

**The Crisis of Existence under Religious Fanaticism: Understanding
Patriarchy through Kambili's experience in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.**

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Abstract

This discourse attempts to explore the extreme religious fanaticism and Catholic high handedness of the novel's central character, Eugene Achike and the subsequent patriarchal attitude it begets towards the family members especially Kambili. It shows how religion which is otherwise an instrument of peace is used by him to support the violent behavior directed against the ideologically different set of people. As a staunch religious character whose Catholic ideals dominate his humanly love and his compassionate self, he doesn't ever hesitate in turning brutal on his family when they fail to come upto his impossibly high religious standards. The paper thus brings to light the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression and highlights the role played by patriarchy in augmenting this sentiment. It brings to light how patriarchy which is a product of traditional and uncultivated society acquires greater force and intensity through neocolonial agencies at work in a post-colonial setup. Since patriarchy gives the dominant set of people a right to consider them as the standard, they consider it rightful to compel others to follow. As a result, they deprive them of their ability to think and infuse in them a kind of

identity crisis. The paper proceeds into understanding the silent and inward struggle of Kambili to achieve a stabilized and substantial sense of self. Kambili strives hard to become functional in the way a normal free individual is. The novel is about her hard and incessant struggle to transform herself from a mere spectator and a victim to a self-conscious individual. This consciousness reveals itself through the development of many facets of her personality which enable her to acquire a social and sexual awareness. Thus, the study shows how the novel slowly shifts Kambili from the margins to the center of her own consciousness.

Keywords: religious fanaticism, patriarchy, domination, struggle, self-consciousness etc.

Introduction

Patriarchy, a system where men hold the power from which women are largely excluded, has been an important feature of traditional Nigerian society. As a structure of a set of social relations with material base, it enables men to dominate women [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]. In a patriarchal household, it is a male who heads the family and under whose supervision others have to conduct their day to day chores. Whatever decisions are to be taken, are taken by the males while women are largely kept away from public dealings which is strictly a masculine domain demanding the qualities like strength, vigour, virile/powerful courage, self-confidence and the ability to meet the outside world. The idea of patriarchy has been rigorously explored in literature even before the resurgence of women's studies and feminist movements [6]. However in the postcolonial era, there have been many texts by women that explore a relationship between the gendered modernity and patriarchal structures in an ambience wholly dominated by religious ideals e.g. El Saadawi in her work *Women at Point Zero* highlights a critique of Arab society where the men, well-versed with religion, take it as their right to beat their women whenever they feel like that, as if the doctrines of religion allowed such punishments. Likewise, Tehmina Durrani in her autobiography, *My Feudal Lord* and the novel *Blasphemy* investigates "the lives of women in rigidly patriarchal families where religious doctrines are used to circumscribe, exploit and oppress them" [7]. Her works draw interconnections between religion and patriarchy as she labours to expound on the violence perpetrated by males on females. It is in this vein that Adichie seems to have written *Purple Hibiscus* where she is at pains to demonstrate the agony experienced by Kambili under the authoritative companionship of her father, Eugene.

The novel has been dealt from a variety of critical approaches and many critics have come up with their own estimation of the work. Ranti's review affirms that the novel is "a complex picture of a man struggling with his demons, taking out his struggles on those he loves: his wife, Beatrice; his son, Jaja, and Kambili, (his daughter, the protagonist of the novel)" [8]. Daniel Massa [9] described *Purple Hibiscus* as focusing its attention on "love, cultural dislocation, political oppression, and domestic violence in their search for personal freedom" (Commonwealth news). Likewise, Onukaogu and Onyerionwu are of the view that *Purple Hibiscus* is a feminist novel. They based their argument on what Adichie said regarding being a "happy feminist". This aspect is considered as being quite strategic in the criticism of her work, in which her feminist temperament reflects in its fullness, for Adichie's prose reveals that she is a synthesis of virtually every feminist tenet; even though the element of subtlety is strong in her narrative [10].

Feminism, as such, can be associated with Postcolonialism in an inseparable way because both are based on the notion of the dominance of one over the other. While in postcolonialism which comes after colonization, the underlying force is the intervention of powerful nations represented as masculine desire into weaker nations represented as feminized lands, Feminism is the result of patriarchy which is also governed by the idea of powerful male gaze intruding a female identity. Thus, it can be said that the idea of colonization is rooted in patriarchy and so any agency promoting patriarchy would indirectly promote colonization. In other words, patriarchy in itself is a form of colonization [11]. As far as the novel, *Purple Hibiscus* is concerned, the withdrawal of British left behind a system which kept Nigerian thought process still colonized even when their lands were made free. The novel explores how Christianity holds power as a neocolonial

weapon and promotes the practice of patriarchy, thereby, keeping the remnants of colonization alive. Thus, it is not only the female gender that suffers under patriarchy but also the male gender that toils under the neocolonial grip of the former masters. In both cases, a thorough understanding of the subtle nuances that patriarchy and neocolonialism percolate would be beneficial in decolonizing the minds. A feminist driven counterattack would especially enable the victims to bring to light their own identity. Here, however, only the individual awareness of Kambili, who almost had succumbed under the patriarchal pressure of her father, would be taken into consideration.

The novel begins in *medias res* and we are acquainted with almost all the members of the family- mother Beatrice, father Eugene and the children Kambili and Jaja. The atmosphere is perceived to be tense due to Jaja's flagrant denial to attend communion which fills Eugene with extraordinary rage and he flings "his heavy missal across the room and breaks the figurines on *étagère*." This is because of the change that has pervaded the mindset of children after the influential interaction with their liberal minded aunt Ifeoma and having inhaled the air of emancipation at her household in Nsukka. This journey of the family, from the point when Eugene is full of male chauvinism, single handedly commanding the family to the present state where he confronts a kind of rebellion from his child Jaja has been narrated as a kind of flashback from the point of view of Kambili. This is followed by Eugene's death on account of poisoning by his wife followed by Jaja's three years imprisonment as he takes the crime onto himself. This portion of the novel again comes to us through Kambili's perspective.

Eugene's Predominance and Kambili's Acquiescence

Dominance has been from ages a supreme characteristic defining men. More than just gender, there are other agencies by which men tend to empower themselves. In the novel under consideration, the combined effect of masculine gender and the agency of religion give Eugene a power to suppress others. In the supremely religious atmosphere that Eugene keeps creating in his house, Kambili turns into a mute child- a mere spectator. Pauline Ada Uwakweh (1998) observes that:

Silencing comprises all imposed restrictions on women's social being, thinking and expressions that are religiously or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control, it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or muted female structure [12]. (75)

In *Purple Hibiscus* the weapon of silence is used not only to ensure a domestic servitude but also a loss of control on self. Heather Hewett in her article expresses that Kambili has become so paralyzed by fear that she struggles to even speak about the most mundane of things. Hewett says, "These secrets weigh most heavily on Kambili herself, whose frequent inability to speak suggests how deeply her fear has sunk" [13]. When Papa was scolding Jaja for missing his Palm Sunday, Kambili "stood at the door watching them." It was out of question to step out of her boundaries and comment on the situation. She in spite of wishing to speak had neither the courage nor the permission to speak out her mind and it felt as if she was trapped inside her own thoughts causing her to stutter or get a coughing fit whenever she tried to speak. In yet another incident, when her brother Jaja walked away from the dining table before her father, a very unexpected thing to do, she felt that a turbulence would inevitably follow where "the compound walls would crumble...the sky would cave in...the Persian rugs on the floor would shrink...but the only thing that happened was my choking" [14]. The lack of self control coupled with the

meekness of her character caused her language to develop a constant element of stuttering which worked uniformly irrespective of with whom she was communicating. She stuttered with father, with mother, with classmates and even with aunt Ifeoma. She couldn't even handle the mischievous playfulness of her aunt when she tried to make her aware of her growing femininity by gently reaching out and pulling at her left breast. In spite of responding with the same mischievousness, she "instead looked away and inhaled deeply" so that she "would not start to stutter" (51). This breakdown of language that Kambili was used to suffering from makes her an unwelcome person in her own eyes. She is sure of not being able to establish friendly connections with people around, even of her own age. In one of such situations, while trying to befriend her classmate through an informal conversation, she finds herself speaking what she never intended as if it was someone else speaking through her. She says:

I wanted Ezinne to know that I appreciated that she was always nice to me even though I was awkward and tongue tied. I wanted to say thank you for not laughing at me and calling me a "backyard snob" the way rest of the girls did but the words that came out were, "Did u travel?" (35)

This suggests that Kambili had lost that vigour and promptness which was so characteristic of her age and which could have enabled her to establish humanly intimacy with others. The want of cordiality in her character distanced her even from her mother with whom the comfort zone was always lacking. Though the secret behind cleaning the figurines always haunted her in childhood and she knew that the figurines held an important place in the life of her mother, she never spoke to her mother about them. It was, however, later in life that she understood why her mother would often clean the figurines. It would act as a kind of consolation whenever Eugene would

beat her. Heartbroken Mama would channel her grief by cleaning these figurines with which she associated herself. Just as the figurines would serve the purpose of decoration in the house and at times would come crashing down due to the violent anger of Eugene, Beatrice underwent the same experience. The regular beating and domination by Eugene had broken her from within and left her hollow. Adichie in the novel expresses quite deeply the condition of both mother and daughter and the following paragraph thus has a dual implication. On one hand, it shows the silent acceptance of the oppression which Eugene exacted on his wife and on the other we get an impression of the timidity to which Kambili had succumbed when she says:

I meant to say I am sorry Papa broke our figurines, but the words came out were, “I’m sorry your figurines broke, Mama”. She nodded quickly, and then shook her head to show that the figurines did not matter. They did, though. Years ago, before I understood, I used to wonder why she polished them each time I heard sounds from their room, like something banged against their door. Her rubber slippers never made a sound on the stairs, but I knew she went downstairs when I heard the dining room door open. I would go down to see her standing by the *étagère* with a towel soaked in soapy water. She spent at least a quarter of an hour on each ballet-dancing figurine. There were never tears on her face. The last time, only two weeks ago, when her swollen eye was still the black-purple colour of an overripe avocado, she had rearranged them after she polished them. (Adichie, 2003, p. 18-19)

Eugene had created watertight compartments in which Kambili was forced to live. This had snatched from her the freedom to experience life on her own terms. Her ability to determine the function of her tongue had been on wane. This kept her from feeling emancipated as the

atmosphere of suffocation continuously surrounded and weighed heavy on her. “Their fussy, mercantile father buil[t] a world stuffed with materialistic wholeness, a world that lack[ed] ventilation [15]. Kambili says, “Although our spacious dining room gave way to an even wider living room, I felt suffocated...even the glass dining table was moving toward me” (Adichie, 2003, p. 8).

Kambili lacked a voice as much as she lacked the ability to socialize. She hardly knew her cousins and mingling with her classmates the way other girls did was almost a dream. Because of this restricted behavior and the silence which had become a part of her, coupled with the constricted usage of her tongue, she is called a “backyard snob” (35). Her necessity of remaining aloof had got so absorbed in her that she finds it futile to waste even a single minute to exchange pleasantries with her classmates before she starts running towards Kevin’s car to be driven back home. Her classmates see this as “aristocratic arrogance” not knowing that her life is a robotic expression of that schedule which her father has written in pencil and she engraved on her heart. Any change in the schedule wouldn’t be tolerated. Once, when she took some extra time to reach the car, Kevin complained to her father and the reaction that came forth was unexpected for a child of fifteen. She narrated the consequences as, “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” (37). The strict timing was not only pertaining to school but also for other things, even meeting their grandfather whom Eugene had prohibited from entering his home because of his traditionalist views. Eugene had shunted him off as pagan. Even before entering their grandpa’s premise, the dead- line of fifteen minutes began to cause discomfiture. Besides they were not allowed to eat or drink in that ungodly man’s house. Eugene said to them, “Remember don’t

touch any food don't drink anything...and you will stay not longer than fifteen minutes. *Fifteen minutes*"(44).

Eugene, thus, had a radical thinking which proceeded from the diehard religious thoughts. It made its impact on many other aspects besides Kambili's speech. If we consider her academic life, it was devoid of any creativity. The burden of standing first in the class didn't allow her to explore new ways of learning because she didn't know when those novel techniques of studying might deceive her.

Ogaga says,

Both her home and school become a prison for her, as she slips down the academic ladder. The kind of academic system that Eugene wants for his children is dehumanizing. He is mechanical in all spheres of life, and he condemns all forms of leisure. [16]

This attitude of Eugene made Kambili want to stand first in the class not for herself as much as she wanted to appease her father. She says, "I needed him to touch the back of my neck and tell me that I was fulfilling God's purpose...but I had come second. I was stained by failure" (28). This anxiety channeled itself through an urge and she went to pass the urine, and before she could come out, her father was in her room. The sudden confrontation with her stern father caused her to lose balance, such that her tongue didn't conform to her mind. She wanted to quickly acknowledge her father about her academic status but she said "yes" when he asked whether the school was good. The terror that her father's disposition produced has been aptly captured by Adichie. Her father's presence caused an imbalance not only in her mind but in her body. She says,

My stomach was making sounds, hollow rumbling sounds that seemed too loud that wouldn't stop even when I sucked in my belly... I walked downstairs, my legs felt joint free like long strips of wood...I couldn't look at Papa's face when he spoke. The boiled yams and peppery greens refused to go down my throat. They clung to my throat like children clinging to their mother's hands at a nursery school entrance. I downed glass after glass to push them down. (Adichie 29)

Eugene's self-determined behavior was quite unpredictable for Kambili which added to her repertoire of miseries. She couldn't make out how her father would react on her coming second in the class. So, when Papa asked where Chinwe, the girl who stood first, was, she couldn't make out what he was upto and thus wanted somehow to escape the situation. She said, "I wanted the ground to open up and swallow the whole compound" (33). Papa could have scolded Kambili for coming second but he chose quite an insulting way to make his point by taking Kambili near the school building and drawing physical comparisons between Kambili and Chinwe not realizing that it was the mental capacity that counted. On this situation, Ogaga comments as follows:

When Kambili comes second in the class, rather than encouraging the girl to put more effort into her academic business, he petulantly asks a mechanical question. "How many heads has Chinwe Jideze." He didn't stop there; he brings out a mirror and gives it to Kambili in order to ascertain how many heads she has. (Ogaga 2011, p.148)

In order to remake her reputation before her father, Kambili adopts a method of cramming and calculation. This is because the nickname of snob doesn't matter so much to her as does the stress of regaining her position in the class. However this method was too much to be handled by her. She says,

It was like balancing a sack of gravel on my head everyday at school and not being allowed to steady it with my hand. I still saw the print in my textbooks as a red blur...I memorized what the teachers said because I knew that my textbooks would not make any sense if I tried to study later. After every test, a tough lump like a poorly made fufu formed in my throat and stayed there until our exercise books came back. (Adichie 38)

Eugene's overzealous and dominating nature had reduced all others to mere puppets who couldn't laugh at their will, dress according to their choice or even increase acquaintance with relatives by visiting them or freely talking to them. They had become robots who worked strictly according to Eugene's instructions and never even thought of listening to their own mind which had almost stopped working on its own. "The conservative mindset of their father makes them observe anything he labels as evil abominable to them without any rational or dialectical questioning" (Ogaga 2009, p.250). This declares a kind of perpetual silence on these subordinate characters like Kambili as Ade Coker, the editor of Eugene's newspaper Standard, in the novel observes about Kambili and Jaja, "they are always so quiet. So quiet" (41).

Contrasting her own way of life with that of her cousins, Kambili feels out of place when she realizes that she is not allowed to wear even a pair of trousers which her father considers ungodly dress. "She wonders why she didn't tell her aunt that she didn't own even a single pair of them." This is because it might have felt quite obstinate to her liberal minded aunt. It seemed that Papa was never a true Catholic because his behavior with his family was so unlike a religious man. He never thought before brutally torturing his family members of which his wife was the greatest victim who suffered miscarriages twice due to his terrible beating. It bewilders a person to know that Eugene, a man of religion, a man of dedication who has devoted his life to fight for his

people's political freedom is a wife beater. His wife comes out as a woman always quiet, silently accepting his torture which he inflicts in the guise of religious ideology. As Kambili tries to decipher this wife-beating of her father, she becomes dumbfounded. The heavy thuds on the bedroom door of her parents don't allow her sleep for many days. This coupled with the sight of her mother lifelessly slung over Papa's shoulder makes her shudder. The only thing she could think of was to clean the drops of blood trickling on the floor (Adichie 33). The domestic violence which Eugene committed on his wife becomes visible to Kambili from the distorted disposition of her mother; "Mama was at the door when we drove into our compound. Her face was swollen and the area around her right eye was the black-purple shade of an overripe avocado" (Adichie 135)

Eugene's extreme devotion for the new religion fills him with a kind of hysteria, compelling him to adapt harsh, insensitive and villainous measures in treating his children's religious mistakes. When Kambili, because of her monthly period, breaks her Eucharist fast, Eugene turns monstrous in beating all the family members for being accomplice in her sin. Taking out his heavy leather belt, the strokes landed on anyone who came in between Eugene and his anger; on Jaja, Beatrice's arm when she tried to save her son and on Kambili's back as she stooped to put the bowl down. Eugene seemed to be possessed, like a Fulani nomad while swinging his belt in the air and it landing on motionless people with a swish in the air (Adichie, 73).

Kambili meets the same fate again as she confesses about her pre knowledge of living with her pagan grandfather in the same house in which she was living with her aunt. Papa teaches her a lesson for knowing the sin and still walking into it by pouring boiling hot water on her feet to remind her of what she might have to go through in hell. According to Mabel Evwierhoma [17]

as quoted by Ogechekwu, “Man is the king, ruler and husband. He makes the rules and the woman is subject in all cases, and must submit and obey without asking questions or else she faces the wrath of the ancestral gods” (vii) [18]. Eugene’s behavior shows that he was being patriarch under the garb of religion and this is what Kambili ultimately pledges to counter in which her visit to Nsukka and interaction with Father Amadi acts as a trigger. Her growing distance with her father makes her realize what life and religion is in the real sense. She finds her grandpa no less religious than her father and Father Amadi the epitome of priesthood while simultaneously being the man who could titillate her heart. It is in this scenario that Kambili begins to actualize herself.

Decolonizing the Thought

Colonization is a quite complex process because it not only impacts the socio-economic prospects of a nation but also enslaves the minds of those colonized. And when decolonization takes place, it is only the lands that are freed while the minds continue to remain in the grip of the powerful nations. And when minds are enslaved, everything automatically comes under the control of the masters. This process of indirect control on the former colonies by ruling the minds of people is called neo-colonialism. It ensures that the status quo between the masters and slaves continues to be in favour of the former without letting the latter get awareness that they are still under control. Neocolonialism, therefore, continues oppression both on men and on women. One of the major ways through which this control is extended is the religion induced patriarchy. While women slave under the male predominance, masculine minds are feminized and controlled through a personalized interpretation of religion by the neocolonial agents. In order to get rid of the power that colonial masters still hold on the thought process of natives,

there has been a movement aimed at decolonizing the thought so as to engender a feeling of equality between the mother nations and the colonies and, therefore, by implication, between the genders as well.

McClintok [19] believes that gender roles are not defined by only male and female sex but by the power equation that two parties involved share. As such, weaker nations could aptly be hyper sexualized by the stronger ones as feminine (14) and so by implication, the stronger men (by that I mean colonizers) can easily extend patriarchal dominance on weaker men (colonized). This dominance in the neocolonial context is of the minds rather than bodies and is more consensual rather than coercive. It is this stigma associated with the feminine self that allows men to oppress women in any society. If the patriarchal setups continue to prevail, the oppression on women will also go side by side. For Clintok, women have been oppressed in many societies irrespective of colonization. They have been invariably disadvantaged and so the colonial restructuring resulted in different outcomes for them than males. They came under double oppression as in addition to suffering under patriarchy, they had to labour under the violent array of hierarchical rules and restrictions imposed upon the society in general (6).

In order to undo the patriarchal effects percolated by colonialism, it is important to reject the patriarchal future which can be brought into place only after one has realized the patriarchal past and present. However, a complete negation of colonial history is neither possible nor desirable because it encapsulates certain beneficial things as well. This coupled with a resurgence of past would mean to replace the colonial patriarchy by the traditional patriarchal system and the situation for females would be no better. Therefore, it is the transformation of the social and cultural identity of females that would guarantee them a new place in the society characterized

by equality and relative freedom of thought. In order to achieve this, it is important to stop clubbing women belonging to different socio cultural and even political realms together into a single category. This is because considering women as one category pits them against the masculine world and presents them as victims of a greater and more powerful section of the society [20]. In addition to this, considering women as just one category discriminates them just on the basis of their sex while ignoring other socio-economic aspects which make some women more disadvantaged than others. Therefore, in order to ensure a complete emancipation of women, it is necessary to first locate the various platforms on which discrimination against them takes place and then pursue the decolonization of their thought and existence.

In this paper, special care is taken to prevent the labeling of women as the incessant victims by putting them in different categories having varied degrees of oppression and freedom. This has enabled to bring forth the multiple ways by which women can change their situation rather than portraying them as the powerless section needing protection and guidance of males. Instead the paper presents them as the agents of social change, thereby, making them an important part of progression and development. Here especially the character of Kambili has been taken into consideration to show how she breaks all the shackles which her position as a little girl child had imposed on her. Her gradual increase in age and travelling outside her hometown exposes her to different experiences which she moulds to her advantage and acquires an individuality long denied to her.

Emerging Female Consciousness and Attainment of Self

Feminism, says Ibeku Ijeoma [21], comes with the root word 'Femina' which means woman, obviously focuses on the development of female consciousness of self and their better

representation in literature rather than being simply portrayed as objects without any say in the matters of men. It tries to discourage discrimination and humiliation done to women and focuses its attention on their emancipation. Many postcolonial writers and scholars have presented their views on this emerging literary movement and tried to use it in their respective works. Ogunyemi defines feminism as:

smacks of rebelliousness, fearlessness, political awareness of sexism and an unpardonable (from the male view point) drive for equality and equity between sexes. It therefore instills fear in men though it thrills many women. The radical feminist can go as far as doing without the macho male to enjoy her liberty. [22]

Obioma Nnaemeka [23] as cited by Walker explains her own version of feminism what she calls as “Nego-feminism”. She says:

Nego-feminism is the feminism of negotiation; second, nego-feminism stands for no-ego feminism. In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise and balance... African feminism (or feminism as I have seen it practiced in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines. In other words, it knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts. [24]

African novel among others has put a lot of emphasis on changing the trend in which women had been hitherto depicted. *Purple hibiscus* following this emerging tradition underlines the feminist stance which is majorly brought to the forefront through the character of Ifeoma. Ifeoma is an

independent character, sister of Eugene, and provides for the sustenance of her three children after the death of her husband. Ogechukwu says that Adichie has presented Auntie Ifeoma as a character that is stable, firm, focused, reasonable and realistic because she takes pride in her Igbo culture and does not feel reluctant in speaking her mother tongue. Thus, adherence to her culture gives her confidence and a certain faith in herself. Akpabot defines culture as “a way of thinking, feeling and behaving in any given society resulting in a behavioural pattern which gives that society a distinctive identity” [25]. Ifeoma has attained that identity for herself and her children. She has anti-patriarchal thoughts which heavily influence Kambili as a result of which she begins to explore herself from the recesses of that darkness which her rigid household had instilled in her. Association with her aunt enables her to realize herself. According to Fitzgerald, Self-realization is the fulfillment by oneself of the possibilities of one’s personality or character. It is “freedom from external coercion, including cultural expectations, political and economic freedom from worldly attachments and desires” [26].

As far as Kambili is concerned, her visit to Nsukka changed everything as she herself admits, “Perhaps we all changed after Nsukka—even Papa—and things were destined not to be the same, not to be in their original order” (Adichie 147). Even before going to Nsukka, Ifeoma’s influence had started dawning on her. After returning from Aro festival where she went with Auntie Ifeoma, she was almost for the first time under her own supervision, trying to enjoy the memories of the trip. She says:

That night I dreamed that I was laughing but it didn’t sound like my laughter, although I was not sure what my laughter sounded like. It was crackling and throaty and enthusiastic like Auntie Ifeoma’s. (Adichie 63)

The sense of emancipation began right from the point they entered the town. For Kambili, Nsukka does not only represent a town where her aunt lives but a symbol of liberty. The first thing they encountered was the university with its motto “to restore the dignity of man” (Adichie 80). It became symbolic for the restoration of Kambili’s lost sense of self. In the uninhibited environment that Nsukka provides her she begins to break all the shackles which she had inherited in her oppressive household and had been enduring since childhood. In the absence of her father’s controlling voice, she feels liberated and slowly begins to gain familiarity with her own voice, her feelings and her desires which she had hitherto suppressed back home at Enugu. At Nsukka, a new Kambili begins to flow out of the older one as if shedding that mask which she had affected to keep up with her father’s creed. Yerima Dina comments on this condition of Kambili as,

Kambili herself is on the road to self-realization when the novel ends. Her journey of self-realization like Jaja’s begins fully in Nsukka. There she doubts and is able to push to the background and into forgetfulness, her father’s dogmatic instructions. She begins to loosen up and finds happiness in living a life like other children. [27]

Her teenage development becomes complete in this town because for the very first time her mouth performs almost all the functions associated with it. She smiles, laughs cries, jokes and sings. There are many forces which surround her at Nsukka and help her in coming out of the cocoon of silence and non-existence, thereby, achieving a full understanding of her being. However, in spite of the newness that began to emerge in Kambili, the impact of the strictness which her father impelled on her didn’t go so easily and stuttering remained very much a part of her personality which gets revealed in her interaction with Amaka’s friend. She wanted to be

proud of her long hair, the fact that it was natural without any attachments and be a part of the company that Amaka and her friend was sharing. But she remained aside, aloof for the reason that she might start to stutter. So instead of staying there and looking at them, she ran into the toilet lest she should disturb them with her coughing fits (Adichie 100).

Gradually under the supervision of her aunt, the silence which had been so dominant in Kambili slowly started to disappear. She realized that she too can articulate her thoughts without stuttering. Getting a thrust from her aunt who encouraged her to speak back to Amaka, Kambili said, “You don’t have to shout Amaka. I don’t know how to do the *orah* leaves but you can show me” (Adichie 120). Not only Amaka acts as a foil to Kambili, she also becomes another influence on her to boost her spirit and understand her emotions as a girl. She acquaints her with girly talks, makeup, modern dress and many other things that Kambili would never have experienced at her home. She wears Amaka’s shorts and tries to apply lipstick though she wipes it back quickly when she goes out with Amadi. These things bring out yet another aspect of her personality thereby augmenting the process of self-understanding.

In addition to her aunt and cousin, Father Amadi becomes the foremost reason for Kambili’s awareness of her sexuality. She realizes that she has a sexual part associated with her without whose experience she would be incomplete. Though there is no sexual gratification in Kambili but she gets a chance to arouse and to some extent pacify her libidinal energy. On meeting Amadi, a dewy feeling starts arousing in her which was hitherto unknown. Calling this young man as “father” seemed sacrilegious. Kambili started giving herself the freedom to live those feelings that had taken birth within her for Amadi which is clearly reflected in her words:

I wanted some of the cloud like warmth in Father Amadi's eyes to rub off on me, settle on me... The music of his voice lowered in apology. I could not help staring at him, because his voice pulled me... Hearing my name in his voice, in that melody, made me feel taut inside... Even in the priestly garb, his loping, comfortable gait pulled my eyes and held them. (Adichie 98)

Slowly and steadily Kambili experienced a transformation in her ideology and the things which had formerly appeared correct and authentic to her began to appear shadowy and doubtful. There was a time when Kambili felt that looking at someone's nakedness was sinful and hurriedly shifted her gaze when she watched Amaka undress in front of her. She had never seen anyone undress because things like body were highly private and forbidden to reveal before others. But this ideology suffered a change when she began to easily scrutinize his shriveled grandfather's naked body as he lay basking in sun (Adichie 84). Such transformation that seized Kambili's mind and understanding is clearly reflected in her response to her grandfather's nakedness. She almost enjoyed looking at her grandfather, not because he was naked but she could appreciate each and every aspect of his body, even the small dots on his hands and legs which appeared to her gleaming in the sunlight. She did not even mind to have a look at the limp cocoon that hung in between his legs and looked smoother than rest of his body, swaying here and there like a mosquito netting. She continued to look at him while he tied his wrapper around the waist, while keeping open his small dark resin like nipples nestled in the tufts of grey hair (Adichie 119).

Another experience in which looking at the nakedness of men no longer appeared a sin was with Father Amadi in the football stadium. She says, "my eyes were on....FatherAmadi's running legs...on many legs of the boys, which all looked like one leg. My hand had finally touched the

top on my lap, moving over it tentatively as though it could breathe, as though it were a part of Father Amadi”(Adichie 126). With Amadi, she felt at home as though it had been the place where she ought to have been from the beginning. On her trip with Amadi, Kambili cherished her existence; every other moment brought with it a new experience which however wasn't tinged with her father's gruesome presence. She wore nice yellow shorts in which her legs got exposed to Amadi who commented, “You have good legs for running. You should practice more” (Adichie 125). Thinking of such a dress would have made her liable for confession had she been in her father's house at Enugu. She smiled though “an embarrassed and amused smile” it was but nevertheless it gave her an indulgent pleasure. “I smiled. I smiled again” (Adichie 125).

There was a time when Kambili wanted to live intimate moments with Amadi and fling all the restrictions and compulsions to the wall. For a moment she knew completely what she wanted and made every effort to get that unlike her former self at Enugu. Like a confident girl she confesses her love to Amadi and wishes it to be reciprocated: “He turned to me with an expression that I had never seen his eyes almost sad. He leaned over the gear and pressed his face to mine. I wanted our lips to meet and hold, but he moved his face away” (Adichie 191).

Kambili in addition to understanding herself also becomes capable of continuing her father's business and charity affairs exactly in the same way as her father did though she doesn't bother herself with “why's”. She just does it because she has the capacity to do it as she says, “I no longer wonder if the checks I have been writing to the Missionary Fathers of the Blessed Way are bribes to God; I just go ahead and write them” (Adchie 209).

By doing this Kambili proves herself no less than a male in a patriarchal society and underscores that her journey of finding her own self has accomplished. She no longer is dependent but an active member of her household, managing the proceedings of her family in a much better way than a man could.

Conclusion

This paper established Eugene Achike as a staunch patriarch who causes physical and mental anguish to his family-his wife and children especially his daughter Kambili who in the novel is the mouth piece of Adichie. In his father's house, Kambili's existence is almost null as she is not aware of her individuality. She looks at the world from her father's eyes, thereby, not allowing any experience of her life to improve her status as an individual human being. Extreme oppression suffered by her and her mother under the hands of her father causes her to revolt. However, this is a very subtle kind of a counter- action the ambience for which is provided by her aunt Ifeoma's household where under the auspices of her aunt and companionship of her cousin Amaka she gradually breaks the shell around her and liberates herself from the clutches of patriarchy which her father had woven. By the end, Kambili is an individual with appreciable subjectivity and dignity.

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