CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Commonwealth Literature as a heterogeneous product of diverse cultures provides its readers larger perspectives of humanity. It has tremendous vitality and variety and a distinct voice to become a significant discipline of English studies. African Literature written in English, French, and other European languages by Africans has added a new dimension to the commonwealth literature. The use of oral literature has given African flavour and authenticity to modern African literature. The contemporary African writing is greatly concerned with interpreting the more recent implications of a history over four centuries. Knowledge of African history, culture, and religion is essential to understand and appreciate the growth of African literature in English.

Africa is no longer a dark continent and a fantasy world today. Right from the time of Prince Henry, the Navigator in the fifteenth century, Africa attracted the European imagination and it was found both fascinating and repellent.
The present dissertation aims at making a close study of the major themes and techniques used by Soyinka in his novels. An intensive study of his novels reveals that he has dealt with 'African' themes of deep concern in fictional terms through his universalizing imagination.

This dissertation has made a brief survey of the emergence of African novel in Nigeria and of the works of Wole Soyinka and endeavoured to study the mind and fictional art of Soyinka especially his techniques—conventional and indigenous techniques of narration in his two novels. The focus of the study is on the thematic concerns of Soyinka which he tries to present in his novels with a sense of commitment to his society. Some of his profound concerns are the rampant corruption—moral, monetary, and intellectual atrophy and religious apostasy and hypocrisy and social commitment of the African intellectual in cleansing the country of social, economic and political evils—which he has explored fully in his two novels and partly in his plays in fictional terms.

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"The contemporary African writing endeavours to highlight the 'unique and novel' potentialities of the Man of Africa and African experience, its rich culture and mythology."

In the Seventeenth century the British who succeeded the Dutch and Portuguese as slave trade masters had prohibited the trade and decided to establish their rule in West Africa. In 1861 the King of Lagos conceded Lagos to the Queen of England which resulted in the emergence of the colony of Lagos. Different ethnic groups were brought together by the British colonial administration in the twentieth century which resulted in the creation of Nigeria. All the territories of Eastern Nigeria became the protectorate of Great Britain in 1893. In 1900 A.D. Southern Nigerian protectorate was formed by the Royal Niger Company. At the same time Northern Nigerian protectorate was also established. In 1914 the two protectorates and the colony were amalgamated to form the protectorate of Nigeria. The new education made the people in Nigeria to become politically conscious and to protest against economic exploitation. The people
demanded direct participation in the colonial administration. Three national parties emerged in Nigeria on regional lines in 1950's. Under the leadership of Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, the Igbos formed the National Council for Nigeria and the cameroons. The Northern people's party of Hausa-Fulani was forced under the leadership of Badauna of Sokoto Ahmadu Bello, while the Yorubas formed the Action-group led by Obofemi Awolowo.

Yoruba's are the largest ethnic group south of the Sahara. In 1960 Hausa and Igbo alliance established the government. It is generally believed that Yoruba sub groups were united under the kingship of Oyo. Yoruba's have the largest number of divinities, numbering about seventeen hundred. They have above the smaller gods the supreme God, Olodumare, who is remote from the earth. He is omniscient and the Discerner of hearts whom Yorubas like Akan and Ashanti tribesman offer sacrifices and worship devoutly.

Ogun is the god of hunters, blacksmith's, wood carvers and locomotive automobile drivers. There are a number of orishas or demi-gods who are in close contact with its inhabitants. Eshu is the Trickster god, god of the market
place, god without house of worship. Eshuro is a follower of Ife, god of medicine. Yoruba's goddess of Earth is Onile as is Ani for Igbo.

Religious belief is an integral part of the life of Africans. There are four religious cults in the Yoruba tribe: Ogboni for judicial functions, Egungun who worship Amaiyesu to escape death, Gelede who is propitiated to save people from other witches and Epa, worshipped by Yorubas in the north. All the deities are worshipped for fertility, good health, long life, and prosperity. Religious festivals provide great opportunities for singing, dancing, masquerades and mimes. Yoruba's are attracted more towards animal husbandry and trade. They have a spiritual (sentimental) attachment with the land. The land not only provides them with a living but also links them with the departed and the severance of ties with the land is feared to bring disaster.

Africa's contact with the west started towards the end of the fifteenth century when the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama touched the shores of West African coast. But the great phenomenon that perturbed Africa was the slave
trade which started in a large scale in the sixteenth century resulting in wars and conflicts. But, there prevailed temporary calm when the metropolitan European powers decided to stop slave trading and establish their rule in different parts of the continent. Because of illiteracy and lack of script even for vernacular African languages there had not been written literature in Africa for a long time. African literature in English and several native languages emerged in this century with new western education. Contemporary African writing which is but a twentieth century creation, traces the history of African state and records the traumatic experiences of the colonial rule and the crises of the native society in cultural and economic bondage. Poets like Philis Wheatly and George Moses Horton deplored their enslaved condition, readiness to accept the values of the west. African writers have looked to European models and literary conventions to narrate their experiences and to explore the human condition in Africa and at the same time for safeguarding African sensibility.

The theme of protest and conflict dominated the African colonial and pre-independence literature. Negritude movement tried for African psychological emancipation in its attempt to restore to African society and state its pristine
glory. And Pan-Africanism protested against the "otherli-
ness" of African because of self-debasement and advocated
racial co-existence and respect for human personality.) As
Colin Legum observed the increased political awareness helped
greater literary production in West Africa in particular.

The negritudic search for roots endeavours to
rediscover Africa's past. Edward Blyden in his essay 'Afri-
ca's Service to the World' has observed, based on sociologi-
cal, historical, and cultural evidences that African culture
is a donor culture, not a client one. Leopold Senghor's
definition of negritude is broad based as it contains all the
basic values of the African people. Negritude is a conven-
ient term to describe the essence of the African civilization
and ethos. Senghor's definition has inspired many African
writers to combat the onslaughts of colonialism. Colonialism
has greatly influenced African literature and life.

As Levine has stated:

"There is no lack of documentation for the
proposition that the colonial period in Africa
produced several transterritorial political
cultures that survived the transition to independence and that continue to affect the internal and external politics of the post-colonial African states. These trans-territorial cultures are modern rather than traditional in the sense that their participants are mainly the products of the westernized strata of African society. They are elite political cultures involving only a small proportion of Africans, most of whom occupy positions of influence and excluding the politically unsophisticated African masses. These elite cultures rest upon shared political values, common or similar political experiences, common educational backgrounds, and shared nationalist symbols.

It is on the basis of this peculiar development of trans-territorial cultures certain thematic as well as stylistic features of modern African literature can be identified. John Povey has stated that:

"There is justification for declaring that African literature in English is a separate
Colonialism resulted in the Europeanisation of African communities. The new values and habits adopted by Africans did not fit into their cultural background. Moreover the colonists for their traditional customs and rituals branded Africans as primitive and culturally inferior. One positive effect of new education has been that Africa could express itself to outside world about its culture and its problems. African literature in English and other European languages also helped in spreading nationalism and inspired Africans to fight for their political freedom. It has also cautioned the people against western ideas and alien culture affecting their life and cultural identity.

As is a writer in modern European living literature cultivates native literary conventions and acquires others by his interaction with writers of other significant literatures, so has African writer supplemented to his indigenous techniques his acquired tools of western writing in an attempt to universalise his themes. In South African writing the emphasis is on the evils of racialism. While in
Francophone Africa, the emphasis has been on asserting African identity and reflecting assimilation, in the Anglophone Africa the primary concern of the writer is the tensions arising from the co-existence of the two divergent ways of life - the western and the traditional. Some writers like Achebe and Soyinka have examined their past with detachment and are critical about their own society - and rituals which are humanly wrong. They have not totally rejected what is alien but suggested a synthesis of the good of the two cultures - native and foreign.

African writers have adapted the European literary forms and acquired some of the western techniques of narration to record their experiences during different periods, their political concerns and fight for social justice and economic development. Of all literary forms like poetry, drama, prose fiction, African writers have chosen 'novel' to present the ongoing reality and to explore the human condition in Africa.

Mofolo was the first African novelist to write in 1906 in his native language, Sesuto, which was later translated into English under the title The Traveller of the East
and published in 1934 by the society for promoting Christian knowledge. It was followed by Pitseng (1910) and Chaka (1925) which was an account of the great South-African warrior, translated into English in 1931, but appeared in print even before the first novel of Mofolo. In 1911 E. Casely Haford published Ethiopia Unbound and in 1943 R.E. Obeng's Eighteen Pence came out in print. All three African novelists had western education and a certain reverence and awe for Christianity. Peter Abrahams first novel Song of the City (1945) was first written novel by non-white African in South Africa which became popular. Amos Tutotola's Palm Wine Drinkard in 1951 was the first West African novel which gained extensive exposure among Western literary audience. Tutuola is unlike other African novelists in several respects. Tutuola's use of English is notably original and it struck the non-African reader of Tutola's work. The Drinkard misled a number of western literary critics into believing that Tutuola's language would be the language of future Anglophone writers. Dylan Thomas referred to Tutola's language as young English by a West African ...." Tutuola has adopted the loose, episodic, non-sequential structure of the traditional tale to a novel format, and his books are prose epics rather than novels. In the words of Dr. Parrinder, it is a beginning of a new type of Afro-English literature.
African novel though Western in form is African in content and flavour and has also in turn influenced western novels. Anglophonic African novel, Francophonic African novel and South African novel have successfully established their distinct identity as a distinct novel produced in Africa.

At the beginning of the century South African writers were interested in recreating their past as writers in other parts of the continent. Best contemporary writing explores African history for self assertion and to establish its cultural identity. Alanpaton, Peter Abrahams and Lewis Nkosi are concerned with the natural human relationships and believe in the triumphal love as the remedial solution to all human problems. And the modern South African writers like Danjacobson, Nadine Gardimer and Ezekiel Mphahlele sensitively present the prevailing human conditions, class tensions, and racial and gender problems.

Francophone African novelists expressed their bitterness against colonialism humoursly in their novels. African writers in general have dealt with the theme of
exposure of the native society to the west with its consequences in their novels.

African novels present the native society in transition and the ongoing reality in fictional terms also to enlighten the readers outside Africa. Charles Larson in *The Emergence of African Fiction* has rightly classified African novels into five categories based on their thematic concerns:

"a) Novels portraying the initial exposure to the west as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and James Ngugi's *The River Between*, concerned with the Africa's confrontation with the western religion (or) the initial stages of colonial government.

b) Novels concerned with the problems of adaptation to western education such as Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'aventure Ambigue* and Bernard Dadie's *Climbic*.

c) Novels of Urbanization as Cyprian Ekwensi's Lagos novels and the novellas by the Onitsha writers."
The first category of novels are concerned with the clash of cultures and faiths while the second category deals with promoting new values of life. In the third category, the novels speak of urbanization and loss of ethos while the fourth is concerned with the political struggle for freedom and social justice in the pre-independent and post-independent situations. Finally, the last category of novels deals with the individual and collective problems in modern society. In the first four categories of situational novels, the African writer is concerned not with the individual problem but with the common problems of the entire society. In a
situational novel, though the focus is on one or two central characters of the story, the novel is primarily concerned with the group consciousness and the final result is felt by all the people involved in the story i.e., by the whole community. In *Things Fall Apart* the focus is on Okonkwo but the frustration he felt, was experienced by the entire community, and the structure of the novel was also so designed to suit the story line and the nature of African communal experience. Situational novels like Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, James Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* and Sembene Osunane's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* also don't have main characters as the emphasis is on community. Even in Henry James' *The American*, the primary concern is society, not the individual. But a conventional western novel is greatly concerned with the individual and his problems with other individuals and society.

The novel of depth and of imagination is yet to emerge and flourish in Africa. The western form of novel is Africanized by the use of native myths, idiom and oral literature material to make African novel distinctly different from the western novel. African English idiom is employed to record African concepts and expressions and to communicate primarily to its native audience. Tutuola has used his own
African idiom of English though "un English", in his fantastic folklore romances whereas Achebe relied heavily on traditional Igbo speech patterns in the form of proverbs and other cultural expressions drawn from oral literature, to give authenticity and African flavour to his novels and other works. Cyprian Ekwensi has also used Africanised idiom of English and skilfully employed pidgin English to suit his narration and characterisation.

Chinua Achebe finds English inadequate to express certain African religious concepts, African ideas and expressions and so has used African terms with explanation to enlighten the outside readership. Further it can be noticed that 'African English' used in African writing is not a uniform language but with variation influenced by several other African indigenous tongues. Unlike in the western novel there are no elaborate descriptions of nature or landscapes of different terrains in Africa nor effective dramatisation of characters in African novel. Toban lo Liyong in a review of James Ngugi's Weep Not Child has complained that Ngugi has rarely used dialogue to aid his characterisation. And also several other Anglophone African writers of 1950's and 1960's could not present impressive characterization as they are primarily concerned with the collective
consciousness of his society. The character portrayal does not go beyond a functional purpose subscribing only to the slender story line in the situational novel. Gerald Moore observes that the central weakness of Cyprian Ekwensi, is dialogue, plot is non-episodic or usually with less significant events to make the plot in much of the contemporary African fiction. Some novels have events loosely attached in depicting the situation and the ongoing reality.

While the novels of Amos Tutuola present the world of African fantasy, Achebe novels chronologically trace the history of Eastern Nigeria through symbolic events and characters. Unlike the western novel, African novel tends to be didactic with deep sense of commitment to keep social morality. Achebe's novels exploring in depth profound human truths tries to reeducate and regenerate the African society in general and Nigerian society in particular. Eventhough African novels record the traumatic experiences of the colonial and post colonial periods and deal predominantly with the cultural aspect of the traditional society affected by the west, the novels have attracted the western readers too as works of art. It is not the pleasure giving quality but the enlightened exposure of Africa and its cultural heritage that interest the reader outside Africa.
In African fiction the individual if isolated becomes exceptional whereas in the western novel the protagonist's loneliness makes him typical and representative of his society. In the African novel the central character tries to assert his point of view without becoming a total outcast. Majority of the African novelists are not interested in characterisation, technique of narration and the rest of it. According to Eustace Palmer -

"The well made novel is a composite of message and technique"

African novelist endeavours to emancipate African novel from its anthropological cliches and dexterously maintains the dichotomy of context and form of expression. Of the basic themes and concerns of modern African writing, Edris Makward writes:

"The most frequently treated of these are the contact and confrontation of the African with the European's world with all the frustrations and bitterness which result (culture-conflict) the African's experiences in the 'whiteman's
country' and its elects on his behaviour among his own people (Quandary of the Been 'to') the evocation of the African past and more or less critical references to traditional customs and philosophies, the condemnation of colonial abuses".

The novels of Chinua Achebe and Cyprian Ekwensi that appeared in 1950s have depicted the human predicament in Nigeria during colonial and preindependent situations. Achebe greatly concerned about the group identity and African cultural identity in his novels tries to redeem African from the complexes of years of denigration and self denigration. Achebe's two novels of African tradition *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* present a cultural conflict in the traditional society after the arrival of the whiteman. Achebe's novels that speak of Igbo culture, Igbo society and Igbo history and trace the history of Nigeria, seem to suggest that the traditional society fed up with the inhuman rituals and practices and weaknesses of the society has accepted the new faith and accommodated the 'new' Western values of life. Achebe tries to reinterpret the history and the legacy of colonialism for the good of the society. He has used, only
the 'usable past' in his novels. In his first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) Achebe has tried to rediscover the traditional African past by evoking the traditional customs and rituals and to recreate African cultural identity which has been severely damaged during the colonial period. *Arrow of God* (1964) which comes next to *Things Fall Apart* thematically depicts the colonial situation with new education faith and administrative system influencing the society. *No Longer At Ease* (1960) deals with the decline of moral standards due to acquired values of European culture. *A Man of the People* (1966) is set in post independent Nigeria. Achebe himself says that *A Man of the People* (1966) is

"a rather serious indictment of 7 post independence Africa".

The novel is about the corruption, folly and violence in an independent African state. The four novels of Achebe gives a picture of the disintegration of the African society due to its exposure and subjugation to the alien forces. Achebe's fifth novel *Anthills of Savannah* (1987) about corruption and tyranny of the new rule is also an explicit comment on the function of literature in modern Africa, especially Nigeria, cautioning the elite about their responsibility in perfecting
the degraded society. The success of Achebe as a leading African novelist is ascribed to his delving deep into African tradition as to present a new set of values to Nigerians to follow.

Cyprian Ekwensi, another prolific writer from Eastern Nigeria is a novelist to reckon with for his famous novels like *Jagua Nana*, *People of the City* and *Beautiful Feathers*. Ekwensi's novels dealing with the city life as in his short stories, picture the sunny side of life in Lagos which is devoid of all norms of human decency, the social and political conditions prevailing in the African societies and the need for development. *People of the City* presents the political ambitions of the African elite and their confrontations as in Wilson Iyari, the protagonist of the *Beautiful Feathers*, *The Burning Grass* portrays the life in African hamlets, and the pathetic and inhuman conditions of the Fulani herdsmen of northern Nigeria during the colonial period.

Eustace Palmer has observed that

"Ekwensi always mars his work by vulgarizing his style to suit the needs of a mass audience. Although he has been reputed to refer"
to himself as the African Charles Dickens, his literary affinities are really with fourth-rate American sex and crime fiction”.

James Ngugi a novelist from East Africa has presented a different literary scene with the publication of his first novel Weep Not Child in 1964. East Africa suffered for longer period than the western province during the colonial period. East Africans had to face several crises apart from cultural, political, economic and social before it achieved its political freedom. For its limited educational opportunities, and inspiration it got from West African writers, significant literature in East Africa emerged only in the 1960s without a long literary history. Ngugi’s The River Between and A Grain of Wheat have dealt with the conflict of cultures and faiths and economic exploitation. In Things Fall Apart Okonkwo rebels against the whiteman’s administration though unsupported by his own clansmen. So also in Weep Not Child, the Mau Mau rebellion takes place in 1950s to safeguard the local interests and to acquire right over their native land from the whiteman. The River Between though communal and relies heavily on oral history, is a protest against the western education, A Grain of Wheat
records the suffering of the people in Kenya during the state of emergency and of the Mau Mau instigating people to fight against colonists.

Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra* records Amadi's own involvement and experiences during the civil war. Amadi's *Concubine*, *The Great Ponds* and *The Slave* which form a trilogy are set in the similar background of Nigerian traditional culture struggling to reconstruct its present through the past.

Ayi Kwei Armah another East African writer in 1970s inspired by Achebe writes of post-independence era in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* as in his other novels. His first novel *Fragments* is about death, decay and moral degradation in the contemporary society in Africa. His protagonists are visionaries and going through trials and tribulations of the time look forward to a better future. *Why Are We So Best* explores the mind of African elite driven ultimately to debasement and self destruction. As in Achebe's works, Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* presents the historicity of the African state in transition.
Wole Soyinka the novel laurate and a literary luminary in African fiction is incensed with new men in power and the African elite for their effeminity and ineffectuality in guiding the confused lot in Nigeria. Wole Soyinka has made his works sacristic to undermine their political considerations. His first novel *The Interpreters* is innovative in its mode of expression and thematic exploration. His second novel *Season of Anomy* too echoes Soyinka’s concerns of his first novel. Both the novels deal with the African elite who are unsuccessful in their attempt to cleanse the society of corruption of every kind. Soyinka’s two novels have set a new trend in African fiction writing in English with less emphasis on central characters, he evokes the scene in native setting to present the crisis and leaving much to the reader’s imagination. He has also made his novels poetical. His novels have become a vehicle for analysing and commenting upon contemporary life in Africa.

The novelist in Africa is an artist-historian and the cultural antenna of his society. He tries to counter the coloniser’s derogatory remark about ‘raffia skirts’ and infuses confidence in them and bestows dignity on African and his cultural tradition.
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