CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about which, if I were re-writing history, I should describe more fully and think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses. The middle-class woman began to write.

- Virginia Woolf, in A Room of One's Own.
The phenomenon of women's writing as a distinguished genre in the realm of African literature is about two decades old. Considering this short time span, women writers from black Africa have been able to achieve a remarkable hold on a steadily increasing international readership. There are two major reasons behind their success: first, the awareness of feminist cause has registered a marked increase the world over; and, second, African women have come to realise the tremendous potential of writing as an effective instrument of voicing their grievances and seek redressal to them.

The need to write about themselves was felt by African women due to, primarily the same set of socio-political and economic reasons which propelled their western sisters to take up the pen. This urge to write was further aided by a significant growth in feminist consciousness during the 1960s and 1970s. Nicci Gerrard offers a critical overview of women's writing that followed the feverish pitch of feminist movement during the late '60s and the '70s.

Two decades have passed since the rebirth of feminist movement. Just as feminism has come of age, so too has the writing that grew up under its wing. Feminist literature has entered the mainstream of the 1980s. Entering the mainstream holds a host of opposing interpretations: selling,
or selling out; gaining access, or losing substance; making more money, or taking fewer risks; becoming part of the larger world, or relinquishing the female world. It is 'coping practically and courageously' with the world in which we live, and it is weakly swimming with the tide. It implies success to some and failure to others. Like all mainstreams, the waters are impure and like all success to some and failure to others. Like all mainstreams, the waters are impure—and some women may long to return to the tributary days. But it is futile to feel nostalgic regret for the dramatic certainties of feminism's beginning. We have to live in today's muddy anxiety.¹

Today the task of a woman writer has become more difficult as she writes about femininity more as a politico-ideological phenomenon. For, the feminist movement today is no more a symbol of a unified vision, a singular ideological assessment of woman's life. As Gerrard writes:

Feminism is now so fragmented and dispersed that it is hard to perceive any sense of a common purpose. The original demands of the women's movement were for equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, free contraception, abortion on demand, 24-hour nurseries, legal and financial independence, an end to discrimination against lesbians and the right of all women to define their own sexuality, and freedom from intimidation by threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status. These goals have not been achieved, but they were practical, clear-cut and generally agreed upon. Nowadays, it would be difficult to draw up a list of common aims.²

In spite of suffering from a lack of common understanding, the feminist politics has acquired renewed vigor and
meaningfulness as the 'scientifically' made progress of our world has simultaneously generated the 'waste' of consumerist outlook and excessive materialistic attitude towards modern life. Under the spell of technological marvels being introduced to the human civilization almost everyday, the patriarchal forces and institutions are far better equipped today to legitimatize their oppressive standards and dominating traditions with respect to the female sex.

Feminist thinkers (and writers) have articulated two major responses to the above situation. The cultural feminists argue:

(...)

the problem of male supremacist culture is the problem of a process in which women are defined by men, that is, by a group which has a contrasting point of view and set of interests from women, not to mention a possible fear and hatred of women. The result of this has been a distortion and devaluation of feminine characteristics, which now can be corrected by a more accurate feminist description and appraisal. Thus the cultural feminist reappraisal construed women’s passivity as her peacefulness, her sentimentality as her proclivity to nurture, her subjectiveness as her advanced self-awareness, and so forth. Cultural feminists have not challenged the defining of woman but only that definition given by men. 3

The post-structuralist approach, on the other hand, has been voiced through a rejection of any possibility of defin-
Feminists who take this tactic go about the business of deconstructing all concepts of woman and argue that both feminist and misogynist attempts to define woman are politically reactionary and ontologically mistaken (...). Using French poststructuralist theory, these feminists argue that such errors occur because we are in fundamental ways duplicating misogynist strategies when we try to define women, characterize women, or speak for women, even though allowing for a range of differences within the gender. The politics of gender or sexual difference must be replaced with a plurality of difference where gender loses its position of significance.  

Women novelists of modern times have brought this problematic of 'defining' femininity as opposed to masculinity within the literary arena. Rosalind Miles offers a critique of the women litterateurs' attempts at coming to grip with the whole question of femininity and masculinity, taking into consideration Mary Ellmann's views on the same. Ellmann attempted to identify the presence of sex difference in the texts through 'difference of tone between men and women writers'. According to her, the male tone conveys authority, weight, rationality, knowledge, and control while the female tone stands for intuitiveness, formlessness, subtlety and overintensity. Miles writes:
This opposition tends to stereotype production; some women 'repeat the ritual gestures of sensibility, just as some men repeat those of authority', and never find their own voice.\textsuperscript{5}

In her book, \textit{Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel}, Sydney Janet Kaplan tries to address to the above dilemma of the opposing sets of identifying elements of femininity and masculinity. She argues that in the novels of contemporary women writers there exists a 'feminine consciousness' (as opposed to a 'female tone') that determines the identity of feminist fictions. She explains:

> When I use the term 'feminine consciousness' here, I hope the reader understands that I am using it in a rather special and limited way. I use it not simply as some general attitude of women towards their own femininity and not as something synonymous with a particular sensibility among female writers. I am concerned with it as a literary device: a method of characterisation of females in fiction.... I am not using 'feminine consciousness' even so broadly as to take in the full range of any given woman's consciousness in a novel, but only those aspects of it which are involved with her definition of self as a specifically feminine being. That is why I use the adjective 'feminine' to modify 'consciousness' rather than 'female'. The latter simply refers to the biological condition of being a woman; the former connotes characteristics which, though usually ascribed to women, derive not only from their physical make-up but from a combination of physical traits and socially based attitudes about what constitutes 'femininity'.\textsuperscript{6}
In this light, it would be an interesting study to find out how far the African women writers have been successful to establish the 'feminine' identity in their work by offering what they have as a juxtaposition to the 'masculine' consciousness. But because the feminine experience under African indigenous tradition is often marked by its ubiquitous dissimilarity to the experience of the western woman, it becomes imperative to have a brief overview of African women from antiquity till the modern times.

The status of women in pre-colonial African society was much different from their present position, and of course, from their sisters in the western civilizations. This is evident in the oral history of traditional societies in Africa. But much information is made obscure by deliberate distortions of African oral history by western historians as well as anthropologists. Instead the Europeans created a number of popular myths about African people and dished them out to the whole world to establish the land as a 'dark' continent inhabited by heathens who are far away from the preliminary requirements of any civilization. The great Africanist, Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah, had thus spoken at the First International Congress of the Africanists:
The central myth in the mythology surrounding Africa is that of the denial that we are a historical people. It is said that whereas other continents have shaped history and determined its course, Africa has stood still held down by inertia. Africa, it is said, entered history only as a result of European contact. Its history, therefore, is widely felt to be an extension of European history. Hegel's authority was lent to this historical hypothesis concerning Africa. And apologists of colonialism and imperialism lost little time in seizing upon it and writing widely about it to their heart's content.\(^7\)

The western historians, ignoring all living images of traditional oral culture of African tribes -- like oral poetry and proverbs, traditional celebrations and rituals, tribal art forms and rich spiritual orientation inherent in the life-pattern of the tribes -- projected Africa before the intellectual west as a land devoid of all possible traces of human civilization. Hugh Trevor-Roper, Regius Professor of modern history at Oxford, was opening a series of television lectures in 1963 on "The Rise of Christian Europe". He started with African history, calling it a non-existent phenomenon without any meaning:

Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history (...) But at present there is none; there is only the history of the European in Africa. The rest is darkness... and darkness is not a subject of history.\(^8\)
Organised and well-constructed propaganda of this kind showed that Africa had received its first light of civilization the day European settlers landed there. Historians like Trevor-Roper propagated the myth that the history of the world for the past five centuries had been European history, thereby making the claim that all studies in history ought to be Eurocentric. Trevor-Roper justified such a claim by saying that history of the world must be the history of the Europeans because they, being civilized, could not go on "amusing themselves with the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe." Anthropological Darwinism placed the 'Negro' at the bottom of the ladder of human evolution and thus established the opinion that called for imposing the civilizing zeal of Europe on the indigenous people of Africa.

A brilliant example of the irony in the European's 'discovery' of Africa was an anecdote published in The East African Standard:

In August 1963, a revealing letter written by an African parent calling himself 'Dume' appeared in The East African Standard. The parent said that in the discussion of last term's examination papers with his nine-year old son, the child suddenly asked him, "Baba, why is it that we were taught: Speke discovered Lake Victoria; does it mean that there were no people living in this
country at that time?" The African parent was for a while somewhat perplexed, since he had not looked at the issue in quite those terms before. But then he answered, "Captain J.H. Speke was merely the first European to see Nyanza, which is Lake Victoria now. This does not necessarily mean discovering in the sense of the word as we Africans would have it understood. But to pass your examinations you have to call it discovery." 10

Even the Africans were forced into a mental set-up, through alien education system, religious institutions and administrative structures, where they saw themselves as inferior to the Europeans. In his collection of essays, *Homecoming*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes:

The colonial system produced the kind of education which nurtured subservience, self-hatred, and mutual suspicion. It produced a people uprooted from the masses. Often there was radical discrimination in the allocation of schools, of teachers, of teaching facilities.... It encouraged slave mentality, with a reverent awe for the achievements of Europe.

...So in history people learnt about the rise of the Anglo-Saxons as if they were the true ancestors of the human race. Even in geography, the rocks of Europe had to be studied first before coming to Africa. 11

Despite all these deliberate distortions of history and institutionalised rape of indigenous culture of the African people, meaningful research done by various scholars has been able to salvage the truth, or at least, a part of it.
The western monopoly of accepting only written documents as records of history has been successfully challenged by historians and anthropologists like Jan Vansina and Cheikh Anta Diop in their pioneering studies based on evidence gathered from oral history and other aspects of oral tradition. As opposed to the literate tradition of the west, African history was contained in its oral literature, or what Ngugi calls as 'orature' (as a contrast to 'literature').


Our investigations have convinced us that the West has not been calm enough and objective enough to teach us our history correctly, without crude falsifications (...). (...) Ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt (...). The ancient Egyptians were Negroes. The moral fruit of their civilization is to be counted among the assets of the Black world. Instead of presenting itself to history as an insolvent debtor, the Black world is the very initiator of the "Western" civilization flaunted before our eyes today. Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science....12
Diop warns that an approach of compromise and condescension will never reveal the African past, rather it should be a 'loyal' and 'determined' struggle which will bring out the truth destroying effects of cultural aggression. He emphatically argues:

...it is not a matter of looking for the Negro under a magnifying glass as one scans the past.... The essential factor is to retrace the history of the entire nation. The contrary is tantamount to thinking that to be or not to be depended on whether or not one is known in Europe.19

The primitive societies which existed in isolated groups spread over African continent had a pluralistic community life, similar to the patterns that Engels talked of in his epoch-making discourse on the origin of family. In his book Engels drew attention towards the state of women in the primitive societies of early history, while analysing conditions that preceded the formation of a system from which the present day family took its shape. Engels's discourse is based on two historic works: Lewis H. Morgan's Ancient Society, or Research in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization (1871), and Bachofen’s Mother Right (1861). Bachofen had provided certain hypotheses regarding the origin of family which Engels noted as follows: (i) In the beginning, humanity
lived in a state of promiscuity; (ii) promiscuity excludes all certainties as regards paternity and therefore lineage could only be reckoned through the female line or the "mother right"; (iii) consequently women, as mothers, were the only definitely ascertainable parents of the younger generation; (iv) therefore, women were treated with a very high degree of respect and which, according to Bachofen's hypothesis, was enhanced to the level of the complete rule by women (gynecocracy); (v) the transition to monogamy, where the woman belongs exclusively to one man, implied the violation of a primeval injunction (that is, in actual fact, the violation of the ancient traditional right of the other men to the same woman), a violation which had to be atoned for or the toleration of which had to be purchased by surrendering the woman for a limited period of time. 14

In support of his hypothesis Bachofen cited examples from ancient classical literature to show that the transition from sexual promiscuity to monogamy, from 'mother right' to 'father right', took place among the Greeks due to a number of factors like evolution of religious ideas, intrusion of new deities, creation of new outlook, etc.

In 1871, Morgan came out with his work, a result of his
research on the peculiar system of kinship among the Iroquois, a group of North American Indians. As an inference he found that kinship systems similar to that of the Iroquois were also found among numerous tribes in Asia, and in somewhat modified forms, in Africa and Australia. He further discovered that the gens organised according to mother right was the original form out of which developed the later gens, organised according father right. The significance of his discovery lies in the fact that original mother right gens existed as a stage preliminary to the father right gens of the civilized peoples.

Based on these two hypotheses, Engels said in his study of history of the primitive societies that men lived in polygamy and their wives, simultaneously in polyandry, in those societies. So the common children were common to all the members of the tribe. These conditions later underwent several modifications to give rise to a dominant monogamous pattern. Otherwise, the sexual liberalism that prevailed within a tribe resulted in a kind of promiscuity which Engels explained as:

That the restrictions in force at present or in earlier times did not exist. We have already witnessed the collapse of the barrier of jealousy.
If anything is certain, it is that jealousy is an emotion of comparatively late development. The same applies to the conception of incest.... However, if we eliminate from the most primitive forms of the family known to us the conceptions of incest that are associated with them - conceptions totally different from our own and often in direct contradiction to them - we arrive at a form of sexual intercourse which can only be described as promiscuous - promiscuous in so far as the restrictions later established by custom did not exist. 15

In this light, when claims are made of a prevalent matriarchy among the ancient African societies that was later destroyed by foreign influence on their culture and religion, one may establish the connections (though at times not very well defined) between the isolated continental civilizations in Africa during pre-colonial times, and their original form about which Diop writes in his book.

As early as in the fifteenth century, the Portuguese landed in Africa via the Atlantic, and established the first contact between Africa and the West. As Diop says, one would really wonder as to what these Portuguese explorers saw, what kind of people they might have come across or what could have been their intellectual capacity and technical aptitude. But one thing was sure, that these people were blacks. According to Diop, distribution of the black people over the African continent took place in two phases:
It is generally agreed that by 7000 B.C., the Sahara had dried up. Equatorial Africa was probably still a forest zone too dense to attract men. Consequently, the last Blacks who had lived in the Sahara now presumably left it to migrate toward the Upper Nile, with the possible exception of a few small isolated groups on the rest of the continent, who either migrated toward the south or headed north.16

Diop's hypothesis further presumes that the blacks could have penetrated deeper into the interior areas of the continent to form the 'nuclei' that gave rise to various civilizations across Africa during the later period. But these civilizations would be cut off from the rest of the world as they were separated by great distance from the Mediterranean, and thus would live in isolation. These small African states (or the isolated groups of black population) had strong and well organized socio-political structures during the time when Portuguese, Dutch, English, Danes, French and Brandenburgers started setting up trading centres along the West African Coast.

According to the above arguments, these isolated societies, taken together as a whole can be a legitimate representative of the African past, before the colonists came to overpower them.
But Diop is not too keen to accept Bachofen's theory of a universal transition from matriarchy to patriarchy. He believes:

...instead of a universal transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, humanity has from the beginning been divided into two geographically distinct "cradles", one of which was favourable to the flourishing of matriarchy and the other to that of patriarchy and (that) these two systems encountered one another and even disputed with each other in different human societies...17

He analyses north and south in terms of the mode of production, social organization, language and mythology to ascertain whether they show matriarchy or patriarchy as the dominant social trend. The southern region, Africa in particular, was characterized by matriarchy on a continent-wide scale. Evidence from Swaziland, Botswana, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Congo and other sub-Saharan countries show that in the pre-colonial days women took part in public life and had the right to vote, could become queens and enjoyed equal legal status as that of the men. This equality inherent in their social system saw many African women as rulers: Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt, Queen Candace of Ethiopia, Queen Nzinga of Angola, Cleopatra of Egypt, Queen Aminatu of Nigeria and many others.
Women not only enjoyed social and legal freedom in these indigenous societies, they occupied a respected place in the socio-political set up of those states. Christine Quinta writes:

The recorded involvement of African women in state administration and military defence planning dates back about four thousand years to the civilan rule in Egypt of Nebet during the Old Kingdom (C.3100 B.C.-2345 B.C.). It must be mentioned that the view propagated by European historians that the ancient Egyptians were not African has been systematically and scientifically laid to rest, thanks to the painstaking research undertaken by African historians.... Contrary to the more popularly held view, African women on a continent-wide scale enjoyed great freedom and had both legal and social equality which, among other things, enabled them to become effective heads of state and military strategists.18

This was due to the highly revered position of the mother in these ancient African societies. The mother was held sacred and her authority was almost unlimited. Apart from Egypt, in the states of pre-colonial Ghana and Mali -- as recorded by ancient Arab writers -- the succession was transmitted from brother to uterine brother, or from uncle to nephew, instead of from father to son. Among the Ashanti and other Akan peoples of Ghana, descent is still matrilineal according to the traditional law. In South African region, vestiges of matriarchy still exists
among various tribes despite the effects of colonization and industrialization. In the Cape, among the Xhosa-speaking people, the woman retains her family or clan name. Among the MaMfengu, the MaGcaleka, the MaRarabe and other Xhosa-speaking peoples, a woman retained her family name and practised the customs of her family throughout marriage and the rest of her life. This ensured a strong bond with her own family even after marriage. In the Swazi royalty, the queen mother's village is always the capital. She is in charge of the second highest court, her counsellors may take part in discussion at her son's court (the highest one), and her hut is a sanctuary even for men sentenced to death.19 So strong was the institution of mother and her clan.


During the pre-colonial era, Igbo women participated actively in the political life of their communities mostly as groups or representatives of organizations (...). A number of women organizations at the time were represented in community matters by their leaders. The most outstanding among them was the Otu Umuada. This group comprised all the umuada, the married daughters of the town. The members of this group were dynamic
and powerful, and were well respected by their communities.20

About the Yoruba women’s involvement in political power structure during pre-colonial times, Uchendu says:

There were groups of powerful women who held important positions in Yoruba political system. The ladies of the palace or the king’s wives as they were called; the Iyamode, Iyemoile, Iyemonari and the Iya-le-ori, who were all priestesses, were very close to the king and wielded great power in the society.(...) Yoruba myth also demonstrates that women were rulers too, in Yoruba’s traditional society. (...) The women as a group had a remarkable influence in the political life of the society. The political role of the Egbe Iyalode Women’s Organization was a force in the political administration of the Yoruba society. It constituted a recognised political pressure group in the state. Any representation made by this group to the political authorities were given great attention (...).21

Women’s role in the pre-colonial Hausa society was equally illustrious, as Uchendu goes on to say:

Like their counterparts in the East and West, Northern women were not lacking in the political administration of their areas in the pre-Islamic society. There are records of women who held titles and offices like the Iya, Magajiya and Mardanni before the 1804 Jihad. These women title holders held outstanding positions in the society just as their male counterparts, and wielded power in the administration of their towns. In the 16th century, Queen Amina of Zaria became famous because of her widespread conquests. She extended her influence to Nupe, built many cities, and
received tributes from many powerful Hausa leaders.22

But the freedom - social and political as well as personal - of women registered a constantly diminishing trend under the influence of Islam, and then, during the colonial rule of the respective states by European powers. The devastating influence on the traditional African life, especially on women, of western aggression can be briefly summed up as follows:

The socio-psychological calamity of African slave trade dealt a death blow to the indigenous institutions that highlighted women's freedom and dignity. It was the Arabs who preceded the Europeans in the enslavement of Africans, and they were also the last to practise the trade. As late as in 1983, a United Nations study had discovered that more than 100,000 black African men, women and children still served the descendants of Arab settlers as slaves. The practice dates back to the 11th century when invading Arab Muslims first took black people as concubines and labourers. The female slaves, who could produce, fetched much higher price than male one. The last public auction of slaves in Mauritania took place as late as in 1978.
In the fifteenth century, Whites, Asian and Africans were sold into slavery in Spain. The general enslavement of Whites, however, effectively ended in 1250 A.D. with the revolt of the White slaves against Turkish and Arab masters. Since then Africa became the hunting ground for the slave runners.

African women also fought along-side their menfolk to survive this holocaust that lasted for centuries. They would not only suffer the trauma of being removed from their motherland, but also be stripped of the dignified position they occupied in their own communities. Most humiliating came in the shape of their becoming sexual prey to their captors. Thus, the slave-runners became the agents who brought disgrace to African womanhood. It is interesting to note that even the missionaries from Europe joined the trade. In the Congo the Catholic priests from Portugal, whose mission was to eradicate the traditional religion of the Africans and substitute their own, were not only among the most active slave traders who owned ships but also had their own harems of enslaved girls.

Centuries later, the history of African slave trade played a dangerous role in the psyche of Africans whom the
West portrayed as people with 'inferior' or 'no' culture. The Africans were reminded again and again through their exposure to the western system of education and culture that the White man was once their absolute master. This generated a deep-rooted inferiority complex in the African psyche in modern times.

The spread of new religions in Africa also negatively affected the status of women. Diop writes in The Cultural Unity of Black Africa:

The African who has been converted to Islam is automatically ruled at least as far as his inheritance is concerned by the patriarchal regime. It is the same with the Christian, whether Protestant or Catholic.24

After Islam, came the Christian Europe to initiate the 'pagans' of Africa to the light of religion. But Christian missionaries to a great extent confused the natives with their message of the new religion. Africans under oral tradition did not have any concept of hell and heaven. They did believe in spirits but the life in the spiritual world was perceived as a continuation of the greater life force that bound the human world with that of the spirits. According to the indigenous faith, the spirits shared all the activities of the living world. The European missionaries,
knowing that the Africans were deeply spiritual, used the concepts of hell and heaven as a terror campaign and goaded them to embrace the new faith to have 'salvations' and a happy after-life. Dunduzu Chisiza provides an interesting account of the African's attitude to religion:

Our attitude to religion has more often than not been determined by our habitual desire for change. We adhere to a religious faith only so long as it is the only faith we know. If some other faith comes our way we do not insulate ourselves against its influence. The result is that often we are reconverted to the dismay of those who converted us first. Sometimes we linger undecided between two faiths while at other times we just marvel at the claims of various religious persuasions.

Given this view, it was no wonder that Africans soon came under the influence of the new religion. Though the belief in continuation of life after death was present in traditional religions, it never constituted any hope for a better life after death. To live here and now was the most important concern for the African.

But Christian moral code made them change their world-view and they started observing strict moral standards that defined Christianity. New orders like one man could marry only one woman, or restricting girls and boys from joining
community rituals and practices of the indigenous faith that encouraged community life, took its toll on women in the society. Traditional religion, through its encouragement of community life, ensured proximity of the male and female members in the society. This shaped a healthy relationship among both the sexes. But the psychological changes that came with the patriarchal moral code of Christianity influenced a change of attitude towards women. They were seen as inferior beings, potential harbourers of sinful tendencies and agents of moral defilement, and persons who were not to be trusted. The new morality also encouraged sexual repression at the cost progressive features in traditional customs that encouraged a healthy man-woman relationship. Women were consequently placed at the receiving end of such negative changes.

The colonial occupation of Africa was achieved through brute force of superior technology and firepower. In the wake of European invasions, women were the worst victims of the marauding band of armed invaders and occupation army. Qunta cites one example from South Africa:

European colonization of Azania had a dramatic impact on the lives of African women. From being respected members of society with a defined and valued economic, social and political role, they
were reduced to landless farm labourers, domestic servants and perpetual minors.

The South African settler colonial state has, from the time that the first Dutch settlers set foot on Azanian soil (...), both covertly and overtly instigated and maintained measures geared toward the oppression and degradation of African women (...). From the outset Van Riebeeck and his fellow settlers, consisting of the crudest elements of Dutch society, took numerous liberties with the indigenous QhoiSan women, forcing them to become their slaves and concubines. This is how syphilis and gonorrhoea were introduced to this part of the continent.26

Thus, all over Africa, the colonial official's biological needs were satisfied through forced prostitution of Black women. This created a new attitude even among the native males towards their women, who were objectified and the idea of their availability for some consideration took away from the respect and reverence they enjoyed during pre-colonial times.

The new education system was completely westernised and propagated western culture, promoted western mannerisms and moral code. At the same time, it rejected the traditional code of conduct, cultural orientation and religious practices by showing them as inferior and unscientific. Young African boys and girls were thus given impetus to embrace Christian faith, European culture and western customs. This
further diminished the status of women as they now came under the powerful hold of a patriarchal European civilization.

The colonists also introduced a new legal system which hardly had any respect for traditional administrative structures and laws. This resulted in great chaos in the indigenous societies, which could not appreciate the meaning of the new legal system as often it would challenge the traditional authority and moral standards. This further shook the African from his/her root and created awe in his/her mind about the white man and his ways. But the new legal system also provided escape routes to many Africans who would have been declared criminals under traditional system. Women often became easy victims of this dual system of legal institutions.

Another major blow to the position of women was struck by the introduction of a new economy. The colonists introduced a new cash-oriented economy replacing the peasant subsistence economy that was based on simple barter system. The traditional economy never encouraged capital accumulation and amassing of private property. The new system, however, reaffirmed the notion of male superiority in the
society as they were the chief wage earners in the new family system. Increase in the individualistic traits under the new culture added further dimensions to the process of accumulation. Ngugi makes a very touching description in *Homecoming*:

There is no area of our lives which has not been affected by the social, political and expansionist needs of European capitalism: from that of the reluctant African, driven by whips and gunpowder to work in the cotton plantations of America, the rubber plantations in the Congo, the gold and diamond mines in Southern Africa, to that of the modern African worker spending his meagre hard-earned income on imported cars and other goods (razor blades and Coca Cola even), to bolster the same Western industries that got off the ground on the backs of his peasant ancestors and on the plunder of a continent. Yet the sad truth is that instead of braking from an economic system whose life-blood is the wholesale exploitation of our continent and the murder of our people, most of our countries have adopted the same system.27

The new capitalist economy with all its patriarchal bias further pushed women inside the domestic perimeter instead of encouraging them for respectable engagements outside home. These historical, social, political and economic interventions changed the mental universe of the African society where a strong male bias came to stay and manifest itself in various social, political and economic institutions. The worldview of African thus became strongly
influenced by the tenets of patriarchy, reducing women to mere commodities.

However, in the traditional set-up, many a tribe had reflections of male bias. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay observe that in many African societies, women's and men's spheres have been separate traditionally. However, the perimeters of the respective spheres do not remain constant, but vary according to ethnic group, geographical setting, social class and historical era. Many societies had menstrual taboos, keeping women apart in menstrual huts. Some secret societies were open only to post-menopausal women, and other male societies were designed to ensure women's submission.28

It may be inferred from above arguments that even though pre-colonial Africa was characterized by dominant matriarchy, there were instances of woman's subordination, even if scatteringly present. But colonization of Africa resulted in removal of the powerful influence of all kinds of indigenous institutions, thereby bringing the continent under dominating influence of patriarchy in every sphere of life.

Nigerian novelists like Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi,
Cyprian Ekwensi have captured in their works the process of enforcement of these social changes that bore colossal significance for the Nigerians. And in their writing, women have come to occupy a central position. How women were affected by socio-political and economic changes during and after the colonial rule in Nigeria, a country shaken by repeated political upheavals, is a recurrent theme in novels of Cyprian Ekwensi, one of Africa's most well known writers.

Buchi Emecheta, a Nigerian novelist of Ibuza origin, has revolutionised the domain of Nigerian women's fiction by her subtle but bold handling of sensitive themes that focus on woman's predicaments - social, political and economic. Emecheta has achieved the remarkable feat of taking her themes outside the domestic domain to show how the world treats a Nigerian woman out in the open, and how she adjusts herself to the changed reality. But she has equally excelled in evolving memorable characters in her narrative who suffer and struggle, and achieve their victory within the sphere of the household. But what the novelists like Emecheta have really accomplished is that they have successfully registered their claim of providing a 'female point of view' within the domain of Nigerian fiction writing.
The proposed thesis thus tries to ascertain the presence of the 'male' and the 'female' points of view in the works of Cyprian Ekwensi and Buchi Emecheta. However, such an analysis would entail the problem of applying an appropriate theoretical framework. As has been discussed earlier, the social and historical realities surrounding African women are essentially different from those of western women. Though the experience of their oppression as women is universal, obvious contradictions like dominant matriarchy and colonial experience, lend different dimensions to their experience as 'African women'. The novelists have highlighted these contradictions in their portrayal of women.

Expressing this view, Nigerian critic Kolawole Ogungbesan said:

...The writer is a member of the society and his sensibility is conditioned by the social and political happenings around him... (as) these issues form a part of the substance of life within which his instinct as writer must struggle.29

Chapter two of the proposed thesis, thus, takes the major contradictions inherent in African women's experience into consideration to evolve a possible response to feminist
issues in African literature. Giving details of how the feminist movement, essentially being a part of the western woman's experience, failed to address to the need of Black and other Third World women, the chapter proposes a different approach with which one could appreciate the woman's experience in Africa.

Chapter three, the first chapter of textual analysis, takes into consideration two war novels; Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace* and Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*, in order to posit women's experience against the backdrop of war.

Chapter four, the second chapter of textual analysis, concentrates on two novels that are located in the urban milieu. In Ekwensi's *People of the City* and Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood*, women characters evolve as they struggle for their survival in the city. The peculiarity of city life, described in vivid details in these novels, adds a different dimension to the experience of Nigerian women.

The last of the textual analyses, Chapter five, deals with women in rural milieu. Through their growing up under traditional lifestyle, women characters in Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* and Emecheta's *The Bride Price* provide ample scope to identify the varying approaches of the two novelists.
In the concluding chapter of the proposed thesis would highlight the difference in the points of view of both the authors in developing their women characters, taking into consideration their varying outlook towards the predicament of women in modern Nigeria.
Notes and References


2. Ibid., p.5.


4. Ibid., p.97.


9. Ibid., pp.7-8.


13. Ibid., p.xvi.

15. Ibid., pp.36-37.


19. Ibid., pp.43-44.


22. Ibid., pp.30-31.


