



Nature: A Tool To Explore Personal Development In Purple Hibiscus By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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Abstract : Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* explores the life of a Nigerian family, focusing on Kambili, a young girl navigating the complexities of an oppressive, postcolonial society. Throughout the novel, Adichie employs rich symbolism, particularly through elements of nature and the use of pathetic fallacy, to reflect the characters' growth and the unfolding narrative. Central to the story are the red and purple hibiscus flowers, which hold significant meaning both for Kambili and her brother Jaja, as well as for the novel as a whole. This paper examines how Adichie utilizes nature as a symbolic device to depict Kambili's personal development within the context of a postcolonial environment.

KEYWORDS: Symbolism, Nature, Tool, Postcolonialism, Personal development, Purple Hibiscus

INTRODUCTION

Humans are an integral part of the earth's ecosystem, like other animals and plants, relying on it for survival. As a species, humanity has emerged through a lengthy process of evolution, during which ecological balance has played a crucial role. While humans lack the abilities of plants, such as photosynthesis, or the capacity for flight like birds, their distinct advantage lies in their intellectual ability to create complex forms of expression, such as "great epic poems," as noted by human ecologist Joseph Meeker. This unique literary capability is what, according to Meeker, elevates humans above other creatures on Earth.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a renowned novelist and feminist advocate, was born in 1977 into a middle-class Igbo family in Enugu, Nigeria. Her mother made history as the first female registrar at the University of Nigeria, while her father was a professor of statistics there. The fifth of six children, Adichie describes her childhood as joyful and full of love, within a close-knit family environment.

Initially, Adichie followed societal and familial expectations by enrolling in medical school at the University of Nigeria. However, after a year and a half, she chose to pursue her passion for writing, leaving medical studies behind to accept a scholarship in communications in the United States. This transition marked her growing awareness of race and identity, as she encountered the stereotypical view of Africa held by her American roommate. Reflecting on her experience, she remarked, "Leaving Nigeria made me much more aware of being Nigerian and what that meant. It also made me aware of race as a concept, because I didn't think of myself as black until I left Nigeria."

Adichie's three novels—*Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americanah* (2013)—explore contemporary Nigerian society, its political challenges, and its interactions with the West. Through these works, she provides readers with a rich understanding of Nigeria's recent history, not just from an academic perspective, but through its diverse cultures, personal narratives, idiomatic expressions, and visions for the future.

The text selected for this study is Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. While studying at Eastern Connecticut State University, Adichie began writing her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). Set in Nigeria, the novel follows the coming-of-age journey of Kambili, a 15-year-old girl from a wealthy and well-respected family, who suffers under the oppressive rule of her fanatically religious father. The novel received significant acclaim, winning the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book (Africa) in 2005, as well as the overall Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book that same year. It was also shortlisted for the 2004 Orange Prize (now known as the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction).

Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960, but the country soon plunged into a brutal civil war, a period also explored in Adichie's later novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. *Purple Hibiscus* is set in the years following the civil war, likely in the 1980s. The novel's depiction of military rule draws inspiration from Ibrahim Babangida, who came to power through a military coup in 1985. Babangida's regime was marked by corruption and widespread human rights abuses, elements reflected in the novel. Additionally, the character of Ade Coker is based on the real-life Nigerian journalist Dele Giwa, who was tragically killed in 1986 by a bomb hidden in a package.

OBJECTIVES

- To portray nature as a tool to explore personal development in *Purple Hibiscus*
- To analyse the effect of symbolism in the selected text

The natural environment is fundamentally intertwined with human existence, and without it, human life cannot be sustained. Human survival depends entirely on a healthy, supportive, and thriving environment. Life on Earth is not viable without an appropriate natural setting. The natural environment encompasses various elements, including social, religious, linguistic, economic, and cultural aspects. A deep understanding of these elements and their interconnectedness is essential for recognizing their relative importance. In the 21st century, there is a growing awareness across various sectors that the natural environment must be preserved and protected. This paper explores the connection between nature and human life by analyzing the personal experiences of the protagonist in the selected novel.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* delves into the life of a wealthy Nigerian family, focusing on Kambili, a young girl who struggles to find her own voice within an oppressive home and society. Throughout the novel, Adichie uses symbolism, particularly through nature and pathetic fallacy, to mirror the characters' development and the unfolding narrative.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the red and purple hibiscus flowers play a central symbolic role, especially for Kambili and her brother Jaja, reflecting both their personal growth and the broader themes of the novel. The purple hibiscuses are described as "rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom," emphasizing their uniqueness and significance. Before the family's breakdown, the hibiscuses are still red, signifying that they are yet to fully bloom and that freedom has not yet permeated their lives. The color red, often associated with anger and violence, haunts Kambili throughout her childhood, particularly after she is forced to clean her mother's blood following an abusive incident with her father. Kambili's inability to focus is symbolized by the blurred black letters on the page turning to "bright red," the color of fresh blood. The red hibiscuses represent the family's oppression, as Papa's violence is the primary means by which he controls his wife and children.

The children first encounter the purple hibiscuses when they visit Auntie Ifeoma in Nsukka, and they are surprised by their existence, as they "didn't know there were" such flowers. This discovery mirrors their realization of true freedom, which they observe in the lives of their cousins. Unlike their own strict, controlled existence, Amaka and Obiora enjoy a sense of autonomy. To Jaja, the purple hibiscuses symbolize hope for a new life, one where he is free from Papa's oppressive rules. He takes a stalk of the flowers home and plants them in the garden, symbolizing his belief that freedom will soon come. Adichie foreshadows Jaja's rebellious spirit through his fascination with the rare flowers, which parallels his refusal to attend communion and the subsequent violent outburst from Papa. As the purple hibiscuses begin to bloom, Jaja's rebellion grows stronger, reflecting his development as a character.

Kambili's relationship with nature also evolves throughout the novel, mirroring her inner conflict and emotional growth. While staying in Nsukka, she encounters an earthworm in the bathtub, which she throws into the toilet despite knowing that Obiora is fascinated by worms. Her decision to remove the worm reflects her emotional turmoil and her reluctance to confront her feelings. In contrast, later in the novel, Kambili encounters a snail in an open basket, observing its struggle to escape. The snail symbolizes Kambili's own sense of entrapment within her father's household, as she, too, crawls toward freedom but is repeatedly pushed back. Over time, Kambili becomes stronger and more mature through the love and support of Auntie Ifeoma and Father Amadi. She learns to embrace her environment, symbolized by her decision to coexist with the earthworms while bathing, signifying her growing acceptance of her surroundings and newfound sense of self. Her joy, expressed through singing and bathing after spending time with Father Amadi, signifies her emotional liberation and the development of her own voice, independent of her family's oppression.

Adichie also uses pathetic fallacy throughout the novel to reflect the characters' emotions and internal states. For instance, after Jaja's defiant act of skipping communion, "howling winds" and "angry rain" uproot trees and cause the satellite dish to crash, mirroring the tense atmosphere in the Achike household. Similarly, the "strange, furious rain" following the death of Ade Coker symbolizes Papa's emotional turmoil. At the end of the novel, after Kambili and Mama visit Jaja in prison, the clouds are described as "dyed cotton wool," creating an ambiguous atmosphere that leaves readers uncertain whether the scene is hopeful or ominous. Adichie also uses nature imagery to reflect Kambili's hopes for the future. She envisions planting orange trees and purple hibiscuses, symbolizing her belief that freedom, like the blooming flowers, will eventually come.

Through the use of pathetic fallacy, imagery, and symbolism, Adichie develops the novel's plot and deepens the characters' growth. The red and purple hibiscuses represent the contrast between freedom and oppression, while Kambili's personal maturation is mirrored in her changing relationship with nature. The use of pathetic fallacy further illuminates the characters' inner thoughts and emotions. This paper illustrates how Adichie skillfully employs nature as a symbolic tool to reveal the inner workings of her characters and to underscore their emotional and narrative development.

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