

The continuing search for women's emancipation: Perspectives from Begum Rokeya to Arundhati Roy

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Abstract - This study examines the perspectives of Begum Rokeya and Arundhati Roy on women's emancipation, analysing their literary contributions to the discourse on gender equality. The objective is to compare their views on women's freedom and assess how their works reflect and critique contemporary societal conditions. While both authors have passionately advocated for women's liberation, their ideas have not been thoroughly analysed in relation to the present-day struggles of women. This review seeks to bridge that gap by critically evaluating their works in the context of ongoing gender inequalities. The study adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing a comparative textual analysis of Begum Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* as primary sources. Relevant scholarly articles and feminist theoretical frameworks supplement the analysis, providing a broader understanding of their perspectives on women's rights. Findings reveal that Begum Rokeya's visionary advocacy for women's independence, as portrayed in *Sultana's Dream*, remains largely unrealized in contemporary society. Despite her utopian vision of a world where women hold power, gender-based oppression persists. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* further highlights the entrenched patriarchal structures and socio-cultural barriers that continue to limit women's autonomy. The comparative analysis underscores the enduring challenges women face and the necessity for sustained efforts toward gender equality. By juxtaposing the works of these two influential authors, this study emphasizes the persistent struggles for women's rights and the ongoing need for advocacy and reform. The insights drawn from their literary contributions reinforce the urgency of addressing gender disparities and striving for a more equitable society.

Keywords: Women's emancipation, gender equality, feminist literature, Begum Rokeya, Arundhati Roy, patriarchy, social justice, women's rights

I. INTRODUCTION

The emancipation of women has long been a central aspiration of feminist thought, pursued across centuries by intellectuals, activists, and writers who have sought to dismantle oppressive patriarchal structures. Among the most influential voices in this ongoing struggle are Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Arundhati Roy, two feminist authors separated by time yet united by a shared commitment to gender justice. Begum Rokeya, an early 20th-century Bengali writer and social reformer, dedicated her life to challenging the systemic marginalization of women in South Asia. She

championed education as a fundamental tool for female empowerment, advocating for intellectual and economic independence as a means to break free from patriarchal constraints. Through her utopian fiction *Sultana's Dream* (1905) and the social novel *Padmarag* (1924), Rokeya envisioned a radical alternative to male-dominated society, imagining female-led communities that defied conventional gender roles. Despite her pioneering efforts, however, many of the issues she sought to resolve persist to this day. Women in many parts of the world, particularly in South Asia, continue to face restrictions on their mobility, education, and autonomy, making Rokeya's vision as urgent and relevant as ever.

This is where the work of Arundhati Roy gains significance. Writing nearly a century after Rokeya, Roy continues to expose and critique the enduring patriarchal norms that oppress women. In her Booker Prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), Roy portrays the deeply ingrained gender and caste hierarchies that govern Indian society, illustrating the devastating consequences faced by women who challenge these structures. The character of Ammu, a woman who defies societal norms by pursuing love outside of marriage, serves as a poignant example of the systemic oppression that punishes female autonomy. Through Roy's lens, readers witness how these oppressive traditions remain deeply embedded in contemporary society, despite the progress made in the realms of education and legal rights. While women today may have greater access to education and employment opportunities than they did in Rokeya's time, true liberation remains elusive as social expectations, economic dependency, and institutionalized sexism continue to restrict their freedom.

This study is anchored in the literary works *Sultana's Dream* by Begum Rokeya and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, analyzing their perspectives on women's rights and societal structures. *Sultana's Dream*, a landmark work of feminist utopian fiction, imagines a world where women lead and thrive in an egalitarian society (Hossain, 1931). The novel challenges conventional gender roles by depicting Ladyland, a society governed by women who have harnessed science and intellect to create a peaceful, efficient civilization, while men are relegated to seclusion—a direct inversion of the purdah system that confined women during Rokeya's time. Rokeya further developed these themes in *Padmarag*, which presents a female-led educational institution that empowers women from diverse backgrounds (Mahmud, 2016; Hasan, 2008). By contrast, Roy's *The God of Small Things* offers a sobering critique of how patriarchal structures continue to limit women's autonomy in modern India. The novel explores themes of caste, gender inequality, and social ostracization, highlighting how women's choices are often dictated by societal expectations and rigid moral codes (Ghosh, 1999).

While numerous scholars have examined the works of both authors separately, significant gaps remain in the comparative analysis of their contributions to feminist discourse. Researchers such as Hariharasudan and Gnanamony (2017) and Outka (2011) have explored Roy's depiction of female oppression across generations, while Elahi (2017) and Hossain (2005) have examined Rokeya's radical feminist vision. However, few studies have directly connected their works to contemporary issues of women's emancipation, leaving unexplored the ways in which Rokeya's early feminist ideals resonate with the challenges faced by modern women as depicted in Roy's writing. By bridging this gap, this study aims to establish a literary dialogue between the two authors, tracing the evolution of feminist thought from Rokeya's utopian vision to Roy's dystopian critique of patriarchal persistence.

The methodology employed in this study is close reading, a technique developed in the 1940s that focuses on extracting meaning directly from texts through detailed analysis of key passages, contextual explanations, and critical interpretations. By closely examining the language, themes, and narrative techniques used by Rokeya and Roy, this study seeks to uncover the deeper feminist critiques embedded in their works. Furthermore, by situating these literary analyses within the broader socio-political landscape of gender disparity, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on women's rights and the continued struggles for equality.

Ultimately, this study underscores the enduring relevance of feminist literature in advocating for gender justice. Though Rokeya imagined a future where women's emancipation would be realized through education and intellectual freedom, Roy's work reminds us that systemic barriers still hinder women's full participation in society. By analyzing the intersections of their works, this research highlights not only the historical roots of gender oppression but also the urgent need for continued feminist resistance. Until the world moves beyond symbolic progress and ensures true gender equality in practice, the dream of women's complete emancipation, as envisioned by Rokeya, will remain an aspiration rather than a reality.

II. METHOD

This study employs a document study approach, utilizing critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine selected literary texts. Document study is a qualitative research method that involves systematically analysing written materials to extract meaning, identify patterns, and interpret underlying themes. In this research, primary sources include *Sultana's Dream* by Begum Rokeya and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. Additionally, secondary sources such as journal articles, books, and critical essays are incorporated to contextualize the literary works within broader feminist and sociocultural discussions.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) serves as the primary analytical framework for this study. CDA, as developed by Fairclough (1989, 1995) and van Dijk (1993), explores the relationship between language, power, and ideology. This method is particularly useful for examining how literary texts reflect, reinforce, or challenge societal structures, particularly those related to gender and patriarchy. By applying CDA, the study critically investigates how Rokeya and Roy construct narratives of women's emancipation, resistance, and subjugation.

The analysis proceeds in the following stages: (a) Textual Analysis: The selected texts are closely read to identify linguistic choices, rhetorical devices, and stylistic features that shape the representation of women. Specific passages that highlight gender roles, power dynamics, and societal constraints are examined in depth. (b) Contextual Analysis: The historical, cultural, and social contexts of both works are explored to understand the ideological background of the authors.

Comparisons are drawn between the patriarchal structures depicted in Rokeya's early 20th-century utopia and Roy's late 20th-century postcolonial narrative.

The findings from the textual and contextual analyses are synthesized to reveal overarching themes related to women's oppression and resistance. The study evaluates the extent to which Roy's work aligns with or diverges from Rokeya's vision of women's liberation. By employing CDA within a document study framework, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how literature serves as both a reflection of and a response to enduring gender inequalities.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Workplace Discrimination

Sultana's Dream, a feminist utopian short story, envisions an alternative reality where women dominate societal roles while men are confined to domestic spaces. Through this gender reversal, the story critiques real-world inequalities, particularly workplace discrimination. This section explores the depiction of workplace discrimination in *Sultana's Dream* and its relevance to contemporary society, drawing comparisons with Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

In *Sultana's Dream*, Ladyland is depicted as a utopian society where women occupy leadership positions, excelling in professions such as science, engineering, politics, and education. While this world appears egalitarian, it subtly reflects the gender biases present in reality. Women in Ladyland thrive in fields traditionally considered nurturing, such as education and medicine, whereas men are perceived as unfit for such roles. This reinforces the stereotype that certain

professions are inherently suited for specific genders, restricting career choices and reinforcing systemic biases.

Additionally, the deliberate exclusion of men from the workforce in *Ladyland* mirrors the historical reality in which women were denied access to various professional fields. The lack of male participation in *Ladyland* highlights the real-world underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. The society in *Sultana's Dream* also views men as incompetent and ridicules them, much like the prejudices women have historically faced in male-dominated industries. As Sultana laments, "We have no hand or voice in the management of our social affairs. In India, man is lord and master. He has taken to himself all powers and privileges and shut up the women in the zenana" (Rokeya, 2005, p. 5).

Although *Sultana's Dream* is a fictional narrative, its themes remain highly relevant in contemporary workplaces where gender discrimination persists in various forms. Women continue to face wage disparities, earning less than their male counterparts for equivalent work. Leadership positions across industries and governments remain disproportionately male-dominated, reinforcing the 'glass ceiling' effect. The story's portrayal of gendered roles reflects how modern societies still struggle with stereotypes that dictate professional opportunities. By addressing these issues, the story underscores the importance of challenging traditional gender norms and promoting inclusivity in the workforce.

In contrast, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* presents a more realistic and stark depiction of workplace discrimination. Set in post-colonial Kerala during the 1960s, the novel explores how deeply entrenched caste and gender hierarchies shape workplace experiences. The characters navigate systemic discrimination that affects both their professional and personal lives.

The novel highlights workplace discrimination through the experiences of Velutha, a lower-caste carpenter employed at a pickle factory owned by the protagonists' family. Despite his exceptional skills, Velutha is marginalized due to his caste, a reflection of the rigid social hierarchy that governs employment opportunities. His status as an 'untouchable' prevents him from advancing in his career, exposing the deep-seated prejudices that limit economic mobility for marginalized communities.

Beyond caste-based discrimination, the novel critiques labour exploitation. Workers in the pickle factory endure harsh conditions, including long hours and meager wages, illustrating how economic disparities disproportionately affect vulnerable individuals. This mirrors real-world challenges where marginalized laborers face systemic exploitation due to limited access to education and resources.

Gender discrimination is also a significant theme in *The God of Small Things*. Ammu, the mother of the protagonists, struggles as a divorced woman trying to secure employment. Her economic opportunities are severely restricted, and she receives unfair wages, reflecting the gender-based wage gap and societal limitations placed on women seeking financial independence. Through her experiences, the novel exposes the intersection of gender and economic inequality, demonstrating how deeply ingrained biases hinder women's progress in the workforce.

The consequences of workplace discrimination in the novel are severe, stripping individuals of their dignity and self-worth. Velutha's wrongful arrest and brutal mistreatment at the hands of law enforcement underscore the dehumanizing effects of systemic discrimination. His tragic fate serves as a poignant reminder of how workplace biases can extend beyond economic limitations and result in life-altering consequences.

Although *The God of Small Things* is set in a historical context, its themes remain highly relevant. Caste-based discrimination, though legally abolished, still influences employment opportunities in India. Many marginalized communities continue to struggle for equal access to education and jobs, mirroring the novel's depiction of workplace prejudice. Additionally, labor

exploitation persists in many industries, particularly in informal sectors where workers are subjected to poor conditions and inadequate pay.

Gender-based workplace discrimination continues to be a global issue, with women facing wage disparities, limited access to leadership roles, and biases that restrict career advancement. By weaving these issues into its narrative, *The God of Small Things* offers a powerful critique of the structural inequalities that persist in workplaces worldwide.

Both Sultana's Dream and *The God of Small Things* provide compelling explorations of workplace discrimination, albeit through different lenses. Sultana's Dream uses utopian fiction to expose the gendered biases of patriarchal societies, while *The God of Small Things* presents a raw, realistic portrayal of caste, class, and gender-based workplace discrimination.

By examining these narratives, readers are encouraged to reflect on the systemic barriers that continue to shape workplace experiences today. Addressing these challenges requires confronting ingrained biases, implementing fair policies, and fostering an inclusive environment where individuals, regardless of gender, caste, or social background, have equal opportunities to succeed. Through literature, we gain a deeper understanding of these issues and the collective responsibility to work towards a more equitable future.

3.2 Gender Inequality

Rokeya (2005) highlights in *Sultana's Dream* that men in India have historically maintained control over women, confining them to the zenana while retaining all rights and privileges. A century later, this patriarchal structure remains deeply entrenched in society, where men continue to be regarded as masters. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* effectively portrays this reality within a patriarchal framework. Sheba (2021; cf. Outka, 2011; cf. Hossain, 1992) argues that men dominate decision-making within the Ayemenam family, severely limiting women's independence. Pappachi, for instance, believes that male authority over women is an inherent right, leading to a marriage dynamic where he perceives his wife as subordinate.

Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream*, published in the early 20th century, powerfully critiques gender inequality, making it a central theme of the book. The narrative challenges gender norms and stereotypes, emphasizing the transformative power of education for women. Sister Sara, a character in the story, describes the Queen's progressive reforms: "Our good Queen liked science very much. She circulated an order that all 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" (Rokeya, 2005, p. 7). This reflects Rokeya's critique of patriarchal oppression, which, though relevant in her time, continues to persist in contemporary society.

Similarly, *The God of Small Things* addresses gender inequality as a significant issue. Roy illustrates how societal norms hinder women's progress through the experiences of Ammu, a central character. One instance of gender bias is evident when Ammu is denied a college education because her father, Pappachi, deems it unnecessary for a girl. Consequently, she is forced to return to Ayemenem after completing school, where her only role is to assist with household chores and wait for marriage proposals: "Ammu completed her schooling the same year that her father retired from his job in Delhi and moved to Ayemenem. Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework" (Roy, 1997, p. 39). This reflects the deeply ingrained patriarchal belief that a woman's primary responsibility lies within the domestic sphere, thereby restricting her educational and professional opportunities.

Ammu's struggle against gender discrimination is further emphasized through her rejection of patriarchal naming conventions. She contemplates reverting to her maiden name, acknowledging the limited choices available to women: "Estha's full name was Esthappen Yako. Rahel's was Rahel. For the time being, they had no surname because Ammu was considering reverting to her maiden

name, though she said that choosing between her husband's name and her father's name didn't give a woman much of a choice" (Roy, 1997, p. 37). Ammu's statement underscores the limited agency women possess in defining their own identities within a male-dominated society.

Moreover, Mardiyani and Tawami (2022) analyze how Pappachi's preferential treatment of Chacko, Ammu's brother, highlights the stark gender imbalance within the family. Chacko, a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, enjoys privileges and freedoms denied to Ammu: "Chacko had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and was permitted excesses and eccentricities nobody else was" (Roy, 1997, p. 38). The distinction between Chacko and Ammu's treatment underscores the systemic discrimination against women, reinforcing their subordination within both familial and societal structures.

Ammu's experiences illustrate the pervasive gender inequality that continues to shape women's lives. She not only had to fight for her rights but also had to endure systemic discrimination at home and in her relationships. Through her character, Roy critiques the enduring legacy of patriarchal oppression, making *The God of Small Things* a powerful commentary on gender-based disparities in India.

3.3 Violence against Women

Begum Rokeya, a pioneering Bengali feminist writer of the early 20th century, courageously addressed the issue of violence against women in her literary works. Through her essays, stories, and novels, she exposed the various forms of violence inflicted upon women and the oppressive structures that sustained their subjugation. Rokeya's writings aimed to raise awareness, challenge societal norms, and advocate for women's rights. She vividly portrayed physical abuse, including domestic violence, beatings, and honor killings, emphasizing the harsh realities faced by countless women and the urgent need for societal reform.

Beyond physical violence, Rokeya also explored the emotional and psychological abuse endured by women in patriarchal societies. Her works examine how restrictive gender roles, oppressive traditions, and rigid societal expectations negatively affect women's mental well-being. She depicted instances of gaslighting, humiliation, and systemic discrimination, highlighting the deep-seated inequalities that marginalized women, denied them education and employment, and restricted their autonomy.

Despite focusing on the injustices faced by women, Rokeya's narratives also celebrate resilience and empowerment. She encouraged women to resist oppression, challenge societal norms, and pursue education as a means of liberation. Her stories feature strong female characters who defy traditional expectations and confront the violence inflicted upon them. As Sister Sara states in *Sultana's Dream*, "As a matter of fact, in your country this very thing is done! Men, who do at least are capable of doing no end of mischief, are let loose and the innocent women shut up in the zenana! How can you trust those untrained men out of doors?" (Rokeya, 2005, p. 5). Through her works, Rokeya not only exposed gender-based violence but also sought to inspire societal change. She remains a foundational figure in feminist literature, providing a platform for later activists and writers, such as Arundhati Roy, to address gender injustices.

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy explores the theme of violence against women, portraying the deep-rooted patriarchal structures that sustain their subjugation. The novel presents multiple forms of violence, demonstrating its devastating impact on women's lives and emphasizing the urgent need for societal transformation.

One of the most harrowing depictions of violence in the novel is the domestic abuse suffered by Ammu. She endures both physical and emotional torment at the hands of her husband, Baba, illustrating the power imbalances within their marriage. This violence not only inflicts suffering upon Ammu but also leaves a lasting psychological impact on her children, reinforcing the cycle of harm perpetuated by domestic abuse.

Additionally, Roy highlights the societal violence inflicted upon women who defy traditional gender roles. Characters like Ammu and Velutha face severe consequences for transgressing societal expectations, experiencing ostracization, verbal abuse, and the denial of basic rights. The novel also

addresses the objectification and sexual exploitation of women, exemplified through the harassment Sophie Mol experiences from an older male relative, reflecting the widespread vulnerability of women to such predatory behaviour.

Moreover, Roy explores internalized misogyny and the ways in which patriarchal ideologies compel women to enforce their own oppression. Baby Kochamma embodies this internalized violence, perpetuating harmful beliefs and actions against other women, demonstrating how deeply ingrained patriarchal values can be.

Through her portrayal of violence against women in *The God of Small Things*, Roy critiques the pervasive nature of gender-based oppression. She challenges readers to confront entrenched patriarchal systems that normalize violence and inequality. By exposing the multifaceted dimensions of gender-based violence, Roy calls for a collective effort to dismantle oppressive structures and create a more just and equitable society for women. Her storytelling serves as a powerful reflection of societal unrest, urging change through both narrative and activism.

3.4 Male Dominance

Sultana's Dream, a groundbreaking novella, offers a compelling critique of patriarchal norms and gender roles. This visionary work challenges conventional gender dynamics by presenting an alternative society where women exercise power and agency. Through the lens of *Sultana's Dream*, the narrative exposes the ramifications of patriarchy while envisioning a more egalitarian world.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain critiques patriarchal oppression by inverting gender roles in *Ladyland*, a matriarchal utopia where men are confined to the "zenana"—a restricted space traditionally reserved for women—while women lead society. In a pivotal conversation between Sultana and Sister Sara, this role reversal is emphasized: "Where are the men? I asked her. In their proper places, where they ought to be" (Rokeya, 2005, p. 4). Similarly, Sister Sara remarks, "We shut our men indoors" (Rokeya, 2005, p. 5). By mirroring the subjugation historically imposed on women, Rokeya highlights the inherent absurdity of patriarchal restrictions and urges readers to challenge entrenched gender biases.

Rokeya also subverts traditional gender stereotypes by portraying the women of *Ladyland* as intelligent, assertive, and capable leaders who shape the progress of their society. Unlike the restrictive roles assigned to women in patriarchal structures, these women engage in intellectual pursuits and decision-making processes. Through this portrayal, Rokeya underscores the transformative power of education and intellectual autonomy, advocating for the recognition of women beyond their conventional domestic roles.

Furthermore, *Sultana's Dream* critiques male dominance and its consequences, emphasizing the destructiveness of patriarchal systems. Rokeya contrasts the war-driven, conflict-ridden world of men with the peaceful, harmonious society of *Ladyland*, illustrating the potential for a more compassionate and inclusive world when women lead. By inviting readers to reflect on hierarchical power structures, she promotes the vision of a society built on equality and cooperation.

Rokeya's work extends beyond literary imagination, offering a call to action for gender equality and social transformation. By envisioning a world free from patriarchal constraints, she inspires readers to advocate for justice and empowerment. *Sultana's Dream* remains a seminal feminist text that critiques gender-based oppression and reimagines a future where empathy, equity, and inclusivity prevail. Its enduring relevance continues to ignite discussions on dismantling patriarchal structures in pursuit of a more just society.

Despite Rokeya's literary activism, gender-based oppression, rigid power dynamics, and systemic inequities persist in contemporary society. While her novella provides a powerful critique, it alone cannot eradicate deep-seated patriarchal practices. The echoes of female subjugation continue to reverberate, highlighting the need for continuous discourse and advocacy. Arundhati Roy, following in the footsteps of feminist literary activism, amplifies these conversations by using various platforms to challenge societal repression and ensure women's voices are heard.

Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things*, delves into the theme of patriarchy, unraveling its pervasive influence on individuals and society. Set in post-colonial India, the novel explores the complexities and consequences of patriarchal systems, revealing the suffocating constraints imposed on its characters. Through evocative storytelling and incisive social critique, Roy exposes the mechanisms of patriarchal control while showcasing acts of resistance and resilience.

Roy masterfully illustrates the rigid gender roles perpetuated by patriarchy, which confine both men and women to restrictive expectations. Men bear the burden of societal masculinity, while women are relegated to submissive roles as obedient daughters and dutiful wives. These imposed roles stifle individuality and hinder personal aspirations, reinforcing systemic inequality. Roy's narrative critiques these suffocating constructs, shedding light on their oppressive nature and the unfulfilled potential they engender.

The God of Small Things also highlights the darker dimensions of patriarchy, revealing the violence and coercion that sustain it. Male characters, shaped by patriarchal norms, exert their dominance through both physical and emotional abuse. Roy poignantly illustrates the devastating consequences of such oppression, particularly for women, who endure cycles of trauma and subjugation. By confronting these harsh realities, the novel compels readers to recognize and challenge the structural injustices that perpetuate gender-based violence.

Amidst this oppressive backdrop, Roy interweaves narratives of defiance and resistance. Female characters like Ammu and Baby Kochamma challenge societal conventions and assert their autonomy, refusing to conform to prescribed gender roles. Their pursuit of self-determination, though fraught with adversity, signals a broader critique of patriarchal constraints. Roy's portrayal of these acts of defiance inspires readers to question entrenched norms and envision alternative pathways to liberation.

Beyond individual struggles, *The God of Small Things* explores the far-reaching consequences of patriarchy on society as a whole. The novel illustrates how patriarchal oppression extends beyond gender, shaping social hierarchies and perpetuating cycles of injustice. Ammu and Velutha's tragic fates exemplify the intersectionality of gender and caste-based discrimination, highlighting the pervasive and systemic nature of oppression. Yet, amidst these injustices, the novel offers glimpses of redemption and the possibility of transformative change.

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy confronts patriarchy with unflinching honesty, exposing its suffocating grip on individuals and communities. Through her compelling narrative, she critiques oppressive gender roles, systemic violence, and the rigid structures that uphold male dominance. Simultaneously, she illuminates acts of resistance and resilience, urging readers to challenge these constraints and envision a society where individuals can exist free from patriarchal limitations. By intertwining critique with hope, Roy crafts a narrative that not only exposes injustice but also inspires the pursuit of equality and liberation.

VI. CONCLUSION

Despite the progressive vision presented in *Sultana's Dream*, the harsh realities of patriarchy persist more than a century after its publication. Nearly 90 years after Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's passing, gender-based violence remains a pressing issue. Domestic abuse, honor killings, and dowry-related murders continue to claim countless lives, underscoring the enduring power structures that subordinate women. While significant strides have been made in advancing women's rights, the fundamental struggle for autonomy, safety, and equality is far from over. Women's lives are still dictated by the expectations and decisions of the men around them – fathers, husbands, brothers, and even societal gatekeepers who determine the extent of their freedoms.

Education, a cornerstone of empowerment emphasized by Rokeya, remains inaccessible for many girls worldwide. In several communities, parents still withhold education from their daughters, fearing harassment, violence, or social stigma. Schools, rather than being places of

learning and opportunity, are often perceived as sites of danger for young girls. The zenana that Rokeya sought to dismantle may no longer be a physical space, but it continues to exist in the deeply ingrained patriarchal mindset that confines women within invisible boundaries of tradition, expectation, and fear.

This lingering oppression is echoed in the works of contemporary feminist writers like Arundhati Roy. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy exposes the far-reaching consequences of patriarchal dominance, illustrating how gender-based hierarchies shape lives, dictate personal choices, and fuel cycles of oppression. The struggles of characters like Ammu reflect the lived experiences of countless women who resist, suffer, and ultimately become casualties of an unforgiving system. Roy's narrative serves as both a critique and a lament, emphasizing that despite modernity and globalization, the fundamental injustices that plagued women in Rokeya's time remain prevalent today.

The dream of women's complete independence, as envisioned in *Sultana's Dream*, remains largely unrealized. Although feminism has sparked awareness, challenged traditions, and pushed for policy reforms, true gender equality remains an aspiration rather than a reality. Rokeya's utopian vision of Ladyland was meant to inspire change, yet in many ways, it remains a distant fantasy. The fight against patriarchy requires constant resistance, systemic transformation, and collective action. Until society fully dismantles its deeply embedded gender biases, the dream of a world where women live free from oppression will remain just that – a dream.

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