



Tracing The Depths Of Human Aggression: Analysing *Purple Hibiscus*

Simerjit Kaur

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Saroop Rani Government College for Women, Amritsar, India

Abstract: Emotions have a considerable impact on the cognitive processes in human beings. They influence the thinking of individuals which alters their behaviours in particular situations. These emotions need to be controlled as they can overpower the rational mind of an individual instigating him to take emotional decisions causing harm not only to oneself but also the other person who is at the receiver's end. Anger is one of the emotions which could prove harmful if not managed properly and it could lead to aggressive behaviour resulting in violence. There could be a number of reasons that triggers the aggressive behaviour of human beings and many research works have been done to understand the various causes of this human aggression. One such theory is propounded by Anderson and Bushman in which they try to understand the human aggression through their model that is General Aggression Model. The present paper aims at exploring the human aggressive behaviour through the study of the character Eugene from the novel *Purple Hibiscus* written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche by applying the general aggression model. Eugene is a violent character who abuses his whole family in different ways.

Keywords: Aggression, Violence, inputs, routes, outcomes.

"Your emotions are the slaves to your thoughts, and you are the slave to your emotions". (Gilbert 139). Human beings are driven by the emotions which they experience during their day to day interactions with people or things. Though human beings are rational who uses logic and reason for their decision making but sometimes these emotions which are intense feelings influence the decisions of human beings by overpowering the rational part. Vincent Van Gogh writes to his wife Theo in one of his letters, "My dear fellow- let's not forget that small emotions are the great captains of our lives, and that these we obey without knowing it." (Gogh). The emotions experienced by human beings play a vital role in their behaviour as sometimes they are swayed by the emotions to such an extent that they don't even realise the impact of them on their decisions. Emotion is a subjective feeling which varies from person to person but some basic emotions which are experienced by everyone are- fear, anger, disgust, happiness, sadness and surprise. Anger is a natural and powerful emotion which is experienced by everyone though the intensity differs in each case. Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, "We boil at different degrees." (Qtd in Oxford Quotes 10) Anger is an important emotion if not controlled appropriately it not only affects the person feeling this emotion but also the one who becomes the target of the anger. Human beings controlled by the emotion of anger sometimes lead to aggression causing harm to others. Aggression is defined as feelings of anger and hate that may result in threatening or violent behaviour. Oxford Dictionary defines the word aggression as, "hostile act or feeling". (Oxford) Literature depicts various aspects of human life through its narration, characters or themes. There are many literary texts which depicts the characters who behave in aggressive manner. One of such example is Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* written by Emily Bronte. Heathcliff developed the feelings of anger and frustration due to the behaviour of Hindley which made him isolated from the family by realising him again and again that he didn't belong to

the family. These feelings of anger and frustration resulted into despising the people around him and he turned aggressive towards them. (Bronte) Okonowo from *Things fall apart* written by Chinua Achebe has an excessive fear of being like his father and he tries to demonstrate that he is strong and brave. In order to prove that he is different from his father and he is not weak like him, he turns into aggressive, angry and violent man who beats his wives. (Achebe) The causes of aggressive behaviour in both the characters are different.

Human aggression has been studied by many psychologists and different theories have been formulated to understand and analyse the various causes of aggression. One such theory has been proposed by Anderson and Bushman who formulated General Aggression Model to analyse the causes and outcomes of aggressive behaviour. This model was developed to assimilate various domain-specific theories that have been used before to explain aggression in order to provide a more comprehensive framework of aggression theory. The General Aggression Model provides a useful framework to understand and analyse the aggressive behaviour of individuals. The model is divided into three phases- Inputs, Routes and Outcomes. According to this model the first phase (inputs) focuses on the influence of personological (person factors) and situational variables. Personological input variables are personal characteristics that influence how a person reacts in a situation and the Situational input variables include important aspects of situation that interact with personological inputs to stimulate or inhibit aggression. The second phase (routes) focuses on how input variables influence affect, cognition, and arousal. These three routes comprise an individual's present internal state of mind which encourages or discourages aggressive behaviour. The third phase (outcomes) aims at how these routes impact appraisal and decision processes leading to either thoughtful or an impulsive action. The present paper focuses on understanding the aggressive behaviour of a character, Eugene from the novel *Purple Hibiscus* by applying the General Aggression model.

Purple Hibiscus is a novel that narrates the account of a fifteen year old girl, Kambili who is a victim of violence. She lives in a constant fear of his father, Eugene and she always tries to please him. Eugene has this duality in his character where on the one side he is a strict disciplinarian to the extent of being aggressive and violent on the domestic front and on the other side he maintains a charismatic image in public of being a philanthropic. Eugene is a violent Catholic patriarch who is considered very generous by his community that they call him by the title Omelora, The One who does for the community but in reality he is repressive and fanatically religious person at home. He is also awarded with a human rights award for his philanthropic work. Eugene's personality is dominated by his religious beliefs and he is very strict in following the norms and the rituals of his faith that he never tolerates any kind of sacrilege. The novel is full of instances where Eugene's aggression causes harm to the members of his own family. Eugene's temperament is formed by his personal characteristics which include his belief in Catholicism as it became part of his personality. Personal characteristics of a person influence his/her behaviour in a particular situation and these personal characteristics form personological (person factors) input variables. Personality can be considered as a sum of knowledge structures and these knowledge structures develop from experiences which further influence perception at multiple levels and can influence behaviours. Eugene's knowledge structure influences his perception in such a way that when his family members violate any religious practice it triggers his anger and makes him violent. Eugene considers himself to be very upright and religious person and wants his family to follow the proper rules of their religion. He doesn't forgive anyone from his family if they don't perform the things properly. He tries to convert his father into a catholic but when his father refuses to change his faith Eugene breaks all his ties with him. Eugene publishes a newspaper called 'Standard' which is known to speak about the truth but at home his own family members are not allowed to talk much. The Bible teaches that Love is God but Eugene forgets this teaching in his anger and chooses the path of violence to correct those actions of his family members which he considers as mistakes. Eugene beats his wife knowingly that she is pregnant, he beats his daughter so badly that she is admitted to hospital and he also breaks his son's thumb for not getting the first position in class. Three incidents from the novel will be studied through the lens of General Aggression Model to understand the aggressive behaviour of Eugene.

The first incident happens in the beginning of the novel on Palm Sunday when Jaja doesn't go to communion which makes his father, Eugene furious. When Eugene returns from the church after mass, he is so angry that he bangs his heavy leather-bound missal down on the dining table. Eugene questions Jaja about his behaviour to which Jaja responds that Wafer gives him bad breath and it nauseates him when the priest keeps touching his mouth. Eugene always insists on calling it "host" instead of wafer as "host" captures the essence of Christ's body and not receiving it means death. Jaja says that he prefers to die rather than to receive it. The response of Jaja makes him angry and he throws the missal towards Jaja. "He picked up the missal and flung it across the room, toward Jaja. It missed Jaja completely, but it hit the glass étagère, which Mama polished often."

(Adiche 7). The first phase of General Aggression Model is inputs and in this incident the inputs are both personal and situational. The belief system of Eugene that his deep faith in religion is challenged which creates the person factors input variable. The second input which Eugene receives is the situational input and in this case the situation which triggers his anger is the disobedience of his own son who is challenging his faith by not following the set rules. The inputs change Eugene's mood and emotions resulting in bad temper and creating anger emotions which constitute the affect route and these inputs further create hostile thoughts which are part of cognition route. The input variables increase arousal in Eugene's case as the words of Jaja provokes him more. The third phase is outcome where the decision is made through immediate appraisal or reappraisal and Eugene instead of giving a second thought takes the immediate appraisal and follows the path of aggression for correcting the mistakes of Jaja. He throws the missal towards Jaja to punish him for not following the rules.

The second incident of Eugene's aggressive behaviour is seen towards his wife, Beatrice. Eugene and his family always visit Father Benedict after the mass. When Beatrice is pregnant and she is not feeling well she asks Eugene to stay behind in the car. "Let me stay in the car and wait, biko" "I feel vomit in my throat." (Adiche 29). Eugene stares at her and asks if she really wants to stay in the car. Instead of understanding the condition of his wife he gets angry. Although she goes with her husband to visit Father Benedict but still Eugene's aggression leads him to act violently. When they return home Eugene beats his wife so badly that she suffers miscarriage. Jaja and Kambili could hear the voices of banging in their room but they are afraid to come out. When the voices are not heard anymore they come out of their rooms to look out and find that their father is carrying their mother like a jute sack of rice outside the house. "Mama was slung over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers bought in bulk at the Seme Border." (Adiche 33) Both the children clean the blood from the floor and Kambili is so affected by the incident that she could not study well and it seems to her as if the words in the textbooks are turning into blood. The inputs in this particular situation are again person factors and situational inputs. The first input that is personological remains the same as the first incident, Eugene's belief system is again questioned by his wife when she refuses to obey his command. The situational input is the refusal of his wife to meet Father Benedict after the mass. The inputs alter Eugene's present mood and emotions ensuing anger in the affect route and these inputs create hostile thoughts in the mind of Eugene which is a part of cognition route causing an arousal for the aggressive behaviour. The outcome of this case is aggression and the decision is taken through immediate appraisal.

The third encounter of aggressive behaviour is with Kambili, Eugene's daughter. Kambili when comes back from her aunt's house she brings the portrait of his grandfather made by her cousin. Eugene doesn't talk to his father because he believes in his own native gods and Eugene calls him pagan. He tries to change his father's beliefs and wants him to be a Christian but when his father doesn't agree he stops talking to his father. He doesn't allow his children to meet him but when the people of his village ask him to allow his father to meet his grandchildren Eugene decides to give only ten minutes for the meeting every time they visit the village. When Eugene sees the portrait of his father whom he considers as pagan he tears it up and gets very furious. Kambili collects the pieces which increase his anger and he starts beating Kambili so badly that she needs to be admitted to the hospital. In this incident both the input variables personal and situational that is his religious beliefs are again challenged by his own daughter and instead of apologising she starts collecting the pieces of portrait of Eugene's pagan father, take Eugene to the second phase generating anger and hostile thoughts resulting in immediate appraisal by kicking his own daughter so badly that she is admitted in a hospital.

The personological input variables in all the three incidents remain the same which is Eugene's belief system and only the situational variables change where his family members challenge his beliefs by not obeying them. Eugene's beliefs make him a strict follower of his faith but the problem arises when he expects his family members to follow him in the same manner. The disobedience of his family frustrates him creating the emotion of anger which intensifies and turns into aggression causing physical and mental harm to his wife and children. The emotion of anger created by the input variables brings hostile thoughts in the mind of Eugene who thinks that he could correct the mistakes of his family by using violence and this anger going through the routes of affect, cognition, and arousal decides to take impulsive action rather than thinking about it for a second time. The character of Eugene depicts those persons who give prominence only to their belief system and can't tolerate any other person challenging their beliefs. This type of personality could be harmful for the persons having such traits and for others also who are related to them as all the persons can never have same beliefs and thoughts. Everyone has their own thought process and opinions which ought to vary from others.

References

- [1] Achebe, Chinua. 2001. *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin Classics.
- [2] Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2013. *Purple Hibiscus*. Harper Perennial.
- [3] Allen, J. J., & Anderson, C. A. 2017. General Aggression Model. In P. Roessler, C. A. Hoffner, & L. van Zoonen (Eds.) *International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*. Wiley- Blackwell.
- [4] Bronte, Emily. 2022. *Wuthering Heights*. Arushi Book Enterprises.
- [5] Elliott, Julia, *et al.*, editors. 2006. *Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus*. Oxford UP, pp. 15.
- [6] Gilbert, Elizabeth. 2007. *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything*. A&C Black.
- [7] Gogh, Vincent van. "Vincent van Gogh The Letters." 1889. www.vangoghletters.org.
<https://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let790/letter.html#translation>. Accessed 15 September, 2023.
- [8] Ratcliffe, Susan, editor. 2006. *Oxford Quotations and Proverbs*. Oxford UP, pp. 10.