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Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the renowned Nigerian novelists of the 21st century. In Nigeria, generally woman is a victim of suppression and violence. Adichie shows it in almost all of her novels, and courageously depicts the forms of violence heaped upon African women. Adichie has carved a niche in the minds of the readers through the publication of her first debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). Her powerful language shed a little on black women's sufferings at the hands of men who treat them shabbily in cold-blood. Her voice is so powerful which gives a clarion call against the subjugation of woman on a string of patriarchal society. In general, women are not only suppressed, oppressed by their husband's alone but also by the society in which they live on. This paper explores the portrayal of domestic violence and its effects as depicted in the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. It also delves deep into how this violence affects the female gender which makes them a symbol of silence. Adichie portrays the violence which affects the Nigerian society through the eyes of the female characters. Her writings show a strong call against domestic violence and the treatment of women as commodities. Basically, domestic violence is committed against women and children in various parts of the world. It is one of the prevalent social injustices imposed on women in Nigeria.

Keywords: Violence, Victim, Patriarchal Society, Subjugation, Silence, Commodities, Culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the most important Nigerian novelists who magnetize the readers through her debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* published in 2003. The novel has received a huge attention and wide acclaim among the readers as well as critics which leads it to receive many awards including Commonwealth Writer's prize in 2005. Her other works are *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), *Americanah* (2013), *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014), *Notes on Grief* (2021). Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* is a robust work which screens the dehumanizing tendencies of the men folk as evident in the character of Mama (Beatrice) who eventually exposes the African conception of an ideal woman and keeps dumb even in the face of humiliation, oppression, and brutality because to be perceived as a good woman in the patriarchal society.

Domestic violence is among the most under-reported form of crimes afflicting women and children in the present scenario. It is a kind of abuse or exploitation of both genders who may feel that such violence is acceptable or condoned by the community. In the novel *Purple Hibiscus*, physical and sexual violence play a vital role through the victims of Kambili and her mother, Beatrice. Even though we live in the 21st century, many forms of violence heaped upon women which are ineradicable by them. Furthermore, religion and culture suppressed women in all over the world, and they do not break the chain of patriarchy which makes them remain silence under it.

Abuse in relationships can take many various forms, including physical, sexual, religious and emotional abuse. This paper explores the cruelty of domestic violence perpetrated against woman in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The story of the novel is set in post-independence Nigeria, but the action takes place primarily at Eugene Achike's house. Eugene is a prosperous

businessman but a callous husband who often physically and emotionally abuses his family. In the beginning of the novel itself, one can feel the physical violence through the eyes of Kambili who is the protagonist of the novel. She says, "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion..." (3). This line makes the readers understand the sense of disintegration and turmoil among the family members. Kambili describes the abuses of his own father who turned into a cold-blooded man by a fanatical brand of Catholicism and how he uses the institution of religion as a tool of oppression to his wife and his family members.

A family crisis is the first major event in *Purple Hibiscus*, and it reappears frequently in the story. Eugene is seen as an ardent Christian to his religion but an atrocious fellow to his wife and children. So, the opening lines of *Purple Hibiscus* are a signal to threat of co-existence among family members because of the lack of free space assigned by the patriarchal society. In the novel, readers can understand the first episode of violence through the character Jaja, the eldest son of the Achike family, when his father throws the missal at Jaja by screening his angry for not being participated in the catholic tradition of receiving Holy Communion on Palm Sunday. Kambili stated the incident: "He picked up the missal and flung it across the room, toward Jaja. It missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass "etagere", which Mama polished often" (7). His anger shatters the "figurines" on the "etagere" (a piece of furniture) which symbolizes the broken heart of everyone in the family except Eugene. Though, Jaja himself is a victim of his father's tyrannical and abusive nature, he cares for his mother (Beatrice) and sister (Kambili). So, the reader can clearly understand the brutal characteristics of Eugene through

his violence.

The breaking of "figurines" is a metaphor for Beatrice's frail condition. She spends a little time with the figurines after her husband's inhuman torture because it gives ease and solace to her painful heart. Thus, the figurines stand for the submissiveness and weakness of Beatrice. Beatrice plays a passive role by receiving brutal deeds from her husband. When Jaja discovers that his mother is pregnant, he expresses his concern for the unborn baby, and he plans to protect him from the brutality of his father. Kambili says: "Jaja closed his eyes... We will take care of the baby; we will protect him. I knew that Jaja meant from Papa..." (23).

Thus, Beatrice is portrayed as a representative of silence and subordination of men folk. Meanwhile, Beatrice performs most of the domestic duties even on Sunday, but Papa enjoys his siesta and ignores her pain and sufferings. This also highlights an uneven position of men and woman in the society. So, Mama's obligations place her squarely in the domestic arena and her world completely controlled by him. So, the systems of any oppression extract its power and authority from the submissive act of its victims who often admit their image and vulnerable position.

So, it is no surprise that when aunty Ifeoma wants to take her out but Mama does not go with her because of the fear to her husband which makes her to stay within the four walls of her home. She tells Ifeoma that "You know Eugene likes me to stay around" (80). Therefore, the domestic space reserved for mother is a site of patriarchal oppression. Ogundipe-Leslie asserts: "Oppression at the matrimonial level as one of the highest which retain them in suppression for their entire life" (26).

Eugene wants to visit father Benedict with his children and his wife without much care on the physical condition of Beatrice's health. Beatrice feels like death

warmed up because of her early pregnancy symptoms, and wishes to stay in the car. She tries to convey her physical illness to her husband, but she does not tell him because of the fright words of her husband. She says, "My body does not feel right... but Papa asked "Are you want to stay in the car?" This ardent word makes her submissive and immediately she says, "I will come with you. It is really not that bad" (29). Hence, Papa's word is final, and he disregards the feelings and burdens of his own wife. So, Beatrice hangs at the periphery of Papa's world without questioning. Despite being unwell, she is compelled to go with her husband. So, she controls her vomiting sensation until she returns to her home. It shows the pathetic condition of woman being suppressed to showing their seedy state, even to her husband because she is forced to remain a caged bird with painful heart.

In one episode, Beatrice received brutal beating like a jute sack of rice from her monster husband. He continually beats her, and goes to the extent of throwing the table on her belly which makes her nothing to save her unborn baby. Beatrice recounts the harsh experience to Ifeoma who lives in Nusukku: "I got back from the hospital today... 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 get out of here eyes" (248).

After her discharge from the hospital, Eugene invites the priest to his house for cleaning the house and praying for his wife's sin of disobedience. He requests the priest that the holy water cleans the family from the mother's sinful act of refusing to visit the priest after mass, despite the miscarriage caused by the beatings of him. Kambili's self reflection for this cruel attitude of her father makes her to say, "I did not think, I did not even think to think,

what Mama needed to be forgiven for” (36).

Beatrice is a representation of silence, subordination, and is “gas lighted” by her husband. She endured countless physical abuses from her husband without any reason. In the novel, the frail Beatrice is severely abused by her husband, which causes her to lose the unborn baby. Every woman is expected to stoop and keep in silence by the patriarchal society which earns her the derogatory moniker of “noble woman” in the discriminatory society. Women are indoctrinated that they are “weaker sexes,” so they endure marital violence without criticizing the patriarchal system. Even though Beatrice has endured many gruesome events in her life, she is a remarkably gentle woman who never speaks badly of her spouse. This heartless experience of Beatrice made the readers into a “Zero at the bone”. Though, women do all the domestic activities in the family, and sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, women are ignored by their family members even during sickness.

In the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, children also encounter domestic abuses from her fanatic father. Kambili and Jaja strictly follow the study timetable assigned to them by his father Eugene. They never disobey the rules created by their cruel father because Eugene as a man of control and power exercises his male authorities over them without knowing the basic desire of his children. Unlike other children, both have absence of free space for enjoyment of their day to day life. They feel unfit to move with their neighbours because it is hatred by his father who allots the space within the four walls and not even in the whole house. They learn to obey, and to submissive but at the same time, they forgot themselves to relish like others. The horrible picture of Eugene often provokes and reminds them to be in silence. Kambili and Jaja not only felt their crushed feelings and subjection, but also felt a fear about the unborn baby

of his mother who may encounter the same problem in future. Eugene appears to be a dictator, tyrant, and meticulous in maintaining order which sucks the freedom of all in the family. Kambili states:

Kambili was written in bold letters on the top of the white sheet of paper, just as Jaja was written on the schedule above Jaja’s desk in the room. I wondered when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born or wait until he was a toddler. Papa liked order. It showed even in the schedules themselves, the way his meticulously drawn lines, in black ink, cut across each day, separating study from siesta, siesta from family time, family time from eating, eating from prayer, prayer from sleep. He revised them often.... When we were on vocation, we had a little time, a little more time to read newspapers, play chess, and listen to the radio. (23-24)

Because of this, Amaka, her cousin, may believe that Kambili and Jaja are “odd,” prompting her to inquire with her mother about whether anything is wrong with them. Kambili has been psychologically damaged by Papa's harsh and authoritarian traits as a traditional patriarch, and she believes that everything other than what is not on Papa's schedule is wrong. Her personal development has been wrecked psychologically, and as a result, she was naturally unable to socialize or experience the joy of relationships because of her silence. Due to a lack of connections, Kambili, who always strove to win her patriarchal father's favour and appreciation, ended herself depressed and alone. Both the children, Kambili and Jaja, felt the freedom of independence when they moved from their native place to Abba, where they see the world of heaven, because there they do not follow any rules for conversing with others. They enjoy speaking and laughing amidst the group. She says, “In Abba, Jaja and I had no

schedules. We talked more and sat alone in our room less..." (59).

Eugene uses religious ritual over his wife and children to whip them into fearful submission. The wife's subordinate position makes men so powerful, and thinks that they are head of the family and sucks the source of independence of woman. Beatrice is weak without a voice and unable to protect herself from an abusive husband because she does not have any financial independence and unable to question her husband. Beatrice, walks with a limp, speaks in whispers, and repeats her husband's opinions and she cannot survive on her own feet; hence, her resolution is to remain in an abusive marriage.

She can only respond to her predicament by crying alone. In Beatrice, we see a character that honestly plays her social responsibilities well even though she is brutally abused by her husband. She remains silent for the sake of her children. She serves a lot to her husband and children diligently and dutifully as a goodwife and mother. Kambili observes: "She cried for a long time... she cried until she fell asleep..." (24). It can be argued that patriarchy always tries to control the domestic space and denied women the chance to enter into the public sphere.

These kinds of brutal violence are not only experienced by Beatrice herself but also her children too. When they were in primary school until they were five years old, both of the kids endured terrific experiences of physical abuse at the hands of their father. Eugene's favourite method of corporal punishment was using a long stick. Jaja cleverly gave him the stick that had been soaked in cold water, because it made them feel less pain when they were severely battered by their father. In an occasion, Kambili was discovered by his father to have spent the time in the same room where his heathen father resides in Nsukku, which adds fuel to the fire. Thus,

he gets anger and punishes Kambili for disobeying the religious rules made by him. So, without giving it any thought, he fills the bathtub with boiling water and pours on Kambili's feet to atone for her wrong doing. He had become a religious zealot which closed his eyes into blindness. Furthermore, he enjoyed the screaming sound of her daughter. He blindly believes that boiling water removes all kinds of sin; meanwhile, he forgets that it burns the body of his daughter. Kambili narrates the experience and says, "I stepped into the tub and stood looking at him... He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet... The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed" (194). Thus, Eugene represents the autocrat who subjected his family to numerous sorts of brutality.

Kambili's silence, fear and pain of her father's torture are heart breaking and leaves the readers with a desperate hope of rescue in the last moment. Having been beaten and controlled by Eugene for years, Beatrice has lost her own voice, and she becomes helpless and speechless, even when she witnesses her children's sufferings and pains. Kambili herself accepts the inevitable situation without questioning the ethics of her father's decisions. So, she stands out as a passive victim like her mother.

On several occasions in the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, Papa beats both his wife and his children frequently. The silence resides when the presence of Eugene, and no one in the house speaks against him. They cannot find the right situation because they are always afraid of Eugene. So they could not reveal the painful experience to anyone; their pains make them passive and weak.

Another violent outburst is seen from Eugene while he discovered a portrait of his pagan father in the hands of Kambili.

Eugene thought that his heathen father portrait also has the sin. So, he brutally punished and beaten her daughter until she almost dies. He is successful in carrying out these acts of violence against his wife and children who lack the capacity to question against him. He uses the institution of religion as a tool of oppression and punished her daughter Kambili heartlessly. She cries and says:

He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English. The kicking increased in tempo... The stinging was row mow, even more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking... A low voice was saying, "Please, *biko*, please". More stings. More slaps. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet. (210-11)

The protagonist, Kambili has experienced severe trauma as a result of her father's maltreatment. She is impacted not only by the abuse that her father imposes on her openly but also by the inexplicable abuse, she watches from her mother. Her father, Eugene, has an impact on her on both an emotional and physical level. Normally, children who experience physical assault may also get the psychological ramifications in their mind. The impact of such atrocities carried out in front of young children by their parents in their own homes has a negative impact on their cognitive development. Kambili and Jaja are such characters who experience more psychological as well as bodily pain from her fanatic father Eugene. Kambili is also psychologically traumatized by the way her father hits her mother, and she has a secret death wish for him. She despises her mother's weak submission and occasionally questions herself, why she does not shield her kids from their terrible father. Kambili practices an enforced silence and follows a world full of violence because she was unable to grow

up in a tranquil environment. Thus, the character Eugene represents a domineering patriarch who dominates the household using a combination of strict rules, strict schedules, and ritualized performance by others.

Therefore, domestic violence happens when one partner knowingly harms a family member, whether physically or mentally. As a representation of a despot, the male antagonist Eugene is revealed to be a heinous abuser of his wife and kids. His family members are subjected to physical and psychological abuse as well as dominance and subjugation. Adichie is a skillful writer who disparages woman like Mama and suggests that women should shout at their oppression in an effort to confront of the conscience of their oppressors. Yetunde Akorede asserts: "The subjugation of women is prevalent in all areas of Africa as the men hide under the transparent canopy of religion and culture to suppress women" (196). So, women's subjugation is not only peculiar in Nigeria but also obtainable throughout the country.

In the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, readers can discern the cruelty of domestic violence even in the present day society. Thus, the novel *Purple Hibiscus* shows light on oppression and brutalization happened in the patriarchal society. The novel urges the readers to stop family members from abusing one another in the home. It also encourages readers to reflect on some societal issues, and inculcates in them an egalitarian, feminist-driven sense of the need to defend one's identity. The phrase "empower women" is frequently used, yet it receives less attention in terms of its actual implementation and overall success. The eradication of violence, access to choice, economic independence, and educational resources are necessary for the empowerment of subaltern women. This study has examined the key causes of domestic violence against women as they are depicted in Adichie's fictional universe. In conclusion, domestic abuse is

a very severe problem in recent times, and it is vividly seen in *Purple Hibiscus*. Everybody is affected differently by it, and it can come in a wide variety of forms and shapes.

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