



BEGUM ROKEYAS THOUGHTS OF FEMALE EDUCATION

MUKUL SK, School Teacher, MA in Education & UGC NET Qualified.

Abstract:

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain(1880-1932) the mother of muslim awakening in undivided Bengal and she also a visionary social reformer, educator, played a pivotal role in advancing female's education and empowerment in early 20th-century. Her educational philosophy, thoughts and contribution emphasized that female's liberation could only be achieved through education, challenging the patriarchal and religious constraints that confined women to domestic roles. Through the establishment of the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School in 1911, she provided women with access to modern education, fostering intellectual, social, and economic independence. Rokeya's legacy has had a lasting impact on contemporary female's education in Bengal, inspiring ongoing movements for gender equality, increased female literacy, and broader participation in various professions. Her work also addressed the intersectionality of gender, class, and religion, particularly focusing on providing education to Muslim female from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Today, her vision continues to influence modern feminist movements, demonstrating the enduring importance of education as a tool for social and gender justice.

Key-words: Begum Rokeya, Education, Muslim, Female, Influence,

Details:

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain(1880-1932) the mother of muslim awakening in undivided Bengal and she also a visionary social reformer, educator, played a pivotal role in advancing female's education and empowerment in early 20th-century. Her educational philosophy, thoughts and contribution emphasized that female's liberation could only be achieved through education, challenging the patriarchal and religious constraints that confined women to domestic roles. Through the establishment of the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School in 1911, she provided women with access to modern education, fostering intellectual, social, and economic independence. Rokeya's legacy has had a lasting impact on contemporary female's education in Bengal, inspiring ongoing movements for gender equality, increased female literacy, and broader participation in various professions. Her work also addressed the intersectionality of gender, class, and religion, particularly focusing on providing education to Muslim female from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Today, her vision continues to influence modern feminist movements, demonstrating the enduring importance of education as a tool for social and gender justice.

Rokeya devoted her life to the emancipation of Muslim women in Bengal beginning in 1909. Later, she established a school and a women's organization to implement feminist principles. Rokeya witnessed the distress of women in the Bengali Muslim community and believed it was her responsibility as a Muslim woman to rectify social errors. Rokeya identified the paucity of education for Bengali Muslim women of the same age as one of the greatest flaws. She determined that all women must receive an education. She began to publish numerous articles, essays, books, brief articles, and socially critical essays in which she encouraged women to pursue an education. This is how Rokeya began the Bengali Muslim women's liberation movement.

She was the first Bengali Muslim to publicly address the issue of women's equality, ushering in a new era in the Bengali Muslim community's history.

The most attractive aspect of Rokeya's narrative is not her rhetoric or intellectual profundity, but rather her actions. She was not only an intellectual proponent of the cause, but also an activist, a combination we rarely see. She composed novels, poems, short tales, works of fantasy, satire, treatises, and essays. In her writings, she argued that men and women should be regarded equally as rational beings, and that the primary reason for women's lagging behind is their lack of education.

Rokeya argued that education for girls is the fundamental requirement for women's emancipation; consequently, she founded a primary school in Kolkata for Bengali Muslim girls. Rokeya is said to have gone door-to-door to convince the elderly to transfer their daughters to her school. She led the varsity team until her death despite vitriolic criticism and numerous social obstacles. She founded the Muslim Women's Association in 1916, a group that campaigned for the education and employment of women. In 1926, Rokeya presided over the Bengal Women's Education Conference in Kolkata, which was the first significant attempt to unite women in support of women's education rights. She participated in debates and conferences regarding the Advancement of women until her passing on December 9, 1932, shortly after presiding over a session at the Indian Women's Conference. She desired to examine Bengali, the predominant vernacular in Bengal. The family disapproved of this because many upper-class Muslims of the time preferred to use Arabic and Persian as the medium of instruction rather than Bengali, their native language. Khan Bahadur Sakhawat Hussain, her Urdu-speaking spouse, was kind, liberal, and very interested in female education. He encouraged her to write, and based on his recommendation, she chose Bengali as the primary language for her literary works, as it was the language of the populace. She began her literary career in 1902 with an essay titled *Pipasa* (Thirst) in Bengali. During her husband's tenure, she also published *Motichur* (1905) and *Sultana's Dream* (1908).

. In honor of her cherished spouse, Rokeya established the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' high school. It began with only five pupils in Bhagalpur, a historically Urdu speaking region. A property dispute with her husband's family compelled her to relocate the institution to Bengali-speaking Calcutta in 1911. It remains one of the city's most popular institutions for women and is now run by the state government. Rokeya also founded the Islamic Women's Association (Anjuman e Khawateen e Islam), which actively held debates and conferences regarding the status of females and education. She advocated reformation, especially for women, and believed that parochialism and excessive conservatism were primarily responsible for the relatively sluggish growth of Muslims in British India. Consequently, she is one of the foremost Muslim feminists. She believed that modern Islam had been distorted or corrupted; Anjuman e Khawateen e Islam organized numerous social reform events in support of the original teachings of Islam, which she believed had been lost. We are about to commemorate 'International Women's Day' on March 8, with a vision to ensure a more gender-equal world, to confirm justice, dignity, and hope for daughters everywhere. At this very instant, we recall our own cherished daughter, who celebrated the freedom trail for Muslim women in Bengal. She will be described as the embodiment of the age's spirit and conscience.

Shamsun Nahar Mahmud (1908-1964), biographer and associate of Begum Rokeya, described her as a „spider mother' and famously proclaimed: "The fate of the Bengali Muslim women has changed dramatically over the past half century, and there's no way to deny that this kind-hearted woman played the most significant role in it." Rokeya was mentioned within the meticulous conservatism practiced at the time by the aristocratic Muslims. She became the harshest critic of the system as a result, her understanding and insight regarding Islam and mere societal doctrine allow us to reconcile the ostensibly contradictory positions of Islam and female education. Instead of blindly blaming Islam for the ignorance and unholy conservatism of that period, Rokeya cited historical evidence to support the importance of Muslim girls' education. Despite the fact that Islam has effectively prevented the physical murder of infant girls, Muslims continue to destroy the mind, intellect, and judgement of their daughters. Many consider it a badge of honors to keep their daughters ignorant, devoid of knowledge and comprehension of the world, and cooped up within the four walls of the home. In her 1926 address to the Bengal women's education conference, Rokeya harshly condemned males

for denying women education in the name of religion. Her eloquent assertion reveals the profundity of her thought and concept as well as the breadth of her comprehension. Her comment reminds us of the inadequacy of thought and behavior of Bengali Muslims at the time, as well as her ability to accept that religion is not an obstacle to women's rights, but rather social dogmas in the name of faith.

The most attractive aspect of Rokeya's narrative is not her rhetoric or intellectual profundity, but rather her actions. She was not only an intellectual force in the campaign, but also an activist, an uncommon combination. Rokeya was born into a very conservative family environment and had no formal education, so her existence was destined to be that of a typical Muslim housewife. She grew up to become a writer in both Bengali and English, as well as an activist for the freedom of Muslim women in Bengal and an educator. In March 1911, she established the Sakhawat Memorial School for Women to instruct Muslim females. Rokeya, who as a child had never set foot in a classroom, became the architect of the Bengal Renaissance through the education and modernization of Bengali Muslim women. Begum Rokeya led the college for twenty-four years, enduring severe criticism and overcoming numerous social obstacles to make it the most effective institution of higher education for Muslim women. Initially, only females who were not Bengali attended Sakhawat Memorial School. However, Begum Rokeya exerted significant effort to persuade Bengali Muslim families to enroll their daughters in high school. She went door-to-door; persuading the elderly that education could be essential for women and promising that her school would observe purdah.

The result of her tireless efforts was that middle-class Muslim girls broke the taboo against leaving the home to check. She also organized horse-drawn carriages so that girls could travel to and from school while observing purdah. Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School taught Quran recitation and interpretation, as well as Bangla, English, Urdu, Persian, home nursing, first aid, cookery, sewing, exercise, and other subjects. Begum Rokeya frequently visited other girls' schools to observe the teaching techniques employed and the administration of the faculties. Due to the dearth of qualified female teachers in Calcutta at the time, Rokeya chose to train the teachers she hired from Madras, Gaya, Agra, and other cities. 1919 saw the establishment of the Muslim Women Training School in Calcutta, per her repeated requests. She worked to secure government funding and social support for the institute, despite facing widespread criticism.

Begum Rokeya left behind numerous Bangla and English correspondence. She possessed a high regard for the Bangla vernacular. Although Urdu was the language of the aristocratic Muslims of the time, including her own residence, she realized that Bangla, the language spoken by the majority of Muslims in Bengal, should be her primary language. In 1927, at the Bangiya Nari Shikkha Sammelan (Convention on Women Literacy in Bengal), she advocated vehemently for the usage of Bangla.

The union led the battle for the education, employment, and legal and political rights of women. Society subsidized the cost of education for an excessive number of women and arranged marriages for a number of disadvantaged girls. It provided housing for orphans and the indigent, as well as financial assistance to widows. In addition, it established enterprises to help girls achieve economic independence. It significantly contributed to the event of Muslim women in Kolkata. Rokeya encouraged women to join the union despite scathing criticisms and accusations from conservatives. She criticized ruthless customs based on a perverted interpretation of Islam and emphasized that girls achieving their full potential as individuals could best exhibit Allah's glory. Rokeya realized that economic independence was necessary for women to achieve complete emancipation and no longer rely on their fathers, siblings, and husbands for their livelihoods. To that end, she advocated for the revival of artisan industries that women could pursue successfully at home.

In contrast to the Hindu women's reform movements, which relied primarily on legislative changes, Muslim women's reform was administered on a more social level, focusing on issues related to education, purdah, health care, and the adoption of a literate modern Muslim identity. In 1937, the application of jurisprudence was proposed as a revolutionary solution to the deprived status of Muslim women. Furthermore, issues pertaining to marriage, divorce, polygamy, and inheritance also figured prominently. The social reform of Muslim women is best viewed from three distinct perspectives:

1. She faced religious criticisms and countered them by writing many articles essays to differentiate between true religion and man-made religion. Her aim in this regard was to convince the parents about the need of education in the life of their daughters. She saw how the Muslim women submitted themselves to their husbands and had no chance to question inequality inherent in the Muslim society.
2. Rokeya wanted to break the religious dogma and also wanted to inform the women that Islam did not promote inequality between man and woman.
3. For the true understanding of the religious doctrine in the Quran, she recommended the translation of the Holy book into provincial languages. She recommended the reading of Quran But she did not support the parrot like recitation of the Holy Book She told that the very truth exposed by the Quran should be understood by the Muslim girls.
4. She emphasized on physical education because she believed that it would make the women physically stronger, fit and confident. She also gave importance to vocational training because she thought that it would make the women economically independent.
5. She also recommended the value oriented education for making the girls ideal daughters, wives and mothers or obedient daughters, loving sisters, dutiful wives and instructive mothers
6. Rokeya dared to go against the norms of the Muslim society for the inspiration she got seeing the efforts made by the British Rulers and the educationalist like Vidyasagar in the expansion of women education. She was also affected immensely by the rationalism of Raja Ram Mohan Roy Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Keshab Chandra Sen.
7. She felt the need of good teachers for providing the best education to the girl students of Bengal. There was a lack of female teachers at that time. For creating good female teachers she herself used to train them.
8. Ulama-led attempts to purify Muslim women and their religious practices by educating them about actual Islamic teachings;
9. Modern educationist- and reformer-led movements for women's education; and
10. Literary solutions offered to elevate the moral psyche and provide guidance for the modern Muslim woman's subjectivity. The underlying motif of all three reform strands was the effort to reconcile with a modern Muslim identity by manipulating, re-conceptualizing, and appropriating modern Muslim women.

In the History of Women education of India, Rokeya is a legendary figure who supported and fought for women's independence and education She was a seer. She felt that the women would be equal to the men in respect of knowledge, vision productive-thinking and intelligence if they are given the opportunities. To provide them opportunities and awaken their inner soul for freedom, her struggle for the educational opportunities of the women especially of the Muslim women was very notable in the History of Women Education of Bengal Her educational ideniti was the mixture of pragmatism and progressiveness. This made her a prominent educationalist in the British dominated India. The initiative of women education was first taken up by the Christian Missionary Vidyasagar's role in women education was praiseworthy too. Following the footprint of the former, Begum Rokeya continued her mission for the emancipation of the Muslim girls through education. She advocated women education but she had no formal education in real sense of the term. It is very much astonishing to all of us We can conclude mentioning the definition of education given by Rokeya in her literary piece named 'Stree Jatir Abanati

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