

**Exploring Violence, Trauma and Recovery in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*:
A Feminist Perspective**

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Abstract: This paper looks at the issue of violence and trauma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The story is about a Nigerian family ripped apart by religious and political tyranny, with Kambili, the protagonist, being subjected to physical and mental abuse at the hands of her father. The research addresses the generalised perception of violence and trauma as isolated episodes, whereas the long-term repercussions on individuals and communities are often ignored. The paper looks at how Kambili's horrific experience affected her memory and how these traumatic memories are passed down through generations. Kambili's experience is representative of the abuse encountered by women and girls in a patriarchal society. The paper also contends that appreciating and highlighting a woman's contributions can be empowering. We can empower women by recognising and amplifying their voices as a society. Moreover, literature may support processing and recovery from trauma, as Kambili escapes from her terrible family life by reading books, which gives her comfort. Kambili can find her own voice and perspective and start to recover from trauma. The paper aims to present a Challenge to the prevalent patriarchal narratives and create a space to build a more equitable society.

Keywords: Identity, Memory, Patriarchy, Religious, Trauma, Violence

Introduction

Women in general, regardless of rank, class, age, caste, or religion, face violence in almost every aspect of their lives, whether at home, school, work, on the street, in government institutions, or

during times of conflict or disaster. It is a global attack that takes place in communities. Physical, emotional, sexual, economic, and psychological abuse are examples of such violence. Family members, as well as outsiders, frequently carry out this abusive behaviour. According to bell hooks, in patriarchies, men often condone violence against women so as to exert control over them and their families. In her words:

Patriarchy, like any system of domination (for example, racism), relies on socialising everyone to believe that in all human relations, there is an inferior and a superior party, one person is strong, the other weak, and that it is, therefore, natural for the powerful to rule over the powerless. To those who support patriarchal thinking, maintaining power and control is acceptable by whatever means. (hooks 142)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a prominent contemporary writer from Enugu, Nigeria. She was born to Igbo parents on September 15, 1977, and is now a member of Africa's third generation of female writers. Adichie earned numerous academic distinctions while attending high school. She obtained her MA in African Studies from Yale University in 2008. She was a Hodder fellow at Princeton University from 2005 to 2006. She divides her time between Nigeria and the United States, where she often gives writing seminars. Her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), highlights how women strive for their identities and struggle for survival in a violent and patriarchal society (of Nigeria). The novel depicts the anguish and resilience of three female characters—Kambili Achike (the protagonist), Beatrice Achike (her mother), and Aunty Ifeoma (Kambili's paternal aunt)—as they navigate through complex family dynamics and societal expectations. Adichie credits writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye for a “mental shift” in her perception of literature. She said she “realised that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature. I started to write about things I recognised” (Adichie). That is probably why her female characters are believable and have been portrayed realistically in *Purple Hibiscus*.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the reader is provided with the stories female characters tell. These narrators illustrate a variety of concerns regarding violence against women. This study examines the themes of violence, trauma, and healing in Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, *The Purple Hibiscus*. The story describes a post-colonial Nigerian patriarchal society in which Kambili, a fifteen-year-old girl, and her mother, Beatrice, have been physically and psychologically abused by her father, Eugene Achike. While well-liked in society, Eugene is a charismatic but violent Catholic patriarch who acts as a fanatically devout tyrant at home. In terms of colonial ideals and patriarchal tone, the characters' lives as they contend with the impact of Western religion, education, and patriarchal traditions imposed by colonial forces and how these principles lead to Kambili and her mother face violence and trauma throughout their lives as a result of their direct personal encounter with patriarchy's corrupting influence and psychological abuse.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie describes several forms of discrimination faced by women. Women are tortured and subjected to emotional distress. Through Kambili's eyes, we observe how a complete family has modified their lives under a repressive and unpredictable patriarch. The novel reveals the complex realities that Kambili and the other female characters experience, as well as their responses to these problems. Heather Hewett, in her article "Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the Voice of the Third Generation," she says that through Kambili, the author introduces her readers to a family blessed with material wealth but cursed by violence. As the story unfolds, the daily events of their troubled lives—their mother's multiple miscarriages, Jaja's deformed little finger—remain unspoken secrets" (H81).

Violence in Patriarchy

Male dominance and the imposition of conventional gender roles are depicted as characteristics of a deeply rooted socioeconomic system. Patriarchy has a socioeconomic basis that remains hidden. This is especially seen in Eugene, whose authority moulds the family dynamics. He utilises his religious zeal to exert his patriarchal power over his wife, Beatrice, and his children, Kambili and Jaja. "Things fall apart"—with these words, Kambili begins the account by referring to a change from stability to

chaos frequently sparked by internal and external influences. It denotes a failure of the relationship system or framework. This expression indicates the breakdown of the family's outward unity and the emergence of underlying tension as a result of patriarchal rules and violence. "Things Fall Apart" and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe serve as models for understanding how violence contributes to Eugene's family's disintegration. According to Cheryl Stobie, "Eugene's absolutist intolerance of women's biological functions is exhibited when he beats the family with his belt as Kambili has consumed food with medication for menstrual pain, thus breaking her fast before Mass" (Stobie 427).

As Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, Eugene moulds his family from his point of view and is unconcerned with the needs of the other family members. Both Eugene and Okonkwo have authority over their children and strive to mould them into what they view as virtues. In order to shape the destiny of the children, Eugene uses violence and forces Kambili and Jaja to adopt the Catholic faith as a model for a civilised lifestyle. Eugene's vision of the Catholic faith is highly dogmatic and dictatorial, and he uses forces to impose his views on his children. Family harmony and individual well-being are irreparably harmed by the patriarchal system and the violence that upholds it. Multiple acts of violence bolster Eugene's patriarchal dominance. He uses physical violence to chastise his family members and retain his power through his own abusive behaviour. This allows him to maintain absolute control over his family through terror. The characters are greatly affected by patriarchy and brutality. Beatrice, Eugene's obedient wife, assimilated his position and suffered silently under his dominance. Their children, Kambili and Jaja, retain their father's anger scars. "Part of the problem afflicting the Achike household is not just the frequent vicious rages of its head but also the stifling silence imposed on its members. Since no cruelty Beatrice and her children have to endure is ever spoken about, Kambili and her brother Jaja are reduced to communicating with their eyes and reading the language of bodies" (Hillman 99). The novel depicts the protagonists' struggles to break free from the patriarchal and violent cycle. The contrast between Kambili's exposure to a more open-minded and caring household at Aunt Ifeoma and the stifling setting at home is apparent. Ifeoma defies established gender roles and offers Kambili and Jaja a fresh outlook. The prospect of

breaking free from patriarchal restrictions and creating a more equal future is desirable to Kambili and necessary for her personal growth.

Trauma and Its Manifestations

Trauma describes the overwhelming, upsetting situations that trigger a person's strong emotional, psychological, and physical reactions. It can arouse powerful emotions, including fear, anxiety, anger, and sadness. Kambili and her mother are often terrified, oppressed, and driven to psychological breakdown by a strong, dictatorial masculine figure, Father Eugene. Fear and tension haunt their troubled memories and sordid situations. Even in his absence, Eugene's imposition of rules on her family implies that their daily activities, such as meals, prayers, studies, and even free time, are planned according to a strict schedule. The timetable strictly controls the family's lives. The imposition of such a timetable disturbs Kambili and Mama's feelings of oppression and terror. When Kambili's father violently belts her, she experiences humiliation and psychological disturbance. "It was like the hot water Papa had poured on my feet, except now it was my entire body that burned" (Adichie 211). The characters have been subjected to violence or abuse, most commonly at the hands of their father. Her complete body experiences the agony that at first only impacted the feet and continues to haunt her physical, mental, and emotional state. This depicts the cascading impacts of trauma. However, through exposure to other viewpoints, helpful connections, and a different familial setting, Kambili is able to recover and reclaim control over her life gradually. Her journey from a helpless bystander to an independent person demonstrates the possibility of recovery, development, and resiliency despite the devastating effects of trauma. Cheryl Stobie, in her work "Dethroning the Infallible Father: Religion, Patriarchy and Politics in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" says:

The reader is invited to experience this loss of absolute faith, but not of love, through the point of view of the young narrator as she journeys to an adult's understanding of the malaise at the heart of her family. While the quest for psychological autonomy is a universal one to which any reader will respond, the novel is also firmly located in a Nigeria where this

particular family is presented as a microcosm of a nation and church that is in need of reform.
(Stobie 423)

Recovery and Resistance

“It has never happened like this before. He has never punished her like this before” (Adichie 214). These lines denote a turning point consistent with the ideas of resistance and recovery. Kambili is aware of the brutality her father has shown her. On her way to rehabilitation, Kambili must gradually push back against her father's authority. She begins to doubt his authority and the propriety of his actions as she learns more about the magnitude of the abuse. This internal resistance intensifies as she gains the courage to defend herself and voice her own thoughts. By not following the restrictions imposed by her father's authority, she reclaims her agency and identity through her resistance. Aunty Ifeoma is crucial to Kambili's recuperation and resistance. Her home becomes a safe haven for Kambili, providing an alternative setting where open dialogue and critical thinking are welcomed. Moments crucial to her transition include her developing understanding of her father's violence and the contrast between his authoritarian and Aunty Ifeoma's loving atmosphere. It is intriguing to observe the role that her time in Nsukka played in helping her discover her voice and resist repressive influences in her life. This illustrates how supportive connections and different viewpoints may encourage personal development and resistance.

Ifeoma's loving and accepting disposition serves as a counter-example to her father's authoritarian behaviour. Ifeoma supports Kambili in rejecting her father's dominance and following her road to healing by exposing her to a setting where her voice matters, and she is encouraged to think freely. Much of Kambili's recuperation and resistance comes from her contact with the Ifeoma family, her cousin, and Nsukka. It symbolises her coming to terms with her father's unusual conduct and the start of her path to recovery. The mentoring role Aunty Ifeoma plays, and the supportive environment she creates are crucial to Kambili's metamorphosis because they enable her to find her voice and defy the repressive forces that have ruled her life.

Feminist Perspective on Healing

The character of Mama (Beatrice Achike) exposes the African concept of an ideal woman as one who keeps quiet in the face of humiliation, victimisation, and brutality in order to be perceived as a good woman. She is a prime example of how Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* challenges men's propensity to dehumanise women. "She is trapped not only by the brutal customs of a Christianity that exercises stifling control over mind and body but also by her inability to recognise the negative effects of Igbo patriarchy" (Hillman 97). In her book, Adichie depicted two kinds of women: the actual woman (Aunty Ifeoma) and the excellent woman (Mama). In this tale, women attempt to debunk this age-old legend by standing up for themselves and displaying their power in the face of adversity. Ifeoma, Eugene's sister, is attractive, dedicated, financially secure, sturdy, and self-assured. Despite the fact that her late husband's relatives cause her discomfort for a variety of reasons, she is not provoked. She stands up for herself to show that a woman can stand up to a dominant male; when men resign from their obligations, women assume leadership roles and carry out the duties that were historically ascribed to men. They defy conventional gender stereotypes and expectations by demonstrating their capacity to manage various problems and duties traditionally ascribed to men. Following her father's death, Kambili ensures that the family's various business concerns are well maintained. In this tale, women attempt to debunk this age-old myth by standing up for themselves and displaying their power in the face of adversity.

Kambili recognises that, in light of her brother's imprisonment and her mother's psychiatric instability, it is her responsibility to make decisions for the family. She appeared feeble and weakened at first. However, she is subsequently prepared to adjust to current circumstances in order to deal with problems at home alone. Aunty Ifeoma and Amaka challenge stereotypes by seeking education and creative expression, demonstrating that women may transcend limited societal norms. Their tales demonstrate how recovering agency and pursuing personal improvement are essential components of the healing process. *Purple Hibiscus* emphasises themes of agency unity, perseverance, and empowerment. The story demonstrates the transforming potential of women supporting and enabling

one another in their collective search of self-discovery, freedom, and healing from the scars of patriarchal oppression by showing the characters' journey to recovery.

Conclusion

Adichie expertly reveals the lingering wounds of violence while crafting a narrative of survival and empowerment through the experiences of the protagonist, Kambili, and her family. Kambili's path from persecution to the release of her voice acts as a beacon of hope amid the dark landscape of trauma. Adichie's depiction of Kambili's development exemplifies the transformative force of autonomy and self-discovery, echoing the stories of numerous women navigating patriarchal systems to recover their identities. The *Purple Hibiscus* has the capacity to act as a catalyst for recovery and transformation. Kambili highlights the transforming power of stories by providing the voiceless and the oppressed with courage. The work of Adichie is proof of the value of narratives in amplifying the voices of the marginalised and opening the door for rehabilitation, change, and healing. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* examines violence and suffering and provides a gripping narrative that contradicts standard conceptions by investigating the long-term effects of trauma on individuals and communities.

Kambili's story shows the long-term consequences of abuse, demonstrating how trauma memories may span generations. Furthermore, Kambili's capacity to find peace in reading demonstrates storytelling's therapeutic potential. Her escape from her harsh reality through reading represents the function of literature in trauma processing and recovery. Kambili begins on a journey of healing and perseverance as she discovers her voice and perspective. This paper also underlines the need to empower women by acknowledging and amplifying their efforts. Kambili's story demonstrates the difficulties experienced by women in patriarchal civilisations, emphasising the importance of opposing dominant narratives in order to promote a more egalitarian society. *Purple Hibiscus* is a strong prism through which to analyse the complexities of violence, trauma, and empowerment. Stobie further says, "The novel is not, however, an example of Afro-pessimism. Adichie pays tribute to the spirit of survival, to the power of humour and intelligent criticism and the

possibility of social reform” (Stobie 428). We pave the path for a more compassionate and just world by understanding the long-term repercussions of trauma, supporting women's voices, and embracing literature as a tool for rehabilitation.

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