CHAPTER II
THE MILIEU

This chapter outlines the moral climate in which the literary careers of Toni Morrison and Buchi Emecheta flowered into full blossom. The two writers are living in a transforming time in matters of black women’s position in society which includes their right to decide their own lives, their status in the domestic and social fields of struggles along with many other problems conceded with ‘woman question.’ Thus, this background around the contour of African literature will form an important basis of the thesis. It is worthwhile to mention that the focal points of this chapter rest on the important opinions of some African writers, Black women’s movements in both America and Africa, their trends, black and white feminism, differences between womanism and feminism, etc. All these boil down to the significant aspects of black women’s consciousness, their search for wholeness, their (re)discovery of their own selves and imagination.

For a better understanding of the background of African literature, the viewpoints of some important African writers are worth discussing. First, the choice of the language plays a pivotal role whenever we approach any form of writing with special reference to the history of colonialism and decolonization. Some prefer the colonizer’s language but the others cannot accept any other language other than their own native languages.

In 1964, Chinua Achebe in a speech entitled “The African Writer and the English Language” said, “Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else’s? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a
guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it” (Thiong’o 2007: 7).

Further, Achebe also discusses the overall position of a colonized writer who writes in the colonizer’s language. But it is nothing like a copycat attitude. It is more like a synthesis of the essence of both cultures and mediums with something more universal in outlook and appeal. To quote him:

I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral but altered to suit new African surroundings. (Ashcroft 2008: 264)

Interestingly Ngugi wa Thiong’o has a different opinion on the choice and use of language. It is because of the fact that he considers language as “the most important vehicle through which [colonial] power fascinates and held prisoner” the colonized people where the “bullet was the means of physical subjugation” whereas language “was the means of spiritual subjugation” (265). He further argues and also clearly refuses to adopt the language of the colonial master. Thus, he questions compassionately: “Why, we may ask, should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed by taking from his mother-tongue to enrich other tongue?” (264).

There is one major reason for the difference in the approach towards the use of English language by these two important twentieth century African writers – Achebe and Ngugi. It lies on their respective community’s different experiences of colonialism and decolonization. Achebe’s Nigeria (West Africa) experienced the indirect British rule and so it had minimal impact upon the
local culture. Unfortunately, Ngugi’s Kenya (East Africa) endured the worst kind of Imperial rule where not only lands but natives became sellable commodities that later resulted to the vicious agitations such as the Mau Mau rebellion for independence.

Irrespective of the choice of language, whether native or borrowed, one thing is very clear. It is a fact that the writers are eager to continue writing. Another fact that remains static is that only when these writers write about the struggles of the people, the language becomes the real language of the people in the actual sense. One such instance is the new interpretations of Shakespeare’s play, *The Tempest* by Aimé Césaire and other postcolonial writers. They now use the master’s language to express how the savage and deformed Caliban feels towards the colonizer, Prospero. In fact, the classical hero, Prospero has become the villain and Caliban its protagonist.

Secondly, the themes used by the African writers and poets in their works tend to depict the African experience, crisis and contradictions faced by their people extensively. Their hybridized and advanced vision for the ideal society has much significance. They stress on the importance of the necessity to combine the best of both the ancient cultural traditions and the modern innovative ideas. Yet, the contemporary writers express resentment towards the political decadence and misuse. They also hail their solidarity with the peoples who are still under the domination of the racist regime.

Dennis Brutus in his poetry writes about political struggles, apartheid regime and personal conflicts. He also adds the theme of ‘tension’ which is present in his works as partly “a deliberate desire to catch tension” based on his
belief that “tension is the essence of good poetry” (Duerden 1972: 54). He further talks about the interconnection between the political struggle of South Africa and personal conflicts during the apartheid regime. He, however, adds the physical and spiritual presence of South Africa in the symbol of a mistress in his poetry representing both the spiritual country as well as the physical woman. He sums up his various themes in his works as writing “about the political, social conditions, and in a sense condemning them, but not as a politician would condemn them but as a poet who is really just a sensitive and articulate human being” (59).

Other than these themes, Ngugi has also added many more – like land, community conflict, etc. He admits that the land or soil has a lot of effect on the people; and it is “more than the material, it is almost akin to spiritual.” Here, he talks about the ‘river’ that flows between different communities. According to him, it can be “a factor which brings people together as well as being a factor of separation” and so can both unite and separate the peoples (125).

Ezekiel Mphahlele, on the other hand, explains clearly about the emergence of a completely new interpretation and perception of the term ‘African Experience.’ He says that “when people live segregated life, they form their own ways of life” due to their access being denied to the European institutions (99). In other words, the future of African experience and later African writings with the above impact will definitely be quite different. In his own words such writings “would be exclusively African depending on whether the fellow, the writer, has lived in that segregated society; or it will bring in European characters, if he has had such an experience: but it will always
reflect, his play will always reflect this kind of rift between the various racial groups” (100).

Thirdly, the style adopted and used for writing is also significant. The readership of African literature is global in nature. The African literature gives its readers a better understanding of its places, peoples and cultures more efficiently than other forms of communication like newscasts, documentaries, travelogues, etc. Moreover, it presents the lives of the African people living in their native cultures. Further, this evokes genuine feelings of empathy, opinions and sentiments towards the pressing problems these people have been facing and enduring. In fact, it brings out the truth that breaks down the prejudices and beliefs that have clouded the moonlit-beauty of the actual story behind African origin.

Ama Ata Aidoo especially supports the African oral literature strongly which is unlike any western literature. She has totally disagreed with people who “feel that oral literature is one stage in the development of man’s artistic genius” (23). In fact, for her it is the very end and not some means towards an end. Likewise, Mphahlele also talks about the changes that have come over African literature along with its challenges. He writes:

We are dealing in Africa with a number of forms which are alien to Africa. Although we have told stories in the oral tradition before, for centuries, the novel itself is a new medium to Africa … this creates a number of problems … in style and … in the structure of what you want to say …. Poetry … is something that is traditional in Africa, but we are again introducing a modification and a particular determinant of form in using the English language… (104)
Mphahlele certainly feels that ballad as a form is worth trying as it is “a form nearest to the African story-telling which is repetitive and an almost sing-song kind of thing” (105). This very thought encouraged her to try and experiment with this prose style which could be easily collaborated with the poetic form too. Besides her optimistic approach, she nurtures a fear that lingers in her heart regarding the gap between the past, present and future of African literature.

Fourthly, the audience is very important in literature as they being the mirror of the society, involve the to-and-fro flow of ideas between the writer and the society. Likewise, any form of literature is incomplete without the audience or readers because no message of communication is complete without the receiver. But Wole Soyinka has shocked many people with this remark, “This may be unrealistic thing to say, but quite frankly I do not think of any audience when I write” (177). Indeed, this remark becomes quite convincing when we learn about his belief and faith on the presence of like-minded people as well as their support for him. To quote him:

I write in the firm belief that there must be at least a hall full of people who are sort of on the same wave length as mine from the very stratum of society and there must be at least a thousand people who are able to feel the same way as I do about something. So when I write, I write in the absolute confidence that it must have an audience; but production is a different thing … in the actual writing, I don’t think I need bother my head, or anybody need bother their heads at all about the audience, whether Nigeria or the Europe … (177)

In addition, Soyinka also mentions the presence of communal participation. He holds that it is the lively relationship shared between the
conscious performer and the audience which is very vividly visible in the indigenous Nigerian theatre. To quote him:

… the audience in Nigeria are very, very accommodating … they’re really curious… The important thing is that there was something in it, enough to make them want to see it again, and … I think it is true of most of the Nigerian audience … but left to themselves, and given the proper guidance, I have no doubt at all that we have one of the most interested audience in any event, in any cultural event, here in Nigeria. (176)

Further, Aidoo is interested in triggering the interest of the audience to receive accurate and apt feedbacks. She says that “we should have the African intellectuals or whatever you call the crowd, the readership, made more interested in African writers because it is only when you get them reading that you are also going to get them to say whether they like this or not” (25-6).

Similarly, in the context of the spread of the English language as a medium for African writers, Daniel Brutus has focused on the use of simple diction in these words very clearly. He says, for those writers “who are just becoming familiar with the English language – but who one hopes will develop a great love for the language … I think then one must avoid embroidery or anything that could be an interference in, and a barrier against communication between writer and listener” (58).

Finally, the primary aim of any literature is often associated with the didactic purpose, which can be compared to the pleasant scent that is part of a beautiful flower. But this approach has changed a great deal over the past few years. It is mainly due to the evolution in values and outlook of the people.
According to John Nagenda, in African context, the question of “Who is an African writer?” is more urgent and controversial than to discuss what is the writer’s aim and responsibility towards the audience or reader. And so, he reveals his own doubts and asks “[I]is it a person who is a black African, a negro African, or is it anybody writing in Africa, or is it anybody at all writing on African affairs [?]” (116).

In Nagendra’s personal opinion, an African writer is “somebody who lives in Africa and who writes on matters which have got an African slant, in other words, which are based on the continent” which includes “many parts of Africa like Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda,” etc (116). However, he adds that it will be profitable to discuss “writing by white Africans on African affairs … because we could have decided why it was different, or if it was different, and if it wasn’t, why not” (116).

Mphahlele lays more emphasis on this same necessity to accept the importance of white African writers and their works because he says:

… we are not writing fast enough, and there are only few African writers in the field … We certainly should include in this, writing by white Africans like those in South Africa, Nadine Gordimer, Jack Cope, Alan Paton, and Dan Jacobson; also Joyce Carey, Joseph Conrad, Elspeth Huxley, Dorris Lessing: there are artists who should be introduced to the university teaching so that the African student should be acquainted with the image of Africa as represented by Africans, white Africans and black Africans and non-Africans, who are writing out of the African experience. (98)
Thus, this entire necessity is a must to counter African peoples’ psychological subjugation by the colonial experience. In Aidoo’s opinion, “Africans have not even understood that African writers are to be read” (26). She also adds that even though independence is beautiful; and yet “it’s what has happened to our minds that is … the most frightening thing about the colonial experience” (26). For instance, until recently people even thought that “a book was written by a white man” (26). Soyinka’s interpretation of the term ‘duty’ is not didactic or conventional in nature. He says:

My prime duty as a playwright is to provide excellent theatre … I have only one commitment to the public, and that is to my audience and that is to make sure they do not leave the theatre bored. I don’t believe that I have any obligation to enlighten, to instruct, to teach: I don’t possess that sense of duty or didacticism … I believe my primary duty is just to see that I provide excellent theatre for the audience … (172-3)

Quite contrary to the above opinion is Brutus’s view. He feels that basically the reason behind the failure of the contemporary African writers is the lack of substance and essence to confront the actual life. He elaborates his opinion in the context of the African poetry and says, “It is because they don’t want to react to the broader situation, either in terms of South Africa or much wider, and this failure, this inhibition, this failure to respond, I think, is what eviscerates the poems and make them gutless” (60).

Nevertheless, the influence of the general African writers on the contemporary African postcolonial writers is undisputable. Ngugi personally confesses:
What the African writers did for me in a way that no other English writer could do for me was to make me feel that they are really speaking to me: the situation about which they are writing was one which was immediate to me, and also I found for the first time I was talking with my own people. (122)

Yet contrary to this inseparable union, there is also the presence of an unavoidable side effect, which not even Ngugi can deny. He has confessed that “in the African context or in the Kenyan context, the geographical or racial situation adds a special problem which makes it even more difficult for the African writer to really confess what’s in heart of hearts” (127). However, the solution recommended by Ngugi emphasizes the need for a broad global outlook to be practiced by the African writer. In addition to it is “being able to stand a little bit detached; and see the problem, the human problem, the human relationship in its proper perspective” (128).

In a nutshell, Ngugi’s opinion on the African writer’s duty is to observe his society with a commitment and also to confess the truth to the society through his writings. In fact, the writer “has got to be an observer and at the same time a part of him is committed, committed to the situation” (128). For instance, in context of Kenya, “he [the African writer] must be wholly involved in the problems of Kenya; at the same time he mustn’t allow the involvement in that particular social situation to impinge on his judgment or on his creative activities” (128).

The African writers’ movements may be further linked with black women’s movement in America. Some very important movements for black liberation in America were – the Civil Rights Movement, the Black
Nationalism, the Black Panthers, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, etc. Unfortunately, the Black Liberation Movement was all about the interest of black men and their rights. Actually it was against its general claim of being the black peoples’ liberation movement. Here, the black men’s freedom was equated with manhood which was redemption of black masculinity. bell hooks [deliberately uncapsitalized] had rightly commented that “black men overemphasize[d] white male sexual exploitation of black womanhood as a way to explain their disapproval of inter-racial relationships”. In other words, in this demand for freedom, men actually wanted to have indiscriminate access to control over women’s body.

Similar was the case of the feminist movements. Black women who participated in the feminist movements during 1960s often met with racism. Thus, black women’s interest got diluted because ‘black’ was about black man’s racism and ‘woman’ with white woman’s gender issues. In such context, some very unusually shocking claims made by black men and white women prove the presence of a mentality responsible for black women’s much subjugated and marginalized position.

In the first instance, Eldridge Cleaver who was a black misogynist rapist declares:

I became a rapist. To refine my technique and modes operandi, I started out by practicing on black girls in the ghetto-in the black ghetto where vicious and dark deeds appear not as aberrations or deviations from the norm, but as part of the sufficiency of the Evil of a day – and when I considered myself smooth enough, I crossed the tracks and sought out white prey.2
In the second instance, Andrienne Rich has given a rather contradictory claim on white women’s interest on racism by saying, “our white foresisters have … often [defied] patriarchy … not on their behalf but for the sake of black men, women and children. We have a strong anti-racist tradition.” However, bell hooks [deliberately uncapitalized] has pointed out that “[t]here is little historical evidence to document Rich’s assertion that white women as a collective group or white women’s rights advocates are part of an anti-racist tradition.” In fact, every movement of women in America was merely a new and innovative means which were hidden to guarantee the white society’s supremacy. But disappointingly it never meant black liberation or racial equality.

Consequently, the Black Feminist Movement in America had its birth with the foundation of the National Black Feminist Organization, New York, in 1973. It was founded with the objective to develop the black women’s theory. Such theory adequately addresses the way race, gender and class were interconnected in their lives. It further aimed to take action to stop such triple discriminations against them.

Some important myths surrounding black women’s freedom are:
1. The black woman is already liberated.
2. Racism is the primary or only oppression black woman has to confront.
3. Feminism is nothing but man-hating.
4. Women’s issues are apolitical and narrow generally.
5. Feminists are nothing but lesbians.
The first point is challenged as false because the black woman’s financial ‘freedom’ while working outside the home and supporting the family financially is actually not a choice but is inherited under patriarchy. Secondly, racism and sexism for black women need to be confronted simultaneously as they overlap one another inseparably as forms of oppression. Thirdly, black women’s liberation movement is nurturing and embraces the entire black community’s interest which includes black men too. Fourthly, black women’s struggle is not one-sided like white women’s interest upon gender issue. It is multi-layered and complex under race, gender and class discriminations. And finally, the last myth brings out the homophobic outlook towards any women’s movement. Indeed, the silence given towards this issue by many early black woman activists itself reveals the gravity of such myth and prejudice.

The core focus of black feminist writing was based on racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism in their lives. In fact, these writings were a part of black women’s consciousness. And it included a critical dialogue that addresses their experiences and connected them to a larger political agenda. Such political agenda revolved around black women’s freedom from all kinds of bondage.

As a whole, the black feminist movement’s significant impact upon feminist theory is that now the latter includes an analysis of the way race, gender and class as well as sexuality influence women’s lives. However, it’s not the case with the entire black community. The academic community is much aware of sexism and yet the general black people enjoy and harbor what black men’s misogynist outlook practiced in rap music for instance. Only when white feminists and black men could equally respect and nurture the aims of black feminist movement, the world will become a better and beautiful one with much insight and acceptance for everyone.
Black women’s movement in Africa may be viewed in this context. Antonia C. Kalu in “Women in African Literature” has brought up ‘Activist Feminism’ in Africa as a theory that maintains the ideology that only the African women can convincingly explore their experience. It is more inclined towards the in-depth exploration of their exclusionary traditions. However, a lapse of this school of thought is the rejection of the Negritude Movement’s mythical portrayal of African women’s motherhood as an oppressive and offensive portrayal. It is contradictory to the reality where this mythical image is coextensive to her portrayal of her experiences and views.

Next school is ‘Missionary Feminism’ which is more predominated by moral approach. Amanda Berry Smith, a nineteenth century African missionary, has given an interesting claim. She says, “You will often see a great, big man walking ahead, with nothing in his hand but a cutlass (as they always carry that or a spare), and a woman, his wife, coming on behind, with a great big child on her back, and a load on her head.”

However, Smith’s claim is often criticized for carrying her sarcastic tone of a returned native with newly imposed morality of the whites that is ignorant towards the harsh and unsafe situation of women in the colonized Africa. It is indeed far away from the important issues of African feminism – polygamy, falsely glorified womanhood and motherhood, conflict between new feminist ideas and traditions, etc. And African feminism nurtures the most crucial objective of developing an individual identity of African woman. But for such new independence there emerges the need to combine both the traditions and new knowledge of western feminism based on acceptance according to Frank Yerby. Umeh Marie has justified this dilemma. She says, “We are still a long away from that yet, here feminism means everything the society says is bad for
women. Independence, outspokenness, immorality, all the ills you can think of."\(^9\)

According to Brown, neocolonial feminism is not confrontational as it merely focuses on the African woman’s sense of self and identity.\(^{10}\) It has debunked the importance given to postcolonial experience and instead argues that mixing of two or more cultural values will result into the absence of a significant African worldview. In other words, it nurtures the value and also acknowledges its belief that pre-colonial Africa had its own significant ideas about women’s autonomy as such that feminism is foreign to African women’s experience. Some writers are – Ama Ata Aidoo in short story, Efua Sutherland in play, and Flora Nwapa in novel. They have successfully managed to develop their themes in such a way that their chosen forms are inseparable from the manner they perceive women and society in general. But the strategy of this school to put African female writers beyond the canon of Africa’s base also backfires. It (re)creates them as an incident in Western Literature on Africa.

On the other hand, “African feminism as a school of thought indulges in the inscription of the African woman not within Africa but also in the context of diaspora.”\(^{11}\) It also asserts her narrative and viewpoints as routes to understand her experience as a woman of African origin. It has adopted an explanatory stance and also emphasizes the understanding of African cultures and social systems by the outsider. For instance, the African-born writer like Buchi Emecheta’s writings exemplify the necessity to awaken African woman’s denial and blindness towards her own oppression within the society. But her works are often accused of being too autobiographical by the European critics and explanatory by the African critics. In Phanuel Egyuru’s words, “the author is defending the position of the African woman before an audience that has
either misunderstood the position or has been ignorant of it\textsuperscript{12} on account of her choice of language and historical approach. And in American context, the works of the Afro-American writers like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth reflects resistance and fight against paradigms of history and experience of black women’s search for self-expression. It includes further their quest for self-identity and harmonious coexistence.

Here, the trend in black women’s movement is not out of context. Barbara Smith in “Towards a Black Feminist Criticism” discusses the significance of the commitment of a black feminist critic in exploring the role of racial and sexual politics upon black women’s development of ‘self identity.’\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, there comes the concept of black women writers to manifest common interests to create and share a common literature about black women based on their political, social and economic experiences as black women. Books by such black women writers embrace black women’s enormous language and cultural experiences. In addition, these books take the black women beyond the confinements based on race or gender too. Overall their works contain rich coalescing of uniquely appealing forms and content which complements the complex nature of the black women’s experiences.

In \textit{The Black Feminist Reader} (2000), the journey of black women has emerged as a marathon of sufferings, oppressions and discrimination since their arrival from Africa into America as mere slaves. In fact, the black woman struggles through various multiple oppressions based on race, gender and class which have become a great heritage of American history in later future. Two important and extraordinary black women were– Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. The former was a self-named and self-emancipated former slave; and the latter was the first American woman to head black and white troops in
battles. Truth had a great impact on expanding the notions of womanhood when she delivered the two significant speeches – “Women’s Rights” (1851) and “When Woman Gets Her Rights Man Will Be Right” (1867). Harriet Jacob’s *Incidence in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) was an eye opener in slave narrative during the nineteenth century.

In the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance marked the beginning of another milestone in black women’s writings. Such unique characteristic was vividly evident in the works of Zora Neil Hurston, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Nells Larsen, etc. which dealt with issues like race, gender, class etc. It was followed by the new literary traditions of Realism and Modernism which was much apparent in the works of – Dorothy West, Gwendolen Brook, Annie Allen, Lorraine Hansberry, etc. – covering the struggles of black peoples in general and black women in particular in a creative endeavor. The ideology of 1960s was to stress upon the necessity of the Afro-Americans to rediscover their blackness and their unity in their blackness. In the 1960s and 1970s, black women as individuals as well as a group issued calls for a transformative black feminism on new issues like sexuality and socio-economic roles in various works like Toni Cade’s *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970) and Angela Davis’s *Women, Race and Class* (1981). Likewise, in the late 1970s and early 1980s “a flurry of writings by black women sought to correct the racial bias of women’s studies and communities and the gender bias of women’s studies and communities within and outside of the academy” (James 2000: 4) Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982) – were important works. Walker also introduced a new term “womanist” for the first time in her seminal book *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983) with the connotation of colored feminism exclusively for black women as being different from the white feminism.
In the late 1980s, race and gender issues targeted towards black women (under the white and male hegemony) were discussed. Some examples were–Katie G. Cannon’s *Black Womanist Ethics*, Jacquelin Grant’s *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus*, and Delous S. William’s *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. In the mid-to-late 1990s there developed a complex kind of black feminism which challenged the clear divisions of monolithic or homogenous nature of white feminism. Such dynamic nature of black woman writer’s journey is expressed with much depth in “Black Feminist Statement” (1977). To quote:

There have always been Black women activists – some known, like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E.W. Harper, Ida B.Wells Barnett and Mary Church Terell, and thousands upon thousands unknown – who have a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and the focus of their political struggles unique. Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters. (James 2000: 6)

In fact, the significance of Patricia Hill Collins’s “Black Feminist Thought” is associated with two types of standpoints that are interdependent upon each other (184):

1. everyday taken for granted knowledge of Afro-American women i.e. experience and wisdom.

2. the more specialized knowledge practiced by the selective few experts who represent the community i.e. education.
In fact, black women’s both the general and specialized types of knowledge combine together to create an extended tool for resistance. However, this tool of resistance involves not merely taking of elements and themes from black women’s experience and culture but more importantly evolve consciousness.

However, the black women have experienced three phases of feminism exclusively. As part of the first wave feminism, Angela Davis in *Women, Race and Class* (1981) has clearly quoted Elizabeth Cady Stanton regarding the dilemma between race and gender oppression among black women. She says, “In two millions of Southern black women are not to be secured the rights of person, property, wages and children, their emancipation is but another form of slavery. In fact, it is better to be the slave of an educated white man, than of a degraded, ignorant black one” (Madsen 2000: 214).

The second wave of feminism was criticized by bell hooks [deliberately uncapitalized] in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* (2009) as it failed to acknowledge the politics between race and gender where the black men dominated the Civil Rights Movement while the white middle-class-educated women similarly dominated the Women’s Movement. In fact, she further adds, “As workers, poor and working class women knew from their experiences that work was neither personally fulfilling nor liberatory – that it was for the most part exploitative and dehumanizing” (Madsen 2000: 210).

As such, the significance of black feminism in America lies in the fact that these black women interpret their experiences in terms of the historical context of slavery. Now, with the coming of the third wave it has become more global and accepting in nature towards other societies.
Now, it is worthwhile to take note on the difference between Black and White feminism. Patricia Hill Collins in “What’s In A Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, And Beyond” has taken up Alice Walker’s stand upon the race and gender oppression that black women are awarded with. It is the ignorance of this core reality by white women that further creates the difference between feminism and black feminism or womanism. Walker says “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” where a black woman is a womanist just as a white woman is merely a feminist. This term was coined by her in 1979 with the general connotation that a womanist was a feminist, “only more common” with “strong, outrageous or outspoken behavior.”

Pearl Cleage defines feminism as “the belief that women are full human beings capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities – intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual and economic”. In the nineteenth century, feminism as a movement was a movement for white-middle-class married women. However, black feminism is related to the position that Afro-American women take up to their movement towards their emancipation globally as well. Unfortunately, the global aspect which has been gifted by white women’s feminism carries the tendency to divert the focus of black women from their immediate issues.

In fact, traditional feminism has ignored the intersectional politics of race, gender and class which is the fate all black women are destined to. And so, only black feminism is capable of recognizing and fighting against such systematic oppression of black women. Such representation also includes the multi-dimensional aspects of the black women’s myriad and diverse experiences. Three important early womanist theologists are – Jacquelyn Grant, Katie Cannon, and Delores Williams. To quote Katie Cannon:
Having struggled so long and hard at the intersection of race, sex, and class, African and American women scholars cannot allow the suspicion of fraudulence to spread and contaminate the creative horizons in womanish research and writing. Staying open-minded as heterogeneous theoreticians may prove to be the most difficult ethical challenge in securing the legacy of our intellectual life.  

Patricia Collins in “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought” talks about Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s useful approach “to clarifying the relationship between a black woman’s standpoint and black feminist thought with the contention that knowledge exists on two levels” (James 2000: 187). On another aspect, for the black women it is all about survival first unlike the white women’s freedom. An important example is Zora Neal Hurston who represents self-reliance and fighting spirit; but also refuses to separate herself from ‘common people.’

Again, the difference between womanism and black feminism may be highlighted in clear terms. According to Patricia Hill Collins in “What’s In A Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond,” it was only during 1970’s that black women broke their ‘silence.’ And in the 1980s and 1990s Afro-American women finally developed their voice to self-define ‘black womanhood.’ However, there were many hurdles in store for them. Oppressions and discriminations based on sexuality, social class, nationality, religion and region brought the complexity and pluralism of their experience.

In addition to the diverse debates upon its multiplicity, there arises the new question whether to call it womanism or black feminism. Such is the basic challenge of accommodating diversity among black women. And according to Alice Walker, a “womanist” is a “black feminist or feminist of color.”
Likewise, Barbara Omolade has pointed out that “black feminism is sometimes referred to womanism because both are concerned with struggles with sexism and racism by black women who are themselves part of the black community’s efforts to achieve equity and liberty.”¹⁷ Thus, womanism and black feminism have both harbored the painful experiences of black women under racism and gender issues.

However, there are certain core differences that separate womanism and black feminism apart from each other. They are: ¹⁸

1. Womanism often is too emerged in the racist oppression that it is unable to recognize gender issues that black feminism fights for.

2. Racial solidarity of being a community of black people as a whole which is present within womanism is different from the opinion differences in the ideology of black feminism. In fact, it also reflects the experience, acceptance and rejection of black people being embraced within black feminism.

3. Womanism is enveloped more or less within the black community based on racial issues while black feminism has both domestic and global political agenda as being based on gender issues.

There are other dimensions of womanism and black feminism too. Firstly, they both need to collaborate the experience and education for the knowledge to understand the complexity behind racism and sexism to work as a political agenda. For instance, by shifting from black women’s oppression towards the institutionalized racism along-side gender-specific oppression both black men and women can grow above the separatist political philosophies of Black Nationalism, Afrocentrism, and Feminism. Also the heterogeneous relationship shared by womanism and black feminism can accommodate
interests of both black men and women as a whole. Indeed, black women’s experience without the acknowledgement of intellectual conflicts and political struggles is an incomplete approach.

In fact, womanism is a cultural aesthetic that embraces a humanistic approach rather than the latter’s examination based on the politics of oppression or the other related issues. It is such that, womanism affirms spiritual and organic side as opposed to the political analysis of black feminism’s conditions of oppression. Further, Walker’s womanism is a reflection of Afro-American women’s culture and struggles for survival. However, it is not to say that womanism and black feminism are entirely different or opposed to each other. Similarly, it is important to alert the reader of the subtle but decisive ideological differences that demarcate them.

It is now important to look upon the triple consciousness or the blackness of black women. According to Toni Morrison in “Unspoken Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature,” Eurocentric based racial discrimination has “marginalized” as well as discriminated both the existence and the acceptance of works of the third world writers (James 2000: 32-3). Some significant sequences of such views from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century are:

1. There is no Afro-American (or third world) art.

2. Even if it exists, it is of inferior quality.

3. Even if it exists, it is of superior quality only when it measures up to the “universal” criteria of western art.
4. Actually, it is not an art but a rich ore that needs an expert Eurocentric-Westerner who can refine its crude originality into complex authenticity of the whites.

The binary oppositions based on racial discrimination is much evident further in the dehumanization of the slaves in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899). The slaves are mostly body parts that continue to be mere part of Atlantic Slave Trade flourished in Britain. In fact, the main purpose of the whites is to illuminate the stark difference between the white colonizer and the “savage” black slaves. The slaves are cannibalistically vile and cunning with no language or voice audible to the civilized readers. The paradigms of the colonizer and the colonized never get fair debate as the marginalized “savage” is never given an individualistic voice either. Indeed, even the slave cargo ship is personified as “she” which is also a symbol of Africa. In other words, it reflects the idea of being vulnerable and weak like a woman who is unable to defend herself physically and socially. Sexism is a common feature crossing boundaries of classism and racism of white and black communities. According to Leah Trit:

Women’s suffering under sexist tyranny is a common bond among all women, transcending the particulars of the different forms that tyranny takes. Suffering cannot be measured and compared quantitatively … but should these two women survey each other without the screen of patriarchal class status, they may find a commonality in the fact that they are both oppressed, both miserable. (James 2000: 134)

In fact, the connotation associated with suffering and oppression is not necessarily the same in context of white and black women’s experience.
Benjamin Barber in *Liberating Feminism* has criticized the women’s movement as “Suffering is not necessarily a fixed and universal experience that can be measured by a single rod: it is related to situations, needs and aspirations” (134). Further the French feminist, Christine Delphy, has pointed out in her essay “For a Materialist Feminism” that the significance of the term “oppression” lies as “the notion of a political origin, i.e., social, is an integral part of the concept of oppression” within the feminist struggle in a radical political framework (135).

Thus, the black women encounter suffering and oppression under racism and sexism. Then there is the treatment of their sexuality, especially in context of rape. Black women are rather exposed to a more hostile form of sexism. In the case of rape, it does not necessarily mean mere physical violation as a manifestation of male power over women’s sexuality. But the black woman being an outsider to the patriarchal order of white society is isolated beyond the white norms. And thus, her rape seems to cloud the hideous double-natured use of rape as a weapon of racial and sexual terror.

Felicity Nussbaum in “The Other Woman: Polygamy, *Pamela*, and the Prerogative of Empire,” has supported the opinion that in the eighteenth century, Africa was “visualized as a woman, and naked mother under the heat of the sun, flanked by devil and lion, carrying gifts to Europe, a pharoah’s head and pyramid in the background, and tropical trees behind” (Hendricks 1994: 141). Similarly, black women also became almost “metaphors of seduction, penetration, and conquest” in the eyes of the colonizer as the wild exotic sexuality of the Other.

In addition, black slave women were more in demand as sexual objects as well as property for “women’s ‘work’ [which] also included sexual services”
according to Paul Lovejoy (144). Consequently, the white slave owners indulged in such unacknowledged polygamous union with these black women to use their wombs as the breeding ground for more slave children. Harriet Jacobs had mocked such mentality in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave* by using the voice of a slave woman. To quote: “Southern [white] woman often marry a [white] man knowing that he is the father of many little slaves. They do not trouble themselves about it. They regard such children as property, as marketable as the pigs on the plantation” (145-6).

According to Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, many literary critics in “Race”, *Writing and Difference* (1994), have defined race as the “ultimate troupe of difference” – as artificially and arbitrarily nourished discrimination in order to produce and maintain the demarcations of power and subordination. Likewise, Barbara Fields, a historian, has opined that for analysis of race in the context of its function and maintenance within specific context is indeed neither natural nor transhistorical in nature. Thus, in the context of Afro-American history, the use of the adjective ‘black’ for their community, experience and voice, etc. has such socio-economic implications associated with gender and class discrimination within racism too. Indeed, the combined force of race, class and gender reflects the total impact black women’s experience in cross-cultural society like America.

On a personal note, Ian Fleming’s *James Bond Series* portray the racist and sexist attitude of whites in general. The movies are almost wild-fantasy of male misogynist freedom through camera lens. Likewise, Hollywood’s globally hot character of Lara Croft in the *Tomb Rader Series* is mere men’s visual interpretation of their hot, sassy and strong female sexual fantasy. Fleming’s particular episode of the dual between two gypsy girls in *From Russia With
*Love* (1957)\(^{19}\) while fighting for the love of a guy is sexist in so many aspects. The description of the girls and their fight by Bond is as a sexist white male spectator. To quote one such narration:

They were both gypsy-dark, with coarse hair to their shoulder, and they were both dressed in the collection of rags you associate with shanty-town Negroes – tattered brown shirts that were mostly darns and patches. One was bigger-boned than the other, and obviously stronger, but she looked sullen and slow-eyed and might not be quick on her feet … Where this girl was a lioness, the other was a panther – lithe and quick with cunning sharp eyes … The muscles of her fine legs looked hard as a man’s. The breasts were small, and unlike the big breasts of the other girl, hardly swelled the rags of her shirt. She looks a dangerous little bitch of a girl, thought Bond. (Fleming 2001: 104-5)

This above narration is followed by more steamy description of half-nude female bodies. It indeed seems like a B-graded film based on a porn video with stripping included:

The girls tore apart and backed away like cats, their shining bodies glinting through the last rags of their shirts and blood showing on the exposed breasts of the big girl … They circled warily, both glad to have escaped, and as they tore off the last of their rags and threw them into the audience. (105)

Unfortunately, the battle and excitement ends unexpectedly when they are attacked by some rival group and Bond turns out to be the hero of the hour typically as expected. He gets the reward from the head of the gypsy troupe who declares, “Zora and Vida are yours until their breasts fall” (109). But Bond
is not into such offer as he thinks that “[h]e [the tribe leader] will need these girls to bear children for the tribe” (108).

On the other hand, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) earns itself great criticism from many black writers for being racist in many levels. Chinua Achebe has accused him of creating an offensive work which thoroughly dehumanized and degraded black existence. Here, they are merely grotesque and howling mob or worse body parts and not individual beings. However they are denied speech of any kind to defend their own experience as well as to accuse or condemn the white masters for their dirty colonizing process. They are described as – “unhappy savages,” “black shapes,” “black shadows of disease and starvation,” “bronze figures,” etc. with cannibalistic tendency and “no sound of human language” as Kurtz argues on behalf of the might of whites. He says:

… we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at ‘must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the might as a deity’ and so on, and so on. ‘By simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded. (Watts 2007: 155)

However, the portrayal of black woman is even more degrading both from racist and sexist perspectives. Kurtz introduces her as someone who does the starch collars of his shirts with perfection and modesty, “I’ve been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work” (119). Indeed, she also represents the wild and exotic native appeal associated with Africa herself. To quote:

She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in
the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul. (168)

Ironically, the black woman’s desperate attempts to be with Kurtz when he was alive as well as after his death are mocked. The man in patches adds, “If she had offered to come abroad I really think I would have tried to shoot her,” as he risked his life so hard to keep her away from Kurtz (168). And opposed to her is the white woman of Kurtz, his fiancée who is in mourning where “[t]his fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed to be surrounded by an ashy halo” with “her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow” (183). Marlow, the narrator is amazed at the power Kurtz had upon these two women from far two ends of the world. However, the only difference is that the black woman saw the dark and savage side of Kurtz filled with selfish colonizer’s mentality unlike the other. Unfortunately, the white woman is still given the luxury by Marlow to remember the false Kurtz she wants to see and believe fully sugar-coated with romantic notions. She believes that Kurtz called out her name just before he died. However, the reality is that in his last moment “The horror! The horror!” was the ultimate truth behind his fear and hatred (178).

Barbara Smith in “Towards a Black Feminist Criticism” has clearly satirized Sara Blackburn’s white-washed racist review of Toni Morrison’s *Sula* that said:

Toni Morrison is far more talented to remain only a marvelous recorder of the black side of provincial American life. If she is to maintain the large and serious audience she deserves, she is going to have to address
a riskier contemporary reality than this beautiful but nevertheless distanced novel. And if she does this, it seems to me that she might easily transcend that early and unintentionally limiting classification “black woman writer” and take her place among the most serious, important and talented American novelists now working.\textsuperscript{21}

Another such instance is William Shakespeare’s \textit{The Tempest}. Here, Caliban symbolizes the vile and savage race. In \textit{Jane Eyre} (1847)\textsuperscript{22} there is his counterpart Bertha Mason. In other words, \textit{The Tempest’s} Miranda is the perfect and ideal beauty while \textit{Jane Eyre’s} Jane is a bit inferior to her in beauty and wealth but still an almost equivalent in the end of the novel. bell hooks [deliberately uncapitalized] in “Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory” has pointed out that early feminism only meant “more” of the problem that has no name where it covers only the middle class, white and educated house-wives. Such narrow and rigid connotations were supported in Betty Friedan’s \textit{The Feminine Mystique} (1963) that voiced against sexism merely for being without any career option for these housewives.

White women’s class knowledge has such intentional ignorance and unacknowledgement when it comes to race. Rita Mae Brown has explained the complex nature of class knowledge and its political implication among white middle-class women in these lines:

Class is much more than Marx’s definition of relationship to the means of production. Class involves your behavior, your basic assumptions about life. Your experience (determined by your class) validates those assumptions, how you are taught to behave, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act. It is these behavioral patterns that middle-class women resist recognizing although they may
be perfectly willing to accept class in Marxist terms, a near trick that helps them avoid really dealing with class behavior and changing that behavior in themselves. It is these behavioral patterns which must be recognized, understood and changed. 23

In fact, much negligence was shown by the white bourgeois feminists towards black women’s oppression and sufferings. Such negative aspect of white feminism creates a certain isolation in women of other class and race groups; and also creates a vacuum within the fight against women’s oppression in general. To describe its consequence bell hooks [deliberately uncapitalized] says:

They did not see us equals. They did not treat us equals … From the time the women’s liberation movement began individual black women went to groups. Many never returned after a first meeting … but has had little impact on the behavior of white feminists towards black women … They make us the “objects” of their privileged discourse on race. As “objects,” we remain unequals, inferiors. (James 2000: 141-2)

For black women, in addition to white male oppressor there are other two more exploiters. Black men may be victims of racism but they are also the exploiters and oppressors of black women. Similarly, white women may be victims of gender oppression but the racial and class privileges they acquire make them eligible to treat blacks as inferior beings. In other words, for black men and white women equality revolves around white men’s status. But such narrow gender and racial insight is of no use for black women’s emancipation.
According to Patricia Hill Collins the foundation of ‘Black Feminist Thought’ is from the experiences of Afro-American women as a group different from anyone who is not black (men) and female (white women). Ruth Shays’s observation on such difference in perspective says: “The mind of the man and the mind of the woman is the same. But this business of living makes women use their minds in ways that men don’t even have to think about” (185). Indeed, Hannah Nelson has affirmed this cruel reality behind the silent and passive black women further in this statement, “I have grown to womanhood in a world where the saner you are, the madder you are made to appear” (185).

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race” has quoted Henry Louis Gates’s argument that states “race has become a troupe of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific belief systems which – more often than not – also have fundamentally opposed economic interest” (Clark 1993: 98). For instance, an apt example worth citing is the fact that in America, until the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, the term ‘race’ actually also was a metaphor for class in an unusual way.

Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre is the eighteenth century bildungroman that is considered as an attempt to portray a “complete female” according to Elaine Showalter in “Charlotte Bronte: The Feminine Heroine.” It has an inclination towards the educated working class woman of Victorian Era in the character of Jane Eyre, the protagonist. She is especially important for her quest for identity as a woman in a patriarchal society. But a (re)reading of this valued feminist novel is rather controversial from the postcolonial perspective. Her description of her counterpart Bertha Mason proves this point abundantly. Bertha with – “a demonic laugh,” “was purple: the lips were swelled and dark;
the brow furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised over the blood shot eyes,” reminded her of “the foul German specter – the Vampire” capable of vile scheming and murderous acts in her madness. In fact, “[w]hat it was, whether beast or human being, one could not,... it groveled seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face” (Kapadia 1999: 258).

Mr. Rochester’s account of Bertha makes her vile and cunningly capable of doing anything evil and dangerous, “Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations? Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and drunkard!” (257-8). His rather unconvincing excuses are amusing. To quote him:

I found her a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram: tall, dark and majestic. Her family wished to secure me because I was a good race; and so did she. ... She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishment .... my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw and inexperience, I thought I loved her. ... a marriage was achieved almost before I knew where I was .... I was not sure of the existence of one virtue in her nature : I was marked neither modesty nor benevolence, nor candour, nor refinement in her mind or manner – and, I married her: gross groveling, mole-eyed blockhead that I was! (269-70)

His final big addition is that “for the doctors now discovered that my wife was mad – her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity” was also five years his senior (271). However, he finds that ten years of her confinement as a lunatic is a burden he has undertaken without any thought but overwhelmed with goodness.
From the academic point of view, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) almost always is studied parallel with Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*. Bertha Mason from the latter novel is Antoinette here. Surprisingly, she, who is the silent, mad and vile first wife of Rochester, gets a voice of her own to defend and project her story of struggles and oppression. The white social norms of the colonizer are represented by the two patriarchs – Mason and Rochester. However, the “creole” concept is not merely a single race unlike as in *Jane Eyre*’s treatment based merely on racial and cultural dimensions. Instead, ‘creole’ carries the icons of division – white, black and colored. It is further subdivided based on places of native creole like Martinique as opposed to English creole like Jamaica. In fact, Antoinette herself as a colored creole is an alien or outcast among the Black creole people of Jamaica.

On the other hand, Jane turns out to be a feminist character representing white-educated woman who gains status with her new-found economic freedom only through inheritance. Bertha/Antoinette is the black feminist who fights back when she gets exploited as a West Indian mulatto under white norms both sexually and financially by Rochester who declared her mad and vile. In fact, the utopia of white women is actually possible only upon the cost of black women’s silent deaths. However, in *Jane Eyre*, the truth behind the sudden shift of Jane from a mere governess to an independent mistress is only through an inheritance. Yet, the discovery of the roots of her emancipation being entangled to slave-trade rather makes it even more ironical and symbolic in close (re)interpretation. It definitely hits the bull’s eye of the colonized setting in the novel.

In “Images of Black Women in Afro-American Literature: From Stereotype to Character,” the black ‘mammy’ figure is described as the most
prominent black female figure present in the southern white literature (Christian 1985: 2). Even though she is complete opposite to the ideal white female character, they share an unbreakable mutual bond based on reliance to one another. Her typical characteristic traits are – black, fat, nurturing, religious, but most importantly an all embracing character who tends to create her identity by giving nurturing services to all. In fact, she is the expanded form of the mythical mother figure of Africa. She is not some mere mother in the physical sense; but also embodies a dignified and responsible nurturing figure. However, a typically ideal white woman in the eighteenth century needed beauty, genteelessness, piousness and if married she needed the black women to flourish her household and also her character in front of the society. And the black women are often portrayed as unwomanly and tasteless compared to such perfectly ideal white woman.

Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With The Wind* (1936)\(^2\) is another significant work. Dilcey represents the soft black mother who even feeds white children like Melanie’s baby when the latter is too weak for the job. Prissy is the opposite of her mother. She brags and talks too much and fickle too. But there is the old mammy – Ellen’s mammy and Scarlett’s mammy who has a very important role of nursing, holding together and preserving the O’Hara household and Tara through every adversity. To quote Scarlet:

> Her [Mammy’s] eyes lit up at the sight of Scarlett, her white teeth gleamed as she sat down the buckets, and Scarlett ran to her, laying her head on the broad, sagging breast which had held so many heads, black and white. Here was something of stability, thought Scarlett, something of the old life that was unchanging her kind black face sad with the uncompromising sadness of a monkey’s face. (409)
During the war with a weak father and an absent mother, Ellen – Scarlett found “the negroes looking up to her with child-like faith, clinging to her skirts, knowing that Ellen’s daughter would be the refuge Ellen had always been” (412). Ellen’s exact words was “[b]e firm but be gentle with inferiors, especially darkies” (426). She found “[t]hose damned nigger lovers daring to come here and taunt her about her poverty” intimidating (529). On the other hand, for Scarlet “[l]osing the darkies isn’t the worst part about this [war]. It’s the loss of the men, young men” but the loyalty of darkies is invaluable in an unusual way (488).

However, contradictory truth is also present for “Mammy would take care of Scarlett whether Scarlett wished it or not” (541). Likewise, Mammy with “[t]he mottle wise old eyes saw deeply, saw clearly, with the directness of the savage and the child, undeterred by the conscience when danger pet” to her baby, Scarlett and gets ready to help the latter in every possible manner (540). And consequently, Scarlett was successful in her deliberate attempt to break-up Sullen-Frank engagement and later married Frank for his prospect and money in order to save Tara. There Scarlett “thought of the kind, gnarled hands of Mammy worn rough in Ellen’s service and hers and Wade’s. What did these strangers know of black hands, hoe dear and comforting they could be, how unerring they knew how to soothe, to pat, to fondle? She laughed shortly” (663).

She is amazed at the Yankees’ inability to grasp the child-like qualities of blacks. She says:

They did not know that negroes had to be handled gently, as though they were children, directed, praised, petted, scolded. They didn’t
understand negro or the relations between the negroes and their former masters. Yet they had fought a war to free them, they didn’t want to have anything to do with them, except to use them to terrorize Southerners. (665-6)

Also, “Scarlett trusted them far more than most white people, certainly more than she trusted nay Yankee. There were qualities of loyalty and tirelessness and love in them that no strain could break, no money could buy” (665-6).

According to Rhett Butler, “Mammy’s a smart old soul and one the few people I [he] know[s] whose respect and good will I’d [he would] like to have” who refused to take money from a mule like him very politely by saying that “she wasn’t a free nigger and didn’t need my money” (837). That’s why he always consulted her in matters of the children. However, she was hardly polite to him until she finally showed her silk petticoat he bought for her giggling girlishly and calling him “Mist’ Rhett” for the first time instead of “Cap’n Butler!” formally.

Scarlett faced many hardships while trying to save Tara. It was possible to do so with Mammy by her side. In her personal tragedy of losing her daughter, miscarriage, and disappointed-dejected Rhett’s departure, she suddenly realizes the need of Mammy for this another hard round of battle to win him back. There is finality of Mammy’s worth in the last few lines of this lengthy classic novel. It says, “Suddenly she wanted mammy desperately as she wanted her when she was a little girl, wanted the broad bosom on which to lay her head, the gnarled black hand on her hair. Mammy, the last link with the old days” (1024).
But, here in this context, what happens to black male writers? Black men have often criticized Alice Walker for portraying the oppression of the black women by black men as minorities unlike by the acceptable traditional white male oppressors. But according to Walker, the black woman writer must be “the voice of the people, but she is also the people” being a black woman. She has clearly stated the marginalized position of black women writers in America in an interview. To quote her:

There are two reasons why the black woman writer is not taken as seriously as the black male writer. One is that she is a woman. Critics seem unusually ill-equipped to intelligently discuss and analyze the works of black women. Generally, they do not even attempt; they prefer, rather, to talk about the lives of black women writers, not about what they write. And, since Black women writers, are not-it would seem-very likable—until recently they were the least willing worshipers of male supremacy – comments about them tend to be cruel. 25

Barbara Christian in “The Race for Theory” has declared that one of the reasons behind the surfacing of Afro-American women’s writing during 1970’s is sexism (James 2000: 20). However, the sexism is not merely triggered by racist white males. Its actual root is the 1960’s connotation of ‘black’ being black male only within the black community. In other words, black women’s plight lies in the connotation of the two terms – race and gender – where race means black male and gender is white women.

Michael Awkward in “A Black Man’s Place in Black Feminist Criticism” has discussed the conflict between black and female perspectives where the former group seems quite myopic towards the universal nature of
black female writers while representing the plights of their black community. He has cited McDowell’s observation regarding the widely circulated androcentric male analysis of the works by important Afro-American feminists like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. To quote McDowell:

Critics leading the debate [about the representation of black men in black women’s texts] have focused on one tiny aspect of their immensely complex and diverse project – the image of black men – despite the fact that, if we can claim a centre for these texts, it is located in the complexities of the black female subjectivity and experience. In other words, though black women writers have made black women the subjects of their own family stories, these male readers/critics are attempting to usurp that place for themselves and place it at the centre for critical inquiry. (96)

In fact, the black feminist critics unlike their counterpart, male writers/critics have only created wider space where both of them can participate as comrades. In this common space they can further exercise more combined efforts for the development and recognition of their black community. For instance, Awkward adds that in Hortense Spiller’s “Mama’s Baby Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” the heritage of a black mother enables to connect as well as discover the black roots among Afro-American males unlike the absent and doubtful identity associated with the father figure (99). Thus, acknowledgement of black women and her struggles will only help built his ‘self-identity’ too.

Chinua Achebe’s much acclaimed postcolonial novel Things Fall Apart (1958) has a very interesting story behind Achebe’s venture into writing. This
book is of particular importance because of its discussion on the fusion of African native features (like oral tradition of storytelling, etc.) along with the European language which gives the best of both literary traditions. He further reveals the significance of the connection of reading colonial novels like *Heart of Darkness* and his decision to become a writer. Such understanding is possible through the cultural function played by postcolonial works. He further says:

I suddenly saw that these books had to be read in a different light. Reading *Heart of Darkness*, for instance … I realized that I was one of those savages jumping up and down on the beach. Once that kind of enlightenment comes to you, you realize that someone has to write a different story. (Watts 2007: 343)

Okonkwo, the protagonist is introduced as the typically strong and masculine patriarch of Africa in these lines:

Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children. But his whole life was dominated by the fear, the fear of failure and of weakness … It was no external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father’s failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was agbada. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that agbada was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion- to hate everything that his father Unoko had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness. (Achebe 1996: 9-10)
Then there is the episode of beating his youngest wife who forgot to cook for him. He beats her in the Week of Peace and is fined by Ezeini, the priest of earth Goddess, Ani. And after that, “inwardly he was repentant. But he was not the man to go about telling his neighbours that he was in error. And so people said he had no respect for the gods of the clan” (22). There is also the tragic episode of Ikemefuna’s killing by his very own adopted father, Okonkwo. He pushes himself too much under the pressure to be not called a weakling. Nwoye, his eldest son is constantly pressurized with his expectations throughout the novel. He has always been a disappointment with the traits of his weak deceased father, Unoko. So, when he discovers his conversion to the white peoples’ religion of Christianity his first instinct is to kill every one of them.

But on further thought he told himself that Nwoye was not worth fighting for. He cried in his heart why he should of all people be cursed with such a son. For him,

to abandon the gods of one’s father and go about with a lot of effeminate men chuckling like old hens was the very depth of abomination. Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye’s steps and abandon their ancestors? … If such a thing were to happen, he, Okonwo, would wipe them off the face of the earth. (100)

Unfortunately, Okonkwo ended up committing a female crime like an ‘agbada’ as his gun exploded and killed a boy by mistake. And he had to flee as last option for he was exiled for seven years for the crime against goddess Ani to kill a clansman which itself was inadvertent. Thus, he landed in Mbanta, his motherland. Here, the village elders accepted and welcomed him with open
arms. But the elder shared his wisdom too. He asked, “Can you tell me, Okonwo, why is that none of the commonest names we give our children is Nneka, or “Mother is Supreme?” A man belongs to his fatherland and not to his motherland. And yet we say nneka – “Mother is Supreme”. Why is that?’ (94). And he revealed later the insight of the truth behind his question for, “A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland” (94-5).

However, the irony is that Okonkwo didn’t learn anything. He kept thinking that “he would have prospered even more in Umofia, in the land of his father where men were bold and warlike” (115). That’s why it was no wonder when he called “the first child born to him in exile Nneka – ‘mother is Supreme’ – out of politeness to his mother’s kinsmen. But two years later when a son was born he called him Nwofia – ‘Begotten in the wilderness’” (115). Likewise, his treatment of his favorite daughter, Ezinma, had gender prejudices involved. He asked his still single daughter to marry in Umofia only. And also he continued to wish that she was a boy instead of being a girl. In other words, it was an open denial of her strong personality as a woman like her mother. With such mentality when he saw the order of his ideal manhood degraded upon his return in Umofio, he ended up committing suicide after killing a messenger of the whites due to an outburst of his anger and frustration. But such death is considered as an offense against the Earth and so he could not be buried by his own people. Okonkwo’s close friend, Obiereka cried out “That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog” (147).

On the other hand, Achebe’s prejudiced male authorship is evident many times in the novel. For instance, Okonkwo has many wives. But Achebe has
forgotten to name them all except his second wife, Ekwefi. She is the one who challenged him after getting a beating from him. She murmurs about his guns being never used and gets nearly shot. It’s comical in first glance but very grave on (re)reading from a woman’s perspective. But there is no denial that she represents a very strong and independent woman:

Many many years when she was village beauty, Okonkwo had won her heart by throwing the Cat in the greatest contest within living memory. She did not marry him because he was too poor to pay her bride-price. But a few years later she ran away from her husband and come to live with Okonkwo. (28)

In addition, Ekwefi was a very unfortunate mother who had ten children but none survived for long. So, when Ezinma looked as if she will finally survive, she dotted her much more. In fact, mother-daughter shared a very special kind of friendship too for “Ezinma did not call her mother Nne like other children … there was something in it like the companionship of equals, which was strengthened by such little conspiracies as eating eggs in the bedroom” (54). No wonder, Ekwefi was not even scared to follow the oracle who took away Ezinma when the latter was sick and almost died.

On the other hand, the play by Ngugi wa Thion’o and Micere Githae Mugo, namely The Trial of Dedam Kimathi (1976)\textsuperscript{27} is based on the historical facts of the Nigerian gorilla freedom fighter, Dedan Kimathi. It is quite contradictory to the limited and prejudiced portrayal of women in Things fall Apart. Moreover, it deals more about the significant role played by women freedom fighters. These courageous and strong women inspire the future generation to realize and continue the fight for Africa’s freedom. One such fearless and determined woman is represented by the character of a woman
between thirty to forty years of age in the play. She has no name in particular which symbolizes any woman of Nigeria fighting for its cause who is a mother and a fighter – all in one. She confesses her past:

I too have lived in the city. I know the life you have described. Fighting … Drinking … I was a bad woman … a lost stinking life … until I heard the call … The call of our family. The humiliated, the injured, the insulted, the exploited, the submerged millions of laboring men and women of Kenya. (19)

However, she reacts quite unexpectedly when the boy calls her “mama” after she gives money. She says angrily, “You want to change masters for a white master! Have you no other horizon? Except to be a slave!” (20).

On the other hand, the plight of a young black girl and her exploitation in various forms within Kenya is expressed by the narration of the girl in the play. She narrates her own plight in this lengthy narration:

I’m … tired … of … running. All my life I have been running. On the run. On the road. Men molesting me. I was once a dutiful daughter. … I ran away from school because the headmaster because he wanted to do wicked things with me … all he wanted was to touch my breasts. So, I left school. I wanted to stay at home and teach myself how to sew or do something with my life. But my father would have nothing of it. He called me an idler and sent me to pick tea leaves for that cruel seller, Mr. Jones. He used to abuse and punish us! I had to run away from home, from my father, from Mr. Jones …In the city it was the boys. Always harassing me … And yet I did not want to starve! I lost my virginity while trying to run away from losing it. How else could I live? … Yet, the money was so miserable. And sometimes they
However, the young boy is mesmerized by the inspiration provided by the woman and her call for revolt. In fact, her voice and speech haunts him time and again until he suggests the girl to join him in the cause and help rescue Dedan Kimathi during his trial. In fact, in the ending of the play they symbolize the future generation inspired to be part of the cause and the fight for freedom. They show protest of the people against the death penalty awarded to Dedan Kimathi through their loud singing. It is soon followed by First Soldier shyly joining the singing and making it more significant and aspiring.

The description of the Kenyan revolutionary women by Johnnie who represents the colonial mind is very important too. He is a sexist to remark that women’s ‘nice legs’ and ‘pretty face’ were their free passports to go anywhere. He further shares his encounter with Mau Mau revolutionary fighter who supported Dedan Kimathi, Wanjiru, when they captured her. He says:

She swore at us, spat in our faces and kicked like a wild goat as we bound her …. She would not eat or drink … she bit my finger. And why? I wanted to see if she really was a woman. Our Africans: Gati, Hungu, Marndanda and even Wambararia, Kimathi’s brother, were frightened of her. (10-11).

But the greatest homage to every woman’s labor and contribution in Kenya while fighting for the cause came from Dedan Kimathi himself in the following lines:

Do you see this woman?
How many tasks has she performed
… How many people has she
Snatched from jails, from colonial
Jaws of death!
How many brave warriors has she
Recruited at great risks!
… When this struggle is over
We shall erect at all the city corners
Monuments
To our women
Their courage and dedication. (72-3)

To sum up, this chapter provides the foundation vis-à-vis the theoretical background of the black female writers. It starts with the general introduction of the umbrella term ‘African literature’ and advances towards the ‘triple consciousness’ of the black women. Such complex and multiple aspects of the black women’s experiences of race, gender and class discriminations definitely have impacted upon their writings. And consequently, both the differences between white and black feminism as well as womanism and black feminism erupt significantly. This may be properly linked with the two writers in question to be dealt with in the subsequent chapters.
NOTES

1 <http://www.mit.edu/~thistle/v9/9.01/blackf.html> (Web. 29 Jan. 2011) is the link of this source/idea.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 <http://www.india-seminar.com/2000/490%...> (Web. 27 Jan. 2011) is the link of this source/idea.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 <http://www.wofford.edu/.._/Toward.html> (Web. 25 Jan. 2011) is the link of this source/idea.

14 <http://www.raceandeducation.com/2008_series...> (Web. 12 Feb. 2011) is the link of this source/idea.

15 Ibid.

16 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25002353> (Web. 19 Feb. 2011) is the link of
this source/idea.

17 <http://www.raceandeducation.com/2008_series...> (Web. 12 Feb. 2011) is the link of this source/idea.

18 Ibid.

19 Ian Fleming, From Russia With Love, (Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2001)


21 <http://www.wofford.edu/..../Toward.html> (Web. 25 Jan. 2011) is the link of this source/idea.


23 <http://www.mit.edu/~thistle/v9/9.01/blackf.html> (Web. 29 Jan. 2011) is the link of this source/idea.


25 <http://www.wofford.edu/..../Toward.html> (Web. 25 Jan. 2011) is the link of this source/idea.
