

Rokeya Begum: Pioneer Of Renaissance In Bengali Women's Education

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Abstract

Rokeya, Bengal's first Muslim feminist thinker, writer, and educationist, fought for women's independence and female education. She believed in empowering Muslim women to reach their full potential and pursue their interests without reliance on men, linking education expansion with women's progress. This paper delves into the educational initiatives Begum Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain, a pioneering figure in advocating for the education of Muslim girls in Bengal. Her efforts not only challenged the prevailing norms of a deeply patriarchal society but also laid the foundation for women's empowerment through education. By establishing schools and promoting literacy, Begum Rokeya aimed to equip women with the tools necessary for self-reliance and societal participation. This paper examines her significant contributions, the challenges she faced, and the lasting impact of her work on the education and empowerment of Muslim Girls in Bengal. Through a critical analysis of her strategies and their outcomes, this study seeks to underscore the relevance of her legacy in the contemporary discourse on women's education and empowerment. Her thoughts and practices continue to resonate in the present day, underscoring the ongoing need for educational reform.

Keywords: Begum Rokeya; Education reform; Girl's Education; Women Rights

INTRODUCTION

More than a hundred years ago ' in what is then an undivided India, now Bangladesh '(Ray, 2012:17), a veiled Bengali woman wrote a fifteen page novella called sultana's Dream . Begum Rokeya as an early self-conscious feminist of her writings and activities. She was fortunate to have a brother who taught her how to read and write after her returned home from office each day. Moreover, Begum Rokeya was fortunate to have married a progressive man who encouraged her to continue her education - theirs was a love match. Years later, as an adult woman, she creates her own utopian vision when she writes her allegorical satire, Sultan's dream in 1905, It takes place in the country of Ladyland Rokeya Sakhae women run the country: they are the politicians, the scientists, the soldiers and traders, their men languish inside the zenana - the harem if we will - in purdah (Vaile used by Muslim women) (Tharu et al, 1995: 340). In the last century, when Rokeya identified the problems of women, the ideas of gender issues did not establish as discourse academically anywhere (Selina Hossain, 2013:10). Through in our society we see most of the cases we like to suggest, we do not show our interest to do something partially for the women. Even most of the time

women are expecting that men will do something for them. As a result, they cannot remove the chain from their mind (Siraj, 2013,206-212).

In this present world, superficially women are enjoying equal rights but they are actually deprived of getting access in every chance of their outgrowth. The dream of women is enclosed in the shackle of patriarchy. The system engulfs the society by letting women inside and teaches them how to surrender to male power. Begum Rokeya, a pioneer of female education, was concerned about the issue and realized that only female education can alternate their fate. (Asha, 2021). Rokeya and Sufia explained that the follies and frivolities ascribed to women were not natural but social constructions. The patriarchal society imputed these attributes to women to subjugate them. They argued that, like women, if men were denied the opportunities to develop their rational powers, to grow into intelligent persons, they would also become very emotional (Mahmud, 2020).

Women's education in India, particularly in Bengal lagged significantly behind the great strides taking place like the Bengali Renaissance and the opening of the universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. However, for women, the mainstream Hindu society was mired in prejudices and superstitions. For girls to be married off by the age twelve or thirteen receiving an education was often considered an anathema, sometimes even a sin. But by the middle of the nineteenth century, liberal Indian minds imbued with western thoughts and values started feeling the serious deficiency. Some of these men, among the British Administrators, also felt the need to spread women's education (Sircar, 2016).

All our lassies, smacking their fingers and books in their hands will spiral down to infamy; With knowledge of "A, B" and dressed like memsahibs, and surely muttering in their foreign lingo; Wait a few more days my brothers, surely you will not miss the sight (Sarker,2004). The advent of British proved a boon as well as a bane for Indian society. On the one hand, colonialism dispossessed the indigenous people from their land as well as from their culture; it brought new systems of education, scientific learning and western philosophy. Muslim community as a whole was considered disadvantaged, Muslim women were considered more disadvantaged, lagging behind their male counterparts. Despite the Government measures for educational uplift of the Muslims nothing was said about the education of Muslim women and no special provision was made for them even in the early part of the twentieth century. Maulvi Abdul Hakim of the Calcutta Madrasah responded to this question saying that the education offered to Muslim girls at home was quite adequate. As the Muslim girls observed purdah they could not go to schools. (Majumdar ,1960) Unlike Abdul Latif, Syed Ameer Ali proved supportive to the cause of women's education. At the All-India Muslim Educational Conference in 1891, he strongly advocated women's education saying that it should advance at the same pace as that of male education. Unfortunately, nothing concrete emerged out of this. Traditionally, women in Bengal received their education at home, and it was mostly religious and moral in nature (Wadud, 1956).

One such work is the Sachar Committee Report published in 2006 by the Government of India. According to the report, "In this dismal scenario there is one big ray of hope, while the education system appears to have given up on Muslim girls, the girls themselves have not given up on education. There is a strong desire and enthusiasm for education among Muslim women and girls across the board (Rizvi,1993)". Women and girls have been victims of ruthless power struggles for centuries in all societies and cultures around the world, some examine hadith, authentic sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. "Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim." The superiority the learned are the heirs of the Prophets, and the Prophets leave neither dinar nor dirham, leaving only knowledge, and he who takes it takes an abundant portion (Gupta,2005)". (emphasis added) At this time the light of western knowledge, science had fell on our old system and customs. People arrested questions against the traditional system. As a result, few noble persons came forward for women education and women empowerment. In Hindu Bengali society Vidyasagar,

Rammohun Roy, Shiba Prasad Sastri was the memorable names for women rights. It is sometimes called that the 19th century “intellectual revolution” (Stein, 2004).

polygamy, or rather Sanskritization of Bengali as the appropriate medium of instruction. The Muslims had taken to the print media much later. Yet, interesting enough, by the end of the 19th century, we find periodicals run by Hindus replete with disparaging representations of Muslim men and women. While the modernist and even secular among the Hindus / Brahmas earlier in the century had also “operated with a conception of „Muslim tyranny (Jogi, 2008).” or medieval dark (Ibid, pp-52).

“Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process.” (ICPD Programme of Action) (Joshi, 2008). Despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. During the period of social reform, the problem of the “status of women” or “the women’s question”, to use the language of those times, was central to a whole range of social movements. Though reformers had remarkably different, if not diametrically opposed, agendas they all agreed on this woman had to be educated. Given the elite bias of most of these reformers, however, the dominant focus was on women as the custodians of traditional cultural values, who as wives and mothers, needed to uphold the family while at the same time complementing their husbands” changing needs and desires. As, a result, the emphasis was largely on separate women’s schools, different curricula and languages of instruction, even different standards (Siddiqui, pp- 81-85).

OBJECTIVES

In this study researchers want to finds some objectives based on above discussion

- To study the educational ideas in the writings of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain.
- To identify the efforts of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain for Muslim girls " education in Pre-independent and Colonial Bengal.
- To explore and analyze the educational practices in the schools established by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain.
- To observe the innovative ideas and liberal thoughts in her creative writings concerning the freedom of education for Muslim girls in Bengal

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research lays emphasis on discovering and understanding the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of participants – that is; qualitative research explores meaning, purpose, or reality (Hiatt, 1986). In other words, qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). There are about as many definitions of qualitative research as there are books on the subject. Some authors highlight the research purpose and focus: Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative research approach uses methods such as participant observation or interview, which result in a narrative, descriptive account of a setting or practice (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011). Qualitative research is usually described as allowing a detailed exploration of a topic of interest in which information is collected by a researcher through case studies, ethnographic work, interviews, and so on. Qualitative research methods are also described as inductive (Denzin, 2006).

Historical research is analytical research which makes an attempt —to examine past events or combinations of events and establish facts in order to arrive at conclusions concerning past events or predict future events (Educational Research, 2010, page 266, Shefali R Pandya). Historical research — deals with discovery of

data that already exists and does not involve creation of data using structured tools (Pandya, 2010 page 267). According to A.K.Singh. —Historical analysis can be directed towards an individual, an idea, a movement or an institution (Pandya, 2010 Page 347).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

THE EDUCATIONAL IDEAS IN THE WRITINGS OF ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932), a leading feminist writer, educationalist and activist of colonial Muslim Bengal, has been described as ‘a passionate advocate of change’. Born in 1880, in an aristocratic conservative Muslim family in the village of Pairaband, Rangpur, located in the British Bengal Presidency, which is now located in the present-day Bangladesh, Begum Rokeya herself had the sour taste of rampant gender.

discrimination meted out to women by the orthodox family and society of the time. Because of her father Zahiruddin Muhammad Abu Ali Hyder Saber's loath and insular mentality regarding female education, she along with her sisters were not allowed to attend schools for studying Bengali, English and pursuing any other forms of knowledge except learning the skill to read the Qur'an to become a future ideal wife and mother. Her father 's opposition to and disapproval of Rokeya's going to a formal school was mainly because of the existing ethos of Muslim families almost all over India that girls' exposure to education at an institutional setting might contaminate their minds with non-Muslim ideas. So, he only allowed home education for his daughters and imposed strict purdah (veil from head to toe) on them from a very early age (Miah, 2018).

The fate she suffered during her daughterhood left a lasting impact on her writing in subsequent times. She continued to produce literary piece of works prolifically highlighting the necessity of providing equal education opportunity to women to establish them as equal partners in all family, social and economic affairs. She considered certain social and religious customs such as purdah, zenana education or education at home and escorting girls under strict veiling from home to school and from school to home as major obstacles to their proper education. In fact, bitter criticism against the extreme imposition of veiling occupied a greater part of her writing. She also boldly worked throughout her life to eliminate the strict version of purdah, which Tharu and Lalita (1995) terms as the Dzpurdah of ignorance (Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, 1995, p. 340).

The system reminds me of the lethal carbonic acid gas, which being a painless killer, its victims are never alert to its hazards. Women kept confined to the home die a slow death by the effect of this fatal gas known as purdah's (Hossain, 1993, p. 441).

Like a scientist, she continued to tell that this extreme form of confinement to a room or to the interior of the house was injurious to health that eventually dulled their brains and made them succumb to innocuous and worthless patterns of behavior. That is why, she, in her essay Tin Kure (Three Idle Men), threw a straight question to the upholders of orthodox beliefs: DzPurdah does not mean deprivation of all rights and confinement within four walls. Have you read at all the Koran Sharif? Or do you just hang it around your neck (Hossain, 1993, p.486).

Though Begum Rokeya was born in a highly educated family, she could not get the scope of formal education. At the age of eighteen, when she got married, she found an opportunity to nourish herself through proper education. As her husband was suave and noble- minded, he encouraged Rokeya to learn Bengali and English language. Later, she wrote in a number of genres including novel, poem, short story, essay and even satirical article. Child marriage had created a strong influence on her mind while her sister was forced to marry at the age of fifteen and later, it drove her to stand against women subordination (Asha, 2021).

At the beginning of the story of Sultana's Dream, Begum Rokeya has depicted the real plight of Indian women and the freedom of woman in a lady-land through a dialogue between Sultana and Sister Sara. When

they were walking in the street of the lady- land on a fine morning, Sultana was ‘feeling shy’ since she walked ‘in the street in broad daylight’. She also said, “I feel somewhat awkward. As being a purdahnisha or veiled woman I am not accustomed to walking about unveiled.” (Bagchi, 2005: 143).

All subsequent feminist writers and literary practitioners of the country owe a significant debt to her relentless and pioneering intellectual work and leadership. Rokeya's literary journey began in 1902 when her essay ‘Pipasha’ (‘Thirst’) was published in the Calcutta-based periodical Nabaprabha. Her Sultana’s Dream (Hossain, 2006 [1905]) is arguably the first major piece of literature in English written by a Muslim author, followed by Ahmed Ali’s Twilight in Delhi (1994 [1940]). Apart from this remarkable feminist fantasy novel and a number of newspaper letters, Rokeya's two other significant English works are ‘God Gives, Man Robs’ (Hossain, 2006 [1927]) and ‘Education Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl’ (Hossain, 2006 [1931]).

THE EFFORTS OF ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN FOR MUSLIM GIRLS' IN PRE-INDEPENDENT BENGAL

The credit for being the pioneer in formal education for Muslim women in Bengal goes to Nawab Faizunnesa Chaudhurani, (1847-1903). She was a reputed social worker with a large zamindari estate at paschim gaon in the Kumilla district of East Bengal. Queen Victoria vetoed her with the title of 'Nawab' ‘appreciating her charitable disposition. In 1873 with the assistance of a reputed Brahmo social worker, Kalicharan Dey, she had laid the foundations of the Faizunnesa Government Girls’ School at Kumilla. (Hasan, 2013).

Sirajgunj district of East Bengal. Although Khairunnesa had received some formal education, her talents as a writer bore fruit owing to the constant support and encouragement that she received from her husband, Asiruddin, himself a sub registrar. In 1895 Khairunnesa took up the responsibility of shouldering the post of the Headmistress of the Sirajgunj Hosenpur girl's school. A job that she discharged with extreme diligence until her last (Sayed, 2011).

Another Muslim women educator in the early 20th century Bengal was Khujista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardiya (1874-1919) a member of the politically and culturally prominent Shurawardi family of Midnapore and Calcutta. Educated in Persian and Urdu by her father, Maulana Ubaidullah al-Ubaidi Shurawardi, who was the first Principal of the Dhaka Madrasah, she went on to become fluent in English as well, and translated several novels from English into Urdu. She also founded two primary schools for girls, and was the inspiration for a tradition of women’s education and activism in her family. (Minault, 1998).

The most remarkable Bengali Muslim woman in this respect was Rokeya the most remarkable Bengali Muslim woman in this respect was Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, (1880-1932) the founder of the Sakhawat Memorial Govt. Girls ‘High School at Calcutta. Born in Pairaband, a village in Rangpur district in Northern Bengal, Rokeya was the daughter of a Zamindar, Zahiruddin Muhammad Abu Ali Saber. Like many other men of his time, Zahiruddin Saber was aware of the need to educate his sons to meet the demands of the changing society, but he felt no need to educate his purdah – observing daughters, who were, as might be expected in a highly literate family – clever and eager to learn (Jahan, 1988).

Rokeya's elder sister Karimunnisa learned Bengali from her elder brothers, but when her relatives caught her reading, they criticized her and married her off at a young age. Rokeya an avid reader, learned from her sister's experience to keep literacy to herself. Rokeya's elder brother Ibrahim Saber, who had graduated from the St. Xavier's College, taught Rokeya Bengali and English late at night, when the rest of the household was asleep. Rokeya's marriage with Sayyid Sakhawat Hossain, a civil servant posted at Rangpur, was also arranged by Ibrahim Saber. Rokeya's husband, was a firm supporter of women's education, and encouraged her to mix up with the educated Hindu and Christian women of the town. Rokeya published her first articles

in 1903-1904 in Bengali women's magazines in Calcutta, on subjects relating to the status of women (Roushan, 1993).

In this book she came out as an outspoken critic of purdahs in a more extreme form. With the publication of —Sultana's Dream a feminist utopian fantasy in 1905, in the "Indian Ladies" magazine, Rokeya spoke of an egalitarian lady land observatory, solar heaters and 'air cars' all constructed by educated women. Their energy, dedication and organizational skills coupled with sheer courage in the face of indifference and hostility were remarkable (Mainault, 1998).

Muslim reformist movements in British India, feminist and otherwise, had mainly two pivotal centers, North India and Muslim Bengal. While the Muslim feminist tradition of the former, stands on its own as an established intellectual tradition (Mainault, 1998), that of the latter seems still overwhelmed and pushed to the edge by the dominant representation of Hindu writers. While generally the representation of Muslim women writers has been marginal and inadequate, Akhtar (2008: xxiv) notes in the context of Bangla literature.

Sarkar (2008) argues that Muslim women in colonial Bengal have been more undervalued than their Hindu sisters in nationalist discourses and in subsequent historical accounts. An analysis of the existing literary studies indeed suggests that the representation of Muslim women writers of the past and present, compared to that of their Hindu sisters, has been limited. For example, though the history of Muslim women's literary production in Bengal is as old as that of their Hindu counterparts, Jayawardena (2003) includes no Muslim feminist writers of Bengal in her well-known book, while she covers several Bengali Hindu women writers.

During the colonial period, while Muslim leaders like Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) in North India and Nawab Abdul Latif (1828–1893) and Syed Ameer Ali (1849–1928) in Bengal were prominently advancing Muslim causes, there was a feminist 'subculture' in these regions—on both literary and political fronts—that espoused Muslim women's education and advancement (see also Tundawala, 2012).

A similar type of duality and ideological split towards women is found in Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898), the paramount figure of Muslim modern education of the time who had a great influence on other Muslim reformers in Greater Bengal regions for his views of modern secular education. But surprisingly, he too did not support formal schooling and western type of education for women, and adamantly opposed to bring women out of veiling. Almost all Islamic scholars so far supported female education, but certainly within the jurisdiction of the Qur'an and its interpretations. To talk about the Islamists' puritanical views about women, Rachana Chakraborty (2011) states: "Their consideration of women's position in the family and plans for women's education included discussion of household customs and rituals, of purdah, and of Islamic law as it pertained to women." (Chakraborty, 2011, pp. 77-78)

THE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN THE SCHOOLS ESTABLISHED BY ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain both an Educationist and Social Activist, was not only a visionary but also a committed parishioner. She dedicated herself to actualizing her vision of reform. Central to her beliefs was the conviction that education was crucial for women's liberation. She argued that without dispelling the 'veil of ignorance' Indian women could neither overcome their suffering nor fully realize their potential. With this perspective, she founded the Sakhawat Hossain Memorial School for Girls, utilizing a legacy of Rs 10,000 bequeathed by her late husband for this purpose; fittingly, the school was named in his honor. Despite her noble intentions, some critics insinuated that the young widow established the school merely to gain societal admiration. (Gupta, 2013). Others alleged that her associates were prostitutes and the dregs of society (Mahmud, 2009). Some even accused her of being a prostitute and embezzling funds (Gupta, 2013). Rokeya believed that the purpose of education should extend beyond merely obtaining a degree or securing employment; it should not be limited to intellectual cultivation alone. Education, in her view, should be

comprehensive and holistic, fostering the development of an individuals, physical, moral and mental' faculties (Gupta,2013). She argued that education should not be acquiring academic degrees or mindlessly imitating a community or race, but rather about nurturing the inherent abilities of the individual (Quadir, 1999). In 'The Dawn', she emphasizes that true education involves more than just the ability to read a few books or write a few lines of verse. She envisioned education that empowers individuals to claim their rights as citizens, I want that education which will enable them to earn their rights as citizens, cultivating both the body and the mind (Quyam,2013).

English was a compulsory subject at the school, along with math, science, geography, history and public administration. Additionally extracurricular activities like music and sports were included, and the girls were exposed to a diverse range of literary and cultural experiences. Once Rokeya established the school in Calcutta, it became the centerpiece of her life. She immersed herself completely, involving herself in every aspect of the school - from teaching and administration hiring and training teachers, and ensuring the well-being of the students. She became so absorbed with the school that she had to forgo almost everything else in her life. In a letter to her cousin, she wrote, " I have to keep an eye on everything. I even have to make sure that the horses are regularly massaged in the evening "(Quyadir, 1999).

In 1916, she founded the Anjuman-e-Khamwaen-e-Islam (Islamic Women's Association), which was her other organizational contribution to Bengali Muslim women. She writes, "The Muslim society is paying a greater price for the lack of any system of education for their women. I have been informed by a reliable source that some educated Muslim youths of well-to-do families are setting conditions that if they can't find educated Muslim women, they will not marry. They even threaten to become Christians and marry someone from that community if they fail to find educated Muslim women."(Sufi, 2001).

In addition to facing daily persecution from the orthodox segment of society, Rokeya also had to address various practical issues to run the school successfully. "When I began the school with five students, it seemed most surprising to me as to how one teacher could teach five students together at the same time"(Quadir, 1999). Rokeya had said when recounting her experience of opening the school earlier in Bhagalpur. To overcome this shortcoming and to gain experience in school administration, she visited several Brahmo and Hindu schools in Calcutta, where she met leading Bengali educationists of the time, such as P. K. Roy, Rajkumari Das, Sarala Ray and Abala Bose, and not only learned from their experience but also forged life-long friendships with them (Quyam, 2013).

In 'Educational Ideals for Indian Girls', she proffers that since education is meant as preparation for life' and for complete living', students should be trained intellectually, physically as well as morally; moral education should not be neglected'(Akhtar & Bhaumik, 1998). she advised. We should by all means broaden the outlook of our girls and teach them to modernize themselves but we should not sacrifice the elements of good in India's age – old traditions of thought and method so that a new educational practice and tradition may be evolved which will transcend both that of the East and West (Alam, 2013).

It is with these ideals in mind that Rokeya followed an inclusive curriculum at her school, where traditional and modern, religious as well as science courses were taught side by side. In this regard, Fateha Khanam, a close associate of Rokeya, explains in a letter to the well-known Bengali writer Abul Fazal: Everything is taught in her school, from Quran recitation and its tafsir [exegesis] to English, Bengali, Urdu, Persian, Home Nursing, First Aid, Cooking, Sewing and whatever else are essential for Muslim girls to learn'(Quadir, 1999).

Her belief that only bookish knowledge and education without vocational training cannot be the gateway to women's true advancement and emancipation indicates her pragmatic feminist thought. She also gave special importance on women's physical strength, and advised parents and teachers to provide physical training to girls both at home and at school. While urging women in 'Istrijati Abanati (Women's Downfall) to employ their body and mind, she wrote: "We are born with certain natural faculties, gifted by God, and to

hone these faculties through rigorous training is real education. One must aim at both physical and mental efflorescence, and learn how to put to effective use of all the organs gifted by God. One has to utilize usefully one's hands and legs, observe carefully with one's eyes, listen attentively with one's ears, and think intelligently with one's brain." (Hossain, 1993, p. 18) Her effort was not limited to giving such advice only; Acknowledged equal mental and intellectual potential of men and women, but delineate domestic roles for women in great detail, restricted women's participation in public life and extolled the virtue of the family." (Kazi, 1999, p. 7)

Begum Rokeya died on December 9, 1932, and up until 11pm on December 8, 1932, she was working on an unfinished article titled, "Narir Odhikar", which translates to women's rights. The over-arching principle that governed her literary and social work was feminism and through it she heralded the discourse into Bengal. As a Muslim reformist from that era, Rokeya's activism was neither half – baked nor exclusionist as the classist and sexist Aligarh movement led by Syed Ahmed Khan, yet little is known of her meaningful contributions to society. Today, Rokeya's memory is as fleeting — even for her benefactors — as Sultana's dream (Bagchi, 2005).

THE RELEVANCE OF HER EDUCATIONAL AND INNOVATIVE THOUGHT IN PRESENT SCENARIO OF MUSLIM GIRLS IN BENGAL

As a pioneer, she championed education for girls and worked to provide human services to people in her community. Within her, community, she transcended boundaries to work with Hindu and Christian women and be part of a feminist movement in the All- India Muslim Ladies Conference. As a Muslim woman, she overcome the odds, running a school for girls in a culture where seclusion and purdah were a norm.

Muslim women's access to European education and cultural products was doubly restricted, because of their gender and religious identity. The colonial administration "established an educational institution for girls, Bethune School, in Calcutta in 1849 (later developed into the Bethune College in 1879); but access for Muslim girls was restricted until 1885" (Hasan 2013, 45). Equal educational opportunities for Muslim girls came about only in 1939 with the opening of Lady Brabourne College, founded "mainly – but not exclusively – for Muslim girls" (Amin 1996, xiii). So, like most other Muslim women of her time, Rokeya did not have the opportunity to receive a formal, western education.

Rokeya's greatest challenge was attracting students to her school. She had started the school in Calcutta in 1911 with eight students. Her ongoing concern was how to increase enrollment and expand the school, despite the social environment and widespread apathy among Muslims towards women's education, particularly their fear of violating the purdah norm. Rokeya undertook door to door campaign to recruit students and pursued parents that education would not convert their daughters to Christianity but would instead help them become better individuals and citizens. She assured parents that purdah norms would be respected, with girls being transported in fully curtained vehicles. This dedication remains a testament to Rokeya's efforts for Muslim girls' women's a cause she championed at a time when they were marginalized and, in her own words, utterly 'ship-wrecked' (Quadir, 1999, p. 537).

Despite her educational background, she successfully created a school for women that later became a college. The most important aspect of Rokeya Hossain is that she was part of a grassroots movement that met the needs of Indian women. Rokeya Hossain repeatedly made calls for action amongst men and women in India to improve their way of life. Rokeya Hossain was also mindful of the condition of the Muslim community in colonial India. Compared to the Hindus, the Muslim community in India had fallen behind in areas of education and social standing due to the mandate in which the British made English an official language in India.

Begum Rokeya wanted all women to be independent. She exposed the glaring inequalities present between sexes not only among the Muslims but also among other communities. Begum Rokeya wanted women to

come out of their confinement and take part in all spheres of life. Begum Rokeya led the way to empowering and enlighten women by founding two major institutions - Sakhawat Memorial Girl's school and Anjuman- i Khawatin -i- Islam.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's essay on 'Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girl' (Hossain, 2006 [1931]) further illustrates her indigenous feminist philosophy, which is deeply rooted in the cultural specificity of her society. This approach is more suited to local expressions of women's rights. Her emphasis on grounding feminist ideas with indigenous culture reflects the nationalist fervour of her Era. She opposed the indiscriminate adoption of Western culture without appreciating its context with a different social setting. Hossain liked someone who abandons their own cultural identity in a favor of elements from other cultures to a disfigured, strange animal (Hossain, 2006 [1931]: 249).

CONCLUSION

Rokeya was not only a worker, a reformer; she was also a creative writer. We know that Rokeya was self – educated. She had captured the knowledge of both Bengali and English and she could use them fluently. Rokeya is a perfect – example of what a woman can be if she has patience and perseverance along with great mental strength. Not only, she read but also acquired knowledge and then expressed that in her own way. She wrote stories, novels, poems, essays and also composed in English. The theme of her writings was neglected woman society. (Haiduzamman, 2016).

In fact, the writings of Rokeya are like a sword if you touch it there would be no blood shed, rather you would be encouraged through the light of consciousness, and you would be inspired to walk in the open air of freedom. Rokeya's pen is that mirror where the woman can see their face always and the man can see their reactions. (Haiduzamman, 2016).

Rokeya would not write much. But within the short writings her talent, depth of thinking, choice of subject, and uses of language everything is as bright as sunlight. When she began to write Bengali prose had already crossed its hundred years. Crossing the Bankimi age it had entered the Rabindric age. Rokeya had chosen the chaste language but very simple and without poetic touch. As if she wanted to reach directly to the subject matter. The qualities of literature in a way are denied in her writings (Haiduzamman, 2016).

As a woman Rokeya is sometimes a patient mother, sometimes she is a sympathetic woman and a sister. She always felt heartily urgency. She not only wanted to hear that call of urgency herself, but she always tried to make the others hear the call of urgency, specially to the neglected woman. She wanted to tell the new morning would come to every human being, only you have to call it (Haiduzamman, 2016).

Rokeya had set up school for the girls. The school is now a self – supported school. She had formed woman organization but that had abolished in course of time, what remains for all is her pen. Many compositions of Rokeya had already been published. There is much devotion there. Yet the publication of her writings again proves that there is a need of connecting Rokeya's thoughts and feelings of human beings (Haiduzamman, 2016).

People are gradually curious about Rokeya. She is not only confined to the communities. We wish that the writings of Rokeya will become favorite to all rising above religious, castes, communities and creeds. We hope that the more the biography, the works will be discussed, the more the Bengali will be self – supported (Ferdousi, 2014).

To the end, Rokeya is potent even today. Her educational Philosophy, idea, thinking, attitude, approach are still valid in the present-day context and may cater the. needs and aspirations of every socially conscious girl in general and Muslim women in particular. For Rokeya wanted to raise up the status of women from narrowness, exploitation, social degradation, and bigotry and sincerely devoted her life for the cause of education and women's emancipation which had given her new dimension in her own and distinctive personality (Ferdousi, 2014).

She in her life and work symbolizes a spirit of continuity, non-conformity, humanism, rationalism, courage, acquiescence and protest, conventionalism and progressivism. Rokeya was a tireless worker who proposed plans and programmes, suggested right measures, visualized limitations, and above all, took all personal initiatives for the cause of female education and laid the foundation stone of the Muslim Women's emancipation (Ferdousi, 2014).

Despite the challenges she faced, Rokeya never wavered in her mission. Even on the night before her death, she was diligently working on an essay titled, 'The Rights of Women', which was later found unfinished on her reading table. In one of her personal letters, Rokeya wrote, "No, I am not unfortunate provided this school works well and I can realize my literary talents' (Syed, 2011, p. 8). Both her writings and her school have withstood the test of time, serving and lasting testimonies of Rokeya's unwavering dedication to the emancipation and empowerment of Bengali/Indian women. As Roushan Jahan 1988, p. 55) notes, "every educated [Bengali] woman is a living memorial to this remarkable woman".

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