



## **KAMBILI'S TRANSFORMATION IN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS***

**ADHAV SHAMAL BALASAHEB**

Teacher,  
Pinakeshwar English School,  
Aurangabad.  
(MS) INDIA

### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper offers an insight into a character of Kambili in Chimamanda Adichie's debut novel Purple Hibiscus. Her character develops from the submissive character to new developed person who resists to patriarchal system and finds her happiness. The present paper focuses on this new voice of Kambili. Kambili not only develops her character, her womanhood but also gives voice to her mother's sufferings too. Moreover, the range of women's struggle in overcoming the marginalization in the sexist and patriarchal society in term of Kambili's Character has also been analyzed. As a result, a thorough discussion has been made on the analysis from depowered woman to empowered woman who ultimately achieves a voice of her own, it is a study of how she achieved freedom and glory in life.*

**Key words:** Purple Hibiscus, Nigeria, Sexism, Gender, Psychology, Womanhood, Revolt Etc.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Every human being on earth has a right to freedom. If this freedom is denied there appears a tendency to revolt against the rule. This revolt may take violent action and may cause of awakening of offenders. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's debut novel Purple Hibiscus is studied from a feminist point of view. The novel set-in postcolonial Nigeria – a country suffering from economic and political instability – that focuses on the disintegration of 15-year-old Kambili's family. Its main character Kambili develops from a teenage girl to a mature woman both physically and mentally in the course of the novel. She is a member of a wealthy and well settled family dominated by her devoutly catholic father.

**ADHAV SHAMAL BALASAHEB**

1P age



For over 160 years that lead up to its independence of Nigeria, many areas of Nigerian society were influenced by the culture of the colonisers, not least when it came to schooling and religion, and the influence of colonial policies stretched into and beyond the country's independence in 1960 (Ikwuemesi, 2012). In order to break the native systems the colonizers imposed Western traditions and practices on Africans. This is directly linked to the reasons of the chaos seen in Nigeria after it became independent from Britain – Frantz Fanon claims that colonialism was primarily the methodical conflict of another person, denying them their humanity and forcing them to contemplate who they actually were (Fanon 2001. P. 200). However, Purple Hibiscus documents the dynamics of the Achike family during the 1970's in an independent Nigeria. But the voices of the past can be seen clearly (methodical conflict of another person) when Kambil claims that “Papa's sister, Aunty Ifeoma, said once that Papa was too much of a colonial product” (Adichie 13). The reader is given the parallels with colonialism e.g. Aunty Ifeoma's opinion of her brother, and when Kambili infers that English is the civilised language and Igbo is the uncivilised language. Kambil is an independent woman in an independent country, and represents the systematic upbringing of children in a country which was once colonised. The most powerful agency of change for the modern woman like Kambil has been Nigeria's formal education system, from which a large number of elite women like her have emerged. Intelligent, educated, and confident, they can be found in all leading occupations; they now challenge many aspects of patriarchy and are gradually organizing to ensure that the political arena expands sufficiently to accommodate them.

The novel foregrounds the political conflict and civil war, offers an opportunity to attend an uncommonly heard voice, that of black, African female. The story is told from Kambili's eyes and is about the disintegration of family and her struggle for maturity. This paper explores the journey of the development of Kambili from a submissive teenage girl to an independent and mature woman who faces problems of her family strongly and confidently. The flash back of her life delineates her as a cowered girl who closes her eyes and counts numbers whenever there is a difficult situation. But after her personality transmission she gives up these practices and faces the situation. There is a psychological change in her behavior. The same Kambili who could not communicate properly even to neighboring children at her aunt's house later discusses many things with Father Amedi confidently. The present paper focuses on this new voice of Kambili. Kambili not only develops her character, her womanhood but also gives voice to her mother's sufferings too. Moreover, this study examines the range of women's struggle in overcoming the marginalization in the sexist and patriarchal society that was once colonized. The Purple Hibiscus explores various female characters so as to discuss and present the recent history and cultural hybridity of different ethnicities, religions and ultimately the persistence of western influences in Nigeria.

#### **Kambili's Character:**

**ADHAV SHAMAL BALASAHEB**

2P a g e



In order to understand Kambili's character it is important to trace her transformation from a cowered girl to a very confident and responsible daughter who supports her mother during crisis in their life. If we take a look of her former life and her reactions to various odd situations, the difference in her behavior gets visual it becomes clearer. Kambili's process of growing up in the novel marked by her changed opinion about her father. In the beginning she idealizes her father, his dominance and religious attitude. "That night I fell asleep hugging close the image of papa's face lit up, the sound of papa telling me how proud of me he was, how I fulfilled Gods purpose for me."(Pg.52-53) However, during the course of her growing-up these attitude changes, when papa asks them that they will recite fifteen novenas for mama's forgiveness, Kambili feels that mama need not be forgiven. She had great fear of her father, she never speak in front of him. She closes her eyes and count numbers in her mind instead of facing the situation. When Jaja refuses to go to communion and when papa angrily flung missal towards Jaja, Kambili got so much frighten she was so terrified. "There has been a proven correlation between children that have been exposed to domestic violence and those that go on to abuse their own families or when in other relationship" (Nixonet.al.2013).

Kambil confesses "I felt suffocated. The off-white walls with the framed photos of grandfather were narrowing, bearing down on me, even glass dining table moving toward me" (pg.07). This is a clear sign of Kambili's mental condition, fear of her father's torturous dominance on her mind. She could not face whatever may happen. She is portrayed as a victim of patriarchal society and she dumbly submits herself to it. She could not think differently from her father's attitude to religion, but Jaja opposes to his father. This clash between them had a great psychological impact on Kambili. She became ill after this incident. She felt inside in her head thousands of monster play game of catch, but instead ofball they threw each other missal.

### **Kambil's Psychological Conditioning**

In her earlier life she had great respect for her father and never thinks bad about him. When mama compared him with other people who marry second time for children, Kambili does not like her comparison of papa to other lower people because according to her, papa is different, he can never do any ill.

Her mother's first miscarriage due to papa's brutal beating had a great torturous impact on Kambili's mind. "I went upstairs then and sat staring at my textbook. The black type blurred, the letters swimming into one another, and then changed to bright red, the red of fresh blood. The blood was watery, flowing from mama, flowing from my eyes."

**ADHAV SHAMAL BALASAHEB**

3P a g e



This resulted in her psychological conditioning that whenever she opens her book to study, she feels her textbook turning into blood. Even at her first term exam the words on the pages make no sense to her. This results in her standing second in exam which disappoints her father very much. Kambili always lives under great burden of securing first rank in the class and for that she never mixes in other girls, even in short recess she never plays with her friends. Instead she studies all the time. So, her friends call her backyard snob. She always runs fast towards the gate after school because papa scolds her for late. All the girls call her proud and egoistic. She never took part in game and other activities. Kambili continues her study to make her father feel happy. She feels that she always carries big load on her back. She never feels free from the burden. After every test she feels something in her throat and it remained until exercise book comes back. Papa is practitioner of patriarchal power but this made his personality violent and abusive. According to Cheryl Stobie “Eugene is not merely an individual. References to the Big Man in politics [...] and in universities make it clear that Adichie is using Eugene as a symptomatic case of the unchecked use of patriarchal power” (Stobie, 2010: 426)

### **Kambil’s Transformation**

Kambil’s change begins when she visits their grandfather in village. She does not notice any ill, strange and evil in him as her father always mentions. “I had examined him that day, too, looking away when his eyes met mine, for sign of difference, of Godlessness. I didn’t see any.”(pg.63) there is lot of confusion in her mind that she could not bridge her father’s ideology and her own visual experiences. “Kambili arguably learns to question her father’s principles, but she is never able to completely remove the aureole she has put around Eugene’s head.” (Tunca. 2009. p. 128). The presence of aunt Ifeoma- her father’s sister had great impact on her mind. In the very first meeting she gets attracted to her. She had a free attitude towards life.

“She walked fast like one who knew just where she was going and what she was going to do there.”Initially Kambili could not make proper conversation with her cousins too. “Throughout PH, Ifeoma’s empowerment and liberation has a great symbolic meaning both in terms of Kambili’s own process of growing up.” (Álvaro Delgado Ordás, 2015.) “I forced a cough out of my throat; I hoped I would not shudder.” (pg.79) she could not laugh and chat freely with Ameka –her cousin. In contrast to her Ameka is very confident and dashing girl though they are of same age.

Their first visit to Nsukka – aunt Ifeoma’s resident is life changing phase of her life. In this visit she introduced with different type of environment where is freedom of opinion, thinking.



Kambili feels everything would remain same if they didn't visit Nsukka. When she looks at Ameka she realized her own shortcomings in her life style also.

“She was wearing lipsticks, a different shades that was redder than brown, and her dress was molded to her lean body.” (pg.116) she feels some kind of diffident in front of Ameka who is like aunt Ifeoma- confident and dashing. She gets surprised at their cousin's way they talk freely because Jaja and she only speak with purpose in their house and that too in lower voice. This comparison of Kambili is beginning of change. She felt amusement that she can say anything she like and air was free as you breathe, as you wish at Nsukka.

Father Amedi's entry in Kambili's life is a milestone in novel. He stands in her life as lover, well-wisher and instructor who gives her life direction of where to go and how. He creates confidence in her mind that she can do anything she likes. “You can do anything you want, Kambili.” (pg.239) In the presence of him she feels relaxed. She feels that he had singer's voice, a voice that had the same effect on her ears that “mama working pears baby oil on her hair”. “He spoke so effortlessly, as if his mouth were musical instrument that just let sound out when touched, when opened.”

This attraction to father Amedi is root cause of Kambili's change. Father Amedi express surprise that she never smile or speak anything. Aunt Ifeoma says that Kambili is shy. She could not make proper conversation to the Ameka's friends who praise her for long hair. Father Amedi wants to take Kambili to stadium for playing football. For the first time in lifeshe wears shorts of course it is for Father Amedi. She uses lipsticks,

*“I wiped it off. My lips looked pale, a dour brown. I ran the lipsticks over my lips again, and my hand shakes.”*

### **Kambil's Womanhood**

This change in her behavior is her realization of being woman. This is the beginning of her journey towards womanhood. She enjoys the company of Father Amedi. In the car she sits very close to him, she got attracted to his musicality. “It seemed so close, too intimate, to have his eyes on my legs, on any part of me.” (pg.176) Kambili felt shyness in company of Father Amedi. When he asks about lipsticks on her lips she starts smiling. Everything was quite new in her life. She felt with him as having a place where she meant to be from a very long time. She laughs heartily and feels if she were listening to the recorded laughter of stranger being played back. On the stadium Father Amedi asks Kambili to run after him and catch. Kambili confidently runs and catches him. Father Amedi says to her that she had good legs for running. She feels that she will not hear this sound again. She does not want him to



leave, will remember time spent with him for life time. When she return to her home she remember father Amedi and write his name again and again on paper. She tried to catch his voice in music. After the school opens, Kambili joins volleyball field on the second day of the school. She did not hear the whispers of backyard snob or ridiculous laughter. She did not notice amused pinches of friends to one another. She only see Father Amedi's clay colored face and only "you have good legs for running."

This is the watermarking change in Kambili's behavior. She gets confidence in her activities. While looking at Grandfathers painting with Jaja she does not fear of Papa. Instead of it she looks at it and does not keep it back though papa comes in the room. She is now fearless.

*"Perhaps we all changed after Nsukka – even papa – and things were destined to not be in their original order."*

Kambili's second visit to Nsukka changes her very much. In the first visit she could not make proper conversation with Ameka but now they are good friends. Kambili feels that the old discomfort between them has gone. She falls in love with Father Amedi and she likes Ameka's teasing to her by Father Amedi's name. She sings Igbo songs with Father Amedi in loud voice. Before this she never sang a song. Now she does not close her eyes and count numbers to avoid terrible situation. She faces it, feels it. When papa called them on phone she grabs the strength of not receiving his phone.

Kambili express her love to Father Amedi though he refuses it, his support, his love changes her very much. She faces his rejection strongly. Now she can laugh heartily. She seems a lot of things easy now. Papa's death has had a great shock for Kambili but she recovers herself and mama also after arrest of Jaja. She visits many lawyers, officers and judges for Jaja's case. She boldly handles this situation, bribes many officers for jaja's release and also handles mama too who is now mentally disturbed.

Though father Amedi refuses her love she does not behave childishly with him. She accept him as friend, well-wisher in life though not a lover. She communicates with him through letters. At the end of the novel she plans to visit Nsukka after Jaja will come out of the prison. She hopes new rains will come down.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Brenda cooper (2010) rightly observes that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie strives for a holistic vision in her novel, Purple Hibiscus, that integrates Igbo customs and language with Catholic ritual and further incorporates men into her gender politics and enriches the literary traditions

**ADHAV SHAMAL BALASAHEB**

6P a g e



of her elders – Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Alice Walker. We have witnessed that Kambil is hopeless to cope emotionally with the mixed feelings of love and terror towards her father, and further admiration and disregard for her passive and abused mother. She never really acknowledged and understands these mix sets of feelings. She shudders, chokes and also whispers, ultimately, she hopes that the silence has grown between herself and Jaja, after all the family tragedies and she hopes that they will be able to eventually ‘to cloth things in words, things that have long been naked’ Purple Hibiscus has described many naked truths, broken things, things with the spirits of old gods still living with people. Adichie woven them with words appropriate to their concrete material realities and altered them into new metaphors, metaphors for a global world, metaphors constructed in America, in Catholic Church and in the shrine of the Igbo village. Throughout her story Kambil repeats a phrase “my words would not come” t links to her silence that puts her in a long tradition of women and Heather Hewett (2005) rightly comments that whose abuse disallows language until they can struggle against their oppression in order to come into voice. Kambil repeatedly follow-ups, Ifeoma wears bright red lipstick and trousers, signs of feminine confidence that Eugen never ever approves even in the 1990s.

A close reading of the novel makes us understand that it is solely directed to the critique of Christianity. As a matter of fact, both Christianity and Igbo cultures have been exposed in Purple Hibiscus as causes of serious sufferings, especially towards women, and that they are also causes of healing and hope. The novel relates Kambil’s changed life in Ifeoma’s household under father Amadi’s spiritual guidance. In the presence of these two Kambil begins to speak, to smile, to laugh and to sing Igbo songs. Her eventual final voicing of “No” to her father in a scene of horrific abuse develops not as Kambil rejects Christianity altogether, but as she affirms a different version of Christianity, one that values the body and Igbo language and culture. Hence, it can be said that her healing came with both critique and embrace. Finally, Adichie’s novel offers a lesson to interpretive humility; it is a hopeful portrayal of re-appropriated traditions and representation of self-sacrificing love. It not only criticises imperialism but also enable the readers to recognise Kambil’s silence and voice as ways of her redemption.

## REFERENCES

1. Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “Purple Hibiscus.” London: Fourth State, 2004
2. Álvaro Delgado Ordás. “Submission and Resistance: Archetypes of Contemporary Nigerian Women in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus and the Thing around Your Neck.” Term paper submitted to Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona June 2013.



3. Cooper, Brenda. Resurgent Spirits, Catholic Echoes of Igbo & Petals of Purple: The Syncretised World of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus, Ed. ALT 27 New Novels in African Literature Today by Ernest N. Emenyonu at. el. Boydell & Brewer; James Currey an imprint of Boydell & Brewer. 2010.
4. Falola, Toyin. The History of Nigeria. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999.
5. Fanon, Frantz. The Wretched of the Earth. London: Penguin Books, 2001.
6. Hewett, Heather. "Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie the Third Generation." English in Africa English in Africa 15th August 2021.
7. Ikwemesi, C. Krydz. Astride Memory and Desire: Peoples, Cultures, and Development in Nigeria. Enugu, Nigeria: ABIC, 2012.
8. Stobie, Cheryl. "Dethroning the Infallible Father: Religion, Patriarchy and Politics in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus." Literature & Theology.
9. Tunca, Daria. "Ideology in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus." English Text Construction. John Benjamins Publishing Company.