CHAPTER IV

FEMINISM IN WEST AFRICAN NOVEL

The term feminism signifies action against oppression, discrimination and violence encountered by women. It is broadly described as a belief in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes.

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary,

‘feminism’ is the belief and aim that woman should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim.

Chambers 20th Century Dictionary defines the term ‘feminism’ as,

an idiom or expression characteristic of woman: addiction to feminine ways.

Feminism today is not just the forte of the West, but it has found its way into literatures of other countries also. Male-centred aesthetics and their hegemony of the masculine perspective are now being challenged in and through the writings of African-American women. Black women, being at
once black, poor and female have been victimized by racism, sexism, and capitalism, not only from the White world but also from the men of their own black world. As Barbara Smith observes, the black women are bearers of "geometric oppression" and bear race, gender and class-a triple consciousness. Paul Marshall stands out as a pioneer of the black women's renaissance in the field of Afro-American literature.

In South African context, women in the works of Nadine Gordimer are under serious political and domestic constraints. Their struggle is not totally against their men who are themselves oppressed as helpless, but much against the system.

Feminism seeks to remove gender inequalities and to create an egalitarian society where women are given equal and uniform treatment by the society. But the term was misunderstood giving rise to misconceptions and false propaganda that it is meant to hate the authority of men. The chief objective of feminism as a movement is to accomplish specific goals to bring awareness in women about their just rights and to oppose male domination in all spheres of life of women.
Contemporary feminism is an ideology which tries to define woman's place in the social pattern. In the patriarchal society woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject; he is the Absolute-she is the other. Indeed such a placement and scaling down of woman is the crux of Western feminism.

Feminism as a movement is to check domestic violence and to work for economic development by identifying feminist issues and problems. It also meant to encourage women to assert themselves thereby challenging some of the practices that affected their individuality and subordinated their position in their own society. It means that women too are capable and have the right to make their own decisions and choose their own course of advancement.

Feminism is a notion that cuts the barriers deliberately formed to prevent the progress and affect the interests of women. It worked for the self-realization of women and for parity with men and similar participation in all developmental activities. It is an effort made by a group of committed women writers in single voice to counter women degradation due to their sex discrimination and supposed lack
of individuality. Women writers try to educate women about their condition of life and goals. It is a voice raised against the degrading attitude of men towards women. It sounds more than philosophy and a fight against female sexual oppression and exploitation.

Feminism generally viewed as a constructive effort made to resist women oppression and a commitment to struggle for women's liberation from all kind of atrocities-internal, external, psychological, emotional, socio-economical, political, philosophical and discrimination based on race, class and culture. It aims at conferring dignity, social status on women and it opposes the traditional customs that degrade women and that are detrimental to their progress. In order to curb too much male assertion it has disguised itself as female chauvinism. It sensitized women to advance in life.

According to Gloria Steinem,

_Feminism is no simple reform. It really is a revolution. Sex and race because they are easy and visible differences have been the primary ways of organizing human beings into superior and inferior groups and into the cheap labor in which the system_
still survives. We are talking about a society in which there will be no roles other than those chosen or those earned. We are really talking about the humanism.¹

Pearl S Buck opines that the society exists based on the healthy familial relations, in particular between men and women.

*The basic discovery about any people is the discovery of the relationship between its men and its women.*²

Elaine Heffner feels that the expansion of women into selfhood, motherhood and self-esteem'd individual is possible only through liberation of women.

*Women do not have to sacrifice personhood if they are mothers. They do not have to sacrifice motherhood in order to be persons. Liberation was meant to expand women's opportunities not to limit them. The self-esteem that has been found in new pursuits can also be found in mothering.*³

Susan B. Anthony slyly remarks that there should be parity between the two genders.
Even today in the United States of America women are being discriminated on the basis of gender, colour and economic status. Women with similar qualifications are still paid less than their male counterparts for the same job and further women are restricted in choosing their employment. Woman is harassed and victimized. There is woman enslavement practiced in the closed tradition-bound societies in Afghanistan and women are forced to wear burka from head to toe. Also in India in orthodox societies in different parts of the country, women find similar ill treatment, insubordination and enslavement to so-called tradition and 'shariyath' in Muslim community. Widows are but non-entities in their own family. Though education and cultural reforms have changed the mindset and outlook of the people in some places, the old attitudinal patterns are continued in other places. Widows are still considered as a bad omen in certain modern societies. In orthodox family they are not allowed to perform certain rituals and participate in celebrations.

The status of women in rural areas is different from that of in urban society. In villages women are either confined to
kitchen or allowed to assist their spouse in farming. And they are not consulted in decision-making nor they are allowed to remarry. The Indian society is also basically a male dominated society. Indian Feminism is obviously critical about marriage, orthodoxy and anti-male domination. Even in the United States of America some of the well qualified, English-speaking Indian women after marriage when they join their husbands on H-1B visa face many restrictions. They too are often forced to remain indoors and are subjected to domestic violence and abuse, physical and psychological repression. They are not allowed to take up employment of their choice under the provisions of the H-4 spouse visa and thus are deprived of economic independence. They cannot even get back to their native country to lead independent life.

Women nearly half of the 37.2 million adult population suffer from HIV, a serious threat to mankind as a whole, because of lack of education, economic independence and due to sexual harassment. Kathleen Cravero, Deputy Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) says,

*Increasingly the face of AIDS is young and female.*

*Young women are almost an endangered species in*
Southern Africa from AIDS for several reasons. Many women have no access to education or jobs. They are often economically dependent on men and may not have the power to resist sex, or ask their husbands or partner to use a condom.  

The main HIV risk factor on the increase in women is just because they are loyal and submissive to their husbands though they have illicit relations with other women. Even girls in their teenage are acquiring the virus from affected male because of sexual violence. In South Asian context feminism is described as an awareness of women suppression and exploitation at the place of work and within the family, and it emerged as a conscious effort made by women and men to change the situation and attitude of the society towards women.

A feminist discriminating a traditional woman from a modern woman said that,

a traditional woman in Africa is one who is dumb enough to live with polygamist in a remote village and speak Igbo, Wolof, Twi, Yoruba, or some other African language, while a modern woman is one who
is able to leave her husband move to city and speak / write English, Spanish or French.\textsuperscript{6}

The role of African woman in agriculture, trade and other economic pursuits is constructive and supportive to her family and society. Though she works for more than eighteen hours like men yet she is deprived of her right to property and she cannot make financial transactions independently. Harrison has rightly observed that woman is so heavily burdened throughout the third world that it becomes a Herculean task to redress her grievances in much of Africa.

African women strain more but paid less money. They are vulnerable to serious diseases. Sometimes even elite women are lured by the trappings of sophistication and to maintain social status and for show off, they subject themselves to moral deprivation. Women though equally qualified are denied jobs in the fields of engineering, computer technology, architecture and medicine for no valid reason. Child marriages are common in certain communities adding to their suffering. Female literacy in Africa is poor as in Arab states and south Asia. In Nigeria mostly educated women prefer to become teachers though they have but limited opportunities to progress. Slowly the situation in Africa too is changing. Women are going
for higher education, joining technical courses and also seeking self-employment.

The emergence of feminism can be traced to the early twentieth century when some so called feminist women committed themselves to certain issues of women, such as equal rights, personal freedom, economic independence, parity with men and emancipation from social and familial bondage. Feminists are deeply concerned with and about uplift of women in society. They advocate personal freedom for self-fulfilment. They have even demanded the entry of women into all those domains where men constitute the only work force.

Economic independence is most essential to assert oneself and for personal advancement as held by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the foremost feminist intellectual of the early twentieth century. In her famous book *Women and Economics* (1898), she argued that only when women achieved economic independence, further racial progress would be assured. She supported the idea of married career-women and the modernization of second marriage by assigning house keeping and relegating tasks such as cooking, laundry and child-care at home to professionals.
The younger feminists held the view that the life of women just for some biological differentiation is culturally conditioned for insubordination. Sexual emancipation according to Emma Goldman is required more than the winning of legal rights for women. Gilman saw sex as drain on intellectual achievement and a threat to personal autonomy.

Goldman declares that the greatest shortcoming of the emancipation of woman today lies in its artificial stiffness and its narrow respectabilities, which produce an emptiness in woman's soul that will not let her drink from the fountain of life and that the demand for equal rights in every vocation of life is just and fair. But after all, the most vital right is the right to love and be loved.

It is worth noting that African-American women too have insisted on gender equality. Many early feminist women who once championed the cause of women gave up their struggle after sometime. But a new phrase developed disowning their status. "I am not a feminist, but...." is a phrase that encouraged and organized possible activity to bring about change in society.

Talking about feminism in Africa Professor Amina Mama, one of Africa's leading contemporary feminist scholars,
the Chairperson of Gender Studies and Director of the African Gender Institute (AGI) tells about her personal journey into feminism. She says that she has often been called a feminist, and she has confessed that she has been influenced by Rebecca Mae West. Whenever she does something contrary to tradition and domestic convention, people call her a feminist. Sometimes the term remained unpalatable for its anti-democratic interests. The so-called ‘imperial feminism’ evoked much response from different sections of society and was debated for consensus. African regimes have encouraged gender politics and misrepresented feminism. And African societies too have failed to perceive the concept of ‘feminism’ and its importance in community development. Amina Mama ignoring the antagonistic attitude of the society, as a feminist committed to the cause of women took up the responsibility of bettering the condition of life of African women.

Identifying herself with feminism, Amina Mama says that feminism has emerged as a positive and constructive movement. Feminism is a social commitment to struggle for liberation of women from all kinds of oppression-internal, external, psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical. Amina Mama likes the word ‘feminist’
because it identifies her with a community of confident and radical women, many of whom she respects, both as individuals and for their contribution to the development progressive and harmonious.

Talking about the relevance of womanism to African feminists she said that the term was coined by Alice Walker, an American woman of colour, as a critique of and her response to white-dominated feminism. In the USA white domination is most visible to women of colour like Walker. It is quite evident that the most salient thing to black women living in the West is racism, and they feel like alienating themselves from the white. Even in white-dominated contexts she feels that the white feminism conflicts with the northern-based white women's monopoly of feminism.

Amina Mama wants a delinking of Women's Movements from Feminism in African context. Women's liberation requires thorough addressing of gender injustice form micro-to the macro-political level, and not shying away from any level of struggle. She suggests the ways to address the issues pertaining to the disturbing trend in anti-intellectualism among some women activists. She further tells that much emphasis is on engaging women with theory and analysis from an activist
perspective instead of leaving them to continue to face perpetrating intellectual and epistemic violence against them.

TWENTIETH CENTURY WOMEN LIBERATION MOVEMENT:

Americans earlier thought that women were generally weak and but a means of procreation.

*Some nations believe that women ought to be protected because they are weak, but we know the truth, women must be protected because they have the strength to carry the pains of creation*.

But people who speak of liberation should realize that it is possible only through women’s emancipation. President Sekov Toure feels that in the emancipation of women is the emancipation of men.

African women’s movement gains momentum only when it educates, mobilizes, organizes African women folk successfully. Liberation movements like Anglo LAN women movement, a popular movement for the liberation of Angola united people together and lead to the unification of women for their own emancipation from cultural male-domination. A Conference was held to approve and declare women’s liberation
movement as International Women's Day. But the women's struggle for liberation remained dormant in nineteen twenties.

In the Nineteen Sixties Women's Liberation Movement became popular and appealed to the public conscience thereby created a sensation in the United States of America as a social movement. Women's Liberation Movement developed into two distinct streams. The first was the National Organization for women 1966 (NOW). They were highly traditional with their own strategy to claim equality with men for jobs and to become part of the work force. National conferences were held by this organization and it fought against gender discrimination.

The second was called Women's movement comprising mostly young women graduates from colleges who had been active in the anti-war and civil rights movements. This movement was meant to change the social life of women and encounter male dominated power structure in the society. This was more publicized through sit-ins, street theatres, poetry and songs, speak-outs, irreverent images and slogans.

Historically the black African women are the most suppressed lot in the United States for they are discriminated in their own patriarchal community by their male and racially
discriminated and sexually exploited by the white male and further they are also forced to become subservient to the white woman. This led to African woman's psychological depression, which she has meekly accepted as her fate, destined not to become free individual. The plight of her is ascribed to her economic dependence and her adherence to traditional responsibility of sustaining her family. In nineteen sixty-five the United States government published a booklet entitled The Negro Family- The Case for National Action (1965). The author of the booklet states that in essence, the Negro community has been forced into matriarchal structure, because it is so out of time with the rest of American society, which retards the progress of the group as a whole.

Contrary to the popular opinion, black woman under slavery on the American soil underwent a process of desocialization adopting a new culture and a language. All Black women resisted the sexual advances made by white men and allowed their exploitation only to save and support their family. Many black women realized that together with their men they would have to fight against colour discrimination and economic exploitation by the Whites.
Feminists insisted that violence against women should not become a public political issue like rape, incest, domestic violence and sexual harassment. By early nineteen seventies black feminism progressed and gave impetus to women's liberation movement and thus creating a free space for exploring personal and sexual issues which lesbians felt free to express themselves. Leaders of the movement were scared that lesbians would degrade and dilute the spirit of feminism.

Women Liberation Movement expected good response from black women too. The frustrated women started alienating themselves from their men and black women started showing little concern for the things 'American'. This caused a change in the attitude of men towards women both in America and Africa. Feminist's movements educated women to fight for better treatment and equal wages for similar work. Men were compelled to share the responsibility of the household and child rearing when they went out to work. Gradually by 1980s and 1990s female were treated as equals. Women felt that without another world war the world recognized the intensity of their suffering and put an end to their centuries long degradation and male domination.
AFRICAN FEMINISM:

African feminism is an emerging model, conception of concerns of black women born of female discourse. It deals with sexism, totalitarianism and ethnic prejudice. Prominent nineteenth century feminists such as Sojourner Truth, Mary Ann Shaddcary, Harriet Tubman and Lucy C Laney marked the beginning of Black feminism in the United States of America. They encouraged the black women to emotionally advance and become politically conscious. And subsequently African-American women of twentieth century turned black feminism into a political movement, intellectual voice and vision of fulfillment.

African women became in course of time self-reliant, independent and resourceful. Black feminism emerged as a self-conscious struggle leading to the realization of humanistic vision of a community; as a voice against suppression and oppression; and a revolution anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-elitist. In other words it is for human empowerment, empowerment of black women. Black feminism has revealed black women's historical attention in four core themes-the legacy of struggle, the search for voice, the
interdependence of thought and action and significance of empowerment in everyday life.

Legacy of struggle against the suppression in the society led to the awareness among black intellectuals to think about the race, class, gender differences and women's suffering. It differentiates white women from black women. Search for voice or the refusal of women to remain silenced reveals black women's inferiority and ineffectuality. It comprises four controlling images of a black woman—the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother, and jezebel, which reflect the dominant groups' interests in maintaining black woman's subordination. Their own community and outsiders view black women negatively as well. Portrayal of positive images acts as a source of inspiration and fount of strength to black women.

The interdependence of thought and action is black women's political activism. They have merged the two forms of expression—orientation of views and thought and action as a part of the same process. The thought and action makes black women visualize oppression, bitter experiences, to develop self-defined voice against suppressions and to become self-reliant. The empowerment in everyday life is quite necessary to encounter the challenges pertaining to race, gender, and class
oppression. Collective action is the only solution to eradicate long standing political social and economic inequalities.

Black feminism in the twentieth century got diversified into a national political movement, a movement for transformation and for contemporary awareness. National political movement raises intellectual voice for civil rights, end of terrorism, and adequate standard of living. The growth of black urban community led to the foundation of black women's club movement. Change occurred in the working class in which black women advanced the humanistic vision in black feminist thought primarily within African-American communities. The contemporary period analyzed subjects such as the struggle for education, sexual politics, violence, race, pride, racial, prejudice etc. African women portrayed as overburdened with domestic work and also with caring animals and families, are the negative images which they hated.

Cooper, a black woman, a recipient of an M.A. degree from Oberlin College and a Ph.D. from Sorbonne in Paris works as educator. Her book A Voice From the South (1892) has described the black women's legacy of struggle against racism and sexism by protesting black women's vulnerability to sexual violence. She says that she would beg to add her plea for the
colored girls of the South: the large, bright, promising fatally beautiful class, so full of promise and possibilities, yet so sure of destruction; often without a father to whom they dare apply the loving term, often without a stronger brother to espouse their cause and defend their honor with his life's blood; in the midst of pitfalls and snares, way laid by the lower classes of white men with no shelter, no protection.

Williams viewed the black women not as a defenseless victim but as a strong willed resistor as meanly as she is thought of, hindered as she is in all directions, she is always doing something of merit and credit that is not expected of her.

The period from 1920 to 1960 had not been very significant in protecting the interests of women. Everyday activity of black women reflected some aspect of feminism. Black feminism in the later period articulated black women's agenda and led to the formation of an organizational base to effectively present the themes of black feminism. Black feminism raised its voice against the long-standing illness restricting women's freedom and their participation in socio-cultural activities and in the last quarter of the twentieth century the trends of black feminism fostered an attitudinal change. Firstly, the increasing social class distinction led to the thinking

Catherine McKinnon states that sexuality is the focus point of male power. Radical feminists have grudgingly pointed out that women's suppression is because of the disparity in gender relationship found in sexual asymmetry and the sexual division of labour and in the patriarchal and universal male control and women's sexual procreative capacity. According to Katherine Frank, novels by African women writers are concerned with "...how...the contemporary African woman can negotiate her way between the claims of tradition and modernization."

Most feminists have advocated empowerment of women initially in their family. Motherhood is a theme that dominates the writings of many African women writers who pose a question if women are merely forced mothers or sexual objects. They pointed out women's sexuality controlled by an unbalanced sexual division of labour that manipulates woman's procreative activities on the one hand and on the other woman's body
presented as a pleasure based entity that has either been suppressed or repressed.

Feminist criticism works as a device to analyze feminism further in the context of literature and cultural angularities of different nations. It focuses on women, their biographical, historical studies, women writers and women audience and women’s issues portrayed in individual literature. Hazel Carby’s article, *White Women Listen? Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood* deals with the black women’s historiography reconstituting the power and privilege of black women.

Feminist critics probe into the feminist verbiage. A feminist critic must necessarily be an outsider with an unbiased scholarship fostering intellectual maturity and possible social changes. Feminist concerns uphold patriarchal system oppressing women and subjecting them to sexual exploitation. Feminist critical theory as a formal, legitimate and analytical tool helps in the contextual and structural analysis.

Feminist critics of African literature have chosen African women as slaves to the African traditions for study and probing. African women seem to shout in one voice,
Feminist critics focus primarily the rebellious nature of women to liberate themselves from tradition-bound African society. True feminists, who believe in possibilities, make possibilities happen.

Feminist critics look at Nwapa's Efuru as a reformer than a rebel, an agent of change, even to alter the rules for her own good. Even though the radical feminist goes against African traditions, an Igbo adheres to his culture to keep its organic nature for its strengths and advantages.

Elaine Showalter in his book *A Literature of Their Own* classified feminist theory into Androgynist poetics, Feminist critique, Female aesthetic and Gynocritics. Androgynist poetics emerged in the mid-Victorian women's writings and the main purpose was to uphold the female virtues, women given to imagination without prejudice. Feminist critique analysed the male oriented society subjecting women to oppression and treating women as inferior. Another form of feminist theory manifested itself into the female aesthetics relating to the female
consciousness colliding against her own self; 'something about the body, about the passions.'

Gynocriticism does not approve of female identity and style. It tries to trace the ideological inscriptions and the literary effects of Gender system. Feminism is prominent as a critique to counter in literature the misrepresentations of women struggling for education, for improved economic status for survival, their motherhood in domestic sphere and as responsible members of community to participate in politics and support their men in revolution and of their demand for better treatment by men.

African women have greater roles to perform in the words of Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, “as a writer as a woman and as a third world person”. Feminine writing has developed its own style since it has a specific purpose, a social transformation, and a change in the attitude of male towards their counterparts. And thus feminist scholarship fosters intellectual maturity for social change. The femininistic representation sometimes appears to be harsh and rude but only to caution men who are arrogant and indifferent and inhuman to women and hinder their intellectual growth and social and economical advancement.
African Feminist critics are dogmatic on certain aspects of African feminism, like radical feminism that opposed woman portrayal in literature as non-entity and ineffective being and are keen on exhibiting potentialities of African woman. Honor Tracy, a British woman made implacable observations in her critical review of *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. Achebe himself was impatient with such sarcasm by the Blacks about blacks questioning their integrity and cultural affiliation. He wonders how these bright Negro barristers who talk gullibly about African culture would like to return to wearing raffia skirts.

African literary texts are complex with many intricacies. Our selective and one-dimensional readings are but superficial. Instead of going into the complexities of the text some feminists chose to engage themselves in questioning the selectivity akin to prosecution and declaring the defendant guilty even before the trial begins. The pervasive selectivity of the criticism renders validity, authenticity and legitimacy. Critics of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* are silent about Okonkwo's actions even though he transgressed the norms of the Igbo traditional society and beat his wife in the peace week and was harsh to his women and children.
Okonkwo is rude and gives himself to rage on several occasions. During the Peace Week when his wife Ojiugo goes to her friend’s house to plait her hair and returns late, Okonkwo becomes furious and starts bullying and beating her. He considers her only as an object of subjugation but her intolerance and reaction comes as a rude shock.

Feminists try to shield female characters from thorough scrutiny and reprimand. The illusion of sisterhood that tossed over the complexities of women’s lives in the first decade of the second wave of feminism causing much pain becomes a moral lesson to the feminists. Throughout the literary text women slander, backstab and cause pain to one another. Achebe’s works are an exception since his women are only at the receiving end as victims of violence.

Florence Stratton has observed that the central divinity in Achebe’s Umuofia is represented by Ani, the goddess of earth, but Ani doesn’t protect the interests of women. Though Okonkwo commits an outrage against Ani by beating his youngest wife during the Peace Week, Ani does not punish him for his male brutality. Feminist critics strike a similarity between the Igbo goddess and the policemen. Feminist criticism of
African literature always aims at heralding the emergence of the rebellious African woman.

Women never defend men always since they keep themselves busy in counting the spoils gained on their behalf by the feminists. Family law says that women are always guaranteed three quarters of the property and are the sole custodian of their children most of the time simply by pleading womanhood. For the past forty years men have had a set back and allowed themselves to be browbeaten into submission and castrated by feminists- Rosie O Donnell and Hillary Clinto. Female critics opine that the need to liberate African people from neo-colonialism and other forms of race and class oppression is coupled with respect for certain features of traditional African cultures.

The feminist consciousness craves for recognition of women as individuals in the contemporary African societies. Feminist criticism broadens the literary cannon by introducing the literature of African women in the changed social setup. Western feminist critics also speak of their own heightened awareness and the concerns of the authors and their works. They use sociological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and historical
approaches to give a wider perspective of womanism in African literature.

The Feminist criticism tends to probe into several historical and biographical studies of women of different countries and communities. Feminism remains a positive movement since it has committed itself to the struggle for emancipation of woman from all bondages and forms of oppression—internal, external, psychological, emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical. In the society dominated by the Whites, white women try to assert themselves and champion their causes for the uplift of women in general. Western feminists have a strong feeling that women in different societies are exposed to the onslaughts of the society based on class, race and culture reflected in gender relations.

Most feminists discriminate sex from gender. Sex is understood as a person's biological maleness or femaleness, while gender refers to the non-physiological aspects of sex, a group of attributes or behavioural patterns shaped by society and culture. Some feminists have argued that gender is a sociocultural process involving a complex set of relations that inevitably interlock with other relations of age, race, class, ethnicity, ideology etc.
In Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* in the household of Okonkwo, his first wife occupies prime position even after Okonkwo’s marrying two wives namely Ekwefi and Ojiugo. Okonkwo as a mark of respect never calls his first wife by her name like the other two. Moreover she is addressed as Nwoye’s mother. During the Peace Week, she is the first to offer Kola nut to Ani, the goddess of Earth. Okonkwo eats the food sent by Nwoye’s mother first and then relishes the dishes of the other two wives.

African gender exhibits inequality between women and between the spouses. Gender discriminates one from the other in every respect like education, work, socio-economic status, marriage, decision-making powers, mobility, domestic violence and political participation by African women. Men enjoy all the privileges in the patriarchal society whereas women are mostly the deprived lot.

Educational deprivation is common for gender discrimination, and even for similar work they are paid less. For their total economic dependency on male they can’t go against the will of their men. Extreme chronic poverty is because of large family, economic dependence, lack of viable options outside marriage and a deeply entrenched culture of
male authority which makes domestic violence endemic in Africa. Decision-making is a far-imagined choice to African women. They have their say only in showing the accounts of expenditure related to income and investment.

Participation of women in politics means casting their vote during the elections. They find no proper place or position in the administration except attending election meeting and in participating in the election campaign for the candidature mostly of men. Their services to the family and society go unrecognized and unacknowledged.

In Imperial Leather, Anne Mc Clintock argues that to understand gender one must recognize that,

race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather they come into existence in and through relation to each other— if in contradictory and conflicted ways.  

WEST AFRICAN FEMINISM:

Mother is supreme. Even the patriarchal African traditional society is governed by the female principle. African
woman occupies a significant place though relegated to a secondary place next to male in tradition-bound society unlike in European and Arab countries. Most African women writers do not qualify themselves to be called feminists. Since their feminism does not adequately describe and define their socio-cultural realities, writers like Flora Nwapa and others prefer to be called womanists, a term as suggested by Alice Walker to show their allegiance to the struggle of black women in Africa and Diaspora against racism, sexism, and ageism. Though the West African writers do not conform to the specifications of feminists as set by the western feminists, their works offer realistic pictures of gender issues in a patriarchal society.

Flora Nwapa's first two novels *Efuru* in 1966 and *Idu* in 1970 earned her name and reputation as a writer to reckon with in West African literature. Nwapa continued her career as an educator. She has used Nigerian myths to make her modern stories interesting also to the outsider. She has portrayed strong and individualized women in Nigerian setting in her novels. Her female characters are assertive and decisive to take decisions on vital issues of her own family and pertaining to the social customs.
Flora Nwapa prefers to present the socio-economic and cultural problems from the female point of view with a view to elevating the status of women in their native society. Nwapa's works have identified African women's problems and tried to give remedial solutions. Her feminism is reflected in defining and interpreting the lives of African women. But in an interview with Dr. Akachi Ezeigbo, Nwapa has admitted that she is not imposing any of her feminist characters like Amaka in *One is Enough* on her readers.

She said,

> It depends on the motivation I have when portraying a character. *In One is Enough* I was not cut to create a role model in Amaka. I was simply creating a woman who found herself in a corrupt society and struggles to exist there the way she thought the best.\(^9\)

Nwapa's novel *One is Enough* is a replica of Saadawi's work *In Women at Point Zero* and Helen Buckingham's *Women in Crime*. Saadawi in her novel *In Women at Point Zero* has portrayed a prostitute more worthy than a wife. A wife to her is the most exploited slave who foolishly submits herself to her husband even though he is
ungrateful while the prostitute is a self-reputed woman and more self-conscious, conscious of her position, who exposes the wicked nature of man and cautions him that he would have to pay heavily if would approach her.

Saadawi declares that a woman’s life is always miserable. A prostitute, however, is a little better of all and women are prostitutes of one kind or another. The lowest paid body is that of a wife. A successful prostitute (is) better than a mislaid saint. Marriage (is) a system built on the most cruel suffering of woman.

Similarly Nwapa confesses that a wife’s position is less than a prostitute. So Amaka as her mouthpiece prefers to become a prostitute than to remain a submissive wife. Amaka, the heroine after beating her husband nearly to death, escapes into the city disowning her husband and breaking marital bonds out of utter contempt for men. The provoked violence forces Amaka question her own beliefs and societal roles.

She questions herself,

*Was she useless to society if she were not a mother? .... Was a woman nothing because she was*
unmarried or barren? Was there no other fulfillment for her? 10

She thinks that she is only a woman of substance. But the irony is that the same Amaka who rejects one man who is her husband, willingly and enthusiastically allows herself to become public property of all men in the city.

Liberation indeed has come! Long live feminism!

Nwapa as an early feminist inspired many women writers in Africa. In the words of Prof. Charles Nnolim, the female writers that emerged after Nwapa, never quite freed themselves from Nwapa's janus-faced, confusion ridden feminist ideology. The novels of Nwapa examined and reviewed many of the prevalent notions of marriage, social responsibilities, self-sacrifice, and service to society and humanity. Nwapa's feminine perspective is visualized through her female characters catalyzing the events and the fate of other characters involved in action.

Nwapa's women stand for industry, ingenuity and resilience. Nwapa deals only with successful women and the fate of nation. She initiated 'womanisation' of Nigerian letters. Nwapa's distinctive concern is the inter-relationship between life
and death, which has become a landmark in Nigerian literature. It is thematically recreated in the birth of insanity and the death of pregnant women. She weaves together traditional Igbo and the myths with imported views of women to create complex characters struggling for independence in their societies. She shows how women succeeded outside their traditional roles of mother and wife but reaffirming faith in Igbo culture; Nwapa says that she has been writing for nearly thirty years and her interest has been on both the rural and the urban woman in her quest for survival in a fast-changing world dominated by men.

By breaking the silence of women in Nigerian letters Nwapa has carved a niche for herself in the twentieth century African women's writing. But Nwapa upholds the androgy nous nature of her society. Boldly she has exposed the complementary sex role system in Ugwuta society. She has realistically portrayed her women in their traditional roles as shrewd market women, energetic farmers, wealthy traders, decision makers, sharp business entrepreneurs, independent thinkers, and powerful respected priestess.

Her heroines are of course, ideal women but with serious flaws in them that are contrary to the traditional norms and customs. She exhibits firm understanding of the moral
issues involved; the betrayal of trust; the insecurity of marriage and motherhood; the revaluation and reentering of motherhood; and the possibility that woman can be economically and emotionally independent.

Efuru, in *Efuru* sets a feminist example through her longing for independence and as a symbol of survival of legacy of colonialism. She is successful, gay, and liberal, liberated from the bonds of repression and oppression from her first husband Adizua and also from equally carefree and disappointing second husband, Gilbert. Both men symbolize colonial power. But Adizua is benefited in marrying Efuru without dowry while Gilbert by his Christian name and ideals could marry Efuru. Though Efuru liked freedom most she also followed traditional practices, such as circumcision, polygamy, traditional beliefs and traditional attitude towards wifehood and infertility. She considers kitchen to be her forte symbolizing a place of empowerment and weaponry in the truest sense of the term.

Efuru first meets Adizua in a festival where young men and women look for their spouses. Adizua is fascinated by the beauty of Efuru and declares that he would marry her. She too readily agrees to the proposal. They love each other so intensely that Efuru tells Adizua that she would drown herself in
the lake if he would deceive her. So also to ensure about his love Adizua tells that even the dust she trod on is most dear to him. Though he is madly in love with her, he has no money to pay towards the bride price. Both agree to elope on Nkwo day, a market day when people are out of the village. Adizua’s mother after returning from the market is shocked to find Efuru with all her belongings in her house.

Adizua convinced his mother that he could marry her without paying bride price. His mother felt elated for her son’s choice and started showering love upon Efuru and treating her like her own daughter. Efuru’s father was enraged when he heard about her elopement with Adizua and deputed some elders of his clan to get her back. Efuru offered them Kola nut, Gin and assured them that she would never bring shame to her family. Knowing pretty well her husband’s economic status she promised them that she would return to her father after sometime along with her husband to pay the bride price. And the elders appreciated her courage and conviction and for upholding the tradition.

Efuru’s father later decided to send another batch of elders to persuade Efuru to get back but it was to no avail. Finally he severed his relations with his daughter. On the
domestic front, when Adizua asked Efuru to work in the farm along with him, the feminist in her bluntly turned down his proposal and declared that she was not cut for a farm but for trade. She stayed back in the town and started trading. Adizua could not concentrate on his farm and used to frequent town. However, both could save from their earnings the amount required for the bride price to get the legal sanction for their marriage.

Efuru did not conceive for a long time, which caused anxiety in her mother-in-law. When she also pleaded with Efuru to get a second wife for his son, Efuru consented to get a second wife for her husband but without sacrificing her position as first wife. But unfortunately, Adizua developed an illicit relationship with Nykoyne. Meanwhile, Efuru conceived and delivered a child who was later named Ogonim. She even employed Ogea, a maidservant to look after her child. However, her happiness was short-lived as the child died after a brief illness. Adizua, though informed about the death of his child did not attend the funeral. Efuru, deeply hurt by the indifference of her husband returned to her father's house once for all and decided to lead her life independently.
When Ogea too was taken away by her parents, Efuru found herself lonely and depressed. Later she would meet Enerbi Gilbert, her childhood friend, and they talked of their old experiences and gradually their love turned into their marriage. They would be happy for sometime as married couple. Again she was destined to suffer as she failed to conceive. Her mother-in-law dissatisfied with her infertility and compelled Gilbert to go for a second wife. However, when Gilbert too like Adizua failed to attend the funeral of her father, Efuru would decide to divorce Gilbert.

*Efuru* (1966) presents a long awaited departure from the stereotyped female figure in male-authored African fiction. The dynamic Efuru chooses her own man and marries him without his paying a bride price. She is radical in her thinking unlike traditional African woman. When Adizua fails to pay the bride price she tells him not to bother about it. And they proclaim themselves as married against the norms of society. Efuru unlike traditional woman refuses to work in the farm with her husband.

She rightly claims that,

*I am not cut for farm work. I am going to trade ... I want to be nurtured and sustained by the strengths of*
my culture but I am also prepared to make changes if and when the need arises.  

Efuru is a woman struggling hard for recognition and to establish her individual social status in the society. She is portrayed as a promising woman advancing from the beginning of her life till the end encountering many challenges in life but keeping the tradition of marriage and family life. Facing boldly her misfortunes she feels that she has the blessings of Uhamiri, the goddess of the lake. The story of Efuru reveals the author's intention to create a free-spirited, self-reliant, strong-willed and hardworking independent woman. She questions the very traditions in the society and the importance given to men and sympathizes with the plight of women folk unable to raise their voice against the excesses of men.

Stratton has wrongly diagnosed the rebellious nature of Efuru that Efuru's first decision to marry a poor farmer without obtaining her father's consent and even without the bride price being paid to him before the marriage, seems to flout the patriarchal authority. Efuru is more a reformer than a rebel, an agent looking forward to and welcoming change to her advantage and other women in the society.
She openly confesses that,

_Tell my father that I shall be the last person to bring shame on him since my mother died five years ago, I have been a good daughter to him. My husband is not rich. In fact he is poor. But the dowry must be paid. I must see that this is done._

Efuru negotiates with all the possibilities made available to her. When Adizua desires to marry a second wife, she approves wholeheartedly his proposal but on condition that she retains her status as first wife.

_What is wrong in his marrying a second wife? It is only a bad woman who wants her husband all to herself. I don’t object to his marrying a second wife but I do object to being relegated to the background. I want to keep my position, as the first wife for it is my right._

When Efuru's father pities her marital relationship with Adizua and desires to take her home, she refuses to go with him and says,
I have not made up my mind. Once it is made up there is no coming back. 

Efuru as a revolutionary goes beyond the societal norms. She being a staunch feminist divorces her first husband, Adizua and marries Gilbert, her schoolmate. But when Gilbert fails to attend her father’s funeral she even divorces him. She herself is the master of her destiny and the master of her own will.

In her second novel Idu (1970), Nwapa emerges as a revisionist who holds man responsible for infertility in woman. Idu rejects the cultural ethics of wife inheritance, male dominance and primacy of the child. Nwapa seems to correct the perceptions of male about women’s wants and needs, from the female point of view. Nwapa asserts that the so-called, passive, passionless, unimaginative, powerless and irresponsible African woman is a figment of the male’s imagination that she has set out to correct. Her fiction provides glimpses of women achieving economic power and exalted positions through participation in religious, business and political activities.

Idu as the most affectionate and devout wife served Adiwere in his sickness. She did not conceive and shared her
sorrow with her friend Ojiugo who was also barren. Though Adiwere married his second wife he continued to love Idu as before. Ewuu, his second wife was quarrelsome and deserted him to marry another man.

Meanwhile, Idu delivered a child and thanked God for His good graces and blessing her with a child though late. But people thought the child since was born on inauspicious day would devour his father. And as suspected Adiewere fell seriously ill and died. Adiewere and Idu after marriage had planned to construct their house and lead happy life but it remained an unfulfilled dream with the sudden death of Adiewere. After twenty-eight days, Idu also died and it was believed that she had joined her husband as devout wife in the next world.

Nwapa in Idu writes about the marginality and misrepresentation of women by subtly saying that a woman is not an inanimate object without brains, feelings, emotions and desires. Idu stands for industry, ingenuity and resilience. The novel ends catastrophically with the suicide of an impotent man and a pregnant woman. Childlessness is the main theme interrelating life and death, birth and madness. Women's
speeches are sprinkled with anecdotes, oral as well as folk wisdom, moral judgments and sympathy.

Idu is a total contrast to Efuru. Efuru represents a woman of protest whereas Idu signifies submission. Both allow their husbands to go for a second marriage. Efuru asserts her position as first wife but Idu shows much patience and compromises with life. Adiewere, husband of Idu returns home after becoming sick and Idu nurses him until his last and dies twenty-seven days after his death.

In Nwapa's third novel One is Enough Amaka is shocked to learn about her husband, Obioro's illicit relations with other women and is utterly disillusioned. For many days she suffers the tyranny of her husband as she fails to conceive. Her sensitivity about her barrenness initially subdues her to her husband's violence. But when she is cornered in the bathroom and attacked by her husband, Amaka becomes conscious of her victimization and becomes vengeful. Fearing that Obiora might become too violent, she seeks to protect herself by locking up the bathroom door from inside. When Obiora breaks open the bathroom door she hits him on the chest with a hammer. This violence provoked by her husband forces Amaka to question her own values and her societal role. She declares that she has
desired a man who is not only independent but also pure and simple. She wants a man, not a husband and she would like to be neither a wife nor married. Amaka revolts against female suppression and tells of her desire to assert herself.

As a wife, I am never free. I am a shadow of myself. There is something in that world that doesn't suit me... I am in prison, unable to advance in body and soul. Something gets holds of me as a wife and destroys me. ¹⁵

Amaka becomes the mouthpiece of Flora Nwapa expounding feminism. She sets an example of a rebel countering man's undue authority and atrocities. Nwapa presents Amaka as a symbol of woman's struggle for a possible way out. Nwapa upholding the innate desire and potentialities in woman seems to be encouraging in One is Enough the emergence of 'new' African woman.

Emecheta’s works too have portrayed African woman, primarily in the image of mother in Nigerian Society. She has also highlighted how sexuality and the ability to conceive alone sometimes define feminity and womanhood. She represents three societies-Igbo, Yoruba and British. Like Tony Morrison,
she believes that, "Fiction has a vital social responsibility". The stories she narrates in her novels are entertaining and didactic with message to her readers.

Her first two novels In the Ditch and Second Class Citizen are autobiographical. And others are paradoxical of her own experiences. In 1978 she won the Jock Campbell prize for her novel The Slave Girl (1977). In 1979 she won the award for 'the best black writer in Britain' for her novel The Joys of Motherhood (1979). Emecheta branded by her own critics as a feminist, sought cooperation from women in America and also from men in Africa to improve the social status and the economic condition of black woman.

I did not start as a feminist. I do not think I am one now. Most of my readers would take this to be the statement of a coward. But it is not. I thought before I would like to be one but after my recent visit to the United States when I talk to real Feminists with a capital F, I think we women of African background still have a very very long way to go before we can really rub shoulders with such men...so my sisters in America I am not shunning your advanced help, in
fact I still think women of Africa need your contribution and at the same time we need our men.¹⁶

Alice Walker has observed that Buchi Emecheta “integrates the profession of writer into cultural concepts of mother/worker because she is both.” Emecheta is totally committed to the cause of black women. She states,

I have the courage to say I write for blacks. ¹⁷

She has given women positive roles, to her women and has also encouraged woman education, which she thinks would advance their position in their society. She says that women are capable of living for so many other reasons. She believes that her story with a deep sense of commitment would certainly bring success. About her own commitment she said:

I work towards the liberation of women but I am not a feminist, I am just a woman. Just keep trying and trying. If you have the determination and commitment, you will succeed.¹⁸

Buchi Emecheta believes in her brand of African feminism.
I do believe in the African kind of feminism. They call it womanism, because you see, you Europeans don't worry about water, you don't worry about schooling, you are so well off. Now, I buy land, and I say, 'OK, I can’t build on it, I have no money, so I give it to some women to start planting. That is my brand of feminism.'

But Emecheta's contemporary, Catherine Acholonu resented Emecheta's brand of feminism. She holds that for Emecheta, individual freedom is but sexual freedom and sexual freedom is tantamount to promiscuity and that many of her female readers would argue against her generalizations on marriage, and on promiscuity as a way out for emancipation of women born of hatred towards men folBuchi Emecheta has also been criticized by some male African writers for her feministic views and called her "hostile emigrant contaminated by European views."

In The Joys of Motherhood, Nnu Ego and her husband Nnaife renounce every thing to educate first their eldest son Oshia, and then they think of educating their second son Adim, with the left over money. But they never think of
educating their daughters. The parents treat daughters only as commodities who would bring in good bride price to invest further on the study of their brothers. Nnu Ego's expectation that her sons would return home to take care of her goes wrong and this she realizes much later. Nnu Ego realized that part of the pride of motherhood was to look a little unfashionable and be able to draw with joy. She could not afford another outfit because she was nursing him. So she could not go anywhere to sell anything. However, Nnu Ego is hopeful that her old age would be comfortable as he would grow soon and clothe her and farm for her, so that her old age would be sweet.

Tsitsi's *Nervous Conditions* also deals with the theme of gender discrimination. As in *The Joys of Motherhood* it records the bitter experiences of women in general and their craving for independence and equality. Nhamo, the only son in the family is given education. But unexpectedly he dies leaving the responsibility of the family to Tamboo, the eldest daughter in the family. Even though she is prepared to sustain them, the elders do not accept her offer to help her family in a positive sense. Instead, they find fault with her education saying that she is helping out her husband's family and not her own family.
In her interview with James, Buchi Emecheta speaks of the significant role of women as the guardians of culture. She discussed that idea in her latest book, *The Rape of Shavi* which is about the rape of a culture. At the end of that rape we find it is women who bring things together. Whereas if they had allowed women to take part all along may be the rape would not have taken place.

Emecheta confirms that African writers need to become concerned about several other matters other than colonialism and cultural cringe. She says that African literature is deeply concerned about colonialism and the impact of the West on Africa. African writers today write about the human predicament in Africa resulting form years of denigration. Emecheta though lives in England, is sentimentally attached to Nigeria and is concerned about the human condition in her homeland.

She feels that Nigeria and African women in general need to bind together to support each other instead of bitching about each other. She is frank enough to declare that in Nigeria women are riddled with hypocrisy. They learn to say what they don’t feel. They learn to laugh or not to laugh too loudly.
Her frankness about Nigeria often invites criticism from Nigerian writers who charged that she subjected herself to alien influence sacrificing her African identity. However Emecheta defended herself saying that many African writers strive for recognition outside Africa. Africans are fond of reading cheap American novels than novels by African writers, which in turn has necessitated the African writers to move to Europe for their career receives due encouragement.

Writing about women Emecheta wonders- why are women as they are? Why are they so pathetic? When you hear about traditional women who were very strong, you wonder why are we today so pathetic, so hypocritical? The Joys of Motherhood ends with a note:

_Nnu Ego had it all yet still did not answer prayers for children._

Nnu Ego in her prayer asks God when He would create a woman with fulfillment as a complete human being and not as any body's appendage. When talking to Ubani, Nnu Ego says that the money may be small and the work like slave labour, but least his wife's mind is at rest knowing that at the
end of the month she gets some money to feed her children and him. She asks what more a woman wants.

And we approve of Nnu Ego’s belief in her fulfillment as woman. Her attitude towards change strains her familiar relationship. She is a slave owned by her husband. But she faces the world boldly as a feminist. Nnu Ego condemned by the society as an unsuccessful mother revolts against society for the injustice done to her and justifies her stand.

She had been brought up to believe that children made a woman. She had had children, nine in all, luckily seven were alive, much more than many women of her period could boast of ... still, how was she to know that by the time her children grew up the values of her country, her people and her tribe would have changed so drastically, to the extent where a woman with many children could face a lonely old age, and may be a miserable death all alone, just like a barren woman. 20

The tragedy of Nnu Ego goes beyond her death to suggest that Emecheta is critical also about the behaviour of her protagonist. Emecheta does not remain a silent observer. She
seems to suggest remedial solution to Nnu Ego's problem by which she would have been more comfortable in life. Nnu Ego who is portrayed as a traditional and submissive woman accepting all the norms of the society, becomes rebellious against the social conventions.

Buchi Emecheta's poetic rendition *Wives at War* has earned her reputation as Africa's most sustained and vigorous feminist voice of protest. *In the Ditch* (1972) is Emecheta's autobiographical novel written after divorcing her husband. The main focus of the novel is on the importance of initiation and determination of Adah to revolt against the norms and customs of the society, an attempt to get out of the ditch.

*Second Class Citizen* (1974) is her second novel depicting the frustration and distress experienced by a young foreign mother in a strange and inhospitable country. The basic theme of the novel is hatred towards gender discrimination. *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) also known as *The Mother*, *The Mother's Mother*, *The Mother's Early Life* and *First Shock of Motherhood* is acknowledged as the most successful and realistic African novel. She narrates the agony Nnu Ego underwent in the male chauvinistic society.
She describes the hardships and problems faced by an immigrant living by herself unsupported by male. The story is about a young mother's concern for her children. She tries to provide all comforts to them in a patriarchal polygamous society. The novel also explores the ethical problems of a poor family. The lives of two women Adaku and Nnu Ego mark the difference between realism and illusion, between sanity and lunacy.

**The Joys of Motherhood** is a study of victimization and enslavement of a traditional Igbo woman to the dictates of Igbo culture. The novel reflects the different stances of motherhood with their consequences. As a feminist she speaks out against imperialism,

> I don't know if death isn't better than this! There is nothing we can do. The British own us just like God does, and just like God they are free to take any of us when they wish. 21

When Nnu Ego is forced to rear her children she bluntly argues,

> As for my daughters, they will have to take their own chances in the world. I am not prepared to stay here be the mad woman, just because I have no sons. 22
Nnu Ego's anguish over the possible death of herself speaks of the tyranny of the British imperialism. The novelist is critical about the protagonist for her indignity and lack of aspirations. Nnu Ego dies a miserable death by the roadside thinking that she has reached her home. She dies quietly with no child, no friend to talk to her. She has never really made friends with anybody as she has kept herself very busy as a true mother taking utmost care of her children. But she dies in the end as a destitute.

Emecheta's novel *The Bride Price* (1976) depicts how an African woman becomes a scapegoat and allows herself to be sold as a commodity for good bride price.

*People adhere to the belief that a female is worthless to a family except for the bride price she will bring to it.*

The novel speaks of the African age-old customs, female suppression and sexism. Aku-nna and Nna-nndo live with their father Ezekiel Odio often called Nna in Lagos. Aku-nna is thirteen-year-old taking after her father in stature and nature as she is fondly called Aku-nna, which means father's wealth. Her father is anxious to get big bride price for her when
she would get married to a wealthy man. He works as a head-moulder at the Loco yard in Lagos. One day he hurts his leg and gets hospitalized for treatment. When he does not return home, Aku-nna becomes anxious and is consoled by her uncle Joseph and Uche.

The next day when the dead body of her father is brought home, Aku-nna and Nna-nndo are shocked by the sudden demise of their father. Her mother Ma Blackie returns to Lagos to bring her children back to Ibuza. The people of Lagos bid farewell to the family with little presents and tears. But Aku-nna desires to marry a person hailing from Lagos and not from Ibuza. Further, when the family moves to her father's brother, Okonkwo's house her mother is compelled to become his fourth wife.

Okonkwo gets Aku-nna married to Okoboshi, a physically challenged person for a big bride price. Aku-nna unwillingly marries him as she has already given her heart to Chike. On the very first day after her marriage she rebukes Okoboshi and runs away with Chike. Chike following the tradition pays more bride price to Okonkwo to own Aku-nna. Aku-nna gets her brother educated with the help of her
husband. She delivers a child and names it as 'Joy' to symbolize her unfulfilled joy and dies after few days.

So it was that Chike and Akku-nna substantiated the traditional superstition they had unknowingly set out to eradicate. Every girl born in Ibuza after Akku-nna's death was told her story to reinforce the old taboos of the land. If a girl wished to live long and see her children's children, she must accept the husband chosen for her by her people and the bride price must be paid. If the bride price were not paid, she would never survive the birth of her first child. It was a psychological hold that existed for a very long time.24

Buchi Emecheta's novel The Slave Girl deals with the change taking place in the country from the colonial period to the period of independence fictional terms. In the novel Ojebeta is portrayed as an assertive woman enjoying social status in the colonial world. Destination Biafra (1994) throws light on the horrible things witnessed during the civil war erupted in the late 1960s in Biafra and the conflicting feelings of Debbi Ogedembge, the oxford educated daughter of a corrupt
government minister. It is about the active participation of the protagonist in the Biafra's struggle, and the attempt made to bridge the gap between the old and the new and for solidarity between male and female, in Biafra.

**Head Above Water** is Emecheta's autobiographical novel showing the transformation of Emecheta from a tribal child in African bush to a life in the north of London as an internationally acclaimed writer. She says that as her survival for the past twenty-five years in England from which when she was a little over twenty dragging four cold and dripping babies with her and pregnant with the one that was a miracle. And if for any reason we do not believe in miracles, we are requested to start believing, because keeping her head above water in this indifferent society is a miracle.

**Kehinde** (1994), the latest novel of Emecheta centering on the awareness of cultural priorities and discriminations, presents Kehinde, as a Nigerian woman reposing too much of confidence in her husband. She dreams of leading a happy life with her husband Albert. But to her utter disappointment, he returns to Nigeria with a second wife. This transforms Kehinde into a rebel from an affectionate wife and she decides to depart to London against the Nigerian custom.
The novel has also recorded Emecheta's own experience at the psychiatric hospital in London where out of eleven patients nine are black, that suffer not from mental illness but because:

*that they heard voices and spoke to that voice.*

Ama Ata Aidoo, the multifaceted scholar, revolutionary and an exciting writer in literary circles had formal education as a means to mitigate the suffering caused by gender inferiority. She represents women writers in general though she is deeply concerned about lesbianism in African society. As an idealist she has positive attitude towards womanhood. She always scorns male linguistic chauvinism and wants to bring in woman political awareness, and exhibits woman sensitivity to social issues, and her vulnerability to mental stress and physical suffering. She refuses to see her heroines suffering and become victims of circumstances. She too as a feminist gives a feminine perspective of African society.

Aidoo is a bilingual and has acquired fluency in French and developed a fascination for English dramas. Owing to economic constraints she could not establish a theatre for English drama. As a feminist, she wished to see dramas where women played their prominent roles, in a positive way for
bettering the condition of African women in the male dominated society. Being a black woman she has admitted her difficulty in understanding the situation in America where people are carefree, and irresponsible. She is very pragmatic in her outlook. She liked to write in her stories about lovers in Paris and in other works about sophistication in politics in Africa. She hesitates to use the term 'black power' and call the black American black Negro.

Ama Ata Aidoo produced two dramas and wrote an article entitled *The New African*. She held the view that poetry should conform to certain accepted western standards. She opposed western notion of African primitiveness. She liked to read Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for their commitment to regenerate the society and dealing with universal values.

**Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint** (1979) is Ama Ata Aidoo's most exciting novel. It is the historically established and culturally sanctioned sexism of African society in terms of lesbianism. Aidoo's character Sissie is an independent, and assertive woman without the support of men. Aidoo in the novel is not interested in bridging
the gap between western and African thought but tries to create something novel, different from black or female concerns.

Owusu thinks that Aidoo’s work,

    gives a sense of structural and linguistic irony which

    is functional...signifying a couple of things the need

    for and very process of revamping. 26

‘Changes: A Love Story’ (1991), Aidoo’s the most privileged novel brings political awareness among women. The women like Esi Kom and the grandmother Nana in the novel assert themselves in the patriarchal Akan society. The relationship between these women reflects political suppression experienced by successive generation in the Yawson clan. The repentance and the reconciliation of Esi Kom and Eulalie reflect the existing Diaspora that Aidoo calls Africa’s ‘amnesia’ relating to the slave trade. Eulalie though presented as a submissive character in the beginning, later becomes a dictator finding a significant position among the women of her community.

But Esi Kom, the protagonist symbolizing modern African women and holding a high position leads an independent life with her husband and child. She is dissatisfied with her mother and grandmother who have different perception of
marriage. Despite their warnings, she separates herself from her husband Oko and prefers to settle down as a second wife to her lover Ali Kondey. Both her mother and grandmother discourage Esi from becoming the second wife of Ali Kondey. But Esi gives a deaf ear to what they have said and lamented.

*She could never be as close to her mother as her mother was to her grandmother...why had they sent her to school...with no hope of ever meaningfully reentering her mother's world ....all this was too high a price to pay to achieve the dangerous confusion she was now in and the country was now in.*

Esi's economic independence threw her into confused state of mind regarding the choice of the values of her own culture. Esi complains against her parents for sending her to school for no purpose. Rhetorically she questions her gender discrimination. She has protested saying:

*Why had they sent her to school?*
*What had they hoped to gain from it?*
*What had they hoped she would gain from it?*
*Who had designed the educational system that had produced her sort?*
What had that person or persons hoped to gain from it?^{28}

Educated women have to pay a high price resulting in confusion and depriving them of their socio-political rights. Esi's failure to comply with the traditions and remain a faithful granddaughter makes her become philosophical.

_Hopefully a whole people would soon have answers for them. In the mean time she would listen to her grandmother._^{29}

**Changes: A Love Story** presents a young woman as a symbol of African woman's pre-colonial protest, and successfully projects the complexities of colonial political dispensation. Aidoo also presents in the woman's resistance to the political order the contradictions of African women of 1980s and 1990s. The writer by glorifying the African past makes the woman become nostalgic about her pre-colonial position.

Aidoo also presents the intricacies of the conflict in terms of modernity reflected in African woman and society and the conflict between the age-old traditions and their aspirations to ignore them. Aidoo is satirical about the attitude of modern women in African context. Modern Ghanaian women too
experience similar predicament and problems hindering their progress in their life.

**Changes** is the story of a woman trying to discover herself and her futile attempt to strike a balance between her desire for freedom and her craving for love and recognition within the Ghanaian culture. And she finds Ghanaian culture very accommodative. It focuses on how modern African women like Esi Sekyi, Opokuya Dakwa and Fusena Kondey view their lives and the strategies they adopt for self-improvement encountering the challenges of post-colonial African society on all fronts. They face many problems to marry grooms of their choice. As educated African women, they are in a dilemma whether to go by social convention or against the tradition because of the reaction to their thinking within the family and society. Esi is rebellious in nature, while Opokuyia and Fusena decide to lead traditional married life.

**The Dilemma of the Ghost** (1965) focuses on the placement of women in West African communities. It speaks of familial relationship between mother and daughter which later turns into the relation between mother and daughter-in-law. Aidoo presents a promising picture of a woman involved in political activities of her male dominated Akan society. **Anowa**
succeeds in replacing Euro centric feminist bias in historical context. Living in a matriarchal society, Aidoo upholds the status of women.

Women were every thing: they were supposed to hold the power...yet when a priestess had her period she couldn't approach her own shrine.\(^{30}\)

Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* narrates a traveller's tale like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Sissie is a member of the Ghanaian branch of INVOLOU, of the voluntary organization popularly called VOLOU. Sissie represents a section of the black women which indulges in debauchery and selfish and indifferent to the order and harmony in society and giving itself sentimentally to European values without properly understanding social morality and human virtues. Sissie returns to Africa unscathed as she has shown restraint in not becoming a lesbian attracted towards her German friend, Marija.

Aidoo makes Sissie conduct her journey not into the territories of darkness in *Heart of Darkness* but into the human landscapes of civilization. Her departure form the Ghanaian airport is a retelling of the myth of conceptual polarities, as
presented in a morality play by Africans and Europeans to represent savagery and civilization, respectively.

Marija's village has a castle turned into a hostel for the young volunteers from abroad. In that castle it is said once lived a lord controlling the destiny of many serfs. For Marija, Sissie is but a sexual object like Kurtz's savage Amazon in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Aidoo, in Sissie has evoked a debased black woman as in colonial fiction. The relationship between Sissie and Marija, with cultural angularities reflects the sterility of European civilization and European's facile assumptions about morality.

As Kwaku Larbi Korang observes the fundamental asymmetry of power coincides with Sissie's and Marija's racial locations, and displaces the notion of a catholic feminity and universal humanity as meaningful political possibilities for Aidoo's novel. In fact Aidoo uses their friendship to warn Africa of the serious consequences of her total dependency on Europe. Aidoo like her male Ghanaian counterpart, Ayi Kwe Armah, says that they [Africans] have been so long following the falling sun, flowing to the desert, moving to their burial. Africa's dependency on Europe is suicide, and suicide, they know, is murder with the consent of victim.
Sissie leaves Germany to visit her African 'brothers' in London, who continue to stay on even after the completion of their studies, to tell them that they are addicted to the poison that would kill them. It is time for them to decolonize their minds, to go back to Africa and contribute to its development.

As a female Nigerian critic Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi has made her own assessment about the two feminist writers,

*If Nwapa is the challenger, Buchi Emecheta is the fighter...for the first time, female readers through female characters are aware of their subjugation by their fathers, uncles, husbands, brothers and sons.*

Nwapa's work is a biography, a collective biography of beautiful, strong Ugwuta women and about their majestic lake capturing the complexities, ambiguities and contradictions of their environment as embodied in the force that lies at the bottom of the lake. Flora Nwapa openly confesses that she is not a feminist, but an ordinary woman projecting the images of women positively.

She has also admitted that she is just an ordinary writer, who as a sensitive committed writer has to write about
her women folk. Like several other writers, she too is expressive and communicative with a social purpose.

I have tried several times to take university appointments and work as a critic but each time I have packed up and left without giving notice. I found that I could not bring myself to criticize other people's work...for myself I don't deal with great ideological issues. I write about the little happenings of everyday life.

Being a woman and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small 'f'.

But unlike other African writers, Nwapa expects a woman to be dynamic and to oppose tradition where necessary for her advancement. She has cautioned women that,

a woman who holds her husband as a father dies an orphan.
To her a woman should be economically independent not relying on inheritance or on men for survival. Buchi Emecheta, an immigrant of Nigeria insists on following family tradition and work for the well being of their family.

Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Ba and Flora Nwapa belong to the second generation of African Women Writers in presenting women as complex characters radical in their attitude symbolizing modern feminism. Emecheta’s novel *The Joys of Motherhood*, which is ironically titled, exposes the sufferings of Nnu Ego resulting from motherhood. There is a striking similarity between Nwapa’s Efuru and Emecheta’s Nnu Ego. Both have lost their mothers before the novel begins and are victims of patriarchy.

Both get married twice and lead their miserable life. Efuru did not conceive for a long time while Nnu Ego suffered as her sons neglected her. But the basic difference between the two characters is that Nnu Ego’s husband divorces her, for infertility while Efuru though infertile, divorces her husband allowing him to opt for a second wife. Nnu Ego bears the insult and sees herself as a failure. She confesses,

*I am sure the fault is on my side. How can I face my father and tell him that I have failed.* 34
Efuru refuses to accept her infertility and claims her original position even after husband marries a second wife. She bluntly argues,

>I want to keep my position, as the first wife for it is my right.\[^{35}\]

Emecheta’s Adaku, the co-wife of Nnu Ego and Nwapa’s Efuru resemble each other. Adaku is also hardworking, strong-willed trader with a great sense of freedom. But unlike Efuru she is blessed with children mostly girls born to others. While Adaku enjoys little respect Efuru is praised for her sacrificing nature.

Flora Nwapa and Ama Ata Aidoo present a different picture of the role of African woman representing her generation and not compromising with the political change. Nwapa’s novels are set in urban areas. The chief concern of Nwapa’s novels is woman’s barrenness whereas Aidoo’s novels deal with the other problems of African women than infertility. Nwapa’s novels focus on the deity ‘Chi’ as the most powerful mother of Ugwutha community. Aidoo does not present African society as highly superstitious. Nwapa’s women try to become economically
independent while Aidoo’s women occupy significant positions in society.

Emecheta has proclaimed that she does not sympathize with a woman who deserts her children and with a woman who would stay with a brute as husband only to be regarded in society. She says that she has no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children; neither does she have sympathy for a woman who insists on staying in a marriage with a brute of a man simply to be respectable.

All the novels of Emecheta expound,

the theme of female oppression, the slave girl becoming her leit motif—the archetypal African woman buried alive under the heavy yoke of traditional mores and customs.36

Virginia Woolf has observed that,

Saadawi’s Women at Point Zero, Flora Nwapa’s Efuru and One is Enough, Buchi Emecheta’s Second Class Citizen, The Slave Girl and Joys of Motherhood are all united by their possession of respective maladies: They are blessed with all the
features of fairy tales and myth; they unabashedly distort with indecency and uncanny bravado history, sociology and gender images just to make some shallow feminist point; their heroines are conveniently spared healthy competitions as they only thrive in outlandish communities peopled by only weak, emasculated, lazy, foolish and insane men.37

Achebe's Okonkwo is obstinate, violent and arrogant like Nnu Ego of Buchi Emecheta's Joys of Motherhood. Buchi Emecheta protests against the victimization of women in Igbo society and she converts personal problems into a public crusade only to expose the society. Buchi too like Chinua Achebe does not merely expose the society of its evils and social injustices, but also highlights the good of native tradition. Achebe has portrayed women characters as highly submissive, obedient to their husbands and abiding by the customs and traditions of Igbo society. But the women in the novels of Achebe lack depth. Except sexual subjugation, the real affinity that strengthens the bonds of marital relationship is lacking in his novels whereas women are powerful and independent with individuality in the works of Flora Nwapa. They demand love
and affection and their rightful place in society and family as wife.

Only in *Anthills of the Savannah* Achebe has portrayed Beatrice, an intellectual and a journalist who has advanced in the Nigerian contemporary society. The Igbo traditional society in Achebe’s novels seems to be governed by the female principle. It is Ani, the goddess of Earth that controls the social morality. The crises—social, political and cultural emerged with the arrival of the white man. There were events in Igbo land when women supported their men in resisting the entry of the British. Women too became concerned about the political change in Igbo land.

Tony Morrison has observed that Achebe’s female characters are without male-bias. With Achebe she never felt the male claw grabbing up the entire canvas; there was feminine space where women existed without permission from the man. Like Toni Morrison, Emecheta too believes in functional fiction—‘Fiction has a vital social responsibility’.

Both deal with women’s problems and prejudices against women in the black African society. Buchi Emecheta as a womanist is interested in the positive portrayals of women.
Ogunyemi has pointed out that womanism in Africa is but a celebration of black roots.

*Womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideas of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom.*\(^{38}\)
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