



Repercussions of domestic violence on victim and culprit in *purple hibiscus* and *provoked: A true story*

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Abstract

Domestic Violence is the most common form of abuse meted out to women in the society. It occurs when a partner purposely causes physical, mental, emotional or psychological violence on other family members. It is the product of years of patriarchy and male insecurity. This article discusses two great works of novel and cinema which finely explores the theme of domestic violence. It examines the patriarchal structures in the Nigerian novel *Purple Hibiscus* and set in the backdrop of Indian Culture, an English movie entitled "*Provoked: A True Story*". This article also examines how violence cuts both ways. The far-reaching implications on oppressor and shows how Eugene Achike and Deepak Ahluwalia are victims of their own violence. Both the stories put light on how it is normal for the perpetrators to beat and sexually force their wives on a regular basis.

Keywords: Domestic violence, victim, brutality, abuse, repercussion, justice

Introduction

Women, to a huge extent, are considered as second-class human beings, who are supposed to follow instructions given by men but not give command to their male counterparts. They are subjected to oppression and victimization. Out of the many injustices that women face in their everyday lives, domestic violence stands to be one of the most common and serious issue.

Domestic Violence can happen in all forms of physical, emotional, sexual, psychological and mental abuse. Physical violence is done by the use of physical force like beating, kicking, punching, choking, etc. (Somach and Abouzeid 5). It is the most common form of violence and possess the highest change of death of the victim. Sexual violence occurs when the victim is harassed sexually, humiliated and exploited. Here the victim is forced to participate in the sexual activity. Marital rape is the best example of sexual violence. Emotional violence includes threatening, criticizing, terrorizing, insulting, isolating the victim from his/her family, friends and relatives. Psychological abuse is related to all abuses. It affects the victim's mental health so much that he/she loses his/her mind and suffers from depression, anxiety or other psychological illness.

Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; social and economic forces in a particular society give it impetus,

shape, direction, and even area of concern. According to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, literature serves as a mirror of society and presents accurate representations of societal reality by drawing on human experiences. Thus, number of articles, journals novels are written which became women's voice and presented the male perpetuated injustices. Many writers have tried to represent violence on women and exposed the misery that women face in today's society.

This article explores Adichie's feminist novel *Purple Hibiscus*, which exposes the African notion of the ideal woman and opposes the dehumanizing tendencies of men, as demonstrated by Mama (Beatrice Achike). She remains silent on the face of humiliation, victimization, and brutality. However, as the events unfold, she was forced by the situations beyond her control to respond and go radical and in order to kill whatever that stood in her way of happiness.

Just like literature, cinema is also an imitation of real life and society. It tries to project the flaws of the society while aiming to create awareness and awakes a sense of realization. This article also discusses a great work of cinema which revolves around the theme of domestic violence. Jay Mundhra's *Provoked: A True Story* is a 2006 British biographical drama film which is loosely based on the true story of Kiranjit Ahluwalia, who killed her husband.

Kiranjit after enduring ten years of abuse, brutality and rape, sets her husband on fire while he was sleeping, unintentionally killing him. The case of Kiranjit Ahluwalia is considered as a landmark in the history of UK as she was freed by the judicial system, redefining provocation in cases of battered women in the UK.

The purpose of taking a work of cinema and a literary work (novel) is because both come from two different medium of awareness and entertainment. Meanwhile, the text *Purple Hibiscus* and *Provoked: A True Story*, are deliberately selected because apart from their similar theme, both the works have a similar cultural background. *Purple Hibiscus* is set in the backdrop of Nigerian culture whereas *Provoked* is set in the backdrop of the Indian culture. Though separated by distance, India and Nigeria, both belong to the third world. Both the nations are post-colonial countries and both are products of prolonged military rule. Given the history of their route to colonization and independence, it is not surprising that both these countries have same subject matter. Additionally, both nations have patriarchal social structures.

Review of Literature

Different scholars have analysed and reviewed *Purple Hibiscus* and *Provoked*. They have discussed various issues regarding women and their representation in fiction and films. This article focuses on a number of scholars and films who have touched on concepts related to women's oppression, domestic violence and problems women encounter. Since *Purple Hibiscus* and *Provoked* are the primary sources of the research, a brief summary of both the novel and the film are given.

The primary character Kambili Achike narrates Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, which is set in post-colonial Nigeria's Enugu. The novel is a story of Papa Eugene, a business tycoon and Catholic fanatic who rules his house like a dictator. He is so despotic that he batters his wife along with his children for disobeying his instructions. He beats his wife so often that she went through two miscarriages and this impacted her health to such an extent that, she stood at the verge of death. In the end, Beatrice poisons him to death to escape his insane brutality.

Provoked: A True Story by Jay Mundhra, cinematizes the true story of one woman in England and her case which changed British law. In the early hours of May 9, 1989, Deepak Ahluwalia suffers severe burns while sleeping on his bed in London, England. He states that his wife sets him on fire but she doesn't deny it. When the lawyer discovers bruises on her body and learns that she suffered from ten years of physical and mental abuse at the hands of her husband. Kiranjit fights for her freedom and at last, she is freed by the court.

The secondary resources include dissertations, journals those have examined *Purple Hibiscus* and cinemas those highlight the issue of domestic violence. In "Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Nigeria: Implications for Counselling" Ose defines domestic violence, its types, causes and effects; giving us a clear scenario of domestic violence in Nigerian society. In "A Reformist-Feminist Approach to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" Fwangyil states that "The oppressive and dehumanizing

situations that women undergo in this novel seem extraordinary, but these are real life stories that have been modified and recreated for the society's awareness. This novel is, in effect, a dramatic indictment of the oppressive attitudes of men towards women and children that they are supposed to love and care for." Fwangyil also states that "In this novel, the stifling and oppressive social environments that women live in are aptly portrayed."

Kehinde in "Rulers against Writers and Writers against Rulers: The Failed Promise of the Public Sphere in Post-colonial Nigerian Fiction" interprets "*Purple Hibiscus* as a campaign against female marginalization, adding that man slaughtering at the end of the novel is in consonance with radical feminism and an indication that the direction that the feminist campaign is taking currently is a bitter one, and that a violent alternative is not out of the question". Both the critics foreground the brutality that patriarchy inflicts on females.

Adenji in "Patriarchal Structures and Female Empowerment in Nigeria and Taiwanese Novels: A Study of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Li Ang's *The Butcher's Wife*" concludes that "The fact that such female oppression exists in novels published by female writers' years after the independence of both countries evidence the continuing male-female divide in the two societies, and the attendant disadvantaged position of the latter. The answer lies not only in education but also in re-educating the men in the two nations to view women as equal collaborators in the endeavor of establishing families and nations."

The same conclusion is applicable to Okuyade,s "*Changing Bodersand Creating Voices: Silence as Character in Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus (2009)*" and "*Beyond the Odds of the Red Hibiscus: A Critical Reading of Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus*" by Oha.

Apart from the above dissertations, *The Burning Bed*, a 1984 movie was also watched, in order to get more reference about domestic violence. *The Burning Bed* is both a 1980 non-fiction book by Faith McNulty about battered housewife Francine Hughes and a movie adaptation written by Rose Leiman Goldemberg. The story revolves around Hughes' trial for her husband James Berlin Mickey Hughes' murder after she burned the bed he was using to sleep in their Dansville, Michigan, home on March 9, 1977, and after she endured thirteen years of physical abuse at his hands. After the house catches fire, Hughes drives with her children to the local police station in order to confess to the act. Hughes is tried for first degree murder, and is found by a jury of her peers to be not guilty by reason of temporary instinct.

After watching the movie, it was concluded that *The Burning Bed* shares a very similar plot with that of *Provoked: A True Story*. In both the cases the victims are women who set their husbands on fire while they were asleep as a reaction to the years of physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse and at the end, they got justice.

Brutality and violence suffered by Beatrice Achike in Adichie's purple hibiscus

The chapter takes a close examination of the violent practices Beatrice Achike encounter at the hands of her husband, Eugene. Beatrice is the mother to Kambili Achike and Jaja, wife to Eugene and sister-in-law to Ifeoma.

Beatrice is obedient to her husband, religious as she follows Catholicism and an uneducated housewife. She is a protective mother to her children. She ensures the household works are done sincerely and neatly. Her concerns for her house are to make it shiny and beautiful. She decorates her house with figurines and she polishes them daily. "The figurines are special to Beatrice; she protects them daily. The pieces of the figurines can also symbolise the unborn children killed by Eugene's brutal hand" (Adichie 34). Since being married to Eugene, she suffers a lot of violence at the hands of her husband.

Achike, who uses his powers to dominate his wife. This chapter also analyses Eugene as the executioner of domestic violence in this novel. He manipulates religion to justify his violent act. Here religion is referred as Catholicism because the story is set in the Nigerian society occupied by Catholics and traditionalists.

When the narrative opens, Beatrice's figurines are broken by Eugene's heavy missal in his attempt to hit their son Jaja, for not taking part in the communion at the church during the Palm Sunday. "He picked up the missal and flung it across the room, towards Jaja. It missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass étagère, which Mama polished often. It cracked the top shelf, swept the beige, finger-size ceramic figurines of ballet dancers in various contorted postures to the hard floor and then landed after them" (Adichie 7). Eugene's anger which breaks the figurines and shatters them on floor shows not only his violence but also how its effects extend beyond the target. The missal misses Jaja but breaks Beatrice's figurines. This justifies patriarchy always favours men and justifies their cruel deeds. Religion for the longest time has served a base of justification for men to torture women. There is a connection between the scatterings of the figurines to Beatrice's miscarriages. "There's blood on the blood on the floor," Jaja said. "I'll get the brush from the bathroom. We cleaned up the trickle of blood, which trailed away as if someone had carried a leaking jar of red watercolour all the way downstairs, Jaja scrubbed while I wiped" (Adichie 33). The number of thuds Kambili hears in her parents' room can be connected to the way Eugene hits the figurines and breaks them. "I used to wonder why she polished them each time I heard the sounds from their room, like something being banged against the door" (Adichie 10). The blood she loses accounts for her numerous miscarriages after being bitten by her husband. But Eugene ignores the pain and sufferings of his wife.

The oppressive atmosphere is starkly illustrated when Kambili describes her father's violent outburst, saying, "Papa was staring at Jaja, and Mama was nodding. Jaja's defiance was still so fresh it hung in the air like a piece of driftwood after a storm" (Adichie,). This depiction exposes the suffocating aura of fear and intimidation that pervades the household, offering a poignant insight into the psychological toll of domestic violence on the characters.

Beatrice is conditioned by her husband to always fulfil his daily needs despite the abuses she experiences. Eugene doesn't allow Beatrice to have a social life. Thus, subjecting her to live like a slave. She remains isolated from everyone. She only shares her pain to Ifeoma. Beatrice is terrified to call the police and report her husband's violent behaviour. So, she shares her agony with her daughter. One day she shares about her misery with her daughter about her

pregnancy. "You know after you came and I had the miscarriage, the villagers started to whisper" (Adichie 20). Most of Beatrice's miscarriage happened at the first trimester, thus Eugene's brutality affected both his wife and the unborn child. On the other hand, the villagers discussing Beatrice's inability to bear children are blinded by the way how patriarchy operates. This scene is a clear example of how society questions only women for any mishap. Feminism questions and tries to change this thought process. Eugene's violence on Beatrice dehumanizes her. For instance, "It was at nineteen when the sounds stopped. I heard the door open. Papa's gait on the stairs sounded heavier, more awkward, than usual. I stepped out of my room just as Jaja came out of his. We stood at the landings and watched Papa descend. Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute of rice sacks" (Adichie 33). This shows to Eugene, Beatrice was just an object and not human.

Kambili perceives the pain, bereavement, and imperfections her mother experiences in her union with Eugene. Beatrice arrival from the hospital is an excellent instance that shows for her sufferings. "Her eyes were vacant, like the eyes of those mad people who wandered around the roadside garbage dumps in town, pulling grimy, torn canvas bags with their life fragments inside" (Adichie 34). From this quote, Beatrice appears to have no direction in life. Beatrice also appears lifeless because whenever her child is dead, she is left with agony.

Beatrice also suffers psychologically when she sees Eugene's violence on her daughter, Kambili. As Eugene sprinkling warm water upon her daughter's feet, Beatrice observes. She suffers as a mother physically, emotionally and psychologically.

But Beatrice, unlike Ifeoma, is less assertive and too weak to fight for her rights. Although she is frequently bitten by Eugene, she tries to defend her husband's deeds. She claims that he has a lot on his mind as he works for the press and for the people. But these reasons do not justify his actions. Ifeoma tells Beatrice to flee Eugene because of her lack of initiative, humility, and submission. But Beatrice refuses to listen to Ifeoma's advice. She considers Ifeoma's advice as "university talks" and says universities does not prepare girls for marriage. Beatrice's thought on this shows that an educated woman is far-removed from the practical realities of a traditional marriage. She is a traditional woman who believes a wife must listen to her husband regardless of the mistakes he makes. Husband is next to God and disobeying him is equals to disrespecting God. Eugene is everything to her. Beatrice finds herself trapped in a violent marriage and is unable to let go. This is because she has nowhere to go. She tells Ifeoma "Where should I go if I leave Eugene's house? Tell me where would I go?" (Adichie 250).

At the end of the narrative, Beatrice kills her husband because of the repressed emotions. Since a long time, she was suffering from domestic violence. And one day the line of the patience broke and she poisoned Eugene. Beatrice poisons her husband and then has a mental collapse. She is psychologically disturbed after committing the murder of her husband. She is devastated and becomes a neurotic case. It is evident that Eugene's extreme violence and insensitivity led Beatrice to committee murder.

On the other hand, Eugene's violence on Beatrice is because

of the male superiority. He enforces the power over those he thinks are weak like his wife, daughter and son. For longest time our society is conditioned to believe that men are superior to women. Thus, Eugene caters as one more example of gender superiority.

Brutality and violence suffered by Kiranjit Alhuwalia in *Provoked: A true story*

The chapter takes a close examination of the violent practices Kiranjit Alhuwalia encountered at the hands of her husband, Deepak Alhuwalia, who used his powers to dominate his wife. This chapter also analyses Deepak as the executioner of domestic violence in this movie. He emotionally manipulates Kiranjit to justify his violent act.

One evening at dinner, Ravi, one of Deepak's friends, dedicates a song to the newly-wed couple and encourages them to dance. Deepak declines the invitation and insists that instead of him, Kiranjit should dance with Ravi. When they return home, a jealous argument starts, Deepak slaps Kiranjit on her face. The chain of violence begins. This reflects the insecurities men go through in a relationship. This instance also shows that Deepak knew he was less eligible for Kiranjit.

Deepak was not just the perpetrator of violence but was also prejudiced. Before marriage Kiranjit wanted to study law. She was at first assured that Deepak had no issues with her studying after marriage but then right after the marriage Kiranjit was forced to stay home and ditch her dreams of further studies. Deepak started controlling and oppressing innocent Kiran. She was also not allowed to wear western clothes. His prejudices continued to dominate her.

Another instance of the violence was when, Deepak and Kiranjit visited Deepak's mother. While Kiranjit and her mother-in-law were cooking in the kitchen, Deepak suddenly comes in and starts beating his wife. Though his mother supported Kiranjit but she did not pay much attention to the violence that Kiranjit was subjected to. This shows how by being silent at that point unknowingly she supported her son. Just like every Indian mother, she was also blinded by the love for her son. Kiranjit felt helpless and disheartened.

Though Kiranjit was oppressed by her husband but she was brave enough to raise her voice. One day while Kiranjit was pressing the shirts, Deepak arrives and starts questioning about the money that Kiranjit had withdrawn from his account. Kiranjit stubbornly replies she had spent it on food for their sons. Apart from the violence, Deepak made his family suffer from food deprivation. Deepak threatens her to destroy her beautiful face by burning it with press iron. Threatening is an act of violence. This incident also evidences that Deepak was not just a careless husband but was also a careless father who does not even care for his own children.

While Kiranjit was pregnant with Deepak's third child, he pushes her from the staircase which leads to a miscarriage. She suffers as a mother physically, emotionally and psychologically. However, Kiranjit decides to stay in the marriage just to financially secure the life of her two children, Rajid and Sandib. She was financially depended on her husband and also thought her English was too weak to give her a life in London.

Apart from all these, Deepak was a man of no self-respect.

He had a number of extra marital affairs and also forced Kiranjit to borrow money from her brother in India. At first, Deepak repents and apologies after each incident. But over the time, his abusive nature exceeded to brutal beatings and sexual assaults, and no longer followed by even the smallest gesture of guilt or repentance. Deepak's violence on Kiranjit is because of the male superiority.

However, after ten years of domestic abuse, marital rape, physical, mental and psychological torture; one fateful evening on May 9, 1989 after a savage beating, Kiranjit creeps quietly into Deepak's room while he was asleep and sets him on fire. Her repressed agony and anger turned her into her husband's murderess.

Repercussions of domestic violence on Eugene Achike and Deepak Alhuwalia

The previous chapters studied the brutality, physical, mental, emotional and sexual assault Beatrice and Kiranjit suffered in their marriage. This chapter examines how violence has far reaching repercussions on men. This shows how Eugene Achike and Deepak Alhuwalia are victims of their own violence. "A study conducted by Kai Thaler in South Africa established that perpetrators of violence are victimised in the process. Thaler was interested in examining the relationship between violence, the perpetrator and the victim of the violence and concluded that the carriers of weapons and perpetrators of violence face a high risk of being victims of violence themselves "(Nzegenuka,44).

Eugene is a devoted Catholic. He blindly follows the religion as the foundation of his family, by observing rules and regulations too strictly. He cannot tolerate anyone who does not follow the Catholic rituals and norms. Catholicism is rooted in Eugene's mind, body and soul. He doesn't realize religion is hypnotic and has turned him as a victim of his own violence. Eugene worked very hard at the missionary in his teenage life. He also worked as a gardener for the priest. In his teenage life, Eugene was punished severely after being caught masturbating. This incident had a great impact on him which was seen in the form of violence in his latter part of life. The punishments and oppressive conditions translated him in bringing violence in his family. He wants others to experience the sufferings that he went through.

Eugene's early independence helped him succeed as a businessman and newspaper owner as an adult. He becomes wealthy, privileged and religion becomes the centre point of his believes. He expects too much from his family. He wants his family to set an example to the society by obeying all the catholic norms. But contrary to his expectations, his family breaks the rules of Catholicism and this drives him to commit violence on his family. For an instance, when Jaja refuses to go for the communion there is a huge misunderstanding. Jaja is not comfortable as the wafers give him bad breadth. This shows Eugene's religion is not suitable to his son which makes him super angry and violent. The incident with wafer communion during the Palm Sunday, Eugene considers himself as God when he tells his son he will die for sure. According to him not receiving the sacrament means death. He believes that God punishes them who don't follow the rules. Thus, being a flag bearer of his religion, he has the right to punish his

family, when they break the religious rules. He also becomes violent when his family breaks the Eucharist fast. Religion makes him unconscious and he fails to differentiate between moral rights and wrongs. Religion becomes a self-destruction path for Eugene.

In the process of being strict with the family, he forgets to see his own mistakes. He has also disobeyed God by tossing the holy book. This behaviour of Eugene shows that he is not actually afraid of God. He just aims to establish his power in the name of God. He cannot tolerate the fact that his commands are not being followed by his family. "Papa looked around the room quickly, as if searching for proof that something had fallen from the high ceiling, something he had never thought would fall" (Adichie 7). This shows that Eugene has exerted maximum violence in his family. Now that his family is disobeying him, he is not able to take this rebel. His disappointment is evident as the narrator says "Papa's breathing was always noisy, but now he panted as if he were out of breath and I wondered what he was thinking, if perhaps he was running in his mind, running away from something" (Adichie 15). This is evident that his violence is ruining him and making him restless in anger. He couldn't digest the fact that his own son has dared to go against him and this affects him psychologically. The feeling of powerlessness is disturbing Eugene to a great extent.

Eugene asks for his family's protection from the traditionalists through prayer. For instance, he tortures his wife, beats her to death that she suffers from miscarriage. After committing the crime, he tells his children to pray for their mother. He also uses prayer to hide his true colours from the society. He exploits prayers to exert his power on his family. Through the prayers he contradicts himself. He prays for the welfare of his country. He prays people should have a better man and not a big man with 'spindly legs of a child'. He wishes the citizens should get a responsible leader. But ironically, he is the unstable leader like a spindly legged man. He fails to maintain peace in his own family. He is insensitive towards his family. He mercilessly beats his wife and children without thinking of the consequence of his violence. He forces his own family to confess to Father Benedict. He thinks confession opens the door to heaven. His violent behaviour continues even after confessing. He fails to see that violence is degrading his humanity.

Another instance that shows his sufferings is when Eugene's voice quavers because he cannot believe the fact that his energy is failing to maintain authority on his daughter. "His voice quavered now, like someone speaking at the funeral, choked with emotions. You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it. He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it towards 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" (Adichie 194). He wants his children to be obedient. His quavering of voice implies that he is in pain because he knows how painful it is to be abused (as he was a victim of abuse in his childhood). He witnesses his own violence when he stays besides his daughter at the time she was hospitalised. He remains awake the whole night. He is psychologically disturbed after seeing his daughter in pain. He seems to be regretting his abuse. But even after doing so much harm to his family, he doesn't

stop. He continues battering his wife, Beatrice.

Finally, Eugene's violence comes to an end in the hands of Beatrice. She becomes fed up with his torture. He gathers up courage and poisons Eugene. This is clearly evident that Eugene faces the repercussions of his own violence. The violence that he enforced on his family has now become the cause of his death. Thus, violence cuts both ways. He gets equal and opposite reaction to his miserable and cruel actions.

Deepak Ahluwalia was an unpredictable and cruel character who gets affected by his own violence. He dies a painful death in the hands of her wife Kiranjit. In the movie the character of Deepak was introduced as a positive character. But his insecurities made him the antagonist and perpetrator of violence.

One evening at dinner, Ravi, one of Deepak's friends, dedicated a song to the newly-wed couple and asked them to dance. Deepak hesitated the invitation and insisted that instead of him, Kiranjit should dance with Ravi. When they return home, a jealous argument started and Deepak slapped Kiranjit on her face. This is a clear instance of insecurity. Deepak's prejudices made Kiranjit feel claustrophobic in the marriage. She stood still to ten years of harassment. She also suffered a miscarriage because of Deepak's torture.

In the end Deepak's brutality ended in the hands of his wife. After suffering from years of extreme torture, she finally gathered strength to put an end to Deepak's violence. She quietly crept into his room while he was asleep and burned him with fire. Thus, Deepak became the victim of his own violence. He lost his life for the violence that he had started. Both Eugene and Deepak's death justifies that he who lives by the sword dies by the sword. Violence begets violence.

Conclusion

Domestic Violence can be defined as the victimisation of a person where the abuser shares an intimate or spousal relationship with the victim. Domestic Violence can be enforced against both men and women. This article discussed how the female protagonists, Beatrice Achike and Kiranjit Ahluwalia, were oppressed, tormented and tortured by their husbands. Both of them were subjected to years of abuse, harassment and even miscarriage due to their husband's inhuman behaviour. This article critically analyses the patriarchal society and the in-built culture which allows violence on women to happen.

This article also established how domestic violence has far reaching implications on both the victim and the culprit. It discussed that violence on these women destroyed their lives by suppressing their voices, happiness and injuries. While the victims had to suffer years of physical assault, the men, Eugene Achike and Deepak Ahluwalia, who were the perpetrator of such violence, had to lose their lives at the end. Both suffered from prejudices, male ego, superiority complexes and arrogance. Thus, violence cuts both ways.

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