

# CHAPTER 1

## Africa at a Glance

### 1.1 African History

The continent of Africa as conceived by most Africans and many Africanists, consider it as a whole and a comprehensive unit. It is a vast continent, which 'presents an abundance and pluralism of cultures and peoples.

Thousands of ethnic groups live in this continent, most of them affected by similar issues and have thus developed cultural practices that are overlapping. Africa is an entire continent most diverse in culture, language, religion stretching from the Mediterranean to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa and has on its map fifty three odd countries including the islands in the Indian Ocean.

African history is a massive and a huge topic, relatively new in academic and intellectual disciplines with a history of not more than fifty years. As the modern discipline of history became established in Western universities the general assumption was that Africa was a *tabulus rasa* as it had 'no history'. The entire sub-Saharan Africa was ascribed an ahistorical status. The societies were considered primitive, with absence of literacy, and a complete absence of historical consciousness to speak of. Such perceptions and prejudices were held by the imperialist forces to mobilize and justify their ideologies and cultural and political hegemony. In the early part of the twentieth century the validity of an African history continued to be debated upon. Some western academicians still voiced their doubts about an 'African history'.

Prior to 1940s three different approaches were taken to record the African past. The first approach considered African societies to be static with no history (ahistorical) prior to the coming of the Europeans. The imperialists compiled ethnographic reports and surveys which championed the contributions of the British Empire. Judgments were primarily value based as aspects of African culture were viewed through Christian eyes. As a part of history writing anthropological studies were taken up which concentrated on analyzing unwritten records but all this did little except validate and justify colonial rule and their superiority to conclude that the only collective and powerful identity is the notion of the African 'tribe.

The second approach were by Africans themselves who often highlighted less attractive facts of the British rule as they disagreed with the impact and nature of British rule while some of the Africans anticipated progress and modernization from the new colonial rule.

The third approach came with W.E.B. Du Bois and his contemporary Pan Africanist who linked the Africans to those of African diaspora. However, it did not emerge as an independent field of inquiry.

African studies as a field of academic interest began only after World War II. With the rise of a good number of African universities many Africans assumed responsibility in correcting misinterpretations of the past giving rise to a renewed interest in colonial history. This group of Africanists were categorized into three groups. The largest group comprised of those who had the least grievances against the colonial rule and they felt that by and large they had benefited from the colonizers. The second group, ignored the colonial rule completely and concentrated on the precolonial past because of differences of opinion among different universities. The

third, group was influenced by the British Labor Party with nationalist sentiment and were anti-colonist. All the three groups despite differences in opinion felt that time had come for the Africans to manage their own affairs.

The clinical birth of Africa was decided in the Berlin conference in 1884 which carved out an entire continent with a myriad of cultures and ethnicities into different colonies. This was purely guided by economic, political, and cultural agendas despite claims of the 'civilizing mission.' The division was made on the basis of the different languages of European powers, viz. Francophone (French), Anglophone (English) and Lusophone (Portuguese) countries.

With the spread of education and Christianity the Africans who were referred to as 'petty bourgeoisie.' (Ngugi) benefitted from the above European cultural and religious tools and expressed themselves through writing in the said languages. They looked for permanent ties with imperialism and played the role of an intermediary between the metropolis and colony. A section amongst them saw the future of the nation in the form of independent national economies which were emerging from colonialism or were struggling to emerge. This was translated into nationalistic themes that formed the rhetoric of the nation: an alternative history that Africa is not a *tabulus rasa*, it had a past, culture, dignity and a rich heritage. With this renewed and reinvigorated identity they attacked the racist bigotry of the Europeans.

## **1.2 African Literature**

African literature refers to literature of and from Africa. George (1992:371) states, the European perception of literature generally refers to written letters, the African concept includes oral literature.

Traditionally, Africans do not radically separate art from teaching. African writers, taking their cue from oral literature, use its beauty to help communicate important truths and information to society. Indeed, an object is considered beautiful because of the truths it reveals and the communities it helps to build.

In most African communities, literature is a way of life. This is found especially in songs and dances. People participate in work songs especially during farming activities and sing or recite poems. This also is to be observed in urban setting when they sing while working in factories, community projects or when they raise their voice of protest against one thing or the other. However, it is generally agreed that the novel form was imported.

### **1.2.1 Oral literature**

Oral literature may be in prose or verse. The prose is often mythological or historical and can include tales of the trickster character. Storytellers in Africa sometimes use call-and-response techniques to tell their stories. Poetry, often sung, includes: narrative epic, occupational verse, ritual verse, praise poems to rulers and other prominent people. Praise singers, bards sometimes known as ‘griots’, tell their stories with music. Also recited, often sung are: love songs, work songs, children's songs, along with epigrams, proverbs, riddles.

### **1.2.2 Precolonial literature**

There is a wide range of precolonial African literature. Epic of Sundiata composed in medieval Mali is one example of Oral literature from West Africa. The older Epic of Dinga from the old Ghana Empire. In Ethiopia, originally written in Ge'ez script is the Kebra Negast or book of kings. ‘Trickster’ story is a popular form of an indigenous form of folktale, where encounters are fought between small and larger creatures with

the smaller animal using its wits to emerge victorious. Ashanti people in Ghana have animal tricksters in the form of Anasi, a spider. In Nigeria Yoruba folklore has Ijàpá, in Nigeria, and a hare named Sungura is found in East African folklore. The Sahel regions in West Africa the Swahili coast, and the entire West Africa have written works in abundance.

During the Islamic times, North Africans such as Ibn Khaldun reached great heights within Arabic literature. Fez and Cairo were mediaeval universities in North Africa, with a large body of literature.

### **1.2.3 Colonial African literature**

Colonial African literature already started working on themes which were to occupy the future generations. Africans exposed to Western languages began to write in Europhonic tongues. In 1911, Joseph Ephraim Casely-Hayford (also known as Ekra-Agiman) of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) published *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation [1911]* which is perhaps the first African novel to be written in English. The book shows the protagonist concern with public issues rather than private. It is interwoven into the indigenous idea realizes the need of restoring indigenous practice. Casely Hayford is the earliest representative of the conflict man with irreconcilable cultural loyalties. When he writes about a Fanti god Nyiakrapen that it is very much alike to the Christian god. He mentions about Christ being born of an Ethiopian woman (10) talks about establishment of a national university discuss people should not be despised on the basis of language customs and institutions and hoped to avoid national death. (17) References to the journey to the underworld feature Pan Africanism echoes, towards the end of the book metonymic in a congregation on Mt. Atlas symbolizing Africa.

The African works best known in the West from the period of colonization and the slave trade are predominantly slave narratives, such as Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789)*. The colonial experience varied from region to region. African plays began to emerge by Herbert Isaac Ernest Dhlomo, Ngugi wrote on racism between African tribes. Writers like Amos Tutola was nearer the oral artist assumes a vast body of lore and fills in the forms of the image with a known conclusion which is the secondary audience.

With a Black writer espousing Pan African the universe of Black African writer expanded the cultural strongholds in the form of language, culture, way of life, gods, food, which were lost. Their early life in the new world was an initiation into a reunderstanding of the mores that they had left behind.

African literature in the late colonial period increasingly showed themes of liberation, independence, and négritude. The African literary clarity of this time remained intact with the diverse issues that it tackled. Many, indeed, suffered deeply and directly: censured for casting aside his artistic responsibilities in order to participate actively in warfare, Christopher Okigbo was killed in battle for Biafra against the Nigerian movement of the 1960s' civil war; Mongane Wally Serote was detained under South Africa's Terrorism between 1969 and 1970, and subsequently released without ever having stood trial; in London in 1970, his countryman Arthur Norje committed suicide; Malawi's Jack Mapanje was incarcerated with neither charge nor trial because of an off-hand remark at a university pub; and, in 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa died by the gallows of the Nigerian junta'. (Wikipedia)

#### **1.2.4 Postcolonial African literature**

Wole Soyinka gets the credit of being the first post-independence writer to win the Nobel Prize in literature in 1986. Algerian-born Albert Camus had been awarded the 1957 prize i.e. before independence.

Wide spread literacy and education which resulted in a decolonized mind and spirit the African nations came out of the shackles of Imperialism between 1950s and 1960s. With liberation of mind and spirit caused by increased literacy as most African nations gained their independence in the 1950s and 1960s, African literature has gained momentum and has grown in a dramatic manner both in quality and acclaim. It has drawn worldwide attention as the works started appearing in Western academic circles and curricula. The best of works that was compiled towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had many African writers writing in English, other Europhonic languages and in other native indigenous African languages. The essence and meaning of African Literature has been debated upon by critics and writers since the beginning. Some writers like Ngugi emphasize on the importance of indigenous African language as the yardstick to write, whereas some writers like Achebe, Soyinka believe in writing in the colonizers language by nativizing or indigenizing to create a new offshoot with certain stylistic devices. The Bolekaja critics relatively a new branch of literary criticism entered in African intellectual discourse in 1970's termed Neo-Tarzanists strongly resisted the European models of expression and believed in using only indigenous authentic African forms. Through the years, there have been debates on what is and what qualifies as African literature.

The year was 1962 at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda, a historic meeting titled "A conference for African writers of English Expression" was

convened. The title of the conference suggested that writers in African languages were excluded. The list of participants were names who eventually are to become stalwarts in African literature. Africa was in the pangs of decolonization and for the group of young enthusiastic writers attending the conference anything was possible. Their goal was to define, or come to a common consensus about the parameters of African literary aesthetics and also serve the purpose of reorienting the African minds towards a political and cultural decolonization. As vanguards of a literary tradition their excitement in their new roles was evident.

Writers who attended the meet were the stalwarts of African literary tradition like Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, and James Ngugi, Bloke Modisane, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Langston Hughes. The conference sat down to outline the definition of African literature even with the exclusion of the writers and literature of African languages. “Was it literature about Africa or the African experience? What about non-African who wrote about Africa: Did his work qualify as African literature? Or were African languages the criteria? Can Arabic be a part of African literature? Or what if a European wrote about Europe in African languages?” (Ngugi: decolonizing) The question was never seriously asked or answered. The debate on languages was never resolved. More importance was laid on subject matter, racial origins and geographical habitation of the writer. As the 1962 Makerere conference failed to answer the questions raised, a year later a conference held at Faculte des Lettres of Dakar University in Senegal came up with a tentative definition. The journal *Transition* recorded the definition:

This therefore includes .....as creative writing in which an African setting is authentically handled or to which experiences originating in Africa are integral. This therefore includes among others, writing by

white Africans as well like Nadine Gordimer, Dan Jacobson, Doris Lessing, Elspeth Huxley, Alan Paton and so on, and that by non-Africans Conrad (specifically, *The Heart of Darkness*). Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* could have been given any setting outside Africa, and so it does not qualify to be included amongst African literature. (Transition: 16)

The renewed upsurge and enthusiasm resulted in the writers being exiled, jailed, detention and other oppressive measures. Chinua Achebe became a spokesperson for Biafran cause and independence from Nigeria, doing ambassadorial work in both Africa and abroad. Christopher Okigbo an eminent writer died in the Biafran war in 1967. Wole Soyinka was detained for his peace activism in 1966 by the Nigerian military government of General Yakubu. The Kenyan government of Jomo Kenyatta detained Ngugi for his political writing and theatre work in Gikuyu, his mother tongue.

Unlike the others, the Makerere conference was the first to be held on African soil with African literary aesthetics and decolonization at the center of discussion. Critics like Langston Hughes stated that African literature was coming more into the hands of the people. The young and optimistic Ngugi also captured this excitement when he enthusiastically concluded in his post-conference write up, “With the death of colonialism, a new society is being born. And with it a new literature.” (Ngugi; 1962:7)

Ulli Beier a Yoruba scholar formed the first Mbari Club in 1961, a year before the Makerere Conference and brought together Nigerian writers and artists including Achebe and Soyinka. The purpose was with the mandate “to support the arts: to organize drama and musical festivals, to publish literature, to mount art exhibitions, and to hold art classes.” (Wikipedia: Mbari) The club became a center for cultural

activity. It was indeed to celebrate the Negro experience that formed the basis of the Mbari club: A way of retracing the roots to re-establish the ignored and forgotten past. Mbari is an Igbo concept related to "creation", was suggested as the name by Achebe. Another awakening occurred during the Negritude movement in Francophone Africa "which was an attempt also to place positive value on African culture and to make Europeans aware that Africa has a culture, local traditions, that Africa was capable of high" quality literature often based on the same premises as the Europeans were using. It was addressed to Africans themselves who through reading their literature could change their own minds about the experience they have been through.

Ali A. Mazrui and others mention seven contentions as themes: "(a) the clash between Africa's past and present, (b) between tradition and modernity, (c) between indigenous and foreign, between (d) individualism and community, (e) between socialism and capitalism, (f) between development (g) self-reliance and between (h) Africanity and humanity". (Wiki/African-lit) Other themes in this period include social problems such as corruption, the economic disparities in newly independent countries, and the rights and roles of women. Female writers are today far better represented in published African literature than they were prior to independence. In the last two decades there has been tremendous change in the literary scenario as women writers have emerged as dominant voices to chalk out a new course.

Traditional African literature is an informal evening fire-side 'class' where young ones are taught ethics, values morality and the culture of the community by the elders. Morality and literature is integrally related and is demonstrated by various tradition. One is the Igbo Mbari tradition which celebrates art presented through lived in

experience. It is a performance by the community on command by Ani, the earth goddess. This underscores the essentialised element of didacticism in African literature. In the multi-ethnic setup the existence of small communities have merged into single states, therefore the literature that comes out from nation states clearly demonstrated by Achebe in his works in the form of contemporary politics which the author satirizes with a purpose. Through many African works didacticism is expressed through oral lore. The writer in modern-day Africa has assumed the role of the conscience of the society, reminding readers and society of the high cultural ethos that must be upheld. Since the tribal divisions have been done away with the small communities have collectively merged into states with the writers now focusing on nation-states. Thereby, many works of literature have emerged satirizing the corruption of modern governments. Almost all the works of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi are criticisms of negative social and political practices. The aim of the criticisms is to change the transgressors of socio political ethics and morality into positive agents in society.

Two distinct themes emerge in African literature, one deals with confrontation between Europe and Africa and the other is the post-independence disillusionment. (Komotso: 13-14).

Most African literature is an expression of its country social change. The writers are concerned about the past and present history of their country and this concern is reflected in their words. The social transformation that Africa has undergone since the colonization of the country in the cultural and political sphere with the influences of Christianity and its present state of achieved independence results in a growing awareness of both national identity and modern problems.

Abiola Irele defines African literature

The term 'Africa' appears to correspond to a geographical notion but we know that in practical terms it also takes in those areas of collective awareness that have been determined by ethnic, historical and sociological factors, all these factors, as they affect and express themselves in our literature, marking off for it a broad area of reference. Within this area of reference then, and related to certain aspects that are intrinsic to the literature, the problem of definition involves as well a consideration of aesthetic modes in their intimate correlation to the cultural and social structures which determine and define the expressive schemes of African peoples and societies. (1981: 10)

From the above definition the semiotics and semantics of African literature over the years to the present is crystallized in its world view and ontology. The non-linearity of time in its cyclical rhythm unlike European march of progress. Ancestor worship, spirit world, customs, traditions and rituals, use of verbal arts in the form of proverbs, riddles, sayings, myths and legends form the basic stylistic oeuvre in African Literature. Besides, creative use of language using various linguistic devices in the form of 'abrogation' and 'appropriation' and common themes like the criticism of the colonial intruder, rootlessness and rural urban migration, loss of tradition and neo-colonialism and its aftermath in the post colony reverberate in their works.

An example of Achebe's use of language much quoted in the African context captured in *Arrow of God*

*I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there.  
If there is nothing in it, you will come back. But if there  
Is something there, you will bring home my share.  
The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well,  
You do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those  
Who do not befriend the white man today will be saying  
Had we known tomorrow*

Achebe presents the same passage from the European viewpoint

*I am sending you as my representative among these people - just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight.*

(Achebe 1975: 102)

In spite of being in English the sensibility is entirely different as the text itself works as a kind of performance animating it with symbols and masques that entails dances, gyrations that could be vividly captured by an African reader.

African literature encompasses a wide range of literary genres from poetry, drama, prose and novel writing. The novel has emerged as a dominant literary genre and has established its unique position in relation to other literary exercise as it has been used by many writers. The postcolonial writers have explored the possibilities of the novel to suit their purpose. Initially it was used to further a tradition of African writing using oral resources to enrich the new form. Thus the novel as a western form, in the colonizers language emerged with an African sensibility. It made use of a precolonial culture deeply rooted in realism, rewriting history and culture of a rich past as a native. This created an independent form which translates the postcolonial environment. Each writer has his/her distinguishing techniques of representation which gives the essence of a writer.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was the catalyst that facilitated the emerging voices of an 'imagined community' in African Literature. His writings represent the Anglophone literature that came from West Africa.

My area of study will be the Anglophone literature of Western Africa i.e. Nigeria to be precise.

### **1.3 History of Nigeria**

As we have come to understand the very name Nigeria is a colonial construct. The colonial aggression that has been distorting the history of the continent in the writing of names and mapping of population as tribes from the western perceptive. Nigeria, like the clinical birth of Africa was a creation of the British Empire builder, Sir Lord Fredrick Lugard. The name comes from the word river 'Niger', and the area as Niger Area to create the portmanteau word Nigeria. It was a name given by a Flora Louise Shaw a journalist who later on became Sir Lugard's wife. The Governor General forcefully joined a disparate group of tribes and ethnicities to amalgamate an artificial nation devoid of any homogeneity. Nigeria has a diverse population of over 140 million, the largest in any African country, with several hundred languages and ethnic groups. (Ethnologue 2005) Without a single group being a majority, and the three largest ethnic groups comprise of the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa together constituting only approximately half of the country's total population. The nullification of the Royal Niger Company in 1900 brought Nigeria under the control of Britain, which was divided into the Colony (i.e., Lagos) and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria.

In the 19th century with the end of slave trade and the Imperialist to maintain their economic interest in Western Africa, became more deeply involved in local affairs. By the end of the nineteenth century, Britain, following the resolution reached at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, legitimized its primacy on the Niger in the European 'Scramble for Africa'. Between 1885 and 1906, the British brought different regions of Nigeria under their control through military force or 'pacification campaigns'. Once the British secured their colonial power, they implemented the philosophy of

“indirect rule” in Nigeria, that is the British dominated Nigeria via traditional rulers with colonial officials giving advices to local rulers so as to “minimize direct contacts with the majority of the population” (Falola : 70). Since “indirect rule” favored the control of the traditional rulers who were unresponsive to political and economic changes in the country and it disregarded the political realities of small scale societies, the young educated elites who were denied inclusion in the management of their towns pressed for a change of the country. Although the colonial rule saw the development of infrastructure to facilitate the trade between Nigeria and other nations, the expansion of educational facilities, the improvement of health service and the creation of new cities, colonial economy, Toyin Falola (1999) concludes, was essentially exploitative with a focus on exports as the “mechanism for wealth transfer from Nigeria to Europe”. (Falola: 76).

Prior to the colonization of Nigeria was made up of empires and state-towns in different regions such as the empire of Hausa in the north, the Jukun Empire in the Middle Belt, the Yoruba Empire of Oyo in the south, and the small scaled state-town societies of the Igbo, Isoko, and Urhobo in the east, etc. Both the centralized states and the non-centralized state-towns had developed their political, social, cultural and artistic structures to a sophisticate level. For centuries, their economic life mainly depended on the local resources, such as farming and cattle-rearing in the north, fishing along the coast and river banks. Regional trading provided them with the stuff unavailable within each region. The trans-Saharan trade linked Nigeria with North Africa, the Nile valley and, indirectly, Europe and brought Islam to Nigerian life as well. Since 1486 when the Portuguese first made their presence on the coast south of Benin, later joined by the British, French and Dutch, the trade center of Nigeria had gradually shifted from the north to the south. The increasing demand of labor in the

Americas motivated the Europeans to target their trading commodities from pepper, cloths, beads and ivory to slaves. The slave trade then became the kernel of Euro-Nigerian trade well into the nineteenth century. The chiefs and merchants along Nigerian coastline acted as the middlemen for European traders in exchange for imported goods. The slave trade brought about a huge population loss and affected deeply the cultural, political and social lives of Nigeria, e.g. the introduction of Christianity to the belief system, the adoption of European languages in trading communities, the reshaping of economic activities and its consequential alternation of power structure. The Northern region was associated with the Hausa-Fulani, the Southwest region associated with the Yoruba and the Southeast region associated with the Igbo. This amalgamation favored the British colonial masters but worked against the local people, as they lacked: similar cultures; common citizenship with equal rights and privileges; common laws and a common judicial system; equal rights of all citizens before law; rights to acquire property and make a living anywhere in the country; equal rights to employment anywhere in the country and equal rights to protection of life and property, but 'while the people of the South made strenuous efforts at Nigerian unity, the people of the North did everything to stultify, indeed kill, anything that would foster it'. (Ojukwu:1969) Unemployment, racial discrimination, forced labor and taxation gave rise to the outcry for self-government. Three major political organizations – the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the Northern People's Congress (NPC), and the Action Group (AG) – were instrumental in leading the nationalist movements. With the Nigerian soldiers participating in World War II who fought for the allies the demand for Nigerian independence became stronger. The necessity of decolonization was intensified by the two new superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union which had no colonies

in Africa. Under these circumstances, the Labor Party whose leaders were sympathetic with the colonies started its process of decolonization in Africa (Falola: 22-93). Tribalism and regionalism prevented a smooth transition. Motivated by regional feelings the political parties became the ideal agencies of tribalism as they played the 'regionalism card'. The parties like NPC (Hausa-Fulani), AG (Yoruba), and NCNC (Igbo) were more concerned narrow gains from independence instead of pan-Nigerian issues. Internal differences and strife heightened with the conservative north more worried about the domination by the more westernized south, the minority groups within each region feared the domination by the larger group. Therefore, the move toward national independence was delayed several times. After a series of conferences and compromises, the 1959 general elections finally saw the alliance of NPC and NCNC and the formation of the first government of Nigeria with Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1912-1966) as the Prime Minister and Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996) as the Governor-General. On October 1st, 1960, Nigeria declared its independence.

#### **1.4. Nigerian literature**

From the history and literary tradition of the Nigerian nation it is observed that the beginnings take its form from oral literary tradition which incidentally happens to be the root of African literature. It began with the oral tradition of the literary griots patronized by kings. Others were storytellers, minstrels, royal bards, warriors who fought in battles singing about the battles. Performance necessitated creativity as such a compendium of proverbs and folklore was born and they became the unknown literary champions.

Bade Ajuwon in his article, 'Oral and Written Literature in Nigeria', states in Nigerian History and Culture, pre-literate Nigeria once enjoyed a verbal art civilization which, at its high point, was warmly patronized by traditional rulers and the general public. "At a period when writing was unknown, the oral medium served the people as a bank for the preservation of their ancient experiences and beliefs. Much of the evidence that related to the past of Nigeria, therefore, could be found in oral traditions." (Ajuwon: 1985)

He commented on the instance of Yoruba community where "as a means of relaxation, farmers gather their children and sit under the moon for tale-telling... that instruct the young and teach them to respect the dictates of their custom". This was the practice across the cultural groupings that form Nigeria today. The credibility of a literary work derives its quality from the rich traditional lore which qualifies as African literature. Nigeria's great strides in the international scenario is due to her rich oral traditions.

In the southern and eastern parts of Nigeria missionary activities in 1840's went hand in hand with literacy mission that worked on indigenous languages to translate the Bible. Benefitted by literacy and Western education a corpus of work came up where stories, fables, animal tales, poems were composed based on oral culture. By 1940's realism replaced fantasy. The University College in Ibadan was instrumental in bringing the themes from fantasy to realism through various calls at conferences, journals and organizing competition. In 1963 they had organized a novel writing competition which provided guidelines for the treatment of various themes rooted in contemporary times and projecting the realities prevailing in Nigeria. The Yoruba writers dealt with themes on poverty, labor, religion and other contemporary

issues. However elements of folklore were woven brilliantly into the text. Chinua Achebe is a prominent example. Emenyonu comments, 'every Nigerian who writes fiction in English today has his foundation in the oral heritage of his ethnic group'.(1971:1-11)

Onitsha market literature and Kano market literature also contributed to the literary climate of Nigeria. Though Nigeria has been plagued with a myriad of problems in the literary scene yet Nigerian literature has come a long way. In spite of all the numerous problems that has troubled the Nigerian literary scene, it could be said that Nigerian literature has come a long way. It has produced writers who are gifted with the likes of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. Achebe's path breaking work '*Things Fall Apart*' translated into more than 50 languages globally or Soyinka's winning the Nobel Prize in literature in 1986 has gone to make Nigeria proud.

Nigerian writers of the new generation have equally stirred Nigeria further and has pushed it to the zenith by clinging many a literary award. Ben Okri won the Booker Prize for his *The Famished Road* in 1991, Helon Habila, Segun Afolabi and E. C Osondu, won the Caine Prize for their *Prison Story*, *Monday Morning* and *Waiting*, respectively. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie a third generation writer has, like Habila, won the Commonwealth Prize for Literature. She has as well won the Orange Prize with her novel on Biafran war, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Beyond setting international literary standards, these writers are cultural ambassadors and cultural translators and are portraying their culture and tradition to the other parts of the world successfully. Professor Charles E. Nnolim who has written extensively on African literature applauds the Nigerian writers and their contribution to the global literary scene and

comments, “Nigeria today stands tall before the international community because of the collective endeavors of her writers.”(Nnolim)

Nigerian literature today occupies an important position and attracts national and international attention. The literature is produced by writers who represent the emerging westernized elites who have been benefited by the European education and can express themselves in English with élan than an indigenous code.

### **1.5. The post-colonial perspective: Issues on identity and nationalism**

‘The postcolonial’ specifies a transformed historical cultural formations that have arisen as an answer to a revamped political climate in the erstwhile dominions of imperial power. It describes a whole new experience of political freedom. The sovereign nation-states now asserts its independence by preparing its own programme for economic and social development and by generating its own, newer cultural forms where earlier the European cultural power determined and decided through its cultural imperialism. Critics debate on the term postcolonialism. Some of them ascribe a historical position as a determiner for a non-European country. Cultures are placed before European colonialism or after European colonial experience as the time line.

In the late eighteenth century, Herder in his book *Ideas on the philosophy of the history of mankind* (1784-91) criticized eurocentricism and the hegemonic role of European culture. Herder advocated the notions of ‘pluralism’ and ‘culture’ that eventually became a representative for marginal voices and their culture. Thereby to trace the roots of post colonialism which is a branch of cultural studies has its origin to the resistance and rejection of European cultural hegemony. According to Raymond Williams ‘national’ and ‘traditional’ and ‘folk culture’ (1983:89) are to be

emphasized upon. The general opinion of taking the European yardstick to gauge as the standard was seriously contested and a new initiative to reform by taking an intellectual and political bearing to tackle all forms of imperial agenda.

The idea of post-colonial literary theory emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing. European theories themselves emerge from particular cultural traditions which are hidden by false notions of 'the universal'. Theories of style and genre, assumptions about the universal features of language, epistemologies and value systems are all radically questioned by the practices of post-colonial writing. (Ashcroft: 11)

Postcoloniality refers to historical, material, and actual living conditions of newly independent Asian, African and South American states within the global system. Postcoloniality emphasizes the impact of geopolitics globalization and economic shifts upon material conditions in Asian and African nation states.

“Postcolonial is useful because the questions that it raises are large and important. It carries with it the implication that what we are talking about has to do with large scale historical phenomena, phenomena involving shifting power relationships between different parts of the world, as well as between people within particular territories. It demands a kind of double awareness: of the colonial inheritance as it continues to operate within a specific culture, community or country; and of the changing relations between these cultures, communities and countries in the modern world.” (Walder: 2)

Postcoloniality also captures the strategies of resistance negotiation and cultural assertion that countries such as India adopt to deal with increasing neo colonial interference and control exerted by developed 'first world nations'. 'Postcoloniality' therefore, is a set of practices that seek, to negotiate a history of colonialism the

present state of political independence and always imminent threat of neo-colonialism in economic, cultural, and social fields. This explains the advent of cultural nationalism and religious fundamentalism, tribalism and regionalism in Asian and African nation states which emerge as social strategies in face of globalization. The reconstruction of native cultures, the revival of folkloric forms in the arts, the newer forms of narrative and rewriting of histories constitute the practice of postcoloniality and post colonialism. (Morrison: 17)

Post-colonialism as it is now used in its various fields, describes a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, professional fields, and critical enterprises. It has been used as a way of ordering a critique of totalizing forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of 'class', as a subset of both postmodernism and post-structuralism . . . ; as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a Third World Intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power; as an oppositional form of 'reading practice'; and . . . as the name for a category of 'literary' activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called 'Commonwealth' literary studies. (Slemon: 16)

### **1.6 Commonwealth literature**

The term 'Commonwealth literature' was an important antecedent for postcolonial literature. It was a term grossly used for emerging literature coming from countries with a common colonial history, a term which was in vogue. In the early fifties English Literature abated being an exhaustive subject. Prior to 1950s writers from South Africa, India, Nigeria, New Zealand were either ignored or assimilated.

The literature that was emerging from nations which had newly gained independence like Nigeria, Kenya and the other older dominions of European settlement like South Africa, Australia were producing works which were interesting and gaining importance outside their national borders. These voices of literary and cultural expression during decolonization produced some remarkable first English writings which had an impact globally. Works in the form of novels by Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao from India in 1930s, Nigeria's Wole Soyinka, Kenya's Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Chinua Achebe's achievement to turn colonial legacy to fictional opportunity which resulted in the path breaking work *Things fall apart*. It was indeed the study of writers coming from European settler communities as well as from countries which were on the process of gaining independence from British rule. Consequently, a fast-growing body of literature was emerging from India, Nigeria, New-Zealand and Caribbean. Attempts were made to locate and identify the works and also make a comparative study of the common concerns that these voices were articulating. A significant observation was that American or Irish literature did not find a place. Hence Commonwealth Literature was associated with some selected countries with a history of colonialism.

The change from colonial to Commonwealth has a purely historical perspective as the status of the colonized countries changed from 'subsistence to equality'. An important assumption of Commonwealth literature held by Western critics was the relationship between literature and the nation. Critics agreed that the new and novel ways, new perspectives enabled the writers to forge their own national and cultural identity.

Interestingly, the nationalistic concerns were considered secondary vis a vis the abstract concerns, like identifying a common goal and common sets of concerns among different nations rather than matters dealing with 'local' affairs in their endeavor to unify under the common banner of Commonwealth irrespective of being produced in any part of the world was assumed to transcend national borders. Though a good number of them had cultural and national issues yet their secret power lay in having an universal appeal.

The texts studied as Commonwealth literature were written invariably in English and the literary quality lay in relation to age-old English classic texts. Hence, the yardstick was the English literary canon in short, a sub-set of canonical English literature. As Norman Jeffares puts it, a Commonwealth writer of value 'wants ultimately to be judged not because he gives us a picture of life in a particular place, in a particular situation, but by the universal, lasting quality of his writings, judged by neither local nor yet national standards. Good writing is something which transcends borders whether local or national, whether of the mind or of the spirit. (Commonwealth Literature: 18)

As Shirley Chew has explained, 'a paradox sits at the heart of the Commonwealth: described as a free association of equal and mutually cooperating nations, it is nevertheless drawn together by a shared history of colonial exploitations, dependence and interchange'. (McLeod: 16) If the study of Commonwealth literature was pursued in the spirit of philanthropic spirit of the first side of this paradox, the critical activity of post colonialism was to concentrate more on the other, the darker side of exploitation and dependence. In the late 1970's and 1980's many critics endeavoured to discard the liberal humanist bias perceived in critics of Commonwealth literature.

Theories relating to colonial discourses have greatly influenced the development of post colonialism. Many writers have tried to show how colonialism has suggested in perceiving the world in a particular way: the subservience of the colonised, and the assumed superiority of the coloniser. The coloniser justifies his stand by perpetuating the idea about the act of colonising by asserting superiority in matters of language, culture, and making the native realise their inferior status. They persuade the colonised to internalise the coloniser's logic, language and make them see and perceive the world in a particular way. In short it is an attempt in colonising the mind where language and power meet. This power dynamics eventually ends up in making the colonised succumbing to the idea that they want to perpetuate. Kenyan novelist N Thiongo Wa Ngugi has been very articulate about the role of language and culture and its relevance to issues on identity Ngugi comments "imperialism in.....and putting blinkers on him to make him view the path ahead only as determined for him by the master armed with the bible and the sword" (Ngugi: 4)

Nationalistic representations were to be seen in different periods as early as 1890s in settler colonies during the phase of high 'imperialism.' The idea of a nation is one of the most important modes of social and political organisation in the modern world and emerged with industrialisation and capitalism which was an important component of imperialism.

To considered each nation with defined borders and maps in a geographical space is a rule in modern times Yet such borders are 'contested, constructed and defended' by groups of people As Ernest Gellner argues in his book Nations and nationalism Nations are not inscribed into the nature of things. (49) Nations like buildings are

planned by people is built upon particular foundations which means like buildings they can rise and fall.

Benedict Anderson defines the nation first and foremost as an 'imagined political community'. (6) Individuals think that each of them happen to be a part of the collective whole and hence share a 'deep and 'horizontal comradeship' (7) while Timothy Brennan in his essay 'The National longing for form' in Nations and Narration. (44-70) That nation refers to the modern nation state and to something more ancient and nebulous –'the Natio' a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging. (45)So central to the idea of nation are notions of collectively and belonging a mutual sense of community that a group of individuals imagines it shares. This feeling of community are the emotive foundations for the organisation, administration and membership of the state, the political agency which enforces the social order of the nations. (McLeod: 69) It is to be observed to foster a sense of national belonging the invention of certain symbols, national traditional icons gives a sense of continuity and 'shared history', 'to collectively give a kind of identity' on which people work upon .

The lens of post-colonial theory as a literary discourse promotes inquiry into the various social and pedagogical issues that emerge with the impact of colonialism. This is observed in embracing the historical past rather than rejecting it. It also studies the role of hegemonic languages in the perpetuation of dominance and control. The belittling of traditional religion, and culture by mapping of diversities into a single dimension, to promote religion and culture within the format of 'standardization': a colonization of the mind. The subsequent result of the dominance of the metropole for a considerable time led to issues on identity: personal and national, that has been thwarted. The colony's attempts in, rejection, imitation, appropriation, mimicry,

abrogation in culture, language, religion led to the construction of new identities: the hybrid, the liminal, the syncretised and the global. All these requires an understanding and re-evaluation of the canonically produced bases of standardization and at the same time comprehend the challenges of the past, and the goals that needs to be set, for effective writing.

### **1.7 Postmodernism as a postcolonial strategy**

Post-colonial writers embrace postmodernity as one of the conditions to locate their place and writings. Both post colonialism and postmodernism oppose totality i.e. defining things in absolute terms which is the western way of constructing truths. Moreover teleology, the defined and determined sign is deconstructed, grand narrative or metanarratives are replaced with petite narratives. Both try to subvert the centre, authority, logo centricism. Language or the sign, the chirographic denominator is replaced. Post colonialism does it from the periphery, whereas postmodernism does it from the centre. Ato Quayson, the Nigerian postcolonial theorist, believes that the two theories are necessarily interconnected, since post colonialists apply postmodern theory to unearth the inequalities that colonial metanarratives impose (Quayson:140). In other words, post colonialists apply postmodern ideas to question the authority of metanarratives to the context of a people struggling to balance the disparate knowledge's of indigenous and colonial experiences into a functional cultural.

A general and wide-ranging term which is applied to literature, art, philosophy, architecture, fiction, and cultural and literary criticism, among others. Postmodernism is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of scientific, or objective, efforts to explain reality. In essence, it stems from a recognition that reality is not simply mirrored in human understanding of it, but rather, is constructed as the mind tries to understand its own particular and personal reality. (Zygmunt: 2003)

Postmodernism is highly sceptical of explanations which claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races, and instead focuses on the relative truths of each person. In the postmodern understanding, interpretation is everything; reality only comes into being through our interpretations of what the world means to us individually. Postmodernism relies on concrete experience over abstract principles, knowing always that the outcome of one's own experience will necessarily be fallible and relative, rather than certain and universal.

Postmodernism is "post" because it denies the existence of any ultimate principles, and it lacks the optimism of there being a scientific, philosophical, or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody - a characteristic of the so-called "modern" mind. The paradox of the postmodern position is that, in placing all principles under the scrutiny of its scepticism, it must realize that even its own principles are not beyond questioning.

### **1.8 Definition of Folklore**

Folklore is common to all people. It is a body of expressive form showcased in a culture within a specific community which comprises the tradition of that culture, subculture, or group. Abrams defines it as “the collective names applied to verbal materials and social rituals that have been handed down solely, or at least primarily, by word of mouth and by example, rather than in written form.” (Abrams: 66). It includes, among other things, folktales, riddles, proverbs, myths, songs, legends and superstitions. Folklore developed in pre-literate societies and still flourishes in communities where the oral culture still dominates. In an oral society before the spread of literacy in the twentieth century, texts were conserved in memory and performed or recited. They were a source of entertainment, instruction and

commemoration. The foremost among prose forms in African oral literature is the myth. African myths explain the creation of the universe, the activities of the gods at the beginning of creation, the essence of all creatures, and their interrelationships. African folklore stress on three functional aspects – practical wisdom, moral range and didactic value that have taken place in Africa in the last few centuries. People have remained in close contact with traditional cultures and institutions and oral traditions continue to be a part of their lives. Oral traditions are useful resources for making writings on ‘Africa authentic’ which further help in the reconstruction of traditional life and in the understanding of Africa.

African literature of the twentieth century has to be primarily seen in relation to the forces that have changed this traditional society. Postcolonial African writers have made an enormous contribution to world literature. These writers engage themselves with the issues and examine newly surfacing identities in the postcolonial climate. Cultural and political hegemonies, new structures of oppression, neo-colonialism that results in economic instability, language appropriation have drawn heightening critical attention.

This calls for a re-reading of post-independence writings from African nations, not as postcolonial texts but as ‘Literature from Africa’, the objectives of which would be to look beyond the restrictions of postcolonial discourse. This shift in the focus of study is to see how writings after independence which might have begun as an attempt at decolonisation, moved beyond to offer an alternative critique of the postcolonial construct. The past (includes period of colonisation) is a collective and continued legacy of the African people, and not just certain fragments of it. Colonisation is a great historical, political and sociological fact for African writers which cannot be

ignored, nor can the postcolonial situation be overlooked. Colonisation is one historical moment that disrupted the continent's natural development, but, the disturbing times instilled a deeper sense of commitment in the writers who could write their stories even during such troubled day. Postcolonial African writers have made an enormous contribution to world literature.

### **1.9 Folklore in Literary Form**

With reference to the postcolonial situation and postmodern stance the African writers in the post colony have resorted to a variety of narrative devices in different genres to articulate their position in the centre/periphery binary, defying the western canon in rewriting their culture. This has been done through a compendium of folkloric devices which subverts the western hegemony. The so called reductionist strategy to 'strategic essentialism' (Gayatri Spivak) through colonial's condemnation of being continental in scope mapping

The relevance of folklore in contemporary Nigerian society cannot be denied, especially the forms known as proverb and folktale. Chinua Achebe was quoted as saying that "proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (TFA: 73). Achebe's ingenious way of using of proverbs resulted in the success of *Things Fall Apart*. Proverbs are fundamental items of African languages and are referred to as the 'grammar of values' They are not only used to make effective points but also embellish their speeches in such way admired and appreciated by their audience. Oratory is a skill appreciated and revered in oral societies. The use of rhetoric in everyday speech is integral in the art of oratory for an accomplished orator to adorn his rhetoric with apt and appealing proverbs. The orator uses proverbs to express universal truths warn, laud, or express harshest truth in a euphemistic manner. It is

also used to settle discords, reiterate themes, to sharpen characterization, to negotiate, and to emphasise on the values of the society he portrays. In the novel, proverbs are “a most powerful and effective instrument for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to another.” (Akporobaro and Emovon 1) It is interesting to note that Achebe made use of folktales with the same objectives in his novels. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe uses eight folktales whose structure and themes parallel and illuminate those of the main story: the story of Okonkwo, a famous warrior and successful farmer whose rise and tragic fall are interwoven with those of his people at a period of transition in the history of the community. The use of folklore in the modern setting permeates in the works of notable Nigerian and other African writers like Amos Tutuola in *The Palm-wine Drinkard*, Flora Nwapa in *Efuru*, J. P. Clark in *Ozidi*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o in *Petals of Blood*, Ama Ata Aidoo in *Anowa* and a host of others. In contemporary writing folkloric devices are remodelled by the authors. Elements of orality like riddles and proverbs which requires performance as a technique has been woven ingeniously into the text in such a manner that they replace verbal interaction to an intellectual one with the reader as the audience. Myth history and storytelling which is a part of the folkloric tradition is incorporated seamlessly in narratives. The foremost among prose forms in African oral literature is the myth. African myths explain the creation of the universe, the activities of the gods at the beginning of creation, the essence of all creatures, and their interrelationships. African folklore stress on three functional aspects practical wisdom, moral range and didactic value. Ben Okri’s abiku myth is used to highlight a contemporary political situation. Likewise myth which is used in many postcolonial writing has a certain political role as it interrogates as well as subverts monologic discourses. Contemporary African writers through the medium

of folklore deal with contemporary issues and propose their vision of a better future. African writers have gone beyond the issues on colonialism and its aftermath, deal with other issues establish themselves and their work in the global scenario yet maintain a distinct African identity. And this calls for a re-reading of post-independence writings from African nations, not as postcolonial texts but as Literature from Africa, the objectives of which would be to look beyond the restrictions of a postcolonial discourse.