



WOMAN AND NATURE IN ADICHIE'S "PURPLE HIBISCUS"

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Abstract

Adichie establishes the significance of human-nature interaction through her work *Purple Hibiscus*. The female protagonist, Auntie Ifeoma is projected as a true lover of nature who shares most of her time with the plants in her garden in spite of being a lecturer at the University. The purple hibiscus in her garden attracts Jaja and Kambili at once, which appears as a symbol of hope and freedom for them. These rare colored hibiscus flowers bring in a new insight into them who longed to speak their minds. Compared to this, there were plenty of red hibiscuses in Kambili's house at Enugu, symbolic of the sudden visits of violence and bloodshed. Jaja connects the freedom his cousins had at their home to the presence of purple hibiscuses, which forces him to bring the stalks of these flowers to their garden at Enugu. Adichie also draws our attention to the healing capacity of nature. Kambili is physically and mentally damaged by her father's violent attacks, but her mental healing takes place when she reaches Nsukka. Adichie brings rain as a companion to Kambili helping her to wipe away her sorrows. Sun is introduced as a hope for a new beginning at Nsukka offering her many possibilities to escape her burdens in life. The freshness in the air, the edible scent of soil, everything takes part in curing the physical as well as mental distortions happened to Kambili. A great transformation in Kambili's attitude to nature reveals her change in attitude to life. Kambili had difficulty in interacting with insects during her early days at Nsukka. But the gradual development in her outlook towards nature and life happens when she begins to mingle with everything in nature. Kambili and Jaja depended on their father to decide upon their fate. But later we can recognize their growth as individuals capable of deciding upon their own fate. When Jaja decides to go to Nsukka without his father's permission Kambili seeks the support of nature and gets out of her fear. Nature is presented as conveyer of the pathetic condition of women suffering under patriarchy. Eugene Achike is a carefully developed character whom Adichie presents as a representation of dominance, in a male dominated society. The physical and psychological abuse suffered by the family are emphasized using objects of nature. Kambili compares Eugene's brutal kicks to bites from thousand giant mosquitoes. Kambili, also describes on the blooming of love between herself and Father Amadi. This fresh sensation of love is related to the freshness in the atmosphere. Thus, Adichie projects nature's role in every aspect of human life, be it a sad moment or a happy situation in life.

Key words: Patriarchy, fate, hope, abuse, violence

Ecofeminism highlights on the similarities between instances of oppression of women and the degradation of nature. Love, war, conflict, inequality between men and women and environmental concerns are among the dominant themes in most of Adichie's works. Ecofeminism voices the need for the liberation of nature and women and Ecofeminists argue that a strong parallel exists between the oppression and subordination of women in families and society and the degradation of nature. Adichie relates her women protagonists to nature and upholds female potentialities which the patriarchal structure has repressed. Man threatens the natural surroundings for his selfish needs. Likewise he exploits women and children to gain authority over them. A transformation from inactive to an active stage gradually becomes visible both in the case of women and nature as a reply to these exploitations.

Environmental pollution and deforestation are some of the major threats to nature imposed upon by man. Man blindly establishes his supreme authority over nature without thinking about its consequences. This action of man leads to nature's reaction which is far from the reach and control of human beings. Natural calamities like droughts, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis etc. make man's life impossible over nature. There is a relation between these responses of nature and women's struggles to overcome marginalisation in a sexist and patriarchal society. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* projects woman hood in a positive light. She also makes role models out of her female protagonists. Women's impassioned struggles to free themselves from the shackles of male dominated society hold us spellbound to Adichie's extremely powerful novels. But what makes it most alluring is the inseparable role of environment in conveying the content of the narrative.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the character Eugene Achike appears as the true representation of male brutality and dominance in a patriarchal society. His wife Beatrice and children Kambili and Jaja live in perpetual fear of him. He controls his family with clenched fists and sickens every member of his household. The different situations in the novel are

presented by the author by connecting to nature and the various forces of nature brings about a foreshadowing effect all through the narrative helping the readers understand the significance of those situations in the narrative.

Domestic violence is one of the major themes in *Purple Hibiscus*. Beatrice spends much of her time attending to domestic duties. While Beatrice does most of the domestic duties after Sunday, Eugene her husband enjoys his siesta, which reflects on the uneven situation for men and women in a patriarchal society. Eugene's brutal beatings and sexual abuse have caused Beatrice to undergo a number of miscarriages in her life. Kambili and Jaja scared to question their Papa whose punishments were unbearable for both. At one instance in the novel, the narrator describes on her Papa's uncontrollable anger which caused her mother to abort her pregnancy. Here Beatrice is compared to jute sacks of rice Eugene's workers brought in bulk at the Seme Border. Even though Beatrice lived a life of servitude, she had to undergo many traumatic experiences. Beatrice's weakened body slung over Eugene's shoulder is compared to jute sacks of rice. The narrator utilizes objects of nature to emphasise the severity of punishments imposed upon by Eugene on his wife.

Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers bought in bulk at the Seme Border. He opened the dining room door. Then we heard the front door open, heard him say something to the gate man, Adamu.

"There's blood on the floor," Jaja said. "I'll get the brush from the bathroom."

We cleaned up the trickle of blood, which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red watercolor all the way downstairs. Jaja scrubbed while I wiped. (Adichie 33)

Eugene always expected good results for Kambili and Jaja in their exams. When they fail to come up to his expectations he punished them brutally. When Kambili came up as second in one of her exams, she was asked to come downstairs and at this instance she felt that her legs had turned joint-free like long strips of wood. Her fear to face

Papa is emphasized by using objects of nature. She also had great difficulty in engulfing the food kept before her.

I did not, could not, look at Papa's face when he spoke. The boiled yam and peppery greens refused to go down my throat; they clung to my mouth like children clinging to their mothers' hand at a nursery school entrance. I downed glass after glass of water to push them down, and by the time Papa started the grace, my stomach was swollen with water. When he was done, Papa said, "Kambili, come upstairs" (Adichie 41).

Eugene's uncontrollable anger is visible at many instances in the novel. During one of those situations, he unleashes his anger on Kambili, his only daughter when she tried to protect Papa-Nnukwu's painting. She compares his kicking to bites from giant mosquitoes. Here we can identify the narrator's use of insects to emphasise such a violent action. At this instance, Eugene kicks his daughter Kambili with his slippers and she felt it like bites from giant mosquitoes when the metal buckles stung on her body. He started to kick me. The metal buckles on the slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones. Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire. The kicking increased in tempo... I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of painting...The stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy. Because I could hear a swoosh in the air... More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet. (Adichie 210-211)

When Kambili got discharged from the hospital Beatrice took her to Auntie Ifeoma's flat where she can easily recover from the physical and mental damage imposed upon her by her father. The narrator describes on the mixing up of rain and sun when they reached Auntie Ifeoma's place. Here rain symbolizes the sorrows and pains of Kambili and sun, a hope to recover from the present situation.

Rain splashed across the floor of the verandah, even though the sun blazed and I had to narrow my eyes to look out the door of Auntie Ifeoma's living room. Mama used to tell Jaja and me that God was undecided about what to send rain or sun. We would sit in our rooms and look out at the raindrops glinting with sunlight, waiting for God to decide. (Adichie 217)

The mental healing of Kambili happens immediately after reaching Auntie Ifeoma's flat. Kambili enjoyed the smell of freshness in the air as the rain stopped; giving way to sun. Nature's comfort is offered to Kambili at this instance in response to her discomforts at home. She easily gets out of her depression as she smells the freshness of air at Auntie Ifeoma's flat. She feels that nature is with her as a supporter to relieve her of the struggles in life. The sun, soil and the fresh air helps her to have a sensation of a new beginning that can give way to a tension free future.

I went out to the verandah and stood by the wet metal railings, watching the rain thin to a drizzle and then stop. God had decided on sunlight. There was the smell of freshness in the air, that edible scent the baked soil gave out at the first touch of rain. I imagined going into the garden, where Jaja was on his knees, digging out a clump of mud with my fingers and eating it. (Adichie 218)

Kambili experienced her first love after she reached Auntie Ifeoma's house. She was attracted to Father Amadi, a frequent visitor to Auntie Ifeoma's residence. The blooming of allamanda bushes in Auntie Ifeoma's garden represent the blooming of the love between Kambili and Father Amadi. Kambili enjoyed the smell of green leaves washed clean by rain, and everything around her appeared to have freshness, a beauty which is related to the fresh sensation of love with Father Amadi.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili stands as a representation of a delicate, suffering girl who accepts her father's punishments and goes after Father Amadi to experience her ever sought-after love and care. During one of her meetings with Father Amadi, she explains on her desire to become the water that he poured into his

throat. Water, which forms an important part of nature is used to exhibit the deep love of Kambili for Father Amadi.

He picked up the water bottle, drank deeply from it. I watched the ripples in his throat as the water went down. I wished I were the water, going into him, to be with him, one with him. I had never envied water so much before. His eyes caught mine, and I looked away, wondering if he had seen the longing in my eyes. (Adichie 226-227)

Eugene was a religious fanatic who was not ready to make any compromise related to religious matters. His wife and children fearfully followed his strict rules even when they were sick. They never used to eat anything before mass, but when Kambili had her period, she couldn't suffer her stomach pain and mama asked her to take panadol after eating a bowl of cornflakes. When Eugene found Kambili eating ten minutes before the mass he couldn't control himself and punished three of them, Kambili, Jaja and Mama brutally with his belt. The narrator compares Eugene to the Fulani nomads who herded their cows across the roads. In a male dominated society, men usually hold the supreme position and blindly believe that it is their duty to tame women and children, without letting them to move in a wrong direction.

He unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle...it landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy sequined sleeve on her church blouse. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back. Sometimes I watched the Fulani nomads, white jellabas flapping against their legs in the wind, making clucking sounds as they herded their cows across the roads in Enugu with a switch, each smack of the switch swift and precise. Papa was like a Fulani nomad— although he did not have their spare, tall body—as he swung his belt at Mama, Jaja, and me, muttering that the devil would not win. We did not move more than two steps away from the leather belt that swished through the air (Adichie 102).

Here we can very well identify Eugene behaving like a man who threatens his own natural surroundings, his own family, causing both physical and mental distortions upon his wife and children.

The three main female protagonists of the novel—Kambili, Beatrice and Aunty Ifeoma represent the different faces of nature. Kambili suffered all pains inflicted upon her by her Papa without any complaint. Hence she can be compared to the figure of the suffering mother earth accepting the damages caused by the various actions of human beings. Unlike Kambili, Beatrice suddenly explodes in the end of the narrative in return to all that she had to suffer. An unexpected change happens in her outlook towards life which destroys her enemy completely. Sometimes, nature responds in unexpected ways leaving behind very bitter experiences in man's life. Aunty Ifeoma is a true representation of the harmonious relation of man with his natural surroundings.

She is a widow who enjoys complete freedom in her family and who keeps her own identity in the society. Her boldness outshines even the most authoritative figure Eugene. It is she who takes initiative to develop self-awareness in Jaja and Kambili. She escapes and helps others escape sorrows in life. When a problem arises in her University she makes immediate plans to shift to America. Aunty Ifeoma holds the capacity to sublimate everything around her and thus represents the most peaceful, undisturbed part of nature.

Kambili never questioned her Papa even when he refused to grant her freedom to be with her grandpa. She had to experience very bitter moments in her life for being with her grandpa at Nsukka. Eugene poured hot water on her feet for hiding the truth of staying with Papa Nnukwu, a heathen which was considered as an unbearable mistake by him.

"You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it." He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears

streaming down his face. I saw the moist steam before I saw the water. I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second and then I screamed (Adichie 194).

Water which is an important part of nature and which forms the most part of a human body that maintains its health and energy is applied on to the human body with a negative intention to cause it damage.

Purple Hibiscus can be analysed by rearranging the order of the chapters which will help to build a meaningful interpretation. Reverting the order of the chapters can provide us with a meaningful interpretation of the narrative. An analysis should be done in the direction of Before Palm Sunday, Palm Sunday and After Palm Sunday; the events of Palm Sunday leading to Palm Sunday and ending in After Palm Sunday.

It was Beatrice's miscarriage before Palm Sunday caused by her husband Eugene that leads to Jaja's defiance. His anger becomes uncontrollable and he gradually develops into a different person. Jaja was an obedient child who feared to move away from his father's commands.

Adichie in her novels identifies various sources of female oppression and have found out that they are more abused in the realm of their own family and by those whom they love most. She uses her novels as instruments of self-awareness and healing for the abused women who may have undergone many sorrowful situations in their marital life. Eugene's brutal beatings and mental torture have caused Beatrice to undergo miscarriages on many occasions, leaving her body constantly sapped of energy. Beatrice recounts her pain-filled experiences when she meets her sister-in-law and her daughter Kambili.

I got back from the hospital today. The doctor told me to rest, but I took Eugene's money and asked Kevin to take me to the park. I hired a taxi and came here... "You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly." She sounded as if she were

talking about someone else, as if the table were not made of sturdy wood. "My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it." Mama shook her head slowly. A thin line of tears crawled down her cheeks as though it had been a struggle for them to roll out of her eyes (Adichie 248).

While she was at Nsukka Kambili used to enjoy everything in nature. Back at home, she gets sickened with the smell of fruits and flowers confined to the high walls when the gate man Adamu opens the compound gates. This shows her difficulty to interact with her surroundings in the presence of problems at home. The painful incidents that happened before Palm Sunday made Jaja a disobedient, indifferent boy. The blooming of purple hibiscus meant the blooming of freedom for Jaja. He believes that his father will certainly receive the right punishment for his deeds.

The scent of fruits filled my nose when Adamu opened our compound gates. It was as if the high walls locked in the scent of the ripening cashews and mangoes and avocados, it nauseated me. "See, the purple hibiscuses are about to bloom," Jaja said, as we got out of the car. He was pointing, although I did not need him to. I could see the sleepy, oval-shaped buds in the front yard as they swayed in the evening breeze.

The next day was Palm Sunday, the day Jaja did not go to communion, the day Papa threw his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines (Adichie 252-253).

In *Purple Hibiscus* Eugene appears as a pious man who adheres to religious beliefs and customs. Bible, which is a sacred book and which has to be handled giving due respect according to Christian beliefs is used as an instrument to inflict pain and to impose punishment by Eugene. In spite of being a strong believer of Christianity he expressed his contempt for Christianity through his violent actions. He disregarded the gospels with his unpleasant behaviours and attitudes. Abortion is regarded as a great sin according to Christianity. But we can identify Eugene using the missal as an object to cause many abortions in his wife's uterus.

In a patriarchal society, men take up the most powerful role and control women and children. Likewise here, Eugene considers it his duty to punish his wife and children to follow a guiltless life. When the children find Eugene himself as guilty it becomes unbearable for them and Jaja gradually decides to punish his father for his crimes. His determination to punish his father becomes visible in his development as an independent individual and in his gaining of courage at Aunt Ifeoma's house. Even Kambili, his sister is highly surprised at his development. Jaja's act of killing the chickens without effort at Aunt Ifeoma's house shows his determination to face and respond to his father's punishments.

I followed Jaja out to the backyard, watched him hold the wings down under his foot. He bent the chicken's head back. The knife glinted, meeting with the sun rays to give off sparks. The chicken had stopped squawking; perhaps it had decided to accept the inevitable. I did not look as Jaja slit its feathery neck, but I watched the chicken dance to the frenzied tunes of death. It flapped its gray wings in the red mud, twisting and flailing. Finally, it lay in a puff of sullied feathers. Jaja picked it up and dunked it in the basin of hot water that Amaka brought. There was a precision in Jaja, a single-mindedness that was cold, clinical. He started to pluck the feathers off quickly, and he did not speak until the chicken had been reduced to a slim form covered with white-yellow skin (Adichie 235).

Eugene's family becomes totally disintegrated after Palm Sunday when Jaja decides to disobey his father. The sudden disturbance in the family and in nature occurs together highlighting man's integrated existence with nature. We can identify many such situations in the novel beginning with Eugene's act of throwing his heavy missile towards Jaja on Palm Sunday. Adichie aptly places the statement, Things started to fall apart in the very beginning by drawing from Achebe's most famous work *Things fall apart*. This also signifies the many disturbances that followed the one on Palm Sunday. The narrator considers this particular event as leading to great, irrevocable changes in their lives. Jaja exhibited only a kind of indifference to such an action as if he had already decided to

face everything in life. But for Kambili, this event has caused the deformation of everything related to them.

A great damage occurs in the house in relation to the disturbances in the natural surroundings which appears as nature asking man to lead a calm life with his fellow beings, otherwise be ready to receive punishment.

Everything came tumbling down after Palm Sunday. Howling winds came with an angry rain, uprooting frangipani trees in the front yard. They lay on the lawn, their pink and white flowers grazing the grass, their roots waving lumpy soil in the air. The satellite dish on top of the garage came crashing down, and lounged on the driveway like a visiting alien spaceship. The door of my wardrobe dislodged completely. Sisi broke a full set of Mama's china (Adichie 257).

Kambili and Jaja develop courage to take up decisions themselves after Palm Sunday which becomes visible in Jaja's determination to visit Aunt Ifeoma's house once again even without seeking Eugene's permission. At this instance Kambili draws the support of nature and remains calm instead of being frightened at the thought of Eugene's punishments. "I stood still in front of the staircase, my hands trembling violently. Yet I did not think to close my ears; I did not think to count to twenty. Instead, I went into my room and sat by the window, looking out at the cashew tree" (Adichie 261).

Adichie presents her suffering female characters as enjoying a calmness and a peace of mind after winning over their oppressors. The narrator describes Beatrice's pleasant state of mind after killing her cruel husband. "Mama tightened her wrapper, then went to the windows; she pushed the drapes aside, checking that the louvers were shut to keep the rain from splashing into the house. Her movements were calm and slow. When she spoke, her voice was just as calm and slow. "I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor" (Adichie 290).

Here we can identify Beatrice's development as a courageous woman capable of deciding her own fate rather than letting others to decide. She shuts the louvers without allowing rain to splash into her house. This act of Beatrice shows her growth as an individual capable of protecting herself and her surroundings.

Adichie utilizes Palm as a dominant symbol to associate woman and nature, their combined effort to eradicate male domination and women's subordination. In the first chapter, Mama makes her entry with fresh palm fronds wet with holy water and places them on the dining table. Palm fronds can symbolize victory of good over evil. In Christianity, these palm fronds distributed on Palm Sunday is made into the shape of a cross which has to be kept in houses until the next Ash Wednesday. These palm fronds will be burned to ashes and used to make a cross on the forehead of the believers of Christianity. Thus the Christians follow the Christ and his cross in order to win over the evil forces.

Likewise in *Purple Hibiscus*, Mama would knot the palm fronds in sagging cross shapes and hang them beside their family photo, which would stay there until next Ash Wednesday and later get burned to ashes. Papa helps to distribute the ash every year. Mama holding the palms and Papa the ashes foreshadows the end of the narrative where Papa becomes ashes by being poisoned by Mama who thus gains victory over him. The children, Jaja and Kambili, share this victory by supporting Mama, which can be seen in the character Jaja who willingly goes to prison for his Mama's crime.

Eugene although strongly believed in Christianity and who was well aware of the virtues and vices, used to punish everyone at home even for simple mistakes. Even though he expressed his paternal love and care for his children, he forced them to follow his strict rules at home. Kambili and Jaja underwent a bitter childhood and these experiences remained in their unconscious about which Kambili even had nightmares. She compares it with the situation after her Papa's death, which lets her to have freedom in life. "Silence hangs over us, but it is a different kind of silence, one that lets

us breathe. I have nightmares about the other kind, the silence of when Papa was alive" (Adichie 305).

Children couldn't enjoy freedom, and they suppressed their emotions in his presence. Hot tea, given to Kambili by Papa in the name of 'love sip' was a source of torment for her.

A love sip, he called it, because you shared the little things you loved with the people you loved. Have a love sip, he would say, and Jaja would go first. Then I would hold the cup with both hands and raise it to my lips. One sip. The tea was always too hot, always burned my tongue, and if lunch was something peppery, my raw tongue suffered (Adichie 8).

Mama was their only comfort zone and they spent most of their time with her. In the first chapter, the narrator, Kambili explains how her Mama was forced to hide her emotions and feelings in her husband's presence. When Eugene broke her figurines she might have felt great pain but she never expressed it on her face. At this instance Kambili compares the black purple color of her swollen eye with the color of an overripe avocado. Her eyes might have become swollen due to the punishment she received from her cruel husband. "The last time, only two weeks ago, when her swollen eye was still the black-purple color of an overripe avocado, she had rearranged them after she polished them" (Adichie 10-11).

The character Beatrice can be compared to nature. Human beings use their power to bring nature under their control. Likewise Eugene was trying to bring Beatrice under his control by exerting pressure over her. Exploitation of nature by human beings can finally result in its response in uncontrollable ways, like volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, drought, floods etc. which can cause great harm to human life and property. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus* Beatrice's suppression of her emotions finally result in bursting out of her anger which becomes uncontrollable. She poisons her husband when his cruelties become unbearable. And thus destroys her enemy without leaving a trace of him in the kingdom he reigned.

Nature shares the sorrows of the children in *Purple Hibiscus*. Eugene asks his children, Kambili and Jaja to get the sticks themselves in order to receive punishment from him, and they chose the branches of whistling pine because they were malleable and not as painful and stiffer as that of gmelina or the avocado. Women and children play the role of puppets in patriarchal society and are forced to act in accordance with the orders of men. The punishments become even more severe when they themselves are forced to choose objects for receiving it.

In Christianity there is an implication that nature is created for the human beings and thus have a right to exploit nature. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the narrator describes on the blooming of red hibiscuses, which Mama used to decorate the church altar. There are other people in her prayer group who plucked flowers for their selfish needs. This shows man's dominance over nature, in contrast to Mama, a lover of nature and religion who offers the flowers she carefully planted to Christ. "It was mostly Mama's prayer group members who plucked flowers; a woman tucked one behind her ear once—I saw her clearly from my window. But even the government agents, two men in black jackets who came some time ago, yanked at the hibiscus as they left" (Adichie 9).

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* can also be analysed based on womanist theory which aims at the empowerment of women. Alice Walker makes a direct relation between womanism and feminism in her work *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* by claiming, Womanist is to feminist as Purple to lavender. What she tries to convey is very clear—she considers womanist as a synonym for a feminist. As both womanism and feminism are concerned with struggles against sexism and racism by black women both can be brought under an umbrella.

Womanism projects the idea that women should love themselves and other women by adoring and appreciating all aspects of womanhood. Womanists should prefer female characteristics to those of men without being hostile towards men. They share many

characteristics with feminists, like the similarities between the colors purple and lavender, even though both are undeniably different.

Feminism has traditionally been a middle class white women's movement which fought for suffrage rights for white women and didn't emphasise the need for granting black women social equality. Black women not only had to suffer both gender based inequality and injustice but also discrimination based on skin color. So womanism is black feminism that emphasises on the need for wiping away the multifaceted oppression suffered by black women.

Black women are positioned within structures of power which is different from the situation of white woman. Womanism has the aim of ensuring the peaceful survival of men, women and children.

As Sunitha noted (2014), In *Purple Hibiscus*, the colour 'purple' symbolises freedom, courage and transformation. Adichie uses the motif of purple colored hibiscus to provide a sense of hope and development for every African woman. She also emphasises on women's capacity to survive in the face of domestic violence, senseless brutality and ceaseless threats to their lives. In addition to this, Adichie's characters Kambili and Jaja represent powerful children who can contribute to the positive transformation of the Nigerian society.

Beatrice and her children relentlessly struggle to achieve freedom to think and act without the control of Eugene. The huge walls surrounding their house lock the scent of the flowers and fruits in their garden. Likewise Jaja and Kambili had to lock up their emotions and feelings in order to avoid creating disturbances in their home, which also ensures that the violence that occurs in the family is not known to the outer world. This also shows the power of a male dominated family.

Red hibiscuses grew in plenty in Enugu which symbolises the frequent visit of violence and bloodshed in the Achike family. Eugene's fanatic adherence to the catholic principles makes him to react violently even to simple mistakes committed

by his wife and children .Even when Kambili falls sick he punishes her brutally for breaking the Eucharistic fast.

Red Hibiscuses and Eugene's red satin pyjamas reflect the aggressive violent behaviour of the character Eugene and reminds us of the pain, anger and oppression suffered by Beatrice and her children

In contrast to Eugene, Father Amadi is compared to the gentle blue wind who helps Kambili to transform into a new individual and teaches her to enjoy the simple things in life .Here the blue wind indicates the calmness and solitude represented by Father Amadi whose caring, protecting nature helps Kambili to develop into an independent girl.

Jaja and Kambili notices the purple hibiscus in Auntie Ifeoma's flat and the rare colored flower helps Jaja to believe in possibilities that can add a new color to their lives. The common red hibiscuses represented the unchangeable dull, boring life at Enugu, whereas the deep purple hibiscuses which were rare indicated an emergence out of their frustrated, distorted selves and a hope for mental healing both for their mother and for Jaja and Kambili.

Womanists love other women and their own selves; likewise in *Purple Hibiscus* we meet Auntie Ifeoma who loves herself and other women .She holds most of the qualities of a true womanist .She lives an independent life at Nsukka and provides a helping hand to everyone she meets in her life.

Auntie Ifeoma's close mingling with environment can be seen at many instances in *Purple Hibiscus*. She takes good care of her garden besides working at the University. She spends most of her leisure time with the flowers and trees in her flat."Aunt Ifeoma continued watering the row of tiny banana-colored flowers that clustered in bunches" (Adichie 144).

Auntie Ifeoma is the one who plants the rare colored hibiscus in her garden that attracts Jaja and Kambili.Jaja and Kambili had to repress their feelings while at Enugu and could only respond to their Papa with their spirits. But, life at Nsukka with

Auntie Ifeoma and her children brought about a tremendous change in the lives of Kambili and Jaja.Earlier, Jaja feared to deviate from his father's instructions but later we can identify a changed person in Jaja who starts taking decisions independently.

"We are going to Nsukka. Kambili and I," I heard him say. I did not hear what Papa said, then I heard Jaja say, "We are going to Nsukka today, not tomorrow. If Kevin will not take us, we will still go. We will walk if we have to"(Adichie 261).

Kambili and Jaja were not allowed to sing songs in between their prayer at home. But when they reached Auntie Ifeoma's place, they found the family members singing Igbo praise songs along with the rosary. At first they adhered to their father's principles as they were scared to break his orders. But later they joined their cousins in singing the Igbo chorus songs during their prayers which again gives evidence of their self-discovery and maturity. Eugene was proud about his quiet children Jaja and Kambili who never raised their voice anywhere.

"I wanted to tell Mama that it did feel different to be back, that our living room had too much wasted marble floor that gleamed from Sisi's polishing and housed nothing. Our ceilings were too high. Our furniture was lifeless: the glass tables did not shed twisted skin in the harmattan, the leather sofas' greeting was a clammy coldness, the Persian rugs were too lush to have any feeling"(Adichie 192). Auntie Ifeoma brings up her children without discrimination on gender lines and assigns all sorts of domestic duties to them. Adichie challenges the society that treats girls and boys differently. Jaja and Kambili experience something different at Nsukka that reforms them. They develop an increased awareness and their outlook towards life changes which becomes clear when Kambili expresses her intension to convince her mother about the desire to change the interior design of her house.

Beatrice and her children were restricted from expressing their feelings at Enugu. She brought my report card a few days later and I had come

first. Mama did not sing her Igbo praise songs; she only said, "Thanks be to God" (Adichie 215).

Later we can identify a great change occurring in Kambili and Jaja after spending many days with Auntie Ifeoma and her children. They learn to socialise, and find it easy to talk and laugh without difficulty. "I laughed. It seemed so easy now, laughter. So many things seemed easy now. Jaja was laughing, too, as was Amaka, and we were all sitting on the grass, waiting for Obiora to come up to the top." (284-285)

Their outlook broadens, and they start taking independent decisions which is visible in Jaja's refusal to go to communion on Palm Sunday. Jaja hopes on the blooming of purple hibiscus in their garden before Palm Sunday which is also a hope for gaining freedom from the existing situation.

Their interaction with the insects in nature also shows their senses were confined to the space inside the huge walls at Enugu and could not mingle with the beautiful nature outside. But the short pleasure trips they enjoyed with their cousins helped them to be a part of the natural world. In spite of that, their senses opened up to the outer world enjoying the touch, smell and sight of everything in the non-human world.

He walked up slowly, holding something that turned out to be a grasshopper. "It's so strong," he said. "I can feel the pressure of its wings." He spread his palm and watched the grasshopper fly off (Adichie 285).

Kambili was also surprised to find herself making others laugh. She never expected that she can mingle well with others, especially with someone like Amaka who always found fault with like her behaviours and attitudes. "I had never heard that before. I saved it for later, to ruminate over and over that I had made her laugh, that I could make her laugh" (Adichie 266).

Kambili's development as a social being and the cleansing of her mind is indicated by the pouring of clean rain without dust. The removal of floating leaves and twigs from the rain water shows the removal of unnecessary fears and disturbances

from the lives of Jaja and Kambili. The emergence of sun after the rain indicates a new beginning of fearless lives for them.

Adichie's bold characters like Auntie Ifeoma represent determined women who hold the potential to bring about an upliftment in the lives of Nigerian women who are doomed to suffer subjugation.

The rains came then, pouring down in strong sheets that made it impossible to see the garages across the yard. The sky and rain and ground merged into one silver-colored film that seems to go on and on. We dashed back to the flat and placed buckets on the verandah to catch the rain water and watched them fill rapidly. All the children ran out to the yard in their shots, twirling and dancing, because this was clean rain, the kind that did not come with dust that did not leave brown stains on clothes. It stopped as quickly as it had started, and the sun came out again, mildly, as if yawning after a nap. The buckets were full; we fished out floating leaves and twigs and took the buckets in (Adichie 266).

Women like Beatrice suffer all pains in their marital life as they are made to believe that they are inferior and cannot bring up their children without the support of a man. When Auntie Ifeoma comes to their house at Abba, she argues with her on the need for a companion in a woman's life. "A woman with children and no husband... How can a woman live like that? Mama's eyes had grown round, taking up more space on her face... A husband crowns a woman's life, Ifeoma" (Adichie 75).

Beatrice silently accepted the pain inflicted upon her by cruel Eugene hiding it from everyone outside. At one instance she gives a false explanation to Father Benedict who notices her tiredness. Actually she was trying to protect Eugene's good image without letting the disturbances of the family leak to the outer world. "I'm fine, Father. It's only my allergies because of the weather, you know, the clash of harmattan and rainy season" (Adichie 30). Here, the clash of harmattan and rainy season signifies the

brutal beatings of Eugene without even considering Beatrice's pregnancy.

In contrast to Beatrice, Aunty Ifeoma turns out to be a courageous woman who accepts her life as a widow and lives a happy life with her children. She takes good care of her old father and also gives mental support to Beatrice and her children. Even when she is accused as the killer of her husband by the people of his home town, she neglects it and develops a peaceful existence for her family. She appears as an independent, educated, courageous woman who believes in chances that can bring in a positive effect in everyone's life.

Aunty Ifeoma ignores pointless accusations imposed upon her by the members of her husband's hometown, unlike women who cry over silly matters in life.

The people in his *umunna* said he left money somewhere and I have been hiding it. Last Christmas, one of the women from their compound even told me I had killed him. I wanted to stuff sand in her mouth. Then I thought that I should sit her down, eh, and explain that you do not kill a husband you love, that you do not orchestrate a car accident in which a trailer rams into your husband's car, but again, why waste my time? They all have the brains of guinea fowls (Adichie 74).

Adichie suggests on the capacity of women to lead a happy and contented life even without a husband through the character Aunty Ifeoma. When Beatrice talks on the need for the support of a husband, Aunty Ifeoma responds by stressing on the possibility of a new beginning with the end of marital life. She doesn't believe in the care and protection a woman dreams about from a husband. Instead she considers marriage as a license for man to abuse women for their selfish needs. "Six girls in my first-year seminar class are married, their husbands visit in Mercedes and Lexus cars every weekend, their husbands buy them stereos and textbooks and refrigerators, and when they graduate, the husbands own them and their degrees" (Adichie 75).

A true intension to develop an awareness about their identity in characters like Kambili, Jaja

and Beatrice is identifiable in Aunty Ifeoma. She is exact opposite of self-centered women who doesn't even share their time for others. She gives good care for Jaja and Kambili with her meagre income when they visit her place and treat them as their own family. She always wanted to provide the best for them and worried on the limitations of her house. But Kambili and Jaja always enjoyed completely at Aunty Ifeoma's place and remembered on the lack of freedom at Enugu. "Kambili, is something wrong with the food?" Aunty Ifeoma asked, startling me. I had felt as if I were not there, that I was just observing a table where you could say anything at any time to anyone, where the air was free for you to breathe as you wished" (Adichie 120).

Even with all comforts in their house they couldn't have freedom to talk or laugh whenever they wished to. Kambili always wondered on the easy talk and laughter that floated everywhere in Aunty Ifeoma's house. "Laughter floated over my head. Words spurted from everyone, often not seeking and not getting any response. We always spoke with a purpose back home, especially at the table, but my cousins seemed to simply speak and speak and speak" (Adichie 120).

Kambili and Jaja gradually borrowed Aunty Ifeoma's attitude towards life. They remained as silent and disciplined children until they reached their cousin's home, although with great dislike. Driven by an impulse to respond to the violation of their rights, Kambili and Jaja borrows the ideals of Aunty Ifeoma who was projected as a heroine in their minds, who could talk and laugh fearlessly in the presence of Eugene, their father.

We can identify them developing as new individuals freed of all barriers. "That night, I dreamed that I was laughing, but it did not sound like my laughter, although I was not sure what my laughter sounded like. It was cackling and throaty and enthusiastic, like Aunty Ifeoma's" (Adichie 88).

Aunty Ifeoma was never ready to make any compromise on her duties as a daughter even when she was struggling to make both ends meet in her life. She gives good attention to Papa- Nnukwu

when he falls sick and also encourages her children and their cousins to give support and care for him.

Aunty Ifeoma took Papa-Nnukwu to the University Medical Centre in the morning and came back shortly afterward, her mouth set in a full pout. The lab staff was on strike, too, so Papa-Nnukwu could not have the tests done. Aunty Ifeoma stared at the middle distance and said she would have to find a private lab in town and, in a lower voice, said the private labs jacked up their fees so much that a simple typhoid fever test cost more than the medicine for the fever...She left Papa-Nnukwu to rest and went out to buy the medicine that Doctor Nduoma had prescribed, worry lines etched in her forehead"(Adichie 155).It is she who teaches Kambili to respond to difficult situations in life. "Aunty Ifeoma's eyes hardened — she was not looking at Amaka, she was looking at me...Kambili,have you no mouth? Talk back to her!" (Adichie 170).

Amaka always irritated Kambili over simple reasons and Kambili always remained silent accepting her mistreatments.But Aunty Ifeoma helps her to express her dislike towards Amaka's words.

Her desire to protect her sister-in-law from the violent behaviour of her husband is visible when Beatrice visits Aunty Ifeoma's flat after getting discharged from the hospital. She doesn't give a positive reply to Eugene's phone call who wanted to take Beatrice back home.

She cried for a long time. She cried until my hand, clasped in hers, felt stiff. She cried until Aunty Ifeoma finished cooking the rotting meat in a spicy stew. She cried until she fell asleep, her head against the seat of the chair. Jaja laid her on a mattress on the living room floor(Adichie 249).

Beatrice becomes mentally depressed with Eugene's physical abuse and she cries heartbroken when she reaches Aunty Ifeoma's residence. She appears as a weak, fragile woman in the beginning of the novel, but she turns out as an extremely courageous woman at the end of the narrative.Her difficulty to imagine living without the care and protection of her husband forces her to remain

attached to him even in the face of unbearable oppression.

Aunty Ifeoma also helped Jaja to express his disagreement with something that hurts him. She compares him to the stubborn King, Jaja of Opobo and teaches him the necessity of becoming defiant at the right time. Kambili, wonders at his sudden growth and the broadening of his shoulders within two weeks at Aunty Ifeoma's house which symbolise the broadening of his views on life. "His shoulders seemed broader, and I wondered if it was possible for a teenager's shoulder's to broaden in a week"(Adichie 154).

She also tried her best to understand the emotions and feelings of Kambili and her brother Jaja which was a new experience for both. "Why do you look that way, *o gini?*" she asked. "What way, Aunty?" There are tears in your eyes."I felt my wet eyes. "Something must have flown into my eyes."Aunty Ifeoma looked doubtful(Adichie 165).

Adichie presents her character Aunty Ifeoma as a true representation of motherhood. She never failed to transmit the ideals that she followed to her children.

As mentioned earlier, she tried her best to provide good attention to her father when he fell sick even if she couldn't find a solution to her financial problems."I don't have enough fuel in the car to reach even Ninth Mile, and I don't know when fuel will come.I cannot afford to charter a taxi. If I take public transport, how will I bring back a sick old man in those buses so packed with people your face is in the next person's smelly armpit?" Aunty Ifeoma shook her head. "I am tired. I am so tired . . ."(Adichie 149)

Her children also exhibits their kindness towards their grandfather when he is ill. The intensity of their desire to take good care to him is visible at many situations in the novel."Papa-Nnukwa is sick?" Amaka asked shrilly. "Mom, when did you know?" "You should have told us!!Amaka shouted. "When can we go to Abba, Mom?" Obiora asked, calmly, and at that moment, as in many others I had observed since we came, he seemed so much older than Jaja (Adichie 149).

A strong bond of love existed between Amaka and her grandfather which attracts Kambili who wished to experience such a deep and secured relationship with Papa-Nnukwu. "Amaka and Papa-Nnukwu spoke sometimes, their voices low, twining together. They understood each other using the sparsest words. Watching them, I felt a longing for something I knew I would never have" (Adichie 165).

Aunty Ifeoma defends Papa –Nnukwu her father who was regarded as a heathen by everyone else. "Papa-Nnukwu was not a heathen but a traditionalist, that sometimes what was different was just as good as what was familiar" (Adichie 166). This shows her capacity to understand others; unlike her brother Eugene who neither listened to his father nor considered his feelings. Eugene's dislike towards him and his beliefs is visible at many instances who command his children to be back in fifteen minutes after visiting their grandfather's house. "Kambili and Jaja, you will go this afternoon to your grandfather's house and greet him. Kevin will take you. Remember, don't touch any food, don't drink anything. And, as usual, you will stay not longer than fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes" (Adichie 61).

Conclusion

Gaard's book *Ecofeminism : Women, Animals, Nature* underlines the hope for a better condition for women in future which can be established by unifying the protest of every oppressed groups which can lessen the strength of the opponent. Aunty Ifeoma appeared sensitive to the pains and sorrows of other women and everyone around her. She wanted to bring in comforts into their lives with whatever she had. As a character, she plays a very significant role in the novel to exhibit the essential qualities needed for a woman to survive in the face of difficulties. The three dominant characters in the novel attain maturity and develop a sense of identity at the end of the narrative due to the character Aunty Ifeoma who reconstructed their mental structure.

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