

Women in Virginia Woolf and Begum Rokeya: A View from Western and Islamic Perspective

Farzana Zaman¹, Mahbuba Sultana², Marzia Shurovi³

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, Manarat International University, Gulshan, Dhaka.

²Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Manarat International University, Gulshan, Dhaka.

³Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Manarat International University, Gulshan, Dhaka.

Abstract: This paper explores the privileges and the rights of women from Islamic perspective as well as from the view of western culture and literature with especial reference to Virginia Woolf and Begum Rokeya. Women hold the prestigious place in Islam which is not very common practice in the current world due to the discrimination. The feminist writers sail to explore a new region of women's rights through their works. In this study both the primary and secondary sources are used. The researchers show how the Asian and Muslim women are provided with better human rights than that of western women as reflected in Begum Rokeya and Virginia Woolf's writings. A study on women's rights in the light of literature and Islam could bring forth the realistic scenario of world's women's predicament as well as some effective solutions to their sufferings.

Keywords: Emancipation, Feminism, Islam, Women.

I. Introduction

Feminism is the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way. Islam and feminist literature deal with the privileges of women that ensure their true positions and roles in every sector of their lives. In Islam a woman is an independent, unique individual in her own right but this truth is almost absent in the attitudes of our society and culture due to discrimination. The feminist writers try to exhibit the picture of women in their society through their literary works and want to give women relief from discrimination of gender in literature and every sector of life. The first wave of feminism started in the nineteenth and early twentieth century when the women's movement was a renewal of an old tradition of thought and action. And for this reason in 1960 a renewal of feminist criticism came to raise voice against this discrimination. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) and Begum Rokeya (1880-1932) are two significant figures of feminist literature where they explore women's condition from their respective society. In the West, women's writing began to develop from the belief that women have been under-represented as a topic of scholars. In Woolf's time, patriarchal, repressive Victorian society did not encourage women to attend universities or to participate in intellectual debate. Woolf in her A Room of One's Own shows how women are being suppressed or oppressed by the male and male dominating society as a whole. She raises a few basic questions in terms of the rights of women. In Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf gives an idea about the roles of women at that period and their seeming insignificance. Women couldn't articulate their mental agony because of fear, shame and rejection of society. But Allah in the Holy Quran preserved the women's rights and this remains in Islam before the birth of any social and cultural ritual or feminism and feminist criticism. Women have been created with a soul of the same nature as men. In respect of gender justice what the prophet (PBUH) addressed in his historic speech in the farewell pilgrimage still outshines & the other utterance of feminism.

“O People! It is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under God's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not make friends with any one of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste.”

Even Early 20th century women of this subcontinent would not think themselves useful for the society. Begum Rokeya is the founding pillar of Asian Muslim feminism. She deals with the basic issues of women in a different way where she has shown interest in opening up the inner world of women so that they can understand that the dogmatic patriarchal society treats them as subhuman for their own convenience. Sultana's Dream (1905) and Padmarag (1924) are two intriguing examples of feminist utopia. Sultana's Dream is a feminist utopia that cuts across time and space and explores the feminine inner self. In Sultana's Dream, women are shown confident with their education and sound financial condition whereas men are accustomed to doing many services. Resonant with autobiographical hints, Padmarag is a powerful reflection of male oppression and a celebration of Rokeya's strong faith Allah in a universalist society. Here the author focuses on formal education

and teaching crafts to get economic freedom and self dependence of women. She wrote courageously against restrictions on women to promote their emancipation. Rokeya's struggle for women's emancipation against a male dominating society, her articulation for the rights of women in the light of women's rights in Islam are indeed the testimony of her writings. In the Holy Quran Allah says, **"O mankind, be conscious of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate (of the same kind) and from them twain has spread a multitude of men and women."** [Quran: 4, 1]

So the law of Allah is same for all, there is no injustice for women or men. In this paper it is shown that the advancement that the feminist writers want to have in every sphere of women's life is celebrated in Islam since the seventh century.

II. Literature Review

The oppression of women in male dominating society has always been an issue of attention in the intellectual world. In this regard, a plethora of research has been conducted in the light of plight of women in European and Asian context, especially, their sufferings, agony caused by the patriarchal rules over them as reflected in the literary pieces of particular ages in particular society- interestingly, the motto and vision of female writers, Begum Rokeya and Virginia Woolf are quite different.

In "Reconstructing Virginia Woolf's Feminism", Dr. Ghanim Jasim Samarrai observes Woolf's utilization of "a number of techniques- including historical and sociological analyses and fictional hypothesis" to highlight the lack of women's opportunities and liberal atmosphere of society to educate themselves, to flourish their apt imagination and creativity in literature, as well as to quench their thirst for knowledge at a library, to get equal payment at official work as the men get.

Apart from the difficulties generated from the lack of privacy and fortune, a lady could not get supportive environment to become a writer because of the biased and prejudiced attitude of the patriarchal society,

"The indifference of the world which Keats and Flaubert and other men of genius have found so hard to bear was in her case not indifference but hostility. The world did not say to her as it said to them, Write if you choose, it makes no difference to me. The world said with a guffaw, Write? What's the good of your writing?" (A Room of One's Own, 2181)

The citation of Charlotte Bronte's personal experience intensifies Woolf's claim regarding how the lack of money, privacy and dignity thwarts the potential genius in women, "She left her story, to which her entire devotion was due, to attend to some personal grievance. She remembered that she had been starved of her proper due of experience- she had been made to stagnate on a parsonage mending stockings when she wanted to wander free over the world. Her imagination swerved from indignation and we feel it swerve."

Woolf's personal encounter with her social prejudice as a writer breeds her resentment at the fact that how could be the English society- that claims to be the center of modern civilization-blessed with a lady Shakespeare, where a single lady in the 20th century is not allowed to enter a library alone to explore the intellectual world?

Similarly, Mahmoud Mohammed Hassan/Mohammed Fattah Rashid in their paper "Patriarchy in Virginia Woolf's Jacob's Room" highlights "the psychological effects of patriarchy in Woolf's Jacob's Room on female characters. These effects include humiliation, pessimism, depression and others." Here "the negligence of the works of women" is acutely focused. The author observes, "Female literary works are marginalized. Mrs. Flanders wonders of the possibility of reading the unpublished works of women." Here, the heart rendering scene of, "...how interesting her (Mrs. Jarvis') letters were... For the blotting paper's worn to holes and the nib cleft and clotted" projects the severity of the "subordination of unpublished works of women by the male readers."

According to the writers, the reason for the women's suppression is, "the male predominates the social, political and philosophical life. This predominance has an authoritative tone. The passivity of females in the novel can be attributed to it. Mrs. Fanny Elmar was not given the chance to explore her thoughts and life. She was obliged 'to live her political and philosophical lives through a man.' She took Jacob her ideal. She imagined him as a Turkish knight or an emperor. Fanny was in conflict between her ideal and the reality of Jacob. Yet, she refused to see Jacob as anything more than a frame for her dreams."

Apart from A Room of One's Own and Jacob's Room, almost same kind of suffering, trauma on the part of women is shown in Mrs. Dalloway, where we see, Lucrezia, the wife of Septimus Warren Smith, suffers from post-war agony with her insane husband,

"But Lucrezia Warren Smith was saying to herself, it's wicked; why should I suffer? She was asking as she walked down the broad path. No; I can't stand it any longer..."

If we look at the feminism of Begum Rokeya it becomes obvious that the feminist standpoint of West and East is not same. Md. Mahmudul Hasan, in his "Islam's encounter with women's rights and feminism: The need for

greater engagement of Muslim women” observes, “Muslim women have now launched this movement that—clearly expresses the renewal of the place of women in Islamic societies and an affirmation of a liberation vindicated by complete fidelity to the principles of Islam, and they—are today calling for a liberation within and by Islam”

Surprisingly the necessity of Muslim women’s waking up today to claim their rights that are liberally announced in Islam was voiced in Begum Rokeya’s “passionate call to women” almost 200 years back, “we are half of society. If we lag behind how will our society advance? If one leg of a person is fastened, how long will she go limping on the other? Our interest and men’s interest is one and the same. [...] For a child both mother and father are equally needed. We [women] should possess required qualities so that we can go with them [men] abreast in both spiritual and material spheres. [...] In this world a nation whose men and women worked together reached the zenith of development. It is imperative we [women] should be complementary partner of men instead of being a burden for them.”

Nowadays, it becomes vitally important that the female society should come forward to claim their rights. Mahmudul Hasan advocates, “Muslim women’s active participation, with proper knowledge and understanding of Islam, is badly needed in the intellectual endeavour of establishing their rights in society. Knowledge is the key to win this battle against chauvinistic attitudes and patriarchal authority. Zaynab al Ghazali in an interview at her residence in Heliopolis, Egypt in 1981 expressed the same view.—The Muslim woman must study Islam so she will know that it is Islam that has given her all her rights.”

To shake the dormant female society, Begum Rokeya’s Padmarag and Sultana’s Dream could play pioneering role, not only to vocalize the pain of women in male dominating society, but also to dream of and to show the way of establishing feasible projects that could literally alleviate the passivity of women in building up busy, vibrating, constructive, productive, progressive social life.

In this regard, Syeda Afsana Ferdousi, in her “A Social Reformer is peeping through-Sultana’s Dream” highlights the significant history of Begum Rokeya’s biography, “Through a minute observation on Sultana’s Dream it’s clearly identified that it’s a path shower of an ideal, hygienic, educated class of generation with aesthetic sense of beauty. It is an example of agriculturally developed, scientifically modern generation as an idol to be copied. This feminist utopia by Rokeya has become the pioneer observer of all basic problems of that contemporary society. As a social worker she has dedicated her life especially after the death of her babies and the tragic death of her husband, where there was no place for her own recreation. In a letter on 19th of August 1915 to Marium Rashid she wrote she could not take any personal time because she dedicated her life for the development of the society.”

As a result, Rokeya puts ample emphasize not only on women’s education but also on creating dedicated, workaholic female manpower to run the society smoothly. On this point, Syeda Afsana observes, “Sara is an example of an ideal working class as Sultana observed she could manage to do all sorts of works. It’s an encouragement for Rokeya’s own state. She takes care of office and also does home decoration and even does “needle work” so she asked Sara to give us a clue how we can manage to be manpower for the society-Sultana asks: “How can you find time to do all these? You have to do the office work as well?”

She answered: “I do not stick to the laboratory all day long. I finish my work in two hours.” She criticized the officials (men) of our society who linger two hours work into seven to eight hours to show they dwindle away their time in various unproductive activities. As they talk much about their work, but do little”. She set a calculation of time they are wasting: “Suppose one choroot takes half an hour to burn off and a man smokes twelve cheroots daily; then you see he wastes six hours every day in sheer smoking.” This is a real picture of our officials which they cannot deny. This is logical and constructive attack of a feminist writer to criticize men of the society so that they change their mentality.”

So, this dream of a utopia which seems absent in Woolf’s feminist treatises, portrays how a peaceful, progressive society could run, only with the honest female workers: “An ideal country should not have any conflicts as in lady land they don’t have any conflicts. Every social worker is humanists. Sultana also talks of a religion “based on truth and love”

In lady land the treatment on human is liberal as she said- “It is our duty to love one another and to be absolutely truthful.” There is no punishment like “killing creation of God, especially a human being.” The punishment is set intellectually as a human being “we are the best creation.”

Again, if we consider Padmarag, it could be taken as another example to reform the entire society, especially to alleviate the pain of tortured women. According to Barnita Bagchi, “Rokeya’s vision in this novella is courageous and bold, showing that Hindus, Brahmas, Muslims, and Christians, black women and white women, all suffer from patriarchal oppression, and all need to receive refuge and education from communities of competent women working together to reform society. The uncompromising, ambitious and unsectarian nature of Rokeya’s vision of feminism and education are revealed perhaps most graphically, among all the works she penned, in Padmarag.”

In this novel, the vivid tales of heart rendering sufferings of almost all the women living at Tarini Bhaban is not the end of the story, there is an echoing question at the end of it, as Barnita Bagchi translates,

“Siddika asks: Is there no medicine to cure these running sores of society? ... Is there no remedy for this? Soudamini replies, in a ringing manifesto of the novel, there is! That remedy is the ‘Society for the Alleviation of Women’s Suffering’ in Tarini Bhaban. Come, all women who are abandoned, pauperized, neglected, helpless, oppressed-come all. Then we declare war against society. And Tarini Bhaban is our fortress.”

So, these two different poles of feminist observation—from the west and Asia—could not only reveal the social document of the then England and Indian subcontinent’s realistic picture of women’s oppression, suppression by the male dominating society but also the answer to the question, “what could be done to change the lot of tortured, helpless women?”

III. Interpretation

III.1 The Question of Inheritance and Equal Pay

Woolf’s context and condition of the then period of England enforced her to write to articulate only the plight and predicament of the women, whose familial, educational, and social dignity are under threat. Woolf accounts that women are just entrapped as an angel within four walls; they are imprisoned in their own house. Society as a larger home is the place where they are alien.

The alienation, echoed by Rokeya in her context, almost resembles the circumstances of Woolf, though Rokeya sparkles with the spirit to fight more vigorously because of her strong faith in Allah which is the fountain of all her strength that propels her a step ahead. A diagnosis of their biography reveals the roots of their different approaches to almost similar problems. We come across that due to the familial support Rokeya becomes more resilient and Woolf becomes more revolting.

With a sigh, the limited omniscient narrator of Woolf denounces, “If only Mrs. Seton and her mother and her mother before her had learnt the great art of making money and had left their money, we might have looked forward without undue confidence to a pleasant and honorable life time spent in the shelter of one of the liberally endowed professions” [p. 30, *A Room of One’s Own*]

Later part of the essay also reveals that she got the news of inheritance and voting right simultaneously but the prior matters more to her.

On the other side of the coin, we find different approaches among the characters of Rokeya. “Wake up sisters, wake up!” epitomizes her revolution, her spirit, her positive voice. Siddika’s brother [*Padmarag*, p-335] asks her ‘to get ready for the battle of life’. He stipulates, “I will make you such educated so that you should not be dependent on any barbaric one for a piece of bread.”

In addition to this area what received more attention is Siddika’s large inheritance from her brother which she inherits by Islamic law, not by force. Moreover, she inhales both for the prestigious properties she inherits: the wealth and education and likely priorities to the knowledge itself.

First example of Woolf is about the despair of generation that has only better experience and shadowy future and the example of Rokeya draws the focus on strength and stimulation moulded in Islam.

Woolf is the citizen of Britain where the history of women’s empowerment and emancipation does not go back to the prehistoric age rather if we look at the economic rights of women in Britain, we see how they fared only decades ago. “In Britain, women did not have the right of equal pay to equal work until the enactment of the equal pay Act of 1970, enforced in 1975 and amended in 1984”, [Md Mahmudul Hasan, “Feminism of Islamophobia: A review of misogyny charges against Islam” *Intellectual Discourse*, 20(1)201255-78, 61] and this manmade, man forced inequality is vividly depicted in Woolf’s *Room* though her sigh drifted apart without any solution. Surprisingly, Rokeya in Both her *Padmarag* and *Sultana’s Dream* has shown the women’s empowerment in her two utopian novels. Rokeya prescribes the tremendous solution in favour of women’s empowerment. In *Sultana’s Dream*, sister Sara says, “We are all very busy making nature yield as much as she can. We do not find time to quarrel with one another as we never sit idle.”

Islam has given women the right to ownership and equal pay for equal work since the seventh century. The Quran is categorical: “**And do not covet that by which Allah has made some of you excel others; men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn; and ask God of His grace; surely God knows all things.**” [Quran, 4:32]

This verse focuses on the individual and unique rights of both male and female irrespective of their sex. Moreover Islam does not draw the division between male and female regarding work and pay.

III.2 Double Chain: Chain of Patriarchy and Chain of Imperialism

Helen, one of the dwellers of Tarini Bhaban in Rokeya’s *Padmarag* becomes the victim of British law. She got married to a lunatic and eventually the law enforced her to be with him perpetually. One of Rokeya’s characters Sakina who represents the author’s view mentioned here that “Helen has to endure the poisonous fruit of the insanity of Hares and the law of England could not make her unchained from the tie of an insane Hares’s

torture. Being the critic of this law, the author voices that “What can be worst torture and injustice than that, how does England the so called civilized country claim themselves civilized?” [Padmarag]

On the other hand, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, we find an entirely new England where Clarissa seems meek regarding her mental distance with her husband, worse than that, Lucrezia Warren Smith seems to be on the verge of nervous breakdown because of her constant mental agony for her insane husband. None of them show any sparkling spirit to overcome their predicaments what is surprising here is the women of Rokeya’s continent should have been more broken, fragile in mental strength as they were the “double colonized” victim of British colony in India. But the female characters of Rokeya show the other way round.

It is a praiseworthy matter that in the hand of Rokeya, Helen gets revived, has embraced the alternative way to get rid of the plight of her life. Because of her belief transmitted from Tarini Bhaban she has learnt to balm her sore, spreading herself among the distressed people, enlightening her surrounding splashing the light of education.

Rokeya imparts the message against imperialism through her captivating words, not through an argument rather in the soothing persuasive and positive way. She says in her *Sultana’s Dream*: “We do not covet other people’s land, we do not fight for a piece of diamond, and we dive deep into the ocean of knowledge.”

This motto is very relevant to Islam- as the complete code of life; Islam addresses every corner of life including capturing a country. The message of Quran is reflected in the utterance of Rokeya.

In Holy Quran Allah says,

“O you who have believed, do not consume one another's wealth unjustly but only [in lawful] business by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves (or one another). Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful.” [An-Nesa, 2: 29]

To mock and frown at the malpractices of the male dominated society, Rokeya imparts power and position to female stand instead of male which is indeed a witty work of a dreamer of a wise reformer. She can be deemed as crusader. Despite the victim of the society, Siddika, the protagonist of *Padmarag*, tries to struggle to keep on standing. Her irresistible pain and aching could not resist her spirit, her endeavor.

From the very beginning of the novel, Siddika pushes through the dark veil that engulfed her life with the firm belief on Allah. Completely exhausted disguised in man’s attire when she keeps on waiting for the next train, the limited omniscient narrator utters her inside with the words, “How do we express her mental agony? May be she exposes her mind to the one and only merciful creator, Allah. The mind who sought the help from Allah in its pain and suffering knows how soothing it is! How the sweetened name of Allah can replace the pain with solidarity and tranquility.” [Padmarag]

Here the author projects her philosophy through her character which exhibits her strong belief in Allah.

III.3 Maltreatment

With surprise, Woolf notices the absence of women writers in Elizabethan England, gets puzzled not to find any prominent, ground breaking women writer in that fertile literary period. “She imagines what would happen if Shakespeare had an equally gifted sister named Judith.” Actually Judith would be a failure in disguise, synonymous to tragedy, tragic end, and the author compares the outlines of the courses of Shakespeare and his sister’s life where one is blessed and the other is suppressed regarding education, marital decision and the choice of doing work.

Unlike her brother, however, she would not be able to attend school as her family would breed the enslaved mentality, would discourage her from independent study. She would be enforced to get married against her will as a teenager and run away to London. Had she had the zeal to follow the footsteps of her brother regarding acting in a theatre where her dream would be completely shattered followed by a catastrophe. The man at a theatre would not only deny her the chance to work but also would throw her like the peal after satisfying his monstrous appetite.

The howl of outrage and astonishment of the society is hardly present here after her probable suicide. The devastating picture that we get of a society here is worse than the picture drawn by Rokeya where another fictitious character, Usha, gets abducted from her in-laws but does not lose her chastity and of course, does not get murdered even by the robbers. Here at least she had a loving husband and a family before this accident.

Her in-laws denied her chastity upon her return to her house and asked her to leave which provoked her to commit suicide. Now as readers, we can easily sense the depth of depression Usha suffers as the result of cowardice of her husband and injustice and cruelty of her in-laws that breaks her enough to choose to commit suicide as the only option left.

Here, the author introduces the maid of their house who rebukes her, “Moron! Why should you die to be a ghost? Better start working as a cook at people’s house to spit on your in-laws’ so called status.”

Now, imagine the level of self-spirit Rokeya endows with a maid-servant of the then rural illiterate household- who did not get the least facility to educate herself to improve her financial lot, with a dignified

official job. And, of course, the broken daughter-in-law of this household gets inspired, realizing, "Really, why should I die? I should rather spit on the people who are responsible for my misfortune."

The point to be noted, here, is why is this courage missing in the people's mind in contemporary Virginia Woolf's characters who being born in such an affluent country, the country that claims to be the center of trade commerce education and modern civilization? Had they had such drive to "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."- till the end, their Judith Shakespeare would not have committed suicide, their Septimus Warren Smith would not have concluded, "now we will kill ourselves" who has literally done that, their Lucrezia would not have felt like disclosing her inner turmoil to the happy, kind passersby who looked kind, like an insane, Rokeya is unique in respect of the inner drive to fight till the end that she injects in her female characters who suffer much more than Woolf's Lucrezia, Clarissa, Saly Seton etc. It is not only about the outburst of agony for the deprivation from equal opportunity for education and other human needs. The self esteem, the indomitable spirit, that belief that, "Man can be destroyed not defeated" is the very essence that is missing in Woolf's characters. And that is the reason why and how Usha, Rafia, Siddika, Soudamini, at one point of their lives, stand up again and lead a dignified life to outshine the female characters, Judith and Lucrezia, of the so called modern and developed country. One of the reasons could be the absence of the pillar of faith that holds the centre of existence of a human heart when all the other things fall apart around him.

One of the characters Rafia refers that committing suicide is a sin and she does not grant it. She says, "I don't grant that very sin (suicide)."

In Islam killing oneself i.e. suicide is strictly prohibited. In the Holy Quran Allah says, "**Nor kill (or destroy) yourselves: for verily God hath been to you Most Merciful! If any do that in rancor and injustice, soon shall We cast them into the Fire: And easy it is for God.**" [Holy Quran, 4: 29 – 30]

Prophet (PBUH) said, "**A man was inflicted with wounds and he committed suicide, and so Allah said: My slave has caused death on himself hurriedly, so I forbid Paradise for him.**" [Bukhari, Volume 2, Book 23, Number 445]

Narrated Thabit bin Ad-Dahhak: "**And if somebody commits suicide with anything in this world, he will be tortured with that very thing on the Day of Resurrection.**" [Bukhari Volume 8, Book 73, Number 73]

Centuries of maltreatment of the women in the so called Western civilization not only thwarted their intellectual potential or their rights to receive higher academic degrees as a man could receive at that time, but also broke their spirit to dream of a solution to their precarious situation/eternal suffering.

III.4 Empowerment and Access to Knowledge

Sultana's Dream represents a utopian society where the power of male is driven out and given to female. The patriarchal order is inverted & males are kept in mardana. The men lost their position because they believe in muscle power rather than intellectual power. The inversion of male power and patriarchal order is totally contrasted to the society of Rokeya's time. The picture of the then Rokeya's society was that the confinement to 'zenana' was women's unquestioned destiny. It is also believed that men had sharper brain than brain. But in Sultana's Dream,

"Women's brains are somewhat quicker than men's. Ten years ago, when the military officers called our scientific discoveries "a sentimental nightmare," some of the young ladies wanted to say something in reply to those remarks. But both the Lady Principals restrained them and said, they should reply not by word, but by deed, if ever they got the opportunity. And they had not long to wait for that opportunity." [p- 6, Sultana's Dream]

In Islam we find the space for women in this world where women are not restricted to explore their brain. The financial power and the power of knowledge should be established in the society by women according to Islam. In the Holy Quran Allah says,

"Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward." [Holy Quran, 33:35]

In Hadith, The Prophet of Allah (PBUH) said,
"Acquiring of knowledge is obligatory to every Muslim male and female."

Islam has made it a duty on every Muslim male and female to gain knowledge which is considered to be a superior act of worship in Islam. In Islam therefore both men and women are created with the capacity for learning, understanding and teaching. Acquiring knowledge will enable Muslim men and women to get a better perception and understanding of the world around them and make them more conscious of Almighty Allah. Islam regards women as spiritually and intellectually equal to men. Both have equal rights to receive an education and enter into employment.

In Sultana's Dream, the women believe in self reliance and a universalistic concept of shared humanity that does not consider/ admit any discrimination on the basis of caste or gender. In Sultana's Dream, apart from the struggle for equal opportunities and education for women, the intention of the author is also to portray women as equal if not superior to men in many ways.

Rokeya's utopia presents vision of a society what would it look like without gender discrimination. She treats patriarchal reality as threatening space whereas her utopian story provides the liberating space.

IV. Conclusion And Findings

4.1 Virginia Woolf is one of the pioneers of the second wave of Feminist Movement in the west. Woolf's anger for the women of her age for not having the opportunity to educate themselves is praiseworthy, her ventilation of disillusionment is completely justified as she depreciates the gravel path for the female scholars as opposed to the stone covered path for the male scholars at the academies or the ridiculous rule of not letting a single woman into library. But that should not be enough or the end of our motto. We need a dreamer like Rokeya who, first of all, could picturize the sufferings of women of her age, second, identify the root cause of their misfortune, as she articulates, "You have neglected the duty you owe to yourselves and you have lost your natural rights by shutting your eyes to your own interest."

And last but not the least, who could visualize the path to get away with it, the way to improve their lot and show it to them, on a national level as the queen of the Ladyland in Sultana's Dream decrees, "The women in her country should be educated. Accordingly a number of girls' schools were founded and supported by the government. Education was spread far and wide among women. And early marriage also was stopped. No woman was to be allowed to marry before she was twenty-one."

According to Bagchi, "Education is for Rokeya, as it has been for post-enlightenment feminists all over the world, the key way in which women can breach the public and the private spheres."

4.2 The women of all societies have suffered from social maltreatment in terms of unequal educational and social facilities, verbal and physical abuse, discrimination of social response to their suffering etc. So about the social condition of the women Begum Rokeya and Virginia Woolf depict almost same scenario of the then England and Indian sub-continent. From Woolf's quotation from Professor Trevelyan's History of England, we come to know that, "women –in the fifteenth century –were locked up, beaten and flung about the room. Two hundred years later, it was still the exception for women to choose their own husbands, and when the husband had been assigned, he was lord and master." Then Woolf bitterly wonders: "how could Bronte, who would never get her genius expressed whole and entire, help but die young, cramped and thwarted?" On the other hand, all the characters in Rokeya's creation Tarini Bhaban, should have committed suicide for being tortured severely, victimized and burned inside but they didn't, because of the spirit they have, the belief they possess and the platform they have reached. Here, Islam works like a touchstone to get revived and revitalized in this toughest world. In Woolf's A Room of One's Own, she predicts, had there been a sister of Shakespeare named Judith, she would have committed suicide for severe social injustice in terms of unjust social, familial facilities brutal and discriminatory maltreatment by the men of social institution.

4.3 Woolf breathed on the soil that thrived on the blood, sweat of thousands of slaves, colonized, tortured people around the world, but Rokeya lived in the country that was being oppressed by the British. So, it is natural that their characters would be affected by colonization in different ways. Too much greed to conquer other peoples' lands by the western countries led to the unimaginable and astonishing amount of destruction and casualty in the 1st World War. Britain's economy, people's physical and mental health, their faith in religion were tremendously shaken by the shockwave of WWI. Septimus' psychological disorder, suicide, Lucrezia's suffering are the direct result of Britain's imperialism.

On the other hand, Rokeya shows not only the perverted nature of British Law that fails to do justice to a lunatic's wife but also the failure of British hold on the Indian sub continent in the voice of Robinson's dying scream that echoes the final utterance of Kurtz of Heart of Darkness, "He was trembling in fear. Again he cried, 'Father, father, please save me. What do you think, will I be forgiven?' Oh! No- where is my salvation?"

The ultimate upshot of British imperialistic policy eventually broke their own faith in themselves, their mental steadiness and the women like, Rezia were the worst victims of it.

Surprisingly, the Indian women whom Clarissa scorns imagining as "silly, pretty, filmy, nincompoops" turn out to be much brighter in terms of their disposition and attitude towards other nation as they do not 'covet other people's lands rather are quite happy and grateful for their own rich land. This self contentment is the key to their happiness in a progressive society. And the compliment of Tarini Sen, "The matter of happiness is that your (Muslim) society doesn't nourish any superstition" mirrors the fact that, a true practicing Muslim society has neither superstition among them nor prejudice against other societies.

4.4 To show that the women could be good administrators, Rokeya introduces the idea of "community mapping and micro planning in the language of modern educational policy" as Barnita Bagchi phrases it. Sultana's Dream is a visionary piece indeed. Here Rokeya shows how an entire nation could run with solar

power that is being thought today by many governments of developing countries. The ideas of removable roof of the shower room, the plantation to preserve rain water, all the things were really advance for that age what J.K. Rowling is writing was dreamt by Rokeya centuries ago.

Rokeya is the epitome of reformation, the destroyer of social, political barriers. She acquires a new identity. Sultana's Dream is a direct experimentation of gender-centric society that means a group of women create a nearly all female society.

Dream and futuristic visions are used as a powerful weapon to expand the boundaries of human thought. Sultana (the protagonist) dreams of an ideal world, Ladyland where the matriarchal society thrives. Sultana's Dream portrays a utopia to inspire those women who suffer in patriarchal society, more precisely, Rokeya herself represents the liberty of women and though the Ladyland is the testimony of her inculcated dream into reality, she justifies her reasons and views supported and suggested by Islam.

Works Cited

- [1]. Bagchi, Bamita. "Inside Tarini Bhavan: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's Padmarag and the Richness of South Asian Feminism in Furthering Unsectarian, Gender-Just Human Development." www.igidr.ac.in/.../WP-2003-00
- [2]. English Dictionary & Thesaurus. University of Cambridge. 2013.
- [3]. Ferdousi, Syeda Afsana. "A Social Reformer is peeping through-Sultana's Dream". IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). Volume 19. Issue 4. Ver. I (Apr.2014). PP 68-73.
- [4]. Hassan, Mahmoud Mohammed and Mohammed Fattah Rashid. "Patriarchy in Virginia Woolf's Jacob's Room." Tikrit University Journal for Humanities. Vol. (15). No. (2). March 2008.
- [5]. Hasan, Md. Mahmudul. "Islam's encounter with women's rights and feminism: The need for greater engagement of Muslim women." International Journal Of Scientific Thought. 2, 81-94, 2013, ISSN 2306-7012.
- [6]. Islam, Mohammad Shafiqul and Rama Islam. "Emancipation of Women through Education and Economic Freedom: A Feminist Study of Begum Rokeya's Utopias". SUST Journal of Social Sciences. Vol. 18. No. 4. 2012. P. 11-19
- [7]. Jasim Samarrai, Dr. Ghanim. "Reconstructing Virginia Woolf's Feminism." Journal of the College of Arts. University of Basrah. No. (56), 2011.
- [8]. Rokeya, Begum. Sultana's Dream. New Delhi, Penguin, 2005. Print.
- [9]. Rokeya, Begum. Padmarag. Ed. Mostofa Mir. Dhaka: Anindo Printing Press, 2005. Print. The Holy Quran.
- [10]. Woolf, Virginia. A Room of One's Own. Ed. Jenifer Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, Print.
- [11]. Woolf, Virginia. Jacob's Room. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922.
- [12]. Woolf, Virginia. Mrs. Dalloway. London: Penguin Books, 1996 Print.