

Demonstration of Political Consciousness by Two Iconic Feminists, Begum Rokeya and Doris Lessing

Mohammad Kaosar Ahmed*

Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Chittagong, Bangladesh

*Corresponding author: kaosarahmed@rocketmail.com

Received June 04, 2019; Revised August 02, 2019; Accepted August 09, 2019

Abstract Both Lessing and Rokeya demonstrate their political consciousness in their writings. They also write against colonialism. Feminists are always politically active. For Lessing, politics means communism as she has been actively involved with the communist party. That Lessing's political commitment is more intellectual than nationalistic makes her distinguished from Rokeya whose political concern is based on Bangali Nationalism. In her several essays, Rokeya opens out her political stance writing about the deprived Muslims, farmers and the colonized people of India. In spite of having a strong political bearing in mind, Rokeya unlike Doris Lessing did not involve herself with any political party.

Keywords: *political consciousness, nationalism, colonialism*

Cite This Article: Mohammad Kaosar Ahmed, "Demonstration of Political Consciousness by Two Iconic Feminists, Begum Rokeya and Doris Lessing." *Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2019): 58-61. doi: 10.12691/jll-3-2-4.

1. Introduction

Doris Lessing was born in Kermanshah, Persia, on October 22, 1919. In 1925 he left Persia for Southern Rhodesia, to an area a hundred miles west to Mozambique, where he began farming. Much of Doris's youth was spent in the hills and plains in the area of her father's farm. In 1949 she left Southern Rhodesia for England with her younger son and the manuscript of her first book, a novel based on her African life, *The Grass Is Singing*. The year since Lessing's arrival in England have resulted in a steady stream of books. Included in the many volumes are collection of short stories (*This Was Old Chief's Country*, 1951; *The Habit of Loving*, 1957; *A Man And Two Women*, 1963; and *African Stories*, 1964); the five novels in the *Children of Violence* series (*Martha Quest*, 1952; *A Proper Marriage*, 1954; *A Ripple from the Storm*, 1968; *Landlocked*, 1965; and *The Four-Gated City*, 1969); several novelettes and other novels (*The Grass Is Singing*, 1950; *Five*, 1953; *Retreat to Innocence*, 1956; *The Golden Notebook*, 1962; *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, 1971 *The Summer before the Dark*, 1973); volumes of social and or autobiographical commentary (*Going Home*, 1957; *In Pursuit of the English*, 1960; *Particularly Cats*, 1967), several plays (*Each His Own Wilderness*, 1959; *Play With a Tiger*, 1962); and a volume of verse (*Fourteen Poems*, 1959). She has had numerous essays and articles published, as well as two other plays produced but not published ([1] p. 167).

Rokeya was born in 1880 to a declining aristocratic landowning family in the village of Pyrabund, Rangpir.

Rokeya would have been a neglected child, had it not been for the care and tutoring provided by her elder brother Ibrahim Saber, and Sister Karimunnessa Khatun. Between them, they secretly taught Rokeya how to read and write, specially the language of the new elite, English, and that of the non-aristocratic class (*atraf*), Bangalee. Later on her husband would tutor her in English. Consequently Rokeya mastered Urdu- the language of the Bangalee Muslim aristocratic (*or ashraf*) as well as English and Bangla. Around 1898 Rokeya was married to Sakhawat Hossein, a widower who had just returned from his studies in English to take up a post as magistrate in Bhagalpur, in his native Bihar. It was a companionate marriage where Rokeya managed the house with thrift and taste, nursed her diabetic husband, socialized modestly and kept up her intellectual pursuits. Sakhawat encouraged his young and talented wife to study, and write, even to set up a small school for girls. In Bhagalpur Rokeya had embarked on her writing career with *Pipasa*; *Niriha Bangali* and *Sultana's Dream* (first published in 1905).

Rokeya's writings implore women to dissent against discriminations and smash the social barriers that single out them. *Abarodhbasini* ("The Secluded Women", 1931) is a feisty attack on the excessive forms of purdah that jeopardized women's lives and thoughts. Her other noted works contain *Matichur* (1904, 1922), *Sultana's Dream* (1908), *Padmarag* (1924). The second volume of *Matichur* comprises stories and fairy tales such as "Saurajagat" (The Solar System), "Delicia Hatya", "Jvan-phal" (The Fruit of Knowledge), "Nari-Sristi" (Creation of Women), "Nurse Nelly", "Mukti-phal" (The Fruit of Emancipation) etc. She also wrote poems.

2. The Political Doris Lessing

Doris Lessing ought to have distinguished herself with the Communist party in Great Britain. The C.P.G.B. have for various years offered all the more unequivocally to the scholarly people and writers of England than its partner in the United States. Numerous British intellectuals had battled for the Republican cause amid *The Spanish Civil War*, and half of the British people killed in the war had been Communists. In any case, there was likewise a solid sprit of independence in the C.P.G.B., a soul Doris Lessing completely shared. In 1956, for example, a fleeting informal Communist periodical devoted to a more prominent assortment of opinion was circulated, with Lessing as one of its main contributors. At the point when the party kept rehashing the Stalinist line and shielding Soviet mediation after Hungarian Revolt in October 1965, Lessing and numerous others left the party.

The Children of Violence series mirrors a more extensive political direction from her prior activism, thwarted expectation with Communism—and after that, all political battle—into an apocalyptic vision of the world and into mysticism. Like Lessing, the *series's* central character Martha Quest experiences childhood in colonial Africa, weds and bears kids, turns out to be politically active and inevitably moves to England, where she turns out to be increasingly baffled. The last novel, specifically, portrays a dystopic world, destroyed by war and brutality, and veering toward annihilation.

At the beginning of her career, Lessing is unequivocally political. Her first novel, *The Grass is Singing* embarked to portray the brutalities of imperialism, and keeping in mind that still an individual from the Communist Party in the UK, she was prohibited inconclusively from Southern Rhodesia where she was raised and South Africa. In any case, for a large portion of her career, Lessing has upheld a governmental issues of repudiation. In 1962, Lessing sprinkled onto the universal artistic scene with *The Golden Notebook*, an incoherent, troublesome entryway plug of a novel that tried to bind together the dissimilar interests of an author named Anna Wulf. In a black note book, Anna records her recollections of Central Africa, in a red one, her association with the British Communist party, and in a blue one she tries to comprehend her fantasies and desire, the subliminal territory of psychoanalytic intrigue. The brilliant scratch pad of the title would like to unite these dissimilar archives, looking to see how ladies settle the pressures between their own encounters and their political advantages. Be that as it may, the political import of *The Golden Notebook* lies maybe in its principal inconvenience with political commitment itself. At last Anna Wulf arrives at the resolution that the political inquiries that appeared to be so vital at the beginning of the novel appear to be unfilled by its end, similarly that Lessing's own association with communism came to be supplanted first with Jungian psychoanalysis and later with Sufi mystery.

3. The Nationalist Begum Rokeya

That Lessing's political responsibility is more intellectual than nationalistic makes her recognized from

Rokeya whose political concern depends on Bangali Nationalism. In her few expositions, Rokeya opens out her political position expounding on the denied Muslims, ranchers and the colonized individuals of India. Despite having a solid political remembering, Rokeya unlike Doris Lessing did not include herself with any ideological group.

In one of the articles went along in the *Unpublished Essay* "Open Sesame" we discover Rokeya's perspectives on national governmental issues. In this short article Rokeya thoroughly analyzes the Muslims of India with Kasem of "Alibaba and Forty Thieves." Alibaba's Kasem is sharp enough to recollect the words "Open Sesame," when he enters the cavern of the forty criminals, and consequently he could leave the cavern with as much riches as he could convey. In any case, the Indian Muslims had overlooked "Open Sesame," the code word for their liberation, which is, for Rokeya, the improvement of female education. This is the motivation behind why Muslims of India are still backward since they have overlooked that advancement couldn't be accomplished if house wives –begetters of future generations and nurturers of our future hopes, the women-folk, fall behind in education. Rokeya contrast Indian Muslims and Kasem who has all the riches to convey back home, yet has overlooked the code words that would present to him his opportunity. Consequently Muslims are detained in their trivial presence as Rokeya's Kasem is detained in the cavern with all his wealth.

In her article "NirihaBangalee" (Meek Bangalee) in *Motichur*, Part 1, Begum Rokeya's Bangali Nationalism is in all respects firmly felt. She denounces Bangalee men for behaving like women and furthermore censures their trademark shortcoming as delineated in their weakness, resignation, sluggishness, absence of activity, love whether impersonating others as opposed to being creative themselves and, a large portion of all, their unwaveringness to outsider rulers. She contrasts Bengali and different Indians. Her perception is very funny. In the event that we think on India as a novel than Bangalees male is its courageous woman. Bangalee qualities which are condemnable are recorded by Rokeya as pursues ([2], 22-23):

[For the Bengalis] it is easier to get the title "raja" [from the rulers] than to establish a kingdom.

It is easier to get B.Sc. and D.Sc. degrees than to become experts in various industries.

It is easier to have fame by getting the title of "Khan Bahadur" than to do some great work for the country by spending a little money.

It is easier to attend a "Condolence Meeting" than a foreigner, or a rich famous personality, than be sympathetic to the plight of our poor neighbours.

It is easier to get food from America by begging than to become industrious and produce more crops from our own soil.

The list demonstrates how much political is her composition and the amount she detests seeking the support of provincial rulers, dissimilar to most Bangalees of her time. Her nationalistic inclination can be plainly observed from the rundown. That independence and self-reliance go side by side is obvious to Begum Rokeya.

In two essays compiled in *Motichur*, Part II, *Muktiphal* (Fruits of freedom) and *Gyanphal* (Fruits of Wisdom) Begum Rokeya communicates her political thoughts.

Mukhtiphal was written in 1907 while amid the Surat Conference of the Congress the conservatives among the Congress individuals were fruitful in choosing Rashbihari Ghosh as the President of the Congress and when, subsequently, the fanatics in the party were headed out from the Congress.

She makes *Mukhtiphal* a caricature of politics of petition and prayer pursued by the moderate area of the Congress through the narrative of a reviled woman, Kangalini [meaning destitute women]. In the story Kangalini symbolizes the Indian under British rule and her children Prabin and Darpananda are the caricatures of faithful subjects of the British crown who have faith in the policy of petition and moderation.

All these writings of Rokeya obviously demonstrate her patriotic zeal and her political commitment. In the meantime, her compositions also demonstrate that her loyalty to Bangali nationalism. Her analysis of the easygoing and weak Bengali people plainly is intended to stimulate them to action. Like the story of *Gyanphal* the vast majority of Rokeya's compositions portray the financial abuse of India by the British, and the narrative of *Kanak Divp* metaphorically speaks to India's history amid the pilgrim time frame.

4. Double Colonization

Both Lessing and Rokeya write against colonialism. Characteristically feminists are anti-colonial as feminist discourse share many similarities with post-colonial discourse. For instance, the two discourses are overwhelmingly political and fret about the battle against persecution and injustice. Furthermore, both reject the established hierarchical, male centric framework, which is overwhelmed by the hegemonic white male, and passionately preclude the alleged supposed supremacy of masculine power and authority. Imperialism, like patriarchy, is nevertheless a phallogocentric, supremacist belief system that subjugates and dominates its subjects. The oppressed woman is in this sense akin to the colonized subject. Basically, exponents of post-colonialism are reacting against colonialism in the political and economic sense while feminist theorists are rejecting colonialism of a sexual nature.

What makes Lessing and Rokeya anti-colonial is their apprehension that both women and 'natives' are minority groups who are unfairly defined by the intrusive "male gaze", which is a characteristic of both patriarchy and colonialism. Both women and colonized individuals have been reduced to stereotypes like virgin, prostitute, savage, barbarian and so forth and denied a character by the framework that entangles them. As of late, post-colonial studies has responded to this perspective and subsequently involved itself with the issue of gender, questioning to what extent this affects the lives of colonial subjects who also happen to be female, i.e. investigating whether gender or colonial oppression is the more significant political factor in women's lives. The irrefutable reality that colonial oppression influenced people in various ways ought to be perceived, as females are regularly exposed to what has been known as a "double colonization", whereby they were victimized for their situation as colonized individuals as well as women.

5. Rokeya: A Subaltern

Expounding on expansionism Rokeya gives off an impression of being more decided than Lessing. Living in the frontier India Rokeya sounds as the genuine subaltern revolt, while because of her European legacy Lessing's voice turns into the voice of the colonizer. In spite of this distinction of sharpness what makes them indistinguishable is that both abhor colonialism. In Begum Rokeya's enthusiasm and communicated considerations, we locate an unmistakable image of her frame of mind towards the colonialists. In *Sultana's Dream* she draws a blueprint of a perfect world all joking aside. This perfect world is a state which is the direct inverse of a settlement. In this idealistic state, there is no war. No distinction of feeling of contention among the residents, no uniqueness, and henceforth there is no requirement for keeping up a resistance drive. Rokeya says that in a state destitution enters to catch the general population in its grip, and in light of this neediness, the occupants of our nation are influenced by different sorts of disorder and infection. They for the most part beyond words therefore. She composes:

.....and I learned that they [the citizens of this utopia] were not subject to any kind of epidemic disease,-- nor did they suffer from mosquito-bites as we do. I was very much astonished to hear that in Ladyland no one died in youth except by rare accident. ([2] 466)

Rokeya published a poem titled 'Nirupam Beer' (the Peerless Hero) in 1922 in the periodical *Dhoomketu* edited by KaziNazrul Islam. This poem was written in recognition of Kanailal Dutta, who endured martyrdom since he participated in movement against British rule. In this lyric Rokeya's anti-colonialist attitude is unmistakably showed. In every one of its stanzas we locate the profound desire in her mind for the freedom from the colonialists:

Thus the judge declares "kanai you
Will be hung to death."

Hearing this our Shyamalal smiled
With contemptuous hatred.

.....
Leaving the prison Marched along Kanai
Hundreds of millions Shama
Will raise In the Indian sky
(All praise to your name)
Brave children will rise in the morning
The name of Kanai singing
Each morn we Mourn our Kanai
Chanting "All Reverence for thee." ([2] p. 460)

Rokeya congratulates Kanailal's battle for freedom from the burden of colonization. She feels that Kanailal would be ever important in India's battle for autonomy, a hundred crore more Kanailal would come forward to free India after Kanailal's demise.

Other than commending Kanailal, she also does not prevent from lashing out with sharp puncturing words at the Indian men, who are the "fawners" of the British rulers. On standing up about these unpatriotic men, who wants to remain in the good grace of the English rulers, she comments that incapable of having any thoughts about making their country independent and helping it achieve independence.

6. Lessing's White Post-Colonial Guilt

Unlike Rokeya, Lessing's presentation of the of the colonial Africa raises much curiosity among the post-colonial critics and one calls her stands as "White Post-Colonial Guilt" ([3] p. 37) as Lessing belongs to the white privileged class. Her introduction of the sufferings of the colonized dark Africans in *The Grass Is Singing* has been perused as a dynamic critique of "injustice, racism, and sexual hypocrisy" ([3] p. 40) of the white colonizers. Like Rokeya she doesn't strive for a counter post-colonial narrative, her unbiased presentation of colonial Africa make her stand against colonialism quite unambiguous.

It is generally believed that the significant themes of Lessing's novels are anti-colonialism, the emancipation of women and the prediction of mankind's future. In her first novel *The Grass is Singing*, she contacts upon the evil of colonialism and politically-sanctioned racial segregation that caused a great misfortune to African people. In *The Golden Notebook*, which set up her as a celebrated author in contemporary writing, she addresses the colonial issues, the survival of human emergency, just as the survival women and gender relations. Her *African Stories* is a short story collection created in African backgrounds. *A Proper Marriage* depicts white Martha's quest for her identity in the colony. Lessing's sci-fi pentalogy is really the portrayal of the colonial Star Wars, with the Earth as the victim; they moreover demonstrate the malevolence of colonialism and the tragic destiny of human on the Earth.

In *The Grass Is Singing* Lessing bravely demonstrates that the protagonist Mary Turner faces battle in tolerating the blacks as human – not as equivalents, yet just as human. Lessing unfurls different unwritten monstrous laws of colonial Africa that are often referenced in the novel serve as convenient help for a puffed-up type of exclusivism. So unbending was the laws in regards to black-white contact that the house-servant Moses can't ride in a similar vehicle as the body of May Turner: "one could not put a black man close to a white woman, even though she were dead, and murdered by him" ([4] p.28-29). Hence the colonized blacks become "the constant, the invariable, the epitome of crime and violence" ([4] p 29); with the colonizer having behind them the

police, the courts, the prisons, all the natives can exert is patience ([4] p 148). Indeed, even the local police men are not allowed to touch a white man in the pursuit for their duties ([4] p 13). In general, the whites "loathe [the natives] to the point of neurosis" ([4] p 92) which at last causes the homicide of Mary. Lessing's impartial introduction of the dark white relationship in *The Grass Is Singing* shoves her in the side of the oppressed and makes her an enlightened critique of the white colonial attitude which she sees as relics of the by-gone colonial age.

7. Conclusion

From the beginning of her career, Lessing is unequivocally political. Lessing's political responsibility is more intellectual than nationalistic and it makes her different from Rokeya whose political concern depends on Bangali Nationalism. Rokeya opens out her political position expounding on the denied Muslims, ranchers and the colonized people of India. Both Lessing and Rokeya write against colonialism. What makes Lessing and Rokeya anti-colonial is their apprehension that both women and 'natives' are minority groups who are unfairly defined by the intrusive "male gaze", which is a characteristic of both patriarchy and colonialism. Expounding on expansionism Rokeya gives off an impression of being more decided than Lessing. Living in the frontier India Rokeya sounds as the genuine subaltern revolt, while because of her European legacy Lessing's voice turns into the voice of the colonizer. In spite of this distinction of sharpness what makes them indistinguishable is that both abhor colonialism.

References

- [1] Brewster, Dorothy. *Doris Lessing*, English Authors Series. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965. Print.
- [2] Rokeya, Begum. *Rokeya Rachanabali*, 2d edition. Ed. Syed et al. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1999. Print.
- [3] Wang, Joy. "White Postcolonial Guilt in Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*". *Research in African literatures*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Fall 2009). Print.
- [4] Lessing, Doris. *The Grass Is Singing*. New York: New American Library, 1976. Print.

