstop political opposition in these formative years due to tribal unrest, particularly against the Kikuyu and Luo tribes whose members held powerful positions in Kenya's government (such as the president). To stop opposition, the government banned all political parties other than the

dominant Kenyan African National Union (KANU). In essence, Kenya became a dictatorship. The succession of Daniel Arap Moi to the presidency in the late 1970s promised gains but soon proved to be just as oppressive as the past. All groups must register with the government and must have permits to meet, otherwise the members are subject to severe punishment. This makes it difficult for groups to form to change the status quo of women. Women who have tried to run for public offices in the past have been severely harassed and women's organizations have had little success in establishment. Demonstrations of any form against the government are met with violent opposition from the police. Women's isolation from the state establishment excluded them from such politically tinged economic opportunities, and this distance still influences women's personal choices and political engagement today.

Until recently, women in Kenya have not been viewed as an important social stratum or even as populations base that politics ought to address. The 1965 *Sessional Paper on African Socialism* (written by Kenyan policy makers to establish a rhetorically acceptable vision of a mixed-economy, welfare, and self-reliant society) is silent on gender, as have been subsequent policy documents. Yet this silence exists side by side with highly gendered
policies. In addition to land dispossession, women farmers have been routinely excluded from the distribution of agricultural benefits, especially the credit that is guaranteed with land title deeds. Until recently, educational disparities have existed, with glaring gaps at secondary and university levels that have obvious implications for women's employment in the formal labor force and civil service. In addition, women's few rights under the law are not easily exercised in this largely rural country in which customary practices often prevail.

In present-day Kenya, women are increasingly acknowledged in public policy; they are also well organized and positioned to assume a larger share of official political space. Despite the hardships of women forming groups in Kenya, many have and are being utilized by many women. The Kenyan Women's Finance Trust (KWFT) was established in 1981 by professional Kenyan women in banking and law. This organization provides women in business with the technical assistance and credit needed to establish or expand their businesses. The main goals of assistance are to help women increase their income, develop their business, and to generate employment. The Kenyan Women's Finance Trust is

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affiliated with Women’s World Banking (WWB). WWB was established in 1979 to provide access to finance, information, and markets for women entrepreneurs across the world.

The Center for Women in Information Technology and Economic Research (CWITER) promotes the use of electronic communication to educate women's organizations and NGOs in Kenya. The main goal of CWITER is to "create and facilitate a global network of women and the NGO community in Kenya" to increase communication between groups. CWITER does this through the following: Create awareness of available technology, provide information resources, bridge the information gap between organizations with networking tools and those without, address and create solutions to problems faced by African women in the information technology field. This organization also offers conferences on Internet training and the latest electronic communication facilities.

Mandeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) is dedicated to improving the status and conditions for women in Kenya. It conducts energy programs and assists women's groups throughout Kenya. This organization is also lobbying to ban female circumcision in Kenya.
The above is not a comprehensive list of women's organizations in Kenya. These organizations are some of the most prominent and established groups. Many organizations are international NGOs, which assist groups such the WWB. International support from the World Bank and IMF needs to be improved. The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) created to help Kenya develop economically does not include women in the plan. Women in Development (WID) and Gender and development (GAD) are both organizations backing the capitalist route of development suggested by the World Bank. These organizations insist that women's practical needs (access to food, clothing, housing, and child care) and strategic gender needs are included in any policies or plans created. They have examined case studies and found results of increased women's autonomy and self esteem, but without support of internationally connected women, the struggle to be heard would fall on deaf male-dominated governmental ears. Women are finding the media and influence of other international women's organizations to be the key factor in their fight for equality. Since the early 1980s, government and non-governmental organizations have implemented numerous policies and programmes designed to enhance women's condition. This is because it was realized that without the participation of women the
country's economic development would be only a dream. Although in Kenya, some progress has been made in the elimination of sex stereotyping in school textbooks and attempts have been made to address other gender issues, these efforts can still allow traditional gender relations of domination and subordination to flourish.

However, substantial inequalities between genders persist in modern Kenyan societies. The girl child is still disadvantaged in education and career opportunities, regardless of education achievement. Men within marriage dominate women. Even the few women who have reached high-level positions in politics, business and other professions, command little respect in their households. Violence and abuse of women is widespread and in many cases accepted by rural and uneducated women as part of "marital responsibilities". Women are systematically discriminated. Laws and customs often deny women the right to own land, inherit property, establish credit, receive training or move up in their field of work. Laws against domestic violence are often not enforced on behalf of women. And customs, as for example the boy-child is given priority as regards schooling. This situation fundamentally breaches human rights laws.
Walby (1990) has noted that women have entered the public sphere not on equal terms:

They are present in the paid workplace, the state and public cultural institutions. But they are subordinated within them. Further, their subordination in the domestic division of labour, sexual practices, and as receivers of male violence continues.¹²

Achieving gender equality in these areas will require the support of men who exercise most of the power in these spheres of life. The involvement of men is critical to women’s rights and to population policy success.

It is a paradoxical situation to have men supporting women because men have always been instrumental in perpetuating women subordination. However, women have not stood idly but have continued to advance their struggle for their rights and empowerment. Much of the action has taken place under the umbrella or aegis of women organisations in modern Kenya. Moreover, woman’s struggle for liberation in Kenya has been as long as their subordination itself. In every sphere of life - social, economic, political and cultural- women have been facing an

inferior status to that of men, since the pre-colonial days. But comparatively woman enjoyed a better status of life in the pre-colonial period. It is only with the introduction of capitalism and money economy under colonialism, that women status started gradually declining. This happened due to women becoming economically and politically weak. Women's labour in subsistence agriculture was not accounted for, as it did not contribute to the economy. In spite of that women have engaged themselves in other kind of jobs, which would fetch them money. In the political sphere, the titles, which they enjoyed in the pre-colonial days, were taken away by the colonial administration rendering them un empowered. Colonialism in fact proved detrimental to their political status. However, it does not imply that women, didn't voice against such forms of subjugation. Their participation in the national liberation struggle suggests not only their endeavour to get their nation liberated but along with it there liberation and empowerment too. Pinned in the national freedom struggle where their hopes and aspirations, for a better and a respectable standard of living. Unfortunately, these hops and aspirations received a death blow, when in the post-independence situation there conditions did not improved. Their assertion for gender equity and empowerment has became more pronounced, as the modernization process has made
them more and more aware of their rights and privileges. And with this assertion for gender equity women a way are struggling to liberate themselves from all forms of patriarchal oppression and domination.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his fiction has tried to focus on this aspect of women's problem. In the hands of Ngugi and his collaborators the fictional text with its additional power of special language and its capacity to directly communicate to a participatory community, becomes a potential site of representing truly the deprivation and deprecation of the Kenyan women but also there suppressed strength as well as of exposing the unjust and arbitrary patriarchy structures and there subtle sure strategies of domination. In all his novels starting from The River Between until Matigiri, he has tried to show the different forms of gender inequality persisting in different spheres of Kenyan society.

In his earlier novels The River Between and Weep Not Child, Ngugi tries to show how religion and western education have proved disadvantageous for the status of women in Kenyan society. Ngugi also affectively reflects upon African culture focusing on various customs and rituals existing in different tribes, which goes on to undermine the Kenyan women's position. The novels also
sensitively record the sufferings and struggles of these women's in a
colonial land. Women are double sufferers here – in the one hand
they are exploited by the British's in the other there are exploited
by their own men.

In the novel *Weep Not Child* Ngugi depicts a life of a well knit
polygamous family where the duty of the wives has remained to
serve the family with love and peace. She has no voice of her own or
in other words her voice is thwarted if she tries to go against the
head of the family. The man may beat the women, or inflict sexual
violence on her body to pour out his tensions, guilt or uncertainty.
In Ngotho's family when there is a discord on the issue of strike,
Ngotho takes out all his anxiety and uncertainty on his wife in a
hysterical outburst:

I shall do whatever I like. I have never taken orders
from a woman... ‘what if the strike fail? Don't women
me.’ he shouted hysterically. This possibility is what he
feared most. She sensed this note of uncertainty and
fear and seized upon it. ‘What if the strike fails tell me
that’ Ngotho could bear it no longer. She was driving
him mad. He slapped her on the face and raised his hand again.\textsuperscript{13}

In a way this is a reassurance of the right of man in patriarchy to dominate and use the women as he wishes. With physical force, her resistance is undermined. This inferior status of women attributes to her dependence on men. As long as she is silent, she is loved and cajoled. But once she raises her voice she is badly treated. Its not only in the hands of the husband that a women is reprimanded even a father chides his daughter if he defies her husband. Ngugi in his novel \textit{A Grain of Wheat} depicts the suffering state of women in patriarchal set up. Their inferior economic status makes them sell their bodies to buy a piece of bread to quench the family's hunger. Women are slave who is supposed to perform all household chores. Unmindful of her desires and feelings she has to work from dawn to dusk. Above all, her one major duty becomes to please the man whencesoever and howsoever he desires, regardless of the fact whether she is willing or not. She is beaten and even thrown out of the house. For any minor mistake, that too might not be hers, she is discarded like a wastepaper. She is not given a chance to explain herself. Such is

\textsuperscript{13} Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, \textit{Weep Not Child}, (Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya, 1989), pp. 52-53
the experience of the character Mumbi in Ngugi’s fiction *A Grain of Wheat*. Mumbi’s husband does not give her a chance to explain as to how the child was conceived by Mumbi during his detention days. “Gikonyo, instead,... hurried to vent his anger on Mumbi...He would thrash Mumbi until she cried for mercy.”14

After numerous insults when Mumbi leaves the house to return to her parents, she is not welcome there. Rather her father retorts at her, “The women of today surprise me. They cannot take a slap...from a man. In our time a women could take blow after blow from her husband without a thought of running back to her parents.”15 Ngugi in fact shows the exploitation of women under patriarchy forms of oppression. It is not only true in the case of Kenyan women but African women as a whole. Buchi Emecheta in her Article entitled Feminism with a Small ‘f’ emphasizes such state of women:

> In many parts of Africa, only one’s enemies will go out of their way to pray for a pregnant woman to have a girl-child. Most people want a man-child... In most African societies, the birth of a son enhances a women’s authority in the family. Male children are

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15 *ibid*, p 157-58
very, very important. Yet this girl-child that was not desired originally comes into her own at a very early age. From childhood she is conditioned into thinking that being the girl she must do all housework, she must help her mother to cook, clean, fetch water and look after her younger brothers and sisters...16

Ngugi while projecting the gender inequity persisting in the domestic sphere also depicts the women’s struggle for liberation from the standards of patriarchy. In his novel *A Grain of Wheat* he shows the character ‘Mumbi’ as not of submissive one. Even though she had been dominated in life, she refuses to be suppressed any more. In the last few line of the novel, we see a new Mumbi emerging:

Will you-will you come tomorrow?” he [Gikonyo] asked, unable to hide his anxiety and fear. He knew, at once, that in future he would reckon with her feelings, her thoughts, her desires- a new Mumbi...she took her

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leave. She walked away with determined steps, sad but almost sure.\textsuperscript{17}

Ngugi depicts that women in Kenya are sufferer not so much of colonial set up as that of patriarchy. In the post-colonial situation women face, the same standards of patriarchy in both the private and public sphere. In his novel, \textit{Petals of Blood} Ngugi shows how women are exploited in capitalist society and these capitalist forces of exploitation being the Kenyan men themselves. However, women face such of exploitation due to their subordinate status in the economic and political field.

In the economic field, their status is inferior to that of men because women are generally engaged in the household activities and subsistence forms of agriculture, which do not fetch them money. And the only form of employment, which is easily available to them for earning money, is prostitution. Ngugi shows that women are drawn into prostitution not of their choice but out of compulsion. The character Wanja in \textit{Petals of Blood} represent those unfortunate women who are seduced and are left to bear illegitimate child and later thrown into prostitution. However, Ngugi portrays Kenyan women like Wanja who are struggling to liberate

\textsuperscript{17} Ngugi wa Thing'o, \textit{A Grain of Wheat}, (Nairobi: Heinemann, Kenya 1988), p 213
themselves from such state of economic deprivation without being dependent on men. Rather using their sexual power they seem to dominate over men. Wanja the character speaks the voice of many such Kenyan women when she says that 'you eat or you are eaten'. Similarly in *Devil on the Cross* Ngugi reflects the character Waringa's fait of subordination, exploitation and violence inflected upon her by men in various ways. She is exploited under the twin pressures on men and money. In the men's eye women is merely a part of property; an instrument of power and the number of women a man has and can boast about is a sign of status for him. She is supposed to have no identity of her own and her status is reduced to 'being a sugar girl' and 'be-my-women' of Kenyan men. In addition to economic exploitation, there is physical, emotional and psychological torture in terms of seduction, illegitimate children and subsequent guilt to her.

Ngugi through these two characters Wanja and Waringa not only reflects the gender inequity and the exploitation of women in Kenya but also shows the revolutionary spirit within women not to succumb to such male dominated pressures but to empower themselves. While Wanja chooses the profession of a barmaid, Waringa strives hard to become a mechanical engineer.
Thus through all his novels Ngugi has not only tried to portray the unequal position of Kenyan women in every sphere of society- social, economic, political and cultural but also their incessant struggle to assert their identity at par with men and to empower themselves for their emancipation.