

ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN AND WORLD LITERATURE: A CRITICAL LOOK AT *SULTANA'S DREAM*

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Abstract

The literature of any country has its own appeal in today's world of Comparative Literature. To be recognised as a product of world literature brings recognition for most writers in the present day. For Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, a colonised Muslim Indian woman in the late-nineteenth and early- twentieth century India, it would have been a colossal task to reach a global audience with her futuristic writings. Sultana's Dream is a feminist utopian science fiction written by Rokeya, which provides an insight into the power of imagination of a fearless author ahead of her time. This paper argues that along with her other works, Sultana's Dream places Rokeya in the map of Comparative Literature while her practice of translation and her modern world view about women's emancipation earns her a position in World literature. Rokeya in her lifetime could not become part of the core or the European literary circle since she belonged to the periphery. Today the translation of Sultana's Dream can mean her work has an opportunity to transcend local literary boundaries and move to a much larger global audience.

Keywords: *Muslim women, core and periphery, modernity, world literature, translation, local and global*

Introduction

In 1905, the same year *Sultana's Dream* was published, British-ruled India started seeing seismic shifts in its political scene. It was the year of Bongo Bhongo or the Partition of Bengal, which erected a political barrier between the Muslim-populated regions in the East and the Hindu- majority areas in the West of Bengal. Bongo Bhongo was a strategic move devised by Lord Curzon, who claimed that it would help develop the two places. The Hindus believed the 1905 partition as a British ploy to decentralise

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power away from their hands, while many in the Muslim society welcomed its political and financial fallouts. The British were successful in their goal – they had created division among the people using religion as a tool. However, this also proved to be costly in the long run, as Bongo Bhongo gave momentum to nationalist movements which soon took the form of Swadeshi Movement and led to India’s independence from British rule. During this period, the Hindus protested against the British Raj by boycotting their goods and using products that were only found or made in India.

Writing in such a politically volatile time when people were focused on pursuing nationalistic aspirations, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) was fighting her own battles for equal rights and respect for women. As a feminist growing up in a conservative Muslim society, her fight was against patriarchal domination and narrow-minded social order that barred women from getting education and neglected their intellectual properties. Where much contemporary Indian literature focused on political or racial themes, *Sultana’s Dream* was a utopia providing voice to the muffled imaginations of the Muslim women hidden behind the four walls of their homes. Md. Mahmudul Hasan writes, “Although her [Rokeya’s] literary career coincided with the height of the anti-colonial Swadeshi movement, the benefits she reaped from the east–west encounter are evident in the perspectives and viewpoints in her work that supersede its colonial milieu” (11). Hasan here writes that, despite the serious political and social issues that grasped the entire country, Rokeya decided to focus on the prevailing conditions of women which was overlooked by the then organic intellectuals.

Rokeya’s works were more relatable to the situation of the Muslim women as it was one of her significant concerns to modernise the Muslim women in Calcutta. Unlike Muslim women of the time, daughters from affluent Hindu families were sent to study in various institutions as they were not bound by the purdah (a religious practice in Islamic societies to screen women from the eyes of males who are not their immediate family members like father, brother, husband, or son). As a result, the Hindu women were being educated while the Muslim ones remained illiterate. It was Rokeya’s dream to have a society where women would get the same education as men and move forward in life.

Motichur (Vol. 1 1904, Vol. 2 1922), *Padmarag* (1924), *Oborodhbashini* (*The Secluded Women*, 1931) are a few of her major literary works which

explicitly critique the inequality between men and women in the then social milieu. *Sultana's Dream* is one of her famous satires written in English, it was first published in 1905 in the periodical *The Indian Ladies Magazine* based in Madras. The story starts with the narrator resting in a chair when a character named Sara comes along and wakes her up. The narrator calls her Sister Sara as a sign of respect. Sister Sara takes the narrator through the realm of women called Ladyland. Here all the women are educated, peace-loving, and are efficiently ruling the country. The women of her utopian Ladyland are free to work outside their homes while the male population have to stay inside by the order of the Queen. In Ladyland the men are put under reverse *zenana*, which is termed *mardana* in the text. Rokeya uses the term *mardana* to show a similar concept as *zenana* (a secluded place for the

women to keep them hidden from outsiders' eyes) created for men in the household to keep them isolated.

According to Sister Sara the men only waste time by smoking and fighting with each other and in their egocentric attitudes they brought wars on the state, due to which thousands died. So, there was no other way to protect the land without the intervention of the ladies. To preserve the women's *purdah*, the men needed to stay away and the women using their collective creativity won and forever ended the war. Consequently, there remains peace and harmony when Sister Sara brought the narrator to this place. The author uses humour to tell her utopian story, but in the context of the contemporary colonial rule and subjugation of Muslim women, the story is actually a social satire of the male oppression in early twentieth century India.

Rokeya was primarily educated at home in Arabic and Persian since Bangla or English were considered languages inappropriate for Muslims. But the indomitable young Rokeya was taught by her eldest brother, Ibrahim Saber, who secretly bought English books for her to read. Rokeya got married at the age of sixteen, to Khan Bahadur Sakhawat Hussain, an Urdu-speaking deputy magistrate of Bhagalpur. Rokeya's husband, who was much older than her, supported her education and she continued her intimacy with European literature. She never visited Europe but came in contact with Europeans as many British people resided in Calcutta, now Kolkata, where Rokeya lived with her husband. Rokeya knew many British who worked with her husband and she was familiar with their wives. Annie

Besant, Lady Chelmsford, and Mr McPherson were acquaintances of Rokeya's husband and she had the opportunity to exchange views about India and Europe with them (Hasan 54). An avid reader of European writings, Rokeya might have had access to the writings of Rudyard Kipling since he was born in colonial India and explicitly talked about the condition of the colonies in his writings (Hasan 3). The periodicals and novels written

by British female authors encouraged Rokeya to stand up for women in her own country and she could see through the façade of civilization and the grim reality behind it. Ironically the position of women in the so-called developed Britain was strikingly similar to that of the Indian Sub- continent.

Rokeya was a truly cosmopolitan writer. She rose above narrow nationalism and did not boycott English as the language of hegemony instead she started walking in the path of a global reader and embraced Western culture. Rokeya's life was about resisting the oppression against women and she tried to show the oppressors that, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault 95). The way Rokeya chose to resist – with her pen not arms – has a striking resemblance to what the Queen of her Ladyland believes, "If you cannot save your country for lack of physical strength," said the Queen, "try to do so by brain power" (7). Pen was the source of Rokeya's power and the means of resistance against the oppressive patriarchy.

Rokeya, eager to learn the condition of western women and societies, was an avid reader of European literature. She read Jonathan Swift's satirical novel *Gulliver's Travels* and was inspired by the writing style (Hasan 7). Swift created a utopian land where he makes horses superior to men in the place called Houyhnhnm. Rokeya in a similar vein creates Ladyland where the narrator looks at the new world order in which men are kept inside the house as they are unfit to rule and are only capable of creating chaos. On the other hand, the women are in charge of providing food, security, and most importantly peace in the land.

This paper looks at the way Rokeya was informed about the modern cultures and innovations in the West and how her writing proves her worth in the comparative literary studies. She writes science fiction where women experiment with solar heat and also create "a wonderful

balloon” that can store water from the atmosphere to be used at any time. But what might fascinate eco-critics is the way Rokeya deals with the issue of environment and hopes for a future that has sustainable and clean energy where there is no need for “coal or fire”. The Queen of Ladyland is determined to make the entire country a green garden with no pollution. This approach can be considered as a pioneer to the modern ecofeminist writings. The first sentence of *Ecology and Feminism* defines eco-feminism like this:

Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second-wave feminism and the green movement. (Mellor 1)

Eco-feminism is a relatively new field of study and was unheard of in the early twentieth-century, but Rokeya – a female writer from a colonial state – was so culturally well-informed and imaginative that she became one of the unsung pioneers of eco-feminist writings.

Sister Sara in *Sultana’s Dream* narrates when women work for scientific innovations to create a sustainable development, they are mocked by the men who could not care less about the environment:

While the women were engaged in scientific research, the men of this country were busy increasing their military power. When they came to know that the female universities were able to draw water from the atmosphere and collect heat from the sun, they only laughed at the members of the universities and called the whole thing “a sentimental nightmare”! (6)

The men jeered while the women succeeded in establishing a viable and balanced relationship with nature. While war threatened Ladyland, nature was showering its bounty by making the place a green paradise. The narrator was very clear on her position of the completely opposite worldview of both the men and women in her story. In the text she shows the females as not stereotypical mother figures but as autonomous individuals, working for the advancement of their country. Scholars Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva in their writings resonate the possibility of peaceful co-existence between humans and nature by asserting:

That search and experience of interdependence and integrity is the basis for creating a science and knowledge that nurtures, rather than violates, nature’s sustainable systems. (34)

This notion of the relationship between women and nature is what *Sultana's Dream* provides the readers with, to not only give an imaginative utopia but to show the possibilities of what could be achieved if women are educated, free, and dependent on their own intellect instead of being cut off from the outside world.

de Beauvoir analyses the “woman question” in her seminal book *The Second Sex*, by referring to how man reaches his freedom and transcendence by “Othering” of women and destroying their unique identities. de Beauvoir declares, “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (330). Society makes a set code of conducts and roles that bind women inside the household but they are not programmed to be that way from birth. de Beauvoir also believes that, to achieve freedom one must not immerse oneself in the daily activities of household chores or tending to offspring; instead she should have a job, educated views about life and engage oneself in creative projects. Rokeya was aware of the predicament of women in conservative Muslim society, which treated them only as part of the household, nothing more. In 1905, Rokeya was able to analyse the proper role of women in an educated society which was promoted by de Beauvoir almost 44 years later.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was a modern thinker. She attempted to tread the realm of translation. She not only wrote in English to be read among the educated people, but also translated *Sultana's Dream* into Bangla so that women who did not know English could also read the book and thus receive the message that the author wanted to convey.

Translation is a way to reach those who face a language barrier and fail to gain access to an unexplored world of literature. Rokeya believed in imparting knowledge in whichever form she could. She also knew how crucial it was to ensure that her ideas reached women in the most impenetrable corners of conservative Muslim households. Rokeya was correct in comprehending the universality of the condition of women at the time. She once read an English novel *The Murder of Delicia*, first published in 1896, about the plight of British women and was surprised to find the issues that troubled the author Marie Corelli, were strikingly similar to those of the women imprisoned in the Indian households. Rokeya wanted to expose the truth behind the façade of a civilised British society that claimed to respect women, and so she translated parts of the novel into Bangla. The novel talks about a woman trapped in a loveless marriage with

a controlling man, Lord Carlyon, who is a possessive husband and treats Delicia as his property not as a human being. He utters the complacent words of a superior being: “Anyway, she is my wife, and she can’t get rid of me. She has no fault whatever to find with me in the eyes of the law!” (180). This attitude of the British man was exactly the same as his Indian counterparts who put women in purdah and considered them to be household property.

Rokeya’s translation does not only reveal her observation of the European novel’s content and theme but also the practice of working with different languages which makes her active in comparative literary studies. The Bangla translation from parts of Corelli’s book *Delicia Hotya* saw a great amount of circulation among Rokeya’s contemporary females who could relate to the plight of the British woman’s familial life and empathise with the protagonist. This was Rokeya’s way of bringing the European culture into the daily household of Muslim Bengal. Rokeya’s shunning of narrow nationalistic literary criticism and adopting a culture of a comparative literary scholar immersed in translation work is proof of her modern mind-set.

The role and position of Indian women in British colonial era provides significant insight about the process of modernisation of the nation. Jessica Berman while mapping the late colonial Indian writings in English asserts:

Much of the discourse surrounding the modernization of Indian domestic life in the first decades of the twentieth century contains the assumption that modernity is being foisted on Indian households from outside and must either be resisted as a force of imperialism or embraced as a means around it. Modernization becomes double edged, promising education, progress, and global connection, while often seen as Westernized, dangerously violent, and spiritually disruptive. The home in these critiques also becomes the space for resistance to modernity’s discontents. (216)

One way of looking at Indian modernism is to see the domestic sphere as the force which works as a catalyst for modernisation of the state.

Modernism, according to many critics, is a form of resistance to capitalist world order and Theodor Adorno promotes this particular idea. Postcolonial scholar Neil Lazarus in “Modernism and African Literature” refers to Adorno’s notion of modernism:

Adorno casts modernism as an aesthetic formulation of resistance to the prevailing—indeed, the hegemonic—modes of capitalist modernization in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe. (234)

Looking from this perspective one would not be mistaken to put Rokeya's writings as a resistance to the "hegemonic" and dominant European grand narrative of modern culture. *Sultana's Dream* is a resistance to the beliefs that the East learns modernism from their Western counterparts and do not have any original thoughts. Rokeya never termed herself as a feminist, nor was she known to reproach the use of the term in her lifetime. But in her works she was cautious not to blindly imitate the Western feminist concepts, instead she based her writings in her contemporary Muslim society. She wanted Muslim women to come out of purdah but she did not want them to just thoughtlessly imitate Western women. Instead she inspired them to engage in creating a firm position of authority in the community through education and intellectual activity.

It was during the reign of Queen Victoria that Rokeya started writing and she created her utopian science fiction when Edward VII was the British monarch. It is needless to say how the outside world as well as the domestic situation influences a writer who is well aware of her surroundings. Rokeya does not glorify monarchy when she praises the Queen of Ladyland, instead reveals how the patriarchy rules even over a queen. The author points out, "Thirty years ago, when our present Queen was thirteen years old, she inherited the throne. She was Queen in name only, the Prime Minister really ruling the country" The fact that even the female monarch is not free

from the dominating hands of the males, proves Rokeya's writing timely and a biting criticism of the societal norms. The author's imagination maybe influenced by the European culture and monarchy but her modernism is rooted in her Muslim Indian one.

Keeping Rokeya's works in mind, this paper discusses an analysis of cosmopolitanism by Kwame Anthony Appiah where he not only discusses the rooted cosmopolitanism but also clarifies what it means to be liberal and patriotic. Appiah writes:

I have been arguing, in essence, that you can be cosmopolitan celebrating the variety of human cultures; rooted loyal to one local society (or a few) that you count as home; liberal convinced of the value of the individual; and patriotic celebrating the institutions of the state (or states) within which you live. (633)

Appiah's notion of rooted cosmopolitanism is that its origins are the same which fosters "liberalism" and this in turn nurtures "patriotism" and consequently "freedom" is achieved. Diversity in people's lifestyles and language use creates an atmosphere of harmony where people have individual choices and any kind of hegemony is countered by the idea of freedom, and as Appiah declares, "For rooted cosmopolitans, all this is of a single piece" (633). This form of cosmopolitanism is what makes a writer part of global community as they work with new aesthetics of global literary culture while remaining rooted to their own. In a similar vein, Rabindranath Tagore believed in a "philosophical cosmopolitanism that was tied to global art on one end and Indian civilization on the other" (403). From this point of view, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was a cosmopolitan author whose roots were deep in Muslim Indian culture yet she never failed to learn about the culture of the Empire. She always promoted circulation of Bangla, Indian, Arabic, and English texts to be accessed by the people in her country so that one can become a citizen of the world, at least in the sphere of literature.

Every time critics discuss modern Indian authors springing out of colonialism or talk about feminist movements from this part of the world it is more likely that they bring in the later feminist writers such as Sarojini Naidu, Anita Desai or Arundhati Roy. Writing in the first part of the twentieth century, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is still not very well known among writers or readers of literature. All her life Rokeya was a significant part of women's education movement but the socio-economic conditions were hostile towards the women receiving formal education. Rokeya was widowed at a very young age, and without a man's support it was near impossible for her to go out of the house and acquire knowledge. Therefore, for Rokeya to publish or circulate her writings outside the country was an impossibility. Unlike European writers like the Brontë sisters or Mary Anne Evans (commonly known as George Eliot), Rokeya used her real name so that she could encourage other women to come out of their silence and immerse themselves in intellectual activity. Even though *Sultana's Dream* is a utopia, Rokeya was optimistic and believed that there was going to be a future where women's creativity flourishes along with their male counterparts.

Rabindranath Tagore delivered a lecture in Calcutta on comparative literature at the Indian National Council for Education in 1907, two years after the publication of *Sultana's Dream*. He named his lecture "Vishwa

Sahitya” or World Literature. Tagore was always rooting for universality and cosmopolitanism while reflecting the Indianness in his writing. Tagore’s term *Vishwa Sahitya* is similar to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s coinage of the term *Weltliteratur*. Bhavya Tiwari writes:

It is often said that Goethe coined (or at any rate emphasized) the term “world literature” in 1827 following the collapse of Napoleon’s imperial ambitions in Europe, in order to project the role of literature as an instrument for peace and cross-connections between nations. In India, the credit for proposing “world literature” has been given to Tagore, who under the nomenclature of “vishwa sahitya” advocated universality, and interconnections between literatures across and within nations. (43)

Here the important idea is that world literature promotes unification of the world and is against imperialism. Goethe tells Johann Peter Eckermann, “Nowadays, national literature doesn’t mean much: the age of world literature is beginning, and everybody should contribute to hasten its advent”. It is as though Rokeya followed the Goethean notion of world literature and did not refrain herself from embracing a foreign culture. She was already dealing with Arabic, Urdu, and Bangla literature and took an interest in English to connect with the world, to learn from an affluent culture. Rokeya wanted to be heard within the nation and across borders. That is why she wrote her utopian short story in English at first and then translated it herself into Bangla.

In this light the reader might be reminded of the 1848 declaration of Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels that “national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness” are to be discarded and from the volume of “national and local literatures” (7) world literature is born. *Sultana’s Dream* is a piece of Indian literature but at the same time it needs to be viewed as a product of world literature. But this proved to be problematic given the position of India in the periphery during the British rule. According to the *World Systems Analysis*, the political and economic systems of exchange is one but unequal. There are core nation states and there are peripheral states. But then there are semi- peripheral states which are in-between – always striving to develop and become a core state, and ever remaining cautious not to fall in the category of a peripheral state. In the early twentieth

century, the core states were European, especially the British Empire. And although India has now become semi-peripheral (11), it was a peripheral state during that time. Which means when Rokeya was writing

she would have been seen as coming from an underdeveloped, peripheral nation without the proper tools to be modernised and taken seriously as a creative producer of knowledge and art.

This core-periphery notion of world systems also perceives women as non-entities. Immanuel Wallerstein writes about who have the decision making power on the citizens of a nation:

Only part of the population exercises the full rights of citizenship in most countries. For if the people are sovereign, we must then decide who falls within the category of the people, and many, it turns out, are excluded. (51)

The “people” are only those with wealth, power and are able-bodied males. The author then goes on to say that the “imprisoned felons”, the “ethnic minority groups” and the “women” fall into the same category and are largely excluded from the social production or exchange of value. They are not treated as “citizens” but “subjects” and do not possess any decision making rights in the political sphere. Rokeya in her writing appeals to the domination of patriarchal Muslim society as well as the colonial maltreatment of women as authors.

The relationship between literatures from a core and periphery has always been a complicated one. Franco Moretti tries to figure out a solution for the exchange of literatures across the globe and he believes that it will never be equal. Moretti writes:

I will borrow this initial hypothesis from the world systems school of economic history, for which international capitalism is a system that is simultaneously one, and unequal: with a core, and a periphery (and a semi-periphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality. (149)

This “growing inequality” suggests when the peripheral state tries to enter the capitalist market of world system they are inevitably looked down upon and dismissed without a proper evaluation of their worth.

This inequality arises from interference of core literary practices. This is not only true for Rokeya’s colonial India but many other cultures. While talking about the condition of Hebrew literature, Itamar Even-Zohar asserts:

There is no symmetry in literary interference. A target literature is, more often than not, interfered with by a source literature which completely ignores it. (62)

The literature from the periphery will always be interfered with when it comes into contact with that of the core. And in which case the core, especially the Eurocentric one will deliberately overlook the literature from the peripheral state. This notion is also supported by Montserrat Iglesias Santos when she says the core will disrupt or intervene in the smooth transaction of literatures from around the world; and this will most definitely happen to the nations at the periphery (Moretti 150).

Moretti argues against close reading and promotes distant reading; he believes not in tackling a huge number of text but to include more literature from around the world. This might suggest a direction opposite to Eurocentrism in literary criticism. He proclaims:

The point is that there is no other justification for the study of world literature but this: to be a thorn in the side, a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures – especially the local literature. (162)

The author focuses on how nationalistic literary practices need to be checked and a comparative study of literatures around the world need to be exchanged and circulated. But his argument testifies to the fact that to compare literatures there has to be a centre and it goes without saying that the centre has always been the West.

This brings Pascale Casanova's *World Republic of Letters* (2004) to the discussion where she deals with the core-periphery discourse of world systems analysis. Casanova realises that the literary practices of the world are fierce and combative while the rules of "rivalry, struggle and inequality" regulate the space (4). There are two poles of world literary studies: one where the dominant literature from the core asserts its superiority and the other side remains "deprived", or "small" in comparison. The literature from the periphery, Casanova suggests, either absorbs the traditions, norms, and styles of the dominant culture or by posing against it, while ironically the west/core stands as the authority of comparison. Even though to be recognised as a significant produce of world literary culture was never on the plate for *Sultana's Dream* because of existing core-periphery division in the 1900's, Rokeya kept working on cultural exchange through her writing.

If one focuses on David Damrosch's theory of world literature then three things would come to the forefront. Damrosch puts forth his idea of world literature like this:

1. World Literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures.
2. World literature is writing that gains in translation.
3. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time. (281)

Using these three notions of world literature Rokeya's writings, *Sultana's Dream* in particular, can be analysed from a world literary perspective. The issue that her story deals with was a very problematic one in twentieth-century Muslim communities. Rokeya was fighting for equal rights of men and women her whole life. The way she created a utopia might be reproached or dismissed by the male readers as just a dream but it addresses the significant matter of education for Muslim women. This piece of literature talks about a particular and imaginary nation but the situation of all women regardless of their country or culture whether it was India or Britain, was the same. In this way this short story crosses the boundary of national border and enters the realm of world literature.

Rokeya learned English so that she could communicate with the world, especially Europe. Her science fiction was first written in English and then translated into Bangla. When Damrosch says world literature loses or gains something in the act of translation, he does not necessarily include the works which are already in English. It might also be true that a work of everlasting value and scholarship should be written in immaculate English or in a particular literary style or form. In which case Rokeya's work might fall short because of the colonial and societal inhibitions. Still, the content and theme of the work overcomes any linguistic or stylistic flaws that many critics may find. Recently, Penguin Books India has published *Sultana's Dream and Padmarag: Two Feminist Utopias* translated by Barnita Bagchi. It can be hoped that the new translation of the text will make literary scholars take a second look at Rokeya's writing.

The third point of Damrosch is that world literature is not only a set of European or American canons, but the scholarship needs to move beyond boundaries and look in the past and present literatures of the peripheral and semi-peripheral nations from a comparative literary perspective. The similarities and differences in themes, content, culture, political, and economic frameworks of the texts should be kept in mind as to gain a complete knowledge of different literatures. *Sultana's Dream* is a modern

utopia which might be compared with other utopian writings, and/or eco-critical pieces. This article proposes an opportunity for a brilliant piece of writing that has as much potential to be studied in comparative literary context as any of the ones that have already gained access to it.

Wallerstein's idea of core-periphery and Casanova's understanding of the uneven and unequal development discuss the way the core will always make sure that the peripheral produce does not gain equal access to the world same as its own. That means there was less possibility for authors like Rokeya to become as famous as Jane Austen or Mary Shelley. The hegemonic *Weltmarkt* or world market that Goethe described has always been reluctant to provide a place for the literatures of the periphery (Prendergast 7). On the other hand, if *Sultana's Dream* is critiqued by Damrosch and Friedman's theories of literary analysis it is possible to see the text as part of comparative literature.

Nowadays publication houses are focusing more on the non-western, non-white literature as they appeal more to today's readers. Since Penguin India's publication of *Sultana's Dream*, its readership has grown and more critics are engaged in Rokeya scholarship. The problem of world market can on the one hand hinder talents to flourish amid political and cultural hegemony but on the other hand digital media can mediate between the extreme situations of circulation of any text. In today's world of globalisation and Global Village, "Medium is the message". This means new

mediums like the internet can provide a level of exposure for a text which would have been unimaginable for a writer in 1905. So, Rokeya's work can now finally outpace the core-periphery boundaries and reach audiences as an obscure, yet relatable, tale of utopia from the past.

Conclusion

Being a writer from the periphery, that too during the British colonial era, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was successful in transcending barriers of purdah. Even though Rokeya experienced severe criticism for her writings against the male-dominated India, she never yielded and kept on pushing women to break free from the stifling social and religious norms. These modern thoughts and resolve to reach every household in her society makes her a true modern cosmopolitan writer. She was rooted in Indian Muslim culture while her relentless effort to connect imperial Europe with her nation through writing in the language of the core and translations of literature makes her an active force in Tagore's "Vishwa Sahitya".

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