

POST COLONIAL FEMINIST STUDY OF FREEMAN'S A DISOBEDIENT GIRL

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigates Freeman's A Disobedient Girl by using postcolonial feminist theory and it specifically employs Chandra Talpade Mohanty's analysis of Western feminist discourse highlighted in Under Western Eyes. Her theory suggests that Western feminists create stereotypes about women from the South by representing them as helpless victims across all situations. The study uses Mohanty's conceptual framework to analyze Freeman's portrayal of Sri Lankan women through the examples of Latha and Biso who demonstrate resistance and agency despite their constrained socio-political setting. The study analyzes how Sri Lankan women push back against patriarchal and colonial systems through their management of gender-class-colonial inherited structures in their stereotypical views depicting women as helpless victims. The study concentrates on documenting the resistance strategies of these female characters because it shows how Freeman criticizes Western feminism for not recognizing the complex realities of oppressed women. Through incorporation of Mohanty's differential consciousness framework this research advocates both complex interpretations of female experiences in postcolonial societies and feminist theories beyond universalizing frameworks to understand specific South Asian women's lives. The collected evidence shows the necessity for feminist scholarship to develop contextualized resistance to portray women's agency in postcolonial circumstances as well as to break the traditional representations.

Keywords: Agency, Resistance, Victimhood, Colonial legacies, Gender, Patriarchal structures, Feminist discourse

Introduction

Freeman's *A Disobedient Girl* (2009) is a powerful narrative that explores the intersection of gender, class, and societal oppression in postcolonial Sri Lanka. The novel depicts the lives of two women, Latha and Biso, who struggle against rigid social hierarchies and patriarchal norms while seeking autonomy in a deeply stratified society. Their experiences reflect the challenges faced by women in postcolonial settings, where colonial legacies and local traditions intersect to reinforce gendered oppression.

Women in these postcolonial environments encounter dual oppression because colonial heritage meets local customs which specifically target women. The analysis of *A Disobedient Girl* gains clarity from postcolonial feminist theory. Unlike the mainstream feminist perspectives that mainly study gender-oppression postcolonial feminist analysis demonstrates how imperialism along with economic segregation and cultural pressures impact women's societal position (Spivak, 1988). Throughout Freeman's story Latha's domestic work illustrates the survival of colonial power structures along with Biso escaping from marital violence which demonstrates how present-day Sri Lankan society maintains dual forms of discrimination regarding class and gender. The research analysis of *A Disobedient Girl* relies on postcolonial feminist theory to expose Freeman's critique of postcolonial oppression

which combines patriarchal systems with class rule. The analysis explains how the novel counters female agency stereotypes while exposing subaltern silence to unveil multiple social factors limiting genuine freedom for women. This investigation positions *A Disobedient Girl* in postcolonial feminist theory to demonstrate Mohanty's advocacy framework which supports inclusive intersectional feminist arguments.

Significance of Study

The present study maintains critical importance because it expands our understanding of postcolonial feminism by examining how Ru Freeman's novel *A Disobedient Girl* addresses gendered oppression in contemporary postcolonial Sri Lankan society. This research applies postcolonial feminist theory to showcase the special difficulties women are facing after colonial occupation while demonstrating how colonial inheritance interacts with fixed class hierarchies and patriarchal standards to determine female submission (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988). This analysis opposes Western feminism's tendency to make universal claims about oppression by showing the value of specific feminist approaches which incorporate discussions of racial backdrops together with social statuses and colonial backgrounds (Trinh, 1989).

This research contributes new insights to literary scholarship by offering a critical feminist perspective to analyze the disruption of conventional female empowering stories found in *A Disobedient Girl*. This research evaluates how Latha and Biso fight back against pervasive oppression through an examination of their specific situations under postcolonial rule. This research enriches intersectionality dialogue (Crenshaw, 1989) through showing how combinations of social factors including background, economic status and colonial chronicles influence women's daily experiences.

The present study brings forth findings that matter to feminist literary scholarship as well as postcolonial analysis and gender research because the current study develops a thorough insight about how female survivors of Sri Lanka resist domination. The analysis provides important knowledge that benefits instructors alongside researchers and activists working toward increasing the visibility of women's literary perspectives while advancing feminist scholarship towards a postcolonial framework. The analysis of Freeman's novel through postcolonial feminist studies demonstrates why we need the intersectional research strategies and multivalent feminist movement recognition in both book evaluation and cultural studies methodology.

Research Objectives

- i- To evaluate whether the text subverts or dismantles the western feminist assumptions of passivity and victimhood that Western feminists, as articulated by Mohanty in her critique of Western feminism's approach to the "Third World woman".
- ii. To examine how Latha and Biso resist systemic oppression and assert agency within their social structures that limit their choices and opportunities.

Research Questions

- i- To what extent does the text subvert or dismantles the Western feminist assumptions of passivity and victimhood imposed on indigenous women, as articulated by Mohanty in her critique of Western feminism's approach to the "Third World woman"?
- ii- How do Latha and Bisu resist systemic oppression and assert their agency within their social structures that limit their choices and opportunities?

Theoretical Framework

The postcolonial feminist theory emerged as a reaction against mainstream feminism. It emphasizes that the women from formerly colonized regions experience multiple layers of oppression that intersect with varied factors like class and race. (Mohanty 1988).

According to Spivak (1988) in postcolonial feminist studies subaltern women are erased from both colonial and nationalist frameworks through systematic silencing. Through the character of Latha who is the servant girl in the novel, society places her at the margins therefore, her identity evolves constantly from social attitudes. She has to face class and gender distinction that snatches away the possibility of her agency. Through this denial of agency, she validates Spivak's analysis that subaltern women find no audience in patriarchal and colonial controlled societies that insist on defining them. The escape of another key character Bisu in the novel from her abusive marriage intersects with postcolonial feminist studies because Trinh (1989) demonstrates atrocities against women should be understood as social patterns rather than individual circumstances. Through her story she illustrates how modern patriarchal norms maintain control after colonial influence while upholding traditional customs strengthened by historical relationships of power which oppress women.

Postcolonial feminist theory underlines intersectionality through the analysis of gender oppression because race and class and colonial histories influence the relations between men and women (Crenshaw, 1989). The combination of patriarchy with class divisions from colonial rule leads to Latha's servitude as these powerful systems blame her situation on fatal lines between social groups. External societal values which give power to men limit both Bisu and Latha equally. Their stories emphasize the requirement to abandon Western feminist perspectives as these theories fail to address properly the layered effects of oppression found in postcolonial worlds.

A postcolonial feminist analysis of *A Disobedient Girl* uncovers how Sri Lanka's gender oppression results from mixtures between colonial heritage and social hierarchy and status systems. Through her novel, Freeman addresses these multiple intersecting forces by using her female characters to show the widespread resistance encountered by postcolonial women. Through this theoretical examination, the novel advances the academic discussion about feminine resistance against patriarchy and neo-colonialism while supporting cultural-specific feminist analysis for literary interpretation.

The present study incorporates the theoretical concepts of Chandra Talpade Mohanty which she mentions in her book, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003) as the main theoretical framework to analyze *A Disobedient Girl* by Ru Freeman within postcolonial feminist theory. Western feminism develops stereotypes about all women through their depictions as submissive victims who require Western saviors while ignoring the unique and diverse situations of individual women. The theoretical structure provides an analytical tool to study how Freeman represents Sri Lankan women through their struggles against oppression and their ability to handle intricate gender-based and colonial relationships.

Through the characters of Latha and Bisio Freeman presents such a powerful characters in *A Disobedient Girl* who challenge systemic patriarchy as well as colonial legacies while rebelling against the postcolonial society's traditional gender norms. In the story Freeman uses her characters to show how colonial power and patriarchal social systems influence women's choices and identity development while illustrating how this system fail to capture the way women control their destinies within this framework.

Latha and Bisio use multiple forms of opposition by rejecting conventional social expectations while regaining self-control during encounters with family and cultural domination. The Freeman's female characters create an improved understanding of the realistic experiences from South Asia focusing the Sri Lankan society which challenges stereotypical victimized representations of women from Sri Lanka.

The postcolonial feminist framework of this study explores how colonial histories shape both modern postcolonial identities. Gender intersections with class status along with colonial legacies and contemporary exclusion of postcolonial female populations form essential elements in *A Disobedient Girl* (2009) by Freeman. Mohanty provides "differential consciousness" as a critical interpretive framework for recognizing complex forms of oppression of female characters in the selected novel and their capacity of resistance and agency to bring improvement in their lives.

Literature Review

Postcolonial theory is a critical framework that examines the impact of colonialism and imperialism on cultures, societies, and identities. It interrogates power dynamics, resistance, and the continued effects of colonial histories in the contemporary world. Various scholars have provided diverse definitions and interpretations of postcolonial theory, emphasizing its interdisciplinary nature and application in literary, cultural, and social studies.

Said (1978) laid the foundation of postcolonial theory with his seminal work *Orientalism*, in which he critiqued the Western construction of the "Orient" as an exotic and inferior other. He argued that colonial discourse perpetuated stereotypes that justified imperial domination. Building on Said's work, Spivak (1988) introduced the concept of the "subaltern," highlighting the silenced voices of marginalized groups within colonial and postcolonial contexts. Her essay "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" underscored the challenges of representing colonized subjects in dominant discourses.

Bhabha (1994) expanded postcolonial theory by introducing concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence. In *The Location of Culture*, he described how colonized subjects navigate between cultures, creating hybrid identities that challenge colonial authority. His work emphasized the fluidity of cultural identities, and the resistance embedded within postcolonial interactions.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) provided a comprehensive definition of postcolonial theory, describing it as a field that examines "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (p. 2). Their work highlighted the significance of language, literature, and representation in shaping postcolonial identities.

Loomba (2015) further explored postcolonial theory by connecting it with globalization and contemporary political structures. She argued that postcolonialism is not just about historical colonialism but also about the ongoing power imbalances in the modern world. This perspective broadens the applicability of postcolonial theory beyond literature to fields such as sociology, political science, and international relations.

Postcolonial theory has been applied in various academic publications and studies. For instance, Young (2001) in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* provided a detailed historical perspective on the development of postcolonial thought. Additionally, MooreGilbert (1997) examined postcolonialism in literature and its influence on modern literary criticism. Moreover, recent works such as Gopal's (2019) *Insurgent Empire* explored resistance movements and their impact on reshaping colonial narratives.

Postcolonial Literature

The term postcolonial literature applies to creative writing which emerges after colonial authority ends and is created by writers who come from previous colonial territories. The literary works examine multiple subjects starting from identity and power relationships up to cultural mixtures and counteractions against colonial powers and surviving colonial influences. Postcolonial writings analyze imperial rhetoric through the eyes of people who endured subjugation while living under colonial administration. Four significant postcolonial writers in this movement are Chinua Achebe alongside Salman Rushdie and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Arundhati Roy.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory functions as a widespread intellectual framework that studies gender discrimination while investigating male-dominated systems together with systemic female social-economic-political constraints. The approach studies the role of cultural standards and written pieces and recorded stories in female marginalization so it can aid equality between genders. The four primary categories within feminist theory consist of liberal feminism and its radical counterpart as well as socialist feminism and intersectional feminism. The influential feminist academics comprise Simone de Beauvoir, bell hooks, Judith Butler and Betty Friedan.

Postcolonial Feminism

According to Feyzi (2021) it is also referred to as 'third world feminism' which came out as a reaction against mainstream feminism which is influenced by western thoughts and values mainly. Gloria (2016) states that the western feminism focuses on the experiences of Europe and American women only. Hadique (2017) maintains that it leads to criticism that mainstream feminists may not always fully reflect or address the diverse experiences of women in different cultural, social or economic contexts.

Representation

According to Rajan and Park (2013) the postcolonial feminists identify the issue of representation of women living in third world countries. The postcolonial feminists have challenged the homogenous representation of third world women by western feminists which leads to the production of their monolithic image. Smith (2019) maintains that the mainstream feminists are unaware of sociopolitical, cultural, religious and geographical diversities of women from third world countries. Therefore, according to Loomba (2015) the western feminists may not be suitable to represent them.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's Contribution to Feminist Theory and Postcolonial Studies

As a leading scholar of postcolonial and feminist studies Chandra Talpade Mohanty investigates how Western feminism portrays women residing in the Global South. The important publication by Chandra Talpade Mohanty titled "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984) analyzes Western feminist scholarship that uses a simplified understanding of Third World women and their marginalization in it (Mohanty, 1984, 2003).

Key Contributions

Critique of Western Feminism

Western feminists tend to create a single homogenous category which represents Third World women as universally oppressed and powerless entities. According to Mohanty, women's life experiences never form one homogeneous pattern because different populations possess distinct cultural identities and socioeconomic positions and historical developments (Mohanty, 2003).

Intersectionality and Power Structures

Mohanty established how gender merges with race, colonial background and socio-economic standing to produce unique female life experiences even though she did not create the term "intersectionality" (Mohanty, 2003).

Decolonizing Feminist Discourse

She supports “Third World feminism” to understand unique cultural histories along with local obstacles and defensive methods in diverse communities beyond Western societies (Mohanty, 2003).

Postcolonial and Transnational Feminism

Mohanty maintains that feminists should share solidarity across borders while acknowledging systematic differences among women around the world (Mohanty, 2003).

The critical framework of Postcolonial feminism studies focuses on how colonial imposition along with local traditions doubly oppress women. In addition, according to Mohanty (2003) the mainstream feminism led by Western feminists tends to dismiss the individual difficulties faced by women from postcolonial societies. Postcolonial feminist discourse demonstrates how colonial processes with patriarchy and capitalism work together to form the experiences of women living in former colonies (Spivak, 1988). The approach works to promote understanding of marginalized women in South Asia and Africa and the Caribbean through the study of issues such as identity and resistance alongside agency (Loomba, 2005).

Freeman’s novel, *A Disobedient Girl* (2009) offers a rich exploration of gender, class, and postcolonial power structures in Sri Lanka. These two women named Latha and Bisu experience patriarchy alongside socio-economic barriers while their lives remain interlinked throughout the story. The postcolonial feminist reading of *A Disobedient Girl* creates new understanding of how Freeman critiques the ongoing influence of colonial heritage upon women in South Asia.

The novel uses class conflict as its main theme alongside gender relations. Through her positions as an orphaned servant Latha faces institutionalized discrimination which stems from poverty and the gender divide. History and culture shape the oppression faced by women as described by Mohanty (2003) whereas both Latha’s and Bisu’s Sri Lankan experience with such oppression requires attention to the country’s political structure and cultural framework. Hence, Mohanty’s framework is most suitable for the present study. The character portrayal in the novel showcases how colonial influences remained active by establishing rigid social structures. The women characters in Freeman’s narrative detach themselves from men yet remain constrained by patriarchal rules which stem from colonial times (Loomba, 2005). Latha’s forced work as a servant represents the colonial practice of servitude that preserved rigid social classes to trap the women of subcontinent within limited social status.

Through its narrative structure the author investigates disobedience as women use this form of resistance to assert their freedom. Latha’s defiance of her mistress’s authority and Bisu’s departure from her marriage challenge traditional gender roles. According to Narayan (1997), in the postcolonial feminist analysis of today the women perform acts of resistance to break the patriarchal and colonial remnants.

For the current study the researcher chooses two main aspects of Mohanty's postcolonial feminist theory. Firstly, she subverts the monolithic assumptions of being weak and passive victims imposed on the women of third world countries by western feminists.

Secondly, Mohanty's advocates the voice, agency and resistance power of women living in the third world country.

Textual Analysis

In Freeman's novel *A Disobedient Girl* (2009) readers follow a compelling narrative that delves into the issues of gender inequality and class status along with colonial legacies of Sri Lanka. Through the intersecting lives of two women, Latha and Biso, Freeman critiques patriarchal structures, class hierarchies, and the lasting effects of colonialism on women's identities and autonomy. The social historical and cultural backdrop of postcolonial Sri Lanka intersects directly with the challenges the main character faces according to postcolonial feminist criticism.

The following themes emerged after the analysis of the research question no. 1 of the present study. The following analysis addresses the first research question investigates that to what extent the selected novel challenges from the Western feminist constructs of passivity and victimhood imposed on indigenous women, as articulated by Mohanty in her critique of Western feminism's approach to the "Third World woman".

The following themes emerged after the analysis of the research question no. 1 of the present study.

Intersection of Class and Gender

In Freeman's novel *A Disobedient Girl*, the text, "She had learned to disappear into the background, to exist without drawing attention." (Freeman, 2009, p.12). The text mentioned reveals Latha's invisibility, lack of agency and fighting to survive. The women like her live in a class-conscious society where such people are literally the swept under the rug. For Latha, an orphaned servant, this line echoes the presumed expectation that she stays unseen and subservient, even after she spends her formative years growing up with Thara. Though she is conditioned to accept her lower status, but inside her the sparks of mutiny are present as she aspires to have another sort of life. While Biso, who is escaping an abusive marriage, disappearing is an act of self-preservation. Like so many women in oppressive situations, she hides her identity in order to escape the danger, a process that demands silence.

This statement reflects the larger condition of marginalized women, who are deemed to take up space in the dark but desire visibility and agency.

The text further reveals how social status interacts with gender discrimination because the women are continuously training themselves to stay hidden. Lower-class women in colonial societies continue to experience economic exploitation because of labor systems established by the colonial period. Postcolonial scholars including Spivak and Mohanty who studies formerly colonized nations have demonstrated that the combination of different forms of

oppression makes women unable to speak. The tragic fate of Latha demonstrates how Spivak's argument proves women from the subaltern class "cannot speak" because the system refuses to hear their voices.

Furthermore, Freeman writes, "No matter how hard she worked, she would never be one of them." (Freeman, 2009, p.31). The text highlights the rigid social hierarchies left in place by colonial influence. Latha's desire to transcend class boundaries is ultimately thwarted by deep-seated discrimination, revealing how postcolonial societies maintain oppressive structures even after political independence.

Gender and Oppression in a Postcolonial Context

In Freeman's *A Disobedient Girl*, the text "*Women like us must learn when to keep our mouths shut and when to obey.*" (Freeman, 2009, p.14) reflects the gender and class oppression that warp the lives of Latha and Biso.

As a servant in a wealthy Sri Lankan household — Latha is conditioned to be invisible and obedient and knows that defiance can lead to punishment. But she continues to resist, both subtly and openly, unable to fully embrace her role. Likewise, Biso, who flees from an abusive marriage, pushes against societal norms as well, but her story makes clear that freedom has its price, and she must deal with threats, dangers and judgment.

Both women wrestle with a world that would have them silent, asking whether submission actually shields them or if rebellion — despite the danger — is the only option for self-freedom.

Furthermore, through this statement the author reveals women in this postcolonial setting need to develop skills in remaining silent as well as complying with authority. Freeman demonstrates how women from postcolonial societies deal with institutional oppression descended from both colonial background and indigenous male authority networks. As an orphaned servant girl Latha experiences the rigorous social divisions imposed by colonialism because it established permanent social hierarchies in society. Biso who escaped an abusive spouse illustrates how female oppression functions in a society that enforces traditional gender norms on women.

Challenging the Monolithic image of Sri Lankan women

The novel, *A Disobedient Girl* depicts the efforts and struggle of the female characters who are strong enough to challenge and subvert the western feminists' view of third world women as "monolithic universal". The depiction of the female characters Latha and Biso challenge the oversimplified identities of women living in third world country like Sri Lanka. The protagonist named as Biso shows the strength from the starting chapters of the novel, "*She plans of her escape along with her children, when her husband is asleep. She thinks that when he wakes up, stinking drunk, we will be gone... gone.. gone..*" (Freeman, 2009, p. 16). The text depicts the breaking away and unchaining of Biso from the male chauvinism that

restricts her independence. Despite her oppressive circumstances, she actively seeks freedom for herself and her children.

While Bisu is on the train she encounters an accident but very confidently tells her daughters that “you need not to be afraid to live and travel alone in the big world full of struggles” (Freeman, 2009, p. 24)

It reveals that she encourages her daughters to overcome the fears which highlight the importance of self-determination. It asserts that women cannot be defined or restricted by societal concerns regarding their safety or capability.

Bisu, a Sri Lankan woman comes forward with a novel idea of the third world women to be strong, powerful, and self-reliant and are educating their daughters to be the same.

In *A Disobedient Girl*, there is another girl in Bisu’s compartment who is travelling alone. Bisu considers herself as a guardian towards her.

She says, “*Sit her, duwa and I sit next to her. I say touching her head with my palms. I’m here, do not be afraid*” (Freeman, 2009, pp. 60-61).

It depicts the character of Bisu as a symbol of strength and power as she acts as accountable to the girl. She takes the role of a protector. Freeman through her novel tries to awaken an emerging concept within the Sri Lankan women that they can themselves be their own guardian.

In *A Disobedient Girl*, the biggest hurdle in the way of Latha’s education is Mrs. Vithanage. She stresses that she should only get education for ten years. The school principal tells her, “*it’s against the law to keep a bright student like Latha under bondage without sending her to school*” (Freeman, 2009, p. 49).

The above illustration shows that in the third world, the women are not necessarily under the patriarchal clutches rather some women too act as a cog in the patriarchal system. It is because of the support of the school principal that she is able to complete her education. Moreover, Latha is a bright and hardworking student. Though she does not get any extra tuition, even then she scores higher than many of her classmates.

The instance mentioned above is in accordance with Mohanty’s (2004) theory. She emphasizes that the violence against women is multifaceted and strongly rooted in sociocultural environment.

Through the experiences and perspectives of female characters in the selected novels. The writers have challenged the oversimplified identities of third world women.

In *A Disobedient Girl*, Latha demands her salary from Mrs. Vithanage to buy new shoes as she does not want to be dependent on her for trivial things. Freeman writes, "It didn't matter that nobody else seemed to notice. What was important was that she did" (Freeman, 2009, p. 45). The text emphasizes the significance of Latha's individual consciousness in a world which is shaped by colonial structures. Mohanty (2004) likewise, focuses on how the colonialism, power structures and cultural narratives marginalize the perspectives of the oppressed or colonized people. Latha refuses to be invisible in a society that ignores or disregards her insight and vision. Her assertion challenges the dominant narratives that being a brown woman she does not need any external validation. Thus, her sense of self-awareness challenges the forces that keep her silent.

In addition, Freeman depicts some portion of Latha's life in a convent. She goes there with the hope that it is "wholesome and peaceful place, I will grow there" (Freeman, 2009, p. 73) Later, her "hopes vanished, there was no opportunity for growth in four walls of convent" (Freeman, 2009, p.73).

The text illustrates the conflict between Latha's expectations and the reality she came across in the convent. She goes there to seek a space for serenity and personal improvement. Instead she encounters confinement and limitation as it does not provide her an opportunity to develop her independent identity.

The convent can be considered as similar to the colonial power that keeps the native women dependent and subjugated. Thus, Freeman has wracked the otherness by Latha's constant dissatisfaction with the so-called serenity of convent and her unwavering spirit for freedom and identity.

The following themes emerged after the analysis of the research question no. 2 of the present study.

Exhibition of resistance, voice and Agency

Despite the overwhelming oppression faced by the protagonists, *A Disobedient Girl* also highlights acts of resistance. Biso's defiance in escaping her abusive marriage and Latha's subtle acts of rebellion against her employers reflect a struggle against patriarchal control. Freeman uses their narratives to challenge the idea that postcolonial women are merely victims; instead, they are active agents of resistance, even within constrained circumstances. In *A Disobedient Girl* writes, "She chose her own path, even if it led to ruin." encapsulates the novel's central theme of defiance, autonomy and the price of resisting institutional

oppression. In spite of personal cost to them both, both Latha and Biso rebel against the oppressive structures of class, gender and power.

For Latha, it is a rejection of a life of servitude. Raised to be a servant, she repeatedly tests the limits in the service of love and agency. But her defiance does not liberate — it begets treachery, persecution, misery. But she still claims her right to choose, even when it entails pain — or, rather, pain, in her view, is part of self-definition.

For Biso, this line reinforces her decision to leave an abusive marriage with her children and seek a brighter future. But hers is a journey filled with danger and uncertainty, illustrating that agency does not mean safety. Like Latha, she lives in a world that punishes women for being free. For both women, freedom brings risk and suffering, not salvation. But their resolve to act, even at the price of commitment or safety, makes them something beyond mere victims — they are women who dared to defy, at any cost.

The text further emphasizes the agency of postcolonial women despite the systemic oppression. Freeman portrays the difficult choices that women must make in their pursuit of freedom and autonomy, illustrate both the risks and the power of resistance.

Furthermore, the line “The house was hers to clean but never to own.” (Freeman, 2009, p.18) it represents the inflexible class hierarchy and institutional disparity that shape Latha’s existence. An orphaned servant in a privileged family in Sri Lanka, Latha grows up in the same house with Thara but is never allowed to belong. She knows each corner of the house but remains an outsider, meant to serve but not to own.

This also captures Latha’s lifelong struggle for dignity and self-worth. Her life with Jason is one of abuse and broken dreams, teaching her that, no matter how hard she tries, society has decided that she is inferior.

Just above Latha’s individual story, this phrase foregrounds the exploitation of domestic workers and marginalized women, a dominant thematic thread of the novel, which positions servitude against agency, labor against rights and recognition.

Moreover, Freeman writes, “She would not let them break her. Not now, not ever.” (Freeman, 2009, p.56). It shows that despite the overwhelming oppression faced by the protagonists, *A Disobedient Girl* also highlights acts of resistance. Biso’s defiance in escaping her abusive marriage and Latha’s subtle acts of rebellion against her employers reflect a struggle against patriarchal control. Freeman uses their narratives to challenge the idea that postcolonial women are merely victims; instead, they are active agents of resistance, even within constrained circumstances.

In spite of personal cost to them both, both Latha and Biso rebel against the oppressive structures of class, gender and power. For Latha, it is a rejection of a life of servitude.

The female characters in the selected novels are capable enough to act independently and defy external force that seeks to control them. The characters are depicted as active agents, show resistance by speaking out and reclaiming their voices

Latha in *A Disobedient Girl*, exhibits her agency. She shows resistance to attain independence. She raises voice against the injustices that are demonstrated at various moments in her life. “*She cleaned her face, feet, and hands at the well, using one of those*

cakes of lux. She loved fine things, and she had no doubt that she deserved them" (Freeman, 2009, p. 1- 3).

Cleanliness can be seen as a sign of civilization emphasizing on her self-worth (Kainat, 2022). She in actual, exercises her agency for which she work day and night at the Vithanages. It is her sense of agency that motivates her to not to be treated as a pathetic creature in Vithanages' house. In addition, Latha, a young Sri Lankan girl brings out the fate of many women residing in the third world countries. *"She decided to become a princess, she lightly, stroked the still-moist surface. She rubbed the tips of her fingers on her wrist and wore perfume. Now she was ready."* (Freeman 2009, p. 5)

Her decision to become a princess represents a conscious choice to construct and redefine her identity. This can be seen as a reaction against mainstream feminists where identities of third world women are often imposed, fragmented or erased by the dominant discourse. Latha reclaims her agency when she decides to become a princess.

Hence, she does not want to be defined by external forces, instead it reflects her sense of agency. Thus, her unconventional behavior elevates the Sri Lankan women from the falsifications imposed upon them.

Colonial Legacies and Female Agency

In Freeman's *A Disobedient Girl*, the line "She had dreamed of another life, one where she was free" (Freeman, 2009, p.15) captures the profound yearning for freedom and autonomy that characterizes Latha's and Bisu's struggles.

For Latha, an orphaned servant girl, freedom means escaping a life defined by servitude and inequality. Though she is raised under the same roof as Thara, she is never Thara's equal, and she dreams of love and freedom, only to have her dreams are repeatedly crushed by the class and gender she's been born into. For Bisu, who fled an abusive marriage, this line represents her hope for a life without violence and fear. But 'like Latha does' social structures and cultural barriers make real freedom impossible.

This phrase expresses a universal wish for agency, but in the novel's world, even the belief in liberation finds itself at odds with the malevolent influences of class, gender and fate.

Furthermore, the colonial past looms over the narrative, particularly in the ways it affects women's agency. Freeman presents a critique of how colonial ideologies of propriety and class distinction continue to shape contemporary gender norms. The upper-class women in the novel, such as Thara, embody the privileges inherited from colonial social structures, while lower-class women like Latha are denied access to such privileges. Moreover, the text, "The house was hers to clean but never to own" (Freeman,2009) embodies the rigid class hierarchy and systemic inequality that shape Latha's world.

This line is a further reflection of Latha's lifelong battle for dignity and self-worth. It captures the economic and social constraints imposed on Latha. It also reflects the postcolonial reality where women of lower socioeconomic status are confined to servitude, unable to access the upward mobility enjoyed by the privileged classes.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that the text actively combats stereotypes that victimize passive indigenous women according to Mohanty's Western Feminism theory. Within the narrative indigenous women appear in sophisticated roles which demonstrate both their power to act and their strength to combat external and internal subjection. The display of indigenous women through this representation establishes an opposing version to the mainstream Western feminist understanding of indigenous women science, according to Mohanty. The characters fight against stereotyping by choosing to identify with their unique multifaceted personalities which dispute basic Western feminist beliefs that categorize women in postcolonial societies. Therefore, the critique of Western feminist hegemony continues and reinforces localized feminist discourse that takes context into account.

These women face multiple layers of oppression and the barriers to their empowerment are rooted in both local and global power dynamic that result in suppressing their opportunities to flourish. Yet, they are defined with unique characteristics that in spite of challenges they face, they are portrayed as strong, independent, educated and empowered women. It reveals their capacity to develop and to bring improvement in their lives.

The investigation demonstrates that Latha together with Biso uses multiple approaches to fight systemic suppression in their restricted social settings. Although social standards confine their free choices these characters demonstrate power through different degrees of deliberate rebellion. Latha displays defiance with intellectual strength combined with nonstandard behavior and Biso takes on social and family-related resistance towards oppressive social dynamics. Women display resistance as both personal and public acts which draw strength from their cultural heritage as well as common experiences of women in equivalent socio-political landscapes. Through their assertion of agency, the two women demonstrate how empowerment remains possible under any oppressive conditions thereby showing remarkable resilience. Hence, they subvert the monolithic assumptions of being weak, dependent and uneducated. Instead, they are depicted as strong, independent, risk takers, strugglers and survivors.

Conclusion

Through its analysis the research proves that complex feminist representations of indigenous women emerge as the text shows them taking control of their situations while fighting victimization and inactivity. Through their self-defense against marginalization the research shows that women can exercise their agency even while confined to oppressive systems within small social environments. Research findings demand a major revision of feminist methods because they demand Western-centric perspectives to end and instead researchers should establish cultural-specific frameworks understanding active resistance. Research

demonstrates the essential value of studying how marginal women maintain agency which develops through individual decisions and organizational hurdles.

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