

**Domestic Violence in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus***

Savitra Chandrakant Thombare  
Research Student,  
Department of English,  
Shivaji University, Kolhapur  
&  
Dr. A. M. Sarawade  
Associate Professor,  
Department of ENGLISH,  
Shivaji University, Kolhapur

**Abstract**

*The ongoing debate about women and their place in society is never ending. The present research work deals with the image of women in the novel Purple Hibiscus. The attempt in this essay would be to reveal the violence against women, their place in the family. It seeks to reveal how their voices are silenced and their emotions are suppressed. Further it focuses on their revolt against the patriarchal society. Patriarchy is the integral part of the African society, where women for many years lacked any space of their own. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has depicted the agonies and anxieties of African women in her novel Purple Hibiscus. The novel reflects the oppression and exploitation of women in patriarchal system. It portrays the plight of women both psychologically and physically in their own homes, where they are considered to be 'the second sex'. The novel is an excellent feminine document. Purple Hibiscus is the deep study of the oppression and suppression of feelings of woman.*

**Key words:** domestic violence, patriarchy, *Purple Hibiscus*, etc.

Violence can be regarded as any form of oppression leading to injuries either physically or psychologically on a person. When one observes women's lives, one can notice that they are disciplined, constrained, controlled and even at times battered in order to make them conform to the imposed norms of society. In the process, the woman's mental makeup as well as her body undergoes suppression.

The focus of the present article is to throw light on the agonies, pains and sufferings of women in the context of Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus*. Further it discusses the issue of domestic violence and its effects on the body and mind of women. The article, moreover,

aims to display how women are compelled to tolerate the domestic violence. As Wikipedia notes, domestic violence is violence or other abuses by one person against another in a domestic setting, such as in marriage or cohabitation. Domestic violence can also involve violence against children, parents or the elderly people. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie focuses on the pains of women and their silent tolerance of the violence against their body and mind. Women's problems at home are also vividly depicted by Adichie in the novel.

The story of the novel revolves around the family of fifteen year old girl Kambili. Her mother Beatrice is a caring wife, loving mother and suffering figure. She is not an educated woman. Beatrice represents those women who are uneducated and economically reliant on their husbands. Her husband Eugene Achike is a wealthy businessman and owns several factories. Publicly he is a charitable person but at home he is headstrong and religious-fanatic person. He is a converted Catholic and his mind is poisoned against his traditional religion with false ideas. Whenever his wife and children refuse to follow the practices of his professed religion, he uses to beat them severely. It creates a tense atmosphere in their home. They silently tolerate his physical and verbal abuse. Beatrice does not have freedom in her life. She has to listen a lot and speak less. Her life is controlled by her husband. Her long silences speak out her agonies and miseries. Beatrice revolts against Eugene silently by poisoning him. But she never dared to revolts against him openly and never exposes the violence that Eugene exerting upon her and children. Violence at home, as already pointed out, is part and parcel of many women's lives and cannot be illustrated normally as most women do not reveal their experience. She does not reveal those hidden or invisible experiences of violence within the home, the physical and psychological oppression by her well established and successful husband. It also focuses how women develop a sense of inferiority.

The story is told from the point of view of Kambili and she describes her mother as follows:

Mama did not mind, there was so much that she did not mind (19).

And also:

She did not usually say so much at one time, she spoke the way of bird eats in small amounts (19).

It suggests that she lives her life with a long silence; she does not express her feelings openly. She never speaks against the violence of her husband and silently tolerates it as if her duty. There are many incidents of domestic violence in the novel. Once Eugene beats her for

refusing to meet Father Benedict since she does not feel well. Eventually Beatrice loses her pregnancy. The incident is narrated in the following manner:

Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door... I sat down, closed my eyes, and started to count.... I was at nineteen when the sounds stopped...Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice..."There's blood on the floor," Jaja said. (33)

In this way mother and children bear the violence meekly. They do not defend to their mother and themselves. Eugene cannot bear the thought of her refusing to meet the servant of god, so he cruelly beats her until she loses her baby and has to be admitted in the hospital.

In another incident Eugene breaks the table on her belly and again she faces miscarriage. Thus she is physically assaulted several times by Eugene and she meekly suffers everything. There is no cordial conversation between Eugene and Beatrice and she never exposes the lunatic religiousness of her husband to anyone in order not to spoil the prestige of her husband. Beatrice does not mind for many things, she does not think about herself and her grief is suppressed in her heart.

Her eyes have become vacant without any emotions just like those mad people, wandering at the garbage dumps (34). This suggests the pitiable situation of Kambili mother. Thus Beatrice is a weak, meek and unhappy woman. The great Indian female writer Mahashweta Devi in her Raman Magsaysay Award Acceptance Speech in 1997 says:

The ocean of her eyes  
Is dried  
With the tyrannies of life,  
Now she is not  
Afraid of death,  
She saw the extinction  
Before the end of life.

The above lines depict the pitiable and lifeless situation of women, where they have no feeling and emotions because their life is a living death. The same happens with Beatrice. Beatrice is reduced to an object. This status of an object entails a loss of identity and individuality. She is a weak, powerless and submissive woman. Beatrice is a housewife and confined within the space of domesticity, the kitchen. Beatrice takes solace in polishing the

glass figurines. Her rigorous lifestyle is filled with chore such as cleaning the house, cooking the food and attending the guest with false smile. Beatrice is just enslaved herself in these things. She can select the color of the curtains but cannot take any other important decisions. She suffers silently the violence against her body. She suffered several miscarriages and cannot protect her children inside the womb from the violence. She does not know how to fight or resist, rather she does not want to resist her husband. While conversing with Aunt Ifeoma Beatrice says,

A husband crowns a woman's life' (75).

This suggests her submissive nature and a sense of inferiority.

Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* points out that "male control and power over women in all spheres of life in what constitutes patriarchy and therefore one need to eliminate it, but this is not easy as patriarchal ideology says Millet has made it certain that men always love the dominant roles while women love the subordinate roles. By such process of conditioning men are able to gain the approval of the women they oppress. Their oppression is carried out through institutions rationalize and justify women's subordination to men and in most cases women develop a sense of inferiority" (62).

Beatrice is the epitome of love, sacrifice and tolerance. She is an ideal wife and very loving and caring mother. She believes that she cannot exist outside the marriage institute. Their two children, Kambili and Jaja, have to suffer a lot at the heavy hands of Eugene for such trivial things as, for not coming first in the class, for not been selecting as the best student in the school. They are also punished for their short stay at the home of their grandfather, for the grandfather did not convert himself to Christianity rather loves and follows traditional ways of old African religion. For this, Eugene hated his father to the extent that he does not allow his children to meet him. So he harshly punishes them by pouring hot water on their feet. But both Kambili and Jaja develop a bond of affection with their grandpa. They realize the truth of life and get a new outlook about life. Kambili secretly keeps her grandpa's portrait in her bedroom. But unfortunately, Eugene finds it out and goes violent. In that temper he severely beats Kambili until she is to be hospitalized. He believes that all the ancestral rituals lead a man towards hell, so he tries to protect his children and wife from it. But he never realizes the agonies of crushing the souls of his wife and children. His religious extremism destroys their life and badly affects their development.

Thus Adichie has depicted the psychological and physical trauma that women undergo. The subjection and oppression that women face is the major theme of the novel. It is the understanding of the women's dilemma in patriarchal society, where it is very difficult for a woman to find space and freedom. Here the writer suggests that women need to overcome

the acts of violence. They need to display the right form of aggressiveness when it is essential; otherwise they turn into madness. Their economical independence is the only way they can gain self-respect and dignity in the society.

To conclude I would like to write that women should be strong enough to fight against the violence that they undergo physically and mentally.

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