

## PHILOSOPHY OF BEGUM ROKEYA SAKHAWAT IN RELATION TO THE CURRENT STATUS OF WOMEN IN BANGLADESH

Farzana Zaman\*  
Ahmad Mahbub-ul-Alam\*\*  
Syeda Raffat Hyder\*\*\*

**Abstract :** Begum Rokeya Sakhawat is the precious jewel of the nineteenth century of our subcontinent. She represents her contemporary society, her nation and her country. She is the pride of the Muslim women. Her revolutionary writings made her immortal in the literary world. As a feminist, her writings are invaluable. Many feminists were born after her but no second Rokeya has emerged. She represents the Muslims and the philosophy of Islam in bringing up a girl to a woman. She advocated for the method of educating women from moral and ethical point of view. Her philosophy is aimed at establishing the dignity of woman. Her dream was very much realistic and sacred. But today's materialism fails to understand Begum Rokeya's dream. Though the women have got the taste of material and financial freedom, still they deprived themselves from the spiritual and moral freedom. This study focuses on the philosophy of this great lady in relation to the current status of women in Bangladesh.

### Introduction

Today people think that women have been liberated in the west with the help of the women's liberation movement that began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But, in fact, the women's liberation movement was not introduced by the women, rather was revealed by a man in the seventh century, well known as Muhammad (peace be upon him), the last prophet of Islam. Though Islam has given women all the rights they deserve, still those are not exercised. Consequently women remain in a derogatory position in this world. And when we think of the rights of women, another word comes forward, i.e., duties. To establish the rights and duties of women many feminists worked and struggled for a long time. Among them Begum Rokeya is

the name as the founding pillar of Bengali Muslim feminism, who urged the intellectual advancement and freedom in the truest sense.

### Begum Rokeya's Philosophy as Found in Her Writings and Deeds

Begum Rokea came from a renowned Muslim family, and never crossed the Muslim sensibilities, rather believed that "religion is the main source of the national, spiritual and moral advancement" (Motichur 2<sup>nd</sup> part Noor-e-Islam Page-71). Though today's women have successfully broken the barriers and traveled alone and though freedom of movement had been attained by them, their security and safety had eluded them often. She is the most extra-ordinary feminist in the history, who wanted to establish the rights of women in true sense. She wrote: "What we want is neither alms nor gift of favour. It is our inborn right. Our claim is not more than Islam gave women 1,300 years ago." She broke all barriers, and struggled throughout her life for a better society for women who had no voice. She led the way to empowering and enlightening women. Rokeya was actually aiming at creating a female community, capable enough to grow as healthy individuals, both in the mind and body. They should possess promising caliber, in addition to the traditional roles of perfect wives and ideal mothers. She tried to elevate the position of women within an Islamic framework. Now-a-days though the percentage of women education has increased, they remain second class citizens in today's enlightened and technologically advanced world. Glamour and glitter, beauty shows, women's lib programs, silky parties, and smoothened conferences, can not hide the too obvious fact that women at the turn of this century are the most tormented creatures on this planet. It is neither money nor power; rather it is the woman who is mostly being misused today. From birth to death, her existence is lamented. At home, she is turned in to a mere cook, even worse, into a slave. Even prisoners enjoy some rights which are not available to some women. So, our concentration is on that path which will bring the real taste of freedom and advancement in women's life.

The prominent feminist Begum Rokeya defines the advancement in her essay "Unnotir Pothe" (The Way of Advancement). She was a revolutionary writer who brought the revolution in her period concentrating on the importance of acquiring knowledge. Today's women just realize the advancement as to get out from home, but Begum Rokeya did not fight for this so called advancement. The

---

\* Senior Lecturer in English, Manarat International University.  
\*\* Assistant Professor of English, Manarat International University.  
\*\*\* MA in English, Thesis Student, Manarat International University.

social picture of our contemporary time asks us whether Begum Rokeya's dream is a distant utopia. If we observe the present situation of women we will notice that most the families send their daughters to school. Yet the girls of grass root levels are deprived from education. Those school going girls just go through the chapters which are included in the syllabus. Though they are learning General Science, English, Mathematics, Social Science, Philosophy, etc., they are far from the knowledge which is related to spiritual and moral advancement. Our education policy should be reformed. The thing is we are educating our daughters but we fail to produce an ideal citizen, an ideal mother, an ideal part of our society. If we peep into our society, we will feel sorry; because our society is engulfed with so many problems related to the real advancement of women. Our women are not secure; they have become the victim of so many social anarchies. Today 'eve-teasing', 'acid crime', 'death for dowry', 'sexual abuse', 'domestic violence', 'sexual harassment' – all these have become the buzzwords. Can we answer, why the situation is going like this? Reaching to the twenty first century why cannot we be able to establish peace in our society? Why is our social picture going to be the period of 'Aiyame Jahelia' (Age of Ignorance)? The answer is one; that is – we become educated but we fail to achieve the light of education because our education is related to material advancement, not to spiritual or moral advancement.

In the essay 'Unnotir Pothe', Begum Rokeya has satirized the material advancement of society very minutely. She also suggested what should be our education policy. In the novel "Padmaraag" she has given a model of an educational institution named 'Tarini Bhaban' where she depicted her suggested education policy. Her education policy is formed to build up an ideal society. This education will concentrate to all the sections of knowledge including religious study. She prohibited us to teach false history. The importance is given to moral and religious study. She does not want to produce a so-called educated women rather her goal is to produce a good daughter, a good housewife, a good mother and after all a good citizen who will love her culture, nation and country. Moreover Begum Rokeya argued that men and women are created differently, but equally. In her views, "the subjugated position of women was not due to God's will, but due to men's immorality." There is a saying, "Man proposes, God disposes," but our bitter experience shows that, "God gives, man robs." Rokeya believed that, "God has made no

distinction in the life of male and female – both are equally bound to seek food, drink, sleep and pray five times a day." Rokeya used a fascinating logic to enforce the notion of gender equality within an Islamic framework. "If God Himself intended women to be inferior, He would have ordained it so that mothers would have given birth to daughters at the end of fifth month of pregnancy. Then the supply of mother's milk naturally would have been half of that in case of a son. But that is not the case, how can it be? Is not God just and the most merciful?"

That is why she repeatedly put emphasis on the education of women. In her essay 'Islam' she quoted the necessity of education according to the Prophet's (peace be upon him) speech – "Gain knowledge, he who acquires knowledge becomes sober, he who gains knowledge worships Allah, he who teaches knowledge also worships Allah. Only education shows the right path, education is the real friend in tranquility, education gives us consolation when adversity comes; education leads us to the zenith of advancement and consoles us in our sorrow. Education is our jewelry in the friends' party and is the weapon before enemy." She also quoted from Hazrat Ali (a.s.) "Education is the glittering jewel to enlighten the soul."

So, if a woman becomes educated in true sense, she can serve the family, the society, the nation and the world. In her essay 'Shishoo Palon' (Rearing Child) she quoted from Doctor Bharat Chandra, "One should not be a mother without knowing the duty of mother." Begum Rokeya coined the term 'Manoshik Dashotto' or mental slavery to describe the loss of individuality in women, and identified this psychological phenomenon as the main force behind women's subjugation. It is a matter of great regret that modern ladies are busy with their beautification. 'Tongue Worshipping' is one of the main diseases of the modern age. Women remain busy cooking rich foods, adorning their beauty and shopping clothes and jewelry. They have no time for spiritual advancement. Many of them become educated, but their soul remains in quite darkness. Even in the month of Ramadan the women of our country remain busy in preparing different items for Iftar. We can follow Begum Rokeya's education policy in this regard. Two major organizational contributions Rokeya made for attaining women's advancement were her school and 'Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam' (Muslim Women's Association). The curriculum of Sakhawat Memorial Girls'

School included physical education, handy crafts, sewing, cooking, nursing, home economics and gardening in addition to the regular courses in Bangla, English, Urdu, Persian and Arabic. Rokeya emphasized on physical education because she believed that it is important to make women physically stronger, fit and confident. Rokeya ran a slum literacy program in Kolkata by forming work teams to visit women in the slums to teach them reading, writing, personal hygiene and child care.

### **Conclusion**

Begum Rokeya's words are most surprisingly very relevant to our current status as woman today. Even though Rokeya's dreams regarding women's education have been somewhat realized, her vision regarding women's advancement has not yet been established and practiced. If they could realize how honorable creature they are, surely they would prepare themselves and would enlighten their soul by acquiring the knowledge in true sense.

### **Sources**

1. *Sakhawat Begum Rokeya, Begum Rokeya Rochona Shomogra, 2010*
2. *Bengali Literature, www.indianetzone.com*
3. *www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs*
4. *http://www.bangladeshonline.de/begum\_rokeya*
5. *http://www.bangladeshonline.de/begum\_rokeya*
6. *www.shahidulnews.com/2009/.../for-begum-roquiah-'griho'-is-political/ -*
7. *www.lehigh.edu/.../where-women-rule-and-mirrors-are.html*
8. *www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2005/07/05/reflections.htm*
9. *www.islamicvoice.com/december.98/women.htm*
10. *ankahi.tv/voiceofpeople/?p=58*
11. *www.muktadhara.net*