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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEADING TO RISING FEMINISM; RE-READING
PURPLE HIBISCUS

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Abstract

Chimamanda's work *Purple Hibiscus* deals with rising feminist issues in African countries. This is a debut work of Chimamanda. She basically elucidates the dehumanizing child and women abuse by the patriarchy of African countries where the male dominance is crushing the wings of female spirit. The concept of 'good woman' had been seen in every instance. The pre-determined gender roles in every African family are quite visible in Chimamanda's work. The radical reaction of Achike family's women is evident. Papa's dominance hereby ends and the rise of hope and optimism could be seen at the end where Kambili, the protagonist imagines the *Purple Hibiscus* garden and hope her brother Jaja gets released from prison soon. The issue of feminism and cultural faith had been seen in every other step in this work. There is an upsurge of radical feminism. This research paper will be exploring the idea of rising feminism and the way Achike family's women get free of the male dominance and shatter it for once and all. This work of Adiche portrays the worsening condition of the females living in African countries. The rigid norms and pre-determined gender roles set for this gender. Adiche has been a milestone writer in the feminist genre works. Her work *Purple Hibiscus* deals with the uprising feminist issues in African Countries.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Child abuse, Subjugation, Patriarchy, African feminism and Women empowerment.

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Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche is one of the renowned Nigerian feminist writers. *Purple Hibiscus* is a debut novel of Chimamanda's. She has also been bagged up with many prizes and awards. Honored with The Prestigious Orange Broadband Prize for fiction for her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*

(2006). She was also honored with Mac Arthur Foundation Fellowship (2008) and Commonwealth Writer's Prize for her debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2005). Her latest written novel and a headshot on feminist genre is *Americanah* (2013).

Her major focus lies upon the upsurge of radical feminism under Nigerian change of politics

and culture. The women are being subjugated on the basis of gender by the patriarchy. There lies a great difference between the good women (Mama Beatrice) and real women (Aunty Ifeoma). The contrast between these characters speaks up about the changing conditions of Africa. African women are changing the entire phase of Africa's patriarchy. These African women are resistant to western hegemony. African feminists fighting against gender inequality and Kambili's spirit of courage which is highly applauded by the readers.

Purple Hibiscus is a narrated panorama of past and present of a fifteen year old girl Kambili Achike. She had been a victim of child abuse. A catholic girl's narration where she tells that how she mutely underwent her father's violent behavior whom she called 'Papa'. Achike family is a strict follower of catholic doctrine. Even the novel opens with the very scene of domestic violence where a catholic bible is thrown on brother Jaja's face for not accepting communion on the Palm Sunday. Where she proclaims-

Things started to fall apart when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère. (*Purple Hibiscus*, p.1)

Papa Eugene's outrageous behavior although being himself a culturally laden person disturbs the entire Achike family. This opening scene clearly portrays the issue of domestic violence in the African countries. Papa Eugene of Achike family is given utmost respect in the society as he is a culturally well-bred man in the society. When Papa Eugene throws the catholic bible over Jaja's face though he is not harmed but the holy book shatters the shelf of miniature statues accumulated and kept well on that shelf which indirectly symbolizes the breaking of trust and soul of Mama Beatrice. She suggests a submissive minor character it is quite evident from Kambili's statement-

"She usually speaks in a whisper." (*Purple Hibiscus*, p.123)

Mama Beatrice is playing a good women character concept; clearly showing victimization of domestic violence. She mutely accepts the dominance of Papa Eugene but refuses to break the relation. Even her several miscarriages due to domestic violence by her husband keeps her mouth shut but there is revengeful twist in the novel when she silently poisons her husband's tea and in a no attachment tone she declares that he is dead. This raises the bar high of her character that was earlier a victim and now a phoenix. She has been transformed to a radical feminist. She even confesses-

"I started putting poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi it for me, as her uncle is a powerful witch doctor." (*Purple Hibiscus*, p.290)

In most of the scenes it is evident that how African community and their family play a hypocrite role when a culturally well-bred wise man Eugene is applauded in the society for his wisdom and how his barbarian nature created a sense of havoc in his family members. As soon as Papa Eugene enters the premises of his house the family gets disturbed. He ill-treats his wife and asks her to be grateful to him as he has not chosen any other woman still to please him. Papa Eugene who is big in religion and narrow in his mind set. He child abuses his daughter and son. He beats them, torments them, and pours boiling water on them. They mutely accept every torturous acts and Papa Eugene crushes all their fundamental rights even. Gender-based violence leads even to Mama Beatrice's miscarriages. The statement –

"She spoke the way a bird eats, in small amounts." (*Purple Hibiscus*, p.20)

Shows the timidness of the secondary gender and the way she had that good woman attitude towards Papa Eugene. The African violent patriarchy shatters the bond of love which should embrace every family. Even the earlier instances of brutality by Papa Eugene towards his family symbolize his fanatical approach towards embracing cultural norms than family love. The domestic violence howls the members of the family especially Mama Beatrice day by day. While Kambili is reading bible in her room her brother Jaja and she hears the same noise

from her parent's room and after a while they find blood all over the floor and they scrub it which shows that how common and casual it has all become for Achike family to see the brutal violence of their father.

Kambili sarcastically says that-

"Papa deserved praise for not choosing to have more sons with another woman, of course, for not choosing to take a second wife. But then, Papa was different. I wished that Mama would not have compared him with Mr. Ezenadu, with anybody; it lowered him, soiled him." (*Purple Hibiscus*, p.20)

Although Kambili has seen most of the African men brutal but after meeting Father Amidi she starts embracing optimism, faith and power in lord. He encourages Kambili to open up. And when Father finds out that they are against the catholic norms he pours boiling water on Kambili's back. This somewhere or the other shows the deep patriarchal effect and pressure on both Eugene who is always on societal pressure of being an ideal cultural man and Kambili to be a good girl and mutedly accept every her father's punishments.

Papa Eugene is supposed to be the leader of his community. He acts as a stubborn vigorous force violently trying to oppress everyone now and then. He has also been called as a 'colonial product'. Treating women badly as a peasant raises the issue of female subjugation. In most of the African novels it is evident that the women are ill-treated by the patriarchy and are not given equal status as the men in society. It is also clear from Kambili's statement-

"I looked at Jaja and wondered if the dimness in his eyes was shame. I suddenly wished, for him, that he had done the *ima mmuo*, the initiation into the spirit world. I knew very little about it; women were not supposed to know anything at all, since it was the first step toward the initiation to manhood. But Jaja once told me that he heard that boys were flogged and made to bathe in the presence of a taunting crowd. The only time Papa had talked about the *ima mmuo* was to say that the Christians who let their sons do it were

confused, that they would end up in hellfire." (*Purple Hibiscus*, p.87)

The women are treated as a slave and sex object. These females have to obey rules laid down by this patriarchy and where females like Mama Beatrice tolerates every torments and tries to pacify her husband's deed in front of Aunt Ifeoma where she is an example of Radical upsurge of feminism.

"Eugene has not been well. He has been having migraine and fever," she said.

"He is carrying more than any man should carry." (*Purple Hibiscus*, p.255)

The justification is always ready in every statement of Mama Beatrice that why she is tolerating this in -human treatment by her husband. Two types of feminism had been talked here about; one is African feminism and the other is radical feminism. The former deals with tolerance and the other with the resistance and violent reaction towards male dominancy. Mama Beatrice is an example of African feminism. Her silence her tolerance and her surrender traits shows her concept of being an ideal woman. Kambili watches her mother silently.

The situation in Africa forces the readers to re-think the degrading condition of the women dwelling there and their survival instincts by obeying the male patriarchy. On the other hand there is Aunt Ifeoma; the epitome of radical feminism. She earns bread for her family and resistive towards any violent act from male members. She is quite quick in decision making. This is the very example of upsurge for women empowerment. Even her garden is full of *Purple Hibiscus* which again symbolizes that she is the inspiration of courage and faith. Jaja and Kambili finds peace at her place which they could not while living with their father. Her actions show that she is a decolonizing feminist quite liberal and radical in her approach. But the contrasting character is Kambili and Jaja's mother Beatrice who is always pacifying her husband's deed and ready to serve him till his death bed. Kambili's narration states that domestic violence was not at all a big deal for her father Papa Eugene-

We stood and watched Papa descend. Mama was slung over his shoulder... we cleaned up the trickle of blood, which trailed away as if someone carried a leaking jar of red watercolour all the way downstairs. Jaja scrubbed while I wiped. (*Purple Hibiscus*, p.32-33)

Even after Mama Beatrice's many miscarriages rather than choosing freedom she embraces her violent husband's side; she embraces her past life back. This shows that one can give up on Mama Beatrice as Aunt Ifeoma does because she was furious at Eugene for acting like an animal. Even after committing a sin he becomes sober and again commits it. Her statement justifies the above hypothesis clearly-

"Do you know Eugene pays the school fees of up to a hundred of our people? Do you know how many people are alive because of your brother?" that is not is the point and you know it," "Where would I go if I leave Eugene's house? Tell me, where would I go?" (*Purple Hibiscus*, p.255)

Jaja being a male member himself shows a decline and resistive force against his father's violent acts. He has always been a stubborn kid who disobeys most of his father's rules and norms. How he is contended to see his mother taking action against his father and poisoning him with rat poison. Somewhere deep inside his heart he always wanted to do the same and end his cruelty forever. He confesses the crime that he was the one to poison him and saves his mother from imprisonment. When the narration shifts from past to present we see Kambili is optimistic towards her brother's release from prison soon and how she and Jaja will again be visiting Aunt Ifeoma's place and especially her garden to collect *Purple Hibiscus*. Kambili's role is like a watchdog keeping an eye over everything taking place at home. Her mother is in deep agony even after vengeance she is guilty just because her son had been imprisoned for the crime she did-

"She has been different ever since Jaja was locked up, since she went about telling people she killed Papa... but nobody listened to her; they still don't. they think grief and

denial- that her husband is dead and that her son is in prison-have turned her into this vision of a painfully bony body,"(*Purple Hibiscus*, p.296)

Conclusion-

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's work *Purple Hibiscus* is a headshot fling on the menfolk's ego prevailing in the patriarchy of African community. The different phases of feminism are also shown in the work that is liberal and radical feminism. The concept of reel and real women is portrayed in *Purple Hibiscus*. The novelist has contrasted this concept with the portrayal of her two character's Aunt Ifeoma and the other Mama Beatrice; where on is radical in her approach and an independent women and the latter deals with surrendering attitude towards male patriarchy and is grateful to his husband Eugene. Women empowerment is visible through the actions of Aunt Ifeoma's attitude as she is a working woman; a professor at American University can take care of her family well and earn bread for them therefore she does not has to be dependent on any male member. But on the other hand Mama Beatrice is a household women who has to be dependent on Eugene for her every need which directly stiffs her back to take any decision that is against Papa Eugene. But by the end of the novel we find that even she gives up on her silent attitude and finally ends up poisoning her husband with rat poison quenching her thirst of revenge since years. The rising feminism and a warning to every male dominant society had been issued by the end of the work.

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