

### **Analysis of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter* from a Feminist Perspective**

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#### **Abstract**

Women in Africa have been suffering at the hands of male patriarchy for so long and subjected to the oppression of race, gender, and class. The portrayal of the Black women in literary works merely as unfortunate and deplorable as they are subject to sexual and racial exploitation by the patriarchal members of the society. This article attempts to analyze Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter* from the perspective of feminism and to shed a light on how the female characters in these literary pieces endure abuse of various kinds inflicted by male patriarchy and how they display incredible and extraordinary determination to make comprehensive improvements in their respective lives. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie challenges inhuman practices on women carried about by the menfolk, particularly on Mama (Beatrice Achike) by her husband. She often keeps quiet and does not reveal any details of physical abuse she receives from her husband and chooses to remain silent in the face of humiliation, victimization, and brutality to be perceived as a good woman. However, Adichie applauds female characters like Kambili and Auntie Ifeoma, who do not need men for their sustenance or keep themselves attached to men to assert their identity. In *So Long a Letter*, Mariama Ba warrants the reader's admiration as well as the critics' support by portraying female characters that freely speak their minds and act independently and successfully maintain the sense of their identity. Ba's two leading female characters, Aissatou and Ramatoulaye, are portrayed as women who are ready to rebel against the smothering grip of patriarchy to prove their self-worth and to claim their independence.

**Keywords:** Women, feminism, gender issues, discrimination, oppression

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## **Introduction**

Feminism is defined as the advocacy of women's rights that provide the platform to achieve political, social, and economic equality to men, as well as it is concerned with the stigmatization and marginalization of women in a patriarchal society that works in favor of men. Myra Marx Ferree and Aili Mari Tripp defined feminism as 'the broad goal of challenging and changing gender relations that subordinate women to men,' and 'the only or the primary goal feminists...include a commitment to more equal and fair gender relations' (Ferree & Tripp, 2006, p.vii). Lisa Tuttle observes feminism as the 'advocacy of women's rights based on a belief in the equality of the sexes, and in its use, the word refers to everyone aware of and seeking to end women's subjugation in any way and for any reason' (Tuttle, 1986, p.107). According to Helen Chukwuma, feminism is a 'rejection of inferiority and striving for recognition. It seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy, efficient and contributing human being. Feminism is a reaction to such stereotypes of women that deny them a positive identity' (Chukuma, 1994, p.ix). In African society, feminism has bumped into a bitter and antagonistic obstacle because the African culture itself views it with so much scorn and contempt due to the widespread belief that the emancipation and liberal representation of women would undermine the authority of men in society as well as transform their roles in their respective domestic abodes. Femi Ojo-Ade, writer and novelist, takes a distinct stand on the issue of feminism, particularly on African feminism, and observes that 'African feminism propagated by a group of diasporic Blacks whose knowledge of Africa is at best superficially first-hand' (Ojo-Ade, 2003, p.33). This distinct nature of African feminism is revealed by Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves in their book entitled *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, as they believe that

A genuine African feminism can, therefore, be summarized as follows. First, it recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European / American exploitation. It is not antagonistic to African men, but it challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation, which differ from the generalized oppression of all African peoples (Davies & Adams, 1986, p.8-9).

Female/feminist writers, with time, have been extending their loyal support to the feminist movement from the time of Flora Nwapa up until now. They gathered the courage to forget and overlook the years in which female characters remained silent and voiceless, and male characters enjoyed all the powers entrusted to them. It is against these backdrops that Salami-Agunloye observes,

These images and depictions of womanhood are fashioned by the patriarchal system. Male characters in the novel meet their subjects (females) as subservient, docile, timid, with low status and dependent absolutely on male figures around them, especially their husbands; they are passive victims of male oppression, and without agency (as cited in Emenyonu & Eke, 2010, 177).

As evident by the quotation above, African women fight battles in numerous battlegrounds. They do not only aspire to ensure their survival, but also maintain political, economic, social, intellectual, professional, and, naturally, personal desires for change.

Today, the feminist theory and in movement advocate a pattern of lifestyle, activities, and mode of living. An ideal woman should involve herself in the traditional African Societies where they were regarded as inferior, dare not look at their husbands or men in the face. They were treated as housewives (almost servants) who must do all the domestic works and must always follow the dictates of their husbands without asking questions. This shows that the typical African woman is the obedient servant who must do all her husband's biddings without as much as asking him to explain.

One way to begin to counter a male perception of feminist struggle is by evaluating the writings of females from the women's perspective. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Mariama Ba's novels are selected because they present the subject of feminist realism from the perspective of the female and support the premise that women's conditions are better treated by women. This unjust position of women in Africa contributed immensely to the late involvement of female writers. Before the arrival of these female writers, their male counterparts, such as Wole Soyinka in, Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, Meja Nwangi in *Going Down the River* have portrayed women as housewives, mothers, whores, and secondary characters with their succor being men.

Still, when female writers such as Flora Nwapa, Chimamanda Adichie, Buchi Emecheta, Tsitsi Dangarembga emerged, things began to change (not all female writers are feminists). However, some male writers also think there should be gender equality.

This research aims to examine gender imbalance and discriminations as in socio-cultural and literary discourse using the examples Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. The study observes the socio organization and stratification from the novel regarding the male and female gender pay more emphasis on the female and her roles, stand image, and place within the society and her community. The study further explores the status of a woman in Africa in general, in particular, her right as a mother, female child, and wife. This research tends to answer the following questions: How are women represented in the selected texts and gender imbalance? In what ways does African culture contribute to female marginalization, discrimination, and stratification? How have patriarchal values and culture contribute to the discrimination of female gender in African societies? This work is justifiably a literary supplement to the existing stock of research in the field of feminist and gender aesthetics. It will add to scholarly work on literature and women feminist writings. In analyzing the selected novels, the feminist theory will be employed to discuss gender issues identified in the texts.

## **Feminism**

Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish and achieve political, economic, personal, and social rights for women that are equal to those of men. This includes seeking to create equal opportunities for women in education and employment. Feminist movements have campaigned and continue to fight for women's rights, including the right to vote, to hold public office, to work, to earn fair wages or equal pay, to own property, to receive education, to enter contracts, to have equal rights within marriage, and to have maternity leave. Feminists have also worked to promote bodily autonomy and integrity, and to protect women and girls from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. Feminist campaigns are generally considered to be one of the leading forces behind significant historical, societal changes for women's rights, particularly in the West, where they are

near-universally credited with having achieved women's suffrage, gender neutrality in English, reproductive rights for women (including access to contraceptives and abortion), and the right to enter into contracts and own property. Although feminist advocacy is, and has been, mainly focused on women's rights, some feminists, including bell hooks, argue for the inclusion of men's liberation within its aims because men are also harmed by traditional gender roles. Feminist theory, which emerged from feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experience; it has developed approaches in a variety of disciplines to respond to issues concerning gender. Numerous feminist movements and ideologies have evolved over the years and represent different viewpoints and aims. Some forms of feminism have been criticized for taking into account only white, middle class, and educated perspectives. This criticism led to the creation of ethnically specific or multicultural forms of feminism, including black feminism and intersectional feminism.

Feminism seeks a subjective identity, a sense of competent agency, and history for women, which have hitherto been denied them by the dominant male African culture. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie asserts that:

The woman as a daughter or a sister has greater status and more right in her own lineage, married she becomes a possession, voiceless and often rightness in her husband's family except for what accrues to her through her children (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1986, p. 68)

Also, Elaine Showalter, in *The New Feminist Criticism*, compiled the most prominent and contentious articles on the feminist approach to literature and classified feminism into several branches. She believes that the English Feminist movement is essentially Marxist and highlights the oppression of women. At the same time, that of French is Psychoanalytic in its approach to women's problem and proffering an approach that emphasizes repression to her, "the American version is a textual and analytical expression of women ideas" (Showalter, 1986, p. 92). Also, Marilyn French, in her book *Beyond Power*, proposed an approach that included medicine, psychology, law education, history as well as anthropology in tracing the matriarchal nature of some societies. French described female experiences and posited that "Feminism is the only

serious, coherent and universal philosophy that offers an alternative to patriarchal thinking and structures” (French, 1985, p. 442). Feminists propagated and struggled public recognition for the equality of both males and females in all significant ways. Nancy Hartsock strongly believes that a feminist approach would empower women to discover the reasons behind male domination and the physical exploitation of women by men. To Hartstock in *Money, Sex and Power*:

A feminist standpoint can allow us to descend further into materially to an epistemological level at which we can better understand both why patriarchal institutions and ideas take such perverse and deadly forms and how theory and practice can be redirected in more liberatory directions (Hartstock, 1985, p. 23).

She considered a psychological understanding of a patriarchal mentality or mindset that might provide better guidance for feminists to succeed in having their voices heard and gathering support.

Buchi Emecheta was a renowned Nigerian novelist who has published over twenty books, including *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). Her works mainly deal with themes such as female independence, feminism, motherhood, child slavery, and freedom through education. Emecheta’s concept of feminism seeks to redirect African women towards a better way of life by exploring issues like the brutality of polygamy. Ogundipe- Leslie (1987) is another critic that maintains that “Emecheta’s writing is nothing but feminism and they portray the experience and fate of women in a society dominated and ruled by the menfolk” (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1986, p. 5). Mariama Ba was a Senegalese author and renowned feminist who vehemently criticized what she considered as inequalities between both genders associated with traditional African practices. Amanda Smith revealed Ba’s main preoccupation when she posited that “the basic intention of Mariama Ba is to recreate the image of women through feminism” (Smith, 1997, p. 4) It is evident that Ba tried as much as possible to highlight feminist issues affecting women but did not also fail to emphasize the impact of tradition on their lives.

## **Feminist Ideology**

For several centuries, patriarchal, religious, and secular authorities have exercised antagonistic influences on the lives of human beings and affected the course of their lives, either positively or negatively, depending on human responses to them. Literature abounds with characters who have responded in various ways to the dictates of patriarchy, religion, and secular institutions. While some characters have learned from and achieved a better understanding of human existence in their religious, patriarchal, and secular interactions, others have been destroyed by such adherence peculiar interest is on fanatics, ethical, or traditional, and what happens to them and societies to which they belong. Feminist analysis of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* from the perspectives of the impacts that patriarchy, religious and traditional values exercise on the individual psyche, particularly on the female folk, will prove to be invaluable and worthwhile in understanding the inhuman treatment of women in traditional societies. These two prominent writers issue a standard warning that excessive adherence might lead to chaos, the destruction of the woman psyche, and societal harmony. Adichie elevates her female characters at the expense of her male characters. She is conveniently branded as a radical feminist due to the fact that she attempted to develop her female characters to the fullest and to encourage them to fight against patriarchy in all its forms. The theme of female subjugation and oppression is abundantly present in her literary works. This aspect of her rendered her a prominent feminist and became a typical characteristic of her style. Mariama Ba employs the epistolary technique to expose the different aspects of male domination and female deprivations resulting from patriarchal hegemony in the African context. Taiwo observed that Ba put together a rambling collection of episodes built around matters of natural and universal significance and "mobilizes public opinions in favor of women's liberation freedom of action for the individual and a total rejection of un-progressive idea and attitudes" (Taiwo, 1984, p. 17).

The novel is a literary biography written in an epistolary form to accommodate all the events of the past to effect positive changes in all that affect women. Kolawole affirms that:

Women are using literature and specifically the biographical form to create a positive collective consciousness. The meeting point is that both as personal and collective biographies, these women are changing negative myths through nonfiction and the unfolding of social realism. They underscore Africa women transgressing existing traditional spaces to stand on the edge of social change (Kolawole, 1998, p. 216).

It should be kept in mind that despite its certain unavoidable limitations, this article aimed to critically analyze Chimamanda Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*.

### **Analysis of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* from a Feminist Perspective**

*Purple Hibiscus* is a novel set in postcolonial Nigeria, a country beset by political instability and economic difficulties. The central character, Kambili Achike, is fifteen years old for much of the period covered by the book. She's a member of a wealthy family dominated by her devoutly Catholic father, Eugene. Eugene is both a religious zealot and an influential figure in the Achike household, subjecting his wife, Beatrice, Kambili herself, and her brother, Jaja, to beatings and psychological cruelty. Kambili's story opens up by the direct statement of Kambili, "Things started to fall apart at home." The readers discover her unfolding the mood of her prison-like home where violence, lack of freedom, religious fanaticism, and unbroken silence define the atmosphere in the house. The book introduces Kambili's family, where her father, Eugene, dominates every aspect of the home. Eugene is a man of numerous attributes: he is a very wealthy businessman, a fighter for democracy, a human rights awards winner, a devout catholic and church financier, a famous philanthropist, a community leader, and chief but paradoxically, an abusive tyrant in his home. Fifteen-year-old Kambili and her elder brother Jaja are restricted by their father's fanaticism. They know very little beyond Eugene's schedule and anger. Eugene draws daily plans of sleeping, eating, reading, mathematics, and attending services for his children, which they must follow even when away from home. Any deviation from strict adherence to the schedule draws a heavy punishment. Jaja's refusal to attend mass and confess his supposed sins caused Eugene to fling his heavy missile at him. Kambili narrates the incident:



Papa looked around the room quickly, as if searching for proof that that something had fallen from the high ceiling, something he had never thought would fall. He picked up the missal and flung it across the room, toward Jaja. It missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass etagere, which Mama polished often (Adichie, 2012, p. 7)

The physical abuse that Eugene exercises on his children perpetually continues and adversely affects their lives. Kambili's transgression of keeping her grandfather's portrait incurs her near-fatal beating, which lands her in the hospital for months. Kambili and Jaja have hot water poured on their feet for not confessing to their father that his father (Papa Nnakwu) slept under the same roof with them at Aunty Ifeoma's house.

Despite Eugene Achike's public image of being a wealthy factory owner and devout Catholic and active philanthropist, Papa is strictly authoritarian at home. He maintains rigid rules and sets impossibly high standards for the members of his household and does not hesitate to employ violence whenever he believes that they failed or committed sins. His rage knows no boundaries when he discovers that his wife and children desecrated the Eucharistic fast and expresses his frustration at first and then turns to physical violence. He uttered his anger with such words: "Has the devil asked you all to go on errands for him?" and "Has the devil built a tent in my house?" (Adichie, 2012, p. 102). His anger takes the form of physical violence as stated in the book

He unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy sequined sleeve of her church blouse. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back (Adichie, 2012, p. 102).

At home, Eugene has absolute authority. He does not only have the final say but all the say. Everyone depends on his decision so much that when the family needed new curtains, Beatrice commented: "Papa would decide the colors." When invited to spend their holidays with Aunty Ifeoma, Jaja automatically replies, "if papa said it is alright" (Adichie, 2012, p. 94). Beatrice's domestic duties include supervising the house girl,

preparing meals, serving food, and nursing the children back to health after battering from their father. She is an utterly submissive woman and does not speak out her mind. She blindly obeys his commands and believes that she cannot abandon such a well-to-do and socially elevated valuable and philanthropic member of society.

Beatrice watches helplessly as her husband inflicts injuries on their children in the name of discipline or love. She receives her equal share from her husband's physical violence. She endures brutal treatment when she refuses to visit the reverend father after church service because she was feeling weak and nauseous from early pregnancy symptoms. For unnamed wrongdoing, Eugene breaks a massive mahogany table on her stomach, leading to another miscarriage of her six weeks pregnant. Beatrice's passive posture in the face of oppression, violence, and tyranny, in a way, reflects the broader situation of several women in the nation. Akachi Ezeigbo aptly emphasizes this predicament and dilemma of women even when receiving violent physical battering at the hands of their husbands. According to Ezeigbo, "women tend to keep quiet and suffer in silence" (Ezeigbo, 1996, p. 16). This is because society has always prescribed silence, reticence, complaisance, patience, and gentleness as the quality of a virtuous woman. Beatrice displayed tolerance and resignation to her family's oppression; she hardly speaks. Kambili says, "Mama speaks the way birds eat in small amounts, and there was so much that she did not mind" (Adichie, 2012, p. 9).

Aunty Ifeoma is a foil to Beatrice and does not let patriarchy to subjugate her. She is a candid and forthright woman who serves as a professor at a local university. Ifeoma does not spare either her brother, the university, or the government, from her harsh and bitter criticism. She holds a strong belief in Catholicism but continues to maintain a liberal and open-minded attitude. Ifeoma treats her children with respect and often encourages them to speak whatever in their minds. Kambili observes this difference of approach in her aunt's home and expresses her admiration and astonishment when she compares her situation with her aunt's children:

It was what Aunty Ifeoma did to my cousins, I realized then, setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time, believing they would scale the rod. And they did. It

was different for Jaja and me. We did not scale the rod because we thought we could, we scaled it because we were terrified that we couldn't (Adichie, 2012, p. 226).

While Beatrice and her children are relegated, Auntie Ifeoma is assertive. She speaks up and never allows Eugene to intimidate her. Surprisingly, although she challenges Eugene, she's often able to have her way with him. Auntie Ifeoma succeeds in making Eugene release Kambili and Jaja to spend their holidays with her, and she can persuade him to allow them to watch the traditional festivities against his fanatical religious conviction and even release his money for Papa Nnakwu's burial. It is in Nsukka with Auntie Ifeoma's family that Kambili and Jaja can experience the freedom of speech and action coupled with responsible behavior.

At last, they mature and were able to assert themselves and get rid of their father's domination. Quite surprisingly, Beatrice finds the courage within herself to put an end to the tyrannical treatment of her husband as his abuse gets worse and she experiences yet another miscarriage. All the years of forbearance and silence in the face of heavy battering, mauling, mutilations, oppression and subjugation had built up in Beatrice the deadly zeal for revenge. Possibly, her actions result from her mere desperation to be free. However, it is a pity that she eventually succumbs to mild insanity after her supposed liberation. This may be due to the fact that Jaja, her son chooses to suffer imprisonment for his mother's crime.

### **Feminist Analysis of Ba's *So Long a Letter***

Mariama Ba's espousal of modernism entailed a project of liberation for women that had to defer to the men's plan of achieving national freedom. This project for women's liberation still engenders great conflict in North Africa, but in sub-Saharan Africa, its time has clearly come, and *So Long a Letter* played a not inconsiderable role effecting this change, especially in Senegal. In the novel, the story revolves around the protagonist, Ramatoulaye Fall, a recent widow, as she writes to her best friend, Aissatou. She recounts how her estranged husband, Modou Fall, betrayed and deserted her after thirty years by taking a second wife. This second wife happens to be Binetou, who is a friend of her daughter. Ramatoulaye records her anger at Modou, the religion,

and custom that allows polygamy in her long letter to Aissatou, whose predicament is similar. Despite this betrayal, Ramatoulaye's love and loyalty remain within the bounds of marriage. The readers are immersed in the practice of *mirasse*, the period of mourning and seclusion for widows during which all the faults of the deceased are to be brought to light. She takes solace in writing letters in a diary form to her friend, Aissatou.

However, the two women respond differently to their predicament. Unlike Ramatoulaye, Aissatou divorces her husband, traveled abroad with her sons, and gets a lucrative job since her mother-in-law, Aunty Nabou who is a *Guelewar* (princess of the Sine) didn't accept her because she is the daughter of a goldsmith. Grande Nabou then gave young Nobou, her niece to Mawdo, her son to marry as a second wife. She made it very clear that she can't share her husband with another woman, and she said in her letter while she was leaving:

Princes master their feelings to fulfill their duties. 'Others' bend their Head and, in silence, accept a destiny that oppresses them. That brief put, is the internal ordering of our society, with its absurd divisions. I'll not yield to it. I cannot accept what you are offering me today's place of the happiness we once had... I am stripping myself of your love, your name. Clothed in my dignity, the only worthy garment, I go my way. Goodbye, Aissatou (Ba, 1982, pp. 32-33)

These conflicting pressures are accentuated as Ramatoulaye loses her husband first to a younger woman, then to death. Alone by herself and widowed, she obliged to deal with her family on her own. At first, she is forced to confront a series of suitors beginning with her husband's elder brother, Tamsir, who is expected to make her one of his wives. In her anger at his rudeness, she lashes out at him:

You forget that I have a heart, a mind that I am not an object to be passed from one hand to another. You don't know what marriage means to me. It is an act of faith and love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you (Ba, 1982, p. 58).

She also refused Daouda Dieng's proposal because she does not love him even though she's fond of him. Also, she could not bring herself between him and his family after her own bitter experience. She rejects both their offers and the assumption of male superiority, and she puts in their place the brother, the suitor, and the Imam, along with all the former prerogatives of the patriarchal order that attempted to assert its control over her again.

As her gradual passage from wife to widow yields to the pressures of single motherhood, she comes to confront the dangers of modernism to which her children are exposed. She catches three of her daughters smoking and has to deal with her sons recklessly playing in the street. Finally, most movingly, she must handle the delicate situation posed by her daughter, Aissatou's pregnancy. It is at this point that Ramatoulaye passes from being the maltreated victim of male indifference to be the autonomous parent whose reactions and values are to shape the lives of her children profoundly. As she struggles as a mother over how to treat her daughter in need, the dictates of religion and traditional customs, and the issues of becoming the new African woman fade into thin air. Ramatoulaye says at this point that she seeks refuge in God, but in the end, decides to act based on her feeling as a mother:

One is a mother to face the flood. Was I to threaten, in the face of my daughter's shame, her sincere repentance, her pain her anguish? Was I? I took my daughter in my arms. Painfully, I held her tightly, with force multiplied tenfold by pagan revolt and primitive tenderness (Ba, 1982, p. 88).

Towards the end, Ramatoulaye turns increasingly to the dictate of her grandmother. From generations of foremothers to those of their daughter to her situation and soon-to-be-grandmother, she embraces her fate as the woman of her times, forcefully forging the image of the 'New African woman' whose trajectory is delineated by the choices she makes based on both tenderness and revolt. Aissatou's financial success and career might have been thought to qualify her as the exemplar for the position of the New African Woman.

Through Ramatoulaye, Ba reminds us of the importance of values grounded in Senegalese ways, which accounts for the strengths of this most enduring figure and for

the considerable influence that this novel has had upon subsequent generations of African women. It is within this social and political context that Manama Ba's book needs to be read. Her literary work is revolutionary because it calls attention to some of the ways in which women have suffered under Islamic law as it is commonly practiced in Senegal, particularly under the institution of polygamy. In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye decides to remain with her husband, Modou, when he takes a second wife because she believes that he will follow the precepts of Islam in treating the two wives and the two families equally. She says, with resignation: "I had prepared myself for equal sharing, according to the precepts of Islam concerning polygamy life" (Ba, 1982, p. 46). The central character is heartbroken that she has to share a husband with another woman, and the situation is rendered even more difficult because the other woman is her daughter's friend, the same age as her daughter. She nevertheless reasons that this is the best course of action for her, given her beliefs. Ramatoulaye is necessarily a feminist, but she maintains particular views that go entirely against feminism. She is a frequent practitioner of her religion and closely follows the dictates even if they advocate the unequal treatment of women.

Although she has prepared herself for equal sharing, Rama will learn the sad truth about her situation, similar to that of so many other women in Senegal: "He never came again; his newfound happiness gradually swallowed up his memory of us. He forgot about us" (Ba, 1982, p. 46). For Rama, this modern perversion of the system of polygamy opens up questions about the economic and social consequences for women, children, and the country.

Binetou, Modou's second wife, and a friend of Daba, is only 17 years old when she reluctantly consents to marry Modou due to the pressures of her family who only show interest for Modou's money. Binetou was pulled out of school and forced into marriage by her parents, to whom Modou promised an apartment and a trip to Mecca, in addition to the villa, car, jewels, and monthly allowance he pledged to his new wife. As Rama astutely puts it: "Binetou, like many others, was a lamb slaughtered on the altar of 'affluence'" (Ba, 1982, p. 39). It is clear that Ba, like her heroine Rama, feels sympathy for Binetou, a young girl who is permanently "sold" to please a greedy mother interested in material gain and social status. Throughout the novel, we are provided with

glimpses of Binetou's mother wearing her new wealth proudly, trying to impress. However, Binetou manages to survive in her marital union to Moudo by exercising her youth and physical charms. She often plays jokes on him, orders him around, and applying pressure to convince him to buy things for her.

Aissatou is Ramatoulaye's childhood friend and with whom she exchanges letters. Her marital troubles are quite similar to Ramatoulaye's. Her husband decides to take a second wife, a woman of noble birth, and higher social standing to carry out his mother's wishes. However, unlike Rama, who indulges with her husband's wishes, Aissatou reacts to it quite unexpectedly and takes up the courage to leave her husband on principle. Possessing a much freer spirit than her friend, Aissatou decides to change her destiny and returns to school with the intention of pursuing her education. Eventually, she relocates to America and starts a new life there, finds a high-paying job, and takes charge of her own life.

## **Conclusion**

As clearly revealed by the feminist observation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, the patriarchy and chauvinism are the significant problems faced by the women characters in the novels, even in real life. The two books are very much alike, mainly because they both have common themes like; patriarchy, religious zeal, male chauvinism, violence, death, social change, etc. This is an indication that the female folk experience similar problems all over the world (since the novels are set in different places. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* was set in Nigeria while Ba's *So Long a Letter* was set in Senegal.

An exciting aspect of the two novels is that all the female protagonist/heroines survive their onslaught by leaning on each other, but the males either become disillusioned/die outright. Again Modou Fall and Mawdo Ba, like Eugene Achike, are seen as tragic figures whose lives have lost their meanings. They fail to operate above the dictates imposed by religious tradition or a caste system that imposed expectations that destroy their personalities.

Conversely, the three heroines of *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye, Aissatou, and Jacqueline are genuinely in love with their husbands whom they value and respect as partners for their own sake not because of religious or cultural expectations. As a result, they marry without advice or approval since the parents operated from the background of traditional mores dictated by Islam or the caste system. To fulfill themselves, they revolt against societal or family norms. Even Ramatoulaye's is a quiet, assertive revolt manifests itself as she refuses to marry Tamsir, her late husband's brother, or her first suitor, Daouda Dieng as expected of her. Aissatou, on the other hand, chooses to quit the marriage and fend for her children successfully to the shame and frustration of Mawdo. Jacqueline determines to live and accept her predicaments when she discovered there was nothing physically wrong with her except stress.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Beatrice Achike, in a frantic bid to free herself and her family from the stifling relationship that was gradually grinding them emotionally and psychologically, poisons her husband and free them from his misplaced patriarchal control. Auntie Ifeomare presents what an average African woman should be secure, fearless, determined, and unyielding. She is the only female character who didn't succumb to chauvinism.

Thus, this study recommends that bringing to limelight the ills surrounded in our society where women are denied the political power to rule; instead, they are seeing as second-class citizens. Additionally, the theme of feminism could further be discussed by exploring relatively contemporary novels written by both female and male writers. To this end, further studies could justify the assertion that peace shall elude in the home front and at the world level if firm measures are taken to tackle the menace of violation and the occurring subjugation and subordination of women in the society.



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