

A.Meenaz Banu- Domestic violence in chimamanda nagozi adichie's purple hibiscus(2019)

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VANIYAMBADI - 635 752.**



Mavas Publication

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Published In First



Published by

Mayas Publication®

Tamil Nadu | Kerala | Karnataka | New Delhi

Maya1984Kannan@gmail.com

www.mayaspublication.com

www.eijfmr.com

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**Book Name: ONE DAY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGE,
LITERATURE, MEDIA AND CULTURE**

ISBN: "978- 93- 89507- 00-3"

Edition: First

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Islamiah Women's Arts and Science College

ISBN: "978- 93- 89507- 00-3"

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN CHIMAMANDA NAGOZI ADICHIE'S
PURPLE HIBISCUS**

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Women and children suffer physical, emotional and psychological injuries at the hands of a violent partner, companion, husband and father. However, the psychological and emotional effects of domestic violence have enormous consequences, which could be very destructive. The degradation and humiliation of women could be traced back to the pre-colonial times. Women suffered violence and were regarded as property owned and managed by men and society in general which also supported a patriarchal cultural milieu. However, marriage provided a firm ground for the manipulation, humiliation and violation of women's freedom and self-worth. Thus, women perpetually remain slaves to husbands who do not consider their feelings or opinions in matters concerning them. Imbua observes that:

...there are several forms of servile marriage in serving instances when a woman, without the right to refuse is promised or given in marriage on payment in money or in kind to her parents or guardian. In most servile form of marriage, the husband perceives the wife as a property over whose productive and reproductive powers he exercises absolute control. (14) The above quotation gives an insight to the plight of women in the union called 'marriage'. This male figure dominance often times leads to violence of different forms which often affects both the women and children. Hamilton further explains that "the spiritual authority of the husband had a necessary corollary: the inferiority of his wife. This inferiority stemmed from two sources: first the nature of women suited them to a life of submission, second her inferiority was inherent in her role as a help mate... The man was not created for the woman but the woman for the man"(68). It thus becomes clear that women struggle with the problem of domestic violence which hinders their efforts in finding a place and identity in society.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Purple Hibiscus. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2003.

In narrating the story of Kambili, Jaja, Beatrice, and the extraordinary events that affected their lives, Adichie presents and explores a number of important issues rather intricately. Her characters are very complex and credible in nature. On the question of domestic abuse, for instance, Eugene is seen by people as a religious, generous, loving and compassionate person; thus, he receives many recognition from people as well as other organizations. His family however has a contrary view; ironically, as his victims, they are surprised by his dual personality and good will towards people.

To friends and relatives, Beatrice, Kambili and Jaja are living a good life free from stress and poverty. However, behind the enviable walls of their house, provided by their benevolent businessman, father, and husband, Eugene Achike, life is difficult and less enjoyable. Their lives revolve around routine timetable which controls their activities and lives, and finally subdues them. The pressures and emotional torture at home have tremendous impact on the children who also deal with the social and emotional ups and downs of adolescence, peer relations, and petty rivalries in society. The novel takes a different turn when Eugene's widowed sister (Ifeoma) invites the children to spend time with her family at Nsukka. The visit to Aunty Ifeoma's home begins a series of life-changing experiences with far-reaching consequences, which changed Achike's family forever. At their aunt's home, Kambili and her brother (Jaja) discover a life full of love, freedom, and

free from any form of brutality and psychological pains. The visit helps them realize their self worth and capabilities; at the same time it exposes the fact that children grow well mentally and physically in a home filled with love and understanding. Such was the case of aunt Heoma and her children (Chima, Amaka and Obiora). Hence, the possibility of having a family where members are allowed to express their views encouraged Jaja to challenge his father when he refuses to receive communion on a Palm Sunday against his father's directive. Jaja's action causes a major conflict in the family; in the end, the most decisive actions come from the least expected sources. The children's aggressive nature emanates as a result of their father's overbearing attitude and constant molestation. On the other hand, Eugene's wife, Beatrice is not able to cope with the beatings, mental (psychological pains) and humiliation meted on her by her husband; she poisons her husband and chooses to accept what fate brings. Jaja takes blame for his father's death and is imprisoned. Beatrice's mental condition deteriorates and she is taken care of by Kambili, her eighteen year old daughter who has become independent and confident.

Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili are all victims of domestic violence. Battery and physical abuse have become part of the Achike's family experiences. Beatrice Achike is a quiet, responsible and obedient wife who was battered, molested, dehumanized and punished by her husband. Eugene treats his wife like a slave and subjugates her to beating in order to enforce obedience in their relationship. This comes in disguise of religious rules that leave his family without an alternative to live a liberal life. When Beatrice or his children fail to adhere to his instructions, he resorts to violence to instill obedience and fear in them. Thus, the fear of Eugene Achike becomes a night mare to his family. During one of their visits to father Benedict after a church service, Beatrice who is also called Mama opts to stay in the car as a result of her poor health. Her request is turned down with a threatening question that forced her on her feet. "Are you sure you want to stay in the car? Papa asked. My body does not feel right" she mumbled. I asked if you were sure you wanted to stay in the car" (37)? Eugene's stare threatens Beatrice to join them against her will in order to avoid the huge consequences of expressing her opinions. Beatrice's total obedience in visiting father Benedict did not stop her husband's brutality against her expressed opinion. At home, he beats and leaves her with pains and bruises all over her body. Kambili narrates:

When I heard the sound, swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand carved bedroom...counting made it seem not that bad. Sometimes, it was over before I even got to twenty. I was in nineteen when the sounds stopped. I heard the door open...mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory worker bought in bulk at the same border...we cleaned up the trickle of blood which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red water colour all the way down stairs. (41)

Jaja and Kambili are not left out in their father's brutality; when Jaja declines to take Holy Communion on Palm Sunday for personal reasons, he later receives his father's punishment. Jaja confesses his reason for declining: "The wafer gives me bad breathe...And the priest keeps touching my and it nauseates me" (14). In reaction to Jaja's decision, Eugene, "picked up the missal and flung it across the room, toward Jaja" (15). The children suffered many physical threats and abuses in the hands of their father. During one of their visits to the village, the children were punished for staying and exchanging pleasantries with their grandfather whom Eugene regards as a heathen. He poured hot boiling water on his children's feet as a punishment for staying with his own father who is not a Christian. He also brutally beats up Kambili until she collapsed because she was against her father's destruction of the last memory of her grandfather which was in her possession. The kick Kambili got from her father resulted to an injury in her ribs which caused great pain in breathing. This also got her admitted in the hospital; Kambili further narrates her ordeal when she came back home later than usual: "Papa slapped my left and right cheeks at the same time, so his huge palms left parallel marks on my face and ringing in my ears for days"(59). At ten, Jaja's finger was broken by his father because he missed two questions on his catechism test and thus did not emerge as the best candidate. The broken finger is described as a "gnarled finger deformed like a dried stick"(153).

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Chukuma, Helen "Positivism and the Female Crisis: The Novel of Buchi Emecheta" In Nigeria Female Writers: A Critical Perspective. Otokunefor, Henrietta, Obiagelli Nwodo (eds) Lagos: Malthouse, 1989.

Feminist are relevant in exploring the problem of domestic violence in African literature. Indeed, it is difficult to explore domestic violence in African literature without dealing with the problem of gender inequality. Most traditional African societies are patriarchal and the women's roles are highly subordinate and redundant. Thus, African customary laws have traditionally institutionalized inequalities which limit women's opinions and freedom in marriage. This goes a long way in destroying relationships in families and society since the most vulnerable in society such as women and children are dehumanized, brutalized and killed.

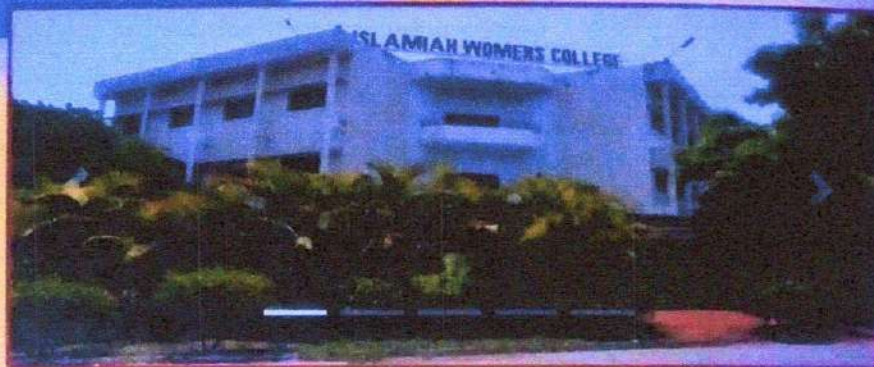
The conclusion is that unless the problem of inequality between men and women is addressed, domestic violence would continue unabated. Hence, the documentation of these inhuman experiences by literary artists is a good step in dealing with this devastating problem which is negatively crippling relationships in society. The major factor that contributes to domestic violence is attributed to the subordinate position of women to men, and the economic dependence of women in society. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Beatrice was totally dependent on her rich business minded husband (Eugene Achike) who manipulated her decisions as well as her emotions. This manipulation also extends to her children (Jaja and Kambili) who lived perpetually in fear and hatred as a result of their father's behaviour. To other people in society, Eugene is a good and wealthy, devoted catholic who cherishes his family and helps the needy. The consequence of this is that, Beatrice hated her husband and later poisoned him in order to escape from her suffocating experiences. The traditional society does not help in curbing the problem of domestic violence or the suppressing social order which classifies women and children as the most vulnerable, incapable of taking decisions in society. Hence, they depend on men (husbands and fathers) for support and decisions over matters that affect their lives. In the novel, Beatrice's and her children's decisions were controlled by Eugene who forced his family to conform to his expected behaviour by yielding to his rules and decisions. In this way, domestic violence functioned as a quick means of enforcing conformity /obedience. This however causes both physical and mental stress to his wife and children; Beatrice's mental illness worsened after the death of her husband. However, she is free from her husband's daily torture; she is deeply entangled in the web of her crime. Her son, Jaja confesses to the crime he did not commit in order to protect her mother, but Beatrice's painful experiences plunged her into a world of psychological torture.

Bowman, Cynthia .G. "Theories of Domestic Violence in African Context." *American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy and Law* 11, no.2(2003) :847-863.

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