

Tribulations Faced by the Women Characters: A Post Colonial Study of Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*

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Abstract

The postcolonial analysis explores the challenges faced by women characters in Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* within the racially stratified 1960s Mississippi. Stockett, an American novelist portrays the plight of African-American maids, notably Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson, confronting systemic oppression. The narrative revolves around Skeeter, a white woman attempting to expose the hardships faced by black maids, highlighting the pervasive racial and gender inequalities of the era. The paper examines the accurate depiction of the historical context, emphasizing the abuse and denial of opportunities for black women. Examining oppression through a postcolonial view, the study delineates cultural imperialism's impact, revealing the compounded challenges faced by black maids in comparison to their white counterparts.

Keywords

Kathryn Stockett, *The Help*, postcolonialism, gender, race, class, identity, solidarity.

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Post-colonial literature originated from Britain's former colonies in the Caribbean, Africa and India. It brings out the effects of colonialism on the societies and cultures. Most of the post-colonial writings focus on themes like the struggle for Independence, emigration, national identity, allegiance and childhood. This paper brings out the tribulations faced by the women as colonised people in the novel, *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett.

It is evident that Jackson city in this novel does not practise racial equality. There are a lot of things going on in the city surrounding the characters because of its extreme bias. Three main women characters of *The Help*, Aibileen, Minny and Skeeter are highlighted and their tribulations are brought out in this paper.

Eugenia Phelan, also known as "Skeeter," has an ambition to become a writer. She has recently completed her degree. After returning home, she started working on her dream job and decided to interview African American maids whose lives are dependent on whites. Initially, no one was willing to volunteer to assist Skeeter because they feared losing their jobs and upsetting their family. All maids were aware that African American workers, even if fired for false claims, might never find another job in the neighbourhood.

However, Skeeter was able to enlist the assistance of other maids because to her friendship with Aibileen, one of her maid friends. Throughout the interview, she was required to tell numerous lies and make the highly dangerous journey to the home of the coloured people in order to conduct the interview and write the book. She had to use extreme care to ensure the security and safety of her work. However, she is more bothered by her insecurities about being too tall and unattractive, particularly when she considers going on a date

with a male. She does, however, conquer over all obstacles and finish her task effectively, which turns into a big hit. With the assistance of her maid companions, she managed to come up with the plan, despite the fact that it was dangerous for her.

Despite coming from a white background, Skeeter had a great respect for Black people and was uneasy with their disparities. She shares all of her stories with Constantine, the maid who nurtured and raised her, and she is greatly missed now. Knowing that Aibileen was interested in reading literature that Black people couldn't access, she secretly obtained the books from the library and handed them to Aibileen. The primary source for Skeeter's interview was Aibileen, who also assisted in bringing in other maids to support her. Despite being aware of possible consequences for a White person who treats a Black person equally, Skeeter took a difficult route because she wanted to bring attention to their pain.

Aibileen is one of the helpers and a central character in this novel. She has just lost her son, Treelore. She had to quit school and help her family at a very young age. Aibileen helps many white families. It was made to be believed that blacks were only worth being domestic servants. Aibileen wished to get educated like other girls of the white folks, but there was no space for it. In her teenage years, she began to work and look after her family to help her mother, who was also a maid. She took care of the white babies from fourteen years on. And she was working for Miss Leefolt at the beginning of the novel. She also raised seventeen children before taking care of Mae Mobley.

Mobley was much more attached to Aibileen than her own mother. This bothered Miss Leefolt, and she narrowed her eyes while looking at Aibileen when Mae Mobley was very close to her. It was sometimes very hurtful to Aibileen

because she doesn't want or like Mae Mobley to behave like her mother or any other whites who disrespect blacks and treat them as others. The idea of a separate bathroom for Aibileen, which was initiated by Hilly Holbrook, telling them that the disease could spread from the Blacks, put Aibileen in a very miserable situation. Aibileen like any other maid had no way to be exempted from the laws made by the whites.

Aibileen was even paid less than what she works for. She couldn't even ask or raise her voice over Miss Leefolt for paying her less. "Miss Leefolt don't pay but ninety-five cents an hour, less than I been paid in years". (Stockett 4)

Her minimum wage is not provided to her for the work she does, and she is very passive, like any other black maid of that period. It was the situation for most black people, and no one could raise their voice over their activities. On the whole, blacks are paid less, and they become slaves for the others with very poor wages. We could notice how Aibileen has been exploited and marginalised through these instances. She is the first one to come forward for Skeeter's interview about Black's life by confronting many obstacles and struggles in a risky environment. The oppressions towards her made her powerless among other people.

Minnie is another servant maid in this novel. She works for Miss Hilly initially and then moves to work for Miss Celia Foote. Minny's husband is a drunkard and acts very violently towards Minny, and she has also not slept for a full night, frightened of him. He once threw a bowl, which made a cut in her eyebrow. In spite of not being drunk, he consciously attacks Minny and behaves very harshly and rudely.

Minnie was the best cook in the town. But Miss Hilly doesn't approve of her being a good cook. She always complains to her and also adds that Miss Hilly's mother went lean only because Minny did not cook good food for her mother. She was later fired from her job by Hilly for false accusations, and it was spread to everyone so that she would not get a job again. Later, Minny found that Miss Celia was in need of help, and she worked for her without the knowledge of her husband for a few days, which was also very risky work. Miss Celia was different from the others.

She treated Minny not as a servant but as her own friend. Whites should not treat blacks as their equals. This is also what was in the mind of Minny. And this was also the norm in the country. Cultural imperialism is very clear in this. At the time when Miss Hilly spread the false news about Minny stealing things, she was not able to get any work. As Hilly was in a more powerful place, her lies were believed by everyone, and they did not hire Minny for work. Minny couldn't do anything about it and remains powerless, like the other maids, which is evident through the following line.

"She telling everybody in town I'm stealing! That's why I can't get no work!..".(Stockett 21) As she is a black woman and a maid working for the so-called superiors, she was not able to prove herself.

In another place, we find that Minny was sent out to eat while it was snowing. She was working for Mr. Charlie at the time. As blacks are not allowed to eat along with whites, she was sent out for eating.

The marginalisation of these black maids is very evident through such kinds of activities. Once, when Minny broke a glass that could probably cost three dollars, she was made to pay ten dollars instead and was exploited by the whites. She had to face such a lot of problems in her life to overcome all the struggles. She also joined with Aibileen and Skeeter by risking her life along with the others to bring out the struggles of blacks in Jackson, Mississippi.

As we observe the numerous hardships that these three characters endure, we discover various forms of oppression directed at each of them. Unlike the other two maids, the one Skeeter dealt with was quite different. Even though Aibileen and Minny experienced different struggles, their racial backgrounds generally caused them to face similar issues of the city.

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