African Literature like many major living literatures is an end in itself. Though it is a twentieth century creation primarily concerned about Africa, African traditions and customs, it had attracted the audience outside Africa as well. It has established that Africa is no longer a dark continent and a gloomy phenomenon inhabited by witches, medicine men, wild life, cannibalistic pigmies and Tarzans—a misrepresentation and distortion of “things” African but rich in culture and mythology.

The ‘new’ voice of Africa, the contemporary African writing in English has vehemently contested the western antithesis of Africa and African. It tries to emancipate Africa from its literary stereotype and complexes born of years of degradation and self-degradation. As every true literature is an art of cultural self-definition defining its identity, African literature too reflects and represents native culture. It is more functional and purposeful and exploring the human condition in Africa it tries to highlight the ‘unique and novel’ potentialities of the man of Africa. Further, it attempts to define the world and
evaluate Western aesthetics in terms of African aesthetics, culture and philosophical assumptions.

African literature has to be studied and examined in African context from the point of view of African aesthetics, politics and history. Beauty and pleasure are not the basic things as in most of the Western literature. African writing today aims at preserving African culture and African character unaffected by the outside world. Modern African literature has gained significance not for its historicity but for presenting in the more restricted and more immediate sense, the socio-cultural environment prevailing in Africa. African anthropological details are integrated into African fiction for its artistic purposes. The dichotomy of the two worlds not in opposition but as a unity has made contemporary African writing in English more alive, relevant and interesting also to the Western reader.

Abiola Irele in *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* says that the term ‘Africa’ has a wider connotation.

*For however gratifying it might be, for the sake of intellectual rigour, to arrive at a precise definition of African literature, the effort would still be beside the*
point, which is to place into focus what I consider to be the essential force of African literature—its reference to the historical and experiential. It is this, which in a real and profound way justifies the ready attachment of the historical and politico-ideological connotation of the term "Africa" to such a diversity of texts and material.¹

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

Modern African writing, like modern creative writing in English emerging from the Third World countries, especially from the earlier colonies of Britain reflects the impact of colonial
experience on the native consciousness and the writers' increasing awareness of the peculiar problems confronting the individual, society and the nation at large. Colonization over the years and centuries in some African countries like in several other colonies of the British Empire, has greatly affected the native sensibility. Many illogical consequences and contradictions in the society are ascribed to the impact of alien culture. Since the native society could not totally wipe out the vestiges of colonialism, African writers have adopted an enlightened outlook for a possible synthesis of the two cultures—native and western. They are deeply committed to reeducate and regenerate the society and try to redefine its traditional values.

Chinua Achebe once said that African novel had to be about Africa as a geographical expression and as a metaphysical landscape. He added that it should be about “a view of the world and all of the cosmos perceived from a particular position.” Chinua Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart* which has become a classic in modern African writing in English, attempts to reconstruct the fractured Igbo traditional society and to redefine African cultural identity. African writer, conscious of his social milieu and the subversive impact of colonization affecting the native psyche, is committed to decolonizing the
African mind. It is the bounteous duty of an African writer to sensitize African to his cultural identity and African tradition and to take pride in 'things' African. Achebe held the view that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans, that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity.

On the qualifications for becoming an African novelist, he added that it is partly a matter of passport, of individual volition and particularly of seeing from that perspective. Being an African, like being a Jew, carries certain penalties... as well as benefits of course. But perhaps more penalties than benefits...(Joseph Conrad of *Heart of Darkness* was a European who did not want to be an African). And it is not even a matter of colour, for Africa has Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing and other novelists.

Peter Igonekwu while discussing the essential elements of African literature says that it gives opportunity to project the positive image of Africa, to counter its misconception by the Western world. African novelist gives a vivid picture of Africa's past and its native traditions for better understanding of African culture and sensibility. James Ngugi Wa Thiongo, the
most exciting and powerful writer responding to most of the issues-topical and of public interest, has advocated total liberation—that is political, economic and psychological emancipation depicting East-African situation in his works.

Anne Tibble in *African-English Literature* rightly observes that thinking briefly, of West Africa as a self-contained literary unit—which of course it is not, though cross-currents with East and South Africa are not strong, we may say that this section of the continent began its production of a written literature latest of the three. When as late as the 1940s, West Africa did awake, the number of its writers quickly grew. Especially so was the case in Nigeria, in spite of the hundred or more indigenous languages there. The total of poets, novelists, and dramatists in West Africa as a whole quickly exceeded those in the South or East.

West African fiction, as could be seen in the works of famous Nigerian writers like Wole Soyinka, the Nobel Laureate, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, T.M.Aluko, Amos Tutuola, J.P.Clarke, Flora Nwapa and others, offers to the native reader and outsider to enlighten him, the most passionate expression of cultural confrontation during the colonial period and the impact of alien culture on the African psyche and the native’s desire to
control his own destiny in a sovereign state. The growth of literary production in Africa is ascribed to significant historical events like the arrival of white man with his culture, new faith and new 'isms'. The depiction of socio, political and cultural change in Africa has made the novel more realistic and highly contemporaneous.

Chinua Achebe, James Ngugi and others have tried to analyse African experience and the nature of mutation in African society exposed to the onslaughts of the West. African writers are sensitive to the prevailing conditions of life in Africa and have skillfully dramatized the historical events to trace the growth of African consciousness. Achebe as a chronicler concerned about the historical change attempts to reconstruct the Igbo society in his first three novels—*Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer At Ease* and *The Arrow of God*. In these novels, there is a particular ordering of events to reveal a tragic pattern to record the effects of colonialism and the tragic consequences of African encounter with Europe.

African fiction in general is dominated by protest against the corrosion of traditional values by colonization, evangelization and urbanization. The people are lured by 'high-life' and money culture during and after the colonial period.
Since Nigeria and certain parts of West Africa were less exposed to the onslaughts of the West, the focus in Nigerian novel is more on African cultural identity than negation of European values. The protest in Nigerian novel seems to be two fold: against the alien culture that corrupted the Blacks and the Blacks that corrupted themselves. Achebe and Ekwensi have blamed the Africans themselves for traditional mores and weaknesses and for the rampant corruption in Nigerian society and have advocated a change initiated by African tradition and culture without the interference of alien culture and other external influences.

African novel of the nineteenth and twentieth century has generally depicted the patriarchal society dominated by male. Women in the society are relegated to a secondary place. Frank Katherine in her controversial article Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa encourages women to assert themselves and shape their own destiny.

_The feminist writers of Africa portray women not only as taking active and shared roles with men but also as finding a destiny of their own . . . destiny with vengeance._ ²
African novel emerging from the underlying tension between the notion of pan-African unity and national identity testifies to the writers' belief that 'fiction has a vital social responsibility', and most of the material of the narrative constitutes 'charting their own social reality'. It deals with the precision and the plight of the marginalized woman struggling to sustain herself and her non-entity status and disappointments overshadowing her existence and above all the choked voice- a victim of eternal degradation and humiliation struggling hard to be heard but all this with the undercurrent of the typical African tradition and culture.

The gender discrimination that is intrinsically interwoven into the fabric of African society and the battling initiative and determination of African woman to preserve her womanhood that is viewed as her sexuality and ability to bear children against the embodied male-dominance gratifying its lust in female subordination are beautifully portrayed in the African novel. The novel depicts how the suppressed and oppressed women are sacrificed at the altar of male-oriented society and the men's exploitation of women to maintain male dominance and thus subjecting women to struggle for their self-actualization and recognition outside the domestic sphere.
Even the characters in African novel without character growth represent some aspect of traditional values or vision of life.

In the traditional novels archetypal characters are portrayed in their native surroundings. As corporate beings they represent collective consciousness and sometimes to respond individually in the changed circumstances. Because of Kinship, which is the basic trait of African society, the society is coherent and organic.

Chinua Achebe's novels Things Fall Apart, No Longer At Ease, A Man of the People and The Arrow of God are concerned with the nature of mutation within the Nigerian society. Things Fall Apart (1958) depicts the disintegration of the hitherto self-contained society with the arrival of the white man. It is significant as it marks the beginning of the cultural conflict in African novels. The Igbo woman is portrayed as a traditional woman in patriarchal society. Women are portrayed as voiceless and unassertive in their own village dominated by male.

The novels of Chinua Achebe speak of Igbo culture, Igbo traditions and Igbo history. Igbo society is patriarchal, egalitarian, and polygamous. It is a title-society where titles are
conferred to individuals based on their prowess demonstrated in wars with neighbouring clans and the number of barns of yam seed produced by the individual. It is basically a masculine society. Man without a single title is disregarded in his own village. Unoka, Okonkwo's father, is called a 'loafer' in Umuofia. Only the rich could afford to marry more than one wife by paying bride price. Women do not have any say in the decision-making but to support their family and participate in agriculture and communal activities and celebrations. For centuries African women were considered insignificant, neglected, exploited and denigrated.

The novel suggests violent conflicts due to the utter lack of a moderating female influence. Achebe makes use of a folk tale narrating the conflict between the earth representing fertility or the female principle and sky denoting the male principle. They assert that Okonkwo's despair was due to the imbalance and insanity of the female principle—"occasionally but reluctantly yields his tender emotions most often expressed perversely towards Ikemefuna and Nwoye, is a paradigm for sky who withholds rain but releases it reluctantly and perversely, since rain falls as it has never fallen before, preventing vulture who represents the female principle from returning to deliver his
message just as Nwoye, with his effeminate nature, does not return to Okonkwo's compound.”

**No Longer at Ease** (1964) shows how Africans have given themselves to the trappings of modernity in the Colonial Period. There is a discernible change in the style of Achebe's portrayal of female characters in his second novel. Obi Okonkwo subdues himself to the traditional ethos when it comes to choose between his mother who threatens to kill herself if he would marry Clara against her wishes and Clara, an outcaste whom he wishes to marry. His mother represents traditionalism while Clara stands for modern feminity. Clara gets aborted and fades out of the story. She is educated, economically independent, highly spirited and working as nurse and confident of leading life with out Obi Okonkwo.

In **A Man of the People** the protagonist Odili who symbolizes Nigerian educated youth is at the crossroads unable to assert himself. But Eunice as lawyer and financer of the common people's convention opposes the corrupt chief Nanga when he shoots Max, the founder of the convention. Eunice decides to retaliate. She kills the chief with her pistol.
She opens her handbag as if to take a handkerchief (takes) out a pistol instead and fires two bullets into chief Coco's chest. *(A M O P-160)*

Achebe adds approving her action:

*Only then does she fall down on Max's body and begin to weep like a woman... a very strange girl,*" people said.

*(A M O P-160)*

**The Arrow of God** (1966) depicts the triumph of the old order by the new order and the old faith by the new faith. Achebe as an insider gives an authentic picture of the extent of impact of Western culture on African culture, faith and African psyche.

Achebe's female characters in the first three novels are idealized women in their traditional roles but in his later novels women become active participating in nation building activities. However, his female characters lack depth. Achebe's female characters are quite often confined to their household activities like ideal mothers. But a few women like Chielo, the priestess of the oracle of the Hills and the Caves are respected in
Umuofia and Ani, the Goddess of Earth, is worshipped by the entire community.

Ekwensi in his novels of city life depicts the life of women lured by the city attractions and high life of Lagos. His *People of the City* and *Burning Grass* deal with the clash between the ways of African rural village and those of the modern commercialized city. T.M.Aluko in *One Man, One Wife* presents the conflict between the monogamy Christianity and polygamy of traditional society. His second novel *One Man, One Matchet* also presents similar conflict between tradition and modernity.

Ayeta Anne Wangusa’ *Tears of Hope* speaks of the plight of African rural woman in traditional patriarchal society, their physical suppression and repression. Her popular novel, *The Official Wife* is critical about and satirizes both polygamy and the marriage practiced in the contemporary society under the influence of the West. Kehinde Ayooola’s first novel, *The Running Woman* is about the struggle of a mother shouldering the responsibility of bringing up her three twins. Peter Kirman’s novel, *Before the Rooster Crows* presents the economic disparities, racism and brutality in Africa and similar inequalities in other societies outside Africa.

Elechi Amadi a Nigerian educator, novelist and dramatist is concerned with the traditional life and the native system of values in his novels. Amadi's early novels are set in the traditional Africa, a precolonial situation in Nigeria. *The Concubine* (1966) depicts the village life, age-old customs and native faith. *The Great Ponds* (1969) is about a war between two villages over fishing rights. His third novel *The Slave* published in 1978 is about enslavement and sufferings of the deprived class of society. *Estrangement* speaks of the aftereffects of the civil wars in Nigeria. His first three novels deal with personal and intimaee aspects of the lives of his characters rather than the public and larger issues that concern their clan. Amadi's focus is the individual, and the forces-social, psychological, actual and supernatural-influencing his actions, and determines the quality of his existence.
The writings of Kalamu are centered on the task of liberating the larger African-American community from an oppressive, domineering white authority and culture where human beings are exploited and treated like cattle for sale in the market. African society is suffused with black male prerogative, black male dominance and violence. Women are relegated as rural workforce to be used in farming for tending animals and nurturing children. Even at the time of community festivals and celebrations and ceremonies only men actively participate while women are just onlookers from the fringe like outsiders. For a long time African women remained neglected, exploited and suppressed. They never participated in decision-making nor allowed to speak out their mind on vital issues pertaining their village and clan.

Post-colonial literature presents a wide range of experience in societies with cultural angularities and divergences. Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin defined post-colonialism in terms of:

- migration
- slavery
- suppression
- resilience
- representation
- difference
- race
- gender
- place
- responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe
Colonial rule subjected Africans to utter humiliation, loss of cultural identity and political enslavement and also economic deprivation. In the post-colonial situation after achieving political independence it has become the primary task of modern African writer to restructure the native society and restore to it its cultural identity. Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ekwensi and others in their own way have endeavored to reeducate and regenerate African society through the rediscovery of the past.

Chinua Achebe, the doyen of modern African writing in English, has successfully presented his theme of exposure to the West with its consequences in his novels because of his strong affiliation to rural background. He has admitted his chief concerns in an interview and has exhorted African not to degrade himself just because of black colour but to take pride in what is African.

About the theme of his writings he said:

As far as I am concerned the fundamental theme is that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great
depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain. [4]

Chinua Achebe has acknowledged that the traditional society in Africa has not given importance to women in community affairs. But Beatrice in Anthills of the Savannah, with her Honours Degree from Queen Mary College, University of London, represents ‘new’ woman with her distinct vision. She is articulate, independent and self-reliant and evaluates women’s position by their assertion. It’s not enough that women should be the court of the last resort because the last resort is a damn sight too far and too late!

Beatrice affirms moral strength and intellectual integrity of African woman, in the changed post-colonial situation in Nigeria. Urbanization and ‘new’ education have broadened women’s horizon. Ikem, the editor of the National Gazette supports advancement in life and her self-supportive role—I can’t tell you what the new role for women will be. I don’t know. I should never presume to know. You have to tell us.

Achebe through Beatrice seems to be championing the cause of woman and her progress. Further, in the novel he
exposes the attitude of new rulers in a sovereign state. In the novel Ikem speaks of “leaders who openly looted our treasury, whose effrontery soiled out national soul”.

And he cautions Nigerians:

> You must develop the habit of skepticism, not to swallow every piece of superstition you are told by witch doctors and professors when you read yourself of these things your potentiality for assisting and directing this nation will be quadrupled.  

Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of Savannah* and Kole Omotoso’s *Just Before Dawn* are experimental novels in the last two decades in the sense that Achebe’s novel has recorded the decline of human interest when the civilian is overthrown by a military junta and on the other hand Omotoso’s work intermingled real historic and fictional element to divulge the shattered picture of the modern Nigeria both in the hands of the British and the politicians eager to grab power after independence.

Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian playwright, poet, novelist and social critic was the first African writer to win the most
coveted Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. Soyinka was cited by the Swedish Academy of Letters as a writer “who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones, fashions the drama of existence.” He studied at the University College of Ibadan, where Chinua Achebe and Christopher Okigbo were his contemporaries and at the Varsity College he was the editor of The Eagle, a cyclostyled news-sheet of a student political organization. Then he moved to Leeds to work for a degree in drama. Leeds offered him many theatrical productions. Soyinka is known for his quick wit and fertile imagination. For supporting the coup in Nigeria in 1966, he was imprisoned in 1967 and was subsequently released in 1969 as part of 'Independence Anniversary Amnesty'. He revealed his arrest and imprisonment in his memoirs The Man Died published in 1972. He was the founding Director of the Orisun Theatre and The 1960 Masks Theatre at Lagos and Ibadan.

Wole Soyinka is a highly cultivated and a very practical man, an actor, producer and theatre-administrator. He is a man of considerable independence and moral courage and is a scolding critic of his own society. Dealing with the problems of his society he has exposed the evils and political injustices in his works. Soyinka operates primarily in a satiric
mode and sometimes incorporates traditional Yoruba myths and rituals to heighten the satire. He has satirized the new men in power for becoming power crazy and selfish and is incensed with the hypocrisy of religious leaders and the intellectuals for their apathy and ineffectuality. He is critical about the transition in Nigeria.

His The Road (1965) is a study in the psychology of transition, the hangover etc. Here the professor, the protagonist, is a frustrated artist who has developed a passionate love for the white man's civilization and has acquired all the trappings only to discover that they do not truly belong to that culture. His another play The Trials of Brother Jero is a farce, hilariously funny exposing the deceit and hypocrisy of a religious leader. The Lion and the Jewel is built around a love triangle with two suitors representing tradition and transition trying to win the bride Sidi who represents feminity, some form of goddess of Earth.

In Kongi's Harvest also Segi, the courtesan and ex-mistress of Kongi symbolizes fertility one aspect of the Earth Mother. Segi is portrayed as a militant, a fit match to challenge the authority of self-styled, power-crazy dictators like Kongi. Soyinka has drawn deeply both from his native Yoruba culture
and Christian education to mould the events in Nigeria to reeducate his society like many African writers.

Even though Amos Tutuola is not a sophisticated writer and his works are branded as “ghost novels” and “naïve romances” written in Yong English’, ‘semi-literate English’, his first work *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is really a significant work of fiction in English by a black West African. It is based on Yoruba folk tales, about the adventurous journey of the palm-wine drinkard into the forests to search for his tapster in the country of the dead. The narrative is but a fantastic series of episodes and incredible experiences of the drinkard.

Mongo Beti is another prolific writer whose works trace the history of Africa. Some works are social and political and others deal with familial ties in the new political dispensation. In an interview given to Boniface Mongo-Mboussa, he criticizes the indifferent attitude of bourgeois. He says that they have beautiful houses, they eat well, they run after women, etc. There is a kind of indifference amongst the elite vis-à-vis the poorer members of the population. For alongside the corrupt and carefree elites, there are those who cannot go to hospital because there is no equipment, children who cannot go to school because their parents have no money, girls who go
into prostitution because they are hungry, etc. But it absolutely does not trouble this 'bourgeoisie' and he feels very much disappointed.

In his novel Mission to Kala, Medza is set off in search of a villager's wife who has run away with a man belonging to another tribe. The Poor Christ of Bomba is a true account of betrayal of the local churchmen in the name of religion. They have used local girls prepared for Christian marriage in the women's camp for their own purposes.

Biyi Bandele-Thomas a Nigerian playwright, poet and novelist writes about institutionalized brutality in his country. He is poetic and satirical when he speaks of the politics of violence, sufferings inflicted by the military, the police and the politicians. His novel The Man Who Came in from the Back of Beyond is a story of Africa-exotic, sprawling, overcrowded and bizarre and it also speaks of the relationship between a student and a literary teacher, a sub-plot in the novel. Maude, a teacher narrates the story of his student's former boyfriend in the first person narration. The novel has presented the deteriorating conditions of life and militarism in modern Nigeria.
Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* speaks of the social and economic condition of women in the contemporary society. Sissie’s voyage to Europe provides her opportunity to know her status in the past during the colonial period and in the new political dispensation. She tries to assert herself in the changed political order and power hierarchy.

As Abena Busia argues,

*One of the primary characteristics in the representation of the black African woman in colonial fiction is the construction of her inactive silence.*

Even the Bible made women become conscious of their existential necessity for the man. The Bible orders women to obey their husbands and submit themselves to them in a respectable way.

*In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.*

(*I Corinthians 11:11*)

Christianity preaches equal treatment to woman on par with man while Islam has provided special status to woman, though there is much insubordination of woman to man in
patriarchal society. The traditional woman though represents fertility; one aspect of Earth Mother, in African society too suffers unable to assert herself. It is proverbially said of the status of traditional woman in Africa that wives and oxen have no friends.

She is also the symbol of fortune to a man.

*If one is rich, one is not successful as long as one lacks a wife.*

But African woman is conscious of her role as mother, which she considers her fulfillment.

*The satiety of pregnant woman is offspring that is motherhood is a woman's fulfillment.*

Keith Booker in *African Novel in English* says that Nnu Ego, the protagonist in Buchi Emecheta’s *Joys of Motherhood* provides “trenchant description of the role played by the glorification of motherhood...in traditional Igbo society.”

In African mythology, woman is regarded as the Earth Mother, to Akposso of Togo she is the first creation and the Ibibio of Nigeria believe that the mother-divinity Eka-Abassi is the originator. In African society woman symbolizes creativity. “She is the mother of life”. But widow has no
significant role in African traditional society. Africans give much importance to marriage and child bearing and traditional woman participates in religious ceremonies. She represents ‘Ani’ the goddess of Earth in Igbo traditional society and ‘Onile’-in Yoruba tribe proclaiming the decisions of the chief deity as its priestess. And thus she controls the social morality in society. She sometimes becomes part of the jury of the village, counsellor and as ceremonial head she performs the rituals of puberty and death, for her supposed knowledge of the spiritual world. She punishes as priestess of the chief deity men that offend women.

In the contemporary African society, which is primarily egalitarian, African women demand better treatment and social justice and also political rights. Feminist ideology reflects specificities of the race, class and culture. Not confining themselves to their household women today have advanced educationally and are economically independent. As professionals and administrators African women have involved themselves in nation building activities and for their own advancements.

The traumatic effects of colonialism have made Africans become aware of their exploitation-social, political and their loss of cultural identity. The ‘new’ education introduced in
the colonial period helped Africans to represent their problems to the administration and to protest against the exploitative policies of the government and also to demand for participation in the local administration.

In *Weep Not Child* of James Ngugi, Ngotho sends his son Njoroge to school to learn 'new' education in the colonial period with the hope that his son would strive to get back the lost lands grabbed by the white man and distributed them by the new laws framed and promulgated by the administration, to the white settlers and black loyalists. Ezeulu in *The Arrow Of God* of Achebe sends his son to the white man's school only to know the secrets of his prowess.

In the changed socio-political scenario today and with the growing concepts of modernization and globalization, African women writers are championing the problems of women in general and contesting the discriminatory laws promulgated if any, affecting the interest of African women in particular. Feminist writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo and others with a deep concern for the suffering of African women have conferred grace and dignity on womanhood and inspired them to advance in all walks of life as individuals and shaping their own destiny. African women writers endeavour to
liberate African women from their traditional bondage, and exploitation on the basis of race, gender and class and self-degradation.
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8. Ibid.

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