Chapter - I

Introduction

Literature, in its essence, is a reflection of the human experience, blending elements of reality and imagination to explore the intricacies of human nature, culture, language, and sensibility. African literature serves as a poignant reflection of the lives of the native Africans, who have faced centuries of oppression and struggle against imperialism and post-independence conflicts. This is especially true of Nigerian literature, which has existed for centuries through a variety of media, including myths, folktales, legends, songs, and other oral forms that precede the European invasion. This period is considered the classical period of Nigerian literature.

During this time, oral literature was practised by a select group of individuals who guarded certain knowledge with a great jealousy. As Ruth Finnegan details in her seminal work, *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), African and Nigerian oral literature were there long before the arrival of the Europeans. These oral traditions served as a source of entertainment, philosophy, and belief, and involved the art of verbal storytelling.

In Nigeria, this literary tradition can be traced back to the rich oral literary tradition of the African people. It is a veritable encyclopedia of contemporary social and political events, conveyed through myths, folk tales, fables, proverbs, idioms, dances, and songs. The origin of this literary tradition can be traced back to the ancient preachers and storytellers who breathed life into the folklore and proverbs that formed the basis of Nigerian oral literature. These stories were passed on from generation to generation, becoming an integral part of the Nigerian cultural heritage. The Yoruba community is particularly renowned for its storytelling traditions, with parents sitting with their

children to recount stories that are steeped in the rich cultural and spiritual beliefs of their people.

Despite the disruptions wrought by colonialism and imperialism, African literature has remained a powerful force in shaping the cultural and social identity of the continent. Nigerian literature, in particular, has evolved to encompass a wide range of genres, including poetry, drama, and novel, with writers seeking to express the unique perspectives and experiences of their people. These literary works offer a glimpse into the rich history and cultural heritage of Nigeria, while also bearing witness to the struggles and challenges faced by its people over the centuries. Indeed, African and Nigerian literature continue to be a testament to the resilience, creativity, and endurance of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

The decolonisation period marked a significant shift in the evolution of African literature, as a new generation of writers emerged to give voice to the experiences and struggles of their people. This movement also gave rise to a division in African literature, which served to provide a comprehensive overview of the diverse writing styles, languages, and perspectives that characterised African literature.

The division of African literature can be broadly categorised into four distinct categories. Firstly, there is the body of African literature written by Westerners in Western languages, which often reflects a Eurocentric perspective and interpretation of African experiences. Secondly, there is African literature written by Africans in Western languages, which reflects a blend of both African and Western cultural and literary traditions. Thirdly, there is African literature written by Africans in African languages, which provides a unique insight into the cultural and linguistic diversity of the continent.

This genre is often overlooked, but it is rich in its portrayal of the local traditions, customs, and beliefs that shape African life and society.

Finally, African oral traditions represent a rich and diverse body of literature that has been passed on from one generation to another through music, storytelling , dance, and other forms of performance art. These traditions provide a unique window into the historical, cultural, and spiritual experiences of African people, and have been a source of inspiration for many contemporary African writers. The division in African literature serves to highlight the richness and diversity of African literary traditions, providing a multifaceted view of the continent's cultural, social, and political landscape (GradesFixer).

As the colonial era drew to a close, a new wave of literature emerged from African writers who had received a traditional education and were now able to travel abroad for formal education from the Western world. Luzolo Mbemba attributes this to the inspiration of the "l'Eveil Africain" (African awakening). During this period, writers such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Ferdinand Oyono, Ousmane Sembene, Mongo Beti and others championed the Negritude movement, which aimed to promote an Africa by Africans and literature written by Africans. However, it is important to note that the contribution of African women writers in this struggle for African consciousness has been largely ignored. In fact, in most accounts of the Negritude movement, little attention is given to the women who, in one way or another, made intellectual and practical contributions to the movement.

In her article entitled "The Women of Negritude," Sarah Dunstan highlights the work of authors such as Sharpley-Whiting, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Jennifer Anne

Boittin, who have written about the significant role of black women in "crafting and catalyzing the movement" of Negritude. Despite this, the impact of women during this period has not been adequately documented and has often been relegated to the background. This can be attributed to the Western educational system, which marginalised African women and encouraged scholarship for African men while neglecting African women. As a result, the vital contributions of women to the Negritude movement have been largely overlooked or ignored (Oyebolu 440-441).

Nuruddin Farah's narratives, including *From a Crooked Rib, A Naked Needle,* and *Maps,* and the trilogy comprising *Sweet and Sour Milk, Sardines,* and *Close Sesame,* have become a powerful metaphor for postcolonial Africa. The narratives explore three dominant themes: the claims of the national, clan, and personal identities, the place of women in African society, and the struggle for human rights and freedom in the face of dictatorship.

What sets Farah's narratives apart is their seamless exploration of four interconnected realms of being: the domestic, the clan, the national, and the international. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, for example, the patriarchal hierarchy of the domestic realm is a reflection of dictatorship at the national level. The patriarch who demands obedience from women and children in the home is mirrored by the grand patriarch of the nation who demands the same from all citizens without question.

Farah's narratives tackle complex societal issues with nuance and depth, offering a poignant reflection on the challenges faced by postcolonial Africa. The narratives capture the struggle for identity, the often-conflicting relationships between gender and power, and the fight for human rights and freedom in the face of oppressive regimes.

In the article “Oral and Written Literature in Nigeria,” Bade Ajuwon highlights that Nigeria had a rich tradition of verbal art before the introduction of writing. This verbal art civilisation was highly valued and supported by traditional rulers as well as the public. At a time when writing was yet unknown, the oral medium served as a repository for preserving the people’s past experiences and beliefs. As a result, a significant portion of evidence related to Nigeria’s history could be found in its oral traditions. This underscores the importance of oral literature in preserving cultural heritage and historical knowledge, especially in societies where writing was not yet widespread. Ajuwon’s observations also shed light on the value of embracing diverse forms of communication and storytelling in understanding and preserving the rich cultural heritage of different societies.

Bade Ajuwon, in the same article, notes that the Yoruba community has been an example of how oral storytelling was valued for its ability to instruct and teach respect for customs. “As a means of relaxation, farmers gather their children and sit under the moon for tale-telling.” This practice was not limited to the Yoruba community but was present in other cultural groupings throughout Nigeria. A literary work that is considered African literature must have roots in these traditional elements. The rich oral tradition of Nigeria is credited for the country’s significant achievements in the international literary scene (Umaisha).

With the advent of western education, Nigeria’s literary tradition began to shift away from traditional folktales and towards realism. This shift was largely driven by literary scholars at the University College of Ibadan in 1948, who championed the movement through journals, conferences, and newspapers. However, it wasn’t until 1963,

when the novel writing competition that centred on Nigeria's current realities was sponsored by the Ministry of Education that the shift truly took place.

According to Bade Ajuwon, Yoruba writers in particular responded by abandoning fantastical elements in favour of human characters and concrete symbols that dealt with universal themes like religion, corruption, labour, and justice. This new literary tradition did not completely eliminate folklore elements but rather blended them with realism to create a unique literary style that captured the essence of Nigeria's cultural heritage while also reflecting the country's contemporary realities. The resulting mixed grill of traditional folklore and modern realism has been a defining characteristic of Nigerian literature ever since and has helped propel the country's writers to international prominence.

Chinua Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, which was published in 1958, still contained Igbo folklore despite being written in English, thereby preserving the African elements in the story. The novel showcased the traditional African way of life, which was interwoven with the Igbo proverbs and idioms that were used to illustrate African culture. According to the Ghanaian poet, Kofi Awonoor, Achebe's use of Igbo proverbs and idioms in his writing was so seamless that it constituted one of the most important features of his purely "African-derived English style" (Umaisha). Achebe's works, including *Things Fall Apart*, have been hailed as the starting point of modern African literature as they were some of the first books to showcase the richness and complexity of African culture in English literature.

There is a widespread consensus among literary scholars that Yoruba literature reached its peak during the initial thirty years of the twentieth century. The Yoruba

language was first put into writing in 1842, as Isola pointed out. Compared to other genres, Yoruba poetry has a much longer history. The earliest Yoruba poetry was written in the form of religious hymns and was published as a collection by Henry Townsend in 1848. This collection represents a significant contribution to Yoruba literature as it marked the beginning of Yoruba literature in print.

According to Adedeji, the Yoruba community has a long-standing tradition of vibrant theatre and drama dating back to the pre-colonial era. The Alarinjo Agbegijo performers and other cultic/ritualistic theatres are considered the predecessors of this tradition. Due to this rich cultural heritage, it is not surprising that some of the well-known plays, even in the English language, are predominantly produced within the Yoruba cultural context.

According to literary scholars, Yoruba novel writing holds a significant position in Nigeria's indigenous literature. The first-ever Yoruba novel, "Itan Emi Segilola Eleyinjuege, Elegberun oko laiye", was published by Isaac B. Thomas in 1930. Isola commented on this novel by saying, "Thomas' socially relevant, realistic novel, first serialised in 1929 in Akede Omo, was not the first attempt at novelistic writing in Yoruba. But his novel was the first that exhibited features of the modern novel." Despite earlier attempts at novelistic writing in Yoruba, Thomas' novel marked a significant shift towards modern novel writing with its realistic portrayal of social issues (Umaisha).

With the arrival of European colonisers, written literature in the form of books was introduced to Nigeria, offering a stark contrast to the vibrant oral traditions that had long been practised. However, it was not until the return of Samuel Ajayi Crowther that

the Nigerians began to see the value of recording their own stories and cultural heritage in a written format. This marked the beginning of Nigerian literature in its written form.

Despite this newfound appreciation for the written word, Nigerian literature did not truly emerge until the publication of Amos Tutuola's *Palm-wine Drinkard* in 1952. This novel marked a turning point in Nigerian literature, serving as a catalyst for the emergence of a distinct Nigerian literary tradition that sought to express the unique experiences and perspectives of the Nigerian people.

Even prior to Tutuola's pioneering work, the Hausas had begun to experiment with written literature, hosting a writing competition in the 1930s that produced a number of notable works, including Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's *Shehu Umar*. These stories were written in Ajami, a hybrid script that combined Arabic and Hausa, further underscoring the cultural and linguistic diversity of Nigerian literature.

In essence, the emergence of written Nigerian literature was a product of the convergence of diverse cultural and historical influences, ranging from the European colonisers to the indigenous oral traditions and linguistic innovations of the Hausas. Despite these varied influences, however, Nigerian literature remains a powerful expression of the Nigerian people's struggles, triumphs, and aspirations, offering a window into the complex and multifaceted nature of the Nigerian cultural identity.

During the colonial era, the introduction of the English language had a profound impact on African literature. Literature in indigenous languages was gradually supplanted by works written in English. Notable Nigerian authors such as Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe embraced this new form of expression and began to write in English, using their works to explore and critique the social and political issues of the day.

The advent of Chinua Achebe and his contemporaries during the 1940s to the 1960s was a remarkable turning point in the history of Nigerian literature. This era saw the rise of some of the most prominent writers in the country, including Wole Soyinka, T.M. Aluko, Gabriel Okara, John Pepper Clark, Christopher Okigbo, and Cyprian Ekwensi. This group of writers collectively referred to as the first-generation writers, played a pivotal role in giving African literature a distinct focus and direction. They dealt with critical African issues such as colonialism and neo-colonialism, while also promoting African values and culture to the rest of the world. Their works helped to shape the literary landscape in Nigeria and beyond, paving the way for future generations of writers to tell their stories and contribute to the literary canon.

As African writers became more adept in the use of the English language, they began to draw from their rich cultural heritage to craft works that were uniquely African in content and style. These contemporary writers deftly interweaved themes of identity, race, and nationalism in their works, giving voice to the struggles and aspirations of their people.

Moreover, these writers were not afraid to tackle difficult and controversial issues, including those related to the position and the status of women in Nigerian society. Through their works, they exposed the challenges and injustices faced by women and called for greater equality and empowerment.

The first-generation writers of Nigeria's literary scene, including Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, were motivated by a desire to rectify the skewed portrayals of Nigerians and Africans in works such as Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* and *African Witch*, Rider Haggard's *She, King Solomon's Mines and Allan Quartermain*, and Joseph

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In contrast to the simplistic and corrupt portrayal of African society in *Mister Johnson*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* depicts the Igbo society as having a rich tradition of careful decision-making and a well-organised system of social, political, and religious beliefs. These writers used their works as a platform to showcase African values and address issues such as colonialism and neo-colonialism. Through their writing, they gave African literature direction and purpose and helped to correct the misconceptions and negative stereotypes that had plagued African societies in the past.

The African Writers Series, established by Heinemann in 1962, played a crucial role in advancing Nigerian and African literature during the Achebe era. This initiative, according to a poet and media consultant, Odimegwu Onwumere, has provided a platform for some of the most remarkable African writers, providing an international platform for literary genii such as Chinua Achebe, Steve Biko, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ama Ata Aidoo, Nadine Gordimer, Okot p'Bitek, and Buchi Emecheta. The series has allowed these writers to reach a global audience, enabling their works to be read and appreciated beyond the confines of their respective countries. By publishing works in English and making them accessible to readers worldwide, the African Writers Series has contributed significantly to the growth and evolution of African literature, promoting African culture, and projecting African voices onto the global literary stage.

The Nigerian literary landscape entered a new phase with the advent of Helon Habila, a journalist who paved the way for contemporary Nigerian writing. Habila's prowess was evident when he claimed two prestigious literary prizes, the 2001 Caine Prize for African Writing for his short story "Love Poems" and the 2003 Commonwealth Writers' Best First Novel Prize for *Waiting for an Angel*. Habila's success opened the floodgates for a new

generation of talented writers who showcased modern Nigeria in their works. These emerging authors included Chris Abani, Eghosa Imasuen, Tolu Ogunlesi, Uche Peter Umez, Biyi Bandele, Uwem Akpan, Toni Kan, and Dulue Mbachu to mention a few. Their works depicted contemporary Nigerian society in a refreshing light, and they have gained widespread acclaim for their contribution to African literature.

Nigerian women are currently dominating the literary scene in Africa and are being celebrated for their exceptional works. They have played a significant role in shaping the country's literary scene. Flora Nwapa, who was the first published Nigerian female novelist, paved the way for others to follow. Her groundbreaking work *Efuru* (1966) challenged traditional notions of women's roles and positions in society. This novel was a catalyst for other female writers like Phebean Ogundipe and Mabel Segun, who also sought to explore and challenge gender roles and expectations in their works. Nwapa's legacy has endured, and her contributions to Nigerian literature have paved the way for other female writers to flourish in the country.

The emergence of female Nigerian writers in the 1970s marked a significant milestone in the country's literary development. Among these women were Zulu Sofola, Adaora Lily Ulasi, Catherine Acholonu, Zaynab Alkali, and Buchi Emecheta, who became the first female writers in English to emerge from the North. Alkali debuted in 1984 with her novel *The Stillborn*, which was followed by *The Virtuous Woman* (1985) and *Cobwebs* (1977), a collection of short stories. Her contribution to Nigerian literature continued in the 2000s with the publication of two additional novels, *The Descendants* and *The Initiates*.

These acclaimed female writers include Promise Okekwe, Helen Oyeyemi, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Sefi Atta, who has achieved worldwide recognition. Adichie, born in Enugu in 1977, gained critical acclaim for her debut novel *Purple Hibiscus*, which was shortlisted for the 2004 Orange Prize for Fiction and won the 2005 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book. Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, won the Orange Prize in 2007, cementing her position as one of the foremost African writers of her generation. Adichie's influence has extended beyond her literary achievements, as she has inspired a new generation of readers worldwide and actively promotes African literature through her annual writing workshop in Lagos. Similarly, the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2001 was won by Helon Habila, a founding member and advisory board member of the African Writers' Trust, further demonstrating his commitment to the development of African literature.

Female writers, both past and present, have displayed a remarkable level of versatility in their literary works. They have gone beyond exploring just feminist themes and delved into broader societal issues such as politics, war, and the economy. Their works reflect their acute understanding and engagement with the various facets of Nigerian society and offer insightful commentary on the issues that affect the country and its people. These women have carved a niche for themselves in the literary world, leaving a lasting impact and inspiring future generations of writers to follow in their footsteps.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Macmillan Publishing Company provided a platform for Nigerian young writers to showcase their literary talents through its young writers' series, Pacesetters. This initiative, which was popular across Africa, provided an avenue for hundreds of young people to get published, with the majority of the authors

being Nigerians. The series focused on contemporary issues that cater to the interest of young adults. Unfortunately, when the economic decline set in around the 1980s, Macmillan Nigeria was separated from the parent company, which took the Pacesetters copyright with it. As a result, the series disappeared, and only a few pirated versions of some titles could be found in Nigeria. Nonetheless, the writers who had the opportunity to be published through the series have made their marks, with some producing more serious literary works. Examples of such writers include Mohammed Tukur Garba, who authored *The Black Temple* in 1981, and Muhammed Sule, who published *Eye of Eternity* and *The Devil's Seat* in the 1990s.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, a striking literary genre emerged in Onitsha, the Eastern Nigeria's commercial nerve centre. The Onitsha Market Literature began with the publication of the first books in 1947. It was not a consciously structured literary movement but emerged due to the convergence of educated people from diverse backgrounds who were either trading or pursuing education in the town. The genre aimed to fill a gap in the availability of reading materials as there were few options apart from school texts, the Bible, and occasional books from Britain.

However, the Nigerian Civil War that ended in 1970 proved to be the undoing of the genre. The aftermath of the war led to a renewed focus on economic priorities, which resulted in the gradual demise of the genre. Nevertheless, some of the pioneers of this genre, such as Cyprian Ekwensi, went on to become famous writers. Ekwensi's works, *When Love Whispers* and *Ikolo, the Wrestler and other Igbo Tales*, were among the first to be published in the genre, and he played a crucial role in its development (Uzoatu).

Nigeria's new generation of writers has also contributed significantly to the country's literary development by winning some of the most distinguished literary prizes. In 1991, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* won the Booker Prize, marking a significant milestone for Nigerian literature. Other new generation writers have also been recognised for their works, with Segun Afolabi, Helon Habila, and E. C. Osondu winning the Caine Prize for their stories *Prison Story*, *Monday Morning* and *Waiting* respectively. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, one of Nigeria's most celebrated authors, has won the Commonwealth Prize for Literature, as well as the Orange Prize for her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Their achievements have put Nigerian literature on the global map and inspired other Nigerian writers to strive for excellence.

Nigerian writers have achieved more than any other group in the country by not only establishing global literary standards but also by promoting Nigerian culture and tradition worldwide. This point was eloquently highlighted by the distinguished literary critic, Professor Charles E. Nnolim, who stated:

> Nigeria today stands tall before the international community because of the collective endeavours of her writers... While our politics and the shenanigans of our business deals often sell the country's private shames in the international scandal market, it is through the collective endeavours of Nigerian writers that Nigeria stands redeemed and enhanced in the eyes of the world. (Umaisha)

Thus, the contributions of Nigerian writers have significantly elevated the status of Nigeria in the eyes of the global community.

Over time, Nigerian literature has evolved to embrace a range of genres, including poetry, drama, and the novel, but its roots in oral tradition remain a defining

characteristic. This literary tradition has not only served as a means of preserving the cultural heritage of the Nigerian people, but it has also garnered global recognition, thanks to the influence of the traditional storyteller and the enduring appeal of the stories they tell. In short, Nigerian literature is a rich and vibrant tapestry, weaving together the threads of history, culture, and imagination to create a powerful and enduring legacy.

In essence, the emergence of English language literature in Nigeria marked a new chapter in the country's literary history, as writers began to experiment with new forms of writing and explored a range of complex themes and issues. Through their works, they sought to capture the spirit and experiences of the Nigerian people and contribute to the ongoing struggle for social justice and equality.

It is widely acknowledged that the history of Nigerian literature owes much to the pioneering efforts of Flora Nwapa, who is widely recognised as the country's first female novelist. Born in January 1931 in the picturesque town of Oguta, located on the eastern banks of the majestic Oguta Lake in Imo State, southeastern Nigeria, Nwapa's literary journey began at a young age with exposure to folklore and classic English literature. It is possible that her experiences during and after the Nigerian Civil War, as well as her background as an educator, influenced her writing style, which was refreshingly different from the norm when Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. published her debut novel, *Efuru*, in 1966. *Efuru* was a book that was likely to have graced the bookshelves of households where reading was a cherished pastime. The stories of women's struggles with men depicted in the novel must have had a unique flavour, distinct from those in contemporary oral and written literature.

Flora Nwapa had a clear mission in her writing, which she articulated as the goal of informing and educating women worldwide about the role of Nigerian women in society. Her works aimed to shed light on topics such as economic independence, relationships with spouses and children, traditional beliefs, and status in the community. Additionally, she sought to write about African children for audiences in Europe, America, and Asia. Despite her focus on women's issues, Nwapa preferred to identify as a "womanist" rather than a feminist, likely reflecting her belief in a holistic approach to gender equality that encompassed social and cultural factors beyond just gender (Bivan).

Zaynab Alkali is among the pioneers of female writers from northern Nigeria. Her entrance into the literary arena was marked by the publication of her novel, *The Stillborn*, in 1984. According to a synopsis of the book on Amazon.in, a leading online retailer of books, the novel "is a milestone in African literature, and the first novel from a woman writer with a Muslim background. It tells of a young woman's experiences in the recurring conflict between traditional and modern values in Africa today, reflecting the author's belief that women should strive to fulfil their potential." Notably, the book sparked numerous discussions, as evident in the academic papers written about it. This highlights its enduring significance and relevance, which has been acknowledged by contemporary writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Alkali's writing career has been characterised by notable works such as *The Virtuous Woman*, a novel published in 1985, and *Cobwebs*, a collection of short stories (Amazon.in).

Aminata Sow Fall, a francophone writer from Senegal, stands out as one of the most productive female novelists of the second generation. Fall's literary works, which include *Le Revenant* (1976), *La Grève des bàttu* (1979), *L'Appel des arènes* (1982), *Ex-*

père de la nation (1987), and *Festins de détresse* (2005), depict the unstable socioeconomic and political situations that impact all members of society. In *Ex-père de la nation*, Fall traces the life of a former African president who is imprisoned, emphasising how neither men nor women in Africa are fulfilling their nurturing roles. Fall's works are a reflection of the pervasive social issues that plague African society, and her writing serves to bring attention to these issues and prompt critical reflection (Mambrol).

In many developing countries, including Nigeria, feminist and gender advocacy predominantly revolve around social and political issues such as women's empowerment, poverty reduction, population processes, and access to education. However, over time, this advocacy has broadened to encompass multiple fields, utilising interdisciplinary approaches to bring to the forefront problematic areas. Economists have provided striking statistics showcasing how rural women's contributions to Nigeria's development go beyond reproductive and nurturing functions. These contributions also include their involvement in farms, fields, food and catering services, local production of household goods, managing home pastures, hairdressing, pottery, spinning, leatherwork, grain sales, and arbitrage. For a long time, these economic contributions were not included in national income accounting, but feminist advocates have sought to rectify this exclusion (Malami).

It is a widely recognised fact that the literary world, in many societies, is predominantly controlled by men. This situation has resulted in a lack of necessary exposure given to the few women writers who have made significant contributions to the development of literature in different parts of the world, even in developed countries. It is

not surprising, therefore, that there may be a dearth of information on the subject of women and literature in most developing countries. This is not an improbable scenario, given that the gender battle alluded to by Mary Wollstonecraft did not originate from what women write or produce, but from the denial of their right to be heard in all spheres of knowledge.

Virginia Woolf, a prominent writer of the early 20th century, attributed the lack of recognition and representation of women in literature during her time to the prevailing "economic and social circumstances." In her renowned work, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), she expounded on this issue and asserted that "all I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point—a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved" (4). However, she also recognised that this solution only addressed a minor aspect of the larger problem concerning the true nature of women and their relationship to literature, which remained unresolved. Woolf's insights continue to be a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse on gender and literature.

In the context of Africa, the lack of recognition for women's literary works is not due to a lack of creativity or imagination on the part of women writers. On the contrary, the continent boasts a multitude of official and unofficial gender commentators who are also prolific women writers. These writers offer unique perspectives that challenge and reformulate inherited popular codes while being sensitive to gender issues. As Newell (1997) notes, during this dynamic process of women attempting to rewrite their narratives and excavate the interlocking relationships between different cultural formations found in

women's writings, concepts such as "womanism," "motherism," and "femalism" have been adopted or coined (Malumfashi 12).

As Alkali believes that the assertion of being a feminist writer does not come from the depth of her heart, she firmly states "I am not a feminist. But you will not be wrong to describe me as a womanist" (Malumfashi 17). She aligns herself with the belief system that promotes the values of womanhood, without necessarily being against men. Despite this, she remains sceptical about categorising intellectuals with labels because human beings are more intricate and multifaceted than what simple tags can portray.

The process of categorisation serves as a means of honouring the ancestors by recognising and preserving their names, intellectual contributions, and creative expressions that remain relevant and impactful in the present. This approach, which is rooted in the Sankofic tradition, is used in this chapter to explore the concept of "Womanism." Through an examination of the meaning of this term, as well as its distinctions from "Black Feminism" and "Africana Womanism," readers will gain a deeper understanding of the themes and analytical perspectives that characterise the work of womanist writers (Davidson and Davidson 240).

Alice Walker, in her book In *Search of Mothers*' *Gardens: Womanist Prose*, is credited with coining the term "Womanism." According to Walker, "Womanism" derives from "womanish," which is the opposite of being "girlish." To act "womanish" means to carry out one's activities boldly and fearlessly, as opposed to acting frivolous, irresponsible, or unserious. The term originates from a black folk expression where mothers would tell their female children that they are "acting womanish," referring to their audacious, outrageous, courageous, or willful behaviour. Walker further explains

that womanish behaviour includes wanting to know more and in greater depth than what is typically considered acceptable (Walker).

The definition of Womanism by Walker is firmly grounded in praxis, as it characterises a Womanist based on her actions and approach to life. Furthermore, her definition embodies a Sankofic project as it draws on events and actions from the past to inform the present. Her definition is also underlined by the significance of relationships, not just between mothers and daughters, but among all women. A Womanist, according to Walker is, "A woman who loves other women sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture... and women's strength. . . . committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist. . . . Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (Walker).

The comparison of Womanism to feminism as "purple is to lavender" is a well-known phrase from Walker's discussion on Womanism. This analogy sheds light on Walker's perception of the fundamental differences between Black women and White women on issues such as agency and community. The "second-wave feminists" were mainly White, middle-class, and well-educated activists who aimed to challenge gender-based oppression and violence. This is demonstrated in the influential works of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, and Luce Irigaray's *This Sex which is not One*. Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury, in their introduction to *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, assert that de Beauvoir's philosophical legacy is rooted in "the application of the philosophical categories of Self and Other to the division of gender" (Conboy et al. 2).

Walker, alongside other feminists of colour/womanists, recognises that the experiences and concerns of women of colour are often overlooked in standard white feminist discourse. White feminism's narrow focus on gender-based oppression leads to the neglect of the broader types of oppression that black as well as other women of colour face. Walker argues that white feminism does not sufficiently consider the underlying effects of social, economic, and racial oppression. Many other black women thinkers, such as Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Michele Wallace, Carol E. Henderson, Cheryl Wall, and Hortense Spillers, also describe the exclusionary practices of white feminist discourses. Collectively, their work documents the various ways in which second-wave feminist discourse defines the category of women based on the experiences and standards of white women.

It is important to note that Walker's definition of Womanism does not discount the importance of issues that are central to White Feminism, particularly those related to gender equality and political participation. However, as many Black women scholars have argued, White Feminism discourse is limited in its exclusion of the experiences and concerns of women of colour. Walker seeks to establish a standpoint from which Black women, and all women, can express their own visions and concerns. The space she creates for discourse and interaction aims to provide Black women with a platform to critique and confront the interlocking systems of oppression based on race, class, and gender. The analogy "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" serves as a reminder that although gender is a common denominator among all women, it is not the only determining factor in a woman's life. Particularly, Black women require a theory

that recognises their singular embodiment as both women and Black in a society that is marked by both sexism and racism.

The primary goal of Womanism is to create a space where the distinctive experiences and concerns of Black women can be articulated. This notion is reminiscent of Toni Morrison's statement, "I write all of the things I should have been able to read" (Walker). Alice Walker builds upon this idea, stating "I write not only what I want to read---understanding fully and indelibly that if I don't do it no one else is so vitally interested, or capable of doing it to my satisfaction -- I write all the things I should have been able to read" (Walker).

Walker developed Womanism as a theoretical foundation, with the hope of making it a comprehensive and empowering discourse. However, some contemporary Black women scholars have expressed doubts about the concept of Womanism. These concerns stem from several crucial factors, such as the observation that some Black women are feminists who do not approach race, class, and gender issues from a Womanist perspective, which they may interpret as Afrocentric. *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* devoted a full volume to examining the significance of this discourse, indicating the importance of the ongoing debate.

Monica A. Coleman, in her essay titled "Must I be a Womanist?" presents her viewpoint as a member of the younger generation, stating that she is more at ease identifying herself as a Black Feminist instead of a Womanist. Coleman puts forth her argument by highlighting the fact that she had significant role models in Black women working in the field of Religious Studies, which sets her apart from her mentors or

"godmothers." Coleman's inspiration came from the likes of Katie Geneva Cannon, a prominent figure in the field of Womanist Theology. She observes:

> I never once doubted that I could have a place in religious scholarship. I never felt the pain that no one was talking about my experience, my literature, or my role models... I've also been shaped by black feminists, and I believe that I'm a part of generation of women who have grown up (intellectually) during a time that takes womanism as a given. I'm not sure I'm a womanist. (85-86)

Coleman, in her essay "Must I be a Womanist?", raises critical concerns about the theoretical limitations of Womanism. She asserts that Womanism fails to address certain issues, such as homophobia, which she believes is a significant shortcoming. She says, "without giving detailed attention to the issue of sexual orientation, womanists paint a picture of black women as sisters, other-mothers, girlfriends, and loving church mothers, when there is much more to the picture" (88). Coleman argues in her essay that Womanism presents a limited and essentialist view of women and their relationships, portraying Black women as only "sisters, other-mothers, girlfriends, and loving church mothers," thereby excluding other important identities and experiences. This, in turn, creates another narrow paradigm where Black women become the primary symbol. Coleman's scepticism highlights the need for feminist and womanist discourses to be inclusive, addressing the complexities and diversities of experiences among Black women.

According to Coleman, Womanism and Black Feminism offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on issues concerning Black women. The need to differentiate these positions should not be viewed as oppositional because it reflects the

unique and related commitments Black women have to their own defined viewpoints, influenced by the hierarchies of power they face. As Coleman explains, "African American women's efforts to distinguish between womanism and black feminism illustrates how black women's placement in the hierarchical power relations fosters different yet related allegiances to black women's self-defined standpoint" (15). Walker's conception of Womanism is grounded in the specific, embodied experiences of Black women and their connection to Black culture. This highlights the importance of acknowledging and centring the experiences of Black women in discussions of feminism and other social justice movements.

Before delving into the nuances of Womanism and Africana Womanism, it is essential to acknowledge that despite their fundamental differences, these two outlooks share a commitment to articulating theories from the perspective of Black women. Additionally, they recognise that Black women in the world, especially in the United States, are part of an oppressed group. In light of this realisation, Black Feminists, Womanists, and Africana Womanists all strive to create relevant and active responses to address the disenfranchisement that Black women face globally. However, the points of contrast they have on issues of community, gender, and sisterhood can reveal a range of possibilities and diverse viewpoints on how to address the oppression of Black women best.

Africana Womanists assert that Walker's concept of Womanism is inadequate. This lack of completeness is attributed to Walker's failure to provide a comprehensive analysis of the objectives and aspirations of Womanism. The argument for the insufficiency of Womanism is further developed in Clenora Hudson-Weems' work titled

Africana Womanist Literary Theory. In this piece, Hudson-Weems observes, "Alice Walker's 'womanism' pronouncements– literally a page and one-half—does little more than present a brief commentary on the shade of differentiation between what Collins notes alternately call[ed] womanism and black feminism" (5).

Hudson-Weems argues that Womanism falls short in terms of its diasporic vision and neglects the experiences of Black women outside of the United States. In her view, Womanism lacks a clear purpose and goals. Hudson-Weems' critique of Womanism is so comprehensive that she coined the term "Africana Womanism" in 1987. According to Ama Mazama, Hudson-Weems came up with this term "out of the realization of the total inadequacy of feminism and like theories (e.g., Black Feminism, African Womanism, or Womanism) to grasp the reality of African women, let alone give us the means to challenge that reality" (8).

From a Womanist perspective, the speaking subject is closely tied to the Western notion of subjectivity where one establishes their own individuality by speaking for themselves. On the other hand, the Africana Womanist perspective sees agency as being tied to the importance of community rather than individuality. However, the concept of Black female identity, according to Africana Womanism, does not imagine Black women beyond their conventional roles in families and communities. While choosing to be a wife or a mother is not inherently problematic, the concern arises when Africana Womanism critiques other strands of Feminism for their emphasis on independence and freedom from familial and societal obligations, potentially limiting the choices available to Black women.

The inquiry into the definition of "Womanist literature" aims to comprehend how a diverse group of writers, who may not have identified as Womanists or viewed their work as Womanist literature, can be grouped together in this category. It is important to view Womanist literature as an inclusive and dynamic category, rather than a restrictive or exclusive one. For instance, the works of Zora Neale Hurston may be viewed as Womanist literature, but they can also be analysed from other perspectives such as Black Feminist or Africana Womanist. In literary studies, Womanism denotes an interpretive approach that seeks to reveal deeper meanings within a text. Davidson in his work "Perspectives on Womanism, Black Feminism, and Africana Womanism" suggests the following definition to describe Womanist literature, "Womanist literature is literature written by Black, Western women and narrated from the perspective of Black, Western female character(s) and addresses the lives, struggles, relatonships, and concerns of black female characters in search of their own agency primarily through finding their own voice" (250).

According to the definition of Womanist literature, there are several key features that distinguish it from other feminist literary theories. Firstly, Womanist literature is rooted in a Western framework, which recognizes that it may not be applicable to all Black women in the African Diaspora. Secondly, the definition highlights that Womanist literature is primarily authored by Black Western women and emphasises the role of their literary production. Thirdly, Womanist literature explores the unique experiences and perspectives of Black Western female characters, while also examining their engagement with the world from a Black female standpoint. Lastly, the most significant aspect of Womanist literature is its focus on developing the agency of Black women through

finding their voice, which distinguishes it from Black Feminism and Africana Womanism. While those theories also address issues of agency and voice, Womanism places more emphasis on gaining a voice as the central theme in its literature. Rather than solely focusing on the ways in which oppression hinders agency, Womanist scholars aim to demonstrate how Black women have been able to articulate and develop their agency in spite of these obstacles.

To provide further clarity, Womanist scholars have a different focus from Black Feminism and Africana Womanism in terms of agency. While the latter two are concerned with how racism, classism, and gender oppression restrict the agency of Black women, Womanist scholars are more interested in highlighting how Black women have been able to assert and cultivate their own agency despite facing oppression. In the words of Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas in her work *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, "Womanism is revolutionary. Womanism is a paradigm shift wherein Black women no longer look to others for their liberation, but instead look to themselves" (I).

In her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), Walker presents a comprehensive four-part definition of womanist that encompasses community, tradition, spirituality, and self, and also includes a criticism of White feminist. These elements offer a solid ground for reflecting on religion and practical application, enabling a deeper understanding and meaningful engagement with womanism.

> Womanist: 1. From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually

referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious.

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter) and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as

in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans.: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender (Walker)

Cannon's work on Black Womanist Ethics (1988) serves as the overarching framework for womanist liberation ethics. Drawing from the literary tradition of Black women, she asserts that it is the apt source for comprehending the social and religious experiences of Black women. Cannon utilises an interdisciplinary approach, combining

ethics, literary studies, history, and political economy to conduct a systematic analysis of race, class, and sex. Her primary objective is to demonstrate that Black women's moral agency differs from the dominant ethics of White males due to the triple oppressions of class, race, and sex. Unlike in dominant ethics, where the freedom of choice is taken for granted, Cannon argues that such an assumption cannot be made for those who are oppressed. Oppression inherently limits the options available to the oppressed, rendering desirable norms in dominant ethics, like frugality, as a required reality for impoverished Black women. Through this argument, Cannon brings a clear distinction between womanist ethics and dominant ethics. Her work provides a unique perspective on the intersectionality of oppression and highlights the importance of considering the experiences of marginalised communities in ethical frameworks.

In 1995, there was a surge of publications in womanist theology, including works by Diana Hayes, Emilie Townes, Katie Cannon, and Cheryl Sanders. Among these scholars, Cannon, a Christian ethicist, presented a significant ethical framework for womanist thought in her book *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*. In this work, Cannon adapted the "dance of redemption" model from feminist ethicist Beverly Wildung Harrison, which outlines the process of recognising oppression and forming ethical decisions and moral standards in relation to it. Similar to the preceding model, Cannon's adaptation does not have a predetermined entry point and is characterized as nonlinear. This approach provides an important perspective for understanding the experiences and struggles of Black women and their communities.

1. Conscientization: When reality does not fit into what is normative, producing "Cognitive Dissonance"

2. Emancipatory Historiography: What are the systems/logos that hold the structures of oppression in place?

3. Theological Resources: How do the theological disciplines as well as one's spiritual community, uphold or liberate the structures of oppression?

4. Norms Clarification: How do one's values become clearer? To whom is one accountable? "Where do you come down?"

5. Strategic Options: Brainstorming; How can I use my conscientization, what have I learned? What are the possible consequences of the option I consider?

6. Annunciation and Celebration: "I can't do this .. . by myself." "Together, remember, name, and celebrate the presence and power that sustains our struggle."

7. Re-reflection/Strategic Action: The process begins again from the insights and knowledge of the previous struggle, but at a deeper level. (140)

Cannon has additionally suggested a model for examining narratives or literature from a womanist perspective. Her model is highly adaptable and allows individuals to enter the analysis at any point. The model is characterised by a dialogical approach in which Cannon poses questions and provides guidance for engaging in womanist analytical reflection.

1. How does this source portray blackness, darkness and economic justice for non-ruling class people?

2. What are women doing in this text? Are women infantalized, pedestalized, idealized, or allowed to be free and independent?

3. Identify and define the mode of oppression.

4. Locate causal dynamics of pervasive cultural racism and manufactured patriarchalism, especially ecclesial clericalization and hierarchalization.

5. Explore intellectual breadth, conceptual depth and structural linkage of domination and oppression in their domestic and international manifestations.

6. Test passage as to whether or not it aids the victims in their struggle to overcome victimization.

7. Critique the presuppositions, intellectual concepts, politics, and prejudice of the writer.

8. Critically evaluate the primary motives, politics, allegiance of interpreters/reviewers.

9. Talk about the revelation of God in this text.

10. Identify "spirit helpers," indigenous people who create opportunities of transformation.

11. In what ways does this text help African American women clean ourselves of hatred and contempt that surround and permeates our identity as women in this society.

12. Refuse to trim the contours of your "hermeneutic of suspicion."

13. Give particular care not to generate monolithic assumptions.

14. Examine the living laboratories that expose the actual historical events and contradictions in which people are engaged as moral agents. (Townes 171)

The literary works of Toni Morrison serve as an excellent example of Womanist literature. Her novels, such as *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*, go beyond traditional feminist concerns of gender and delve into the struggles of Black women to establish a sense of

agency and maintain their connections with each other. This emphasis on the importance of connections between women aligns with the definition of Womanism by Alice Walker, which describes it as "a woman who loves other women sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture... and womens strength." The relationship between the characters Sula and Nel in *Sula* serves as a poignant example of such a connection. They share a profound love for each other, yet societal pressures and opposing personalities lead to their separation. For both Sula and Nel, the relationship is necessary for their survival, as they come from homes that are ultimately unaccepting of their true selves. Sula's rejection of societal norms and Nel's acceptance of them create a balance between the two, making their relationship necessary. Morrison's work highlights the complex and intricate relationships between Black women, emphasising the importance of support and connection in the face of oppression.

The work of Alice Walker is another excellent example of Womanist literature, particularly her celebrated novel *The Color Purple*. In this novel, the protagonist Celie, like her ancestors, achieves the ability to free herself and become an agent of her own life through the power of literacy. Literacy serves as Celie's metaphorical sword, which she uses to cut through the chains that bind her to her rapist stepfather, abusive husband, and a stagnant Black community. Through literacy, Celie is able to develop a close bond with Shug Avery, who supports and comforts her, providing a safe haven for love. As a Womanist work, Walker's novel chronicles Celie's struggles as she searches for her own agency and voice. Despite the constant assaults and abuses she faces, Celie's journey towards self-actualisation is not hindered. In fact, her self-actualisation is achieved when she decides to ask Mr. whether her sister Nettie has sent any other letters. Mr.'s response:

> If they did, he say, I wouldn't give'em to you," causes Celie to curse him. "I say, Until you do tight by me, everything you touch will crumble. . . . Until you do right by me, I ay, everything you even dream about ill fail. . . . Then I say, You better stop talking because all I'm telling you ain't coming just from me. Look like when I open my mouth the air rash in and shape words. (206)

The idea that Celie's struggle in *The Color Purple* is not simply for physical freedom but also for the ability to control her own language and voice is a significant aspect of Womanist literature. This emphasis on language and self-expression is what distinguishes this work as a prime example of the Womanist literary tradition.

The concepts of Womanism, Black Feminism, and Africana Womanism are not just abstract theories detached from the reality of Black women's lives. Rather, they emerge from and respond to the lived experiences of Black women. These theories seek to elevate and give direction to the unique challenges and struggles experienced by Black women. Through this constant dialogue between theory and practice, Womanism, Black Feminism, and Africana Womanism have the potential to not only influence academia but also the everyday lives of Black women. By studying these theories, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of the particular difficulties that Black women face in their personal lives and social interactions. Such insights allow people to make meaningful connections to enrich their own lives, while also fostering greater empathy and understanding towards the experiences of Black women.

Sefi Atta, a Nigerian writer born in January 1964 in Lagos, has established herself as a prominent figure in the literary world. She is well-travelled, dividing her time between England, the United States, and Nigeria. With a Master of Fine Arts degree in

Creative Writing from Antioch University, Los Angeles, she is also a qualified Chartered Accountant in England and a Certified Public Accountant in the United States. In addition to being a novelist, Atta is also a talented playwright with her works performed and published worldwide, including the BBC.

Atta has won several literary awards for her work, including the prestigious PEN International's 2004/2005 David TK Wong Prize and the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa in 2006 for her debut novel *Everything Good Will Come*. She was also awarded the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 2009 for her short story collection, *News from Home*, and numerous other literary awards. In 2010, she served as a juror for the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, highlighting her standing in the literary community. Atta's works often depict bourgeois life in Nigeria in a unique way, setting her apart from other African literary giants.

Sefi Atta's literary prowess shines through her adept storytelling and well-crafted characters, particularly her womanistic portrayals of female characters in all her works. As a prolific writer, she has published five novels, a collection of short stories, and numerous stage and radio plays. In 2015, a critical study of her short stories and novels titled *Writing Contemporary Nigeria: How Sefi Atta Illuminates African Culture and Tradition* edited by Walter P. Collins, III was published by Cambria Press. The present study delves into Atta's womanist writings and explores the postcolonial experiences of her female characters. It also examines the societal pressures placed on women and their journey towards empowerment in Atta's works. Her literary oeuvre provides a lens into the rich complexities of African culture and tradition, as well as the struggles and triumphs of women in a changing world.

Sefi Atta's debut novel *Everything Good Will Come*, published in 2005, is a powerful exploration of post-colonial Nigeria. Set in Lagos, the novel depicts the country's transition from a colonial state to an independent nation, revealing the impact of this change on the lives of its citizens, particularly the characters in the book. Atta highlights the role of education and exposure in challenging the traditional values and customs of Nigerian society. Through her portrayal of female characters, Atta shows how women are pushing for change and striving to make their voices heard.

The novel revolves around Enitan, a young woman from a privileged yet restricted background, who struggles to find her place in society and assert herself in the face of gender bias and societal expectations. Atta's depiction of Enitan's journey towards self-discovery and empowerment is a testament to the resilience and determination of women in Nigeria and beyond.

Enitan's upbringing was marked by conflicting parental opinions and societal expectations. Her life was constrained by strict rules and little room for interaction, with her mother being excessively religious and her father occupied with his legal and political work. Enitan's journey to Europe and her close friendship with Sheri offered her an opportunity to question and challenge the realities of her upbringing.

Everything Good Will Come depicts the life of Enitan, highlighting her challenges and heartbreaks, and her eventual breaking away from the societal expectations that had hindered her choices and self-discovery. The book explores the emergence of African women and their struggle to find their place in a male-dominated society.

Atta's novel portrays the evolution of the African woman and the challenges she faces in a patriarchal African society. The book is a powerful commentary on the impact

of education and exposure on traditional Nigerian society and the role of women in shaping its future. Through Enitan's journey, Atta provides a poignant reflection on the choices and struggles faced by African women in a changing world.

Everything Good Will Come delves into several pertinent themes that are still relevant in today's society. The book vividly portrays the economic misfortune of Nigeria caused by bad governance, which was a major issue in post-colonial Nigeria. The author exposes how the corrupt practices of those in power affected the lives of ordinary citizens.

Gender equality is another significant theme that runs through the book. Enitan's struggles to be heard and her quest for women's rights are prime examples of the author's focus on this issue. The author highlights how women are often overlooked and undervalued in a society that is heavily patriarchal.

Friendship is also a notable theme in the book. The bond between Enitan and Sheri shows how true friendship can transcend boundaries and how friends can support each other through thick and thin. The sacrifices they make for each other portray the depth of their relationship and how true friendship should be.

Parenting patterns are another essential theme in the book. The conflicting ideologies of Taiwos, Bakares, and Francos highlight how different parenting styles can shape a child's perspective and influence their decision-making abilities. The author provides insight into the challenges of parenting and how parents' beliefs can affect their children's lives.

Overall, the novel provides a powerful insight into the struggles of women and the challenges they face in a patriarchal society. It highlights the importance of gender

equality, friendship, and the impact of parenting on a child's life. The themes presented in the book are still pertinent today and can inspire readers to think critically about these issues (Bookclub).

Swallow is the second novel by Atta, which was published in 2010. The book tells the story of two Nigerian women, Rose and Tolani, and their struggles with societal expectations and cultural traditions. Rose is fired from her job after slapping her boss, who had been sexually harassing her for years. Her best friend Tolani is also facing pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, including finding a husband who can provide a dowry.

Rose and Tolani share a room and face various issues in their personal lives. Rose loses her job due to sexual harassment and struggles to make both ends meet, while Tolani worries about her relationship with Sanwo and tries to keep it hidden from their landlady. Meanwhile, Mrs. Duorjaiye, their unsmiling landlady, gets involved in union meetings and supports a strike for better pay. When Salako, Rose's former boss, is investigated for wrongdoing, Tolani helps her report him and Mrs. Duorjaiye assists with the grievance process. Both women aim to end the practice of wealthy bosses getting away with mistreating their employees.

Tolani agrees to invest in Sanwo's business of buying and selling dogs but changes her mind after seeing the operation. Sanwo is angered by her reluctance, but Tolani insists that it is an investment. As Rose is determined to drag Tolani into the drug smuggling gig offered by Rose's partner OC, Tolani has second thoughts about accepting it. Her pondering over it and her experiences in the church makes her stand her ground and she refuses to participate with Rose in the illegal act. Their friendship suffers, and

Rose and Tolani drift apart over their respective relationships. Rose eventually realizes she is sacrificing too much for her selfish partner and has a heart-to-heart with her mother about love and marriage. Tolani also realises that she deserves better and ends her relationship with Sanwo.

The novel explores themes of gender inequality, sexual harassment, and cultural expectations, and sheds light on the challenges faced by women in Nigeria. Through the stories of Rose and Tolani, Atta challenges traditional gender roles and highlights the difficulties women face in asserting their independence and agency in a patriarchal society (Williams).

A Bit of Difference by Sefi Atta, published in 2013, is set partly in Lagos, Nigeria and partly in London, UK. The protagonist, Deola Bello, was born and raised in the affluent suburb of Ikoyi, Lagos, before she was sent to boarding school in England. Unlike her father who founded a bank, Deola chooses to work for an international charity in London, but increasingly feels dissatisfied with her expatriate life. As London becomes more diverse with people from former colonies, including Nigeria, Deola is ambivalent about this change.

The novel explores Deola's character, which is not always likeable, making her more human and convincing. She leads a lonely existence in London, except for her friend Subu, who is now more successful and religious. Deola's relationship with God and men is complicated, and her mother reminds her constantly of her biological clock. Her other acquaintances in London include Bandele, an aspiring writer from Lagos, and Tessa, a friend from boarding school who is getting married.

The novel is not only a personal exploration of Deola's life but also a commentary on the cultural differences and similarities between Nigeria and the UK, particularly the impact of colonialism and globalisation on both countries. Deola returns to Nigeria for a job assignment where she meets her family, including her mother, brother, sister, cousins, and aunties.

The author, Sefi Atta, excels in creating fully developed characters, each with their own unique story and mannerisms. As Deola interacts with her family and acquaintances, the story advances through anecdotes, flashbacks, and observations. Despite the constant references to Jane Austen, the novel is not about finding love, but rather focuses on Deola's views and opinions on family, race, Nigeria, literature, and music.

One of the most memorable characters Deola meets in Nigeria is Wale, a wealthy widower who seems to have come straight out of an Austen novel. But like Austen's Emma, Deola's dominant personality makes the book revolve around her and her experiences. While the novel lacks a traditional plot, it is rich in character development and explores important themes such as identity, family dynamics, and cultural differences (Habila).

Sefi Atta's fourth novel, *The Bead Collector*, takes the story back to Lagos in January 1976, six years after the end of the Nigerian Civil War. Under a new military regime, the country is fraught with tension and rumours of an impending countercoup are rife. It is against this backdrop that Remi Lawal, a Nigerian woman who runs her own greeting-card shop, meets the enigmatic Frances Cooke, an American art dealer in

Nigeria, who has come to buy rare beads, at an art exhibition in the wealthy Ikoyi neighbourhood.

As the weeks pass, the two women form a bond, sharing their aspirations, loyalties, marriage, motherhood, and their views on Nigeria's political climate. Remi's husband, Tunde, is wary of Frances, suspecting her of being a CIA spy, a common perception of Americans in Lagos at the time. But Remi, cynical about the country's instability and disillusioned by the shallowness of the city's elite, is eager to confide in Frances. However, when General Muhammed is assassinated on February 13, Remi begins to question her friend's motives and loyalty. She wonders if Frances is really who she claims to be, or if she is gathering intelligence for the American government. With her trademark subtlety and wit, Atta blends international espionage with the politics of family life, exploring Remi's yearning to help build her country from home amid the legacy of conflict and uncertainty. *The Bead Collector* is a poignant tale of a brief friendship that illuminates the complexities of life in Nigeria during a turbulent period (Interlink Publishing).

Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant*, published in 2022, features her first male protagonist, Lukmon Ahmed-Karim, a Nigerian professor who moves to the U.S. with his family in the late 1990s. While Lukmon criticises Nigeria for its corruption and tribalism, he does not immediately view America as a land of opportunity. His wife, Moriam, is the driving force behind the move, believing their children will have better educational opportunities in the U.S. The novel is a satire and comedy of manners that examines race relations between Africans and African Americans and the challenges of adapting to a new culture.

Lukmon, a former Nigerian professor and writer, takes a job as a security guard in an upscale cosmetics store in Manhattan, while his wife, Moriam, chooses a nursing job. Their teenage children, Taslim and Bashira, are quick to pick up American slang and habits, which baffles Lukmon. He finds himself confronting racism, both from whites and African Americans and feels emasculated by his role as a house husband.

Lukmon's journey of adaptation is both amusing and thought-provoking. He has a lot to learn about race relations in America and recognises the need to change his own views. Despite facing challenges, Lukmon's unfiltered voice and acerbic views of male-female relations, race relations, American lifestyles, and his fellow Nigerian immigrants make for an entertaining read. *The Bad Immigrant* offers a nuanced look at race relations not just between blacks and whites but also between Africans and African Americans. Ultimately, the novel depicts a family's struggle to find their place in a new country while preserving their cultural identity (Pfarrer).

Sefi Atta's book of short stories, *News from Home* (2010), is a masterful work that demonstrates that learning about a country need not be limited to photographs or newscasts. Atta's characters, language, and meticulous attention to subtle shifts in relationships make for a captivating and enlightening experience.

Atta's characters come from diverse backgrounds, spanning various age groups, and enjoy different levels of privilege. In *Madness in the Family*, a mother watches her eldest daughter succumbing to bipolar disorder helplessly, while her husband absconds to London with their younger children, leaving her to confront the disintegration of her own life. Atta skillfully captures the sense of despair and futility that such situations engender,

leaving readers with the sobering realisation that no matter how much money one has or how far one might flee, one cannot escape the harsh realities of their home country.

Despite the often sombre subject matter of her stories, Atta's writing is infused with humour, as evidenced in *Green*, where a young American girl accompanies her parents to the immigration office in New Orleans. Atta's dialogue is sharp and at times funny, imbuing her characters with authenticity and depth (Diehn).

Review of Literature

In the realm of literary criticism, the name Sefi Atta has become synonymous with insightful and illuminating portrayals of African culture and tradition. The premiere edited volume of the work, entitled "Writing Contemporary Nigeria: How Sefi Atta Illuminates African Culture and Tradition", features an impressive array of contributors hailing from across the globe, each offering their unique perspective on Atta's published novels and short stories.

Divided into four sections, the book groups together chapters that share thematic connections, exploring the interplay between Sisterhood, Womanhood and Rites of Passage, The City, Dark Aspects of Atta's Works, and Atta's Literature in Application. Throughout the volume, readers will encounter penetrating analyses of Atta's treatment of these themes, along with thoughtful commentary on her masterful writing style and skilful use of language.

As a highlight of the collection, readers will find an in-depth interview with Atta herself, in which she shares her progressive and insightful perspective on the current state of African language use. This work is an essential resource for anyone seeking a deeper

understanding of Atta's work, and a vital addition to any literature collection, particularly those focused on world literature and African literature.

Anna-Leena Toivanen's article, "Spaces of in-between-ness and unbelonging: The hotel in short stories by Sefi Atta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie," delves into the portrayal of the migrant figure in globalised postcoloniality through the lens of two prominent writers. The short stories of Sefi Atta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie feature the African leisure traveller, tourist, and hotel guest as representatives of the contemporary migrant. The hotel, often viewed as a symbol of in-between-ness and displacement, serves as a central setting for exploring the socio-economic differences between migrant travellers and the diasporic unbelonging they may feel. In "Transition to Glory," the hotel room is used as a space of deviance for an adulterous relationship, existing outside of both the private and public spheres. Although these stories take place in spaces of transition, they also express a metaphorical sense of longing for home. By analysing the literary representation of the hotel as a symbol of the migrant experience, Toivanen's article expands the understanding of postcolonial mobilities.

De La Cruz-Guzman's dissertation titled "Of Masquerading and Weaving Tales of Empowerment: Gender, Composite Consciousness, and Culture-Specificity in the Early Novels of Sefi Atta and Laila Lalami" examines the development of a risky, yet empowering culture-specific women's consciousness in the protagonists of Sefi Atta and Laila Lalami's early novels. By incorporating Jameson's concept of the national situation in the development of a woman's composite consciousness, the dissertation provides insights into the marginalisation and subsequent empowerment of women in specific settings such as Casablanca, Morocco or Lagos, Nigeria.

The study delves into the social, economic, political, racial, ethnic, and religious contexts of Atta and Lalami's characters in order to fully appreciate their cultural milieu. This approach not only grounds women's empowerment in their particular societies with their unique cultural expressions and norms but also fosters a stronger connection between women and their communities, which in turn facilitates their ability to advocate for more options and effect change. Overall, De La Cruz-Guzman's dissertation offers a valuable contribution to the field of women's empowerment in postcolonial literature, highlighting the importance of cultural specificity and community engagement.

Anna-Leena Toivanen's article "Failing cosmopolitanism: aborted transnational journeys in novels by Monique Ilboudo, Sefi Atta and Aminata Sow Fall" provides a nuanced understanding of cosmopolitanism in the context of the novels *Le mal de peau* by Monique Ilboudo, *Swallow* by Sefi Atta, and *Douceurs du bercail* by Aminata Sow Fall. The article explores the ways in which these works highlight the challenges and complexities of postcolonial life, including political instability, globalisation, and African immigration to Europe. The novels focus on the theme of transnational travel and demonstrate how obstacles to cosmopolitanism are often realised in networks of mobility, such as airports and aeroplanes. The trope of aborted transnational journeys also has gendered dimensions in the novels, as the meanings of failing cosmopolitanism are often inscribed on the female body. By analysing the ways in which these works portray the failures of cosmopolitanism, Toivanen sheds light on the limitations of this ideal and the need to examine the complex realities of postcolonial life critically.

The chapter titled "Local and Global Perspectives on Nigerian Women's Activism in *News from Home* by Sefi Atta" by Rose A. Sackeyfio, in the anthology *African Women*

Writing Diaspora: Transnational Perspectives in the Twenty-First Century, explores the various facets of African women's lived experiences, as portrayed through Atta's collection of short stories. Sackeyfio highlights the ways in which social, political, economic, and physical environments influence the daily lives of these women, and demonstrates their unwavering resilience in the face of adversity. Despite facing a myriad of challenges, African women continue to negotiate and redefine their identities, showcasing their ability to survive and thrive in a world that is often hostile to their existence. The author skillfully weaves together themes of activism, gender, and globalisation, ultimately shedding light on the complex realities of African women's lives both locally and on a global scale.

The book titled *Emerging Perspectives of Flora Nwapa: Critical and Theoretical Essays* offers a comprehensive account of the life and works of Flora Nwapa. Author Marie Umeh commends Nwapa for introducing a new canon of Nigerian literature to the world and redefining the image of African women through her literary works. This anthology delves into Nwapa's literary contributions and explores the characters in her works, celebrating the female archetype of Ogubide, the water spirit, characterised by strength, confidence, independence, security, and divinity. Nwapa's legacy, which portrays the new African woman, is the primary focus of the first part of this volume, which examines and addresses the idea of womanhood. As a major twentieth-century writer, Nwapa challenges the previous male-dominated literary trend of writers such as Achebe and Soyinka and highlights the social construction of society and the condition of women. This book is a valuable addition to literature, world literature, and African literature collections, offering fresh insights and critical perspectives on the literary works

of Flora Nwapa, who has been a pioneer in the way she has created her women standing for their freedom, individually and assertion. Buchi Emecheta, Adichie and Sefi Atta are a few of the women writers on whom she has had a very great impact and influence which is clearly evident in their works.

In Yakut Akbay's chapter "Breaking the Borders: Womanhood and Self-Attainment in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*," from the book *Exploring Borders and Boundaries in the Humanities*, the protagonist's assertive character is examined, as well as how she encourages other women to shed their submissive roles. The chapter underscores the importance of speaking up for the socio-cultural issues facing Nigerian women while simultaneously experiencing the journey of womanhood. Furthermore, it suggests that Nigerian women are poised to escalate their struggle to attain equal status within society until they reach their goal.

The chapter titled "Lexical Reiteration, Contextual Belief and Patriarchal Ideology in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*," authored by Amaka C. Ezeife in the book *Pragmatics, Discourse and Society, Volume 1: A Festschrift for Akin Odebunmi*, delves into the complex treatment of lexical reiteration as it relates to patriarchal ideology in the novel. Employing a socio-cognitive model of critical discourse analysis, dominant gender theory, and a contextual beliefs (CBs) model, this study explores the strategic use of lexical repetition and how it shapes contextual beliefs that perpetuate patriarchal ideology in Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*.

In her article titled "Perspective in Africana Feminism; Exploring Expressions of Black Feminism/Womanism in the African Diaspora," Carolette Norwood delves into the various perspectives of Africana feminist thought across different regions, including

Africa, North America, and the Caribbean. Despite the great diversity in culture within and among these regions, Africana women share common experiences of oppression under colonialism and slavery. These shared experiences have given rise to a distinct brand of feminism that is concerned with the challenges faced by women in managing and resisting multiple forms of oppression. Throughout the African diaspora, Africana women have a powerful and inspiring history of resistance, despite being marginalised and silenced by those in power.

The study "Race and Women's Identity Development: Distinguishing Between Feminism and Womanism Among Black and White Women" conducted by Alicia D. Boisnier involved the distribution of a questionnaire that included scales to measure feminist identity, womanist identity, and self-esteem. The results provided some support for the hypothesis that Black women would show stronger agreement with the womanist model, whereas White women would align more strongly with the feminist model. The findings also suggested that the womanist model better differentiated between stages of identity development than the feminist model did for Black women. Furthermore, the study partially supported the hypothesis that race would moderate the relationships between the womanist and feminist identity models and self-esteem.

The present study aims to examine all five novels written by Sefi Atta through the lens of Womanist perspectives. Atta's protagonists, who are mainly African women, are observed to possess remarkable determination, resilience, and assertiveness in the face of a male-dominated society. The study seeks to investigate how these women navigate and challenge the various socio-economic, political, and gender roles imposed upon them, ultimately striving towards harmonious co-existence. Through the exploration of Atta's

work, the study sheds light on the transformative potential of Womanist perspectives in African women's literature and highlights the significance of their lived experiences and voices.

Thesis Statement:

The deprivation of basic human rights and the unjust treatment of fellow human beings in terms of gender, colour, class, race, religion, and culture opprobrium are the cruellest forms of oppression. The research focuses on unveiling the oppressed voices, escalating their issues to the world tracing out the postcolonial traumatic experiences.

Objectives:

- To address the subjugation of women in the Nigerian society
- To trace out the unhinged postcolonial traumatic psyche of the Nigerians
- To flash the light upon the stereotypical expectations and portrayal of women in the Nigerian society
- To bring out the struggles faced by women in the patriarchal society as they move towards empowerment
- To trace how the characters with Afropolitan thinking try to embrace the reality of societal shackles concerning their lifestyle, sexuality, and modern thoughts

The primary sources taken for the study are the novels written by Sefi Atta, namely, *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), *Swallow* (2010), *A Bit of Difference* (2013), *The Bead Collector* (2019), and *The Bad Immigrant* (2021).

Methodology:

The theory of Womanism is widely applied in the study and the Postcolonial trauma theory with referential limits to Cathy Caruth's Trauma Model. This research

adopts formatting techniques and regulations that comply with the MLA Handbook – 8th edition.

Chapterisation:

The present study is structured into five chapters, including an introduction and summation. The first chapter "Introduction" presents a brief account of Nigerian literature and its evolution from oral to written form. The chapter also focuses on the emergence of various ideologies and theories alongside the development of literature. One such theory is Womanism, which emphasises the unique contributions of women to society, particularly in black families. It delves into the tenets of Womanism and its significance in the context of Nigerian literature. Moreover, the chapter highlights the major writers of the period and their contributions to Nigerian literature. The chapter also situates Sefi Atta's place among these writers, providing an overview of her works and their significance in the literary landscape of Nigeria.

In the second chapter, titled "Trauma of Postcolonial Experience," the focus is on the postcolonial trauma theory that delves deeper into the psychological effects experienced by those who underwent colonial trauma, such as slavery, forced migration, and colonisation, and their aftermath, particularly in the recent times of the 20th and 21st centuries. The chapter recognises that postcolonialism has two sides - the positive, such as education, transportation, and globalisation, and the negative, such as over-commercialisation, the heavy influence of Western culture on native customs and traditions, and the loss of the same. Through Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, the chapter examines how Atta's fiction fits under the particular idea that postcolonial trauma causes not only physical destruction but also mental destruction.

The third chapter, “Delineation of Societal Expectations on Nigerian Women,” delves into the multifarious challenges that arise due to Nigeria’s cultural heritage, such as the impact of urbanisation, the widespread influence of Christianity, the prioritisation of business, modernisation, and development, and the prevalent corruption and antiquated customs. The chapter highlights the gender inequality that still exists in Nigeria and many parts of the world and the burden of societal expectations imposed on women. It analyses how Sefi Atta’s female characters portray the struggle to break free from patriarchal societal norms and reconstruct a more equitable society.

In the fourth chapter, “Women’s Sense of Self-worth and Social Change,” the focus shifts to the empowerment of women and how it enables them to make significant life decisions in the face of societal issues. By redefining gender roles in a changing socio-economic and political environment, women can accomplish their goals with greater flexibility. The realisation of self-worth in women is achievable through mutual support among women, thereby creating a supportive community. The chapter examines how Sefi Atta interweaves the duality of women characters through the portrayal of the protagonist and the secondary female characters in her novels. The protagonist embodies the typical woman abiding by societal expectations and following traditions, while the secondary female character is rebellious and does not blindly follow societal norms based on gender dynamics. Atta’s narrative patterns highlight the need for women to be their own champions and help each other in their journey towards self-realisation and empowerment.

The final chapter of the study, “Summation”, provides a comprehensive overview of the arguments presented in the previous chapters. It sheds light on Sefi Atta’s unique

depiction of her female characters, which implicitly conveys that female assertiveness is achievable through education and economic independence. The chapter emphasises the importance of women voicing their opinions not only for their own betterment but also for the advancement of all women. Additionally, the chapter stresses the significance of knowing one's culture and establishing one's identity to achieve self-reliance, self-realisation, and empowerment, which are fundamental to living a meaningful life.