

Introduction

Chapter I

Introduction

A work of art represents life; the writer through his work conveys his vision for transforming the society. Every writer has a moral liability because the primary function of art is to make universal brotherhood as the norm in the society to reinstate social justice. So literary texts are dedicated works created with a motto to render service to society as it possess enormous wisdom. An artist takes the role of a social reformer. “A committed or engaged writer is one who through his work, is dedicated to the advocacy of certain beliefs and programmes especially those which are political or ideological and in aid of social reform” (Jothiprakash 1).

The African culture is believed to have spread from Egypt to all parts of Africa. Initially Northern Africa was a pagan society, later Islam spread to the country. Missionaries introduced Christianity prior to colonialism. Christianity had a major role in shaping the culture of the country. The Europeans were attracted and amazed by the abundant human resource that existed in Africa and their dire need for workers in American plantations was fulfilled by the starting up of slave trade. The Europeans led to the depiction of Africans “into ‘savage’ and of ‘inferior’ nature” (qtd. in Eze 6). The southern part of Nigeria was completely occupied by Portuguese explorers who marched into Nigeria with the intentions to establish trade and also to spread their religion. The historical data conveys, “... by 1480, it had become a regular practice for one or two Portuguese caravels to enter their rivers each year in search of slaves” (Ikime 236). Though people of Africa have been enriched by the invasion of European powers in certain aspects like education and technological development, but the slave trade was the greatest disadvantage.

Nigeria comprises of about two hundred and fifty tribal groups, and each group have their own language and are from divergent cultural background. Nigeria is an amalgamation of three major tribal groups: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The Hausas were pagans, later they adapted to Islam, on the other hand, the Yorubas and Igbos were influenced by Christianity.

In Nigeria, each tribal group has a certain distinctive characteristic of their own. They stay united and believed that they belong to the same lineage and followed the same culture, ritual practices that contribute to their past glory. Every group holds an exclusive traditional custom and separate language and follow their own way of behaviour in regard to dressing, food habits and social hierarchy. They had their own norms and systems to be followed in marriage and other related societal activities. The colonizers manipulated this diversity to establish their policy of divide and rule.

The invasion of European culture brought about a remarkable renovations and drastic changes in all spheres of the society. The acceptance of these new ideologies and changes engulfed the entire continent. The natives who were used to traditional culture and age-old practices were spellbound by the introduction of humanitarian institutions such as hospitals and schools which provided special health care and the education to the poor.

Conventionally the Nigerians lived in extended family setup. It is a setting where people of different generations live together. “The children quickly realize that they stand in the circle of history; their ancestors represent the past, their parents represent the present, and they represent the future ... and are trained to cherish the past and respect the present” (Falola 29). In this extended family setting a child is brought up by the whole village,

which denotes the harmonious relationship between members of a village. The negative aspect is that it paved a way to the dominating factors, patriarchy and feudalism.

Igbo is a tribal community occupying the south eastern region of Nigeria which is referred by the name Igboland. According to their traditional setup, family is the chief social unit and they termed the family as *Eze* in their Igbo language. The major sub divisions that are found in each section are provided with a unique name indicating an ethnic group: “a. *Onuama* (extended family); b. *Umunna* (lineage); c. *Ogbe'* (village); d. *Mba'* (clan); e. *Ikpa, Ohia-ubi, Oke-Ohia* (a mass of land and pieces of uninhabited farmlands, forest and bushes)” (Aligwekwe 81).

Nigerian culture has its origin back to pre-historic times. The King was considered to be the head of a clan and was treated as the most respected person in his tribe. In order to establish his control and to maintain his authority throughout the kingdom, the King selects and nominates clan heads, who should help him and should be under his control. The kingdom was divided into small territories for administrative reasons and each province comprised of numerous villages. There were many sub units which were controlled by the chiefs, who are loyal to the king and help in the administrative process. *Onuama*, is a form of a compound, the place where the extended family lives, consisting of people of the same family and they believed that they belong to a common ancestor whom they term as *Nna-Mbu*, meaning the first father. “The Igbo term for lineage is *Umunna* (the patrilineage). The *Umunna* as a patrilineage limit is made up of the sum total of the agnatic units each of which is called the *Onuama* (the extended family)” (Aliwekwe 61).

In Nigeria, marriage was considered to unite two lineages. The men remain in their *Umunna* throughout their life, while women leave their parental home and subject herself

to the patriarchal dominance of her husband. Obge means village, and the Igbos strongly believed that each village was formed by their distant forefather who was worshiped as a common deity. Mba means Clan which is a combination of two or more villages. The men of a Clan who are from different villages maintain a healthy relationship among themselves. They stand united in sorting out the solutions for problems such as land issues and domestic discord that they faced within their community by conducting communal meetings among themselves, seeking advice from the elderly persons which helped in maintaining law and order.

The most important thing to be observed is that women were treated on par with men and were provided equal role in the administration. The general assembly of the village consisted of women's councils and their opinions were consulted. Certain forums were formed solely to take care of the welfare of the women. The women meet at regular intervals during early hours of mornings to sort out solutions for crucial problem that needs immediate attention.

The women who conducts this meeting is called as Ogene Nyanya or Onye-isi-umunwanyi, meaning the women's leader, headed by the great mother who captures this position as Omu (the great mother). She was given the title by the wealth, heredity, seniority and merits. The Omu thus selected was accepted as the mother by the community and takes care of the women related issues. Omu should be shrewd, intelligent and reliable, with leadership and reasoning skills must be talented enough to make ornaments and prepare concoction to intimidate the evils and to preserve the prosperity of their community. She should be capable enough to carry out the duties like providing solutions to family issues, conducting sacrifices and rituals to their Goddess, settling marriages and taking care of the market place related issues like maintaining a proper pathway, allotting prices for the goods, framing market prohibitions and resolving market related issues, which is considered as part

of the custom of Igbo society. A strict disciplinary action such as exclusion and exile were forced on the woman who misbehaved or who refuses to abide by the standards set by the council. “The Omu had own cabinet (called the *ilogo*) made up with councillors with titular ranks and duties corresponding on a one-to-one basis of those of Obi’s councilors” (Hafkin and Bay 48).

The great mother Omu is the nominated head, but she should not finalise the things without the consent of Ikporoani; the women representative selected from each quarter of the village. Though Omu gained the confidence of the people, all women are provided equal rights to articulate their views and to oppose the judgment of the Omu. Women representatives were selected based on merit and they were given special title. “Thus amongst the Igbo’s, women are said to have well defined political rights and conducted much of their business without male interference” (Pearce 4).

The *Igbo* women too had a role in traditional politics. The ‘Omu’ was in charge of the women in the village with her chosen ‘ilogo’ (cabinet). Women were also organized in associations like ‘Inyemidi’ (wives of a lineage) and ‘Umuada’ (daughters of a lineage) that cited as peer groups. The Inyimidi gathered regularly for ‘mikiri’, a forum for women’s issues. During the ‘mikiri’ rules were formed about farming, livestock and the market, women discussed problems about men; strategies for solving them (including sexual, housework or childcare strikes) were arrived at collectively. (Morgan 500)

Women council gave judgement; dealt with cases that were brought to their council and provided judgement. Women in precolonial period held a high place in the society and enjoyed economic independence too.

African women have varying degrees of economic independence... Wives and husbands in Africa usually have separate incomes, with clearly defined financial obligations to their children, their spouse and spouse's lineage. Married women generally have the right to own and acquire property that is separate from that of their husbands and in many areas men and women were guaranteed equal rights to land use. Business transactions and earnings beyond marital obligations are considered a spouse's private affair. (Hafkin and Bay 60)

In the precolonial period, women involved themselves in retail trade as they shouldered the economic responsibilities of the family along with their husband. "90% Nigerian women are working mothers who trade and farm to provide for their families, ensuring that they have a source of income and economic clout where necessary. The system has existed since pre-colonial times" (Agbese 19). Economic responsibility became an extra burden to the women. "Though women had a substantial measure of economic independence and a voice in political affairs in many parts of the continent, they were not dominant, as some have said and they were not equal" (Hafkin and Bay 61).

During the colonial rule the people of Africa lost their identity totally and started behaving like a submissive servant to the colonial master. They considered that speaking English is the only way of identifying themselves with their colonial masters. They blindly accepted the rules and regulations formulated by the colonisers. After the colonial rule women lost their social status quo they were provided during precolonial times, they became economically backward due to colonial laws and started petty trading and other domestic chores to keep themselves economically fit. "An example is the Hausa women

of Northern Nigeria, who supplemented their husbands' wages by preparing and selling foodstuffs within their compounds" (Entwisle and Coles 264).

The colonial powers brought a new administration policy in Africa. They recognized the male monarch 'obi' but their male chauvinistic nature failed to accept the female counterpart 'omu'. "The colonial system negatively encouraged or brought to the fore the traditional ideologies of patriarchy or male superiority which originally existed in African societies" (Leslie 30). The coloniser and the native administrative court managed by the local male members gave acceptance only to African 'male' power.

The 'omu' lost her prestige and her clientele as her political and religious functions were replaced by colonial rule and Christianity. The introduction of clinics and foreign drugs replaced the sacrifices she and her ilogo had made in their role as guardians of the health and welfare of the community. Cases previously attended by her began to be dealt with by the British-appointed colonial magistrate.

The introduction of imported goods into the market place ruined her system of price-fixing... The traditional title-taking that the 'omu' had presided over was displaced as Christian converts acquired the new title of mississi (Mrs) that came with marriage in church and brought higher status in the new social order. (Ogunyemi 56)

These oppressive forces did not affect the inherent courageous spirit of the African women. The Aba Riots revealed the strength of the African women in Nigerian history. Aba Riots occurred during colonial rule and was a result of the incursion of the British system of administration into the African social framework, especially their

policies regarding women related issues. The colonial administration prohibited the regulations followed by the women committees and associational meetings 'mikiri' which took actions against the wrong doers. These rights were then handed over to the educated wealthy male elite. As women's political role was curtailed it led to the Aba Riots in 1929, known as the Women's War. Slowly women were relegated in social sphere and they were provided with less land resource, thus increasing their dependence on men. It gave men "... potent means of controlling and disciplining women, heightening their subordination" (Mann 705), thus bringing down the women's status in society. "They had no rights to the ownership of land or control over the produce they cultivated. The unpaid labour of women and children essentially subsidized the colonial wage-bill Women received little or no education because neither Africans nor colonial patriarchs regarded it as important" (Schipper 123).

The African men swiftly chose the new ideology transmitted by the colonisers and started to restrict women's independence. The colonial law forbade women from owning land and its produce which made the women to be entirely depended on their men. As a result of colonization African women "... were raped into submission, were exploited as labourers and endured subhuman status as slaves" (Courville 39). African women undergo triple exploitation and discrimination in the name of class, gender and race. Further, women's oppression was institutionalized by the colonial marriage laws that "relegated women to the status of a minor under the control of her father, guardian or husband" (38).

The practice of polygamy was the primary societal immorality in precolonial African societies. Women were oppressed by the practise of polygamy and they submissively accepted their repression. During colonial period the practice of polygamy eroded as they

started to mimic the European cultural norms and values and Christian marriage law forbade polygamy. Beauvoir states that women empowerment is not curtailed by biological differences but by the cultural norms prevailing in the society: “For him she is sex—absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he 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” (Beauvoir 26).

African countries started to fight for their independence from the beginning of the First World War and by 1950 back tracking of the imperial powers started. Consequently, the West Nigeria and East Nigeria attained their independence in the year 1957, and the Northern part of Nigeria achieved its independence in 1959. Nigeria got independence and formed its first Republic in October 1960. After independence, Nigerian economy came under powerful foreign control by the discovery of oil reserves. After the Second World War, there was political turmoil in Nigeria due to problems like unemployment, low wages etc. The postcolonial Nigeria witnessed military coups and civil wars which worsened the economy of the country.

The spirit of the Nigerian writer was kindled by the political independence and patriotism. Nigerians were the first persons of Anglophone Africa, who expressed in a prolific way their thoughts and feelings enthusiastically in creative writing using English. Nigeria stands distinctive in its artistic venture with abundant literary output. The initial stage of African indigenous literature originated from oral culture and folk literature. It is noted that women have contributed more towards African oral literature and thus transmitted their culture and their ancient practices in the form of oral songs to later generations. This oral literature found its offshoot in poetry and short fictional narratives.

Nigerian writers depict the life of the African women realistically and bring out a new version of African womanhood. The major themes of Nigerian writings are:

Protest, inter racial love, proud assertion of race, of later novels. In this wise, emphasis will be more on the written than on the oral type of Literature. This will not however undermine the appearance and use of orature in written literary works, or indeed relevant references to oral literature as the occasion requires. Finally, it is worthy to note that in modern times, literature has become one of Africa's major contributions to the intellectual world. Oral or written, African Literature (and particularly Nigerian), has gained recognition world-wide.
(Ojaide 317)

Igbo culture could be better understood from its *Ifò*. *Ifò* means in Igbo oral genre and could be equalled with English folk tales. *Ifò* have various functions and act as a medium of instruction to educate the children. In ancient days the elderly women, "... make use of riddles, praises, proverbs and songs to open or structure a story, to enliven its narrative, to increase its tension, to characterize a figure, to underline the very concern of the story itself, to add important commentary and ... to offer a welcome and entertaining distractions for the audience" (qtd in Umeh29).

The oral tradition commenced with poems which were translated during French colonization. The literature that flourished in ancient Africa was in the oral forms– which comprised of folktales, proverbial stories, narratives and poems, which helped in circulating their ancient customs and traditional practices. They used oral literature to inform their future generations about their ancestry. This oral form slowly started to diminish as the missionaries started to compile hymns which paved way for rise of new type of literature.

The primary reason for emergence of Nigerian literature in English was the result of the introduction of institutionalized western education during the colonial rule. Nigerian literature is unique as the quintessence of their indigenous literature is represented in their English creative works. The writers used literature as a medium to disclose the dreadful social conditions faced by the poor and the circumstances which made them to be subservient in their own land. Nigerian writers celebrated their independence but it was short lived, the civil war started due to inter-regional quarrels and corruptions that prevailed in the society.

The prominent writers who decorated the Nigerian literary arena are Chinua Achebe, Eddie Iroh, Ken Saro Wiwa, Akachi Adimora, Bisi Ojediran, Christopher Okigbo, Ben Okri and Wole Soyinka, T.M. Aluko, Cyprian Ekwensi, Onuora Nzekwu, Gabriel Okara and Amos Tutuola. They represented Nigerian life realistically in their fiction. They portrayed their insight about Nigerian culture and stimulated the native people to have faith in their ability through their writing.

Initially there were prohibitions regarding the education of girl children. It took a good time for the women to emerge with confidence. Most of the Nigerian writing is only by men as men were provided education in the early years while women were denied education. When African literature re-emerged after a break, because of the western colonization, women were given secondary status. There is, thus, a “crucial nexus between the acquisition of subjectivity through language and the recognition of the social nature of female identity” (Kaplan 72).

In Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Tutuola’s *Palm Wine Drinkard*, women characters are not given much importance, they are made to play a marginal role. Another important

point to be noticed at this juncture is that in the early writings, the male writers depicted women merely as sexual objects: Amadi's Ihuoma in *Concubine*, and Wanja is portrayed as prostitute in Nnugiwa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood*. Most of the male writing did not showcase the exceptional qualities of women; mostly the women characters are marginalised in their writings and men are represented as heroic figures and were considered to be competent in the societal setup. Women's voice was muted in Nigerian literature due to various reasons: when the colonial education was introduced, it was provided first to Nigerian men, due to cultural hindrances and patriarchal system that exists in the society. So, male members of the society got an opportunity to have a head start over women in the field of literature. Lloyd W. Brown rightly remarks that these women, "... are the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field" (Britinger 169).

Women silently approved male superiority and thus began to co-operate in their own subordination. This false consciousness instilled in women as weaker sex becomes the basic foundation for male domination. Women were expected to bear the ethical and moral responsibility from the primeval ages in Nigeria. Though the responsibility is mounted on the women, they were prohibited and subjugated at all levels in the society. This restriction on them made them to choose backseat and showed no urge to showcase their literary talent. One of the prominent aspects 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).

Native women writers represented African women as mere slaves whose existence is restrained to the expectations and norms set by the society. The works of poets like Noemia de Sousa, Marina Gashe, Medard Kasese and Micere-Mugo portrayed male chauvinism in the patriarchal society which overloaded women with the family responsibilities. Efua Sutherland, one of the best poets in the Africa took a step closer to emancipation. Zulu Sofola, the first published female Nigerian playwright states, “whatever a woman achieves in her discipline or profession, she achieves it against plenty of odds because a woman’s life is more burdened and more confused. Unless the woman is disciplined, thoroughly disciplined, by the end of the day she can’t think” (qtd. in Qjaide 144).

Women writers aim to shatter the traditional burdens that are levied on them in the name of societal laws and expressed their desire to be treated equally on par with men. Women characters in Barbara Kimenye’s prose collection, *Kalasanda* (1965) and *Kalasanda Revisited* (1966) are stereotypes representing the impact of Christianity. Efua Sutherland is a poet, as well as a renowned playwright. Her notable plays are *Edufa and Floriwa*. Though the genre of fiction was a Western art form, it became an indispensable literary form in the domain of African literature.

Adaora Lily Ulasi is one among the early novelist. Her novels *Many Things You No Understand* (1970) and *Many Things Begin for a Change* (1971) depict the transformation of traditional Ibo society due to colonization. A trend of women writing was set by novelists like Sutherland, Aidoo and Nwapa who focussed upon the marginalisation and discrimination meted out to the African women. Their novels became a platform for discussing the doubly oppressed condition of African women because of their race and gender.

Grace Ogot, the Kenyan novelist wrote about the problems faced by women in society. Her novel *The Promised Land* (1966), displays gender stereotypes. Her short story collection *Land without Thunder* deals with patriarchy. Flora Nwapa's novels *Efuru* and *Idu* depict the condition of women before colonialism. By analysing the themes of Nwapa's novels it is evident that there is a gradual change in the consciousness of African women. Another powerful African woman novelist is Bessie Head of South Africa. Her first novel, *When the Rain Clouds Gather* was published in 1969, which highlighted cross cultural encounters. Bessie Head's works concentrated more on racial discrimination; for instance *Maru* depicts the plight of the native people due to racism.

The only writer in West Africa who challenges Buchi Emecheta in the volume of her creative writing is the Ghanaian, Ama Ata Aidoo. Aidoo's work *Our Sister Kill joy* (1977), explores the social status of women in the postcolonial Africa and their oppression in the domestic front. Her next novel *Changes: A Love Story* was published in 1991. It gives an authentic condition of the urban African woman of the present times. The protagonist Esi-Sekyi divorces her husband on the ground of marital rape, a concept unheard of in traditional African society. Aidoo's poetical works like *Someone Talking to Sometime* and *An Angry Letter in January*, reverberates with feministic overtones.

Literature reflects the attitude and values of the society to which the author belongs. Igbo literature too reflects the position of men and women of Igbo community. The main aim of their writing is to focus on certain issue which occupies a prime position in their society. It is rightly stated: "The function of art was to teach and educate and move, unify and organize people, not to mystify them or offer dazzling support of the status quo" (Le Roi Jones 8). One such committed writer who hails from Nigeria is Buchi Emecheta.

In her works, she represents various women characters endowed with determination to overcome the hardships of life. It is to be accepted that a writer's work could not be comprehended without understanding the situation in which they were brought up and the shortcoming that the writer had encountered. In order to comprehend Buchi Emecheta's works, a perfect understanding of the socio-cultural scenario which has played an active role in shaping her fiction is essential.

Buchi Emecheta, a Nigerian novelist is unquestionably one of the prominent writers among African women writers. Florence Onye Buchi Emecheta was born on 21 July 1944, in Nigeria, at Yaba, near Lagos to Ibo parents, her father, a railroad worker, Jeremy Nwabudike and her mother, Alice Okuekwu Emecheta were traditional Igbo. During Emecheta's childhood Nigeria was undergoing radical changes as they were fighting for their independence from the colonial rule. Her struggle for equality started when her younger brother was sent to school whereas she was denied the opportunity, later she was allowed to have her primary education at a missionary school. She was orphaned as a young child and was raised by an extended family. She was fascinated by the proficient story telling skill of her aunt, and much attracted by the narration; Buchi aspired to become a writer from her young age onwards. Emecheta won scholarship to Methodist Girl's High School, where she developed her creative abilities.

Buchi Emecheta left school at the age of sixteen, and was married to Sylvester Onwordi. She arrived in London in 1960 as a housewife with two children, when her husband was still a student continuing his studies. As her husband studying, she had to earn for their livelihood. She took care of her family by taking a job as a librarian. In her six-year marriage life, she gave birth to five children but her married life was not

harmonious. She underwent untold sufferings because of her male chauvinistic and selfish husband. Unbearable of the tortures, in the year 1966; Emecheta got separated from her husband.

In her autobiographical works, *Adah's Story* and *Head Above Water*, Buchi Emecheta discusses her failed marriage. Her yearning for studies started again, in the year 1970, she got enrolled at the University of London, and received Honours in Sociology in 1974. In the mean time she took various jobs to take care of her children. She then joined as a community worker in Camden, North London, between 1976 and 1978. Her life is full of miseries in a hostile and poverty ridden environment. She struggled to raise her five children. Buchi Emecheta in her autobiography *Head Above Water* says:

As for my survival for past twenty years in England, from where I was a little over twenty, dragging four cold and dripping babies with me and pregnant with fifth one that is a miracle. And if for any reason you do not believe in miracles, please start believing, because my keeping my head above water in this indifferent society, which is probably succeeding in making me indifferent and private too, is a miracle. (5)

In her creative writing Buchi Emecheta represented her personal experiences and her main focus was on the integrity of women. By the dint of sheer determination, perseverance, self confidence and commitment she became a prominent writer. She withstood the trials and tribulations and published her first novel *In the Ditch* (1972). The novel has more autobiographical instances as the protagonist Adah manages to maintain her dignity and struggles to raise her children.

Buchi Emecheta received a number of awards, some of the meritorious awards are - Best Black Writer in Britain (1978), Jock Campbell award (1979), Daughter of Mark Twain, American literature Award. Her position as a prominent writer was recognised by the British government and was appointed as a member of Art and Council of Great Britain and member of Advisory Council, Home Secretary on Race and Equity, London. Though Buchi Emecheta focussed on the suffering of the black women, her works gave voice to the voiceless subjugated women belonging to all races and culture. She attained heavenly abode on 25th January 2017 at the age of 72.

Emecheta's works discuss the position of black women, within their own race and in emigrant society. Buchi Emecheta being born and brought up in Igbo culture was well aware of the customs followed in her culture. She is quite familiar with the thoughts and attitude of the Igbo people and the way they treat women. She has personally undergone as well as observed the difficulties faced by women in their culture. She intended purposefully and wished to give voice to the suffering women and so it could be noticed that her writings mainly deal with womanhood and more particularly about the Igbo women and the transformation of their social status during pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. Her novels focus mainly about the secondary position rendered to women and women being compelled to take up passive roles. As a woman and a fellow sufferer she is capable to illustrate poignantly the psychological tumult from a women's point of view. Buchi Emecheta, a dynamic and award winning Nigerian writer counsel women that they must claim for their rights through her novels. "Buchi Emecheta's literary upward mobility has been due largely to the attentions she has received from feminist critics" (Stratton 109). Molaria Ogundpie Leslie in an interview says:

Many feel the concerns of women are not serious enough since they are about the area of emotions and the private life. I wonder how we got the idea in colonized societies that only political themes are respectable.

A cultural lag from colonial times perhaps. Great literature has always been about human emotions and the actions which spring from them.

Anna Karenina is first and foremost a love story; Crime and Punishment is about the psychology of a young man in a specific situation. But no; these are not respectable themes in Africa. (qtd. in James 72)

Positioned as an African writer settled in Britain, Emecheta has given her assessment of the status of women. Most of her fictional women characters are searching for self-actualization, wanting to achieve their goals and yearning to be treated with equality in their community. Her first novel *In the Ditch* was published in the New Statesman magazine in 1972 is a semi-autobiographical in nature. The second novel, *Second Class Citizen* (1974) portrays a pitiable young Nigerian woman who grapples to raise her children in London. *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) which explicates the position of women in Nigerian society won the New Statesman Jock Campbell Award; and *The Joys of Motherhood* published in 1979 describes women's experience in bringing up their children where standards of traditional Igbo society is drastically changing. Her novel *Destination Biafra* (1982), was set during the civil war period in Nigeria; *The Rape of Shavi* (1983), is an allegorical account of imperialism in Africa; *Gwendolen* (1989) and *Kehinde* (1994), is about Nigerian immigrants living in London. Her latest work of fiction, *The New Tribe*, was published in 2000 and she also wrote several children's fiction.

Buchi Emecheta was a visiting Professor at a number of universities in the United States throughout and returned to Nigeria in 1980 as Senior Research Fellow and Visiting Professor of English at the University of Calabar. She owns a publishing company - Ogwugwu Afor. Since 1979, she has been a member of the Home Secretary's Advisory Council on Race. She has contributed to the *New Statesman*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and *The Guardian*. Buchi Emecheta was awarded an honorary Doctor of Literature by Fairleigh Dickinson University, New Jersey in 1992.

Buchi Emecheta exceptionalism is her social responsibility as she emphasizes with the fellow women and encouraged them to overcome their shortcoming amidst all struggles that she had faced in her life. She advocated women to take up the accountability for their future as they had potential to solve their problems. Buchi Emecheta states that her prime concern is to highlight the problems faced by women, "When I write," She says, "I look for a problem in a certain society and I write about that problem strictly from a woman's point of view" (Umeh 252). In an interview with Jussawalla and Dasenbrock, Emecheta states,

My friends are not just friends from Africa anymore. My friends are those who are going through the same experience. They don't have to be African, and they don't have to be black. I've found that as I get older and I stay longer, I may have something more in common with you... than with my sister in Nigeria... I'm just a citizen of the world (96).

During the colonial period women were excluded and subjugated in all spheres of society. In the present situation, the views disseminated by women are appreciated and

accepted by men, which is in complete contrast to the situation that existed in the traditional time. Sylvia Leith-Ross, an anthropologist says that: “Nigerian women, because of their economic importance as mothers, farm cultivators and traders, have been more powerful than is generally thought” (21) which rightly suits Buchi Emecheta, who has taken writing as her aspiration, in spite of the various struggles and challenges she achieved the present acclaimed position proving that the Igbo women are spirited and they could conquer the impediment that deter them. Roseanne P. Bell in her article “The Absence of the African Woman Writer” says,

I offer a perspective which is rarely considered when one studies African literature: that African women are by no means ignorant of the triple oppressions - race, class and sex, which are partially responsible for their relatively unimpressive position as writers, and that African women are informed of the cognitive and conative experiences which, in conjunction with changes in other real and concrete practicalities, can and must lead to a liberation of their creative output. (7)

African women writers were hesitant to call themselves as feminists. Molaria Ogundipe Leslie analyses the reason for their hesitance to adopt feminist ideology thus, “Male ridicule, aggression and backlash have resulted in making women apologetic and have given the term “feminist” a bad name. Yet, nothing could be more feminist than the writings of these women writers, in their concern for and deep understanding of the experiences and fates of women in society” (64). Nfah-Abbenyi compares western feminist with African women writers and comments on their aversion towards the term feminist thus,

... African women writers do not categorize their problems in linear/hierarchical, either/or dichotomies, as would some Western feminists who would privilege a specific agenda: sexism over racism, or sexuality / the erotic over material experiences and the sexual division of labour. These women do not separate one form of oppression from another; neither do they advocate such a separation as might only sensationalize certain issues and sweep equally important issues under the carpet, reinforcing the general ignorance and neglect of the problems of African women. (Nfah-Abbenyi and Makuchi 13)

Though African women writers present a unique version of feminism peculiar to their socio-cultural milieu yet similarities could be found in African American women's writing as they share the same cultural bonds. In this context, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi states:

African and Afro American women writers share similar aesthetic attitudes in spite of factors that separate them. As a group, they are distinct from white feminists because of their race, because they have experienced the past and present subjugation of the black population along with present-day subtle (or not so subtle) control exercised over them by the alien, western culture. (Ogunyemi 64)

Carole Boyce Davies, in her 'Notes on African feminism', aptly summed up the tenets of African feminism in seven points. A genuine African feminism, she argues, can be summarized thus:

- a) Recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European and American exploitation.
- b) An African feminist consciousness recognizes that certain ingenuities and limitations existed/exist in traditional societies and that colonization reinforced them and introduced others.
- c) It recognizes that African societies are ancient societies, so logically, African women must have addressed the problems of women's position in society historically.
- d) African feminism examines African societies for institutions which are of value to women and rejects those which work to their detriment and doesn't simply import western women's agendas.
- e) It respects African women's self-reliance and the penchant to cooperative work and social organization.
- f) An African feminist approach has to look objectively at women's situation in societies which have undergone a war of national liberation and social reconstruction.
- g) African feminism looks at traditional and contemporary avenues of choice for women. (564-565)

Emecheta says that feminist movement in Europe and America "has helped in bringing women out of Africa. For example, the feminist Movement in England brought Flora Nwapa and Ama Ata Aidoo here recently. At various conferences they always make sure that Black women are well represented" (James 43). Ama Ata Aidoo states

that women writers mostly write about feminist issues because “it is the most natural thing to do” (qtd. in 164). Aidoo states: “Feminism is an essential tool in women’s struggles everywhere, and that includes African women. Every woman as well as every man, should be a feminist. We Africans should take charge of our land and its wealth, and our own lives and the burden of our reconstruction from colonialism and slavery. (Macauley 164). Buchi Emecheta states, “I write about Africa for the western world and at the same time Africa for Africans” (Umeh 252). In "Feminism with a small 'f'" she writes that:

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. (Zulfiqar 175)

Thereby Buchi Emecheta asserts that she was not influenced by feminist ideology and did not write with the motto of propagating feminist principles. She ascertains that she reflected the suffering of the African women and her writing is based on realism.

Emecheta considers that it is her primary duty to erase all the superstitious beliefs that permeates in the Igbo society. She uses her writing as a weapon to bring about the changes in the society and to demolish the unwanted practices that are followed in her native land. So she elucidates about the dominance of patriarchy and the agony of women and the struggles they faced in order to uphold their dignity and to acquire freedom. “The patriarchal

law speaks to and through each person in his unconscious; the reproduction of the ideology of human society is thus assured in the acquisition of the law by each individual” (Meese and Parker 413).

Emecheta narrates the social, political and economic circumstances that subjugate women which in turn destroy the total self-confidence of the women and made them feel inferior. Buchi Emecheta feels positive about the increasing support for women related issues in the contemporary society as feminist literary theory tries to dismantle the bastion of male supremacy.

[The] female literary history, which describes the evolutionary stages of women's writing during the last 250 years from imitation through protest to self definition, and defines and traces the connections throughout history and across national boundaries of the recurring images, themes, and plots that emerge from women's social psychological, and aesthetic experience in male dominated cultures.

(qtn. in Taylor 96)

This research deals with the analyse of the following novels: *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl*, *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Double Yoke*, *The Rape of Shavi*, *Gwendolen* and *Kehinde*. The main emphasises of the research is to assess the portrayal of women characters in these novels. The thesis proposes to investigate the development of women and their progress in the present situation. Analysis of Buchi Emecheta’s novel help the readers to break the barriers set forth by the society.

Buchi Emecheta’s writing clearly postulates that women have been fighting and challenging the collective prejudice, gender bias and misogyny imposed on them through

the ages. Emecheta through her lucid narration of women's story amplifies the prominent feminist issue of marriage, motherhood, economic independence and selfhood. Women's predicament and their struggle against oppression as reflected in her writings are directed towards paving a way towards a new social order based on gender equality. Buchi Emecheta presents the psychological implications of Nigerian women in the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial times has transformed in accordance with the changing social as well as economic status of women. She firmly asserts that women are victimized by the patriarchal force which negates the necessary rights due to women. The research establishes Buchi Emecheta as a writer committed towards women emancipation as her themes are women centric.