

Her Desire: A Post-colonial Reading of Rabindranath, Rokeya, and Bibhuti

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract:

This research focuses on the idea of ‘desire,’ the manipulation of the word ‘desire’ in creating a false portrayal of the colonial Bengal as well as her daughters. This also focuses on the lack of representation, misrepresentation, as well as exaggeration of false identities of the women of Bengal. The sole purpose for this research is to bring attention towards the matter of neglect faced by the Bengal while considering lack of research done on them, as well as by them. The primary that has been used for the research are- *Chokher Bali* by Rabindranath Tagore, *Sultana’s Dream* by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein, and *Adarsha Hindu Hotel* by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay.

Keywords: *desire, post-colonialism, post-colonial feminism, Bengal, identity, misrepresentation, rethinking.*

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Chapter1: Introduction:

Before starting the research, I want to ask, what are your thoughts and understandings on 'female desire'? Desire, more specifically female desire has always been read and defined in an array of ways as well as shapes. It has also taken different forms depending on the setting, circumstance, and position of the female as well as the individual whose perspective we are patiently seeking. This leading them to view the two words from an extremely subjective point of view, considering their own gender, political position, views, as well as certain socio-cultural, religious, and economic viewpoints. It also comes down to personal taste and the relation between them and nature to some degree. However, while looking at the words, 'female' and 'desire,' we just simply forget about what started this conversation making us disassociate ourselves from very first word of the two focus words of this research. The answer to these newly surfaced questions of 'what started the conversation?' and 'what are we neglecting in it?' is – the initial inquiry was 'what is 'female desire'?' and we are forgetting to properly analyse the very word 'female' while going over the posed question. However, that is not the only thing that is being neglected.

'Female' and 'desire,' both are words that have multiple meanings depending on the placement in a statement or situation. The word 'desire' has changed and transformed, going from a word used to denote the overall interest of the collective, to having a meaning that is dependent explicitly on gender. Due to this, the meaning most widely recognized, appears to have a dark, occult, sensual undertone. This makes it difficult to pair 'desire' with any other word, as this pairing with 'desire' automatically makes the environment created heavier than the words' individual use. A process that is making the title of the research- 'female desire'- giving it a vague appearance of a work on women with immorality, and their desires. However, this is not the case – at least it is not always. Let us go back to the dwelling question of what do you think of 'female desire'? - the important aspect to consider first is

the causes for the breakdown necessary behind this question. It is better understood while considering the stance, position, and to find synchronicity between a woman and her 'desires. Initially the responses curated as well as circulated due to the differed perspectives of an individual. This can be due to – i) personal interpretation (subjective thoughts, stance, views), ii) the already established norms on the functionalities served by the word's 'female' and 'desire', (as one word has the potential to change or imply one or multiple meanings depending on the era, and the transformed way of using the word), iii) wall between the one-way approach towards viewing women and their necessities. With addition to all these, geographical location as well as historical stance also becomes a defining factor to form a proper understanding the matter.

From a post-colonial standpoint, we often find that the colonial India has always shown certain favoritism between its men and women. While looking at historical documentations this may not appear as a brand-new concern, however, in case of the colonial India it is the distance between the colonial thoughts and the Indian thoughts that dictates the whole understanding. Due to the vastness of the colonial India, there has always been some internal- state based dispute which dictated the overall matter of favoritisms in which Bengal held the short end of the stick, making the Bengali population further removed. Finally, within Bengal, the Bengali women became the means to cerebral and emotional exploitation. This multi-layered role division and a further removed ness is behind the lack of representation, misrepresentation of the Bengali women which has a lasting effect till this day. which has a lasting effect till this day. This further removed the Bengali women from the literary scene as well as research fields. The further you are from the motion of power, the lower your chances of being recognized. This became especially true for the colonial women of Bengal.

To write this thesis is to shed some light and draw some attention to Bengali literature to better read, understand, analyze, and value the Bengali women. However, one work is never enough to work on the entirety Bengali women. Hence, this essay will be dedicated exclusively on ‘female desire’ and its meaning for the colonial Bengali women the early 1900s (to specify from 1900-1950). This dissertation seeks to explore the multidimensional and diverse sense of desire as well as the nature and connection between desire and Bengali women (from 1900- 1950), allowing it to focus about the lack of importance given to the matter of proper representation, understanding and analysis of Bengali women, her wants and her connection with desire. Despite having several literary pieces written on the stance and matter of the Bengali women of the early twentieth century we have selected the primary texts for this research based on accessibility, popularity, and understandability. The literary pieces that we will be looking into- *Chokher Bali* by Rabindranath Tagore, *Sultana’s Dream* by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein, and *Adarsha Hindu Hotel* by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay.

1.1 Overview of the Texts:

This segment of the research briefly discusses and summarizes the primary texts chosen for this research. This also contains some major factors that will be focused on from the texts throughout the thesis.

1.1.1 *Chokher Bali* – Rabindranath Tagore:

Personal Illustration

It won't be wrong to consider *Chokher Bali* as Rabindranath Tagore's one the most recognized pieces of work- that gives the scope to witness the complexities of the Bengali women, their desires, and the overall breakdown of a colonial Bengali family. Despite the influence of the novel the film adaptation of the story of 'Binodini and Ashalatha' by Rituparno Ghosh brought the novel its global recognition. However, the film adaptation ends up glamourizing 'Binodini' while focusing more on the perception of sin and sexuality, along with a one-dimensional representation of desire in the 1900s manner. However, this thesis will only investigate Tagore's original work and the complexities surrounding the four major characters of the novel. He (Tagore) set the premise of his work in the mold of the early 19th century India, in an especially fast-growing and transforming Bengal (Calcutta). The entire story investigates the inside life of the pitiful, agonizing, and unfulfilling lives of the widows while tapping into the deeper emotions related to these visibly powerless women and the unrecognized as well as the often-overlooked complexities present in their characteristics, and overall beings.

The story starts with Rajalakshmi, a wealthy widow residing in Calcutta with her son Mahendra, her widowed and childless sister-in-law Annapurna, with addition to Bihari – a childhood friend of Mahendra, trying to convince Mahendra to marry the beautiful and well-educated Binodini. However, Mahendra's rejection of the offer ended Bihari becoming the next target in line for the wealthy matriarch, which in terms also backfires. Hence, Binodini was married off to a distant relative of the widow who later passes away. This results in the start of a young widow's life, Binodini. Annapurna on the other hand proposed her orphan niece's marriage to Bihari, which changed its course due to Mahendra's change of heart to marry Ashalatha in place of his childhood friend.

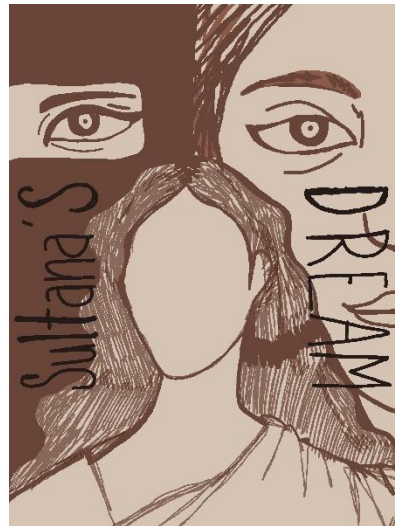
Ashalatha has been depicted as a simple girl, brought up in the shelter of a wealthy uncle where she grew up without being provided with any additional care other than a proper shelter. Ashalatha struggled and lacked in engaging in more than one relationship (be it in the relationship between husband and wife, or mother-in-law and daughter-in law, or the relation she shared with her 'chokher bali'). Due to her lack of knowledge in the ways of the household or 'ghorkonna,' which results in, ultimately devoting her entire time to her other half by being the faithful and loving companion to Mahendra while failing in every other aspect of the household realm. Rajlaksmi was infuriated by everything leading her to leave for her birthplace to evaluate the faithfulness of her son toward her. However, this plan failed miserably instead she ended up meeting and bringing Binodini with her to Calcutta, who in time ends up taking charge of the entire household while strategically befriendng Asha, giving her the name 'Choker Bali'.

The relationship among the four central characters Binodini, Ashalatha, Mahendra and Bihari get complicated as their inner desires and feelings towards each other start to come out one after another. Binodini, despite her true admiration and love for Bihari, ends up in a clandestine affair with Mahendra. Bihari left Calcutta due to the potential disrespect that

could be brought upon the simple and pure Ashalatha, after Mahendra's accusation of Bihari having feelings towards Asha. After the sudden revelation of the forbidden affair between the widowed Binodini and the already married Mahendra, the couple fled while leaving behind Ashalatha and a weak Rajlaxmi. Here, Binodini's proposal of travelling to the country was also a triumph to find Bihari.

All three of them did end up meeting - after Bihari learnt about the sickly state of Rajlaxmi and brought Mahendra and Binodini back to Calcutta. The final encounter of all the characters portrayed Bihari's realization of Binodini's true calibre and capability to love and support just like any other woman, and Mahendra's discovery of a stronger, more confident as well as capable Ashalatha. The novel ends with Binodini's departure for Kashi after the death of the household matriarch.

1.1.2 *Sultana's Dream* – Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain:



Personal Illustration

The short story was first published in 1905 in the Ladies' Magazine and later in 1908 was published as a book. Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is a pioneer in Indian feminism (especially in the Muslim community), as well as one of the greatest influencers promoting

female education and the rights of women. Sultana's Dream is written in the form of science fiction in the early part of the author's English learning journey.

The story begins with the anonymous protagonist "thinking lazily of the condition of Indian womanhood." The feminist short story got its name 'Sultana' as a symbol of the female equivalent of the masculine word 'Sultan,' literally referring to a king or someone of the royal authoritative position as the male here. So, the story proceeds with the narrator falling asleep or in a sleep like a state while sitting in her room.

She then met up with an old friend, Sister Sara, A friend, enters her room and wishes her good morning, despite it being the nighttime. Sara offers her to come outside and join her for a walk in the garden, and at that time the narrator discovers that there is indeed daylight outside, and the streets are filled with people. The narrator is ready to be embarrassed, afraid she will encounter a man while she is walking in the street in broad daylight, an action that is taboo for women at the time. strangely enough, even though the streets were filled with people but there were no men out.

Passers-by start to laugh at her in a language unfamiliar to her. Sister Sara describes the situation that which they are saying she looks "mannish," and that she is timid just like men. The narrator is clueless in this regard but suddenly realizes that the person she was walking with was not Sister Sara but a stranger. She tells the woman of her discomfort in walking around the streets without a veil, still referring to her as "Sister Sara." To this, the stranger reveals that she was in Ladyland, a place where she can run around without worrying about a veil.

The narrator looks around and finds Ladyland to be like a garden, where the streets are filled with flowers. Sister Sara says that Calcutta could have the same aesthetic as well only if the men of the city wanted it to be. To this, the narrator raises the question about the men, to which Sister Sara explains the situation of Ladyland. Ladyland is as the name suggests a

place where women are in power, and the men of the stature are kept indoors, just the way women are kept indoors in all of India. Here the 'zenanas' do exist, however only for men. Sister Sara did explain the stance of Ladyland on this matter while portraying the gender roles, norms and positions present in Calcutta, a place that our narrator comes from, where everything is decided by men, whose strength makes them "lord and master." To this sister, Sara argues with the metaphor of lions. She argues that lions are stronger than men, but that does not let lions rule the world. She exclaims that the women in India have lost their rights by being ignorant of their own best interests. The narrator and Sister Sara sit together and at this time Sister Sara begins to embroider, explaining how the men of Ladyland have to do this in the zenana, women in Ladyland still do this work, rather than giving it to men, who by nature lack the patience to thread a needle. She explains that she can perform chores from the domestic life of women while being responsible for the office work of men due to women being more efficient. Sister Sara also tells the narrator that there are no epidemics or even mosquito bites in Ladyland. It is rare for anyone to die at an early age. She then proceeds to show the narrator their solar technologies. She showed that they use solar energy to cook their food. She says these modern technologies were developed some years ago after the country's queen made female education mandatory while barring marriage for women before the age of 21. Women's universities invented ways to draw water from the sky putting an end to excess rain and storms and energy from the sun. She also explained the history behind the conflict between the men of the society and the conflict that occurred years ago with a foreign king which is the reason why Ladyland became a reality.

Since then, says Sister Sara, no one has dared try to invade Ladyland, and women have ruled while men remained in the zenanas – in the shadow. She reveals that the Queen sent a letter out explaining that the men would be called out again if their services were required and so far, it has been ten years that the stability of Ladyland has been kept put by the women. Sister

Sara explains that the system is called mardana rather than 'zenanas' deriving from 'Marda' or 'mard,' the Urdu word for "man." And ever since the establishment of the mardana system, there has been no need for the criminal justice system as there has been no crime. Sister Sara continues to explain the technological advancement of Ladyland, something becoming the key factor behind the labor-saving mode in Ladyland. She describes how there are no railroads nor paved streets, making it possible to have no railroads or street accidents taking place. She adds that a sprinkler system keeps everyone cool in summer, while stored solar energy works as a heater keeping them warm in winter. Their religion is based on "Love and Truth." And not the typical concept of 'belief and power.'

After her encounter with the entire situation, the narrator asks to meet the Queen, and Sister Sara obligingly assembles a hydrogen-powered aircar to take them to her. The Queen greets them both and tells the narrator about their trade: Ladyland trades only with the women of other countries, not men. They prefer to seek knowledge, not wealth while trying to enjoy anything that nature provides and has in store for them.

The narrator tours Ladyland but suddenly wakes up discovering her back in her chair in India and with the realization that Ladyland was just a dream.

1.1.3 *Adarsha Hindu Hotel* – Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay:



Personal Illustration

Adarsha Hindu Hotel is a novel based on a poor brahman cook named Hajari and his quest to own a hotel. It was first published in 1940 and 17 years after its first publication a film was made based on it as well. Though Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay is mostly known for his literary masterpiece *Pather Panchali*, *Adarsha Hindu Hotel* enables his readers to taste his proficiency in the art of storytelling. Here Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay takes a simple character of a lowly cook from a small hotel, his problems and how he overcomes all his problems one after the another while keeping his values and morals codes intact. The book preaches to convey that no matter how hard life gets one can always succeed or manifest some of their desires via honesty and diligence ultimately paying off.

The book is the life story of a middle-aged man who was ill-treated by the employer and a person at work and later kicked out of his job as a cook. He gained financial aid and the initial loan on his hotel from Atashi and Kusum. His diligence and sincerity are a few of the most prominent aspects of his character as well as his relationship with the female characters are prominent themes of the novel.

As mentioned before this novel was published in 1940 at a time when the entire Indian Subcontinent was going through a constant phase of transformation. People, their ways of thinking and perceiving life were changing, and so were their connection with the simplicity of life and its approaches. The urban areas like Calcutta and other cities were getting out of the reach of the rural areas at an unseen pace. At a time like this, when people were writing to talk about the bigger issues using larger and complicated words, Bibhuti aimed his work to talk about the simpler lives of the subcontinent. He took a simpler approach to talk about life which in terms increased the readability of his work. He brought back and reinforced the strength and ability of honesty, diligence, and sincerity along with other moral codes. However, these are not the only thing that the novel has to offer. The book highlights the dynamic between a father and a daughter, and at times it highlights the connection between the divine and the mortal.

Though the novel is primarily based on a male lead or protagonist, it is the connection between the female characters and the male lead that keeps the cycle going. In every speck of Hajari's life, he had been saved by the female characters. In a time when girls and women were struggling constantly, this novel creates a peaceful picture in front of us. Hajari refers to almost every female character as 'maa' throughout the book. Though it is a figurative speech it still brings out two different yet powerful connotations. 1.) The harmonical relation between a father and a daughter, and 2.) the females are treated from a more religious perspective (as Hajari was a brahman and Hindu, his referred names of the females can be seen as him acknowledging and worshipping them as 'Durga' or other deities). Every female character has been provided with their voice and is shown to have some sense of independence as well.

Hajari's consistency in being moral till the end of the novel is one of its most intriguing factors. From the beginning, the reader connects with Hajari as one after another misfortune

keeps on surrounding him. At times even I thought for Hajari to go for an easier path or act rashly. However, in terms of the character that never happens, and it deliberately keeps on being right and just towards his situations drawing a simple yet effective line between the moral and immoral aspects of life.

1.2 Authors and the texts:

All the texts and authors selected for the essay are carefully picked due to the shared connections and views on the female life of the time, also, the question of femininity at a time when the entire world was going through a rapid transformation. However, the problem or issue that this essay strives to deal with is the lack of recognition of the growth of the female population of Bengal. Whenever the transformations or changes have been mentioned in terms of the colonial Indian sub-continent; people and scholars have always forgotten the female part of the society, the causes, effects, and changes that had been actively taking place inside all the 'zenanas' and 'andarmahals.'

The texts have been selected and divided while considering the religious, personal, social, and political factors of the authors. The focal point of this is to point out and prove two very specific and significant points that were present in the early 19th century: a) the true embodiment of the word desire in the life of a female population (specifically of the then Bengal), and b) the diverse yet interconnectedness found in this said 'desire' for the women, something much greater than the currently appropriated ways of viewing gender and cultural studies.

All the stories and plotlines selected as both the texts for the essay have two aspects in common at their very core. The first is that all the female characters have a keen sense and thirst for freedom, reflecting desire in all shapes, forms, and sizes. Despite the striking differences among the characters, their developments, upbringings, experiences, and socio-political standpoints as well as their positions, despite all their odds, every one of them brings

out a new and unique taste of the changes and transformations, as well as struggles of the lives of a woman in the 19th century Bengal. The second is that the characters somehow ended up making the strict and rigid concept of 'andermahal' seem both breakable, fluid, and interchangeable with themselves. This fluidity in nature might at first glance come off as simple, straightforward and at times boring and unimportant, however, in reality, this is a feature unique to cultural studies that bring out a more appropriate, -stable understanding of the people of the specified era. This one-way-fluid nature in the concept of 'Andar mahal' or 'zenana' works as a complete meal where each female character is an ingredient and their combination of the meal.

Chapter2: Background:

To understand and connect to the theme of 'desire,' the semantic transformation of the word, as well as the connection and tension that this creates in the understanding of the females in addition to their desires. This understanding works as the window connecting us to the lifestyle of the women behind the closed doors and the lives of those that were residing in the pages of Rabindranath, Rokeya, and Bibhuti's literary works. Hence, it is somewhat essential to gather relevant and important knowledge on the events and life events taking place in the early 20th century Bengal.

2.1 History, Culture, Literature, and the lack of feminine representation:

The entirety of the 1900s was filled to the brim with historical events, cultural and social reformations, change and development in science, arts, and commerce, so on and many more throughout the world. This includes the Indian subcontinent as well as Bengal in particular. However, every document that we can access is mostly about, from and by the male population, extraordinarily little is about the other half of the population, the females. The one consistent information that we can put our fingers on is the 'zenanas' or 'andar mahals,' where women were kept 'protected' from the outer crueller world. So much so that even formal education couldn't make it as a part of the list of the glorified 'andar mahal'.

Even on the political ground all the front-line leaders, as well as about 98% of the party members, were male and barely any female present in the process, so much so that while naming a female nationalist the only names that we come across are Pritilata Waddedar and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein. This was primarily due to the extremely low literacy rate of women and the lack of exposure to both political and current affairs. It is also important to note that the lives of the female population around the globe varied drastically dependent on

geography, race, nationality, economic stance, marital status, and education. The European way of living was not the same as the Indian or even the Bengali way of living. Neither was the Bengali way of living close to being like the Creole lifestyle despite their shared identity as colonies. This has always been a sad reality for the female counterparts of every great civilization even, be it the Romans, or the Greeks. Female Children have always been thought of as the burden of the family as opposed to their male siblings. A female child was either killed just after birth or was kept only as a means of reproduction. However, if they were to 'desire' anything other than being and living their whole life in the making and being the trophy wife of a well-established man, their desires were viewed as a sin as women are just a 'lesser' version of their male counterpart. This paved the way for discriminative gender politics dealing with the appearance, aesthetics, as well as antics of a woman which are set standards made and revised by the other sex (classical paintings are the prime example of this). Subsequently, due to this overwhelming amount of overshadowing female representation in literary texts over time has also been sacrificed.

The overall representations found in the pre-modern texts come majorly from the male perspective. This perspective, however, was never taken into consideration nor was it appropriated, rather women or the female characters or protagonists mostly served as characters that denote the flaws in human nature, also at times the cause of all temptations and ultimately sins. Even if this was the scenario of the literary text the female characters barely served to strengthen the protagonist who was often male

2.2 Religion, spirituality and the Feminine:

Religion, faith, and belief are a major part of human existence and in the overall character building of everyone. Now, whether or not an individual believes in the Divine or any form of superior entity, his/ her surrounding environment ends up being believers of some type of

certain faith practice, or in most cases, the surrounding environment is a collection of several varied religions, beliefs, or faith practices. This has always been an extremely common part of our lives. The Indian subcontinent has always been known, admired, and recognized for its diversity in cultural, geographical, social, political, and religion. The Indian subcontinent being the homeland of four of the major global religions, namely- Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, is one of the most diverse places for intermingling faith practices. With this, you have the fastest-growing religion Islam with the addition of regional local religions. Hence, there was diversity in lifestyles as well as the 'parda' system based on the initial belief structure of any given population of a certain religious belief.

According to Hinduism as well as many other Semitic and polytheistic religious practices, females are regarded as highly as the female divinities or goddesses. The use of the word 'maa' becomes the most significant part of this matter, as 'Durga,' 'Kali,' 'Lakshmi' and other goddesses are also considered as 'Maa.' The saying 'wives and daughters are the bringers of good luck and fortune' in the rural Bangla ('Lakshmi-Monto,' can be translated as 'like the goddess Lakshmi, who brings good luck. And fortune), also derives from this idea of females being the 'maa' that is at times on par with 'Maa.' This also conveys, to some extent, the message of a child's blind trust and belief in its mother, creating a differential portrait of total innocence, admiration, and faith towards one and the complete lack of it for the other.

In Christianity, Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ is also known as the 'Virgin Mary,' denoting, and symbolizing her innocence and purity. Ideas such as purity, love, innocence, and chastity are both the most common ones throughout any and every faith practice while being the most reoccurring ones as well. Islam has a unique way of approaching its women. Even here we can find the importance provided to a mother over the father. If we look at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, it is identifiable that the first Muslim was a woman

(Khadija), the first investor of Islam was also a woman, and the first martyr of Islam was also a woman (Sumayya). As Muslims only believe Allah to be the only God, the Quran do convey nurturing, caring and loving messages as well as more strict, straightforward, and logical messages, creating a balance between the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' energies leading to two especially important teachings- i. That Allah is the most balanced, which also broadcasts his greatness, ii. the importance of both the masculine and the feminine. One cannot surpass the other, nor is one in any form lesser than the other.

The same thing can also be found among the more spiritually inclined people. The belief is that the dual energies (the masculine and the feminine), or the duality of energies work as the equalizer of the universe. The idea of yin and yang from the Chinese zodiac and myth also focuses on this idea of balance through the presence of both the energies where yin represents the feminine and yang represents the masculine energy. According to many spiritual schools, it is believed that every person has both the masculine as well as the feminine energy present within them via balancing a person can attain a balanced and peaceful state of mind.

However, due to religion, spirituality, and our connection with them comes first from our family and later on from multiple institutions, the personal understanding, as well as the subjective, individualistic approach towards religion and the individual, private connection with one Creator, gets hampered throughout the process. This is not fundamentally religion's fault, but rather the result of our blind faith and lack of interest as well as this idea that the divine is an untouchable force is caused due to the often represented, misrepresented, and falsely represented personalized beliefs of what the 'God' might have said in the respective scriptures. This ultimately ended up creating worse than good in the process at times. This is exactly what happens when a female's position is being described. Even though the scriptures don't call one gender better than the other one it is us humans who have successfully created

this distinction between the two genders as this gives more power to one side of the spectrum than the other. This sense of comparison prevails the way to greed within us prevailing ways to power, and we get stuck in the endless loop of selfish, power-hungry ways of living.

2.3 Female Literacy:

Education is the most major factor in today's day and age as well as the second basic human right, however arguably the most conflicting right to achieve globally. However, the road to female education has always been from the beginning of time an extremely tough feat to achieve, especially because a women's only duty was thought to be to bear children and carry out the family name. The identity of a woman started with the name of her father which after marriage transformed into the name of her husband, and finally if widowed, she would be known by the name of her male child. This lack of identity is a result of a successfully performed training that has been constantly going on for generations upon generation as well as a lost and complex sense of 'self.' A child's upbringing creates a stimulatory pattern within it which eventually ends up dictating one's behaviour. Even though this is an important part of today's day and age as it has opened doors to better understand both child psychology and the power of patterns over a child, and other aspects of developmental studies simultaneously. However, some points should be noted from the historical background of raising a male and a female child, the different treatments between siblings depending on the gender, and finally, a continuation of the same process as mentioned previously from one generation to the next keeping the chain of family teachings alive. For a better understanding of the selected texts for this essay, we will be focusing specifically on the time frame from 1900 to 1950.

During the first half of the 20th century, the Bengal was under an extremely well recognizable transition phase. Bengal was transforming in its infrastructure, politics, social

conduct, and religious standpoints, and thanks to the introduction of the British governed education system the basic form of the education system was also transforming at a rapid rate. Due to the sudden change in the education system, our previous religious and regional education institutions were sacrificed to a noticeable degree. The easy work opportunities became more significant in the then Bengal resulting in more people showing interest in the western form of education boycotting the 'pathshalas,' 'maqtabs,' and 'madrasas. This ultimately resulted in a conflict between these newly created modern Bengalis and the outdated ones. However, even in this equation, we are barely talking about the female part of the society as women were not allowed to study in the previous religious and regional educational institutions. For Muslim women in particular despite the requirement for them to learn to read the Quran they were by no means were allowed to learn Arabic from a madrasa, rather they were taught strictly behind the closed doors of their 'zenanas', a place common in all the texts from the Muslim female writers. Let us just take Begum Rokeya as our example, her life before her marriage was the life of every wealthy Muslim woman of her time. Even if we compare her post married life with the one of her older sisters it is visible how the life of her elder sister was still compressed, controlled by the 'zenana' system. The only change noticeable was that the forms of the 'zenanas' were different. This was just the story of a portion of the female population, let us move on to a different part which is the Hindu female population of the Bengal.

The Hindus of the 20th century were a step ahead in the race of progressive attitude toward female education, however, were not progressive in terms of letting their daughters be independent or letting them out of the security of their homes unattended. Education was mostly provided via the same procedure as their Muslim sisters. To popularize western education in the 20th-century nuns offered to instruct the girls and women English, classical music, and etiquette, familiarising them with classic literature. However, these were only the

lives of a handful of the upper-class women of the time. The middle class as well as the lower class of the urban area as well as the whole female population of the rural part of the Bengal were not part of the equation of education and literacy rate.

Chapter 3: Literature Review:

The purpose of this research is to answer the questions ‘What is desire?’ ‘What is the relationship between desire and Bengali colonial women of India?’, and finally, ‘Why is it important to have proper representation of women while talking about desire?’. I believe the primary sources selected for this research are perfect texts that can properly depict the answers to these questions. The primary texts selected for this research are: - *Chokher Bali* by Rabindranath Tagore, *Sultana’s Dream* by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein, and *Adarsha Hindu Hotel* by Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay. All of them represent a completely different aspect of colonial Bengali woman, creating a multifunctional as well as multidimensional portrayal of the Bengali women. Though it is unfortunate that the multidimensionality of the Bengali women is not gotten proper attention yet, however, the overall purpose of this research is to bring light on the matter for a better understanding as well as clearer representation of the women of Bengal and what ‘desire’ really was for them. Despite the improvement seen even in today’s India is yet to be true for the position of women. This is actively connected to the past neglect towards women, particularly Bengali women.

3.1 Colonialism and The Clashes of the Worlds:

Looking at the major literary pieces of the 19th century one can almost always see that a colonised Indian woman has always been written in the mould of a ghost. To elaborate on the matter, we will be looking at E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*. One of the things that can be easily noticed in E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* is in the ignorance toward the colonised women of India. are not even part of the conversations of anyone. This removed sense of identity makes the women of the colonial India to be the perfect ‘minored minority.’ This makes the position of the ultimate other, in this case, colonial Indian woman in a flow of disadvantage in every aspect of their lives, hence all their desires became faded, unclear, and

got lost in the translation. Their only identity is that they are the carrier of the next generation, the tool for reproduction.

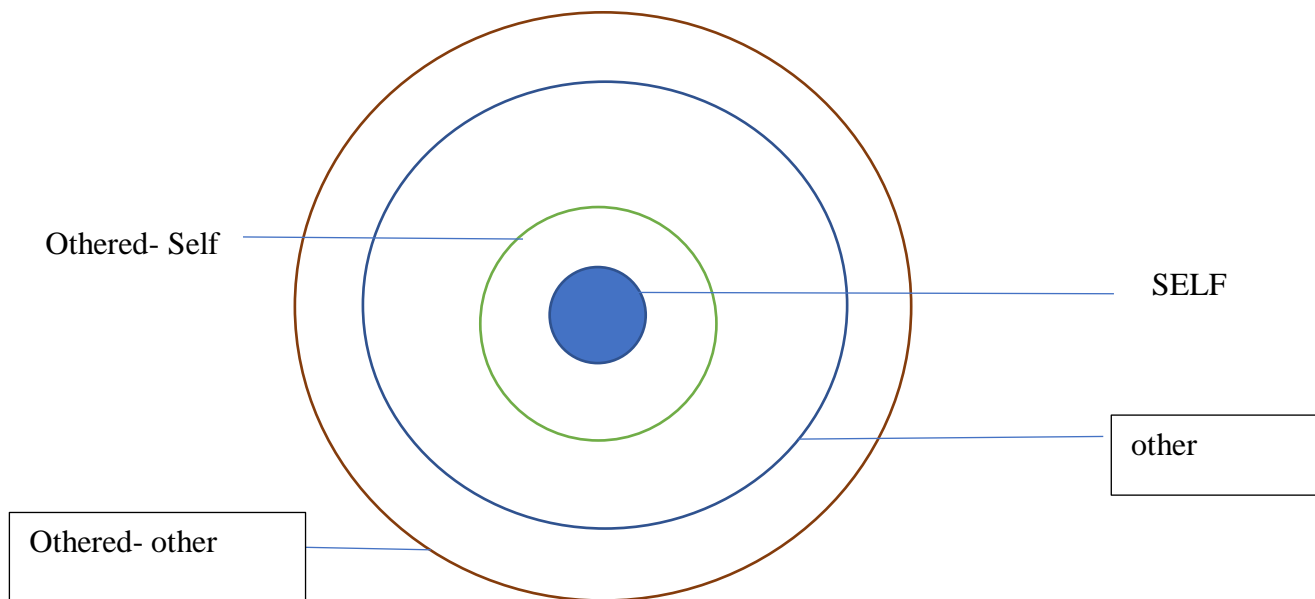


Figure: The imperialist India

The further removed one is from the core, the more neglected his/her state becomes, the more unrecognized they turn into. In the above the figure 'SELF' represents the colonial man, the 'Othered-Self' represents the colonial woman, 'other' simply stands for the colonized man, and finally the 'othered-other' is the visual representation of the colonized woman (here the Bengali women from the time of 1900 to 1950). As the figure represents, the colonized women are the furthest away from the core, hence it is her who is the most neglected.

Colonialism as well as the portrayal of the colonial rule has always been a major theme, and subject matter in world literature. This is particularly true for The Indian subcontinent as well. Now, it is true that Colonialism is not a term exclusively catered towards the British colonial rule, and the Indian Subcontinent was not only colonialisied by the British empire. However, as the British rule became the pioneering force which dictated the overall understanding of the word 'Indian,' hence, the primary if not the only focus group of studies for this thesis will be based on the British colonial rule. According to *Stanford*

Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 'Colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another. One of the difficulties in defining colonialism is that it is hard to distinguish it from imperialism. Frequently the two concepts are treated as synonyms.' Colonialism has portrayed itself to be a multifunctional, multidimensional factors; hence we will be focusing on the major sectors that has faced the wave of transformation the most, among them are- education, culture, socio-economic stance. Though it is true that our lives today have come much forward than the early 1900. However, this forwardness has not been able to amplify the power, stature, status, station, and position of women in today's India. In *Women Without Choice: Female Infanticide and the Rhetoric of Overpopulation in Postcolonial India* Dube talks about the rising issue infanticide and birth control which gave a new meaning to the tag women being unimportant despite infanticide was not something we stumbled upon ourselves rather something that was part of the beautiful teaching of the colonial rule. She mentions,

Teaching about the violence against Indian women means battling the persistent Orientalism that views Indian women as passive victims of absolute and undifferentiated customs of patriarchal oppression. Our extensive historical and literary research demonstrates that female infanticide was never uniformly or universally practiced in India. For example, in nineteenth-century colonial India, female in confined to a few landowning, propertied families and communities in certain regions in northwest India, and with the exception of one tribe, female infanticide was unknown in southern India. (Dube, p.74)

She continues, 'The British belief that female infanticide in India was related to the family's burden of providing an expensive dowry for their daughter is a viewpoint shared by many in India' (Dube 75). The main reason for bringing this point out here is to highlight the inability for our colonial rulers to be perceptive towards a multi-layered nation and trying to make it as

one- tracked and less diverse as possible. Also, their own lack of interest as well as overall neglect towards stopping something they would have stopped for themselves.

Despite the difference created by the West with their glorified western ways, they still failed to free the women India from the boundaries of their four walls. been Despite West's deliberate self-made triumph to be recognized as the superior race with better, bolder, as well as brighter ideas on the distinction between civilized and uncivilized behaviours, Akbar (the third Mughal emperor) beat them in an area that was untouched by the west. This was Akbar's acceptance of India's state before his reign. Amartya Sen in his book *The Argumentative Indian* states on Akbar's capability in capturing plurality says, 'The first was the 'acceptance of plurality,' embracing the regular presence of a multitude of beliefs and convictions. The second was the 'dialogic commitment' in the form of Akbar's visionary insistence on the need to have conversations and interchanges among the holders of different beliefs and convictions' (39). A far reaching almost prophetic vision that even many centuries after the death of Akbar and the essential fall of the multidimensional, multicultural structure built up by Akbar that Winston Churchill had said, India was no more a country than Equator.' This is a direct indication to Churchill's severely strained intellect on the multifunctional, multicultural root of the Indian Subcontinent. Which in terms became one of the causes for Bengali women's one-dimensional character arc in both in real life as well as literature.

3.2 Conflict Over the Female and Femininity of Bengali Women:

In the early 19th century due to the sudden change in every aspect of India took a new form, the identity of the Indian woman started to embody a new form as well. From being in denial of their miserable states they started to face the problems that created the state. In the 19th century women started to come out of their houses (primarily the Hindu women of Bengal) for education. The idea of having a career started to assume space in their minds. Due to the

rapid change in the rights, desires of the European women as well as the massive growth of western feminist ideologies were already shifting at an ultrasonic speed. However, even then the primary concern for this part of the world was to get out of the extreme 'pardah' while looking for a chance to be educated. Begum Rokeya writes in *The Secluded Ones* on the horrific reality of Purdah,

Fortunately for me, the room had an old four-poster. I crawled under it hardly daring to breathe- lest those heartless women hear the sound and look under the bed. There were a few empty boxes and old stools stored in the room. ... We arranged them around me to offer better cover. No one, except Halu [older sister's son], came to ask me whether I needed anything. He would bring me some snacks or a glass of water when asked to do so. Sometimes, though, he would go down to fetch something and would not come back for a long time. ... I had to stay in this miserable plight for four days... (pp. 29-30)

It was not the Muslims who were stuck doing their homely 'duty' as an obligatory part of religion. The other side of the coin, the Hindu female population were struck with the same situation themselves as well. To this Sharada Sugirtharajah in the essay *Hinduism and Feminism: Some Concerns*,

The notion of dharma has a wide of range of meanings (such as duty, righteousness, eternal law, conduct, behavior, morality and so forth) and it has more to do with "duty" than with "rights." This applies equally to people who have a dharma to each other and to the family, but an undue emphasis has been placed on women's duty to their husbands. Furthermore, one's place within the family hierarchy has to do with age, gender, and seniority. Both younger male and female members are expected to show deference to older members. The question is how does one affirm one's individual aspirations in the context of hierarchical relationships? (101)

Despite the religious differences (as one side is a monotheistic religion and the other is a polytheistic religion, as well as in the ritualistic differences) between the females of the Muslim and Hindu communities, they were allies in their shared isolated miseries. In *Muslim and Hindu Women's Public and Private Behaviours: Gender, Family and Communalized Politics in India* Sonalde Desai and Gheda Temsah states,

... This seclusion is established and maintained in many different ways. Physical shielding of one's face - veiling - is but one instance. Veiling includes using a sari or dupatta to cover one's face (known as ghunghat among north Indian Hindus) or wearing a burqa among Muslims (2311).

Another remarkably interesting thing to be noted here is that due to the colonial connection many aristocratic male heirs were going abroad (in this case in particular London) and the men of the colonial Indian at that time came to first hand connection with the ways of their colonisers, the taste of freedom, which they bring back with them. Due to their latest ventures, the Indian men developed a new 'desire' towards the western women that they find desirable, a woman who does not exist in this part of the globe. This sudden change in the Indian men occurred due to the cultural differences between the European women and the Indian women. From birth (at the time) an Indian daughter would go through a rigorous training on the ways of becoming the 'lakshminonto meye' and wife, teaching them total submission. However, the European women introduced the Indian man to new tastes other than submission. Rather than being submissive and talking about only the simple things of life, they brought in complex conversations, as well as had shown a sense of individualism with in themselves. The difference in characteristics and behaviour became stimulating to the Indian man, who was previously only used to being subjected to submission. This also became the cause behind the desperate pleas of the Bengali women to try to imitate the ways

of the modern women from the west without even realising that they have created a new veil, a false identity that is far from the modern way of approaching life. We can find a similar situation between Mahendra, Binodini, and Ashalatha. In spite Mahendra's initial attraction over Ashalatha, it was extremely short lived. The whole idea of his 'desire' shifted almost immediately after his encounter with Binodini. However, the sad reality remains as this, that in the name of copying a way of living that is not their own, every potential for the women finding their own identities were compromised.

3.3 *Chokher Bali*- To the 'women' named 'Change':

Rabindranath Tagore's *Chokher Bali* is a multidimensional novel, where each female character is provided with multiple characteristics. The film adaptation however fails to catch the closely knitted diversity within the female characters that has prevailed to last throughout the novel- something common among all female characters of the writer. On this matter, in *Choreographing gender in Colonial Bengal* Prarthana Purkayastha states, 'I would argue, however, that Tagore's awareness of women's issues and support of women's work predates the early 1900s' (Purkayastha, 71). The melodic choreographic approach that Tagore utilizes to bring out connections between the sexual representation and the more form fitted social status, through dance in understanding as well creating a web that connects one woman with multiple roles at once. Prarthana's statement on the matter,

Tagore at a time when women performers were either associated with a courtesan culture (hence considered sexually available) or "folk" culture (hence unsophisticated), we witness a socio-cultural revolution that cast bourgeois women in central roles beyond the stereotypes of mother, wife, or daughter. Tagore's dance-drama heroines who took centre stage in the 1930s were icons of fringeness: a mythological female warrior (in *Chitrangada* 1936), an untouchable and social outcast (in *Chandalika* 1938), and a court dancer (in *Shyama* 1939), none of whom occupied

recognizable middle-class female subject positions, even though these roles were played by young women from Bengali middle-class families. (69)

It is true that Tagore worked on the issues related women, however, the performances of his melodic works were often dictated by the strong, as well as flawed patriarchal society.

Religion has always been weaponized so that the ones in power can have a steady and stable control over the weak, and throughout the course of time women have always been placed in the position where they have been dominated by the misused, and abused religion. The collective effort of the abuse of religion by the leaders of the society. Hence many women ended up rejecting the weapon that was being used against them by the patriarchal society. However, rather than solving the matter this made it far worse, as their rejection of religion was them closing their eyes on an issue. Rather than fighting against the ones weaponizing religion, they ended up accusing the weapon itself, making the situation of Bengal even worse in terms of religion and tolerance. Sharada Sugirtharajah while describing about Hinduism and its bitter relation with feminism mentions,

As with the term Hinduism,' the label feminism, too, is problematic. Not all Indian women scholars are comfortable with the term feminism. Madhu Kishwar, the editor of *Manushi*, an Indian women's journal, rejects the term feminism because she finds all "isms" inadequate, and because the term is closely linked with the Western women's movement, but she has "no quarrel with western feminist movements in their own context."² Rather than being caught up in disentangling Western assumptions and nuances that go with the term, she prefers to dispense with it. (Sugirtharajah, 97)

She states again, 'It is important to bring out a variety of Hindu perspectives on women's issues, and to guard against homogenizing Hindu patriarchy' (104).

During the early 19th century, female education was being popularized however, it was not catered for every woman. In Macaulay's essay *Minute on Education, February 2,*

1835, we finally get the full picture behind English medium based education, the causes, the target audience as well as the selectively neglected group. Macaulay in his essay (the better 'race,' the oldest face of the 'white saviourism') elaborates,

'I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value.' He continues on the inferiority of the Eastern languages with, 'I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the western literature is indeed fully admitted by these members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education.'

On the superiority of the Oriental education system Macaulay documents,

'It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the paltriest abridgments used at preparatory schools in England.'

Mind I mention, if looked carefully on can easily see the flaw in the oriental education system. The system revolves around the notion of creating an 'obedient student,' who maybe smart yet due to the intense desire to become the 'good boy' in the class loses the rebellious spark of childhood in his pre-adolescent (training starts at home). The primary objective for curating such an education system was to- 'the languages of western Europe civilized Russia. I cannot doubt that they will do for the 'Hindoo what they have done for the Tartar.' And if we look at the training of Binodini, we see that with her knowledge, etiquette, and way of thinking are the characteristics. of the 'good boy' that the Oriental education system aimed to make, so it seems to be obvious what was the original driving force behind her desires were. Her driving force was never desire sprouted from lust rather it has always been desire sprouted from jealousy and anguish.

Now, if one wants to understand *Choker Bali* and the internal conflict among the women of the novel this one statement by Bharati Ray is just the thing for him/her,

Traditionally, the most important person for a bride was her mother-in-law since custom allowed her no contact with her husband during the day. 'It would tend to destroy the joint family if conjugal relationship gained relative primacy' (Gore 1968: 7). A mother-in-law, with but few exceptions, evinced little sympathy for her daughter-in-law, presumably because the latter posed a potential hazard to a power, she herself had acquired after a long period of waiting and persevering.

This is especially evident in the conflicting relation between Rajlakshmi and Ashalatha, however, due to the initial rejection of Mahin's proposal with Ashalatha to the built up dissatisfaction led the road for Binodini get closer and closer to both of them. Where Binodini was jealous of Asha's position, Asha on the other hand put Binod in the position of worship; both taking two extreme steps.

3.4 *Sultana's Dream*- Into the new beginning:

Debali Mookerjee-Leonard in *Futuristic Technologies and Purdah in the Feminist Utopia*:

Rokeya S. Hossain's 'Sultana's Dream' highly praises Begum Rokeya's work for the simplicity and finds the plot to be 'uncomplicated,' she writes, 'Hossain's diction in *Sultana's dream* is simple, with satire replacing the anger so palpable in her essays. The plot too is uncomplicated. (145)'. As one of the fundamental points that Begum Rokeya makes is 'the importance of female education and female literacy' Debali acknowledges it with her statement, 'Hossain recognised the value of education as an instrument for challenging conformity to tyrannical customs imposed by patriarchy. Women's education was a matter of deep personal interest to her' (146).

Other than the obvious scientific approach found in her work Debali also makes it a point to look at anti-imperial stance of the literary master. On Hossain's anti-imperial stance Debali Mokkerjea-Leonard says,

Sultana's waking up from her nap at the end of the narrative might also be read as a metaphor for other awakenings. Besides its criticism of patriarchy, 'Sultana's dream' also articulates, although fleetingly, anti-imperial sentiments via the queen of Ladyland who tells Sultana, ...Clearly, the queen is a foil to the 'Empress of India',... Hossain also voices her anti- imperialist position in Padmarag, where the founder of Tarini Bhavan, Dina-Tarini Sen, refuses financial support for her philanthropic work from the (colonial) government and from rulers of Indian princely states who are loyal to the British empire. Hossain's feminism thus intersects with her anti-colonial views.

If looked at just from the overall plot and storyline *Sultana's Dream* brings out a new *Herland* (by Charlotte Perkins Gilman) through her 'Ladyland.' While *Herland* totally cancelling the existing men (as the women of *Herland* are only made of mothers, due to 'parthenogenesis,' the presence of a father is completely disregarded. The dystopian atmosphere also making it impossible for a different gender to appear. Other than their accidental encounter with the three men, the existence of men can be easily forgotten. However, *Herland* is also a world inside the world we live in. A land outcasted by choice. However, in *Sultana's Dream*, Ladyland, instead of completely getting rid of a whole population of a specific gender tries to manipulate the situation. Instead of asking the question, 'how would the world look id there were no men?' Begum Rokeya asks the question, 'what would it feel like in an upside-down world, where men stay in, and women stay out?' Also, rather than looking at the gender issue like the utopic novel Begum Rokeya Indianizes the story by not introducing 'parthenogenesis' or virgin birth and attracts less attention into the notion of 'eugenics and 'motherhood,' rather she makes it a point to look at

the issues mostly faced by the colonial ‘sultanats,’ which is the extremist pardah system. Whereas Gilman through her use of a male narrator tried to make a point through the then extremely sexist environment (Terry being the embodiment of misogynistic, sexist practices of the time. He also served the position of patriarchy, as he kept on struggling against the matriarchy portrayed in *Herland*), Begum Rokeya brought both the tormenting and crippling anxiety that come with a male dominant veil-based environment. In *Herland* the women do not act ‘feminine,’ however, in *Ladyland* it is our narrator who finds herself in a timid position because of the male- female role reversal. Where Gilman entrusted the men with the knowledge from the women of *Herland*, we find women taking charge in both external as well as internal affairs (example- embroidery).

3.5 *Adarsha Hindu Hotel*- To the mothers of their fathers:

Bibhutibhushon Bandyopadhyay is well known as well as acknowledged for his simple and easy writing style while authoring stories that were not city oriented. Just like stories his female characters are also very simple, they lack in being the wind of change where Rabindranath and his portrayal of a modern Bengali woman flourishes. His female characters also lack in having a firm cerebral presence in the story that Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and her characters provide plenty examples to go through (even his stories are the complete opposite of the genre the other two work on, as his works are more focused on the simple ways of life while the focus being on the days dreams, nature of the rural Bengal, and her peace-loving children). Rather than complexities of the urban world (that is a lot closer to the ‘civilized world’ or the ‘west’), his stories are constantly focused on simplicity, nature, and life as a whole. Bibhutibhushan brought in his works is the stories of the rural area, and its hardworking people at a time when the entire Indian subcontinent was going through massive transformations at an exponential speed, among all the chaos and rapid shifts and changes he brings his reader back to a place of tranquillity, serenity, and raw human emotions. His use of

language also brings out the ‘maa-bhokto’ energy into his works which was frowned upon by the then rulers, to which Sharada Sugirtharajah in the essay *Hinduism and Feminism: Some Concerns* documents,

Hindu devotion to the divine feminine shocked the Victorian morality and Puritan sensibilities of colonial administrators and missionaries, who not only derided it but perceived it as a sign of degeneration. Bengali Hindu men who worshiped the feminine were seen as effeminate, weak, miserable, vulnerable, passive, and lacking in martial skills and rationality. Such effeminate men, in the view of colonialists and missionaries, lacked a strength and toughness which only British masculinity could provide (103).

She continues, ‘in fact, in the later stages of colonialism, British rule of India itself came to be seen as a violation of the feminine principle, and both men and women were involved in liberating Mother India (Bharat Mata) from foreign rule’ (103). Painting a picture of the females under the colonial rule to portray the preferred ‘masculine,’ due to its defining characteristic dwelled only with power and strength.

During the entire course of the novel *Adarsha Hindu Hotel* we find our protagonist ‘Hajari’ to be referring to every young woman that comes to help him or to support him in strengthening his psyche being referred to as ‘maa.’ This has two very distinct factors related to it:

- Maa as mother, invoking a nurturing and caring emotions
- Maa as divinity, where the call for ‘maa’ turns into a pure form of worship.

All throughout the novel he considers almost every woman to be respectable (despite his difficult relation Padma-jhee), especially Kusum, a young widow from his village living near his workplace. He opens up about his ‘desire’ to own his own hotel to Kusum. Due to the shared village as well as shared poverty these two characters developed into a relation that of

a father and daughter. Kusum was the primary source of fund for Hajari while doing this she both became an investor as well as his helping hand. She becomes a daughter who turns into Deity Lakshmi in his life. One key point to note here is that Hindu women let alone widowed women were declined of their inheritance. With addition to that, due to the death of a man the woman or wife gets put in an even sticky situation, as she had lost her power in her in-law's place (firstly, due to being female, and later, for being widowed). In the essay *Upward Social Mobility as an Act of Non-Conformity Towards Repressive Capitalist Society in Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's Novel Adarsha Hindu Hotel* Dr Prasejit Pandey and Mr. Abhisek Bhaka mentions on the father-daughter bond between Kusum and Hajari as, 'Kusum also belongs to the lower stratum of society and works hard to meet the day's ends. Though there is no blood relation between Hazari and Kusum, they develop a warm and cordial father daughter relationship in course of time' (348).

Chapter 4: Methodology, Findings, and Limitations

4.1 Methodology:

This research is the result of qualitative research method while looking at it from the lens of post-colonial studies with a minor emphasis on feminism. However, due to the vastness of the subject matter, the focus of this research is mostly based on political, and religious attributes of the female population of Bengal during the first half of the twentieth century. The research is based firmly on the points and perspectives of the Indian Colonised women and their desires. The thesis emphasizes a lot on the overall position of women of Bengal at a time where transformation, change, and new ways became a global phenomenon.

This research primarily poses to ask the questions ‘what is female desire from the context of Indian colonial women from the time frame of 1900 to 1950?’ and ‘what are the prejudices behind female desire only bringing about the negative/ promiscuous/ sexual aspect of a “woman”?’ Also, just how does the exact same word ‘desire’ gain two completely different meanings when used to describe different genders? This question will be focusing on the social and cultural construction of ‘desire.’ To unveil these gender specific meanings as well as to bring out the basic position while considering their situations of the colonial Indian women (particularly Bengal), this research uses post-colonial feminist lens. To specify, the post-colonial feminist theory that has been used in this thesis is Gayatri Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?* However, that’s not the only lens used in the subject matter, with some added help from the syntactical differences between meanings and the word ‘desire’ itself, and, to a minimal extent there will be some use of Freud’s psycho-analytical criticism to analyse the female characters from the primary texts for a better breakdown of the unseen, often neglected psychological patterns.

There are also mentions of other post-colonial literary texts to form a further understanding on the matter which will also help in placing a more realistic portrayal of the

early 1900s colonial Indian women. This will help us understand an array of viewpoints on the matter, such as, political, economic, social, religious, and regional perspectives. These viewpoints will play a huge role in creating a multidimensional portrayal of the female population of the time (specifically the Bengal) which is a constant recognition absent from most critical studies on these women.

4.2 Findings

This has been mentioned in the previous segments of the research, however, I would like to emphasize on the matter of unavailability of scholarly sources and translations in the case of the subject matter even further. Plethora of research on post-colonial issues, several widely cited journals, and the emergence of post-colonial studies as a recognized wing of English Departments in India (as well as Bangladesh, and places). However, this does not translate into that woman, in particular Indian women received adequate academic attention with regards to their rights and position in the patriarchal society. This is an issue that has prevailed till this day. The basic cause behind the lack of research made on the matter of colonial women lies in the lack of interest in the females of this side by the literary critics as well as scholars (the lack of female scholars in the post-colonial literary field is also a major cause), which eventually led to lack of knowledge on the matter as well. Now, many may argue that a mountain worth of books has been written on the matter of colonial Indian female population, however, despite this statement being true to some extent it lacks in painting a proper picture on the matter- a mistake that was made previously by the older generation of critics as well (Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty might have been champions on the matter of post-colonial studies, and though the main focus of their works is to get rid of the gaps in the sties of the colonial India, the lack of narrative found on the Indian women is still a keeps a big chunk of information and identity missing in the story of the colonial India). Yes, it is true that there are many fictional depictions of these women can

be found however this literary and fictional acknowledgement ultimately ended up in lack of research on the psychology of the women, it lacked in providing proper legal help towards the women for a very long period (however, things are changing). However, lack of fictional representation is not the cause, but the result caused by issues that are far greater. To be exact-

- Lack of opportunity to be trained in a proper and adequate academic environment.
- The male populations complete disregard towards the absence over the female critical scholarship.
- Absolute disregard of the West on the matter of representation of the Indian women, and their selective interest on the critical standpoint of the Indian man.

For example, it was in the 1960s when the first ever law against the practice of dowry came by (something we are to this date are struggling with, as the whole concept, thought, and idea behind dowry has been manipulated to fit under any circumstance. The Consideration of 'dowry' has now been manipulated to be the 'gift' from the girl's house to the boy's for marrying her). Despite the rights and laws on protecting a woman and her rights the dowry system keeps on evolving to challenge the matter even further. The boy's family still holds more power over the bride/ girl's family due to the consistent superiority complex of men. The parents of the bride's side also take advantage of this 'gifting ceremony' a better life for their daughter, as it is only the 'gift' (dowry) that is going bring good luck for the girl. However, 'dowry' system is just one matter, and the lack of interest towards the matter of lack of critical female scholars as well as lack of critical scholarship took a collective effort socio-cultural. and religious issue for centuries. Which ultimately contributed to little research on the Indian women from their individual context (as well as by themselves). Also, westernization or the use of European women as the only examples in of the Indian women- resulted in a massive gap between both in terms of the Indian women vs the European women

and their own lack of understanding of themselves. This lack of representation did two things in addition to the already existing issues, giving the problem more layers, these are:

- i.) Women of the subcontinent growing up with a false identity,
- ii.) Them not relating to the fake one either.

Hence, while writing this research I had to depend mostly on the selected texts, as well as other literary pieces (fictional; as there is a significant decline in the non-fiction department), and other euro-centric feminist and psychological research materials.

4.3 Limitations

Despite the findings related to the selected topic of the thesis there had been an overwhelming pile of limitations that were faced during the writing process. To properly discuss on the matter of limitations faced while writing on the matter of 'Female in India,' and 'Female desire,' the limitation segment will be divided into three distinct parts.

- i. Lack of available Research on the matter
- ii. Overshadowed Identity
- iii. Glorified Ignorance of the Indian Subcontinent by Global Literary criticism.

4.3.1 Lack of Available Research on the Matter:

Looking at the over-interested, overly obsessive outburst of people on Indian culture and heritage. It is a well-acknowledged basic expectation that this bias towards the culture would attract interest of literary critics and giants to verily, as well as thoroughly research the literature of this previously glorious colony. However, that is not the case and Indian literature is thoroughly overlooked by the Western literary critic society, and Bengal is at the very bottom of the pot even within the walls of the little research that had taken place so far

resulting in more decline on the matter in reality as well. Now, one may argue that due to the literary genius of Rabindranath and Begum Rokeya this claim does not necessarily hold a firm ground, however, that is hardly the case. Despite the claim of Rabindranath being well researched the issue remains in terms of the type of material that are well researched. If given proper care it is not an arduous task to identify the biased attitude towards Rabindranath's songs and short stories (specifically the ones focusing on the teens and children), and unfortunately enough the novels barely get any love from the researchers. So, if one tries to get the approximate research done on Rabindranath's works the simple equation fascinatingly will stand like:

Songs > short stories (youth > any other subject matters) > movies (definitely not made by
him) > novels

That was the fate of Rabindranath in terms of research, but in Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain's case, this idea can be easily contested due to the calibre of love, attention, appreciation, celebration of *Sultana's Dream*. Despite all the celebrations, this sense of neglect in the very field of research still holds value to her as well, at least to a certain degree. Even in terms of Begum Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream*, this is the only well-known text which seizes to sweep all the love and admiration and is extremely well established, overtly well celebrated among other female leading works of the author. However, as most of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's literary works are written and published in Bengali, they barely got any recognition from global readers. As for Bibhutibhushan, research is almost a dream. Due the simplistic village-based stories of the celebrated author, the works only gain respect as books that are 'easy to read.' However, that is furthest from the truth if put in the effort to understand the value system of the time. As the subject matters revolve around 'day to day lives of the rural population' they posed and deemed as unproblematic also known as not suited for critical research. However, the chosen books (*Chokher Bali*, *Adarsha Hindu Hotel*, and *Sultana's*

Dreams) could easily be recognized as the transformative representation of the time as well as the constant presence of love and peace during the early 1900s (as independence became the concentrating factor for both the colonizers and colonized population). His works clearly depicted the peace-loving attitude of the people of Bengal. Unfortunately, this friendly, peaceful storytelling is not research-worthy by the standards of both national and international scholars.

4.3.2 Overshadowed Identity:

The first of the twentieth century is packed with historical events, new political stances, and wars. This is the time when massive transformations were being witnessed among the women globally. It is not just the East where chaos prevailed. With the introduction, development, and flourishing of the western feminist school of thoughts, the collision between white men and white women became one of the major points of focus, creating a new division of 'other,' which is the Indian subcontinent. Now, in this situation the divisions introduced by Edward Said on the 'Self' and the 'Other' became visible in pointing out the distance between these categories in relation to races and ethnicities. However, a new sub-section emerges due to the new division between the 'Self.' Keeping the colonial Indian women further away from recognition. Also, the emergence of the British woman as the new 'Other,' a new layer of neglect is added to the already neglected colonized female population.

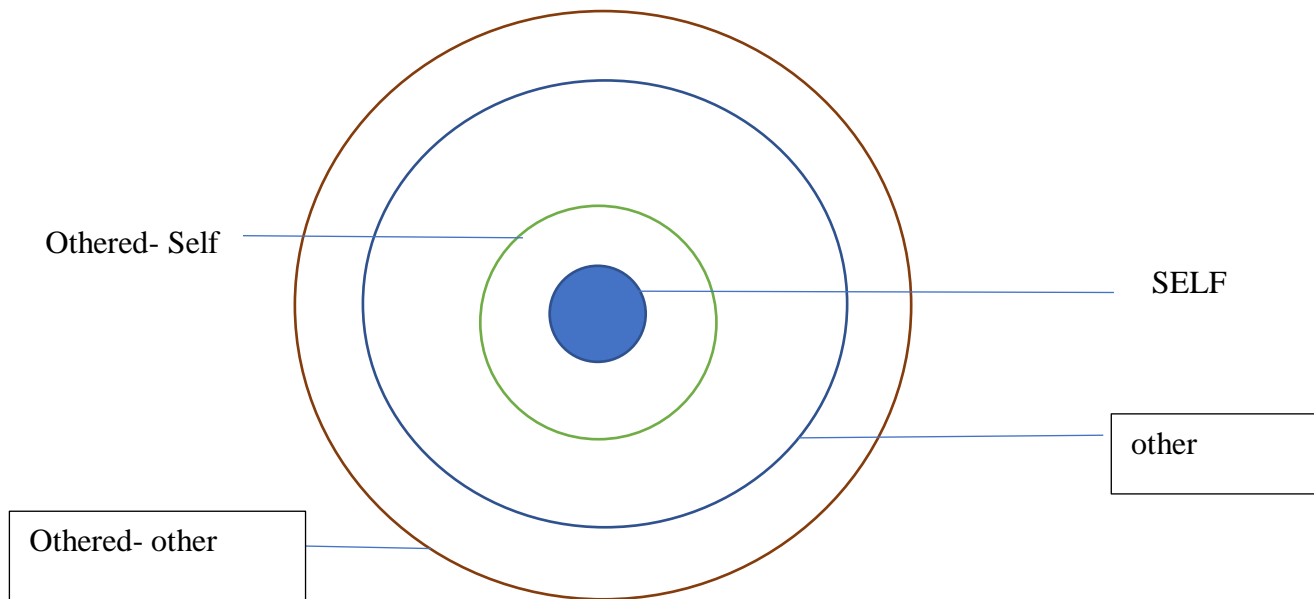


Figure: The imperialist India (Repeat)

Successfully overshadowing all the other women from all other colonies, creating the 'othered-other' or, the 'ultimate other.' This euro-centric ideology was pushed even further as more males from the colonies went to the West (especially London and Paris). Their new encounters with the 'Other' makes the 'othered-other's' existence insignificant. Making the gap between the 'other' and 'othered-other' vaster than of the one found between the 'self' and the 'Other.' Right after this male population return from their glorious excursions from the West ends up seeing the female population of their homeland to be lesser than the western women, creating a sense of disrespect and lack of attention towards them. This resulted the Indian colonial women (in this scenario Bengali women) to blindly imitate the ways of the Western women. This imitation was based on the data gathered by them through the Bengali men or through the newspapers that were (in most cases) read to them by the males of the families (few women could read Bengali, however, finding an English reading woman was extremely rare) Rather than their true identities, the stuck-up mentality on identity brought by the male population from the West became the primary (if not the only focus) focus. This took them even further away from claiming their position in the overall society.

4.3.3 Glorified Ignorance of Indian Subcontinent from Global Literature:

This is an extremely unfortunate, yet constant issue faced in most colonial literature and literary works. Due to the difference in subject matter, works by the eastern writers do not always get celebrated let alone getting the acclamation of the works being critical. And the deeper the subject matter the further removed it gets from the chances of being analysed critically by the globally acclaimed literary critics. The characters of the books end up turning into one dimensional hence easily forgettable. The only focal points for books and texts related to the eastern hemisphere are mostly the protagonists and the socio-cultural values that the book or story line has to offer. Everything else is seen as unimportant, and most female characters and traditions related to them unfortunately fall under this category by default. To exemplify, in E.M. Forster's world-renowned work *A Passage to India*, the entire book mostly revolves around the case that came into being between Adela and Aziz. Even there the main theme while introducing the conflict between women or the female side of the plot was totally based on the pre-modern and modern transformations as well as stand points, which was mostly depicted by the characters Mrs. Moore and Adela. In the entire streak, despite being in India the native female population was not involved in any aspect of the book. In fact, the information that we get from Adela and Mrs. Moore's description of these Indian women was kept so brief that this is a format that has been kept alive and is continued to a certain level within the realms of Bengali as well as the overall Indian literary plane.

Chapter 5: Critical Analysis:

In the critical analysis chapter, I will be focusing on the commonalities found among the selected literary texts, the theories, as well as the divisions that have been made previously while trying to create an environment which is suitable in understanding the claims of the selected topic of this research on the multidimensionality and diverse sense of desire, as well as its connection with the women of the colonial women of Bengal (from 1900- 1950).

5.1 Cultural Approach:

Culture covers a great part in our lives, so much so that our day to day lives are dictated by the rules and regulations of culture, and due to the diversity found among the cultures found worldwide. Culture, by the definition found in the *Cambridge English Dictionary*, 'is the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.' Now, the Indian heritage and culture is extremely well known from the ancient time and had a prominent position in world heritage and culture for a very long period. The rules of multiple foreign rulers have helped in the spread enormously as well. In Suman Mukherjee's *Leisure and Recreation in Colonial Bengal: A Socio-Cultural Study* points, 'Leisure and recreation are indispensable parts of the social and cultural life of humans. In the present world the significance of leisure and recreation is reflected in politics, society, economy, spirituality and even in aesthetics (764).' Due to the humble state of the colonial Indians, this way of enjoying one's leisure was only adopted by the elite class of Calcutta. However, this has rather added to the cultural values than taking from it.

However, culture dictates our lives from almost all aspects of our lives which sometimes creates a foggy line between culture and religion- two most important aspects of the history of Indian subcontinent. This has been a major cause behind the tension between the religions, tension between men and women.

5.1.1 Divided Realities:

There is a saying by Albert Einstein, “Everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by the ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that is stupid.” This is the exact reality that took place with our women. As one cannot make a house without the proper tools, a nation cannot be built without freedom. Freedom becomes the necessary tool to the overall improvement in the topic of ‘women’s rights and power.’ Unfortunately, enough that is, was, and will be the expectation of a woman. However, there were those who take part in both Macaulay’s and Suman Mukherjee’s way of living. In Suman Mukherjee’s *Leisure and Recreation in Colonial Bengal: A Socio-Cultural Study*, ‘A vast number of Indigenous people of Bengal were neither involved in leisure and recreation, nor they took part in such a culture. Though tourism, leisure and recreation were a part of ‘colonial modernity’, but that modernity could only influence a little part of colonial Bengal. Here examples can be both- Binod (after her arrival to Mahan’s) and our mysterious narrator from *Sultana’s Dream*.

In today’s time if we ask any woman this one question, ‘define Bangaliana of a Bengali women?’ most will consider as well as focus on the aesthetic and appearance of Bengali woman where the most prominent features turn out to be- saree, ‘bindi’/’tip’, ‘alta’, and other aspects that are purely dictated by their aesthetic. However, despite their appearance being a prominent part in the defining factor of the cultural value and prowess of Bengal, it rarely does anything in defying our posed question. So, what really is ‘Bangaliana’ for a Bengali woman? The answer to this remains unanswerable. The same can be said about any nation and their identities, rather a politically curated false sense of identity generating more divisions. The initial cause behind the answer is the lack of ‘self,’ lack of ‘identity’ found in us.

During the early 19th century due to the rise and spread of the Western (English) education system, made a huge production of modernized Indian woman, someone who is a

combination of both India and the unknown modern women's mould. The sad reality is that while doing this and being amidst the two conflicts (whether to follow the traditional way of living or to embrace the new) these women could never form their individual personalities. which is evident in today's world even thanks to technological advancement as well as globalization and westernization. Most literary masterpieces from the 1900-1950s do deal with this without a proper resolution to this situation. Ashalatha is the prime example of this dilemma, where she is not the traditional 'boudha' for Rajlakshmi, nor could she become as all rounded as Binodini, which ultimately leads her in carving her own way while some from both however keeping most of it untouched.

There are also writers like Bibhuti who brought out characters that are forever simple and wholesome. The idea behind placing a Hindu Hotel in a village was not something exciting, however, with the addition of nurturing characters can break the long cycle of complicated thought. At the end of the day, *Adarsha Hindu Hotel* will always remain a story about Hajari and the women in his life. From getting the emotional support from 'Lakshmi' (the one who he has a very father like affection towards) to getting the first investment for his – 'Adarsha Hindu Hotel,' as well as to the point that his own daughter becoming his purpose to think of having a higher purpose in life, Hajari dedicates his all to the women (daughters). He dedicates his hard work to these women as well as referring to them all with 'maa,' just like his devotion towards the divinity he calls 'Maa.' from the help him in his life's quest in building a hotel of his own. And this stable atmosphere of the novel is the most gratifying part of all where the female characters stand as a shade over the readers giving them the chance to rest when life and its desires are being hectic.

5.2 Religion and Belief:

Faith or belief systems, also known as religions, have always played a major role in any human's life. However, due to the structural hierarchy found as well as noticed within a faith practice, faith practices or religions have lost the innate sense of peace, love, care, equality that come with it. In the case of the Indian subcontinent as well as the texts selected for this thesis in particular the major religions, we are looking at are- Islam and Hinduism. However, Rabindranath's belief in 'Akeshorbaad' also will be presented in here. We all know the impact, position, status, as well as value that religion has over this part of Asia, so much so that the independence as well as the divisions of the colonial India was to create harmony via divisions based on religious preference. Now, these are things that we all know and have been learning from a very young age as part of our mandatory curriculum, but that is not the tale for today rather we are to focus on the pre-independent colonial India and the religious division within the Bengali community upon the query of gender preference in India. This is a question that has been placed on the hot seat for a very long period, in addition to many several fruitful research works are the outcome of the process. India is a country that has always been divided based on religious intolerance. Though from the exterior it looks as if the animosity lies between the two major religions.

Before further discussion let us start by talking about the objective. The objective behind explaining faith and religion in India is not to find faults with them; the exclusive intention is to identify the correlations between women's subjugation and religious fundamentalism in India. It is astonishing that in both the ancient India as well as the India of 1900- 1950 religion and culture has been used interchangeably, which safely guarded societal norms as well as the positions of the preachers, imams, brahmans of the time. It was done to give more power to one generation and had been passed down since. The most common question that this idea roots from this is that why the female population did not protest against

the system rather than questioning the religion like most of women today. The answer to this will be ‘misrepresentation’ of religious scriptures. In Hinduism, it is not permissible for the Hindu scriptures to be read by anyone other than the ‘brahmans.’ On the other hand, their Muslim counterpart has a completely opposite approach to this. From what we see from the life of Begum Rokeya is that Muslim girls were to learn Arabic (for the recitation of the Islamic scripture, the Quran) and house chores. The similarity between these two groups lies in the areas of:

- the Pardah system
- No formal education (Hindu elites’ collaboration with the colonizers).
- early marriage and the lives after their marriages.

5.2.1 The Twisted Religion:

Even though it was discussed in the last chapter that religion was the true domineering aspect present in the colonial India, with the introduction of modern day feminism as well as the colonial modern India and their introduction of western ideas as well as theories (such as, feminism), things took an extreme turn where the colonial women became more accustomed to the idea of a non-religious lifestyle dictated only by the western views on women, by women as well as through women. About this Sharada Sugirtharajah in the essay *Hinduism and Feminism: Some Concerns* states, ‘Most of those who are happy to call themselves feminists have little to do with religion, and some prefer to distance themselves from it. They shy away from religion or dismiss it as being oppressive and restrictive.’ (97) Which in reality is true to the women of the time, however this totalitarian freedom from religious thoughts wasn’t necessarily enough for the attainability of the ‘desired’ freedom, to which Sharada Sugirtharajah in the essay *Hinduism and Feminism: Some Concerns* further states, ‘Another issue that needs to be borne in mind is that in India, women's issues have never been seen exclusively as the domain of women (102).’ Sharada also mentions how the Hindu

community in terms of their familial hierarchy and family structure finds the ‘duty’ of a woman is put in a very inequal footing, and goes on saying,

The language of "rights" and "equality" is problematic when applied to the Hindu family or society, which is basically hierarchical in structure. Although women in India have far greater constitutional and legal rights, these rights remain unexploited for a variety of reasons. "Rights," "equality," and "individuality" as values per se cause no problems for Hindu women. Relationships within the family are regulated by dharma (duty). (100)

Yes, there is a distinction between the male and female population of the ‘brahmans,’ the female half just like the rest of Hindu population is not allowed to read the ‘Vedas’ either (exception of three very specific chapters that dictate the duties and roles of a woman. This was due to the superstition, that reciting the strong ‘mantras may cause difficulties in the menstruation cycle, and the holistic responsibility of bearing children). However, the argument over the total denial over women being denied of reciting the ‘mantras’ from the ‘vedas’ are often called baseless due to some evidence found in from ancient documents, that women were both allowed to read and write the ‘vedas’ (as documenters). Which brings out the question, ‘what happened between the ancient and modern Hinduism, and why

Shankar met the aged Kumārila at Allahabad. That venerable scholar was then on the point of death. But he was so impressed by reading Shankar’s commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* that he blessed the young scholar and predicted that Shankar would establish Vedantic monotheism (*Adwaita*) for more extensively and triumphantly than he himself had succeeded in doing (Mādhav, VII. 62-end).

Then, as directed by Kumārila with his last breath, Shankar went to Mahishmati on the Narmadā, in order to meet Mandan Mishra, whom Kumārila held to be his best pupil and almost his second self. Mandan was the highest expert practitioner of the Vedic sacrifices and other rituals in that age. He was blessed with a wife named Saraswati (*alias* Ubhay Bhārati) who even surpassed him in learning and was popularly held to be the

Goddess of Learning (Saraswati) incarnate. She alone was fitted to act as judge in the ensuing theological controversy between her husband and Shankar.

Ref: A history of Dasnami Naga Sanyasis by Jadunath Sarkar

Figure: Snippet from *A History of Dasnami Naga* by Jadunath Sarkar

was the power of knowledge taken away through brainwash?' To this Foucault's term- 'knowledge is power' seems to fit the narrative the best, due to the power of knowledge has been stopped from coming to the female population of the Hindu 'shomaj.' However, from the ancient India the stories of Saraswati, Gargi and Maitreyi, and the prowess over the Vedic knowledge had been commence able. In the work of Jadunath Sarkar he mentions, Even, in Islam, Aisha (RA) may peace be upon her, the last wife of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is one of the most bright and influential scholars. Hafsa (RA), the wife of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), also the daughter of Umar (RA) was the woman chosen among the entire first generation ummah to be in charge of protecting the first copy of the holy scripture, Qur'an.

5.3 Femininity and the Female:

Femininity and its connection with the Female have always been considered as wicked, immoral. To prevent the two from intermingling with each other the rule 'pardah,' 'andarmahal' had been taken to its ('pardah') maximum potential. Begum Rokeya has had a number of interactions with the extremes of the 'pardah system,' or 'zenana.' While describing the extreme nature of 'pardah' in a Muslim household in the early 1900s, Begum Rokeya commemorates her own frightening experience with the system,

Ever since I turned five, I have had to hide myself from women even. I could not understand the rationale behind it. yet I had to disappear as soon as strangers approached. Men, naturally, were not allowed in the inner apartments. Therefore, I did not suffer from them. But women were permitted to roam around the inner apartments quite freely, and I had to hide from them. The village women dropped in for sudden visits. Somebody would make a sign and I had to find the nearest hiding place- the kitchen; inside the rolled mats of the maids; under the beds even. (Hossain, 1988b [1929-1931], p. 29)

The reason for taking this as an example of an extreme has a lot to do with the misrepresentation of the Islamic standpoint over 'veil' or 'pardah.' The incident could not have been more removed from the reality of the religious outlook on the matter while also abusing the position of 'faith' by interchanging religion with cultural domination. Freedom of choosing a life for oneself has been highlighted in the Quran, however, due to the lack of proper understanding on the matters of religion the Quran as well as all other religious texts have used, abused, and misused by a certain group while discriminating against the other. The Quran states- "Those who answer to the command of their Lord and establish regular prayer and conduct their affairs by mutual consultations, who spend out what we bestow on them for sustenance" (Surah Al-Shura 42: 38). While considering the laws that derive from this also gives examples on the matter of - A child who has not reached puberty is not required to follow the rules and regulations of the veiling system in accordance with the Islamic law, and - despite religious rules on Pardah/ veil/ the head scarf (and other variants) is a personal choice of the woman. It solely depends on individual relationship between the Almighty Creator and his subject (her).

Often these two rules are not mentioned at all not because these are minor rules rather by violating these rules the Muslim male counterpart had always created a false imagery of women being weak as well as their potential to commit a sin by coming in front of a man. Though in the case of public lives the Quran clarifies it clearly, it is equally important for the man to wear his 'hijab' ('veil') of his gaze. In Surah, An-Nur (verse 30) it has been mentioned clearly that, 'O Prophet! ' Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity. That is purer for them. Surely Allah is All-Aware of what they do.' Chastity and modesty are the two things that are predominantly related to women, however, as we find it the holy scripture most certainly suggests otherwise. This has a lot to do the previously

appointed social stations where due to strictly hermit stationing meant total and supreme control over women which also became a sign of almost no control over men.

In *Sultana's Dream*, the theme of 'pardah' is of great priority, concern, anxiety, as well as shock. 'Priority' as well as 'concern' due to the careful calculation behind the statement, 'The men servants outside were fast asleep just then, and I could have a pleasant walk with Sister Sara,' so that the miss of the house does not have worry about her 'hijab' or 'parda.' Just a few sentences after this initial mention of the importance of veil in one's life we get to introduced with something even greater. The narrator goes on saying, 'as being a purdanishin woman I am not accustomed to walking about unveiled.'

On the matter of chastity of a Bengali woman Bharati Ray says in *Women of Bengal:*

*Transformation in Ideas and Ideals, 1900-1947***,

These emphasised chastity as the principal womanly virtue, housework, and child-care as the only forms of activity, unquestioned obedience and silent self-sacrifice as ideal feminine qualities and imposed an ideology of subservience for women. The denial of the right of education, purdah, and an extremely rigid dichotomisation between private and public life/sphere (see Rosaldo 1974: 1723, for a good analysis of the implications of dichotomisation) assured the continuance of their prescribed roles and removed the possibility of any challenge from them.

The overall functions of women in the early 1900s was majorly dictated by their 'effortless' functionality in housework and childbearing. For which they ended up being unable to basic education and freedom. The whole life of a woman was dictated by her connection with the men in her life (father, husband, and son) who skilfully produced and instigated a life that rigidly bound the private (women) to ever enter the public sphere (education, profession, freedom, free will, as well as the outside world). Here, the fear of being seen by someone becomes the biggest obstacle.



Figure: Visual Representation of Panopticon.

An obstacle curated by her own psyche- a jailing system put up by her own mind (the notion of Jeremy Bentham's 'panopticon'), A 'mind jail' at best. At one point of the story *Sultana's Dream* Sister Sara says this to the narrator,

'...how unfair it is to shut in the harmless women and let loose the men...

Yes, it is not safe so long as there are men and about the streets, nor it is so when a wild animal enters a marketplace.'

'Of course, not'

'Suppose some lunatics escape from asylum and begin to do all sorts of mischief to men, horses and other creatures, in that case what will your countrymen do?'

From where I stand, I find this statement to be the direct connection with the idea of being independent to the point so that a woman's responsibility can stay at her own hand.

Chapter 6: Conclusion:

Regardless of the time and space, women and their position have always been at the grace of anyone other than women themselves. They have been neglected and denied, so have happened to their powers, rights, and identity. However, in case of the women of Bengal (especially from 1900-1950) this issue of neglect takes an even greater appearance. In addition, the lack of representation continues to pose a higher risk of flawed sense of identity, but the overall misrepresentation of the Bengali women denied them of their own diverse sense of 'self,' forcing them to be trapped in the maze of silence. Their potentials have been stripped from them, making them find comfort in their agony, pain, misery, and suffering. This thesis, from the very beginning, have been focusing, and re-focusing on these forgotten women, and her connection with her 'desires.' Despite the common belief of women being only emotional, this never stands up for- women having no dimension nor complexity in her. This is furthest from the truth. Just as a woman can be both a mother at the same time, she can also desire for a multitude of things given her situation as well as time space.

The word 'desire' should have never been dictated by the flawed gender stereotypes. It also should not get negative remarks just for being used after the word 'female' either. Despite the positioning and use of both the words, a woman should never get devoid of her needs, and rights. It's high time, we give our women the chance to embrace the things they want for them- things that they find amusing as well as exciting. In Bengal in particular, thanks to the extreme 'pardah' system, any woman wanting to have a prominent, strong, and independent personality would have been considered to be- shrewd, wicked, vulgar, and mostly she would have been considered a woman with weak moral capacity. However, However, this way of thinking has made the entire narrative over 'Bengali women' and 'desire' a taboo. Something, despite all the effort from today's generation- is still held on by our other half as well as us with our dear lives. This is what that needs to transform. This is

what we should consider looking into while looking Bengal and her daughters. It is important to look at this subject with great seriousness as this the only way for us to bring focus over the hearty and healthy growth of the women in Bengal. This is the only way to bring words to the once 'silenced' daughters, mothers, aunts, and grandmothers of Bengal.

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