

**‘FAMILIES IN CRISES’ IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE’S
*PURPLE HIBISCUS***

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Abstract

Adichie creates miniature version of her country by presenting the picture of two families. Adichie shows how military regime has impacted the lives of common and rich alike. It suppresses the truth and exploits the commons. Even the military regime does not hesitate to kill the people and spread terrorism among the common people. Adichie keeps her finger on the contrasts in two families affected by this military regime. The present paper tries to find out the strategies that are adopted by the families in the novel to face the crises. Adichie presents two families in the novel: A woman headed family and a Man headed family. Both of these families become the victim of the military regime in Nigeria.

Key words: Crisis, family, victim etc.

Crisis are considered as a part and parcel of life. Crisis means an unstable condition, as in political, social, or economic affairs, involving an impending abrupt or decisive change. There could hardly be any place on the earth where man does not have crises. These crises could be social, political or psychological. They make us tough and tougher. Since literature is a

weapon that could be used for the resistance, it could be observed that the true literature flourishes during the times of crises. T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and many others wrote during and after world war I. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is the meditation on life while Europe was in crises. In Russian literature, the writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn had been suppressed due to his vitriolic criticism of communist regime. In his book *One Day in the life of Ivan Denisovich*, he paints the life of Russian people during Stalin regime. In America it was Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* that presents the picture of ruined south of America. It tells the story of Scarlett O'Hara who tries extremely hard to survive in the crises. In Indian literature too, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*, Hasan Sadat Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*, and Rushdie's *Midnight Children* are some of the representative novels that depict the survival of the people and their families in the crises. In the context of African literature, African writers such as Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and many others have enriched the tradition of African novel. During 1960s, the notable works like Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), Yambo Oulugem's *Bound to Violence* (1968), Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) give an account of corrupt ruling class in the society. These all were the nationalist writers who wanted to correct the social and political evils of post-independent African society. All these writers were writing during the political coups and regimes of corrupt and cruel governments.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie one of the young Nigerian writers, is considered as a fresh voice in African literature. She belongs to third generation African writers who have badly suffered from the despotism of more than two decades during their childhood (Adesanmi p. 17). *Purple Hibiscus* is her notable work. The novel explores the domestic life of two families during military coup in Nigeria. Adichie creates miniature version of her country by presenting the picture of two families. Adichie shows how military regime has impacted the lives of common and rich alike. It suppresses the truth and exploits the commons. Even the military regime does not hesitate to kill the people and spread terrorism among the common people. Adichie keeps her finger on the contrasts in two families affected by this military regime. The present paper tries to find out the strategies that are adopted by the families in the novel to face the crises. Adichie presents two families in the novel: A woman headed family and a Man headed family. Both of these families become the victim of the military regime in Nigeria.

Set in Nigeria, the novel tells the story of a fifteen year old Kambili Achike who is the narrator of the novel. Being raised in strict Catholic family, Kambili and her brother Jaja

are not very well exposed to the harsh realities of the world. They are brought up under strict supervision of their father Eugene who is too religious. This remains same until they go to Abba to celebrate Christmas where they meet their grandfather Papa-Nnukwu and Auntie Ifeoma and her Children Amaka, Obiora and Chima. Later they spend vacations in Nsukka at Auntie Ifeoma's home where they learn certain things and observe certain differences.

Adichie brings out the contrast in these two families. Kambili's family does not give any freedom to the children. Her father strictly tries to imbibe Christian values in his children. He raises both of his children in a strict catholic atmosphere. They must attend prayers and go to the church. Children are not even allowed to take the first sip of their cup of tea until Papa takes his first sip. They always have their sip after their father does. Kambili's father calls that sip as "A love sip". Kambili makes a suggestive comment about Papa's concept of "A love sip" in these words- "The tea was always too hot, always burned my tongue...."(Adichie p.8). The implication of this line is that what her father calls as a love sip is in actuality a burden on these innocent children. There is not a single instance that Kambili and Jaja are heartily laughing in their home. When Jaja and Kambili come to know about the pregnancy of their mother, Jaja says "We will take care of the baby; we will protect him."(Adichie p. 23). Jaja suggests how their childhood is so insecure from his father that he becomes anxious about the baby. Kambili and Jaja remain bereft of love of their grandpa due to only their father. He does not respect his father and keeps his children away from Papa-Nnukwu.

Talking about Kambili and Jaja's studies, they have to strictly follow the schedule given by their father and moreover their father observes whether the schedule is being followed. The worst scenario is that they are given a separate different schedule in their vacations. Kambili's father does not appreciate the success that she has in her examination. When she stands second in the class, seeing the girl who stands in the first he sarcastically says "The girl has one head; too, she does not have two. So why did you let her come first?" (Adichie p 47) He never understands his children. Kambili's father takes pride in his children for their silent nature. He says,

"They are not like those loud children people are raising these days, with no home training and no fear of God". (Adichie p. 58)

The contradiction in Kambili's father is that it is he who promotes the truth through his newspaper 'Standard' and loudly speaks about the unjust and corrupt military regime of Nigeria. At the same time he does not allow his children to be "loud". He denies the freedom

to his children. It is contradictory that he criticizes the dictators in his country and talks about the democracy but behaves like the dictator of his home.

He blames other people for making their children loud and takes pride (false) in his silent children. There are instances when Kambili's father becomes so violent. In the novel he has become violent with everyone in his family. He beats Kambili till she is hospitalized. He shows his anger on Jaja for not attending Communion and throws heavy missal at him. At his peak of rage he causes the bleeding and miscarriage of Kambili's mother. At the domestic level Kambili's father Eugene has got unsuccessful.

The atmosphere at Auntie Ifeoma's home is exactly opposite to Kambili's home. Auntie Ifeoma's home caters more freedom and space. Kambili describes the atmosphere in Auntie Ifeoma's home in following words-

“Laughter always rang out in Auntie Ifeoma's house and no matter where the laughter came from; it bounced around all the walls, all the rooms” (Adichie p.141)

Kambili observes two things at her auntie's home. One thing is laughter that she never had previously at her home and other thing is arguments that she never made anyone with. In her family they never argued. Not only is this but even her mother is never seen to be arguing or disputing with her father. But at Auntie Ifeoma's house, she learns to speak. Adichie brings out this sharp contrast in these two homes. It is in Auntie Ifeoma's home that Kambili learns to laugh and learns to make others laugh. She also gets a love of her grandfather at her Auntie's home. She falls in love with Father Amadi in the same place and wears lipstick for the first time. She learns to cook. She also observes that Amaka freely expresses her opinions. She does not become ready to possess a Christian name. It really strikes Kambili. In short Kambili understands how to live life at auntie Ifeoma. Auntie Ifeoma's family suffers from the military regime but it faces the crises courageously. She has to leave Nigeria and go to America. On the contrary Eugene cannot deal with these crises and behaves insanely.

Most significantly Kambili and Jaja learn to differentiate between wrong and right. They start questioning about the religious practices. They learn to rebel and go against their authoritarian father. Finally when they come back home after their vacations, they bring the painting of dead Papa-Nnukwu despite of the fact that their father would not like it. Papa beats Kambili violently. Kambili describes it in these words.

The stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs .Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. (Adichie p.211)

The suppression and exploitation of all family members eventuates into the killing of Kambili's father by his own wife.

In order to survive during these crises both of the families apply different strategies. Achike family is seen to be destroyed. Kambili's father does not understand that the childhood of Kambili and Jaja is like a butterfly that crushes and dies if being held tight. He does not realize how his kids feel. Too much strict and stern atmosphere and suppression of their wishes results in to the murder of Kambili's father. Second family survives the crises by leaving the country. Adichie, like in her other stories, implies that America is the place of the solace and peace for the people of Nigeria.

Adichie holds that though at Auntie Ifeoma's home, the resources are scanty there is a lot of happiness. Unlike Kambili's father; Auntie Ifeoma does not disrespect the indigenous religion. She loves her father Papa-Nnukwu and brings her home in his last days. Auntie Ifeoma follows the Christian faith. But she does not seem to be religious. Rather she is spiritual. Morning and night prayers at auntie Ifeoma's home are coupled with Igbo songs. She does not disown her indigenous culture and at the same time carries on her catholic faith. This flexibility helps her survive in the crises. Kambili's father is more religious than spiritual. Adichie implies that crises which both families go through make them tough. Auntie Ifeoma's family does every possible thing to keep her family safe and intact. However Achike family gets destroyed in these crises.

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