

Challenging Boundaries: Mohanty's Vision of Feminist Solidarity

Vinay Kumar, Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English, University of Delhi.

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Abstract

In the quest for feminist unity, this discourse ventures into the depths of women's diverse experiences, challenging the idea of a universal sisterhood. It critically examines Chandra Talpade Mohanty's influential essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." Mohanty's work, a unifying force against the conservative tide of the 1980s, advocates for women's rights in the developing world, resonating in today's challenges to women's freedoms. It questions the narrative of a common oppression as the sole foundation for sisterhood. The analysis of Mohanty's essay explores the necessity of moving beyond Western-centric views, acknowledging the complex realities of women's lives, and building a solidarity that overcomes geographical and ideological divides. Mohanty's contributions stand as a call to solidarity based on recognizing diversity, complexity, and the collective fight for freedom. This examination not only deconstructs Mohanty's arguments but also sheds light on ways to foster a more inclusive and robust feminist praxis that honors and rejoices in the vast mosaic of women's experiences worldwide.

Keywords: Feminist Praxis, Inclusion, Sisterhood, Solidarity, Third World Women.

Introduction:

Feminist solidarity is a potent entity dedicated to inclusion, empathy, and communal empowerment. However, in achieving this, it must tackle the complications inherent in depicting women in various cultural settings. An influential 1984 essay by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," examines the complicated effects of Western feminist ideology on women in underdeveloped countries. Mohanty demonstrates how Western feminist literature frequently maintains essentialist notions, homogenizing women's lives in non-Western nations. These depictions simplify the lives of "Third World women" to a single, subjugated narrative, hiding the vast complexity of their lived experiences. Western feminists mistakenly reinforce the imperial discourses they want to destroy by positioning themselves as saviors and global south women as oppressed in need of rescue. The paper questions popular concepts of universal sisterhood and advocates for a more complex approach to feminist solidarity that recognizes the complexities of women's experiences. Mohanty

opens the path for a more comprehensive and transformational approach to feminist solidarity that echoes across cultures and borders by employing a decolonial feminist worldview and an intersectional perspective.

In "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," Mohanty criticizes Western feminist scholars who essentialize women's experiences in non-Western cultures without grasping the meaning of individual acts and behaviors. She contends that facts are meaningless without recognizing the historical, social, and cultural settings in which they arise. "That women mother in a variety of societies is not as significant as the value attached to mothering in these societies" (Mohanty, "Colonial Discourses" 340). She cites various examples of how Western feminist researchers draw generalizations about an entire group of women by considering facts such as women wearing veils, gendered work division, or women's financial reliance on men. Mohanty uses the practice of women wearing veils in Iran to demonstrate the relevance of context. While Western feminists frequently interpret this as a symptom of sexual oppression, Mohanty points out that the veil has several connotations in various cultures. The veil became a symbol of communal strength and inspiration during the 1979 Iranian revolution when middle-class women willingly wore it in solidarity alongside their working-class peers. After the revolution, however, an Islamic dictatorship enforced the veil on women, converting it into proof of their subjugation by those in authority. *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture, and Postcolonialism* 1993 by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan extends this critique by revealing how Western feminist depictions of the "subaltern woman" in postcolonial cultures sometimes reproduce Orientalist tropes. She claims that such portrayals frequently portray these women as cultural captives, lacking individual autonomy or the ability to question patriarchal norms. This emphasizes the necessity of a strategy to challenge such generalizations.

The expanding feminist groups in Africa, Asia, and Latin America caught the attention of American and European feminists at the end of the 20th century. As Western feminists became informed of the atrocities suffered by women in certain nations, such as obligatory veiling, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, and female infanticide, they were shocked and felt compelled to assist. As Mohanty points out, "these concepts are used by feminists in providing explanations for women's subordination, apparently assuming their universal applicability" ("Colonial Discourses" 347). In their efforts to assist women in the Global South, they regarded themselves as saviors anxious to rescue them from repressive situations. They failed to understand that the troubles that concerned Western women were not usually the highest priority for women in underdeveloped countries. One instance is the Western feminist notion that patriarchy was the primary issue for women in third-world countries. European imperialism looked ludicrous to women from such places because the position of women in regions of Africa only began to degrade considerably after colonialist Europeans arrived.

International feminism conferences were the best platforms for highlighting the differences between Western women and women in poor countries. After the Copenhagen World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1980,

women from poor countries saw that issues like female genital mutilation and veiling had been highlighted without considering the women whom they most impacted. Women from developing countries perceived their Western counterparts as not paying attention to what they thought about the needs of their societies. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in her article, voiced the same concern four years after the World Conference. She argues that Western feminists will never comprehend the needs and priorities of the very women they are attempting to assist if they continue to see third-world women through the prism that represents their privilege and approach the female population of developing nations as if they all had the exact requirements.

In light of how women in the Global South are portrayed in Western feminist studies, Chandra Talpade Mohanty critically analyzes the feminization of the work sphere. The concept of feminizing labor space describes how Western feminist study frequently places excessive emphasis on women's participation in specific forms of labor, typically domestic or reproductive labor, in non-Western civilizations. This restricted focus on particular facets of women's jobs results in a constrained and flat portrayal of their contributions to their communities. According to Mohanty, the complicated reality of women's lives in the Global South is oversimplified by this process. By focusing solely on domestic or reproductive work, Western feminists run the risk of supporting the idea that non-Western nations predominantly limit women to conventional, passive roles and downplay their participation in other fields of work and activity. In addition, the feminization of labor space conceals the variety of labor women in the Global South perform, such as productive and community-based employment. Western feminist literature erases women's agency, abilities, and contributions to the economic and social development of their societies by ignoring women's involvement in a variety of economic activities.

Mohanty, in her essay, advocates for a more detailed understanding of women's workplace experiences and issues this caution:

Suppose such pictures are assumed to be universally relevant. In that case, the resultant homogenization of class, ethnicity, spiritual, cultural, and chronological particularities of the lives of women in the third world can produce a false understanding of the commonality of oppressions, interests, and struggles between and amongst women globally ("Colonial Discourses" 348).

By understanding the diversity of women's roles and work, feminists may avoid promoting essentialist narratives and adopt a more diverse and liberating stance. Furthermore, Mohanty highlights the significance of understanding the economic and political settings in which women's labor exists. She critiques the "rescue narrative," which portrays Western feminists as liberators of oppressed Third World women. This narrative undercuts the necessity of feminism's solidarity and oversimplifies these women's difficulties by failing to recognize their variety and agency. The essay "Toward a Decolonial Feminism" 2010 by Mara Lugones further underlines the significance of context in feminist solidarity. Lugones opposes Eurocentric viewpoints and advocates for decolonizing feminist theory. Decolonial

feminism, in her opinion, must accept each person's uniqueness and take into account the many ways that colonized people perceive the world and themselves.

The "arithmetic method" of Western feminist analysis, according to Mohanty, oversimplifies complicated topics like women wearing veils. This technique counts the number of veiled women and links it with the degree of oppression while ignoring essential contextual elements like race, class, and belief system. For accurate and meaningful outcomes, according to Mohanty, it is essential to comprehend the veil's importance and meaning within specific cultural settings. The use of a nation's degree of development as a measure of women's oppression is also criticized by Mohanty. This strategy assumes that less developed nations have less repressed women and sets Western standards as the benchmark. This imperialist mindset considers Western feminists to be superior to third-world women and to have a more excellent grasp of their needs. However, Mohanty emphasizes that because the effects of development vary depending on many social and economic conditions, it is crucial to consider other contextual factors.

The idea of purdah is an example of the complications inherent in judging veiling practices. Purdah, a type of veiling, is done in various ways throughout cultures and societies. Mohanty's investigation of purdah illustrates how Western feminists' basic interpretation fails to comprehend the practice's multiple meanings and agency. Purdah may be a sign of religious identity and protection for certain women, while it may be a means of resistance and strength within their society for others. Reducing purdah to simply subjugation ignores the women's complex experiences. "Similarly, a large number of different, fragmented examples from a variety of countries also apparently add up to a universal fact" (Mohanty, "Colonial Discourses" 346). Mohanty pushes for a more nuanced and context-aware feminist study by questioning the arithmetic approach and the use of progress as a gauge of oppression. By criticizing these parameters, Mohanty advocates for more nuanced and context-aware feminist studies. Accepting a greater awareness of cultural particularities and intersectional complexity is critical for creating true feminist unity that transcends colonial viewpoints and respects different perspectives of women everywhere.

During the 1980s, a backlash against the women's movement caused women to confront severe obstacles to maintaining the achievements made in the prior decades. With a change in political leadership and Ronald Reagan taking office, anti-social services, anti-affirmative action, anti-abortion, and anti-reproductive rights views, she prevailed. Feminists had a difficult struggle against social and legal obstacles. In her book, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* 1991, Wall Street Journal writer Susan Faludi listed the setbacks experienced by the feminist movement, which includes the failure to implement the Equal Rights Amendment, the emergence of the anti-abortion movement, a rise in sexual assault and discrimination at work, broadening disparities in wages, and the enormous burden mothers felt obligated to carry. Susan says that "a backlash against women's rights succeeds to the degree that it appears not to be political, that it appears not to be a struggle at all." In this challenging environment for women's liberation, Chandra

Talpade Mohanty wrote her phenomenal essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." Mohanty ardently fights for women's rights in developing nations despite the difficulties that American women endure. She objects to the practice of classifying women from the developing world as a single group based only on the oppression that they have experienced in common. The right to define oneself by one's identity rather than one's oppressors or marital status is emphasized by Mohanty, who is adamant about upholding each person's uniqueness. In her other essay, "Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles" 2003, Mohanty mentions her motive to pen it down:

I did not report "Under Western Eyes" as a testament to the impossibility of egalitarian and noncolonizing cross-cultural scholarship, nor did I describe "Western" and "Third World" feminism in such oppositional ways that there would be no chance of solidarity between Western and Third World feminists (Mohanty, "Revisited: Feminist Solidarity" 502).

Amid a conservative reaction that jeopardized the women's movement's successes in the 1980s, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" remains a steadfast light of feminist unity. Mohanty's fervent support for the rights of third-world women originates in an atmosphere that is opposed to the freedom of women, opposing the homogeneity of their experiences based only on common oppression. Her exhortation to embrace these women's distinctiveness and complexity resonates as a transforming example of feminism that transcends colonial attitudes and uplifts women everywhere. Mohanty's essay serves as a powerful reminder of the need to unravel the complex tapestry of women's lives as feminism faces obstacles and resistance, fostering a unified feminist movement that values diversity and recognizes the numerous struggles and accomplishments of women across the globe. Mohanty's work is a lasting monument to the need to learn beyond Western-centric viewpoints, embrace the complexity of women's experiences, and create a sisterhood of solidarity that knows no bounds in these turbulent times.

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