

Reviewing Feminist Futures in Literary Fictions: A Comparative Analysis of the Visions of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Naomi Alderman

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Abstract

This paper is a comparative analysis of the feminist utopic visions presented in the works of Naomi Alderman and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. The two authors whose lives and work are separated by a century, have presented the vision of a world run by women in *The Power* and *Sultana's Dream*, respectively. The paper follows both these literary works and then proceeds to draw a comparative analysis of the different elements presented in both the pieces of literature. The paper explores how while both these women wrote about patriarchy and how patriarchy could be subverted, the ways in which they have imagined a feminist future is vastly different. The paper is divided into six sections - firstly, there is the introduction which gives us a background to feminist speculative fiction; secondly, there is the background to the research which presents a summary of the literature used and gives insight into the methodology; the third section is dedicated to a discussion of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag*; the fourth section is a discussion of Naomi Alderman's *The Power*. Following this, there is a detailed comparative analysis of *Sultana's Dream* and *The Power*. Finally a conclusion has been drawn in regards to the visions presented in the works of the selected authors.

Keywords: *Feminism, Feminist speculative fiction, Utopic visions, Social change, Comparative analysis*



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Introduction

In recent years, we have seen a substantial rise in feminist speculative fiction. Authors of this genre tend to make frequent use of utopian and dystopian worlds in order to create a dialogue regarding feminism and focus on the predicament of women in contemporary society. On one hand, where feminist utopias present a better world for women, which criticizes patriarchy and tries to put an end to it, feminist dystopias reflect on a world where women are severely subordinated to men. It may happen that utopia and dystopia are combined together to create a sharp contrast between a patriarchal world and a female vision of a perfect world characterised by equality.

Utopic storylines are always perceived as having a futuristic vision. According to Ernst Bloch's principle of hope, individuals are unfinished, they are hopeful of a better life (Kellner 2). Similarly feminist authors frequently focus on a better future, going forward. In feminist utopias, the world all of a sudden undergoes a positive social transformation in contrast to a reality where women are subjugated by men (Gilarek 37). Liberal feminists may even depict an egalitarian society which do not dispose off men completely, they can be socialised into being cooperative individuals but will experience subjugation (Gilarek 37). These futures adhere to feminist values such as freedom, peace and equality. Similarly in *Sultana's Dream* or *Padmarag*, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain tried to dream of a future in which women are no longer living behind the Zenana. They are educated individuals coming up with scientific discoveries like a solar device and a device that can collect water directly from the atmosphere. They don't need the peculiar collocation of men to thrive in society. Even while looking at *Padmarag*, the author tried to create this utopic world in the name of Tarini Bhavan where women of all races, classes, castes, and religions can come together and find refuge from the everyday violence of a patriarchal society.

Radical feminists may even envision a new society which is primarily women-dominated as opposed to controlled by men in the past. This new world is built upon the remnants of existing patriarchal social orders (Gilarek 37). On taking a look at Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, she explores the radical change in the form of women getting the ultimate power of emitting electricity from their body with the help of specialised muscles called skeins - which

they can flex to deliver anything from mild stings to lethal jolts of electricity (Alderman 20). She imagines a world where women become physically more dominant than men. It shows how power corrupts everyone, irrespective of its gender. The book is very ambitious, and provocative and is probably going to be perceived in a very different way by different genders. Alderman herself admitted that the world that she created may be utopic for women but it can prove to be completely dystopic for men.

In this paper, we have tried to put a comparison between two pieces of literature coming from very different social and cultural backgrounds. There is a stark contrast to being noticed in the perception of both the authors who belonged to two completely different centuries. The community and the time period in which they grew up played a very important role in shaping their experiences, but one thing remained constant - they wanted to write for women.

Background to the Research

This paper is a qualitative study of primarily two literary texts that have been studied using textual analysis. In the study of literature textual analysis is an intuitive methodology. It is about the reader coming to an understanding of a certain text based on both their own sensitivity and the context of the text. In more concrete terms “When we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text” (McKee 5). This is exactly what the authors of this paper have attempted to do through the research presented in this paper. The paper primarily analyses two works of fiction separated by a century. Through the paper, we follow Naomi Alderman and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s vision for a feminist future. For the purpose of this paper, the authors have used *The Power* by Naomi Alderman and *Padmarag* and *Sultana’s Dream* by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. *Padmarag* features in this paper in a limited capacity, with maximum scrutiny being put on *Sultana’s Dream*, but it has been included in the analysis since it is an extension of the feminist vision Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain presents in *Sultana’s Dream*. In this section, a brief summary of the three works used has been presented.

Sultana’s Dream is a feminist utopian story written by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in 1905. The story follows the dream Sultana has where she sees herself stepping into a place called Ladyland, guided by a woman who she imagines to be her friend Sister Sara. This stranger who

takes the form of Sister Sara shows Sultana the ways of Ladyland and tells her about its history. In Ladyland, Sister Sara tells Sultana there is no Zenana. Instead, there is a Mardana, a place where all men are kept separated and spend their time in seclusion from women. In Ladyland women are educated and use their education to make scientific discoveries which include a solar device that can store the heat and light of the sun and a device that can collect water directly from the atmosphere. It is by using these devices that ultimately women take over power in Ladyland when the military prowess of the men fails. *Padmarag* is in some ways an extension of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's vision in *Sultana's Dream* and is also a story with autobiographical elements. Written in 1924, it is the story of a female community in Tarini-Bhavan. Padmarag is the name given to the heroine who is also known as Siddika/Zainab. The story of *Padmarag* follows the women of Tarini Bhavan and also Siddika's tragic love story. In the form of Tarini Bhavan, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain creates a utopian community where women of all races, classes, castes, and religions can come together and find refuge from the everyday violence of a patriarchal society.

The Power is a feminist speculative fiction written by British author Naomi Alderman. The book was published in the year 2016. The story follows the experiences of its four main characters - Roxy, Tunde, Allie and Margot. Roxy being the daughter of a London crime boss who gets involved in the family business. Her mother is murdered in front of her and we look at how she goes on to rise up the ladder of her father's illegal organisation and takes revenge for her mother's murder. Margot Cleary is a low-level politician who uses her power to attain political access. Then we meet Allie, an abused foster child from the Southern United States who with the help of her power kills her sexually abusive foster father and finally ends up in a Sister's Convent. It is at this Sister's Convent where using her powers she finally emerges as Mother Eve, thus creating a new matriarchal religion. Roxy becomes Mother Eve's confidant. Finally, there is Tunde, a young Nigerian journalist and the only male character in the story who travels from country to country, recording this whole phenomenon - the movements, the riots and the protests. The novel explores the idea of what would happen if women had the power to cause pain and destruction. If women get the power to rule the world, would they still be naturally peaceful and nurturing as people believe them to be? In pursuit of this power, the main

characters gradually come into conflict with others. The author explores the question of who exactly has the power and how power changes us in the end, irrespective our gender.

The Vision of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

The vision Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain had for a feminist world was a vision of peace. *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag*, are expressions of her vision for a better world for women. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's goal was social reform, and as a Bengali Muslim feminist and educationist both of her feminist utopic writings discussed in this paper are expressions of her belief that a world with educated women is a better world for all.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, popularly also known as Hossain was the daughter of Rahatunnessa Sabera Chowdhurani and Zahiruddin Mohammad Abu Ali Saber who was a wealthy, well-educated and influential landowner and his estate was a stronghold for the traditional way of life. Hossain was one of five children, having two brothers namely Abul Asad Ibrahim Saber and Khalilur Rahman Abu Jaigam Saber and two sisters namely Karimunessa and Humaira. Hossain's life and her zeal for women's education was heavily influenced by her eldest sister Karimunessa and her elder brother Abul Asad Ibrahim Saber. Karimunessa was married off at fifteen years of age when it was discovered that she was studying in secret and it was feared that her education would hamper her chances of marriage. Watching her sister having to leave behind her love for poetry had an impact on Hossain who also nurtured a love for education like her sister. Karimunessa however continued her education using the books of her husband's school-going brothers and she also encouraged the education of Hossain. Abul Asad Ibrahim Saber, Hossain's brother, was the one who taught her English and Bengali in secret and was also instrumental in arranging her marriage to Syed Sakhawat Hossain. As a testament to the influence her siblings had on her, Hossain dedicated *Padmarag* to her brother Abul Asad Ibrahim Saber and *Sultana's Dream* to her sister Karimunessa. At 16 years of age Hossain was married to Syed Sakhawat Hossain who was a widower in his late 30s. He was the deputy magistrate in the region of Bihar in the Bengal presidency and had been educated both locally and in London. Throughout their marriage, Hossain's husband supported and encouraged her writings and it was during their marriage that *Sultana's Dream* was published. After her husband's death in 1909 Hossain opened a school in his memory in Bhagalpur with the 10,000

rupees that he had bequeathed to her for that very purpose. However, due to familial disputes, she moved the school and herself to Kolkata where the Sakhawat Memorial School for Girls still thrives today and is run by the government. While she opened the school in Kolkata in 1911, in 1916 she opened the Anjuman-e-khawatin-e-Islam, Bangla or the Bengali Muslim Women's Association. In 1926 she presided over the Bengal Women's Education Conference held in Calcutta and she continued to be an active crusader for women's right to education until her death in 1932.

A discussion of Hossain's biography is important for the purpose of this paper because it serves as a background to her writings that are being discussed here. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Hossain's vision for a feminist world is a vision of Peace. In *Sultana's Dream*, she is not only expressing that a world where women are educated is a better world, but is also taking a stand against patriarchal militarism. When Sultana finds herself in Ladyland with Sister Sara and wonders that it must have been women warriors who forcibly took over control from the men, she is told that it is women's brains that outdid men and took over control when the military prowess of men failed. The Zenana of Hossain's world does not exist in Ladyland and has been replaced by the Mardana here. The Mardana is the place men were sent to when they were not able to win the war and women had to walk into the battlefield to save their country. Post initial dissatisfaction with being confined to the Mardana, the men of Ladyland had come to accept their seclusion. The relegation of men to the Mardana and their removal from public life is equated with a peaceful, virtuous society - one where there are no sins. The whole concept of Ladyland is a questioning of how it is fair that women who do no harm are shut indoors in the Zenana, while men who are responsible for the degradation of society and cause so much trouble are allowed free reign in the public. Through Sister Sara, Hossain asks if it was wise to keep sane people confined while the insane were allowed free movement in the world. Hossain visualises Ladyland as a feminist utopia where women are at the helm of public life - from running the offices to using science to make their lives efficient and free of distress. Besides imagining a better world with women in control of society, Hossain also emphasizes the point that in order for such a society to exist it is important to end militarism. *Sultana's Dream* has immense relevance for the militaristic world of today where the military budgets of countries

around the world continue to increase and the proliferation of nuclear weapons keeps global politics on edge continuously. Hossain's vision obliterates the belief in military might and brings eternal peace to Ladyland through the intellectual prowess of educated women. Initially, the scientific advancements made by the women of the science universities are called a "sentimental nightmare" (Hossain 8) by the military men. The reason behind this is that the inventions made - a solar device to concentrate and store the light and heat of the sun and a device to draw water directly from the atmosphere - were not meant for the benefit of the military but were meant for benefiting the society at large. In Ladyland Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain imagines a religion of Love and Truth, with the religious duty of every citizen being to love one another and to be absolutely truthful.

While *Sultana's Dream* is a feminist utopia existing in the dream of Sultana, in *Padmarag* Hossain writes of a feminist utopia within the larger patriarchal society in the form of Tarini Bhavan. In the figure of Tarini-Devi, the young widowed second wife of lawyer Tarinicharan Sen we find a representation of Hossain herself who was also her husband's second wife and became a young widow herself. Similarly Tarini Bhavan is based on the Anjuman-e-khawatin-e-Islam which was an organisation set up by Hossain for the upliftment of women. *Padmarag* has an essence of romance in the form of the heroine Siddika/Zainab/*Padmarag's* unfulfilled marriage, but it also has Siddika's rebellion against the forgiveness expected of her. In all the stories we hear of the women of Tarini Bhavan there is loss and trauma suffered at the hands of society and oftentimes at the hands of men in their life. In creating Tarini Bhavan as a community of women and for women Hossain creates a safe space for women's existence free from the burden and trauma that they find in the larger patriarchal society. Earlier it was mentioned that *Padmarag* can be read as an extension of the vision of peace that Hossain expresses in *Sultana's Dream*. This is true in the sense that Ladyland was a whole country dedicated to a community of women who put their men in seclusion and take over the reigns of their world. Tarini Bhavan is a smaller version of that same community that Hossain envisions in Ladyland, the difference is that unlike Ladyland which was a dream Tarini Bhavan is rooted in reality. *Padmarag* is also Hossain's vision of a feminist utopia that can exist within the

patriarchal society itself where women of all religions, races, castes and classes can come together to share their sorrow and build a better world for themselves.

At the center of Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag* lies the idea that a world that has educated women is a better world. In her visions of a feminist utopia Hossain visualises a world where women have the right to education and then use this education to come together with love and empathy and do wonderful things together. She believes that a world run by educated women would have peace. In *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain questions the male superiority of her society and dreams of a world that breaks the male hegemony bringing to the forefront the idea that all women need is education in order to challenge the superiority of men and to break their hold over society. In *Padmarag* she shows how even within the violence of patriarchal society women can be empowered to live an independent and fulfilling life. Hossain's goal was social reform, a goal towards which she worked throughout her life. So in both these pieces of writing too, we find embedded ideas and visions of a better world. It's important to note that Hossain's work remained forgotten for a time until the publication of *Rokeya Rachanaboli* by the Bangla Academy of Dhaka brought back attention to her work. Even though today she is celebrated both in Bangladesh and India, it is a shame that her work was ever forgotten since both *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag* are extremely important and relevant literary works which remain undated even today.

The Vision of Naomi Alderman

Naomi Alderman is an English novelist and game writer, who was born in 1974 in London. She is the daughter of Geoffrey Alderman, a British historian that specialised in the 19th and 20th centuries Jewish community of England. Alderman received her education from the South Hampstead High School and Lincoln College, Oxford where she studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics. She then moved to the United States for her work; and at that time she began to explore the world of fan fiction, focusing on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Alderman started advocating feminism in her teenage years and has since supported women's rights which is heavily reflected in her works. She is best known for her feminist speculative fiction novel *The Power*, which won the Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction in 2017. The book is said to be inspired by the fourth wave of the feminist movement and the MeToo movement. The book was

influenced by Alderman's relationship with Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood, who is well known for her dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The Power belongs to the quasi-metafictional world of literature. It poses an unusual question - What would happen if men and women swapped their roles, which can lead to women becoming the aggressors? It is narrated through a fictional manuscript that talks about an imagined history in which women developed the power to emit electricity from their hands that led to a violent rearrangement of world order into a dominant matriarchal era. The 'power' is shown to be literally embedded in these women. Lodged within a strip of striated muscle across the girl's collarbones which they name the organ of electricity or the 'skein' for its twisted strands. There can be two repercussions to it - would they utilise this energy to create a utopian world like the one envisioned in '*Sultana's Dream*' or the women would turn out to be aggressors just like men? Alderman creates this devilish world of females who claim their power by force and violence because they simply can. It is very important to note that this novel was released in the year 2016, a time when the social upheavals gave rise to the #MeToo movement. When asked about this pure coincidence in The New York Times interview, Alderman replied that being a teenager in the 1990s, women had a misconception that the feminist battles are won. Standing at the present, it is so obvious that it's not (Alderman). There are men who still hold forums to talk about how much they hate women, how they would like to degrade them because the former is in control of the 'power'. The #MeToo era has made a lot of these things more visible now.

What differentiates this novel from other feminist speculative fictions is that Alderman asks the looming question - are women really better than men? At the beginning of the novel, the women are made to feel good about themselves, to imagine themselves in the position of control. This feeling turns out to be a harrowing experience at the end because women are not better than men. They too are human beings who will behave in the same way if they get the power. In the novel, Mayor Margot Cleary who was running for the position of the governor felt: "It doesn't matter that she shouldn't, that she never would. What matters is that she could, if she wanted. The power to hurt is a kind of wealth." (Alderman 71). This excerpt turns out to be influential as it portrays that the freedom to hurt somebody in any way a person wants to is in itself a power.

The story chronicles the experiences of its four main characters, all of them desperately trying to pave their way in this rapidly changing world. It begins with Roxy, the daughter of Bernie Monke, a London crime boss. Her mother is murdered in front of her and we look at how she goes on to rise up the ladder of her father's illegal organisation and takes revenge for her mother's murder. Margot Cleary, a mayor of an American city uses both electrifying and political power to acquire her position in the White House. Then we meet Allie, an abused foster child from Southern US, who with the help of her power kills her sexually abusive foster father and finally ends up in a Sister's Convent. It is at this Sister's Convent where using her powers she finally emerges as Mother Eve, thus creating a new matriarchal religion. Roxy becomes Mother Eve's confidant. And then there is Tunde, a young Nigerian journalist and the only male character in the story who travels from country to country, recording this whole phenomenon - the movements, the riots and the protests.

The vision created by Naomi Alderman is shocking for the readers, especially men because it seems like a dystopia for them but is the reality for most women. The novel completely does a role reversal of sexual power, where men are treated as sexual objects and are dominated by women, which totally goes against the conventional norm of our current society where women are expected to comply to men's sexual needs. Here women are placed at the centre of both controlling and controlled desire. Alderman describes the sexual scenes in such a way that the male body is repeatedly objectified, perceived as something which is only there to gratify the female libido : "He is afraid. He is excited. He realises that he could not stop her, whatever she wanted to do now. The thought is terrifying. The thought is electrifying." (Alderman 15). She also talked about men who request such simulations, who were seen as "deviants and abnormals" (Alderman 151) , again something which we have witnessed in mainstream pornography, just the gender roles reversed.

On one hand when women were using their power to derive sexual pleasure, on the other the power was used to liberate women suffering from sexual abuse. The power was breaking out in Moldova, where women were using it to fight back against sex trafficking and systematic oppression which they have suffered at the hands of men. In this historic overturn of power, men are subjected to imprisonment, rape, torture, murder, all kinds of violence by women gangs,

cults, fundamentalists. The narrative of the book always provides very gruesome and graphic instances of rape and violence which again shows how mainstream media portrays female brutality in real life, always making it so graphic and vicious. The reason this violence on the male body feels so disturbing is that we are so used to reading graphic depictions of violence on women's bodies that we have become desensitized to it. The same descriptions on a male body make the reader feel uncomfortable.

Besides dealing with sexual power, Alderman also points out the repercussion of women starting to dominate the political space. In a scene from the book, we see Mayor Margot Cleary was participating in an on-air debate with this opposition member Daniel. As Daniel gets more aggressive and attacks Margot on a personal note about her daughters, Margot couldn't stop herself and gives a small jolt to his ribcage. Despite being scared that she is going to lose the elections due to this, in the end, Margot won the hearts of people because they valued her aggression. This again shows how aggressive behaviour is always made synonymous with having power.

It is true that this novel is all about matriarchal power but in its heart it is also about binary. In trying to imagine this world conquered by women, the womanhood portrayed in the novel is largely heterosexual, not taking into account the importance of understanding the perspectives of the queer community. The whole idea is constricted within the two mainstream genders and the problem is we have to choose between them. Gender and sex are so much more complex than just being a man or a woman. The author fails to include the viewpoint and social situation of intersex, trans, non-binary, gender non conforming, queer communities.

The Power reminds us that radical changes can only prove to be catastrophic and violent as opposed to gradual changes which are far more realistic, subtle but true. A meaningful long-lasting gender revolution would not simply mean the liberation of only the cisgender women but it needs to include people from all intersections, dismantling the meaning of gender as a whole.

Comparative Analysis of the above discussed Feminist Utopias

With the second wave of feminism (the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s) there was an explosion of feminist utopian literature, a type of writing which falls under the domain of feminist speculative fiction. This subgenre envisions a society being run by women where they are no

longer oppressed, alienated or limited by the patriarchal society and its structures. It is an alternative society where women can feel at home and manifest their potential. Women for centuries now have longed for a society where their destiny is no longer determined solely by their gender (Napikoski).

Both *Sultana's Dream* and *The Power* fall under the genre of feminist utopia. However, there is a lot of debate surrounding whether *The Power* by Naomi Alderman is in fact a feminist utopia or a feminist dystopia depending on one's perspective. Interestingly enough, the author herself has discussed this at length and says that it is not a dystopia for women but exactly so for the male counterparts, which in turn also sheds light on the fact that how even in literary spaces the categorization of genres which is considered universal is from a very dominant male perspective.

From the plot of the two books chosen, there emerges a few key themes that highlight the effect of reverse power dynamics.

Religion

In both the books, we observe how religion becomes a stooge for people in power to control or rather manipulate those who have less power. Religion becomes a source of oppression for the inferior gender in both the storylines.

In *Sultana's Dream*, we see how the male counterparts have been rigidly confined to the domestic spheres. Here in the Ladyland, the author plays upon the practice of purdah. Therefore, instead of a zenana, we find a mardana - a secluded space for men, while women have access to everything. Through this Hossain Hossein has created a fictional inversion. In Ladyland there exists a very feminine version of religion based on 'Love and Truth' which heralds social unity across religious and ethnic divides. This is in stark contrast to *The Power*. Allie in order to survive from her abusive father joins a convent under the alias, Eve. As others in the convent begin to realise that Eve is endowed with the ability to make miracles, she gradually uses it as a deception to preach her own religious ideas. She proclaims that God is a woman. For the girls in the convent, this was "very shocking. But they understand it, each of them. They have been waiting to hear this good news"(Alderman 95). Women gradually assume that divine intervention has saved them from their previous oppressed existence and there has emerged a

new religious leader propagating the matriarchal doctrine of religion. Eve even goes on record where she says: “Jews: look to Miriam, not Moses, for what you can learn from her. Muslims: look to Fatima, not Muhammad. Buddhists: remember Tara, the mother of liberation. Christians: pray to Mary for your salvation” (Alderman 134).

Very tactically, Alderman tries to convey the fact that Eve is not veering away from the religion but just altering the existing narratives around it: “They’re finding scripture that works for them, rewriting the bits that don’t” (Alderman 123). Throughout the book, we see how Allie keeps hearing a voice, which she believes might be God, her mother or even the devil. It is only later that it is revealed that it is the voice of her own self-deception and as a result, it reinforces the argument that faith is often propagated by deception.

Corruption, crime and violence

The two books *The Sultana’s dream* and *the Power* present a clear disparity when it comes to these aforementioned themes. In the Ladyland which is a matriarchal society, there exists peace, love, tranquillity and prosperity. Without the males in power and the unnecessary competition introduced by them, society is able to prosper and evolve. Women have been able to eliminate crime without the use of legal force or intervention (police) especially because of the disappearance of men from the public sphere which led to the crime taking a back seat: “Since the *mardana* system has been established, there has been no more crime or sin; therefore we do not require a policeman to find out a culprit, nor do we want a magistrate to try a criminal case” (Hossain 11).

Along with this, there is also immense technological advancement - hover cars, self-irrigating lands, air travel, and an unending repertoire of resources and wealth. These advancements prevent any accidental deaths from occurring in the Ladyland: “I learned that they were not subject to any kind of epidemic disease, nor did they suffer from mosquito bites as we do. I was very much astonished to hear that in *Ladyland* no one died in youth except by rare accident” (Hossain 7).

Women using scientific knowledge to progress society is also a critique of the male domination of the field of science and men have used this domination to perpetrate violence on each other and/or on the natural world which we inhabit.

However, in *Power* we see the author interrogating the very premise of women being better leaders than men. Her basic argument stems from the fact that irrespective of gender, whoever is in power will inevitably use it for one's own self-serving corrupt purpose to protect one's own status and group rather than for the betterment of society. At the beginning of the book, we see women using their own power (electric shocks emanating from their skin) to defend themselves and escape from horrible situations - such as Allie murdering her rapist dad. Gradually, as women gain more power, it corrupts their own moral fibre and they use it to perpetrate violence and cruelty. The sex slaves who were sold in Moldova, realizing the strength of their newly acquired power, vowed to create a free new country - Bessapara. Tatiana Mosklev, the leader of this new country, lets this power go to her head which intrinsically corrupts her. When she gets infuriated at a young man interrupting her at a party, she shatters a wine bottle on the floor and makes him lick up the wine along with several shards of glass. As situations in Bessapara becomes worse for men to thrive, Tunde, the male journalist, goes into hiding and even fakes his death to escape the tyranny of the state. Later on, he finds that his own works and research have been published by Nina on several websites as her own. She steals his entire life's work without any hesitation because she could. Thus, it becomes clear that power not only permits problematic behaviour but also propels such behaviour. There are also several instances throughout the book, of heinous sexual crimes, more precisely raping of men by women. Time and again, thereby Alderman has countered the idea held by the majority of the population that women are more benevolent and forgiving rulers.

Physical and Mental Quotient

In both the plotlines, we see how women have surpassed their male counterparts in terms of both physical and mental strength, a fact which most men take pride in our world. Both the authors, even though separated through time and space, have played upon it. In *Ladyland*, when Sultana asks Sister Sara how women were able to take charge because men outdo women in terms of the size of their brains. To this Sister Sara replies, "Yes, but what of that? An elephant also has got a bigger and heavier brain than a man has. Yet man can enchain elephants and employ them, according to their own wishes" (Hossain 9).

Similarly in *Power*, we see women have ‘skeins’ - the biological source for electrostatic power in women. Its development was biologically and genetically prompted by a substance called ‘Guardian Angel’, which was put in the water supply as a way to protect citizens from nerve gas during World War II.

Gender Reversals

Owing to the genre that the books belong to - Feminist Utopia, there are several instances of gender reversals in both cases. For instance, in the *Ladyland*, we see how a masculine nature was often attributed to weak, feeble and fragile traits: “Some of the passers-by made jokes at me. Though I could not understand their language, felt sure they were joking.” “I asked my friend, “What do they say?” The women say that you look very mannish.” “Mannish?” said “What do they mean by that? They mean that you are shy and timid like men” (Hossain 3)

We also see how the men are relegated to the domestic space and take care of household chores. Similarly, in *The Power*, we see how in Bessapara men needed permission to go out in public and also over time how their rights were curtailed including - the freedoms to vote, own businesses, and drive cars. The book also opens with an exchange between a fictionalised version of the author herself and a male author named Neil. The letters reveal the tone of the book from the very beginning which is that women are the dominant sex and the males face a lot of discrimination in the world. The end is also very interesting where the fictionalised version of Naomi herself suggests that if Neil wants to be taken seriously as a writer he should publish the book under a female pen name.

Both the books are an eerie mirror that allows both the sexes to envision the world in each other’s shoes.

Concluding Remarks

The two authors, despite being separated by time and space, share almost the same vision - a place where women are in power, a safe haven for them, a land which is truly their own. However, there is a stark contrast to the actualization of the visions presented by the authors. Alderman unapologetically and rightly so has hurled stones at the edifice of patriarchy by turning the tables head-on on how even women would perpetuate violence and trickery to maintain their hegemony. Whereas on the other hand, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain has presented a more

peaceful, calm, nurturing and harmonious version of the utopia - traits which are often perceived as 'feminine' by the wider public. In the world of *The Power*, women are corrupted by their physical strength in much the same way as men are corrupted by their socio-cultural power in our world. In the world of *Sultana's Dream* women's power rests within their intellect and causes the downfall of men's physical power, which she believed would even be possible for our world if universal education was made available for women.

During the second wave of feminism, it was thought that feminism had won the battle and the struggle is over. However, a study of these two works of fiction shows us that the battle feminism has been fighting has only gotten more complex and more necessary. While Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's feminist vision was limited to women's right to education as a way to liberate women, Naomi Alderman's work is a more critical review of patriarchal control and subjugation and challenges the belief that a feminist world will be a peaceful world. Therefore, to conclude, a comparative analysis of these two works allows us to view not only the progress of feminist speculative fiction but also shows us the progress of feminism and feminist thought.

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