

**Marginalization: A Paradigm Shift in Chimamanda Ngozi
Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus***

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Abstract:

Marginalization is always around. Looking into any nation and its history, its attributes and traits somehow or the other are bound with marginalizing and suppressing one particular gender or caste, based on literacy. An inbuilt standard in all disciplines is following the stereotypical authority left by their ancestors. As a result, the right way of living and identifying true potentials is still obsolete. For many decades the global focus is on the topic of gender discrimination, women's oppression, physical and emotional abuse of children. Though awareness campaigns, oriental programme, conferences, discussions are directed towards the eradication of such evils, the realization of such a goal is possible only through the practical implications by each individual. These unchanging problems are brought to light by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie whose stern aim is to eradicate marginalization and to build an equalitarian society on a global scale. The novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) pictures the psychological trauma of the protagonist Kambili and her journey towards a sense of identity. It leaves a spark in the mind of the reader to bring about a change in the marginalization of women and the downtrodden. In an attempt to explore the position of women in recent decades, the novel has been thoroughly examined and a

comparative result with the current scenario will be revealed. The promise of freedom can be achieved by shifting every man's perception about woman's suppression—a problem that lies with the male community of looking at a female as an object of pleasure and not as a co-partner of life. The objective of this paper is to analyze society's stereotypical ideas that block the human mind from thinking on a broader perspective.

Keywords: Marginalization, discrimination, equalitarian, emancipation, colonialism, patriarchy, African women, African culture, feminism, stereotype.

The Definition of women in history is always columned under words like weaker sex, oppression, fight for emancipation, despite the significant role they play towards any country's economic enhancement. A country's backbone does not only lie in economical and structural development but also on building a society where its citizens, both men and women enjoy the real sense of freedom. Overvaluing one particular group or gender and subjugating the other is always a hindrance to a country's development. In recent decades fight for equality and freedom is limited only in writing rather than implicating in personal lives.

Today's society mostly projects minor sexual abuse, gender-based violence, racial discrimination and more appropriately never fails to throw light on the problem of female suppression. There is a saying which states "you have to know the past to understand the present". History of women teaches us that women are one with nature and they are godly. Even in Genesis, God essentially states that man by himself is not good and he gives high value and necessity for the existence of a female companion and creates Eve to help Adam. So there lies the problem with the word 'help'. Women, helping man is just to share his burden, but the wrong notion inherited by men from history is that women are commodities on earth, whose liberation is limited in serving their husbands as faithful servants.

Surveying marginalization of women on a global scale, the history of Africa is one of the most heartbreaking and bloodstained chronicles that could be ever read. Their fight against slavery and sexual oppression is very far from being ended. The British colonial rule gave back serious consequences on African women. Not only they were oppressed in terms of racism and literacy but also faced inequality problems in their traditional society.

Men were the tools of colonialism that they were made to believe as masters of women and their value was measured according to his ability to rule his wife. Their main

work was to bring up a disciplined family by silencing women and children. Patriarchy according to Merriam Webster is, "A social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children or control by men of a disproportionately large share of power". Silencing and denial of independence gave the patriarchal society power to control women. This marginalization of the natives by the natives was the most effective weapon used by the colonizers to control the native population without their knowledge. This is termed as neo-colonialism which is brought to light by the writers of the latter half of the twenty-first century.

One among them is the young Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie whose stern aim is to eradicate the problems of neo-colonialism in Africa, more specifically in and around the cities of Nigeria. Her novels center upon African women and their quest for identity. She believes in the idea that can be achieved by shifting every man's perception of women suppression—a problem that lies with the male community of looking at a female as an object of pleasure and not as a co-partner of life. All of her three novels work on breaking the society's stereotypical ideas that block the society's mind of developing egalitarian earth.

Purple Hibiscus (2003), her debut novel, gives the reader a clear rejection of patriarchy, a sound disaster that should no longer exist in any books. The novel is narrated from a 15-year-old girl's perspective, about her sexual awakening and religious oppression. She discovers an escape from her Catholic patriarchal father and a tyrant who punishes his family in the name of religion. Adichie in this novel indirectly reveals how colonizers in the name of religion marginalize the native people and their traditional culture.

The author has focused on the problems faced by African women in their land. The protagonist of the play, the fifteen-year-old Kambili, and her mother Beatrice are the women victims in the novel. They are crushed and crumbled by the dominant patriarchal father who imposes strict rules to be followed. Kambili's father Eugene who was brought up by the missionaries eventually learns the art of subordination and humility. To Father Benedict, it is always "the pope, papa and Jesus – in that order". (4) Eugene earns superiority in his parish by being a devoted Catholic, but he restricts his tyrant nature within his family. According to Eugene, it is sinful when his family does anything against religion. He punishes his daughter by pouring boiling water over her feet for staying with her heathen Grandfather.

"Kambili you are precious". His voice quavered now, like someone speaking at a funeral, choked with emotion. "You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it". He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. he poured the hot water on my feet, slowly as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears streaming down his face. I saw the moist steam before I saw the water. I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed. "That is what you do to yourself when you walk into sin. You burn your feet" he said. (195)

Eugene's torture is vicious and provokes hatred in the reader's mind towards the male - dominated African culture. Kambili's only source of hope is her mother Beatrice who tries her best to protect her children from the religious tyrant. When he punishes his own family by opting violence as a corrective measure father Benedict approves Eugene's violence based way to righteousness, making Eugene believe that he is a good Christian and father.

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, like soft meat and thorny bones. Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire. The kicking increased in tempo and... I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of painting... Kicking. Kicking. Kicking... More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed my mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped away into quiet....(210-11)

Eugene goes to the extreme of beating Kambili to death when she starts practicing volition. She revolts against her father's will of having the painting of her dead grandfather. Kambili undergoes severe injury and then she survives. Her mother Beatrice also goes through several miscarriages. Both Jaja and Kambili are used to such incidents that they did not talk about the miscarriage but they prefer to talk about social unrest. We did not talk about Mama. Instead, we talked about the three men who were publicly executed two days before, for drug trafficking (33)

More examples could be found in the novel where patriarchal dominance is being accepted by the women. The glass étagère which Beatrice polishes often gives the reader that

violence is very common in the house of Eugene, which he breaks to show his disregard when Jaja refuses his communion on a Sunday mass. Moreover, woman suppressing another woman is also an important area to be discussed. It is a privilege for a woman to have more sons to her family as having sons decided the reputation of the family. Despite the cruel realities, Beatrice tries to keep up her love for her husband when she tells Kambili:

You know after you came and I had the miscarriages the villagers started to whisper. The members of our ummuna even sent people to your father to urge him to have children with someone else. So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were university graduates, too. The might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out, like Mr.Ezendu's second wife did. But your father stayed with me, with us. (20)

As a virtuous wife, Beatrice has never failed to keep up her traditional values. She belongs to a period where women's purpose in life was to serve her husband and be at home. "A woman with children and no husband, what is that?" (75). Beatrice always prefers to be Eugene's wife than to be an independent mother. Though Beatrice and Kambili go through severe psychological trauma they make it their responsibility of keeping up the name of Eugene in their community. He is titled in his community as 'Omelora' which means 'One who does for all'. (66) He never forgets to tell people that what he gives is from God himself.

Adichie's attempt to an egalitarian society is fulfilled through the characters of Ifeoma and her daughter Amaka. Aunt Ifeoma is introduced in the novel as a woman who is reluctant to follow the rules of her culture. She imposes the search for identity among her children when she teaches them to take up turns in doing the household chores. She wants a change in the stereotypical idea in the division of labour at home, where cleaning, washing, cooking and taking care of the home are attributed chores for women but men take up a higher position in the institutions. Ifeoma changes the standpoint of married women when she challenges the government for their corrupted administration rather than restricting herself with the work she is supposed to do as a woman. She faces accusations for disobeying the authorities in the university and is subjected to police threats and finally exiles to America for her living. Ifeoma is a strong character who opposes the strict rules of her husband's umunna. Amaka on the other hand boldly criticizes the Nigerian government through her constant letters in which she suggests ways of women emancipation from the clutches of

patriarchy. Ifeoma warns Beatrice to break her marital bond with Eugene before it is too late. "This cannot go on nwunye m, Auntie Ifeoma said. When a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head" (213). Ifeoma catalyzes the lives of Kambili and Beatrice opening new ways of living and freedom which should be owned.

Moreover, Adichie works on the misconceptions of society in child development. This is relevant when Ifeoma brings up her children with equality when she allots domestic works without any gender discrimination. Through the characters of Ifeoma and Amaka, Adichie builds an egalitarian society in Nsukka. In contrast, she forefronts Enugu as a place meant for gender discrimination and religious oppression. Kambili and Jaja project their revolt after the visit of Nsukka. In Enugu, they witness the need for independence and the deprived joys of childhood. Life at Nsukka is filled with joy and laughter whereas the former is filled with silence and cries.

Purple Hibiscus shifts the idea of man's perception towards female struggle. Men should realize that society is not a separate body governing women, but it is himself acting as a society. It is not the society that restricts women inside the home but it is the man who subjugates his wife from education and other physical pursuits.

Simone de Beauvoir rightly argues, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (293). The socially constructed roles are not given to them from birth but implanted in them in the context of 'supposed to be' where they lose their ability to think and act. Women are taught to take up the roles of wives and mothers whereas men take up authoritative and powerful positions. Adichie also tries to bring a shift in society's idea about marital institutions. Marriage is seen as a custom of ownership in the Igbo tradition. Men are socially constructed as leaders, while the 'other' is seen as subordinate sex. Adichie through her writing paints the plight of African women who are under patriarchal chains. Through the character of Ifeoma, she shows the world of a single parent. Through the character of Beatrice, she shows what it means to be a virtuous wife and mother. The characters Kambili and Amaka are concrete examples of Adichie's future African women.

According to Adichie, it is important to know that the world does not treat women and men in the same way. She has taken a milestone in this "me too" era to showcase the injustice done to women which makes no sense. *Purple Hibiscus* is an answer to the questions of why women are judged more harshly, why all the positions of real power are occupied by men and

why the cultural practices that have prestige are only for men. The novel is a reflection of Nigeria, a kind of longing for what isn't and what she wishes would be. There are male characters in the novel but consciously she writes the world from a female perspective. Through her writing, she records the fact that gender shapes the way people experience the world. Adichie is sure that women experience the world differently because there is nothing biologically inherent in them but they are socialized to become female. She feels that education and feminism alone cannot be the solution for African women's problem but she wants every individual to feel the depth of women's consciousness, sensibilities, impulses, her weakness to shift to egalitarian earth.

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