CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

The term African Literature generally refers to a comprehensive, complex and creative literature of and from Africa. But different critics belonging to different schools of thought have provided varying interpretations about African literature. Chinua Achebe doesn’t “see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units in fact the sum total of all national and ethnic literatures of Africa.” (Gill,9) Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer believes that “African writing done in any language by Africans themselves and by others of whatever skin colour … who share the African experience and who have Africa centred consciousness” (Gill,9)

African literature may be classified into three distinctly and widely accepted categories- traditional oral literature of Africa, literature written in indigenous African languages and literature written in European languages. Africa in pre-colonial times was divided into various ethnic groups. During that period different communities developed distinct oral literature of their own. Traditional oral literature of Africa may be in the form of prose, verse or proverb. It is generally described as orature. Orature flourished in Africa primarily in absence of widespread literacy and was handed down the generations through memorization and recitation. The contents may differ in length ranging from single sentence formulation such as proverbs to epics which has to be performed over a period of time. This verbal art had a utilitarian purpose of providing entertainment as well as instruction. They served as the medium to explain the creation of universe, the essence of the activities of God and creatures and their intra and inter relationships. Oral folklore was employed to reinstate faith in group values and discourage anti social tendencies.

The span of African written literature is close to five thousand years. The antecedents of Africa written literature can be traced to hieroglyphic writing of ancient
• FIGURE : 2 . Map of Africa
• SOURCE : www.mapsanworld.com/africa/index.html
Egypt. Arabic literature also came into vogue during seventh century B.C.E. when Egypt was conquered by Arabs. African literary works are also available in native African languages like those of Yoruba and Hausa in West Africa; Amharic, Somali and Swahili in East Africa, Sotho and Zulu in Southern Africa.

However, with one or two exceptions most of African written literature is in European languages especially English, French and Portuguese. Francophone African literature and Lusophone African literature is nevertheless not extensive as Anglophone African literature. This can be ascribed to the fact that though Africa was colonized by several European imperial powers, British annexed various parts across the length and breadth of Africa beginning from Egypt, Uganda and Kenya in North Africa, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Nigeria in West Africa; Zambia, Botswana and South Africa in the southern part of Africa. It is usually referred as the modern African literature i.e. dominant African literature. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o in Decolonizing the Mind (1986) chooses to describe them ‘Afro European literatures’.

Infact modern African writing arose out of association between West and Africa, a contact which was both historical and experimental in dimensions. One of the striking features of African novels is that “it is a genre developed as a particular body of imaginative discourse primarily occupied with the modes of resisting the role of western cultural hegemony in determining African states of consciousness.” (Pandurang, 1) This strain of protest can be witnessed in the writings of almost all African authors especially of the post-colonial period. The writing during the post-colonial era (between 1960 and 1970) is usually referred as post-colonial literature. In this era, many African nations gained political independence from their colonial rulers and a considerable volume of African written literature in English was authored during these post-colonial times. Thus, post-colonial African literature is a mode to comprehend the African psyche, the physical
and other parameters of African life. It symbolizes the African intellectual response to their experiences of colonialism and neo colonialism. The rich traditions of African continent, the trials and tribulations of contemporary African life induced by socio-politico-economic experience of colonialism and its agonizing neo colonial aftermath, permeates in African literary texts. African imagination and creativity have also been given detailed expression in African literary tests.

African literary giants like Wale Soyinka, Eskia Mapahele, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o made colossal contribution to African literature. The writings of these writers helped in familiarizing the ‘African Consciousnesses’ in Europe and America. Writers of this era were artists cum political activists. These works reflect the sense of euphoria at the birth of independent nations. But this feeling of exultation was swept away by a feeling of disillusionment caused by the misery of their countries in the aftermath of decolonization. These writers of African ancestry were committed to restore faith of people in themselves and society-that is ‘decolonizing the mind’. In the words of Armah “It is the search or research for positive African ideas, perspectives, techniques and values.” (Armah,64) An important touchstone in post-colonial African literature was achieved when Wale Soyinka received Nobel Prize in literature from Africa. It represented the West’s acknowledgement of Nigerian literary extraordinaire. African literature also received momentum when a series on African writers was published by Heinemann Publishers. African English literature is now well-recognized and African works like Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* a classic is approved in the syllabi of Universities in the West.
• FIGURE : 3 . Map of Nigeria
• SOURCE : www.best9ja.blogspot.in/2011/05/map_of_nigeria.html
Among all the African countries Nigeria offers the greatest literary output, notably Afro-centric English literature. Quite a few of Nigeria’s literary output is available in Nigerian languages yet it has so far not been able to attract the attention of western literary circles. Nigerian English literature has a greater influence nationally and internationally. Anglo-phone Nigerian literature has affiliated itself more convincingly with better artistic capitulation to the western audiences. Nigerian literary development is well represented and appreciated in other countries.

The compositions of Nigerian writers like Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri and Wole Soyinka are often pervaded with a sense of dismay and pain at the state of Nigeria during the colonial and post-colonial era. These texts also showcase their disapproval of the leaders of independent African nations who are merely a shadow of former colonial oppressors. These writings provide anthropological information about Nigerian life, and serve as windows into their cultures. Nigerian literary works act as a medium to reflect the thoughts of the nation and tend to rekindle long submissive and often humiliated culture and society. Initial post-colonial Nigerian literature celebrated Nigeria’s much awaited independence from the political domination and cultural servility rendered to the country by its colonial masters – the British. But this ‘tryst with destiny’ was short-lived as Nigeria was engulfed in inter-regional and inter-ethnic violence; and corruptions of a neo-imperialist nation state. This transformation from pre-independence hope and faith to post-independence pain and disillusionment is painted vividly in various Nigerian/African literary outputs.

Leading figures in Black Literature vehemently oppose the ‘hijacking of Africa’ by western colonial powers. Prominent personalities of African literature try to awaken
the spirit of nationalism and advocate the evolution of black identity. They promote self-rediscovery and stimulate faith in long concealed native beliefs and traditions. Hence, these authors have also acted as spiritual and cultural guide of their communities. Literary artists like Chinua Achebe, Wale Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo and John Pepper Clark were referred as ‘quartet of Nigerian literary scene’ in the post-independent times. They were brilliant and self assured writers known for their reformist views and perceptions about Nigeria and Africa.

Wale Soyinka, has drawn much of the attention from different parts of the world. This recognition is owed much to him being awarded the coveted Nobel Prize in literature. But before the emergence of Wale Soyinka, the foundations of Nigerian literary ‘renaissance’ were being shaped by the older pre-independence generation of writers and artists. Figures like D.O. Fagunwa, Hubert Ogunde, Ben Enwonwe and Fela Sonwande are pioneers of Nigerian pre-independent literary and artistic scenario. There is no shadow of doubt that Wale Soyinka was one of the most promising entrants in the field of contemporary Nigerian literature of 1960’s Africa – the first decade of recently independent African nations. Soyinka arrived on the Nigerian literary setting when Nigerian was on the threshold of acquiring formal independence. His literary journey was aided, by the powerful presence of Nigerian artistic trendsetters like Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, John pepper Clark, Demas Nwoko and Duro Ladipo. All of them were splurging immense impressions of originality in diverse fields of literature, performance, visual and plastic arts. Soyinka’s literature offers rich, varying and elegant expression to themes like the saga of contemporary Nigerian seeking to create an operable space in the midst of hostile conditions. His works provides a rewarding study of social, historical and present terrain of Africa. African community engaged in its own social processes trying to re-constitute the battered African entity also find representation
in his texts. When Soyinka’s mature and serious works were published “he become instantly and forever – one of the most important writers in English speaking world.” (Jeyifo, 1)

Soyinka in his works like Poems of Black Africa and Myth, literature and African World theorized the “identification and valorization of a distinct black world.” (Jeyifo, 43) Chinua Achebe, another renowned Nigerian novelist is best known for his ground breaking fiction Things Fall Apart in which he remarkably paints a comprehensive picture of Igbo society at the end of nineteenth century. Bendict Chiaka Njoko is of the view that “Achebe’s fictional world is realistic and at times verges on naturalism as he delves into photographic re-enactments of Ibo traditional life and cultures such as can be readily be adopted to the resources of English language.” (Njoku, 7)

His other works like the Anthills of Savannah, Arrow of God renders the Nigerian consciousness struggling to redefine itself within the oppressive confines of the western world, thus inducing psychological crises in Nigerian literature. This was clarified by him in the following lines, “African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans… their society had a philosophy… they had dignity. It is that dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is that they must now regain.” (qtd. in Killam, 7)

The torch of Nigerian literature was now reassigned to the hands of second generation poets like Odia Ofeimium and Nigi Osundare and authors of the calibre of Biyi-Bandele Thomas and Ben Okri. Ben Okri received the Bookers Prize, in 1991 for his novel. The Famished Road as “It was a beautifully written and moving novel which conveyed Nigerian peasant life in a changing world.” (Lim, 59) Themes like corruption, military excesses, nationalism often feature in his novels. However ‘the tradition of protest’ through literature is slightly subdued in his works. This angry tone is more explicitly registered in the texts of Achebe and Soyinka. Nonetheless, his essay “The
catastrophe now facing Nigeria” – is an attempt on Nigerian politics. It was a reaction to Nigerian political crisis that emerged after 1993 election results. He restraints from portraying any ‘overt’ preference or prejudice regarding any tribal community, party or geo-political area of Nigeria. Thus, almost all the Nigerian literary artists question and challenge the ‘too-modest’ representation of Africa as cultic and mystifying land; a dark continent; a formless area of life devoid of human significance. Instead their works highlights the trepidation of a new born nation that is undergoing a painful process of conversion from a colonial to neocolonial to wholly self determining nation.

In this slowly renovating Nigeria, people are facing various challenges in their day to day life. Of course life is a bundle of challenges for people all over the world and more so for Nigerian women who has to face a multitude of problems like poverty, sexism, racism, gender inequality, polygamy, infringement of reproductive rights, domestic violence and intimidation by patriarchal practices. Since time immemorial womenfolk has been forced to confront challenges and accept impositions thrust upon them by society, customs and traditions and men. All over the world in every social setup, in East as well as in West, women have been assigned lower and subordinated position compared to men over the years, and they had been groomed to accept this relegated position. This degenerated status is so deeply etched in a woman’s psyche that she performs her duties, functions and obligations without demanding any recognition and rarely shows a spirit of rebellion. She chooses to be an embodiment of love, docility, patience and sacrifice. Female subordination has been set feature of Nigerian society. On one hand she is expected to participate in the cultivation of land, preparation of food, home education of children and other matrimonial matters, but on the other hand, she is coerced to accept ignominious position both at home (where she could be scolded, beaten, used and thrown away to fend for herself at her man’s will whose interests hold supreme) and society
where all the important socio-economic and political decisions are taken by male elders of the community. However in recent times the status of women in African countries has been undergoing a rapid change. Access to western education; exposure to western culture; awareness about the benefits of education; urbanization and active participation in various sectors of employment resulted in financial independence, and ushered emotional – mental well being. It also helped her to gain a distinct identity of her own and realize herself as a human being capable of learning and earning. This female empowerment upgraded the position of Nigerian women, curbed female enslavement to a certain extent and encouraged her to try her forte in various male dominated initiatives. All over the world, various human endeavours including creative writing had been a male bastion as: “In patriarchal western culture… the text’s author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power… Moreover, his pen’s power is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity, to which he lays claim.”(Gilbert and Gubar, 6) 

This has been a regular feature in western literature and so in African and Nigerian literature. A cursory glance at the Nigerian literary development from pre-colonial to post–colonial period aptly pinpoints the male heritage in African literature. Male authors like Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutola, and Wale Soyinka generally deal themes exclusively about male concerns and interests. They usually depict women tied to patriarchal authority and situated in uncomplimentary roles. Most of Nigerian / African literature targeted male audiences and therefore women characters were often ignored, portrayed as helpless and shown operating within male defined parameters.

This ‘voicelessness’ of women in Nigerian literature can be attributed to various factors. Widespread illiteracy among women due to cultural impediments coupled with early education to Nigerian men provided Nigerian male a head start over women. This
male bias in education was promoted during the colonial period and hence is partially responsible for cutting off women from the written word. Moreover, the notion of patriarchy in the Nigerian cultural milieu, the restrictive gender roles as daughters, wives and mothers, the conventional reticence of women automatically makes them take the backseat. Furthermore, African women lack conducive environment needed for creative writing. Nigerian women face the constraints of both time and space, neither do they have the luxury of having a room for themselves where they can write in solitude and privacy nor the time needed to indulge in reflective and introspective thinking. The obstacles of African women are further accentuated by the indifferent attitude of the government. Financial support and other incentives needed to boost the morale of budding young writers, both male and female, are measly provided by the Nigerian government. Generally the government neither welcomes nor promotes home produced works especially those written by black female writers. However, 1960’s and 1970’s Africa/Nigeria witnessed the emergence of female writers. 1966 remains a landmark year in the history of African literature. The Promised Land by Grace Ogot was the first novel by a woman to be published by East African Publishing House. Efuru was the first novel, written by a woman, to be published in the prestigious Heinemann African Writers Series. Thus, 1966 marked the advent of contemporary female writing in African fiction. These female writers like Flora Nwapa, Mariamma Ba, Ama Ata Aidoo, Grace Ogot, Efua Sutherland, Buchi Emecheta represent the dawn of black female literary writing. This breakthrough by women writers on the Nigerian literary scene is well expressed by Gloria T. Hull in the editorial introducing The Black Scholar – “One of the most dramatic changes in the literary world over the last decade has been the blossoming of a large corps of female writers, poets critics. It is not that black women writers did not exist prior to this period, but the black literary scene had historically been a male preserve.”
It is interesting to note that African women writers can be divided into two
classes. According to Femi-Ojo-Ade:

There are those who constitute the old guard – Flora Nwapa, Grace Ogot, 
Efua Sutherland, Ama Ata Aidoo – they are steeped in the tradition of land 
complaining of their sufferings as subjects of their male masters but 
seeking solace in a society that has proclaimed women the mother. Ba, 
Emecheta fall in the second category who are crying out for the liberation 
of women…(Stratton, 135)

Nevertheless, all female writers’ basic thematic concern is to express solidarity 
against the marginalization of women and celebrate women’s capabilities. Their works 
marks a scathing opposition to women’s alienation, dislocation and displacement. Female 
literary writers expose the sexiest bias in male literary tradition and attempt to erase the 
invisibility of Nigerian / African women on the literary scene.Flora Nwapa is generally 
hailed as the mother of African female tradition in fiction. She was one of the first woman 
writers to challenge the orthodoxies of male literary representation. Her path breaking 
mirrors the issues that concern women like marriage, the importance of children in 
marrige, her roles at home and family and the need for economical independence among 
women. The brutalities and tragedy of Nigerian civil war is reflected in her work Never 
Again (1975). Igbo society along with its customs and traditions is also portrayed in her 
works. She also pioneered the ‘New African Woman’ in Efuru (1966) – the foremost and 
boldest deviation from the stereotypical image of women essayed in African literature. 
Through her works she emphasizes the necessity for women to be economically, 
emotionally and mentally liberated. Mariamma Ba, is another Senegalese writer who 
crusades for the valorization of women power. Her novels So Long a Letter and Scarlet
Song exhibit the yearnings of African women. She empathizes against the social injustice and indignities inflicted on women. Most of the protagonists in her novels are crushed under the inexorable grip of religion and religion sanctioned practice of polygamy. Ama Ata Aidoo of Ghana is yet another female writer who is committed to the cause of blacks and their betterment. Aidoo works exhibit her deep resentment regarding the influences of western culture on African consciousness. Her novels are an indictment against the various ills of race, colour, gender that plague an imbalanced society. She is equally sarcastic about the hypocritical African who blindly apes the west. Thus, the novels of Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo touched upon the situation of women in African countries. This female coming in African literature received a shot in the arm with the arrival of Buchi Emecheta in the Nigerian literary world. Buchi Emecheta ‘in an interview’ described herself as “the new sister” of Flora Nwapa, Grace Ogot and Ama Ata Aidoo.

Buchi Emecheta, a late twentieth century Nigerian Igbo novelist, is generally to this date the most prolific and best known African female writer in English. This has been acknowledged by Lloyd Brown “of all the women writers in contemporary African literature Buchi Emecheta of Nigerian has been the most sustained and rigorous voice of direct feminist protest.” (Gill, 33) The sheer volume of her work is a testimony to the fact that Emecheta is more successful as a writer than any of her female predecessors. In fact she is one of the few recognized and appreciated African women writers. Her reception of various awards and critical accolades speaks about her reputation and position in contemporary African literature. Dr. Buchi Emecheta received New statement Jack Campbell award for Commonwealth Writers in 1978 for her novel The Slave Girl. Her other awards include Best Black British Young Writers (1983). This critical acclaim was
ASSORTMENT OF LITERARY RENDITIONS
BY BUCHI EMECHETA

FIG : 4 . Novels of Buchi Emecheta
FIG : 5. Buchi Emecheta’s Literary World

SOURCE: www.sitesatlas.com/customs/ Igboland.html
rewarded by an upward mobility in Lindfor ranking of authors. Marie Umeh states that “Berneth Lindfors, in his empirical survey, ‘Big shots and Little Shots of the Anglophone African Literary Canon’ places her in a tetrarch of the most influential of contemporary African women writers.” (xxiii) She herself acknowledges that since 1970 she is able to support herself from the royalties of her literary works. Reginald Mcnight in New York times book review writes:

Emecheta is no ideologue, her characters do not utter or think words, that would not come from them, they are not mere representatives of larger social movements but real complex human beings, shaped by the vicissitudes of class, culture and sexual politics. She raises the right questions but never harangues. She writes with subtlety, power and abundant compassion. (Mcknight,30)

and *Family Bargain* for radio and Television that were aired on BBC TV. She also wrote her autobiography *Head Above Water* (1980). All these vast literary works appropriately showcases her versatility as an authoress.

Florence OyneBuchi Emecheta was born on 21st May 1944 in Lagos, a city of Nigeria to Igbo parents Jeremy Nwa Budinke and Alice Emecheta. She also has a brother Adolophus. Her parents were semi-educated and embraced the Church Missionary Society’s way of life. Her father was railway worker and molder. As the education of girls was practically nonexistent and discouraged due to gender bias prevalent in the pre-independent Nigeria of 1930’s, young Emecheta spent her initial years at home. But gradually she convinced her parents to recognize the benefits of education and so on her insistence on being schooled, she was enrolled in the same school where her brother used to study. But a cruel act of fate snatched her father away when Emecheta was about eleven years old. Her mother followed age old Igbo custom and started to live with her husband’s brother in their native Ibuza village. At such a tender age Emecheta remained in Lagos and stayed with her mother’s cousin where she was treated more like a servant than a relative. She applied for admission to Girls Methodist School and won four years scholarship. There she studied English and other native languages along with regular subjects. After finishing her schooling, Emecheta bound by Igbo customs and adverse circumstances married Slyvester Onwardi at the age of sixteen. She was betrothed to him at eleven years of age. Slyvester Onwardi was a quiet young man studying accounts. Emecheta bore their first child, Chiedu at seventeen and their second child ,Ikechukwu followed in quick succession. In the meantime Emecheta secured a well paid job at the American Embassy in Lagos. But she always dreamt of going to England, the kingdom of God, and persuaded Slyvester of studying in England. She managed to convince her father-in-law regarding her decision of joining her husband in London and arrived there
in 1962 with her two children. The condition of life in England especially those of the immigrants shattered her dream. She was equally disillusioned with her increasingly abusive husband and her marital life began to crumble. Repeated pregnancies resulting in the birth of three more children, Chukwuemeka, Obiajulu and Chiago further disintegrated Emecheta’s life. Thus, Emecheta, the mother of five children by the age of twentytwo, found herself in the midst of dysfunctional and stormy marriage. However, initially bowing to traditional customs, values and upbringing, Emecheta tried to save her marriage by nonchalantly incurring her husband’s wrath and physical abuse. Racism, unemployment and successive failure in examinations intensified the frustration of Sylvester and he outpoured all his bitterness on Buchi Emecheta. In the process he also tried to stifle Emecheta’s quest for financial and mental liberation. Even amid those trying conditions Emecheta used to engage in creative writing as she believed that by immersing herself in it she would able to maintain sanity in those turbulent times but on a fateful day, her jealous husband burnt and tore the manuscript of her first endeavour The Bride Price. This proved to be the last straw that tore their marriage apart. Emecheta finally mustered up the courage to walk out of her oppressive marriage. They separated in 1966. Following their separation, Emecheta and her five children moved to a council estate a public housing project maintained by British social welfare system, situated in a poor slum in London.

This housing is mentioned as Pussycat Mansions in her debut novel In the Ditch. Eventually she managed to find a job as a librarian (1960-64) in the library of British Museum. From 1965 to 1969 she was designated to the post of Library Officer, British Museum. But as she was not allowed to leave her children alone, while she went to work, Emecheta had no other choice but to quit her job. However, undeterred Emecheta continued to accept odd jobs at welfare centers in an effort to raise her five kids. She was
a youth worker and resident student of RACE (1974-76). She also worked as a community worker, Camden Council (1976-78). Even these unfavourable situations failed to undermine Emecheta’s literary aspirations and she devoted herself to writing in her spare time. She wrote far into the night and early morning before her children got up. She began to chronicle the experiences of a poor black mother of five kids trying to pursue an education yet earning bread for her children. Initially her essays were rejected by various publishers from 1968 to 1970. But ultimately her article *Observations of the London Poor* saw the light of the day when it was published by New Statesmen in a column *Life in the Ditch*. This token step affirmed her decision to live by the pen and effectively launched her writing career.

Though literary writing is Emecheta’s prime passion, yet she successfully managed to attain academic qualifications that elevated her place in literary circles. In 1970, she enrolled at the University of London and earned Bachelor’s Degree in sociology in 1974. In 1976, she received master’s degree in Philosophy from London University. She was a visiting Lecturer at eleven Universities in United States of America including Pennsylvania State University of California and Los Angeles University at Illinois. She was a senior research fellow and visiting Professor of English at University of Calabar, Nigeria from 1980 – 1981. She also held the post of Lecturer, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut in 1982. Since 1982 she is a Lecturer at the University of London and is also member of Home Secretary Advisory Council of RACE. In 1992, she was felicitated with Doctor of Literature Degree from Fairleigh Dickinson University. In recent times, Emecheta is a visiting Professor to many Universities of Nigeria, United States and elsewhere.

In spite of being an accomplished writer, Buchi Emecheta is never shy of paying tribute to the female fore bearers of African Literature like Grace Ogot, Bessie Head &
Flora Nwapa. She openly professes her debt to Flora Nwapa whom she believed to be her role model. She is well acquainted and influenced by many English writers of Nigeria like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. She is equally inspired by her ‘big mother’ her father’s aunt. She considers her aunt as her muse who encouraged the young Emecheta to become a storyteller. As a child, Emecheta used to be mesmerized at her aunt stories which projected the heroic deeds of their ancestors and provided knowledge about their mores and customs. Her first attempts at creative writing were thwarted upon by her school’s teacher who deemed Emecheta’s English to be dismal. But this and other unfortunate incidents could not dampen the spirits of Buchi Emecheta and her perseverance bore fruit when her debut novel *In the Ditch* was published in 1972.

*In the Ditch* marked Emecheta’s debut in the world of creative writing. This piece is heavily drawn from personal experiences. Adah, the protagonist of the novel can be regarded as the fictionalized self of Emecheta. It is derived from her accumulated observations and was eventually published in New Statesman. This novel registers the perspectives of a Nigerian émigré regarding the anomalous British welfare system. It also provides Emecheta the podium to crusade against the subjugation of African women and envisions her mantra for women’s emancipation, individual initiative, perseverance and education. She asserts that these above said qualities guarantees escape from oppression and enslavement. The story follows the protagonist’s ordeal as she tries to free herself from one bondage only to be engulfed in another – from an unsuccessful marriage to the degrading entrapment of welfarism. Through her positive attitude, grit and determination, Adah is able to emerge from the ditch of dependency on both fronts: physiological and financial. Although criticized for its overtly simple style and language, *In the Ditch* is a powerful example of bildungsroman by a female writer in African literature.
Second Class Citizen is the rightful chronological successor of Emecheta’s debut novel In the Ditch. The novel portrays the story of Adah, a young and spirited African girl. She is in fact the mouthpiece to represent the author’s experiences and is also a paradigm of the ordeal sustained by African women in their journey of life and their intimidated existence by the heavily tyrannical patriarchy. The setting of the novel is around the first half of 1950’s Nigeria, about seven to eight years after World War II. The story starts off with Adah’s parents’ disappointment at the birth of a baby girl. The birth of a girl child was regarded as a sort of tragedy; hence Adah’s birth is neither rejoiced nor recorded. Adah’s brother was sent to school while Adah remained at home with her mother. But schooling and education were so desirous for her that one day she slipped out of house without the knowledge of her mother and ran off to school with the hope that the teacher, whom she knew beforehand, would let her be in the class. She barged into the class much to the bewilderment of the students. Fortunately, the teacher allowed her to attend the class. Later on, she forces her plans on the family’s blueprint and manages to continue schooling. Her dreams pause at the death of her father. Adah’s mother moves in with her husband’s brother and settles in their village whereas Adah stays with her maternal uncle in Lagos. Adah excels in school and secures a four year scholarship to fund her secondary education. Thus, Adah, in her childhood is portrayed as an utterly determined girl focused on rising from obscurity through tenacity, hard work and unaltering faith in herself. Her subsequent set of problems occurs after her marriage with Francis. Initially she is inhibited towards marriage until she realizes that marriage might be the only option to realize her dreams of being University educated. The African male’s incorrigible tendencies to oppress women are well manifested in Francis. His wickedness, insecurity and inclination to hurt physical and mental abuse throw Adah’s life into a pit of anguish and agony. Adah, however, never puts her dreams to rest. She manages to secure
a decently salaried job at American Embassy in Lagos and convinces Francis to move to London for further studies. Her father-in-law, at the outset, disapproves her intent to join Francis in London but Adah smartly manoeuvres her agenda and sets off to London with her two kids. On her arrival at London, she feels dejected at the bleak, cold, damp weather of London. The grey overcast skies seemed to presage the nightmarish ordeal that Adah was fated to. Her initial years at London are marred by domestic violence and intimidation inflicted upon her by indolent and sadistic Francis. She also experiences racism and sexism in a predominantly white world. To sustain her family, she starts working in London while Francis becomes a parasite. Her basic rights of reproduction are violated upon by Francis that results in relentless and unwanted pregnancies and by the age of twenty two she becomes a mother of five. Her first attempts to write a novel is put to flames when her husband burns the manuscript of *The Slave Girl*, her brainchild. It leads to the breakdown of their marriage. She decides to leave her ruined nest and separates from her husband. Ultimately she achieves success by vanquishing the obstacles that lay on her path. Thus, through the story, Adah is depicted as a feisty, independent and assertive woman who assumes the role of a breadwinner and is bedrock of the family. She also takes all the important decisions of the family and uncomplainingly drags along a saddled husband. Her triumphs in life are constantly juxtaposed against Francis failures and weaknesses. The socio-cultural and personal plight of African women, retrograde gender disparity, race-class-ethnicity related bigotry are well underscored in the novel.

*The Bride Price* is Emecheta’s third published novel. This novel’s first manuscript, torn and burnt by her husband, explores the victimization of women in the guise of customs, mores and traditions namely the humiliating tradition of bride price which categorizes women as commodities deemed to be exchanged for money, the
enslavement of women through marriage, the age old proverbs which entrap women in the web of cultural ethos and their subjugation to rigid socio-cultural diktats.

Her next novel *The Slave Girl* is a valiant attempt to highlight the plight of women sold into slavery. It depicts the value of the women as property that can be sold and discarded at men’s will, whose decisions hold influence. It also portrays the limited opportunities available to women in an unjust and chauvinistic Nigerian society.

Her subsequent novel *The Joys of Motherhood* is generally considered as Emecheta’s most accomplished work so far. It revolves in the period in the history of Nigeria from early twentieth century to 1950. The setting of the novel centers on the village of Obuli in Ibuza and Lagos in Nigeria. *The Joys of Motherhood* is an authentic representation of the squeezed conditions of African women oppressed by male idealizations of wifehood and motherhood on one hand and constraints imposed upon her by the rapid altering Nigerian society, influenced by British imperialism of Victorian era. Nnu Ego, the central character’s obsession with childbearing, stemming out of patrilineal Igbo social beliefs, drives her life and pushes her towards alienation and inevitable doom.

After an interlude of four children’s books, Buchi Emecheta penned the novel *Destination Biafra* a sweeping historical novel attempting a fictionalized reconstruction of the civil unrest in Nigeria during the Biafran secessionist movement in the period 1967-1970. Biafra is located in the south–eastern region of Nigeria and its inhabitants are mostly Igbo people. They wanted to separate from Nigeria owing to economic, ethnic, cultural and religious differences. There is a growing corpus of literature related to Nigerian civil war and hence it occupies a place of special importance not only in Nigerian literary creations but also in African literature. However, it is interesting to note that these bodies of works have been, mainly, produced by male authors like Chinua Achebe, Wale Soyinka and Elechi Ammadi. They have provided imaginative and
fictionalized yet authentic version of the traumatic chapter in the history of Nigeria. The implications of those strife torn years on women were unfortunately not projected fairly by these male writers. Buchi Emecheta’s *Destination Biafra* and Flora Nwapa’s *Never Again* recounts women’s views and experiences of Biafran war.

With her next novel *Double Yoke* Emecheta reverted back to her familiar territory yet it campaigned for female liberation and meaningful gender equality through a romantic conflict wavering between constricted and conventional traditional African ethos and the more expansive but untrodden choices offered by contemporary African society. *Double Yoke* is a journey of love with tragic overtones. Ete Kamba and Nko are love struck young University students. This seemingly simple romance is interwoven with more intricate issues plaguing the Africans namely the urgent need to re-brush tribal life so that it is complacent both with ancient values and urbanized Africa.

Buchi Emecheta’s feminist alignment finds rigorous expression in *Naira Power*. Though gender bias remain the core area of emphasis, yet the filth and corruption that has corroded the affluent classes, the disharmonious co-existence of primeval and affluent societies represented through the chaotic traffic logged streets of Lagos, the insatiable lust for power and money among African politicians, the kaleidoscopic vibrancy of African markets, the barbaric medieval justice meted out to wrongdoers has been remarkably captured in the novel. *The Rape of Shavi* is a utopian fable and a represents an experimental deviation in her creations. It is a deceptively simple allegory that explores the relationship between imperialist Europe and primeval Africa. The rape of future Queen of Shavi by European refugees denotes the eventual fate of the idyllic tribe of cattle farmers residing in the mythical country of Shavi and symbolizes the conquest of chaste Africa by power hungry materialistic Europe.
With her next novel *Gweldolen*, Emecheta reverts back to her time tested theme – the plight of black immigrants in London but there is a slight shift regarding the nativity of central protagonist. *Gweldolen* is a girl of Jamaican -Caribbean parentage and not African. *Gweldolen* is a sorrowful tale of a young girl who endures molestation, rape, incest, parental neglect and abuse, racism but finally grows into a strong, proud mother of Iyamide (Gweldolen’s daughter). This novel is a raging commentary on the well known but least discussed plight of girls and women bearing the brunt of incestuous relationship forced upon by their menfolk. Emecheta in her novel *Kehinde* which appeared in 1994 lucidly yet in a plain spoken style portrays the transculturalism of Africans living abroad. It depicts the ongoing conflicts the African Diaspora who have very little touch with the homelands and its mores and customs. The autobiography in the first two novels is restructured in *Head Above Water*. It describes Emecheta’s continued struggle to bring up her family as a single parent, gain a degree in sociology, find jobs and continue to write. It ends with the achievement of two major goals, the purchase of a house of her own and her settling down to become a full-time writer. In between it explores social conditions in black London and sheds interesting light on Emecheta’s development as a writer, as it describes her involvement with each of her novels as they emerge.

While written out of chronological sequence, these novels together present a rich panorama of Nigerian life, rural and urban, before, during and after colonial domination. About also they show us, as never before, Nigerian women’s lives in their historical, social and personal complexity uniquely qualified by both her training and experience to serve as a trustworthy guide, and chronicler of the worlds she describes. (Richardson, 6-7)