

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY  
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AND LITERATURE  
(GRADUATE PROGRAM)**

**PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF  
OUSMANE SEMBENE AND CYPRIAN EKWENSI**

**BY**

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work done under the guidance of my advisor. All relevant sources used for the thesis are duly acknowledged.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Female characters depicted in male-authored texts are usually given stereotyped roles. They often appear marginalized as a result of the male female hierarchy created in the novels. In most cases they are portrayed as passive and submissive, deprived of their right to involve in public and private spheres. There is also a tendency of denying them acknowledgment despite their involvement in public and private matters.

African feminist criticism is concerned with showing how women suffer from socio-economic and political oppressions. It exposes the stereotyped roles assigned to be performed by women and appreciates the acknowledgement of women's contributions to the society. African feminist criticism looks at the facts about racism, sexism and classism as interrelated, for they have an impact on African women's experiences.

Making use of this theory, an attempt has been made in this study to analyze the portrayal of women in relation to their socio-economic and political roles and contributions in two male-authored texts. The points considered in the analysis are, whether major female characters appear as victims, suffering from stereotypical roles assigned to them or as women whose contributions to the society are given due recognition.

A close feminist analysis, on the one hand, shows the presence of stereotypical portrayal of female characters wherein they appear as victims of societal oppression. On the other hand how female characters are depicted as major contributors in the struggle to change the life conditions of their respective societies also demonstrated through such an analysis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>I</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>II</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM .....	1
1.2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY .....	4
1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....	5
1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY .....	6
1.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .....	6
1.6 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY .....	6
1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY.....	8
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</b> .....	<b>9</b>
2.1 DEFINITION OF IMPORTANT TERMS .....	9
2.2 PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY AND GENDER ROLES .....	11
2.3 BIOGRAPHY AND CRITICAL WORKS ABOUT THE WRITERS .....	14
2.4 FEMINISM .....	18
2.4.1 Feminist Literary Criticism.....	22
2.4.2 African Feminist Literary Criticism .....	26
2.4.2.1 The Effect of Colonization on the Development of African Feminism.....	28
2.4.2.2 African Women’s Identity Prior to Colonization .....	29
2.4.2.3 Limitations to the Applicability of Western Feminist.....	30
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>3. ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED NOVELS</b> .....	<b>34</b>
3.1 A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF THE TWO MALE AUTHORED NOVELS.....	34
3.2 CYPRIAN EKWENSI’S JAGUA NANA.....	35
3.2.1 Synopsis of the Story.....	35
3.2.2 Socio –Political Roles and Contributions .....	37
3.2.3 Economic Roles and Contributions.....	47
3.3. OUSMANE SEMBENE’S GOD’S BITS OF WOOD .....	52
3.3.1 Synopsis of the Story .....	52
3.3.2 Socio – Economic Roles and Contributions .....	54
3.3.3 Political Roles and Contributions.....	62
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> .....	<b>69</b>
4.1 CONCLUSION.....	69
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>73</b>

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Statement of the problem

In the history of almost all African societies, where man was the dominator, women used to have their own share of control in the society. Apart from being wives and mothers, they played their own roles in contributing to the socio-economic and political matters. They had a well-defined position and they hold their own rights in defending their position.

They contributed to the economy by participating in the agricultural activity along with their male counterparts in weeding and tending crops. According to Chukukere (1995:2) in some African societies women carried out the responsibility of being the sole supporters in peasant economy by holding the land and the cattle in their own right.

Politically, they had influence over their society by collectively taking actions upon matters. According to Ezeigbo (1990:150):

*The strength of ... women in the traditional society lay in their own strong organizations where they controlled their own affairs and possessed political influence on the basis of their collective strength. It was through such organizations that women retained power in the patriarchy that was patterned to marginalize them.*

After the introduction of western ideology by the colonial regime, things started to change and darkened the African women's world. Despite their contribution, their situation was made inferior. They were given less consideration eventhough they participated in every matter of socio-

economic activities. This being the case, their male counterparts remained passive over the matter because it helped them at least to have control over their home. In addition, schooling was provided as an exclusive privilege of males especially in the West African countries marginalizing women and making them submissive to the male-dominated world and keeping them in their subordinate positions. As stated by Kumah (2000:1):

*Initially, colonial schooling was exclusively offered to males, and when education did become available to both sexes, the male female ratios regarding students' enrollment clearly demonstrated women's continued restriction from formal education.*

The marginalization of women also spilled into the imaginative world and literature became reflective of the societal attitudes towards women. According to Chukukere (1995:7)

*The ideal female created in the fictions of male writers often plays her traditional role of being a wife and a mother. So strong are social values, the respect and love which a woman earns is relative to the degree of her adaptation to these roles.*

Apart from viewing women as objects in terms of motherhood and wifehood, women are featured in stereotypical roles as being only wives and homemakers. The behaviors of the female characters appearing in the texts continued to recur as passive, indecisive and submissive making them dependent on their male counterparts. Female protagonists are painted as subservient to their male counterparts and thus they are forced to support the male protagonists' achievements in social life. Newell (1997:82) states while exposing female subordination and to expose inherited negative stereotypes of women "female subordination

includes the view that women are inferior, weak and peripheral beings in a world where men are central."

Despite their large involvement in every aspect of life, they lack acknowledgement and there is this high tendency of portraying them as passive and dependent individuals in several male authored texts.

Feminist literary criticism is one of the critical methods that is employed to study the representation and misrepresentation of women in literary texts. It looks at the way women take part in socio-economic and political matters. It also deals with the education of women, their access to the economic means of survival, motherhood; women in the domestic sphere, women as a part of their communities and women's role in politics. As it is defined by Tyson (1999:80) "Feminist literary criticism examines the way in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, psychological oppression of women."

Accordingly, feminist literary criticism investigates the society-assigned gender roles to both male and female characters, which portray men as strong, protective, and decisive and women as submissive emotional and dependent. Again according to Tyson (1999:99) "These gender roles have been used very successively to justify such inequalities, ... as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision making positions (in the family as well as in politics, academia and corporate world)."

Many works in African literature have been subjected to this type of criticisms. However it is difficult to generalize and say that this applies to

all male-authored texts of African literature. Chukukere (1995:8) states "it would be erroneous to conclude that all male writers portray their heroines as totally limited characters locked in types and stereotypes." As there are writers who empower the male gender only completely confining the female gender to such roles and 'romanticizing' and 'idealizing' them; there are also other writers who are inclined to show the worth of the female gender by changing the belief that women are fit to house work only. These authors give voice to the female figures that are usually left out to be mute and acted upon. Through positioning men and women equally they bring women from the periphery to the center.

Based on this, feminist literary criticism examines the way women are depicted in literary texts and the images imposed upon them. It makes a close inspection of the way women take roles in both male-authored and female-authored texts. Thus, this study looks at the way female characters are portrayed in two male-authored literary texts from the perspective of feminist literary criticism. Within the framework of the feminist literary criticism the study tries to address the following questions:

1. How are female characters portrayed in these novels? Are they portrayed as passive, indecisive, submissive, and dependent? Or; as strong, independent, courageous heroines who lead the direction of the story in a certain way?
2. How is their role in politics and socio-economic activities portrayed?

## **1.2 Objective of the study**

It is very difficult to live in a position where one is denied one's own right and is viewed as an object. The socially accepted roles force women to live

according to the norms and deny them the authority to react against the impositions. The number of modern, educated, courageous and independent women characters is very small in African literary texts. Thus it is still very hard to find a realistic representation. Instead, they are mostly seen to be confined to their traditional roles. However, there are also cases where women are given the priority and gain a truthful representation in literary texts. Therefore, taking these facts into consideration, the main objective of this study attempts, to explore the place given by male authors to female characters that are presented as central characters. The specific objectives are:

1. To analyze the portrayal of women in the novels of Ousmane Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood* and Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* ;
2. To explore the place given by these authors to female characters who are presented as central characters;
3. To analyze the role these female characters are given in their portrayal of socio-economic and political participation;
4. To explore if there is any hierarchy such as male/female, in the texts;
5. To explore if the writers challenge the socio-cultural constructs that reduce women only to roles of motherhood and womanhood; and
6. To examine if the writers in their works empower women by showing the real worth of women.

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

In addition to preparing the way for further feminist studies, this research will:

1. Try to expose previously hidden experience of women which the society refused to address, supports in breaking the silence inflicted on women.
2. Attempt to provide information about the socially accepted roles of women that has also affected the literary cannon.
3. Endeavour to create awareness of how these societal imposed roles of women affect the lives of women and also help in changing the society's unidirectional way of thinking.

#### **1.4 Scope of the study**

As it was pointed out earlier, this study is concerned with a feminist critique of novels. The main concern of this study is to show how female characters are portrayed in the novels produced by men. This research focuses only on male authors who are much preoccupied with female characters and have used female characters as central characters in their novels. The novels in focus are *God's Bits of Wood* by Ousmane Sembene and *Jagua Nana* by Cyprian Ekwensi.

#### **1.5 Limitations of the study**

Even if it was possible to look at the portrayal of women from both male and female writers points of views, due to space and time constraints the research is limited to showing the portrayal of women only from the view point of the male writers. Therefore, this study only shows how female characters are viewed by male writers.

#### **1.6 Methodology of the Study**

This research depends on descriptive methods. Descriptive and critical survey of library materials and resources from the web constitute the

related literature. In the literature review, the theoretical issues of feminist criticism and African feminist criticism are explored. This has helped the researcher to identify the problems women characteristically encounter. Sources and novels relevant to the present study are constituted in this regard.

Besides, exploring literature in the area of feminist literary criticism, using African feminist literary criticism as a framework for the analysis, this study totally bases itself on textual analysis of the novels selected for this purpose. Two male-authored novels are chosen for the analysis. The basic reasons for choosing these novels are firstly because they are written by male writers and secondly because these writers have used female characters as central characters for their novels. The other reason is, Ousmane Sembene is known for his truthful positive and negative assessment of women's life and Ekwensi is known for comparing his women characters against 'the ideal norm' motherhood. The researcher will classify, analyze and interpret facts and events in the novels against the data collected and categories of criticism selected.

In addition, the novels are genuinely regional novels and draw their elements largely from the local environment to give their stories a local color. They also raise social, economic and political issues giving a wider scope for analysis. The basic theoretical concept used as a framework for the analysis is African feminist literary criticism. The critical analysis has been done from the perspective of female orientation, based on female experience as a reader. The researcher believes such a type of investigation helps to identify the attitudes towards women, to understand the psychology of women and to share the experiences of

women. To show how the female characters are portrayed extracts from the novels are included.

### **1.7 Organization of the Study**

This study is divided into four chapters. Chapter one is the introduction. It contains the statement of the problem, the objective of the study, the significance, the methodology, the scope, limitation, and organization of the study. Chapter two includes the review of literature and characteristics of feminist literary criticism. African feminist literary criticism is used as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the selected novels, which is also included in chapter two. Chapter three presents the analysis of the two selected novels. The last chapter, which is chapter four, is the conclusion.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2. Review of Literature

This review of literature contains four parts. The first part presents definitions of concepts related to the topic of the study. The second part discusses the patriarchal society and the roles given to women in the society. The third part is about feminism and feminist literary criticism. The fourth and the last part discusses African literary criticism which is used as a framework for the analysis of the study.

#### 2.1 Definition of Important Terms

**Patriarchy:** According to Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia (2007) this term is used repeatedly to show the power difference between men and women where all authoritative roles are played by men. It is a system where men assume social, economic and political authority and deprive women of these rights.

**Sexism:** Russell (2007) defines this term as a social situation in which men manipulate a dominant role and dismiss women from the socio-political and economic agency. It is also defined as any attitude, action or institutional structure which systematically subordinates women because of their sex.

**Racism:** According to Russell (2007) any attitude, action or institutional structure which systematically subordinates a person or group because of their color.

**Classism:** According to Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia (2007) it is inequality in status of living conditions created as a result of the introduction of class structure and private property. Factors that impact the inequality include education, race, gender, culture, etc. It creates difference in status and way of living by limiting access to certain sectors.

**Asymmetry:** According to Sercar (1995) this term is related to power difference in accordance with access to means of production. In this case, men and women might have access to means of production but they do not have equal access to the same roles and status.

**Matriarchy:** As it is defined in Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia it is a form of government where women play the dominant role. It can be taken as the opposite of patriarchy. In this type of system women assume authority over men and it is taken as women-centered government.

**Womanism:** According to Wikipedia, Free Encyclopedia (2007) the need for the term womanism arose as a result of western feminism which focuses largely on sexism ignoring the third world oppression of racism and classism. It was at this point the womanists pointed out that, black women experienced a different and more intense kind of oppression from that of white women. Recognizing the limitation of the term 'feminism', black women coined the term believing it can adequately convey feminism according to their context.

**Misogyny:** According to Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia (2007) it is an irrational hatred and fear of women. In feminist theory it is recognized as a political ideology similar to racism, existing to justify and reproduce the subordination of women by men.

**Stereotype:** as it is defined by O'Sullivan et al,(1994:299) it is a social classification of people into particular groups and into more simplified and generalized signs, attaching a set of judgments and values concerning their behavior, characteristics or history.

## **2.2 Patriarchal Society and Gender Roles**

Patriarchy can be defined as “a social organization which produces and guarantees superior status for the male and inferior for the female (Mills; 1996).” Such a society promotes the dominance of the male gender over the female gender and enables men to appropriate powerfulness, rationality strong-ness to men and assigns submissiveness, servility, docility and irrationality to women.

According to Tyson (1999: 83) in patriarchal society, the decision-making position is given to men where men make all the difficult decisions in socio-political and economic affairs and women are expected to comply with the decision. It is a kind of a system which oppresses women socially, economically and politically throughout history giving men greater power in both public and private spheres.

In order to guarantee their power men created obstacles making it harder for women to hold power. According to Jones (1987) cited in Tigest

(2006:12) the society and the cultural context fixes the behavior men and women should have and if they do not behave accordingly they would encounter various problems in the society.

As Nawal El Saadawi (1980:21) states “ A woman with courage or ambition with eyes wide open and who shows audacity and strength, is still considered ugly, repulsive, coarse and vulgar.” This type of attribution of behavior results in producing stereotypical characters which again results in placing women in a disadvantageous position. It restricts women from participating in the social, political and economic activities. Women are usually categorized only as mothers, caregivers, home makers or else as girlfriends, mistresses and/or prostitutes which in both cases make them victims of stereotyped gender roles.

This gender stereotyping of women to specific roles and positions is certainly not a result of a biological phenomenon, rather it is a cultural and psychological phenomenon. According to Moi (1982) feminine and masculine behaviors represent social constructions of sexuality while male and female are purely biological. As a result of the social and cultural constructs, a hierarchy is created between men and women a giving high profile to men and a very low profile to women in the society.

Such an attitude is also reflected through literature. The male authors who are members of the patriarchal society are seen to reflect such behavior through their literature. In most male-authored texts women are shown suppressed and depicted as passive, submissive, irrational, and docile objects. Women portrayed by African male writers show these subverted behaviors in women who are mostly represented as dependent

beings. As Kumah (2000:7) states “Female characters in male authored works are rarely granted primary status their roles often trivialized to varying degrees and they are depicted as silent and submissive in nature; remaining absent in the public sphere.”

Positive rewards are granted if a woman stays submissive and obedient to the social values. Passivity and dependency are also inherent behaviors given to female characters, in most cases such type of representation circumscribes the participation of women in the public sphere and fosters the social emphasis on male values only (Langer: 1996). There is also a trend of depicting women as prostitutes which can be taken as a part of the African male literary tradition. This literary tradition can certainly be an example of the lower values and character given to women who suffer at the hands of male authors (Kumah: 2000).

Male authors often are seen to exclude education from the lives of female characters, since education for women is regarded as destruction as it encourages them to abandon the norms which society assigned to them. Chukukere (1995:5) states:

*The education of women was met with hostility as it encouraged girls to abandon the villages in favor of the cities. Education for women and the subsequent growth of female independence through other social activities were viewed coterminous with the spread of prostitution.*

Therefore, the women characters depicted in male-authored texts are mostly portrayed bearing the responsibility of taking care of their family and their children and most importantly bearing children. If she can not bear children she will be considered as barren and will have to suffer a great deal.

Through literature where values of a society are reflected, most African male writers seem to be unwilling to represent women as independent individuals. Their contribution to the development of the society's life style in every sphere seems to be taken as valueless; instead they are portrayed as meek and docile creatures.

## **2.3 Biography and Critical Works about the Writers**

### **Ousmane Sembene**

Born on January 1923 in Ziguinchor, Senegal, Ousmane Sembene is known as one of the most prominent figures in African film and literature. Primarily self-taught Sembene has been exposed to various situations and experiences. At the age of 15 he started earning his living as a fisherman. Besides, he has also served as a bricklayer, a plumber, an apprentice mechanic, a dock worker and a trade unionist. These experiences have greatly contributed in shaping Sembene as a writer. In this respect, Ousmane Sembene maintains that his education was a result of a training he received in 'the University of Life.' After World War II broke out, Sembene was drafted into the French army. He returned to Senegal after the war, but went back to work in docks of Marseilles where he became a trade union activist and joined the French Communist Party until the independence of Senegal in 1960.

Concerning Sembene's literary works, Sembene's artistic engagement is first and foremost a political engagement through which the artist can hardly address social reality other than political. As stated in Bahri (2007:2):

*The nexus of Sembene's literary and filmic work is generally a critique of the conflictual relationships between the colonizer and the colonized, the state and the people, men and women, the rich and the poor, and the elders and the youth. In sum, his concerns are directed to universal issues involving tensions that are created by power relations.*

Sembene's political engagement is often times viewed from a materialist perspective. As Amuta ( 1989:138) puts:

*"A heavy accent on economic exploitation and physical violence in the novel. But he predicates this perception on an ideological perspective that firmly recognizes cultural and institutional practices as contingent on economic realities."*

Ousmane Sembene is also known as one of the novelists who broke the silence that has been imposed for generations on women. As it is stated in Chukukure(1995:81):

*He is one of the earliest African novelists to break free from the danger of offering his audience only 'heroic' male protagonists. His desire to enlarge the role of women in contemporary African society is all the more striking because his heroines suffer the double handicaps of being females in a traditionally Moslem society.*

As it is also stated in Moore (1980:79) in Sembene's works:

*Woman has the greatest revolutionary potential in Africa, simply because she has the most to gain from a wholly new*

*order. The blend of theoretical radicalism with social conservatism, so common in men, is seldom found in women.*

Sembene Ousmane in general is known for presenting the colonial and the colonized in his stories and it is by perceiving history from the point of view of the colonized and the suppressed that he has restored to the people of Senegal, especially to the women, their place in history. Thus, he continues to produce works which simply depict the reality of the African society and can be considered of cultural importance for contemporary African society.

### **Cyprian Ekwensi**

Cyprian Ekwensi was born in 1921 in Minna, Niger state. He is known as the Nigerian novelist, short story writer and chronicler of traditional tales. Before being a writer he trained as a pharmacist and served in the Nigerian medical service. Later he became head of features in the Nigerian broadcasting services, director of information of the federal ministry of information and director of information services. With his first novel, he was recognized as the first West African author of a major novel in English and marked an important development in African writing. As it is stated in a profile of him by Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe 2007, Ekwensi's strength as a writer is in his portrayal of events which have social and cultural importance.

In an article entitled language and characterization in Cyprian Ekwensi's people of the city and Jauga Nana, N.F. Inyama declares that" his

creative enthusiasm has yielded results in the areas of adult novels, teenage thrillers and tales for children (Jones, 24)."

However, detailed studies of his novels indicate that his works have yielded criticisms of his craft as a novelist. He is criticized for his novels do not speak in an authentic African voice and for his understanding of lack of plot and characterization. As it is state by Bernth in Jones (1991) " Cyprian Ekwensi... best illustrates the dictum that practice does not make a writer perfect and that his novels can serve as excellent examples of how not to write a fiction.'

But critics like N.F. Inyama argue that he may indeed not be the most artistically sophisticated of Nigerians and African novelists but he may have more enthusiasm than craft. As it is indicated in Chukukure(1995) Martin Banham takes him to be little better than a journalistic hack, and a Nigerian critic, Echeruo accuses him of being inauthentically Western rather than uniquely African.

Unlike many African writers, Ekwensi writing is much more focused on the urban area. He reflects the influence of the city on human nature and the clash of man with his environment. Chukukere (1995:43) states "the city, which Ekwensi writes about represents the symbol of the new life, a magnet which draws to it both men and women offering opportunities unrivalled by the traditional experience." She also states on the same page "to Ekwensi, as far as women of the city remain adamant to the voice of the reason and working from the countryside, so long will their hopes and aspirations remain unrealized."

In general despite the negative evaluations Ekwensi's novels have gained readers in the continent and his novels give realist picture of the Nigerian city life.

## **2.4 Feminism**

The culture and society which is organized in favor of men is much more concerned over the authority and powerfulness of men in every aspect of life, denying the right to women by marginalizing and pushing them to a subordinate position. This hierarchal patterning and the society which denies right to women gave rise to the reaction which struggles to get rid of the patriarchal society, asking for equality between the sexes in all spheres of relations of human life. Feminism is an organized movement which strives to promote equality of men and women in the political, economic and social spheres. As stated in Sercar (1995:7):

*It is concerned with the advocacy of the rights of women on the basis of similarity ((i.e) women are human beings like men therefore be granted equal rights) or on the basis of differences ((i.e) women are different from men therefore, ought to be granted the right to represent themselves).*

Most men think that because of the biological difference between men and women, women cannot participate in the public sphere; for this reason home and family is considered as center for women. Thus, the patriarchal society assigns women to roles which do not take them outside their home. This encompassing resulted in categorizing women as mothers and caregivers and their contribution to the society was belittled. Women began to break the attachment of home and the silence imposed on them. They started to go out of their home looking for equal jobs,

educational opportunity and freedom for every social opportunity.

According to Langer (1996:4) the central goal of feminism is:

*To recognize the world on the basis of equality between the sexes in all human relations. They have focused on a variety of problems, including patriarchy; gender modeling, individual freedom, and social justice, equal educational opportunity, equal pay for work, sexual harassment and human rights.*

The beginning of feminism cannot be traced to a single source. It started in a number of societies in a number of ways. As it is stated in Sercar (1995) 1790-1860 is taken as the years of the beginning of the feminist movement. It is dominated by the ideas of the rights of man, reasons, natural law and equal rights. It is also known for securing legal rights for women in marriage, education and employment. In following years, women realized that they cannot depend on the existing political parties since all of them were led by men, they would not be able to support their movement. Therefore, they agreed that they had to fight for justice and equality for themselves. This organized movement is known as the Suffragette Movement which had run from 1860-1930. 1970's and 1980's are known as the 'decades of deconstruction'. It is the period of fragmentation of the feminist movement as a result of the realization of the complexity of women's experiences.

According to Guerin et al. (1992: 183) "Feminism represents the single most important social, economic and aesthetic revolution of modern times." However it exists in diverse forms and it examines the experiences of women from all races, cultures and classes. The theory branched out into many theories which focused on various feminist issues.

For instance advocates of Radical Feminism believe that society must be changed from its base in order to overthrow patriarchy. They also believe that domination of women is the oldest and the worst of a kind and it is all over the world oppressing women of different ethnicity, races and cultures. According to Daly (2007) radical feminists completely reject the roles assigned and all aspects of patriarchy and in some cases they reject men as well. They emphasize their difference from men by forming a group that completely excludes men.

Liberal feminism became popular in the 1950's. Their main view is that all people are created equal and deserve equal rights. According to Mary Wollstonecraft in (Donovan, 1992:9) "women remain enslaved because of a corrupt process of socialization which stunts their intellect and teaches them that their proper purpose in life is to serve men." They believe that men assume themselves to be naturally rational and women lack rationality therefore, women are excluded from being equal with men. This type of feminists argue that oppression exists because of the way men and women are socialized. As Wollstonecraft stated, the world's most important business is conducted by men in the public arena while the frivolous unimportant business is confined to the private sphere to be conducted by women. Liberal feminists believe that men and women have equal mental capacity and therefore they should be given equal opportunity in political, economic and social spheres.

Marxist Feminists believe that there is a connection between class and gender. They argue that working men are rewarded because they produce tradable goods and women's works are not valued because women do not produce tradable goods. This gives men power and control

over women. As mentioned in Guerin et al. (1992:185) “Marxist Feminists reject the prevailing capitalistic system of the west which they view as sexually as well as economically exploitative; they thus combine the study of class with that of gender.” They also reject the notion that biology pre-determines one's gender. Jaggar (2007:2) states that “social roles are not inherent and women’s status must change in both the public and private sphere ... and the way to end this oppression is to put an end to class and gender stereotyping and women must work side by side with men.”

Cultural feminists celebrate the biological differences between men and women. They believe that women are inherently kind and gentle than men. According to Donovan (1992:31) “these feminists instead of emphasizing the similarities between men and women, they often stress the differences, ultimately affirming that feminine qualities may be a source of personal strength and pride and fount of public regeneration.” Donovan also states that “feminist social reform theory held that women should and must enter the public sphere and have the vote because their moral perspective was needed to clear up the corrupt (masculine) world politics.” These feminists essentialize the women’s way as the right and better way for everyone. They usually advocate separate female counter cultures as a way to change society without completely disconnecting. According to Langer (1996: 10) “it is basically a non-political attitude that concentrates on the development of a separate female counter culture or ‘woman culture’.”

Black/African feminists accuse other feminists of developing their ideas only in reference to white middle class women. They accuse other

feminists for, as stated in Guerin et al. (1992:187),“the majority of feminists want to be counted as men and share in the bounties of the dominant society, whether it be equal wages, child care or their accepted social rights.” Black feminists make no distinction between gender and race. Their Marxist orientation forces them to deal with racism, classism, and sexism.

#### **2.4.1 Feminist Literary Criticism**

In the history of literary tradition, women as women are rarely represented; they are not mostly found as the subjects of the token but as supplement for to conqueror. Such representation places women on the other end of the pole usually the negative which ends up placing them in a subordinate position. The male oriented literary tradition is often criticized for its father-son model of transmission of ideas. According to Sercar (1995: 1) “the tradition which gave men to be able to have the strong hold over literature made it possible for men to create a male -oriented mode of creating and evaluating literature.”

The feminist critics in their struggle against oppression, worked to expose the undesirable and obnoxious stereotyping and limitations imposed in the portrayal of women in literature. Feminist literary criticism is concerned with revealing the literary history of women’s images and discusses the dominant stereotyped images of female fictional characters. According to Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia (2007) its goal is to develop and uncover the lost tradition of women’s writing and to interpret the symbolism of women’s writing so that it will not be lost and ignored by the male point of view. It also helps in increasing the awareness of sexual politics of language and style and resists sexism in

literature. Guerin et al. (1992:199) also state that “in criticism and in literature feminist critics identify sex related writing strategies including matters of subject, vocabulary, syntax, style, imagery, narrative structure, characterization and gender preference.”

The unfair stereotyping of women is the result of culturally set categorization of women based on the biological difference between men and women. However, the biological difference between men and women can not be taken as a reason for categorizing women as emotional therefore irrational beings and men unemotional therefore rational beings. K.K Ruthven (1984) has identified the difference between sex and gender which helps to free women from unfair stereotyping on limited concepts. According to him, sex only refers to the biological difference; it cannot further be taken as a base for stereotyping women to certain characteristics while gender carries a meaning which is accorded to it by culture and society and categorizes men and women according to typical characteristics.

According to Guerin et al. (1992:182) feminist literary critics try to explain how and what they call engendered power imbalance is reflected, supported or challenged by literary texts. They focus on the absence of women from the literary discourse. Because of the unequal positioning of women in the society, women are exposed to oppression and ignorance and literature being the reflection of the society. The submergence and oppression is also immersed in the literary canon. The social function of literature can be taken as highly influential since it is one way of socialization. Hence we can say that literature has high potential in fixing or debilitating society's ways of thinking. Mills (1996:307) also states that

“Feminist literary criticism concerns itself with analyzing the representation of women in visual and verbal texts...”

The struggle for women’s equality which finally emerged in the literary tradition in the late 1960’s can be taken, as Ruthven (1984:24) points out as “a scanning device... it operates in service of a new knowledge which is constructed by rendering visible the hitherto invisible component of gender in all discourses produced by the humanities and the social sciences.” Feminist criticism struggles to bring to light the negative images which used to be taken as unworthy of critical investigation. It also struggles to bring forward the importance of women’s ideas in any sort of social affairs through the rediscovery of the women’s literary tradition.

The rediscovery of women’s literary tradition has played an important part in helping women to speak out their suppressed potential and also to share experiences with one another. “Feminist criticism recovered, lost or neglected writers and high lighted the obstacles facing women as authors; it has also established the importance for women of having their own literary tradition in which they speak and express themselves freely” (Sercar: 1995).

Virginia Woolf as quoted in Serpil Tunic (2007:2) argues that the patriarchal society with all its male dominated ideas and ways of living controlled all spheres of importance and prevented women from playing their part and or prevented women from being visible even playing their parts which also resulted in constraining women from realizing their true potential and their creativity.

Even though women continued to be kept out from social, political and economic activities the only way found suitable, for letting out their breath and asserting their 'individuality' and 'autonomy' was writing. The development of feminist consciousness started with the study of images and identification of positive and negative images in texts.

The historical development of feminist literary criticism was analyzed by Elaine Showalter as having three stages. As it was stated in Guerin et al. (1992: 185) the three phases were identified as the 'feminine' phase 1840-1880 where women writers imitated the dominant literary tradition which gives priority to men and male oriented ideas; the 'feminist' phase from 1880-1920 known for its reflection of women's protest and advocacy of minority rights uncovering hatred of women in male authored texts, in this stage women protested against the standards of the dominant literary tradition and finally the 'female' phase from 1920- to present a stage for self discovery where the discovery for identity resulted in the rediscovery of women and women's texts.

Accordingly, women used the opportunity to express themselves and share their experiences and also try to clear up their negative images by appearing as readers and writers. As Moi (1982:172) states:

*Feminist critiques are concerned with woman as a reader, it deals with works authored by male writers, critics from the perspective of female orientation, and it is done based on the female experience from the point of view of female which enables them to see through the male author's plays.*

Gynocriticism deals with women as writers. It emphasizes differences in the female writers (Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia, 2007).

In general despite their diversity and their differences, feminist literary critics agree upon instances such as exposing the patriarchal society's possession and marginalization of women, fostering the discovery and development of literature by women and examining the representation of women by men in the social, cultural, political and psychological aspects.

#### **2.4.2 African Feminist Literary Criticism**

Western feminist critics are accused of homogenizing the idea of feminism without giving consideration to historical, cultural and geographical factors. They tend to universalize their own thoughts knowingly or unknowingly imposing their hegemonic tendency over the rest of the world. As pointed out in Kumah (2000:4) "although the general body of feminist criticism has been greatly instrumental in the increasing awareness, the application of western feminist theories on the writings of the 'Third World' has been questioned." The white upper middle class women struggled for equal rights ignoring other relevant factors as sex, race, class which are intertwined with one another forcing themselves on women other than white women who are identified as Third World Women.

Such categorization of women based on geography, culture, or history is a result of the specificity of women's experiences. Pereira (2007) states that women's realities are shaped by multiple social hierarchies that include gender, class, ethnicity, religion, age, race and so on. Each third world society is also peculiar and is structured according to its own tradition, religion and social structure and it is distinct for it has its own position in the world system. According to Katrak (1996:237):

*For third world peoples with histories of colonial domination, race is an important category.... Racism along with sexism are important analytic categories within third world feminisms, as are also the intersecting categories of class, color, nation without which one cannot undertake a satisfactory analysis of third world women.*

This is what makes African feminism a part of third world feminisms which is different from western feminism. African feminism is not concerned only about the inequalities but also raises consciousness about racism. This means while challenging male dominance it also struggles for the liberation of the nation from colonization and participates in the reconstruction of the nation. Sercar (1995:5) states “Theoretical African feminism has a socialist orientation which recognizes the interconnectedness of race, class and sex oppression.” This is because both are committed to freedom of all people. The capitalist system exploited both men and women; the only difference is that women are exploited by both the capitalist society and by the patriarchal society. Hence, in the African feminist case the liberation of women and liberation of society are blended together.

African feminist criticism relates itself to explaining and emphasizing the African culture and its social system for that is the basis for the creation of different experiences of the society. Kalu (2000) also asserts that it explores the inscription of the African women on the content; the limitation of the African women in various areas of experiences and works for deleting boundaries so that her participation in different areas of life can be fostered.

### **2.4.2.1 The Effect of Colonization on the Development of African Feminism**

African Feminism is characterized by glorifying African knowledge by particularly examining distinct features from texts. It insists on the application of knowledge which asserts the existence and effective participation of women. This school of thought also encourages the women to self-express and exercise their inherent freedom. As Wa Thiango states in Kalu (2000:19) “the African women beauty in the tribe must first be acknowledged by herself rather than by an alien conflicting world view.”

Women’s participation in the traditional society was very significant and they had a part in the decision making process both at home and in public. The introduction of western ideology brought with itself an idea which excludes women from contributing and participating in the social affairs. It introduced silencing of women which forced her to be meek, docile and submissive to her male counter part. Sercar (1995:6) states:

*Colonization deprived the woman of her traditional initiative and status introducing a capitalist economy which undermines her role as a producer and actor in her society. The introduced ideology further perceived women as sexual objects, and this in turn led to wide spread prostitution and further subjection of women.*

Giving secondary status to women was introduced by the colonizer. This affected the relationship between men and women depriving women of their natural right and forcing them to be submissive. The sexual inequality which was brought by the westerners was made possible by limiting the women’s access to resources and introducing production methods which helped men to be closer to cash. As a result women

became economically dependent on men and their every action started to be conducted according to the interest of men. According to Ogundipe Leslie (1970:498) “Colonization... affected African women’s traditional role and status, but stress and crisis enables them to delve in the past resources of strength to march out of the dark shadows of dual colonization.”

#### **2.4.2.2 African Women’s Identity Prior to Colonization**

Woman in the traditional African society had the responsibility to participate and comment in the social order and challenge the dominance of patriarchy. This authority rose out of her control over her own economic resources and out of her being a mother. She was respected because she manages the family’s economy. Her political role also played a great part for her visibility. In some societies women could gain political authorities. They did have roles in politics even though they couldn’t have equal roles with men. Eleanor Leacock as quoted in Sercar (1995:22) asserts:

*In the hunting and gathering and early horticultural societies, relations between sexes were equal. This equality which was expressed in the communal household, the reciprocal division of labor, the independence of the wife and children and the decision making power of women deteriorated with the advent of class society.*

It would seem impossible to understand, who they are and what they do without looking back to their former history. It needs to have a retrospect to their accredited roles, functions and responsibilities they traditionally held. As Theodora Akachi Ezegbo quoted in Newell (1997:3) states: “Women’s positions and power bases in pre-colonial societies is regarded as a crucial discursive pole against which contemporary women’s status

can be compared.” This shows that gender interactions used to be complementary rather than conflictual.

"While the forced implementation of European governments, western schools of thought, and religion were introducing these gender distinctions the colonial governments educational systems were reinforcing them" (Kumah, 2000). Accordingly, the role woman is given in the literary world became reflective of the society's attitude towards her, which again is confirmed by the newly introduced educational system which encourages men to be authoritative and women submissive. Therefore, the marginalization of women in African literature has its roots to be related to the ideology of western colonization. In relation to this, Kalu (2000) also states that colonial interference encouraged separation from traditional African reality and existence and resulted in cultural, local, political and other forms of disarticulation. The African woman portrayal in the literary texts became distorted because of the reappropriation of the western world view.

#### **2.4.2.3 Limitations to the Applicability of Western Feminist Theory to the African Context**

African feminists identify the limitations of the applicability of western feminist theory to the African context. According to Chandra Mohanty as quoted in Kumah (2000:4) "Feminist authorship is inscribed within relations of power that places western theory and the third world women it is imposed upon at polar ends of spectrum." Feminist theory is usually pictured to be a western theory and the fact that society is structured according to its religion and culture does not seem to be given much

consideration. The issues that can be applicable to the western society cannot be applicable to the society of the world as a whole.

The white middle class feminists of the west seem to impose their feminist ideas on the Third World without prior acknowledgment of the fact that women's position in the context of the Third World is deteriorated under the constraints of the European rule. Their loss of economic, political and social agencies also remained unaddressed. Carole Boyce Daives as quoted in Katrak (1996:241) also notes: "African feminism is a hybrid of a sort which seeks to combine African concerns with feminist concerns, a sort of 'balancing' act where women's own issues along with a 'common struggle with African men' against imperialism are important."

African feminism combines the facts about racism, sexism and classism to produce its own more inclusive type of feminism. The colonizers deliberate devaluation of womanhood is calculated for a social control designed to support white supremacy. The sexual exploitation that came as a result of this inflected a racist idea of perceiving and representing women as good time girls, fallen women and prostitutes followed by the dislocation of women's status in the African continent as an outcome. African feminism deals with sexism, classism and racism, to challenge the situation that magnifies the authority of male roles in both private and public institutions and struggles to free women from all modes of oppression. Thus as Freeman (2001:79) states:

*Racial differences, differences of ethnic and religious background, class, sexual orientation and so on all have an important impact on women's lived experiences and make it*

*impossible to describe a universal and homogeneous oppression of women.*

The writings of African literature are usually characterized by a problematic representation in which it categorizes women's role as girl friends, prostitutes, mistresses rejecting their role as decision makers, producers, and heroines. This type of representation has its roots to be traced back to the time of colonization which as a result of being sex objects for western men who had inflicted rape and brutal assaults on native women. This led to the devaluation of women and resulted in the perception of women as prostitutes and good time girls. The legacy of such stereotyping imposed a condition which denies their natural rights.

Women in African literature mostly seem to be written by men as the city types with loose morals. "The most liberated women are not presented as the most admirable in terms of moral values. They are often prostitutes or mistresses" (Mutiso, 1974). The other thing which cannot be left out when talking about women in African literature is polygamy. The role of women seems to be incomplete without mentioning their role in polygamous marriage. "The inequality of the role of women in a polygamous setting vis-a-vis the role of men gives men power and influence at the expense of women" (Mutiso, 1974).

This subjection of women which is reflected through the literary works continued due to the imposition of the colonial ideology. Thus, African feminist literary criticism struggles to shake off the stereotypical female portraiture and magnifies her role. Reliable critical analysis in the African context is the one that grants recognition to the African women's role relating the whole situation with the history of her past and showing

the position she is in due to the consequences of colonization. As Sercar (1996:12) states:

*The true definition of a feminist is a person, male or female who is concerned about the status of women; who appreciates women's contribution to the functioning of society and their active part in history and who feels the need and commitment to free women from all modes of oppression- political, economic and cultural, wishing to restore to women their freedom and dignity.*

The analysis on this study is made with the view of exposing such stereotyped roles assigned to be performed by women and bringing into light and encouraging those writers who commit themselves to depict strong role models of women in literature.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3. Analysis of the Selected Novels

#### 3.1 A Feminist Critique of the Two Male Authored Novels

In this part of the study using the African feminist criticism as a critical frame work an attempt is made to analyze two novels written by male authors. The novels that have been analyzed are Ousmane Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood* and Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*. This is a feminist critique, hence the study focuses on how female characters are portrayed in these male-authored texts. The study also tries to show how the female characters are portrayed in relation to their socio-economic and political contributions in their respective societies.

The theoretical framework used in the analysis of these novels is the theory of African feminist literary criticism which discusses the importance of raising racism, classism and sexism whenever criticizing African texts. The important analytical facts mentioned are sexism along with racism and classism which are incorporated in the analysis of the selected novels. The main focus of sexism is on the notion of male manipulation over female in relation to both private and public affairs where women are considered to be inferior to men. Related to this, racism also discusses the notions that debase womanhood and expose women to sexual exploitation by preventing them the access to socio-economic and political agencies. As a result of gender classism the African women suffer from economic inequality, lack of education and lack of better living conditions. Using these facts as a basis, the study

tries to show the socio-economic and political roles and contributions of major female characters in the selected novels.

## **3.2 Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana***

### **3.2.1 Synopsis of the Story**

Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* is a novel which narrates about the life of a beautiful female prostitute called Jagua. She is named Jagua after the famous British prestige car Jaguar, for her good looks and fashions.

Jagua has a very reckless nature and she gets easily dissatisfied with the life around her and has a restless soul which is always in quest of happiness and glamorous life. Jagua's search for independence starts at her early age. She grew up as an only daughter in a Christian family. Her father is a pastor. Her parents are religious and well-behaved and they live according to the tradition of the society. As a result, she is expected to get married and have children like her peers in her village. But Jagua, unlike the other girls, is so liberated; she lives according to her own principles. She wears make up, wears jeans, rides bicycle and hangs out with boys freely.

After a long quest for the man of her dreams, she settles with a man who owns a petrol filling station. Even though this man could provide her with money, he was unable to provide her with love. He spends most of his time at the station and the only time he has for Jagua is the night time. Jagua tries to behave herself and settle with this man in order to obey her parents but after some time she refuses to adapt herself to the

boring life and the idea of not being able to have a child also pushes her to ditch him and join the city life.

In the city, her first encounter with the glamorous life begins with a white man who just came from England. He leaves Jagua a fortune after enjoying sometime with her. Using the allowance Jagua starts a business, selling wax print and kente cloth between Accra and Lagos. In the meanwhile, Jagua meets a number of lovers, until finally she settles in one of the apartments found in Lagos. There she meets a young teacher called Freddie Nnamdi who aspires to become a lawyer but who fails to have enough money to pursue his career.

Jagua falls in love with this man who is younger than her, she wants to settle down and have children with him. In return, she promises to get him the money he needs to pursue his education. But Jagua's dream of having her own child and husband fails when Freddie leaves for England and forgets all about her.

Jagua is an illiterate woman. She has to depend on the money she gets by selling her flesh in order to support herself. Therefore, she hangs out with men who pay money to get sexual pleasure. After Freddie's departure Jagua starts to go out with a man called Uncle Taiwo who was a secretary of the OP2 party of Obanla Constituency. This man spends a lot of the party money on women and voters in order to win votes. Jagua is one of these women. She spends her time with him to get financial support and to buy herself food and clothing. She even has gone to the extent of campaigning for him without having any knowledge about politics. But he finally fails to win and he is sued for the money he

misappropriated. As a result, Jagua is forced to leave town for the money she uses is the stolen money given to her by Uncle Taiwo. She leaves behind the fortune she accumulated and leaves for her home land Ogbu. There she learns about her father's death. After mourning for a couple of days, Jagua starts to lead a new life. She starts her own business and becomes a tailor. She even gives birth to an illegitimate child which she unfortunately loses only two days after birth. But she is not discouraged by her misfortunes, instead with a better prospect for a new life she dreams of becoming a merchant princess.

### **3.2.2 Socio –Political Roles and Contributions**

The dislocation inflicted by the colonial regime in the African society, disturbed the natural balance, between men and women. While men were taken to work outside their home, women were left to attend to the home and give domestic services including satisfying their white master's command. Even after the end of the colonial regime and beginning of self-government, the tradition of corrupt ruling system, which victimized women for such purposes, continued.

The major character in this novel is Jagua Nana. The story revolves around her. The character Jagua Nana is described as a person who freely enjoys her sexuality. She is also depicted as a sexually irresistible woman and hence, she is compared to 'Jaguar' and called Jagua. She is so talented in the art of seduction.

*When she walked down a street male eyes followed the wiggle of her hips which came with studied unconsciousness. Sometimes she is too ashamed of her too passionate lovemaking. ... When she painted her face and lifted her breasts and exposed what must be concealed and concealed*

*what must be exposed, she could out-class any girl who did not know what to do with her God-given female talent (pp. 6-7).*

A woman's 'God-given female talent' is explained as a woman's ability to use her body by showing her outermost beauty through exposing her breasts, swaying her hips or painting her lips to attract men. The art of seduction is also expressed as if it is God-given, a natural talent given to women to please their men. In this case Jagua is pictured as only determined to respond to her sexual calls which makes even herself to be ashamed of her act. She is a woman who is always ready for a sexual encounter. She has a body and mind of a prostitute. She uses all places and possibilities to attract men. But she does these all to make a living out of it.

One of the victims and the most important one she charms in her expertise is Freddie Namme who comes to town to pursue a university education. He gets exploited by Jagua in order to get money to pursue his education abroad. As compared to him, Jagua is all body-no-mind woman. In an episode where her friend Freddie takes her to an intellectual group meeting at a British Council lecture, while others are enjoying the lecture Jagua gets bored and even tries to seduce the men.

*Laughter broke from the audience. While they were laughing, Jagua decided that she no longer belonged to the group. She felt ostracized by the chorus of inhibited enjoyment and that herd instinct she always sensed among intellectuals. She rose and began walking away. ... She clicked her high heelt shoes, but the listeners were still convulsed with laughter and few male eyes followed her wiggle (pp. 11-12).*

Jagua feels banished because she has no idea about what is going on in the lecture hall. She appears completely alien to what is going on

around her. She is shown as an illiterate woman who couldn't comprehend what was being discussed hence she loses interest in the discussion. Therefore, she attends to what she is capable of, showing her body. This highlights the singular role given to this character, which is to trade her female flesh for money to men who visit her. It also shows that since women are not allowed to take part in men's business she appears to have no interest in any activity that requires her to use her intellect, activities like education. However, Jagua is not completely alien to the worth of education, instead she chooses this life of glamour and a way to get money easily because she thinks education is not for a woman. While lusting for the bright life of the city, she trades her flesh to earn money so that she could send her 'lover' Freddie to England to pursue his education.

*No worry, Freddie. I goin'to sen' you to England. If you don' find peace of min' dere, den, God don't say make you become lawyer. I going to send you to England so you kin read proper law in de inns of court (pp. 23-24)!*

Jagua appreciates the prestigious life of being with an educated man. But she does not see that education is also relevant to change her life. She gives herself to temporary involvements with other men to get money so that she could send the one who is dear to her heart, Freddie to England. Eventhough she strives to get money to send her lover to England so that he could get education, we don't see Jagua striving to get education for herself. She is not even capable of writing her own letter to Freddie while he was in England.

*He wrote to her again and again and at last she went to a letter-writer and paid him two and six pence to write a reply (p.63).*

She receives letters from Freddie but she couldn't respond because she was incapable of reading and writing. It appears that she somehow enjoys what she is doing and it has become the source of her daily income.

*This was her bread and butter, she told herself. She has already pictured herself in it. She loved Freddie well, but his whole salary could not buy that dress. He must understand that making money from the Syrian did not mean she loved him less (P.15).*

Jagua traps all types of men to satisfy her urge for lust and to look good and glamorous. She is depicted as she accepts the reckless and scornful life of being a prostitute and that she cannot take herself out of it. Her recklessness and restlessness is shown as if it is inherent in that, her obsession to follow her lustful feeling begins at her early age. That is where, her sinful female nature starts to reveal itself.

*Jagua was fond of changing her clothes often, and in those early days of makeup-of painting her face. Every few hours she went down to the waterside and took off her clothes and swam in the clean cool water. The boys used to hide and peep at her breasts and hips. ... To the shock of the villagers she wore jeans and rode her bicycle through the narrow alleys of Ogabu and talked loudly and her laughter was throaty so the men drew to her side and wanted her. She considered herself above the local boys, most of whom she has bedded and despised as poor experience (p.166).*

The description, stereotypes her behavior as a woman who is destined to be a prostitute by nature. Jagua is a woman who wears trousers, rides cycles and laughs out loud; her liberated behavior deviates from the norms of the society. The description also shows that if a woman who lives in a patriarchal society does not abide by the rules and stays submissive and docile, she is considered fallen woman. Therefore,

Jagua's liberated behavior is unacceptable according to the society's norm. Putting aside all the opportunities of being independent and courageous, she is depicted as a prostitute because of her liberated and assertive behavior. Her behavior even forces her to abandon her well-to-do but boring husband.

*His main interest was his petrol-filling station and garage. He was up early and he went there to supervise the selling of his petrol and to make entries in his book. He soon had a chain of filling stations all over the city... but he never took her to parties, and would not dress well, for fear the money would leak away. In no way did his ideas of living attract her she found that she had obeyed her parents but now they were not there to see her misery and they would never understand her longing, the hot thrust for adventure in her blood and she wondered how she remain with him as she did for over three years. What grieved her most was that no child came (p167).*

She leaves him after trying so hard to please him and her family by being a submissive wife. She is strained to leave her home because of her being unable to have a child and her husband's obnoxious behavior. Her aspiration to live freely stays in her even though she tries so hard to live according to the norms; but she couldn't suppress for long the feeling and her true being that pushes her to come out and she finally gets relieved following her dreams.

The element of picturing women who want to be liberated of the socio-cultural norms as a sinful female nature seems to be to some extent a Victorian nature and yet, the Victorians are the ones who encouraged the spread of prostitution. Jagua, after she leaves her husband her first encounter, which becomes the basis for her reckless behavior, is her affair with an English businessman.

*His name was John Martell. He told her that his wife was in England. He had come out to work with a firm of builders. If she pleased him, he would treat her well (p.169).*

Here we can see that the ones who encourage prostitution and social chaos are the colonizers, but they instead classify women who want to be liberated destined to fall from grace. As a result, Jagua becomes a constant source of embarrassment because she is not a good example.

*Jagua was wearing a very tight skirt and when she got out a group of jobless boys whistled. Some shouted 'Jagua...' inwardly she felt pleased. She knew there was nothing very Jagua about her bright printed cotton blouse, although her breasts were almost half exposed. She was very conscious of them. She always wore blouses which showed the skin above her breasts and on her arms and shoulders because she knew her best points. Her skirt was split half way up the left thigh, so that when she walked much of her leg showed (p.58).*

She gets constant satisfaction out of showing herself. She pleases her ego of getting liberated through exposing her being to the outside world. She exposes what should have been covered to the world and shows the beauty of it without any fear.

Jagua departs from her village in search of wealth, security and sexual excitement but her actions are conceived wrong in terms of the society's moral values. Underscoring the relationship between wrongdoing and punishment, she is thrown in to a tragic consequence of being a barren which also becomes one of the reasons for her to renounce her marriage.

*She refused to adapt herself to his humdrum life and she wondered how she had been able to remain with him as she did for over three years. What grieved her most was that no child came (p.167).*

Her contradicting character to the standards of the community made her to end up with no child. This again shows that women who are liberated from the norms of the society are depicted as always to end up in an abominable situation. Jagua, even after regaining her fertility she loses her illegitimate child as a result of her wrong doing.

*For two days, the child lived. Jagua, handling Nnochi in all his wetness and elastic gambols drew the maternal satisfaction she has long craved. On the third day, Jagua put Nochi to the breast. ... Jagua felt a sudden slackening of his lips on her nipple. She looked at the face of her newborn infant. It was turning an ashen color (p.191).*

It becomes inevitable that even though she is able to give birth to an illegitimate child, the fact that its being illegitimate by itself contradicts with the social law. Therefore, she goes through a psychological trauma and experiences the tragic event. She is denied her right to enjoy the joy of being a mother.

In most cases, a prostitute is believed to be deviant from the norms of a society. She is not expected to react in a respectable way and participate in any form of social or political affairs. Unlike most cases, Jagua shows ample contribution in both social and political affairs but her contribution is shown in relation to her outstanding ability to use her seductive talent. Prostitution is usually associated with political and economic crisis. It is immoral and debilitates the economic power of a nation. On the contrary in this novel a prostitute believed to be seductive is used to settle disputes and to campaign for an election. In an incident where Jagua tries to settle a dispute between two warlords:

*Jagua giggled. She shook her shoulders in the reckless laughter of a bad woman wanting to be seduced. ... Jagua slackened the buttons on her blouse and skirt. She relaxed her*

*leg across the settee, and with her head on the armrest, shut her eyes and feigned sleep. Through half-shut eyes she saw him come in and there was a triumphant smile on his face (P.93).*

Jagua uses her artful seductive tricks to attract chief Ofubura so that he could promise her a reward. She made it impossible for the chief to say no and he totally has fallen under her control. In this case Jagua does not use her intellect to convince the chief rather she uses her seductive nature as a strategy.

*He took her to bed and she gave him herself with an abandon calculated to shock and delight him. The feigned noises practiced over the years, the careful punctuated sighs and cries of pain, the sudden flexing of thighs and neck...all this she performed with precision, which surprised herself. It was a long time since she played her true role (p.95).*

Questioning what the 'true role' of a woman is, in this sense directs us to the society's understanding of true role of a woman, which is being a sexual object, a role which makes a woman to be put in a subservient position and which makes her object of physical pleasure for men .In this case Jagua does not use her intellect to manipulate the chief, rather she uses her superb sexual talent. She only uses what is on the outside. On the other hand, we see a man losing his mind when he gets the best sexual satisfaction out of a woman and this is the only power given to a woman to make a man surrender.

*The wounded lion had been caged. Jagua felt the proud glow heroes must feel on their return, victorious from hunting ground, carrying the vanquished animal on their shoulders. When the people of Bagana saw the royal canoe of Krenimeh with chief Ofubara gloriously seated in it they stared. ... Jagua, whispered to chief Ofubara. 'Go meet uncle Namme now. Remember how you promise me' (p.96)?*

She certainly does change the history of those people and makes them to reconcile with each other. But this was made possible only because of Jagua's magnified sexual ability. Critically looking at her act, on the one hand it shows a moral transgression and on the other hand, it shows that the only power a woman can have over a man is through her sexuality and this kind of portrayal magnifies the place of a woman as a sexual object.

In another episode, we find Jagua involved in an election campaign initiating women voters to vote for uncle Taiwo.

*When uncle Taiwo came back in the evening, he told Jagua that if she called herself his woman, she must do her best in every way to help win him votes from the women. She could go round now and begin to give door-door talks (p.130).*

In this case Jagua is not given the chance to turn down the offer provided by uncle Taiwo. If she wants to sustain her obsession with the glamorous city and to win her bread, she has to support uncle Taiwo in his campaign. Jagua is not happy about what she is doing because she has no interest in politics and also she has no knowledge about it. For fear Jagua lies to uncle Taiwo that she has received bad news and couldn't campaign for him and he says to her:

*I going to teach you everythin' about politics. You think you know nothin' about politics; and you call yourself Lagos woman! He roared with laughter, and roared again and she was embarrassed because his laughter told her that it was a shameful thing not to be interested in the fortunes of the city (p.130).*

This shows that the part given to women in politics is so limited. Even if they participate in voting, their votes will be taken just as supplementary

support. In same way, Jagua is shown as not interested in politics. This shows how women are denied their right to participate in the political arena and all their actions are taken just to fill numbers. As a result, it makes them to be counted as secondary citizens. However Jagua becomes a very good speaker who is capable of convincing her audiences; but her being very articulate in the speech is a result of the similarity drawn between politics and prostitution. In this case, both require lying and both are directed to the same end which is corruption.

*Jagua stood on a box and looked down on the heads of three thousand market women. Near her was a microphone and above the little square the O.P2 flag waved its orange and white strips. ... the women had come to the campaign meeting of uncle Taiwo. ... Jagua knew these women; astute sure of themselves and completely independent and powerful (pp.143-144).*

The women as traders are completely independent of any other support. They can make differences in their lives and in the society as well. But when it comes to their political role they can easily be misled just because the society's rule does not allow them to participate in political affairs. They are only allowed to give their votes just to increase the number of votes. Jagua's public speech does not also change her life and her place in the society. Jagua, tricked by the false promises of uncle Taiwo and her need to get her monthly allowance and because of her endless desire to pursue her happiness, changes into a politician. Her being well endowed in lying helps her to win the women's votes for uncle Taiwo. However this didn't help any of the women to change their lives, they are used as shadows to help others to shine out. This kind of portrayal of women undermines the role of women by subordinating and giving them little or no part in politics or in other public affairs.

### **3.2.3 Economic Roles and Contributions**

In the society where men and women were engaged equally in the production of necessary goods and where wide spread private property has not developed, women's production played an important part in the growth of economy. Their access to production materials and to the products was not limited and it was actually equal with that of men. However the introduction of the colonial ruling system put an end to the recognition of the women's role in the growth of the economy.

The colonial regime introduced a new ruling system, which debases the part taken by women in the production and distribution of materials by limiting their role in the public sphere. The ruling system also undermines the role of women and privileges men to have more control over products. As a result women's participation in the public sphere started to be seen as irrelevant and women start to confine themselves to the private matters. Those who submitted themselves and accepted their inferiority stayed obedient to the rules imposed on them while the others who could not sustain the brutal rule fled to the cities in search of their independence. Unfortunately, the only easy way the city offers to the migrating women is prostitution. Those who were overcome by the flamboyance of city life stayed prisoners to the filth of the unpleasant life but those who were able to resist the glittery life immersed themselves in education, trade and other life changing activities. But these women who failed to liberate themselves in any way, from the socially accepted rules were ostracized from the society.

In this novel, the community appears to support the traditional ruling system which idolizes motherhood by showing that women who flee to the city in search of their independence easily get attracted to the dress, make up and the easy money and are driven to deny their self-respect to end up in prostitution. Hence, the community punishes them by isolating them from activities of the community and by letting them to suffer the consequences. Jagua, in her bid to escape the traditional life moves to the city and her desire to get economic independence forces herself to get involved in the business of prostitution. She also tries the business of selling cosmetics and fashionable dresses with the money she gets from selling her body.

*With the allowance he gave her she traveled by Mammy Wagon to Accra. She had heard that the people of Accra were Jaguaful they were the real black mermaids from the Guinea gulf their ideas came from Paris. When she got to Accra she was breathless with wonder. She returned to Lagos loaded with a pile of wax prints and kente cloth which she sold at a profit (p.170).*

Jagua manages to involve herself in trade but the high fashion, the Jagua-fulness and the appearance with a much better style than the Lagos women mean more to her, hence she gets unconsciously taken away by the life of prostitution. Jagua is shown lacking moral conscience. She is depicted as unable to see the difference between what is right and what is wrong. Her lack of conscience is what drives her to be victim of the filth of the city. After the Bagana trip, Jagua was offered a business by her brother but she turns the offer down.

*Jagua consulted with Fanzo. With his permission she decided to use the 150 pounds she had and Fanzo added another 50 pounds to make it around 200 pounds. ... Sitting in her own stall, Jagua was miserable. It rained, and when it was not raining the customers came, but not to her stall. She saw them*

*in the stall of the other women traders. ... Her stall seemed to repeal the buyers (pp.104-105).*

It seems trade becomes dull and eventless life to Jagua since it does not allow her to show herself. She is expected to draw people's attention to the products she sells but she is not talented in it. This as a result forces her to return to Lagos back to her old business. This shows that women like Jagua who are infatuated with the business of prostitution become valueless in the real life process and are unable to involve themselves in morally accepted activities. It is as if nature by itself denies them the right to succeed in any other life style. Jagua becomes worthless because she is taken away by her morally unacceptable activity; therefore she becomes unsuccessful even if she tries to involve herself in life-changing activities as long as she doesn't abide by the rules of the community.

The fact that Jagua gets material security from the men, who easily leave her to stay drowned and discourage her to involve herself in other forms of rehabilitating activities. She constantly looks for easy money and high fashion. She chooses to be a victim rather than being self-supporting. She is presented as a person who chooses to be driven by emotion rather than reason. This leads her to suffer the consequences and she ends up in loosing her money and her fame. But after paying for her wrong doings, she manages to rehabilitate herself through getting involved in the sewing business and becomes a tailor.

*Every morning she had it taken out to the main Port Harcourt road by the market and in a shed, which had been built for her, she would sit sewing. ... The girls in the village came to her bringing her work and wanting to learn the craft of fashion from her (p.179).*

This reveals Jagua's total recovery from her wicked behaviour. She completely recovers when she rejects the life of prostitution and starts to live according to the norms of the society.

*In the evenings, she would walk home balancing the sewing machine on her head. ... Soon she was able to buy a bicycle of her own ... she had become a house keeper to the family and more important still, custodian of her mother's will to go on living (p.180).*

When she recovers from her ill-fated life she even manages to become a custodian of her mother's will and manages to reconcile with the norms of the society by submitting herself to the governing rules. This shows the society's approval of the norms which outcast women who try to contend with the sophisticated modern life. Thus, in the novel, it seems that women who try to liberate themselves physically as well as economically to become independent are given less credit because they are considered to be driven by emotion rather than reason. This makes them to be pictured as unable to confront with difficult situations and they end up being failures.

A close analysis of the novel reveals that Jagua is a woman who suffers from the inequality created as a result of the traditional way of thinking of the society. Her assertiveness could have helped her to acquire a better position in the society; but the writer does not depict her that way seemingly to maintain the male/female hierarchy. She supports herself by prostitution and her being unable to get education makes her a victim of male manipulation. Even though she could not get education she could have pursued her trade in selling cloths. But the writer tells a story that women who ignore the traditional norms suffer. Therefore, the study suggests this kind of portrayal which doesn't also show the problem of

women that they are victims should be understood for what they are chauvinistic. This is because not recognizing women who are vital players in uplifting a society's life condition is like cutting out a source which can be a power supply. It is such kind of depiction that supports the superiority of men which debilitates the life of women and keeps them down by tiding them with beliefs so that their lives could not be elevated.

These kinds of portrayals should be exposed to the society so that the right judgment could be made. Society should be able to see how women's life is suppressed and how they become vulnerable to exploitation whereas they can be crucial participants in the socio-economic and political life a nation.

Cyprian Ekwensi has successfully depicted the city life with its nightclubs, dance halls, prostitutes, businessmen, politicians, contractors, lawyers, etc. The writer represented the city life as forcefully attractive to both men and women offering opportunities, which are completely different and impossible to find in the traditional life style. The city is also represents as having a better economic and social opportunity which can easily be tempting to anybody. As far as the women are concerned, he presents them as they get easily attracted to the glitter of city life. They are so determined to meet their aspirations of getting wealth out of the filth and seemingly beautiful life of the city. They allow themselves to suffer, as a result they become victims and they get corrupted. Out shadowing women who strive to get their independence and involve themselves in public activities, is another strategic method used to debase the value of women. This strategy

helped the men to demoralize the women and let them stay submissive to their rules.

In this novel, it seems that some kind of male bias is reflected by maintaining the male/female hierarchy and by giving women a secondary status. While the men are depicted as educated, providers, politicians, women are not even close to such portraitures and are depicted in most cases as prostitutes.

### **3.3. Ousmane Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood***

#### **3.3.1 Synopsis of the Story**

This novel is about a strike that took place on the Dakar–Niger railway line as a result of the subsequent hardship imposed by the French colonialists on the railway workers. The people on the Dakar–Niger line strike demanding a better living condition, equal pay for equal work and old age pensions.

In this novel, no individual character is given a special emphasis to be considered as a major character. The men and the women appear collectively and they are referred to us the 'men' and the 'women'. In the beginning, the matter was only for the men but later on it became a necessary event for both men and women. As a result of the strike, hunger stalks the striking workers and their families. Since the men are on strike, the women take the obligation to feed their respective families and they spend most of their days looking for food outside their homes. The strike takes place on the line from Dakar, Thies up to Bamako. In these places, we find very strong women who play an important part in

maintaining the strike. The women who have been docile and submissive completely transform into assertive and defiant women.

In this mission, women like Ramatoulaye , Mame Sofi, Penda, Maimouna are important contributors. The lack of food and the burden of taking care of their families inflict anger in these women. They stand out motivated to sustain the strike and as a result they develop a political consciousness and solidarity among themselves. The strong relationship and the violence start in Ramatoulye's compound when she is accused of killing a goat that belongs to one of the supporters of the colonizers while they were hunger stricken. It is on this occasion that the women come out to the public to act violently against the colonizers. Women like Mame Sofi help in organizing the women and preparing weapons. These women struggle to get Ramatoulye released and finally they succeeded. The feeling of strength and solidarity extends to women in Thies and from Thies to Dakar. It also encourages the men to carry out their day to day meeting on how to overcome the struggle.

In Theis, women like Penda and Maimouna play an important part in the protest against the colonizers. These two women are ostracized by their society for their disability. Penda is a prostitute and she is banished because of her unacceptable behavior and Maimouna because of her blindness is left out of the society. But the actions they take and the role they play help them to create a laudable effect in their society. Maimouna is a typical mother figure for women in the African society. She is a victim of male lust but she does not see herself as one. Her situation reflects most African women's situation in which are being looked at as a sexual object. Even though she is blind, she perfectly performs her responsibility

as a mother without seeking support from any man. Penda, who is a prostitute, plays an important part in the march of the women. She is assertive and independent and shows her assertiveness by taking over a leadership position to organize and encourage the women in the march.

At the end, the women's common problem helps them to come together to build a very strong relationship among themselves, which finally becomes the cause for their success in the revolution. The novel reflects the extraordinary deeds of ordinary women who once were silent and submissive. The strike helps them to raise their political consciousness and come out to the public and take over responsibilities. The strike that spread from Bamako to Dakar and Theis builds up into a collective reaction and ends with the women's legendary and successful march.

### **3.3.2 Socio – Economic Roles and Contributions**

In this novel, female characters that are doubly handicapped by being female and Moslem are given larger roles. This work is peopled by a number of such women who play an important role in the struggle to change their economic and political situation. They recognize and question the injustice of their situation by creating solidarity among themselves and with their male counterparts.

The women in this novel are shown as very strong and courageous who survive the abject situations of poverty and famine. As a result of the strike, the burden of feeding the family rests on the shoulder of the women. The hard conditions of living created under the hands of the colonialist regime lead these people to struggle. At the beginning, the strike it was the business of the men, women were not allowed to poke

their nose in this business of the men. But later on a breakthrough is made and it was done by a little girl called Adijbigi.

Perhaps Adijbidgi the little girl was the only woman who attends the men's meeting concerning the strike. In an episode where the old woman Niakoro stops her granddaughter from going to the men's meeting,

*Old Niakoro said ' why do you leave the house without a word; and next where are you going in such a hurry? Ad'jibid'ji answers 'to the gathering of the men.' 'To the gathering of the men!' Niakoro repeated. ... 'Why are you always poking your nose in the affairs of the men? They are preparing a strike and that is not a thing for you'(pp.4-5).*

In this case we find two kinds of women. One, who belongs to the old generation and who submits herself to the traditional values and the other, who belongs to the new generation and who is presented as an example for other women, perhaps too matured, educated and politically aware for her age. Here it seems that a comparison is being made between the old and the young to show the difference in position and awareness of the women. The little girl's consciousness of the situation around her foretells the latter's involvement of the women in the matter.

While the men run around to conduct a strike, the burden of taking care of the family becomes the responsibility of the women. Since the men do not work any more, the women leave their homes and their household activities in search of food to feed their men and their children.

*In this country, the men often had several wives, and it is perhaps because of this that at the beginning they were scarcely conscious of the help the women gave them. But soon they began to understand that, here, too, the age to come would have a different countenance. When a man came back from a meeting, with bowed head and empty pocket, The first*

*thing he saw were always the unfired stove, the useless cooking vessels...then he would seek the arms of his wife, without thinking or caring , whether she was the first or the third (P. 33).*

As a traditional community, the men tend to have more than one wife. When a man gets back from work, he goes to one of his wives compound to get food and if he couldn't find food in one of his wives house he goes to another. They didn't care about any other relevance of the women other than providing them with food because they do not consider that women would be capable of helping them in any other matter. But later on reversal of situation occurs. The strike forces the women to leave their household in search of food which makes them the bread winners of their respective families. The men begun to understand that a new generation that takes women out to the public has come; they do not dare to go against it, instead, they learn to appreciate the support they get from their women. Here it is shown how the women's support in the affairs of the men changes into relevance. The women's coming out to the public becomes the beginning of a new way of life for the women that creates a situation for their voice to be heard.

In response to the strike the colonial regime cuts electricity and water supply and withdraws credit facilities. As a result, starvation begins in the community. To overcome the death and starvation the women are forced to go to far away places in search of food and water. Ramatoulaye is one of these women who are burdened with the responsibility of feeding their families. She supports not less than twenty family members. She is silent and obedient by nature and yet she is capable of

breaking the silence. She is shown as a very important woman who makes a very great effort to support the men on the strike.

*Since the beginning of the strike Ramatoulaye had become more withdrawn, and perhaps more stern. There was no longer time for gossip. Her responsibilities had become very great, there were no less than twenty of God's Bits of Wood... (p.40)*

The strike like Ramatoulaye changes the lives of most of the women from being docile and submissive to being more serious and strong women who are capable of defending themselves. They deal with any kind of obstacle and take risks for their own survival. This is justified when Ramatoulaye kills El Hadji Mabique's goat to feed her children.

*She plunged the knife three times into the ram's neck...Ramatoulaye wiped the blade clean on the animal's heavy fleece and stood up at last. There was neither pride nor arrogance in her attitude but a kind of satisfaction as if what she had done had been only a duty she could not avoid (p.68).*

Women by nature are considered to be emotional, sensitive and incapable of doing such things as killing. At this point Ramatoulaye's strength to perform the duty shows how a woman can get relieved from her emotional behavior and can be courageous. The woman does not become helpless when she loses what she has saved for her family. Instead, she defends herself by facing the difficult situation, she takes over a man's duty and kills the ram to feed her family. This shows the woman's diligence to do things that might even cost her life. She explains how hard it is to be the head of a family in such circumstances where hunger and poverty override their strength and their courage and she says,

*When you know that the life and the spirit of others depend on your life and spirit, you have no right to be afraid. In the cruel*

*times we are living through we must find our own strength some how and force ourselves to be hard (p.69).*

These women are hunger stricken but they have a very big heart to fight against it. They know their responsibility and they are ready to justify the strength of their determination. The brutality of the hunger does not shake them instead they become more resolute to fight the root cause of their condition.

*Little by little, the women of Thies have been forced to sell every thing they owned of any value, they were beginning to be disturbed by the lack of buyers. It was impossible now to find a market for their best head cloths, of fine cotton from the most highly skilled weavers of the city, which had been symbols of their pride and were the pride of the entire family (p.136).*

The firmness of their belief in their acts even forces them to sell their head covers, which is a sign of women's pride in their community. Uncovering their heads reflects some radical change in their way of life. It can be taken as a sign of their coming out to the light from their subordinate positions. Their act justifies the denial of the position they are given and shows that they can give laudable support to their respective community. The actions they take demonstrate that they can also be supporters to the economy.

In this novel two types of women are presented. Women who have more or less emancipated themselves from the older values and are more or less assertive and women who stay submissive and servile to the values of the community.

There is also a particular type of woman who considers herself as educated, emancipated but who is a typical slave of the colonizers ideology. This woman is N'deye Touti. She is shown as a perfect example of those who are products of the colonized society. N'deye Touti knows more about Europe than she knows about her own continent. She is educated but the education she is fed forces her to develop a hatred for her own people. She lives in some kind of separate world and thinks that her society's way of living is insane.

*N'deye, as every one calls her, was pretty and she knows very well the stir she caused among all the boys in the district, before the strike she had gone to the teacher's training school. ... The people among whom she lived were polygamous...and this made her recognize what she now called the 'lack of civilization' of her own people (p.57).*

Comparing her way of living to the splendid and luxurious ways of living of the colonizers she thinks that her people lack civilization. Her people are polygamous and according to her understanding polygamous marriage has nothing to do with love. Their 'savage' way of living disgusts her. She even tries to separate herself by creating her own ideal world.

*Real life was there not here, in this wretched corners. Where she was confronted with beggars and cripples at every turning. When N'deye comes out of a theatre where she has seen visions of mountain chalets deep in snow, of beaches where the great of the world lay in the sun, of cities where the night flashed with many colored lights and walked from this world back to her own she would be seized with a kind of nausea a mixture of rage and shame(p.57).*

This shows the colonizer's deliberate poisoning of the minds of the people with their corrupt ideologies so that it would be easy for them to preside over by universalizing their ways of living as the only civilized way of living and this way they can make people their slaves. N'deye becomes

one of the victims. The hatred she develops drives her to complete alienation. She is left out of value for herself and for her society and as a result she loses appreciation of the quality and beauty of her own culture. But she finally wakes up from the dream world she has been living in for so long.

*None of the things she had once disliked doing any longer repelled her; she cared for the children and washed their clothing and went on long errands in the heat of the day, in search of handful of rice (p.224).*

She stays indifferent for so long to the situations her fellow women are living in but later on, she opens her eyes to see what is going on around her by immersing her self in their ways of life so that this way she can understand the social reality on her own and reconcile with it.

Women who are totally submissive and dependent on their husbands, who are victims of the silence imposed upon them, are also presented in this novel. One of these types of women is Assitan. Assitan is the wife of Bakayko who belongs to the educated elites but who keeps his wife suppressed. She is docile, submissive and hard working and she never raises her voice while speaking. She perfectly belongs to the world where women are oppressed and objectified.

*By ancient standards of Africa, Assitan was a perfect wife...she know nothing whatever of her husband's activities, or if she did, she gave no appearance of knowing (p.106).*

Assitan is a perfect example who is portrayed to show the traditional standards that forbid women's participation in the public life and that foster the male values by debilitating the life conditions of women. Assitan

is dependent on her husband. Her submissiveness is also reflected in her lack of interest to know of her husband's day to day activities.

On the contrary there is this woman called Penda who is a radical and powerful young woman. She is liberated sexually, spiritually and physically and she is very assertive. She is shown as a very strong character that stands on her own and lives according to her own principles.

*Penda returned home; she had gone of with a man and stayed with him for several days... Penda often went of like this and for a long time no one had ever restrain her. From her earliest childhood she had demonstrated a resolute independence which only increased as she grew up (p.137).*

She remains faithful to her own choice of life and no one seems strong enough to take it away from her; she is determined in not allowing to let anybody to her own territory. She is portrayed as liberated from the rules of the traditional society in her early childhood. She goes out with men without any fear.

Another woman who is most like Penda is Maimouna who becomes a victim of male lust because of her blindness. Even though she is disabled she is not depicted as a helpless person.

*Samba N'doulougou did not understand clearly what force it was that has compelled him to come here now and seek out this woman. Whose body he had enjoyed one night...he remembered the shame he had lived for months, as he watched her working in the sun while her belly grew large with the child , his child, ' give me the child' he said.... 'you want your child' the blind women said... 'a father may die while a woman is big with child from living because the mother is there. It is up to me to protect the child' (p. 202).*

Even though she is a victim she does not see herself as one. She ascribes her situation to her sexual needs just as a man does. She believes in herself that she can stand for her children no matter what the situation is. She supports herself by selling food stuffs to the railway workers. She is shown as an independent woman who devotes her life for her children. She is a disabled woman but her blindness gives her better insight to her womanhood and also enables her to live according to her own terms. Therefore, she neither exploits nor gets exploited.

Women of the African continent suffer from the unequal distribution of development, economy and their contribution to the economy is often viewed as supplementary. Sembene is one of the African novelists who strived to free women from such types of societal dangers imposed on them. According to him, women can take part in the system of production. He provokes the society's rules by creating typical characters that are defined by their functions rather than by their stereotypical roles imposed on them.

### **3.3.3 Political Roles and Contributions**

The heroines in *God's Bits of Wood* are mostly from the traditional society. They are constrained to come out to the public by social and cultural barriers. But the social and political situation related with their nationalist feeling creates a suitable situation for them to come out to the public in support of the strike with their men. They are shown as politically motivated in bringing a change to their life conditions. Their guts gives strength to the men on the strike. They show their support by marching and working side by side with their men. From being home makers they change into revolutionaries. Considering the importance of

the involvement of the women in their business, the men curb their resistance against the coming out of women to the public.

In the beginning, the men do not consult their women about the strike. As time passes, the women become unable to feed their families therefore the search for food inflects a significant amount of anger in them. They start to develop aggressiveness which leads them to react against the injustice they face. This reaction starts to take its baby steps when the docile and submissive women transform into defiant women.

Ramatoulaye's killing of El Haddji Mabegue's goat is one of the signs of the start of violence among the women. Hunger makes the women cunning, angry and violent. When the tabubas come to arrest Ramatoulaye for killing a goat, the women around the neighborhood come together and defend her. This is where the fight between the women and the colonizers starts.

*It was then that the police arrived in the big central courtyard. The women had never really believed that there was any danger, and in their concern with the preparation of the food they had ceased to think about it, so that now the sudden appearance of armed men in their midst wide spread panic among them. Some, bewildered and frightened ran out in to the street, but even here there were men in uniform. Mame Sofi tightened the knot on her waist cloth and put up the two bottles, filled with hard sand, which she had prepared for an emergency. Bineta, Houdia and several of others did the same ( pp. 72-73).*

The tabubas' arrival in the district was not the women's expectation for they have not done anything wrong except feeding themselves. But women like Mame Sofi know in their heart that they will come across to

such an incident which will create a circumstance favorable to let their anger and their hatred out.

Mame Sofi was ready for the incident. As if she is expecting it to happen so soon, she reacts immediately when she comes across the incident. Others who are panic stricken at the beginning start to follow her foot steps stimulated by her daring action and react against the tabubas. Their reaction through time changes into violence. When the police arrive again on horse backs with a much better mobilized force, the women are also tactful in their defense against them.

*In an instant there was pandemonium. Sheaves of flaming straw and pots of coal were flung at the horse men from every corner of the darkness, while the women shouted at the top of their lungs and beat on tins, trying to frighten the horses with the noise. The animals reared and plunged whinnying frantically and the men swore. The spahis were veterans of a thousand parades but they could do nothing to control their horses... (p.113).*

The need to sustain their families added to the dignity for their solidarity; the women battle successfully against the well trained horse men. At first, it seems that they don't have the ability or the power to defend these trained horse men but the women use their heads and defend themselves wisely. Although at the end the women lose their house with fire, their determination makes them very strong to sustain the accident they encounter. They even insist to follow Ramatoulaye to the police station leaving their burnt houses behind, after she decides to give in voluntarily.

*Once again Mame Sofi has assembled all of the neighbors before the gate of N'diayene. ... Mame Sofi said, 'well tell this tabubas that we are not going to let them take Ramatoulaye.' ... Ramatoulaye said, 'since yesterday we have been tossed about like grains in a winnow, we can not let it start again; I*

*will go with them.' So will all of us-we'll all go with her!' Mame Sofi cried (p.119).*

After even being attacked by the fire men at the police station, their strong fortitude and solidarity helps them to survive all the suffering they encounter. Their collective action becomes successful in letting Ramatoulaye released and it even gives legitimacy to the importance of their role in the strike.

The strike also creates an opportunity for women like Penda who are excluded from the society by their unacceptable behavior. Penda is a prostitute but her breaking the tribal customs and ways of life helps her to assert her independence. Her assertiveness and independence also help her to assume a leadership position. Her leadership ability starts to show when Lahib, the strike leader asks her to control the distributions of the rations.

*... Lahib asked Penda to take over the distribution of the rations to the women (P.140).*

She successfully accomplishes her responsibility and she also strongly resists insults spat upon her to remind her that she is a worthless person in the society; insults thrown upon her from irresponsible and ignorant women like Awa.

*Penda filled her scoop to the exact level ready to empty it in to Awa's container, but the woman just stood there with her hands on her hips. Glaring at her. Then she turned to the crowd in the line behind her and said in broken French, ' I don't want that this whore should serve me!' ... Penda had reached across the table seized her by the neck and spat full in her face (p.142).*

Penda's independence is much more directed to her sexuality before the strike but after the strike she starts to use it to a more positive advantage. After her involvement in the distribution of the rations her leadership ability gains appreciation and respect from both men and women. It also helps her to gain acceptance to lead the march of the women to Dakar. With this march the women also show that they are much worth than being just wives and mothers.

*Now the day had come, the road was too narrow for them, and they moved forward and spread forward in the shape of a fan, so that some walked in the dust and others in the dry grass beside the rail road, and the young ones amused them by leaping from tie to tie. ... Penda, still wearing her soldier's cartridge belt marched at the head of the procession...(p.190).*

Her wearing soldier's cartridge belt shows that she strengthened herself to carry out her responsibility with full diligence. Her legendary courage added to the other women's strength and solidarity helps them to change the history of the society. The women's passivity overcome by the new political consciousness supports them to come out to the public. The march of the women is given a very splendid reception during the last stage of their journey. They are received as heroes though at the end Penda loses her life killed by a policeman when the women try to enter Dakar.

*And already the pressure of this human wall was forcing the soldiers to draw back. Reinforcements began to appear from every where at once, but they were not for the men in uniform. A few rifle butts came up menacingly and were beaten down by clubs and stones. The unnerved soldiers hesitated, not knowing what to do and then some shots rang out and in the column two people fell Penda and Samba N'Doulougou (p.202).*

Penda loses her life while struggling to free her people from the hunger and suppression the colonizers imposed on them. The strike enables her to show out her inner beauty and put it to use to change her name from Penda the prostitute to Penda the hero and she dies with respect and pride. Most importantly, the strike brings to recognition the roles of women and encourages both men and women to work together to reach to the same end.

According to the analysis made, the portrayal of women as providers and supporters of society facilitates understanding by all that women have a better place in a society. It also helps in changing their life conditions and gives recognition to their roles and contributions.

The study believes that the writer has truthfully assessed these women's life conditions without making any superficial judgment. He has tried to show how the life of these women improved to where it is now and how they have come to be able to get recognition. As any other women in any part of the world, these women have also suffered the suppression under the patriarchal society's rule but through their continued effort and struggle they have managed to be able to change their life conditions. This could be a lesson to other women to work hard and uplift their life and reverse the situation that gives them secondary status in a society.

Sembene Ousmane in this literary work has tried to reflect his Marxist view intertwined with feminist consciousness. The working class consciousness encourages both men and women to work together to the same end. This creates awareness of the importance of women's participation which helps to undermine the sexist ideology that exists in

the society. This revolutionary consciousness brought about as a result of the strike becomes a stepping stone to turn down the notion that debases the significance of women in the public sphere and leads to a new order in the society.

In general, the novel has successfully achieved its objective of bringing women out of the shadow. The work has shown the significance of giving recognition to the roles of women in both the public and the private spheres. Their importance for better economic and political conditions is perfectly depicted. The novel also shows how women must learn to work hard to achieve their goals instead of being silent and indifferent to the situations around them because of unstated rules and regulations of society.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.1 Conclusion

The fictional world that the African women dwell in shows us how they are confronted with very a difficult situation in their every day life of oppression. In the literary tradition they are mostly shown as submitted to their way of life accepting their subordinate position and secondary status. This kind of representation seems to perpetuate the suppression and exploitation of women and makes them to be always dependent on their male counterparts. They cannot be seen to stand out by themselves. Instead, they are seen in the shadows of men.

Using African feminist criticism as a theoretical background for the analysis of the two male authored literary texts, *Jagua Nanna* and *God's Bits of Wood*, this study looks at the way women characters are depicted in the texts. African feminist criticism as a part of third world feminism deals with the realities that shape women's multiple experiences while challenging male dominance. It also deals with the problematic representations of women in literary texts related with the roles assigned to women in the socio-economic and political agencies. The study basically focused on sexism to reveal male manipulation over female in the public and private spheres, and racism that classifies women as sexual objects, whores or prostitutes. It has also dealt with classism to reveal the difference in the living conditions of men and women. Taking these into account, this study attempted to reveal how the major female characters in the two novels are depicted in relation to their roles and contributions in the socio-economic and political agencies.

According to African feminist literary criticism identifying positive and negative images of women helps us to identify the loss of status women suffer. It struggles to shake off the stereotypical roles which are given to women and encourages the appreciation of women's contributions to the functioning of a society.

Through an analysis of how the female characters appear in the two novels, attempt is made to show how women are presented as mere contributors in the public and private spheres. In the novel *Jagua Nana*, what is magnified about the major character is her talent in the art of seduction. She appears as only determined to respond to her sexual needs which classifies her as a sexual object. In the process of being a sexual object, this character has given up her chance to be educated and self supportive. While running after the money she gets out of selling her body she fails to succeed in trade. As a result the study found out that this female character, which is presented as a prostitute, is shown as swallowed by the filthy and corrupt situation of the city. Her search for economic independence and sexual liberation makes her an object of sexual pleasure for men.

Concerning her socio-economic role, she is shown as a failure and incapable of achievement until she finally agrees to accept and live according to the traditional rules that require her to stay submissive and docile. Such type of stereotypical representation seems to debase women's ability to take part in public spheres forcing them to stay in the private spheres being only mothers and homemakers. The characters political role also seems not to change her life and the place given to her

in the society. Her role is undermined and used as a supplementary action to support the men.

Unlike *Jagua Nana*, the characters in *God's Bits of Wood* are given a laudable attention with respect to their contribution. In this novel the study has found out that women are presented as more or less emancipated from the older values. They are presented as assertive and independent women. Their collective action to achieve independence reverses their situation and helps them to earn a place in the public affairs. They become the bread winners for their families which magnifies their support to the economy. The revolutionary consciousness that turns down the insignificance of women in politics is seen as another aspect that helps the women to be responsible citizens. The women's collective and legendary action brings a significant change to their lives and gives recognition to the importance of women's participation in politics. Therefore, African literary criticism has helped the study to clearly show how the hierarchy created in the novels makes women to be seen as secondary citizens. As a result, it also has helped to show how women become vulnerable to sexual exploitation and suffer from inequality in status of living.

This study is believed to have contributed in showing the place given to women characters and their roles in two male authored literary texts which are the subjects of the study. Literary works play an important part in inflecting values in a society. Thus, novels that grant positive images to their female characters should be encouraged because these types of novels are inclined to show the worth of women by creating

positive images that support women's access to economic and political activities.

Looking at the usual representation of women as stereotypes in most novels, it is important to consider the emphasis that should be given for such portrayals of female characters. This study is not a comparative study. It is concerned in exploring the positive and negative images given to major female characters in two male authored texts related to their roles in the society. Therefore, it is open for comparative studies that can be made using such types of texts, which present their women characters with positive and negative images.

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