

**Portrayal of Women Characters in Selected African Writing  
in English**

**Md. Minhazul Islam**

**A Thesis**

**submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts in English**



**SOUTHEAST UNIVERSITY**

**House#64/B, Road# 18  
Banani, Dhaka-1213**

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# Portrayal of Women Characters in Selected African Writing in English

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## Declaration

I hereby declare the thesis titled “The portrayal of women characters in selected African writing in English” was commenced by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for MA in English Literature degree at Southeast University. I would like to confirm that this thesis has not been previously submitted for any other degree and has been made for the first time. I also acknowledge that I have duly cited all the references I have taken from different sources.

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## Abstract

A whole lot of works have been carried out on portraying female characters in African Writings. The characters in African Literature have taken numerous forms possessing all the qualities a character could have. Female characters in African Literature show dissimilarities compared to the characters in other literatures because of Africa's diverse cultures and religions. To uphold female characters and to critique an African literary work some theories have been used by critics and researchers. Among them traditionalist theory, functionalist theory, feminist theory or womanist theory are noteworthy and widely used. As these are gender-oriented theories, they are used for the virile comprehension and exact interpretation of women characters. Regarding feminism, interpretations of the Western World are different from those of Third World countries and thus the discourse black feminism has appeared to inspect if colonizers had laid any effects on men's attitudes and behaviors toward women and no theories other than postcolonial feminism will serve this purpose. Hence an attempt to investigate the matter at stake has been made, using Black and Post-colonial feminism in some of the selected African Writings in English. This thesis will cover *The Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka, and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe.

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## Introduction

Like other established Literature, African Literature in English has emerged as an equally recognized and accepted form of literature prolifically excelling in all genres. The characters in African Writing are vividly portrayed reflecting traditions and cultures of African societies. This thesis is entitled to find out the women's conditions in African societies and to explore the causes of their plights as found in some of the selected African Writing. From multifarious African Writings a novel and a play have been selected to investigate and evaluate the portrayal of women characters from the perspectives of post-colonial and black feminism. The novel is *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. The only play selected in this study is *The Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka. These texts have been selected because of its regional aptness and the division of African societies in myriad clans. The characterization of women in different parts of Africa and the characterization of women in other parts of the World are not the same. To portray and interpret the characters of women in any writing from feminist perspectives certain things are ignored if done on western notion of feminism which later on gave birth to the discourse black Feminism. To check if colonizers had brought about any changes to people's attitudes and perceptions, post-colonial feminist approach has been applied. Therefore, to portray the characters of women in selected African Writing in English postcolonial and black Feminist approaches have been used as theoretical frameworks. I will investigate the following questions in this research—

How have the women characters in these writings been portrayed?

Did the writers use any masculinist view in portraying the female characters in their writings? These and a lot more were looked at carefully in this paper.

## **Methodology:**

In carrying out this study, *The Lion and the Jewel* and *Things Fall Apart* have been used as primary sources and the secondary sources consist of critiques of these two African Writings, scholarly journals, web portals, e-books and websites. To analyze the texts the methods of coding and decoding were followed along with discourse analysis. An attempt to clarify everything clearly and easily has been made from the very first chapter of this thesis paper.

## Chapter One: Literature Review

In this chapter, a review of the published literature in this area has been provided. Reviewing the published literature, the answer to why further study is needed in this area has been given in this chapter.

### Literature Review

Women in African writings have been portrayed by many critics. While criticizing any African literary work, most of the writers or the critics have taken up the help of different theories and have discussed respective texts in various contexts. Porter (n.d.) in his article on Ideology and the Image of women brings on the issue whether writer's ideology rather than his biological identity works behind portraying female characters in his writing.

Adeyemi & Ajibade (2009) in their write-up have investigated the portrayal of female characters in two ways-one women portrayed as bad and the other women portrayed with good qualities as loving, hard-working and serious minded. (p-1). In doing so they used feminine approaches.

Kenalemang (2013) in his research paper analyzed the pre and post-colonial Igbo society to direct misleading European novels that depicted Africans as savages and examined the effects of European colonialism on Igbo society. Strong-leek (2001) also in her paper Reading as a woman used the theory of feminism.

So many theses have been written about African literature but no criticism was done by juxtaposing theories, which would address the issues pertaining to the portrayal of female characters in any writing. That is why in this thesis an attempt has been made to portray the female characters in some of the selected African writing in English by using post-colonial and black feminist theories.

This chapter has outlined a literature review in the area of female characters in African literature. In next chapter, related theories will be discussed.

## Chapter Two: Theory in Use

This chapter will provide a theoretical overview of the various aspects related to the portrayal of women characters and in doing so the concept of character, post-colonial and black feminism theories have been discussed for getting the better picture of women in African society.

### Concept of Character

In ancient Greece the idea of character was depicted in Aristotle's *Poetics* (as in Butcher 2010) that 'characters are the men in action and these men must be either of a higher or lower type. Moral character mainly answers these divisions, goodness and badness being the distinguishing marks of moral differences. It follows that we must represent characters either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are. Polygnotus depicted men as nobler than they are, Pauson as less noble, Dionysius drew them true to life. In respect of Character there are four things to be aimed at. First, and most important, it must be good. Now any speech or action that manifests moral purpose of any kind will be expressive of character: the character will be good if the purpose is good. This rule is relative to each class. Even a woman may be good, and also a slave; though the woman may be said to be an inferior being, and the slave quite worthless. The second thing to aim at is propriety. There is a type of manly valor; but valor in a woman, or unscrupulous cleverness is inappropriate. Thirdly, character must be true to life: for this is a distinct thing from goodness and propriety, as here described. The fourth point is consistency: for though the subject of the imitation, who suggested the type, be inconsistent, still he must be consistently inconsistent. As an example of motiveless degradation of character, we have Menelaus in the Orestes; of character indecorous and inappropriate, the lament of Odysseus in the Scylla, and the

speech of Melanippe; of inconsistency, the Iphigenia at Aulis — for Iphigenia the suppliant in no way resembles her later self' (i &xv).

But the idea of character in Elizabethan period is somewhat different from the Greek notion of character. Everybody in our lives plays a character. As Shakespeare would say:

‘All the World’s a Stage

And all the men and women are merely players’ (Shakespeare, 1599).

Character in real life and a character in a written work are different. It may sometimes be identical as real life situation as characters in any written work is the reflection of our society.

Characters are the persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work who are interpreted by the readers as possessing particular moral, intellectual and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it- the dialogue and from what they do-the action. The grounds in the characters, temperament, desires and moral nature for their speech and actions are called their motivation. (Abrams, 2007).

Characters among various tribes, religions and nations often vary. Also, characters of gender do bear peculiarity, essentially because of variations and disparity between cultures, custom and traditional affiliations. (Adeyemi & Ajibade,2001).

The characters in *The Lion and the Jewel* and the *Things Fall Apart* are bestowed with the aforementioned qualities. Both Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka flawlessly portray the characters in their respective writings.

### **Post-colonial Feminism**

Before elaborating on post-colonial feminism, a brief discussion on feminism and post- colonialism is given here.

Feminism is of crucial interest to post-colonial discourse for two major reasons. First, both patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate. Hence the experiences of women in patriarchy and those of colonized subjects can be paralleled in a number of respects, and both feminist and post-colonial politics oppose such dominance. Second, there have been vigorous debates in a number of colonized societies over whether gender or colonial oppression is the more important political factor in women's lives. This has sometimes led to division between Western feminists and political activists from impoverished and oppressed countries; or, alternatively, the two are inextricably entwined, in which case the condition of colonial dominance affects, in material ways, the position of women within their societies. This has led to calls for a greater consideration of the construction and employment of gender in the practices of imperialism and colonialism. Feminism, like post-colonialism, has often been concerned with the ways and extent to which representation and language are crucial to identity formation and to the construction of subjectivity. For both groups, language has been a vehicle for subverting patriarchal and imperial power, and both discourses have invoked essentialist arguments in positing more authentic forms of language against those imposed on them. Both discourses share a sense of disarticulation from an inherited language and have thus attempted to recover a linguistic authenticity via a pre-colonial language or a primal feminine tongue. However, both feminists and colonized peoples, like other subordinate groups, have also used appropriation to subvert and adapt dominant languages and signifying practices. ( in Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin,2007).

The texts of feminist theory and those of post-colonialism concur on many aspects of the theory of identity, of difference and of the interpellation of the subject by a

dominant discourse, as well as offering to each other various strategies of resistance to such controls. Similarities between ‘writing the body’ in feminism and ‘writing place’ in post-colonialism; similarities between the strategies of bisexuality and cultural syncretism; and similar appeals to nationalism may be detected (Ashcroft 1989). In the 1980s, many feminist critics (Carby 1982; Mohanty 1984; Suleri 1992), began to argue that Western feminism, which had assumed that gender overrode cultural differences to create a universal category of the womanly or the feminine, was operating from hidden, universalist assumptions with a middle-class, Euro-centric bias. Feminism was therefore charged with failing to account for or deal adequately with the experiences of Third World women. In this respect, the issues concerning gender face similar problems to those concerned with class. Mohanty, for instance, criticizes the assumption that all of us of the same gender, across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogeneous group identified prior to the process of analysis. . . . Thus, the discursively consensual homogeneity of ‘women’ as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women. (Mohanty 1984: 338) Domatila Barrios de Chungara’s *Let Me Speak* demonstrates how the material reality of different groups of women can lead to very different perceptions of the nature of political struggle. When she was invited to the International Women’s Year Tribunal in Mexico City in 1974, the difference between the feminist agenda of the tribunal and her own political struggle against oppression in the Bolivian tin mines became very clear. In her view, the meeting’s World Plan of Action ‘didn’t touch on the problems that are basic for Latin American women’ (Barrios de Chungara 1977: 201).

The overlap between patriarchal, economic and racial oppression has always been difficult to negotiate, and the differences between the political priorities of First and

Third World women have persisted to the present. Such differences appear to be those of emphasis and strategy rather than those of principle, since the interconnection of various forms of social oppression materially affects the lives of all women. More recently, feminism has been concerned that categories like gender may sometimes be ignored within the larger formation of the colonial, and that post-colonial theory has tended to elide gender differences in constructing a single category of the colonized. These critics argue that colonialism operated very differently for women and for men, and the ‘double colonization’ that resulted when women were subject both to general discrimination as colonial subjects and specific discrimination as women need to be taken into account in any analysis of colonial oppression (Spivak 1985a, 1985b, 1985c and 1986; Mohanty 1984; Suleri 1992). Even post-independence practices of anti-colonial nationalism are not free from this kind of gender bias, and constructions of the traditional or pre-colonial are often heavily inflected by a contemporary masculinist bias that falsely represents native women as quietist and subordinate. One illuminating account of the connections between race and gender as a consequence of imperial expansion is Sander L. Gilman’s ‘Black bodies, white bodies’ (1985), which shows how the representation of the African in nineteenth-century European art, medicine and literature, reinforced the construction of the sexualized female body. The presence of male or female black servants was regularly included in paintings, plays and operas as a sign of illicit sexual activity. ‘By the nineteenth century the sexuality of the black, both male and female, becomes an icon for deviant sexuality in general’ (228). Furthermore, the ‘relationship between the sexuality of the black woman and that of the sexualized white woman enters a new dimension when contemporary scientific discourse concerning the nature of black female sexuality is examined’ (231).

Notorious examples of prurient exoticism, such as the Hottentot Venus displayed on tour in England, provide material examples of the ways in which signs of racial otherness became instrumental in the construction of a (transgressive) female sexuality. In settler colonies, although women's bodies were not directly constructed as part of a transgressive sexuality, their bodies were frequently the site of a power discourse of a different kind. As critics like Whitlock have argued, they were perceived reductively not as sexual but as reproductive subjects, as literal 'wombs of empire' whose function was limited to the population of the new colonies with white settlers. (in Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2007).

Postcolonial feminism is a relatively new stream of thought, developing primarily out of the work of the postcolonial theorists who concern themselves with evaluating how different colonial and imperial relations throughout the nineteenth century have impacted the way particular cultures view themselves. This particular strain of feminism promotes a wider viewpoint of the complex layers of oppression that exist within any given society.

Postcolonial feminism began simply as a critique of both Western feminism and postcolonial theory, but later became a burgeoning method of analysis to address key issues within both fields. Unlike mainstream postcolonial theory, which focuses on the lingering impacts that colonialism has had on the current economic and political institutions of countries, postcolonial feminist theorists are interested in analyzing why postcolonial theory fails to address issues of gender. Postcolonial feminism also seeks to illuminate the tendency of Western feminist thought to apply its claims to all women around the world, when in reality the scope of feminist theory is limited. In this way, postcolonial feminism attempts to account for perceived weaknesses within both postcolonial theory and within Western feminism. The concept of colonization

occupies many different spaces within postcolonial feminist theory; it can refer to the literal act of acquiring lands or to forms of social, political, and economic enslavement in a society. (post-colonial feminism,2015)

### **Black Feminism**

The Black Feminist Movement was formed to address the ways sexism, racism, and classism influences the lives of black women whose needs were ignored by the black men of the Black Liberation Movement and white women in the Women's Movement. The movement has spawned several important organizations which are committed to the struggle against all forms of oppression. They have created a unique model for cross-class organization in which the needs of the poor are not usurped by the needs of the middle-class and the wealthy.

The effectiveness of the movement has not been uniformed in the white feminist and black communities. Many white women in the feminist movement have acknowledged their racism and made attempts to address it in anti-racist training seminars. Feminist theory now includes an analysis of the way race, class, sexuality, as well as gender influence women's lives. The women's studies departments of many prominent universities and colleges now have courses which focus on black women's writings and history, in the United States and in other countries. However, in the black community, the movement has not been as effective. The rhetoric of current black liberation movements still fails to adequately address issues which affect black women. Awareness of sexism has increased within the black academic community but the popular culture (especially that which primarily involves black men, such as the rap music industry) continues to be extremely sexist and misogynist. There are several challenges facing the Black Feminist Movement. Most importantly, the

movement must find a way to broaden support among black and Third World women.

(Black feminism, n.d.)

Education about the true nature and goal of the movement as well as resources and strategies for change must reach the women who have little or no access to the movement. There is a need for the development of mentor relationships between black women scholar/activists and young black students, both female and male. Individual struggle must be connected with a larger feminist movement to effect change, and so that new black feminists need not reinvent theory or search again for history that was never recorded. There is also a need to develop black female subjectivity to address black women as the primary audience of theoretical and critical black feminism. Black women and men need to develop a critical style which encourages further dialogue and development of ideas rather than merely ‘trashing’ and silencing new black feminist voices. Respect for fellow black women must be developed and guarded in spite of the sexist, racist, and classist ‘cultural baggage’ with which all Americans are weighed down. Differences among black women must be acknowledged and affirmed, rather than ignored. Finally, alliances must be strengthened between the black feminist movement and its parent movements. The black feminist movement must hold the current male-dominated black liberation movement accountable for its sexism and at the same time work with the movement to end the oppression of black people. As well, there must be a working dialogue between the white-dominated feminist movement and the black feminist movement to continue to develop theory and action which strives toward the end of sexism (Black feminism, n.d.).

In fine this chapter has sufficiently elaborated on the theories which address all the issues pertaining to the portrayal of women characters in selected African Writing in

English and their whereabouts in those societies. The next chapter will provide the plot summaries of *the Lion and the Jewel* and *Things Fall Apart*.

## Chapter Three: Plot Summary

Chapter three concerns itself with the plot summaries of *the Lion and the Jewel* and the *Things Fall Apart*. The summaries have been provided in short.

### *The Lion and the Jewel*

The play has three episodes: Morning, Noon and Night. The action of the play is confined to a single day. The play starts with the appearance of Sidi, the true village belle, a slim girl with plaited hair in the vicinity of bush school at the outskirts of Ilujinle. The young, iconoclast and outwardly westernized schoolteacher, Lakunle being overwhelmed by Sidi's charm and beauty has been wooing her for quite some time now. While teaching arithmetic table to his students, Sidi is seen with a pail on her head from the school window. Lakunle comes out and offers to take the pail from Sidi showing concern that carrying loads on her head may ruin her neck and also objects her clothing. Sidi being unable to understand any of his big loud words about western manner of dressing and love wants to pulp his brain which Lakunle finds natural as women possess less brain than men. When Sidi wants her pail back, Lakunle tells her that he will turn the whole village upside down starting with crafty rouse Baroka and he wants her by his side in doing this. Sidi insists on her bride-price to be paid first which Lakunle finds an archaic outdated and savage custom. Sidi, on the other hand, finds the custom of kissing strange and unhealthy. The village girls come giving out that the city photographer has come back with the pictures of Sidi and Baroka on a glossy magazine. Sidi is thrilled to see her beauty on the magazine while Bale Baroka's picture is at the corner beside the village latrine. The morning episode finishes with a mime where Lakunle is forced to play the part of a drunkard. They also deride Baroka who is seen at the end of the episode staring at his copy of magazine, particularly at Sidi's photograph nodding and murmuring 'yes, yes...it is five full

months since last I took a wife'. In noon episode Sadiku, head of Baroka's wife, brings a message from the Bale asking Sidi to become his wife. Sidi refuses Sadiku's proposal and even declines the invitation to sup with Baroka. Being rejected by Sidi he impersonates of lost manhood and tells Sadiku not to reveal his shame to anyone which he knew Sadiku will not do and that will eventually bring Sidi to his Bush palace. In last and the longest episode of the play Sidi having knowledge of Bale's impotence decides to go to sup with him and ridicule his lost manhood. When she goes to bush palace, she is impressed with Baroka's prowess and virility. After winning all the bouts of wrestling in order to lure Sidi Baroka tells his plan to modernize the village, beginning with printing stamps with Sidi's photograph for postal and legal documentation purposes. Now that Baroka is sage is clear to Sidi and every word he speaks seem wise to her that helped the Bale to execute his plan. When Sidi is late, Lakunle and Sadiku are worried. Sidi coming back from the bush palace tells Sadiku that the lost manhood was a trick and wishes to get married soon. Though Lakunle becomes happy hearing that, Sidi then tells that she is going to marry Baroka. Lakunle, at this being heartbroken, get over with soon and chases a girl with skirt.

### ***Things Fall Apart***

*Things Fall Apart* is a classic novel by Chinua Achebe. The name has been taken from W. B. Yeats, The 'second coming'. *Things Fall Apart*, a story centered on the life of the protagonist Okonkwo, tells us how an African tribe falls apart by the colonial imposition. As the novel develops Okonkwo accidentally kills a fellow tribe's man which is a sinister act according to the earth goddess and it must be paid with an exemplary punishment. So, he and his family are banished from Umuofia for seven years. During his banishment white missionaries come to Umuofia and change the village. After serving the seven-year punishment in exile in his motherland Onokwo

when returns to Umuofia, his own village, he finds that everything has undergone massive change. Being unhappy with the change brought about by the white missionaries Okonkwo and other villagers coalesce together to drive out the bringer of change from their land. The endeavor goes fruitless as the missionaries send their messengers to abort the meeting. Okonkwo being furious kills one of the messengers and in shock at his action the villagers let the other messengers escape. The messengers report back to the missionaries and they leave for him to bring him to justice. But Oknokwo upon realizing that the villagers are not with him to fight against white missionaries hangs himself.

At this point of this write-up, this chapter has provided plot summaries in essence to accomplish better textual analysis in the following chapter.

## Chapter Four: Portrayal of Women Characters

In this chapter textual analysis of *the Lion and the Jewel* and the novel *Things Fall Apart* has been carried out using the theories discussed in chapter two to point out the women's conditions in Africa.

Beyond any doubt, definitely, there are various perspectives with regard to the issue of women in society. Indeed, there are huge works on the issues that have to do with women character generally in life. Women had been portrayed as wicked, heartless, prostitute, mother, wife, sister, deceit, partner and confidant. (Adeyemi, & Ajibade, 2001)

Women have been portrayed by many writers across the world both as bad and good. In this study an attempt to review the subject matter; portrayal of women characters in selected African Writing in English has been made.

### *The Lion and the Jewel*

The play *The Lion and the Jewel* is the quintessence of typical traditional African women's characterization. The entire play revolves round the character of Sidi. The play has two major female characters. Each has been portrayed in different ways. In this play the characterization of female characters reflects the inclination to cultural beliefs and traditions. The play opens with Lakunle talking to Sidi 'the village belle' to marry whom both crafty, self-indulgent and tradition loving Baroka and xenophile Lakunle are seen keep trying throughout the play. Here major characters in the novel in relation to their disposition with a resistance for the protagonist Sidi will be shown from a feminist point of view. The protagonist is an African village belle who agrees to marry westernized schoolteacher Lakunle provided the bride-price is paid first after his continuous endeavor of courtship. She says:

'I've told you, and I say it again

I shall marry you today, next week

or any day you name

But my bride-price first be paid.' (Soyinka, 1963: 7)

Here bride-price though is a traditional African practice, yet it carries a deeper meaning for women in African Yoruba society. Bride-price is the symbol of a girl's chastity without which a girl is not treated with honor and dignity in Yoruba society. Here it is very much evident that Sidi is well aware of her pride and dignity which she shows stubbornly clinging to the demand of her bride-price to be paid first. The other issue to be addressed in this play is the fact that chastity is being the determinant of African society's women's dignity and honor. Sidi, while talking with Lakunle, says 'will you make me the laughing-stock? Well, do as you please. But Sidi will not make herself a cheap bowl for the village spit' (Soyinka, 1963: 7). This suggests that women of Nigerian Yoruba society are constantly in male domination in every walks of their lives. Whereas male can have as many as sexual partners, the females are kept away from having sexual relationships before marriage. At the very first scene of the play female characters have been stereotyped saying 'weaker sex'. The playwright nicely portrayed the feminist aspect through the dialogue of Sidi and Lakunle. One stereotyped woman saying weaker sex latter came with instant protest saying 'The weaker sex is it? Is it a weaker breed who pounds the yam or bends all day to plant the millet with a child strapped to her back?' (Soyinka, 1963: 4).

The writer was very much conscious in portraying female characters in this play which he proves portraying the women characters through both lenses of feminism. Through Lakunle's dialogue 'I do not seek a wife to fetch and carry, to cook and scrub. To bring forth children by the gross...' (ibid, 7). It is conspicuous that Lakunle reflects

the attitude towards women which he got from the western colonizer who left many of the native Nigerians ambivalent and xenophile.

As Kumar says, 'he appears to be a champion of feminism in course of the play' (p.8) which is the representation of western feminism. Through this dialogue a vivid picture of African women is upheld to the readers. In male dominated polygamous African society women are denied equal rights and merely used as object of male satisfaction. If we further have a look at what Lakunle says to Sidi at the morning scene, we can easily realize the conditions an African wife has to go through at her husband's house. He says, 'I will not have you wait on me till I have dined...no wife of mine, no lawful wedded wife shall eat the leavings off my plate' (ibid, 8).

Women as wives are deprived much more of their rights than unmarried girls. This play not only embodies that African women are the victim of all sort of oppressions of male dominated society but also shows how women are themselves involved in degrading their status by helping their male partners in choosing wives for them. Women in their own society are facing discriminations even in their own houses. While favorite gets to live with Baroka, others have to live at outhouses. Sadiku, being the senior wife of the village Bale, is working as a go-between and soliciting brides for him. Kumar (2011) said 'the female characters like Sidi and Sadiku are the representation of the doubly oppressed in the society where female members are highly marginalized by the males. They are the symbol of marginality, particularly Sidi. She never allows any rational ideas into her mind which is advised by Lakunle...greatly supports and argues for her society and its tradition. She does not want to come out of the conventional ideologies. She does not know that she is marginalizing herself for the ideologies of the society.' (p. 8). Baroka, stunned by the beauty of Sidi after seeing her picture on the magazine, expresses his desire to take

her as a wife and sends for Sadiku on that account. While Sadiku proposes Sidi of being Bale's last wife and tries to persuade her, Sidi says that she is not so gullible and says why the Bale doesn't propose her before her photo being exposed to the whole wide world. She says to Sadiku 'You waste your breath...can you see? Because he sees my worth increased and multiplied above his own; because he can already hear the ballad-makers and their songs in praise of Sidi, the incomparable, while the Lion is forgotten. He seeks to have me as his property where I must fade beneath his jealous hold'. (ibid, 21)

Sidi herself, though described in the opening stage directions as a true village belle, here readily adopts Lakunle's modern terminology to protest Baroka's regarding her as his property and convinces her self-worth through the fame afforded her by Western photography, a fame she then uses to advance her local status. (Batra, 2010).

Here social status is another fact which has to be taken in consideration which in case of Sidi went above the village Bale Baroka that he cannot tolerate. That's why to lower her status and to uplift his own he wants Sidi as his wife which is very much clear in Sidi's dialogue. She says, 'He seeks new fame as the one man who has possessed the jewel of Ilujinle' (ibid, 21). In playwright's discussed society women are suppressed and no way have they been given any chance to equal their status with men. If opportunity comes to anyone, attempts have been made to scotch that through taking her as a wife or concubine. In male dominated African society women are forlorn the moment the male partner pleases. We see it while the Favorite was plucking hair from the Bale's armpit and he was telling her the art of plucking armpit's hair which the current favorite could not master yet, but she tells him that she will learn. Baroka in reply tells her that she is going to take a new wife that night. He says 'You have no time, my dear. Tonight, I hope to take another wife and the honor of this task, you

know belongs by right to my latest choice' (ibid, 27) Favorite at this being furious gives a sudden, sharp and vicious pull at Bale's hair of armpit as she had no other way to protest his taking another wife. Women have been portrayed helpless, powerless and devoid of fundamental rights. Sidi declines the marriage proposal of Sadiku of being Bale's last wife. Baroka freaks out at this and tells Sadiku giving the role of confidant which he knew she would not be able to perform that his manhood ended about a week ago to get Sidi in his palace which was his tactic. Sadiku though mourn the loss of Bale's manhood which he pretends to loss makes her happy inside. She readily celebrates that with dance and rituals and shares the incident with Sidi which she was verboten. The duo celebrates the loss of manhood dancing and Sidi plans to mock his manhood going to sup with Baroka nevertheless Lakunle's inhibition which causes her at the long run to loss chastity and be the Bale's Favorite without bride-price. In this episode of the play when Sidi went to the bush palace to goof on Baroka She said if his current favorite, Ailtau, in any way was dissatisfied with her lord and husband to lampoon his lost manhood.

In reply to Sidi's asking, Baroka said 'Do you think the lion has such leisure that he asks the whys and wherefores of a woman's squint?' This dialogue of Baroka suggests that women are objects of male satisfaction. It is no concern to him if his partner is satisfied or not.

### ***Things Fall Apart***

The novel introduces a female character in the second chapter where a daughter of Umuofia has been killed by a man of Mbaino village. For murdering of a girl of Umuofia, the murderer gave his son and a girl as compensation fearing the dire ramifications of getting into a war with Umuofia. Ikemefuna was the boy given to Okonkwo but why he did not know. He said 'He could not understand what was

happening to him or what he had done. How could he know that his father had taken a hand in killing a daughter of Umuofia? All he...And so the stranger had brought him, and a girl, a long, long way from home, through lonely forest paths. He did not know who the girl was, and he never saw her again'. (Achebe, 1958: 10). From this it can easily be understood that how was the conditions of girls in that society. A girl not even the murderer's own was given to as compensation to what she had no connection with.

In this novel only the portrayal of major female characters will be explored from the feminist point of view. Ojiugo, the youngest wife of Oknokwo, went to plait her hair without cooking meal for his children and husband. At this Oknokwo being angry beat her heavily. Though he has beaten other wives several times, nobody showed concern. They only raised their voices against the beating of Ojiugo as it was the sacred week. Breaking peace in the sacred week is an offence. Just before the New Yam Festival Oknokwo's second wife Ekwefi had merely cut a few leaves off to wrap some food. On this trivial reason Oknokwo gave her a sound beating. This time nobody came to say anything. After beating when he was going for hunting with his gun, Ekwefi who just got beaten murmured something about guns that never shot. Unfortunately for her Oknokwo heard it and ran madly at her with the loaded gun. He pressed the trigger and there was a loud noise accompanied by the wail of the wives and the children. He almost killed her for nothing. Ekwefi, the second wife of Okonkwo, loved him so dearly. She was fond of wrestling. When he threw the cat on great wrestling match, he could not marry her as he was too impoverished to pay her bride-price. Few years later, she ran away from her husband and came to live with Oknokwo. But she gets beaten every now and then without any reasonable cause. This is what she gets for her love. Strong Leek (2001) says investing the aforementioned portrayal of women that

particularly in reference to women, the unanimity of patriarchy is the main priority of the community rather than the physical safety of its women. Furthermore, there is no regard from elders about Ojiugo's condition, to the contrary, one elder boldly asserts that she is at fault and thus the beating itself is not the point of contention. Moreover, because Ekwefi is beaten after this week is no outrage beyond the intercession of the other two wives who dare say in support of their wounded sister, 'It is enough'. Communal events merely continue as normal. The great fight is fought, and new wrestling heroes are born. One may also wonder if while reflecting upon her life, Ekwefi is pondering the life of another young woman who has just decided that the new wrestling hero will be her husband and the possible ramifications of such decision. However, since Ojiugo is battered during the sacred week, Okonkwo must make a sacrifice to earth goddess to recompense for himself and the community which may be punished because of his dishonorable deed. (p. 2).

At the tenth chapter of the novel, we see that in settling the dispute between Ozowulu and Odukwe centering the woman Mgbafo, the charges brought up against Ozowulu were that he used to beat his wife Mgbafo every day. When presenting the case before all the Egwugwe Odukwe continued that 'Two years ago, when she was pregnant, he beat her until she miscarried.' (Achebe, 1958: 65).

Another noticeable character is Ezinma, the only alive child of Ekwefi. Though is the Obanje child, her character has a strong stance in the novel. Ezinma was growing up as a woman having all the strength and disposition. Unlike other children and like her father she used to call her mother by name. Yet they had a relationship of love and respect as her mother would give her eggs to eat secretly at her bedroom. From here it is also noticeable that the understanding of each other, the sympathy, co-operation and love the female characters have for themselves is not seen while a female

character is brought and compared against a male character. The female characters do care for each other as they are being the victim of male dominated society's suppression and oppression. Their caring for each other is evident from Ezima and Ekwefi's secret affairs and also when Ojiugo, the youngest wife of Okonkwo, went to plait her hair without cooking food for her husband and children, he asked his senior wife, seeing Ojiugo's children eating with his first wife's children, if she asked her to feed them before she went. In reply she said, 'Yes, lied Nwoye's mother trying to minimize Ojiugo's thoughtlessness.' (Achebe, 1958: 21). She actually covered for her telling a lie.

When Ezima is taken away at night by the priestess, Ekwefi runs after the priestess to follow her ignoring her husband's possible flogging which also substantiate that they care for each other. Again, Ezinma being a girl of ten had enough qualities to impress her father Okonkwo. Instead of appreciating it, he tells Obierika, his friend, that 'If Ezinma had been a boy I would have been happier. She has the right spirit.' (Achebe, 1958: 46). Strong-leek (2001) suggests that 'One must acknowledge as well that male and female roles are societal constructs, and thus, the entire female identity is based more upon societal constraints rather than physiological realities. Women are taught to mother, while men are conditioned to dominate and control. Hence, we know that men may also read as women, if they are willing to rethink their positions, as well as women's positions within patriarchal constructs.'(p5). In the society described in *Things Fall Apart* the conditions of women are wretched, and they have not been given any rights but at the same time if we see at the religious aspect of the society, women are the goddess and priestess. To avoid the wrath and curses of these female goddesses' people perform rituals and sacrifice things even human beings. When for killing a fellow clansman, Okonkwo went to exile to his motherland and told the story

to Uchendu, he said 'It is a female ochu.' (Achebe, 1958: 91). Even the responsibility of a man's misfortune or evil deed is to be blamed on woman. This is how the women of African Igbo tribe have been portrayed in this novel. Though women in this society holds some important positions like goddesses and priestesses, it does not mean the society has given women veneration too as the action they do to avoid the curses and wrath of these deities goes out of the favor of general women folks.

This chapter has adequately analyzed the portrayal of women in African societies by carefully investigating the two famous writings of African literature and the result of this analysis will be offered in the subsequent chapter.

## Chapter Five: Findings

In this final chapter, an attempt to highlight the result of what has been analyzed in the preceding chapter has been made.

After careful investigation of *The Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe it is seen that the portrayal of female characters is aptly done. Characters reflect the real picture of the African Societies. In *the Lion and the Jewel* female character, Sidi at first was portrayed in a way that she was aware of her pride and dignity. Though women have been stereotyped in that society, they articulate against stereotyping giving examples. The writer in *the Lion and the Jewel* through a male character, Lakunle manifests feminist aspects but which was the western version of feminism that does not address the issues of the black or third world women. Women are the victims of patriarchy. In polygamous male dominated Nigerian Yoruba society though Sidi could have been a free girl who marginalized herself by sticking to the traditional practices of the society. Even other female characters like Sadiku were engaged in marginalizing their conditions helping their male partners choosing new brides for them. The women of the Yoruba Society are doubly oppressed firstly by the societal structure and secondly by the male partners of the society. In this society women are portrayed as helpless. They are thrown away the moment their necessity vanishes. The writer being an African tried his best to bring on the feminist aspect along with Yoruba tradition in portraying female characters in his writing.

In *Things Fall Apart* the portrayal of women's character from feminist point of view is that in this novel female characters are victims of physical, economic and political oppressions. In male dominated Igbo society women are being tortured emotionally and physically every day. We see in this novel woman are getting flogged by their

husbands. In Igbo society women even do not have the right to get justice as long as male intervention is there. Though some women are feared as they are the priestesses of the oracle, it is not because they respect women. It is because the fear of their curse. Here in this novel also the societal structure is the main constrain to women's insurrection. In this post-colonial novel, we see that the African societies were being penetrated by White missionaries. They were converting people into Christianity and annexing different regions to establish their colony. The desperate missionaries and the patriarchal African society both contributed in the unending women's plight. In African both the societies Yoruba and Igbo, women had no formal education. Women are only taught to mother. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the playwright dares to bring the issue of education for all specially women through Lakunle's vision of woman. This play adequately addresses the issues of women but through western glass, which makes the attempt blatant. Whereas the novel *Things Fall Apart* does not show any positive sign of women's emancipation, but rather in this novel we see women characters go through endless sufferings and oppressions by the males. Though the Igbo society is seen much organized, women suffer much in this society. In fine, both writers have exactly showed the African women's plight to the readers in their writings.

## Conclusion

In this thesis 'The Portrayal of Women characters in Selected African Writing in English' women's conditions in some of the famous African literary works have been investigated to show how they are portrayed, by using post-colonial and black feminism theories. The writers portray female characters in their works in numerous forms attributing them various qualities. The main motif of this research was to point out the plights and sufferings African women are exposed to and to see how they are positioned in the society against a man's position. This thesis attempts to accomplish that and the finding shows that women are denied equal rights and they are the victims of male dominated patriarchal society and societal constraints.

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