Summer 2024

Empowered Womanhood in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's "Sultana's Dream" and Greta Gerwig's Barbie: Keys to the Ideal World

Tasnuva Tabassum
Missouri State University, tt948s@MissouriState.edu

EMPOWERED WOMANHOOD IN ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN'S "SULTANA'S DREAM" AND GRETA GERWIG'S *BARBIE*: KEYS TO THE IDEAL WORLD

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, English

By

Tasnuva Tabassum

August 2024

The author assumes responsibility for obtaining and maintaining the necessary rights and releases to legally publish this work, including the informed consent of any subjects identifiable in the photographic and/or illustrative work.

EMPOWERED WOMANHOOD IN ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN'S "SULTANA'S DREAM" AND GRETA GERWIG'S *BARBIE*: KEYS TO THE IDEAL WORLD

English

Missouri State University, August 2024

Master of Arts

Tasnuva Tabassum

ABSTRACT

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's "Sultana's Dream" (1905) and Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023) present feminist utopias separated by more than a century. Despite the temporal gap, both works introduce worlds where traditional gender roles are reversed. This thesis explores Hossain's and Gerwig's suggestions to create ideal worlds through empowerment of women. Considering evolution of feminist utopian thought from the beginning of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first, and the differences in feminisms from East to West, this thesis analyzes the narrative structures, thematic elements, and cultural contexts of these works. Despite differences, both authors seek not just female but human emancipation from oppressive, non-equitable cultural practices. By bridging distinct cultural landscapes and artistic mediums, I aim to deepen the understanding of the shared ideals and unique expressions of these feminist utopias, emphasizing the transformative power of storytelling in advocating for gender equality. I also introduce and explore a new idea of "Synthetic" feminism, which contributes to feminist thinking about the present, technologically-mediated, cultural moment.

KEYWORDS: women empowerment, reversed gender role, feminist utopia, "Sultana's Dream", *Barbie*, synthetic feminism, gender equality

EMPOWERED WOMANHOOD IN ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN'S "SULTANA'S DREAM" AND GRETA GERWIG'S *BARBIE*: KEYS TO THE IDEAL WORLD

By

Tasnuva Tabassum

A Master's Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College
Of Missouri State University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
Master of Arts, English

August 2024

Approved:

Shannon R. Wooden, Ph.D., Thesis Committee Chair

Lanya M. Lamouria, Ph.D., Committee Member

Alan S. Tinkler, Ph.D., Committee Member

Julie Masterson, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Almighty for blessing me with patience to complete my thesis work. My gratitude goes to my parents who always try to give me the best possible opportunities in life. Thanks to my mother for being my ultimate source of inspiration and being the support system during my hours of failure. I am thankful for the feeling of being showered with my father's blessings even from a different universe. Thanks to my sister, brother, and husband who have been cheering for me all the way.

Most importantly, I would like to thank Dr. Shannon R. Wooden, my first reader, without whom this thesis would never have been possible. She spent uncountable hours editing my vague sentences to make sense. I cannot thank her enough for the unbelievable amount of time, inspiration, motivation, support, and guidance she gave me. I am wholeheartedly grateful to Dr. Wooden. I want to thank Dr. Lanya M. Lamouria and Dr. Alan S. Tinkler from the deepest core of my heart for agreeing to be my readers and being my "go to place" in any academic problems. They have always given me the best advice and suggestions that improved me in every way possible. I would also like to thank my fellow GTA friends, all my professors, my students, and the English department at MSU for their unwavering support during my graduate studies.

I dedicate this thesis to my Ammu (mother), Laila Hosne Ara

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

An ideal world is what everyone wants, but we cannot agree on what that means. What if building an ideal world requires empowered women with a vision and leadership? Is the world ready for women to be equal? Has it been ready before or will it be ready in the future? What would the changes look like if the power shifted from male to female hands? These questions are not new. Women have been asking them for decades, not just in the political sphere but in the literary one, and not just in literature but in literary criticism. Early feminist scholars like Ellen Moers, Elaine Showalter, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, began the movement that amplified the scholarship of major and minor women writers from Mary Shelley and Jane Austen to Elizabeth Gaskell and Mary Elizabeth Braddon[1]. Scholars like Gloria Anzaldua and Gayatri Spivak further worked to ensure that the voices of women writers of color were also being heard and studied[2]. A journey of twentieth century Anglo-American feminist speculative literature can be charted from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, originally published in 1915, to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, published in 1985, through William Moulton Marston's *Wonder Woman* comics, created in 1941, through 1970s feminist texts like Joanna Russ's the

[1] Showalter and Moers pioneered the concept of "gynocentricism" in the 1970s, transforming the world of literary criticism by insisting on a place and perspective for women writers. Showalter's *A Literature of their Own* (1977) argued for a cultural framework of British women writers that would include writers like Braddon and Gaskell among the more famous writers like Virginia Woolf. In *Literary Women* (1976) Moers situated Jane Austen's work in a longer "gynocentric" literary tradition and introduced the concept of the "female Gothic," which allows her to likewise interpret Mary Shelley as not just a Romantic or Gothic writer but one writing from a distinctive female perspective. Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic,* taking its name from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, focused on the split personality of the Victorian female authors; like Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, mostly known for writing gothic ghost stories, set the stage for feminist movement through vocalizing issues of gender and class identities as early Victorian authors.

[2] Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* focuses on Chicano culture, criticizing it from a lesbian feminist perspective, and Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" focuses on vocalizing the marginalized communities. Both authors take a strong stance about the social positions of women of color.

Female Man in 1975 and James Tiptree, Jr.'s *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* in 1976. Since *The Handmaid's Tale,* dozens of feminist speculative texts, what Sarah Dillon calls a "tidal wave" of feminist dystopias, have been published (169). Noticeable feminist speculative literature has not been made only by Anglo-American authors but also by other authors from different corners of the globe. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) and Greta Gerwig (1983-present) are two among these many women writers, roughly bookending the conversation to date with major texts published more than a hundred years, and half of the globe, apart. The evolution of feminist literature within these hundred years experiences fictional and critical authors who mobilizes feminism from various angles. Though many authors imagined worlds where women's power could flourish, only a few of these envision actual equality.

The so-called "waves" of modern feminism, often represented by contemporary feminist literature, depict a long twentieth century's exploration of female power as a mandatory part of human societies. Paige Adams considers Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1848 *Declaration of Sentiments* in feminist theory and, in literature, Kate Chopin's 1899 *The Awakening* significant milestones of the first wave feminism focusing on women's social freedom and political rights; Yuanmeng Du similarly describes Gilman's *Herland* as a prominent first wave feminist novel where a utopian society composed entirely of women explores themes of gender equality and reproductive autonomy (93). Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, published in 1949, paved the way for the second wave, while Betty Friedan's 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* is a major second wave feminist text; Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* in 1969 set the stage for feminist literary criticism (Adams). Bulent Ayyildiz sees Joanna Russ's 1975 novel *The Female Man* as a landmark work of feminist speculative fiction that captures the ethos of the second wave of feminism (151) and continues to inspire readers with its bold exploration of gender, identity, and

social justice. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* in 1989, Rebecca Walker's "Becoming the 3rd Wave" in 1992, and Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* in 1990 are some renowned theoretical pieces of third wave feminism. *The Future of Another Timeline* in 2019 by Annalee Newitz is a postfeminist or fourth wave speculative novel that explores themes of time travel, activism, and women's rights. Lee Mandelo finds engagement with complex intersectional issues pivotal in *The Future of Another Timeline* that challenges historiography of present feminist time (175). Newitz engages with contemporary feminist issues, such as reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and intersectionality. Mojgan Abshavi and Zaman Kargozari see Naomi Alderman's 2016 dystopian novel *The Power* as "exhilarating and nauseating" as Alderman "slaps [men] with their own privilege" (819); Alderman resonates with the third wave feminist traits of power dynamics, gender politics, and systemic inequality in a society transformed by women's newfound abilities.

It might seem that questions of gender and power would be radically different across the globe. Indeed, the geographical, cultural, and societal differences between the Western and Eastern parts of the globe, along with the historical differences, are undeniable. The territorial distance and background of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are major factors behind these differences. But despite these differences, there is a similarity in the case of women; in both parts of globe, they are neglected as a part of the total population and as citizens. Women have had a long journey to establish their equal rights as human beings, and even now this has not been established. Women are still treated as second class citizens around the world. For this reason, it should not be an overstatement to call feminism an essential mechanism for establishing equality, a mechanism that Hossain and Gerwig both operate more than a century apart and from two opposite sides of the world. Hossain's 1905 Ladyland and Gerwig's 2023

Barbieland both portray women's emancipation from patriarchal societies as the key to the ideal world and demonstrate a similar answer: female leadership is the solution to social justice, to that question of what feminine power might look like.

Women's speculative worlds have often explored single-gendered and women-only spaces through dystopian and utopian literature. The word "utopia" coined by Thomas More, means "no place" or "nowhere" (Sargent 185) and derives from the Greek words *ou*, meaning "no, not," and *topos*, meaning "place." However, over time, it has come to represent "an idealized place of perfection." Since Thomas More's era, the 1500s, many books similar to his *Utopia* have been written, and numerous plans for perfect societies have been proposed. Feminist scholars all over the world have discussed the history, ambivalence, decolonization and posthuman politics related to feminist utopia, or those speculative or imaginary societies that embody principles of gender equality, social justice, and empowerment of women. Samadrita Kuiti, for instance, explores local patriarchal system and injustices by colonial rule and claims that these two "displaced colonized women" from mainstream social and political sectors in British India (241). She discusses Hossain's work and her role in involving "women's participation in the nationalist movement for freedom" as a clear indicator of anticolonial resistance (Kuiti 242). Lauren Wilcox's study "Practicing Gender, Queering Theory" is one of many articles that examines how the difference between theorizing and practicing gender roles often complicates the success and failure of a gender (792) and blurs the line of social justice. In feminist utopias, gender roles, stereotypes, and discrimination are dismantled, and women have equal access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making power. This concept envisions a world where gender-based oppression and violence are eradicated, and individuals of all genders can thrive and fulfill their potential without constraints imposed by patriarchal norms or

structures. Anna Gilarek examines how feminist utopian writers use speculative techniques to "defamiliarize" their critiques of the present time, allowing readers to "recognize more unequivocally real problems" (36). From this perspective, both "Sultana's Dream" and *Barbie* offer feminist utopias, where one is a dream, and the other is a fantasy, and both defamiliarized spaces afford pointed social satire.

Even in these imaginative media, true equality is seldom achieved because in these supposedly ideal worlds, men are often found in similar positions to women of the contemporary real world, suggesting that one gender's emancipation can only be imagined at the other's expense. Men are depicted as "subaltern" in both Ladyland and Barbieland. The term "subaltern," attributed to post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak, describes those who only receive orders but never give orders, especially in the context of marginalized social classes, such as peasants. Subaltern historiography makes women synonymous with silence when it comes to race and class difference. Spivak also confirms that the same class or element that was dominant in one area could be among the dominated in another (Spivak 79-82). Though Spivak's work is on colonial oppression, we may also find the term "subaltern" appropriate for describing any women and children considered weak and powerless in a patriarchal society. Imagining a world where patriarchy has been disrupted, tends to reposition men as the subaltern.
Moreover, even when literary experiments turn patriarchal worlds to matriarchies and treat men as women, the justification for the distribution and exercise of power is dissimilar to patriarchal worlds. Such illustrations can expose the flaws of patriarchy and the need for equal rights and promote the idea that women would exercise power differently. In this thesis I explore two texts that represent a wide spectrum of time, place, and culture. Textual and visual analysis of Hossain's 1905 science fiction short story "Sultana's Dream" and Gerwig's 2023 film *Barbie*

can illustrate the barriers towards an ideal society or overall system and can be one small step toward a possible resolution to create a sense of equality and harmony.

The Effects of Feminism on Hossain

Feminist utopias can be better understood by studying their contemporary feminist waves that had unique characteristics having effects on the theories and literature of that specific time. Though women have been writing in favor of social and political rights since at least the time of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, arguably the first significantly impactful wave of modern feminism started in the West with the 1848 Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others championed voting rights and political power for women. Eventually, though it took more than 50 years, women won the right to vote in 1920 in the US and in 1928 in the UK. Then the second wave started in the early 1960s with President John F. Kennedy's formation of "President's Commission on the Status of Women" in 1961 and the appointment of Eleanor Roosevelt to lead it. As Martha Rampton, a history professor and director of the Center for Gender Equity at Pacific University, confirms in her "Four Waves of Feminism," it was 1963 when the second wave actively started with Kennedy's signature on the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (Rampton). Between the first wave and the second, the Western world went through various reformations on women's rights, and women were becoming an active part of society by establishing their right to vote and reflect their opinion.

In the meantime, however, the Eastern part of the world had no hint of women's rights. The society in undivided Bengal in Southeast Asia used to confine women inside a house or

zenana[3], for the sake of purdah[4], and women were not allowed to appear in front of any male or house guest ever. They were not allowed to go to school and receive formal education. During the British reign in 19th century India, almost no Indian women were seen outside home. Into this circumstance, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was born on December 9, 1880, at Rangpur of Bengal Presidency. She was born into an affluent but orthodox Muslim family and was homeschooled by her father and later, after marriage, by her husband (Jahan 37-40). She began her writing career by publishing a pathos filled essay "Pipasha" meaning "Thirst" in 1902. She then started writing stories, articles, and novels illustrating the importance of education for girls and women, beginning with her second piece of writing "Strijatir Obonoti" meaning "Women's Downfall" in 1904 (Haque 98). She is the first woman in Bengal who spoke publicly about the necessity of women's education. Though Seneca Falls Convention's "Declaration of Sentiments" advocated for women's suffrage, Hossain's activism for women rights started with the basic right to female education. Hossain became an activist and social reformer for the sake of freeing women from the imprisonment of illiteracy. She is considered as the pioneer feminist of Bengal. It would not be possible to educate girls and women of Bengal if she had not stepped out and established a girl's school in 1909.

"Sultana's Dream" was published in *The Indian Ladies Magazine* in 1905, but it was first published as a book format in 1988 by The Feminist Press, edited by Roushan Jahan with an introduction by Hanna Papanek. Rokeya Hossain was a feminist icon in Bengal by then. There was some scholarship on her work, mostly published in the East, not just on "Sultana's Dream"

[3] Zenana: the rooms or apartments where women are kept if practicing purdah. The male equivalent to zenana is mardana.

[4] Purdah: practiced in certain Hindu or Muslim communities; the act of sequestering women in separate spaces away from men within a house, thus restricting their movement, as well as hiding their bodies using certain items of clothing.

but on her other literary pieces. The publication of "Sultana's Dream" by Penguin Classics in 2005 made a remarkable change in scholarship on Hossain, not only increasing the number of articles but expanding the conversation into Western publications. In the last decade, numerous scholars have paid attention to "Sultana's Dream" and published criticisms on this book, focusing on Hossain's ideas of feminist utopia, female education, breaking out from purdah, and breaking away from colonial rules. Ibtisam Ahmed, focusing on justice and utopian happiness, remarks that Hossain consciously chose justice over "superficial equality," as justice is more concerned with empowerment of the marginalized (Ahmed). Debali Mookerjea-Leonard finds Hossain's simple story important because it "engages in a subversive critical enterprise" (145) by satirizing patriarchy. Fayeza Hasanat, emphasizing on ecocritical view of Hossain, draws attention to the "discourse of religion and gender" (116) while Niaz Zaman sheds light on Hossain's contribution to "women empowerment or people's rights in general" (6) in a comparative study of Islamic feminism to Radical feminism. These perspectives on Hossain's works, both literary and political, indicate why Hossain's name should be mentioned when the history of feminism around the world is discussed anywhere. Indeed, UNESCO's "Memory of the World" or MOW Regional Register has recently, on 8 May 2024, added Rokeya Hossain's "Sultana's Dream" in recognition of human innovation and imagination ("UNESCO's Memory of the World Inscribes 'Sultana's Dream'"). Moreover, Sara Kapheim notes in her review that "Sultana's Dream," a feminist science fiction novella involving a utopian role reversal of genders, preceded even Gilman's *Herland*, which is more often considered the first real "classic old-school feminist utopia novel" (Kapheim).

"Sultana's Dream" is set in a utopian Ladyland, where men are confined to 'mardanas,' a male equivalent of zenanas which does not exist in real world and was made up by Hossain.

"Sultana's Dream" tells the story of the protagonist, Sultana, who falls asleep and finds herself walking with Sister Sara in Ladyland, a country where women hold positions of power, and men are confined to the domestic sphere. Hossain's treatment of utopia is a "delightful satire" or a vehicle of social criticism (Yadav 32). She portrays the prevalent idea about gender in real Indian society through the conversations of Sultana and Sister Sara, where Sultana serves as the mouthpiece of Indian stereotypes and Sister Sara represents Hossain's ideas. Mahbubul Alam and Nawshan Ara Rima in "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's Sultana's Dream: An Avant-Garde of Economic Independence of Women Towards Freedom" remark that through the character of Sultana, Begum Rokeya satirizes the male-dominated patriarchal Indian society, including its customs and tendency to interpret religious texts to suppress women. The practice of secluding women in zenana and depriving them of education ensured that they remained dependent on men for their survival. In contrast to this culture, Hossain expresses self-confidence, self-strength, and self-reliance through the character of Sister Sara in the Ladyland to inspire Indian women to believe in their infinite capability to achieve economic freedom for meaningful female emancipation (Alam and Rima 186).

Furthermore, "Sultana's Dream" offers a compelling vision of a society with rights for women and men based on their ability and responsibilities. In Ladyland, the scientific and technological advancements, such as solar-powered devices and flying cars, made by women were not even imaginable to men while they were ruling that country. Educational reformation--having universities for women--enabled them to become thoughtful leaders who were conscious of their rights. Sister Sara describes how perfect the environment of Ladyland has become since men were sent to 'mardana,' and women took control of this place. The Queen speaks of men as "rather of lower morals" (Hossain 17) who cannot be trusted as they failed to win a battle using

their full military force against the enemy and could not protect the teenage boys from going to the war. Men's low morals and failure in the battle demonstrate they don't deserve or have not earned equal rights. Hence, men are not deserving of rights equal to women, and giving men the rights they deserve has brought peace in Ladyland. Men of higher rank wanted to be free, but the Queen circulated a letter saying, "if their service should ever be needed they would be sent for" (Hossain 14), meanwhile they should remain in mardana. Hossain portrays a harmonized society as one where rights are equitable according to one's contribution to society. In this way Hossain advocates for women's education, empowerment, and participation in public life. Ultimately, the readers of the story realize that women do a job better job than men.

Only an article by freelance journalist Shaurya Thapa on the *DailyO,* an India-based website focused on youth culture, has to date connected Greta Gerwig's work to Hossain's (Thapa), but the comparison of feminist perspectives on patriarchy from 1905 to 2023 can surprise as well as shock us. One might think Gerwig's vision is far advanced from Hossain, but those visions are so similar that it is uncanny to put them side by side.

Greta Gerwig's Feminisms

Gerwig was born on August 4, 1983, in Sacramento, California. Her 2023 film *Barbie* represents the latest thoughts about a feminist world. Audrey Mitchell, in her film review, quotes bell hooks' *All About Love* to have studied the mother-daughter relationship in Gerwig's 2017 film *Ladybird* (Mitchell 59). Gerwig, as a film director, has contributed to the feminist conversation by portraying the lives of women in the West for more than a decade. From *Frances Ha* in 2012 to *Barbie* in 2023, Gerwig has appreciated the struggle and journey of women characters in her films. Gerwig is not just an American film director, but also an actress

and writer. She graduated from Bernard College with a degree in English and Philosophy. Though little beyond reviews have been published in academic journals on *Barbie*, countless essays have emerged on the internet, and many scholars have researched and reviewed Gerwig's other films with great importance. Audrey Mitchell, for example, sees *Ladybird,* an autobiographical portrayal of a teenage girl who reminds the audience about their own teenage years, as evidence that Gerwig is an important director who "resonates" with audience perspective (60). Focusing on *Little Women,* Anika Babel calls Gerwig a "cinematic verbalist" (10), and Caetlin Benson-Allot argues that Gerwig is in a quest for "women's autonomy and self-determination" (67) in her trilogy of *Ladybird, Little Women,* and *Barbie*. Other scholars, such as Helen Warner, Luke Robert Naylor, Ryan Dorrian, Claire Perkins, and Barbara Hochman, have also written reviews on Gerwig's films referring to her as a major director working on coming-of-age stories[5].

Barbie is set in Barbieland, a matriarchal society in which no one is a mother. Every girl is Barbie, and every boy is Ken. In the world of Barbies and Kens, Kens do not have any specific job to do, only the Barbies are active leaders; Barbies are President, scientists, astronauts, doctors, and many other professionals. They rule the world. In *Barbie* as in "Sultana's Dream," inactive masculine characters and the uninterrupted advancement of feminine characters are behind the world's development. When men are not given the chance to corrupt a society, women can run it almost flawlessly.

[5] Helen Warner's "'An indie voice for a generation of women'?: Greta Gerwig, and female authorship post #Metoo," Luke Naylor's "Why *Barbie* and not *Oppenheimer*: A Film Review of *Barbie*, directed by Greta Gerwig. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2023," Ryan Dorrian's "Millennial disentitlement: Greta Gerwig's post-recession hipster stardom," Claire Perkins' "Doing Film Feminisms in the Age of Popular Feminism: A Roundtable Convened by Claire Perkins and Jodi Brooks," and Barbara Hochman's "*Little Women* on Film: Socks or Buttons" are some noteworthy criticisms written on Greta Gerwig's films.

In Barbieland where Barbies live every day as a perfect day, they never age, fail or falter (Millman 36). The perfect world starts cracking when the stereotypical Barbie, played by Margot Robbie, has a thought of death in the middle of a dance party. Eventually she faces imperfections such as flat feet and cellulite. She has to go to the real world, on a journey that recalls Dante's *Inferno* in *Divine Comedy*, to fix her malfunctioning parts; Ken (played by Ryan Gosling), Barbie's boyfriend, comes along with her. Exploring the real world, Barbie realizes how imperfections are embraced by real people every day. Barbie thinks of cellulite, feels depressed, and goes through all the human feelings that Gloria, the owner of a stereotypical Barbie doll, feels. Barbie feels like being in a mother-daughter relationship from the mother's side (Gerwig and Baumbach 34-35). In the meantime, Ken discovers the ideology of patriarchy and goes back to Barbieland to transform it to Kenland, also known as Kendom, to practice patriarchy. Identity crises of both Barbie and Ken turns Barbieland upside down. Returning to Barbieland and seeing the chaotic situation, Barbie takes help from her human friends, Gloria and Sasha, to fix Barbieland, finally realizing that neither matriarchy nor patriarchy is a solution to a harmonized society; it takes two to tango.

Unlike Ladyland, Barbieland is run by women from the beginning. This is because Mattel[6], the company producing Barbie dolls, made Barbie dolls for little girls to play with. Ruth Handler, the creator of Barbie doll and co-founder of Mattel, was inspired by watching her daughter Barbara playing with paper dolls for hours and introduced a three-dimensional doll in 1959. In *Barbie: Her Inspiration, History, and Legacy,* Handler's biographer Robin Gerber

[6] Mattel was not pleased with the famous 1997 song "Barbie Girl" by pop band Aqua as the song "satirize the objectification and sexualization of women with such lyrics as "*I'm a blonde bimbo girl in a fantasy world*" and "*you can brush my hair, undress me everywhere.*" The toy giant didn't want their doll's name associated with the sexual and bitingly cynical lyrics, so they opted to sue Aqua's US record company, MCA records" (Flatau). Mattel used this popular song in the *Barbie* film in 2023, but with a new version of changed lyrics.

writes that Handler noticed the interest of little girls in adulthood as they imagined their paper dolls maturing from babies to teenagers. That is why Handler, in a 1967 interview with *Good Housekeeping,* explained that her philosophy behind the Barbie doll was to let the girls feel that they "could be anything that they wanted to be" (Gerber 17). Her idea was not instantly welcomed by the twenty male engineers of Mattel, though; they thought mothers would never buy their daughters adult-looking three-dimensional dolls with full grown breasts, and they preferred making burp guns than agreeing to Handler's idea (Gerber 17). Later in 1961, Ken doll was introduced as Barbie's boyfriend (Mattel).

Target consumers for Barbie's plastic world were female. So, Barbieland is supposed to be a land for and run by women and girls. Although ABC News interviewer Sarah Ferguson states that Mattel denied calling the film "feminist," Margot Robbie, lead character and a producer of the film, and Greta Gerwig, writer and director of the film, confirmed "it most certainly is a feminist film," with Gerwig declaring it "also a humanist film." Both defined the term feminist as "anybody who thinks men and women should be equal" (ABC News In-Depth). The notion of making a humanist film connects to Gerwig's sense of equity and inclusivity. The interview of Robbie and Gerwig clarifies that despite Mattel's denial, they made a satirical, clearly feminist film, which is very self-aware of its characters.

Being ruled by women from the beginning affects the mindset of men in Barbieland: they're not undeserving and they don't hold grudges, unlike the men in Ladyland who live with the agony of their failure in war. Men in Ladyland ran the country until women overpowered them, so, their mindset was patriarchal from the beginning, and their defeat and seclusion to 'mardana' are what they are ashamed of. What Ken is upset about is not his lack of power, or seclusion, but the lack of attention he receives. Ken's existence depends on Barbie's attention. A

narrative voice in the film confirms that Barbie has a great day every day, but Ken only has a great day if Barbie looks at him (Gerwig and Baumbach 7). When Ken wants to be with Barbie at her place, Barbie does not allow him to be with her, as she would rather have every night as girls' night. This creates an opportunity for *Barbie* to use men-as-subaltern satire, showing the power dynamics of Barbieland, that is not identical to Hossain's world.

In one sense, women aren't leading at all at the beginning of *Barbie*, because Barbieland is a plastic society based on children's play. There is nothing to lead. Barbieland is a place where no one eats real food, falls sick, or really sleeps; it seems like women are running the place, but they have no real duties to perform. For instance, in Barbieland, politicians are in a society without conflicts where they do not have anything to do. Before introducing Barbieland, the narrator says, "Thanks to Barbie; all problems of feminism and equal rights have been solved. At least, that's what the Barbies think." (*Barbie* 00:03:34-00:03:45). Apparently, it seems like a perfect place. In the President's office, President Barbie tells everyone to turn to the Barbie next to each other and give complements; the Reporter Barbie is encouraged to ask questions to President, and she just asks, "How come you are so amazing?" and the reply came "no comments" with an elated laugh from President Barbie (*Barbie* 00:06:42-00:06:). Even in the supreme court, Lawyer Barbie gives a passionate speech on Democracy becoming Plutocracy which they should not support, and everybody applauds because there is no opposition. When a conflict arises, such as Stereotypical Barbie's flat feet or cellulite or thoughts of death, all other Barbies become anxious and send her to Weird Barbie. The doctor or nurse or any other Barbies cannot solve these problems for Stereotypical Barbie. Their leadership becomes visible when we see Ken's version of patriarchy that wrecks everything. Compared to "real-world" patriarchy and Ken's version of shallow, untrained, and ultimately violent leadership, Barbie's leadership is

proven superior, more ethical, and thus more deserving. When the Kens forget their voting day for finalizing the constitution of Kenland, the Barbies vote and finalize the constitution of the place as Barbieland again. The reestablishment of Barbieland shows how women do a better job at leading than men.

The Kens may have been the subaltern part of Barbieland before the revolution, but they are not secluded at the defeat of Kendom; rather Barbieland ultimately aspires to equality. Where Ladyland believes in seclusion of men, Barbieland becomes sympathetic to men and includes all gender identities. The contemporary society of Hossain was imbalanced where women were deprived of their rights. As Sister Sara explains to Sultana, "how unfair it is to shut in the harmless women and let loose the men" (Hossain 9), which may be why she thought of a world where men had only minimum rights; she did not even consider giving voice to any men in Ladyland. Gerwig, however, thinks of an equal society where Barbies are sympathetic to Kens and to Allan during their respective identity crises. The Kens' practice of patriarchy destroys the harmony in Ladyland and almost ruins everything; Ken calls Kendom the land of "The Free and Men" (Gerwig and Baumbach 95), which excludes the other gender identities. However, overpowering the Kens and making Barbieland free of patriarchy brings back the leadership of women, who do not punish the men but teach or invite them to the reign of equality. After President Barbie declares that they have "restored all the Barbies' brains and autonomy," she insists that "No Barbie or Ken should be living in the shadows!" As she recognizes the equal rights for all, the voiceover says that the Kens "have to start somewhere," and will someday have "as much power and influence... as women have in the real world." Whether it is seclusion of men in Ladyland or equal inclusion of all in Barbieland, the reign of women seems to seek justice in both contexts.

Reading “Sultana’s Dream” and watching *Barbie* did not only fascinate me but rather provoked the question, why it has to take more than a hundred years imagining women as leaders, and why in 2023 are females leading a nation still utopian character? Why can’t this be real instead of needing to take place in Ladyland and Barbieland? We are no longer dwelling in the colonial era; we have come a long way with decolonization and the creation of a postcolonial as well as postmodern era. If we are still not courageous enough to see women practicing their rights and excelling in leadership in real world, have we really moved much to call the present era as practicing-feminist? These questions must be asked to understand the progress of human society's civility.

That is why chapters of this paper are going to elaborate on the intersections between gender reversal, the subalternity of men, ecofeminism, feminist and postcolonial movements, and post-feminisms in contexts of “Sultana’s Dream” and *Barbie*. From Hossain’s feminism to Gerwig’s, how the image of men in Ladyland and Barbieland becomes as a reflection of women in the real world and proves the subalternity of women through utopian subaltern men, will be explored in this thesis. The first two chapters claim that the two texts represent certain aspects of their unique historical moments. As similar as they may seem in terms of being pro-women, they are each product of their times. Hossain, writing from turn-of-the-century colonial Bengal, is an essentialist feminist, but postcolonial criticism is necessary to understand her “Sultana’s Dream.” The next chapter claims Gerwig as an important film director of this postfeminist era who is writing for neoliberal, postfeminist, and pointedly consumerist Hollywood, but her most innovative approach is “Synthetic Feminism.” The last chapter sheds light on the final comparisons and the purpose of this work that connects the major claims together and shows

how “Sultana’s Dreams” and Barbie, through shock and horror, are more alike than they ought to be for being so far apart in time and place.

"SULTANA'S DREAM": A MODERN COLONIAL FEMINIST FANTASY

The early twentieth century was a colonial era for the Bengal of India, for Bengalis as well as Indians. India was under British colonial rule. The socio-political sphere in India used to be controlled by the British rulers who were also known as British raj. The British wanted to make India into a replica of England by disseminating Western knowledge and making India serve the needs of industrial England (Mohan 36-37). In the process of colonization, Bengal, mostly Calcutta, was given priority as people were driven to a new pattern of education there. Though the medium of instruction was English, the dissemination of European knowledge among Indians opened the path toward political and economic modernization. In the late nineteenth century, social reformer Ram Mohan Roy supported this development and encouraged young college students to be educated in the Westernized system. The progressive characteristics of Western, especially British, society, such as egalitarianism, economic development, scientific knowledge, and democratic political institutions, were immensely attractive to the 'Young Bengal', a group of college students, in Calcutta.

Although Westernization seemed "progressive," Roy and others were creating a Euro-centric view of Indian history and civilization that was misleading and that distanced them from knowing their own history and culture. Because of the European hegemonic rhetoric, the colonized elite faced two serious consequences: an inferiority complex and a sense of detachment from their ideological and cultural roots, both of which eventually led to disillusionment and tensions between the colonized and the colonial authority (Mohan 37). Postcolonial theorists of the late twentieth century describe this blending of eastern and western thinking as 'hybridity.' It is the condition of creative and contentious mixing of traditions and

cultures that the colonized subject must negotiate. According to John W. Marshall's essay on hybridity, this "Young Bengal" group is an appropriate example of Homi K. Bhaba's developing idea of hybridity, which is a "compromised condition of colonial authority" (Marshall 164).

During the nineteenth century, women were seen as a central tool in the modernization of colonial India. Anglo-Indian women, who were originally European, started writing about women in India who were not treated well by the society and who were kept in 'zenanas' to maintain their purdah. Purdah, especially, was mandatory for Muslim women. In *Married to the Empire*, which addresses Anglo-Indian women as well as Indian women, Marie A. Procida speaks of the "separation of spheres" in the British empire where gender patterns were characterized as "public" for male and "private" for female (Porter 761). Anglo-Indian women were a part of a society outside the home, which Indian women were not. So, having public or private sphere did not make sense in the case of Indian women.

Bengali Muslim Females were supposed to live their entire life within the four walls of zenana. The way women were forced to stay in purdah, was actually a religious and social superstition. In a newspaper article "Purdah in Islam," M. Shah Alam explains that verses 31 and 59 in the Holy Quran demands purdah, for women, meaning covering of the head, neck, and bosoms; verse 30 tells men to keep their gaze lower and guard their modesty as a part of purdah (Alam). The Quranic verses were misinterpreted, and purdah was made a social norm to keep women secluded in zenana. This misinterpretation created a social superstition in India that lasted from the Mughal rule in 1526 AD and into the twentieth century.

Into this social world Rokeya Hossain was born. She had to leave her birthplace, Rangpur, and stay at Bhagalpur in West Bengal after marriage. Though she did not receive any formal education, her elder brother and sister encouraged her to learn languages like Arabic,

Persian, Bengali, and English at home. When she was married off to a much older man who was a magistrate, a government official, and he helped her continue learning. Amidst the intellectual and political movements of the Young Bengals and Anglo-Indian women writers, Hossain became concerned about the emancipation of women and made herself an advocate for female-education, working her whole life to establish women's right to be educated. Hossain established Sakhawat Hossain Memorial School for Muslim girls in Calcutta with the money her husband, Syed Sakhawat Hossain, left to her when he died. Apart from that, Hossain involved herself in welfarist works; she arranged literacy and vocational classes for Muslim women who lived in slums of Calcutta. She dedicated her life to working for the emancipation of Muslim women in Bengal to bring them out of that darkness. She not only founded women's organizations and schools but also participated in debates and conferences concerning the advancement of women until her death (Lakhi 8).

Rokeya Hossain spoke out about ending the unnecessary seclusion in zenana. In *The Secluded Ones,* a collection of socially critical essays, she tells the story of a male doctor who could not diagnose a female patient and treat her because he was not allowed to use stethoscope on her. When the housemaid took one end of the stethoscope and handed over that to the patient, who was covered by blanket, the doctor did not hear any sound coming from the other end and found out the stethoscope was placed on the waist of the patient. He stormed out of the room enraged and did not go back to examine that patient (Hossain 28). The severity of purdah in the nineteenth century is an indication of the ignorance around women's lives. Hossain, as a social reformer, revolted against the superstition of purdah and spread awareness among women.

Creating awareness of the need to break out of purdah became a main goal for Hossain as there were situations when women had to even die to preserve purdah. In another selection from *The Secluded Ones*, Hossain writes about various incidents that happened around purdah.

> Once, a house caught fire. The mistress of the house had the presence of mind to collect her jewelry in a handbag and hurry out of the bedroom. But at the door, she found the courtyard full of strangers fighting the fire. She could not come out in front of them. So she went back to her bedroom with the bag and hid under her bed. She burned to death but did not come out. Long live purdah! (Hossain 26).

Purdah was such a strict religious rule for Muslim women at the time of British raj that we do not need to go too far to find stories like the above one. If a thief entered in zenana ever, he never had to face any obstacles as women would give everything to the thief without a word. Women could not make noise or sound in the presence of a man as they were not allowed to let their voices be heard by any stranger man. So, Hossain attempted to write and create awareness about the unnecessary superstitions on purdah to save Indian women from their invisibility and voicelessness.

Hossain wrote regular Bengali articles for Bengali-periodicals, such as *Nabanoor*, *Nabaprabha,* and *Mahila* (Bagchi 71). Her utopian science fiction "Sultana's Dream," was first published in 1905 in the *Indian Ladies' Magazine*, a major magazine that advocated for women at that time and published the works of major women writers and poets. Though "Sultana's Dream" was written and published before Gilman's 1915 novel *Herland*, the most well-known feminist utopian novel of early twentieth century, the two works share thematic and stylistic features. Even when the narratives differ, the writers address similar topics, such as motherhood, narrative voices, and attitudes toward patriarchy.

The concept of "motherhood" marks a difference between these two texts. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, all women are mothers. They do not need men to become mothers;

rather they apply Parthenogenesis, an asexual process of reproduction, to become mothers. The notion of education comes along with motherhood, as the character Somel says: "The care of babies involves education, and is entrusted only to the most fit" (Gilman 83). Herland is matriarchal in true sense of the word if we require motherhood to be a major trait for matriarchy. Unlike Herland, women in Ladyland depend on sexual reproduction to become mothers, which is why they still have men in their country.

The narrative voices that present their respective societies are also worth noticing; "Sultana's Dream" is narrated by all female voices where women are talking to each other, whereas *Herland* relies on voices of both female and male characters; a male sociologist voice is present as well. This gives Gilman the opportunity to make men, specifically the narrator Van, admire a women's world, while Hossain has no intention to give the narrative over to men's opinion and narrates the story from Sultana's and Sister Sara's perspective. When Van says, "We were now well used to seeing women not as females but as people; people of all sorts, doing every kind of work" (Gilman 137), readers can come to the conclusion that women should no longer be treated just as the female sex but rather as human beings in any world, whether it is patriarchal or matriarchal. Hossain's Sister Sarah, however, says, "Since the mardana system has been established, there has been no more crime or sin" (Hossain 15), which demonstrate that crimes are mostly committed by men, and when men are removed from leadership, an ethical system prevails. Gilman's narrator is learning to appreciate women by breaking out of his previous patriarchal perceptions, but Hossain's narrator already understands that the future is female.

Gilman's and Hossain's women are educated enough to take care of the environment and invent ecofriendly technologies such as parthenogenesis, weather ballons, and flying cars. On the

one hand, Gilman makes Herland a place where plentiful children are given fascinating opportunities to learn and become teachers. On the other hand, Hossain creates universities for women in Ladyland where they can learn and test their achieved knowledge. Therefore, "While *Herland* and 'Sultana's Dream' both share a vision of female-led cooperative social progress, with both societies deeply interested in women's education and in concern and care for the environment, 'Sultana's Dream' also critiques imperialism and colonialism, seen as associated with competitive knowledge production and education" (Bagchi 71). The first thing men observe in Herland is that the forest looks like a garden where all the trees are fruit-bearing or useful in some extent. Likewise, Sultana notices when she is walking through Ladyland that the whole place seems like a garden, and later she learns about the ecofriendly transport system that does not require railroads, meaning that it does not require systems developed by the British colonizers. Since the colonizers never cared about the ecosystem and deforested the land to make railroads in the name of civilization, Hossain seems conflicted by the colonizer's idea of civilization. She did not like the patriarchal system either.

The early twentieth century's first two feminist utopias, "Sultana's Dream" and *Herland,* show concern about all-female society to portray a counter image of the prevailing patriarchy. Since women in Bengal were barred from getting out of their homes and receiving institutional education, Hossain's "Sultana's Dream" seems like an impossible work penned by a Bengali female writer. A woman, who was not even a direct student of science, wrote a piece of science fiction where scientific advancements were prioritized as a reason behind a progressive nation. Figure 1 shows Durga Bai's illustration of Hossain's imagined Weather Balloon for a 2015 edition of the book for Tara Books as an example of Hossain's progressive vision. Hossain's work is probably more dramatic than Gilman's as there is a significant difference between the

length of these two texts; one is a short story, and the other is a novel. Despite having educational and political restrictions, her unstoppable brilliance came out not only through penning such a story but also in showing how ahead of time she had been in her thoughts.

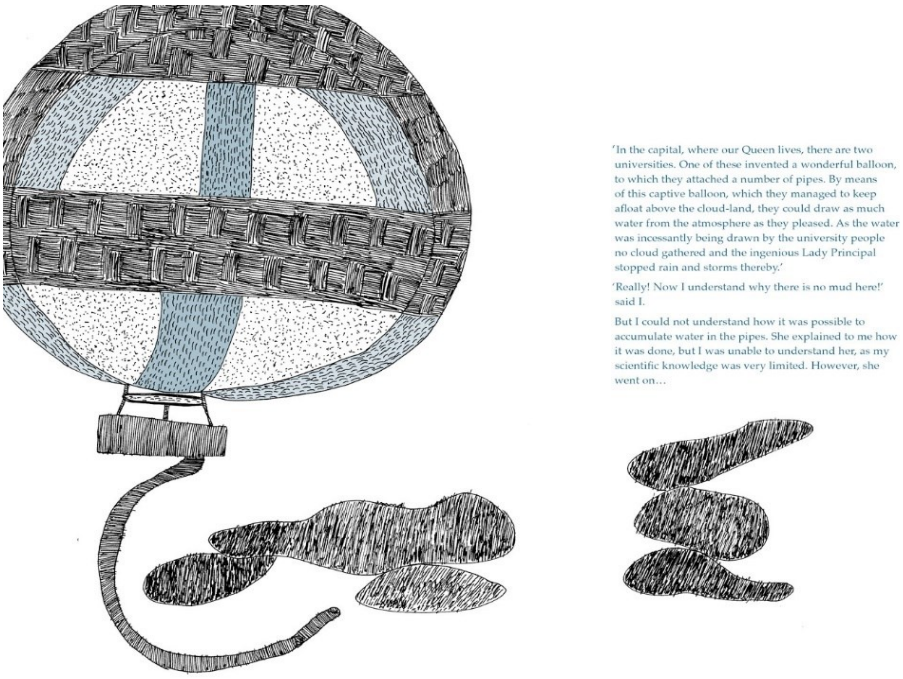

Figure 1. Weather Balloon invented by women students at university in Ladyland (Lewton)

Sultana's dream seems impossible as Hossain distanced Ladyland from the real world by calling it a dream of Sultana. Nonetheless, the scenario of empowered women Hossain explored in "Sultana's Dream" was not easy to digest for the contemporary readers. She had to face criticism about keeping men confined in 'mardana' as menservants to women.

A reader who called herself "Padmini" wrote a fan fiction changing the ending of the story where Ladyland becomes Gentlemen-and-Ladyland to give equality to both men and women (Logan 76). The attempt to balance the involvements of men and women in the fan fiction version misunderstands "Sultana's Dream" as a simple story of gender discrimination. The original story is about a utopian matriarchal place where success of women at a war gave them the right to rule Ladyland, and men chose to be inside home at seclusion as a condition to

their defeat in saving their land. A major perspective of this story, then, is justice. Furthermore, having only women in charge allows Hossain to speculate about maintaining harmony among human lives, nature, and science; gender reversal is an essential ingredient to align this picture of an ideal society with other elements. This is also a reminder to the ignorant contemporary society that if women are given the opportunity to study and educate themselves, the world could be more sustainable and composed. Padmini somehow missed the main point of justice because she did not reflect upon the fact that Sultana's world was one of colonial ideology. Bhaba's "hybridity" stresses the transformations of the culture, language, and politics of both colonizer and colonized that may help us see the real picture through reversing roles of colonizer and colonized which can be implied on Hossain's Ladyland. The history of the Ladyland reminds how women had to stay inside zenana like a colonized group when men behaved like colonizers, and when men had to go inside mardana, the once proud gentlemen "dreaming sentimental dreams themselves" (Hossain 13) became colonized by women. Indian women were continuously being oppressed and their only apparent way to liberation from purdah was aligning with the colonizer. Equality was not enough for Hossain because women were not even counted as a part of the society. Her sense of justice was a challenge not just to patriarchy but to colonial patriarchy that depended upon the subalternity of some to others.

The modern feminist movement, mostly in 1970s, encompassed the political activism of reproductive rights, workplace equality, and legal reforms. The feminisms that emerged, in academic thinking and beyond, comprised what is called the "second wave." Fourteen years after the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1949 in the United States, Betty Friedan published her *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, helping to ignite the second wave of feminism. The public and private spheres of male and female gender roles at that time instigated

women to think about the existing power dynamics. In the same year, labor activist Esther Peterson convinced President Kennedy to sign the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (Alexander). The Civil Rights Movement also gathered momentum and contributed to the feminist movement. The publication date of Hossain's "Sultana's Dream" might suggest that it belongs in the first wave of feminism, with the Seneca Falls women and others, but we can also see Hossain's text as a forerunner of this second wave of feminism, not just for its political activism but for its analysis of power. "Sultana's Dream" highlights the importance of education as a tool not just for women's empowerment but for social transformation, as Ladyland's progress and advancements are attributed to the education and empowerment of its female citizens. The narrative challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes by depicting men as confined to the domestic sphere, while women take on leadership roles and make significant contributions to society. The portrayal of Ladyland offers a powerful critique of patriarchal norms and advocates for gender equality and women's participation in all aspects of society. It presents a vision of a world where women are empowered to realize their full potential and contribute to the betterment of society, free from the constraints of gender-based discrimination and oppression. Hossain's analysis of modern educated women in Ladyland is remarkable because in India, women were not even recognized as an inseparable part of the population.

After Madame Marie Curie won her Nobel Prize in Physics in 1903, women in science were recognized. This may have had an impact on Hossain's thoughts and writings. Science plays a major role in maintaining the well-developed society of Ladyland. The inquisitive nature of women towards learning new knowledge has assisted as an important element as well. For instance, concentrated sun rays and heat preserving technology are used in making war weapons as well as in smokeless and fireless ovens to cook. The water preservation technology is used in

agriculture and in the weather control system of Ladyland. Scientific and technological advancement is a parameter of understanding how educated the people of a society are. Scientific knowledge eliminates superstition, and that is a noticeable fact in Ladyland. Moreover, Hossain's narrative imagines a future where technology has transformed daily life. Some key scientific innovations depicted in the story include solar power, flying cars, and telecommunication. Figure 2 features Bai's 2015 rendering of Hossain's flying car.

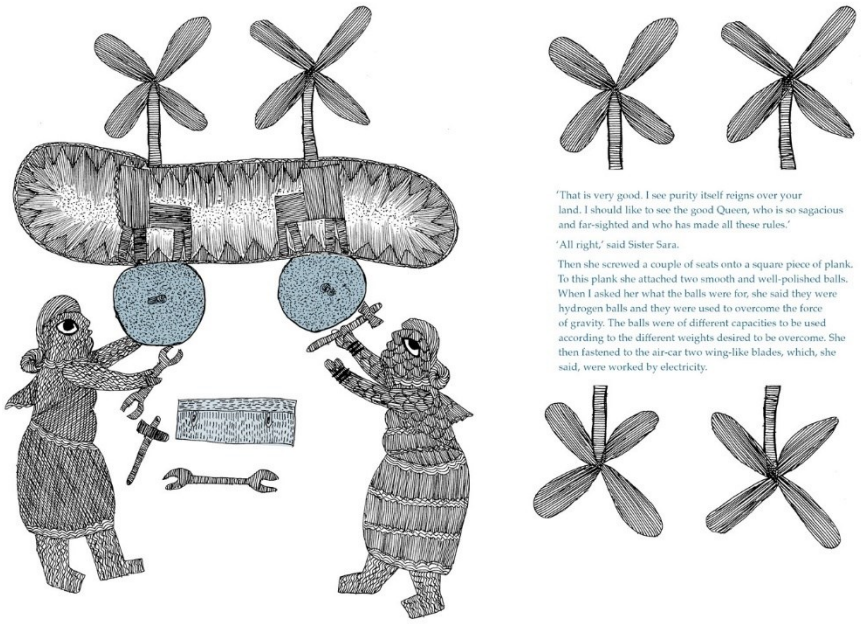

Figure 2. Sister Sara and Sultana preparing the air car to ride (Lewton).

Women in Ladyland harness solar energy for various purposes, such as powering their homes and vehicles. This innovation reflects a forward-thinking approach to renewable energy. Ladyland features flying cars powered by solar energy. This futuristic transportation system not only facilitates travel but also symbolizes society's technological sophistication and innovation. The story mentions a device that allows communication over long distances. While not explicitly described, this device suggests the presence of advanced telecommunications technology, enabling instantaneous communication between individuals across Ladyland.

Hossain demonstrates that feminine power is less violent. The women of Ladyland won a battle without bloodshed and saved their country by using scientific techniques on the battlefield. They released the collected heat of sun, which was unbearable for the opponents, and they fled leaving their arms in the battlefield. Since then, no one else tried to invade their country (Hossain 10). So, these scientific innovations not only served as imaginative elements of the story but also reflected the author's vision of a society where technological advancements contribute to greater convenience, efficiency, and sustainability. Hossain's portrayal of these innovations underscores the potential for scientific progress to enhance quality of life and societal development, even within the context of a fictional utopia.

The matriarchal society of Ladyland projects second wave feminism by advocating for economic and social rights for women in a society may be equal. But, as one of the criticisms of early second-wave feminism was its tendency toward essentialism, critics of Ladyland also pointed out that the leaders of Ladyland treated the nation as home and ran the entire home or nation in a motherly manner. Hossain "is able to enact her desire for an ideal home, i.e., both a world and state in which women come into their own" (Lakhi 12). This essentialist approach of running a country like home reflects the desire of Hossain to create a civilized and harmonized nation.

However, the abundant ideas of invention, technology and sustainable environment suggests that "Sultana's Dream" anticipates eco-feminism. Eco-feminism, emerging from the second wave, is characterized more by its spiritual elements than by its political or theoretical aspects. It may involve practices such as Goddess worship and vegetarianism, although these are not essential. At its core, eco-feminism posits that a patriarchal society tends to exploit its resources without considering long-term consequences, stemming from the attitudes fostered in a

hierarchical society. Eco-feminists often draw parallels between the treatment of the environment, animals, or resources and the treatment of women in society. Though also at times critiqued for essentialism, by challenging patriarchal culture, eco-feminists believe they are also resisting the plundering and destruction of the Earth, and vice versa (West).

Ladyland is such a place where nature is supported by technology. Nature is calm and green, just like Ladyland's social and political atmosphere. As Sister Sara observes, "Virtue herself reigns here" (Hossain 8). Botany is given much priority in this land, and they have a focus on renewable energy to establish a sustainable environment around them. Sultana mistakes the green grass of Ladyland for a velvet cushion, which felt like soft carpet, but it was a path covered with moss and flowers (Hossain 8). The heart-shaped garden of Sister Sara's bungalow is a symbol of their love for nature and tasteful décor in Ladyland (Hossain 10).

A smokeless kitchen where solar heat is used for cooking was an unbelievable idea. Men did not go to kitchen in India, and they were not concerned about food preparation and its impact on environment. The use of coal and fire in cooking used to pollute the air and make the kitchen walls sticky. Solar heat is a fantastic solution to this problem. Balloons, invented by the principal of one university, float over the cloudland and extract water from the atmosphere that makes rain, and storms stop. The land was no longer wet and muddy. The other university invented a system that could collect heat from the sun and distribute that heat whenever needed. All these scientific inventions by universities of women were laughed at by men who called the situation "a sentimental nightmare!" and were busy in increasing military power. Little did they know that they would be dreaming their sentimental dreams in no time (Hossain 11-13).

Being cooperative with nature helped the people of Ladyland stop suffering from floods and thunderstorms. Their agriculture is also maintained with electric power operated machines,

so they do not need to do hard manual work in the fields. They try to make nature yield as much as possible. No wonder their main food is fruit as their Queen is a botany enthusiast who wants to turn the whole country into a majestic garden (Hossain 15-16).

The impacts of those inventions by the universities of women shows not only the eco-feminist concern of Hossain for a sustainable world, but also the impacts of balancing ecology in maintaining a stable socio-political society. When nature is in harmony, the impact of this on human lives is tremendous. The impact of sustainable nature is also known from the fact that no one dies in youth except for accidents in Ladyland. Ladyland does not need policemen to catch any culprits, nor do they need magistrates to try any criminal cases (Hossain 15). Crime and criminals disappeared from their land. Human nature is vastly influenced by mother nature. Both natural and human calamities were gone from Ladyland.

Eco-feminism addresses the domination of the marginalized groups such as nature, women, indigenous people, and subordinate classes, throughout the history of patriarchal and hierarchical civilization. Ecofeminist Vandana Shiva sees this development as a transformation of colonialism. She critiques the concept of development, which she terms ‘maldevelopment’, as it diminishes both women and nature to passive subjects of economic and technological forces (Clark). This reduction not only occurs in ideas and values but also historically disempowers women. While conventional wisdom suggests that women are more oppressed in traditional societies and that Westernization and development improve their status, according to J. P. Clark, Shiva argues that the opposite is often true. Traditional subsistence production fosters greater interdependence between men and women, whereas development typically marginalizes women, diminishes their status and labor value, and reinforces male dominance. Also, technological progress often imposes ecological costs, such as resource depletion, disproportionately affecting

women, which official measures fail to acknowledge (Clark). Hossain just reversed the typical scenario to criticize the patriarchal norms of suppressing others.

A noticeable point is that Ladyland has no railroads and paved streets, which is why they do not have accidents in their country. The environment-friendly and speedy flying car is the transport everyone uses (see Figure 3). Newly constructed railroads and streets were known as advancements made by the British colonizers in the Indian subcontinent. Removing those transport systems is a metaphor of eliminating British colonizers from India. Not only that, but Ladyland's avoidance of conventional religions, the weapon for British 'divide and rule' policy, and shifting to humanity solves the problem of class and caste discrimination in India; and removes the mechanism of being ruled by colonizers. The story of women taking charge and ruling the country already establishes an anti-colonial spirit in "Sultana's Dream." Men lost their role as colonizers to women and women built a perfect world utilizing the gifts of nature. From the eco-feministic view, this science fiction makes perfect sense, portraying the possibilities and capabilities of women when they are given an opportunity to make everything right.

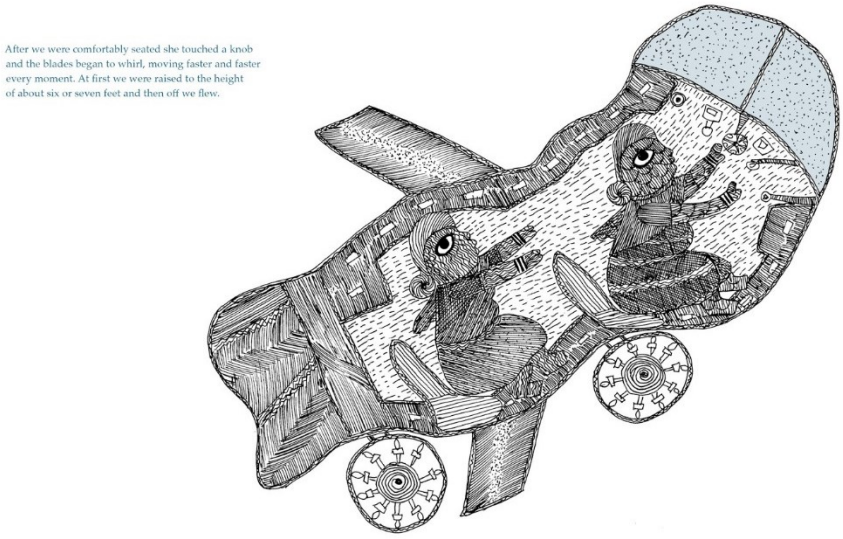

Figure 3. Sister Sara and Sultana riding the air-car (Lewton).

In addition to these innovative theoretical connections between ecology and women, feminist thinkers of the 1970s and 1980s broadened feminism to include the unique lived experiences of women of color and women across the globe. Thinkers like Gloria Anzaldua, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde wrote about social and racial justice for women[7]. Postcolonial feminism further demonstrated the limits of white feminism's focus on Western society. Other thoughts like Black feminism and African feminism made the way from second to third wave feminism. Al Chukuwama Okoli describes the work of contemporary global feminism as "transformational." Quoting Shirley Campbel, Okoli says that transformational feminism "promotes the interests of the subalterns; challenges (and changes) the status quo; and takes risks in the pursuit of creating a radical social change" (Okoli 128).

Activists and eco-feminists like Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar, Al-Haji, Maude Barlow, and Asaha Ufei, according to Lliane Loots, explore the connections between ecological destruction, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression. They argue that the exploitation of nature is intertwined with the subjugation of women and marginalized communities. Their work underscores the importance of gender equity and women's empowerment in environmental movements. Saving and preserving water is an important issue for most of the ecofeminists (Loots 7-9). Hossain makes preserving water from clouds a major invention of Ladyland.

Though preceding most of these feminist theories by decades, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's leadership follows this transformational feminist style insofar as it challenges structures of patriarchy and gender hierarchies and anticipates the postcolonial and eco-feminist work of the later twentieth century. Hossain's writings and activities were the medium of bringing these changes to society. It was a matter of surprise that such conscious messages about

[7] Anzaldua's *Borderlands/ La Frontera,* bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism,* and Audrey Lorde's *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* are renowned books advocating for women rights and justice.

women rights and privileges were coming from a young Muslim woman of colonial Bengal. Her leadership and vision were so influential and legendary for women of undivided India that even at current times, Hossain's writings are relevant against the patriarchal society (Jahan, M.).

In addition to being a forerunner to eco-feminism, "Sultana's Dream" must be understood as a piece of colonial resistance. Postcolonial criticism allows us to explore these feminist utopian and dystopian spaces from another perspective. The term "postcolonial" refers to the aftermath of the colonial era and the lasting impact of colonizers on the former colonized. Though "Sultana's Dream" is not historically a postcolonial text, any more than it is historically a second-wave feminist text, it has dominant or 'colonizer' and dominated or 'colonized' groups that can be recognized through post-colonial lens. It is published during the British colonial period of India but contains a postcolonial spirit and essence.

"Sultana's Dream," a strong satirical utopian work in the context of India, was highly appreciated because it was written and published in English language. Hossain's contemporaries mostly had flattering commentaries about her use of that language. Despite this, she did not continue writing in English. Because she was clear about her purpose of raising the consciousness of men and women in Muslim Bengal, her own language was the most appropriate medium for achieving that. She used her pen as a weapon in her crusade for social reform (Jahan, R., 3). I can confirm that reading her witty essays in Bengali rescued me from the dull prose of her contemporaries while I was in high school in Bangladesh; most of the students are grateful to her for writing in Bengali and deliver her point of view with new generations. Her commitment to writing in mother language was an effort not just to reach out to people in her society but to decolonize her writing from the colonial language in a colonial era; it went unnoticed by the critical thinkers who were always focusing on writing coming out of the pens of male writers.

Colonial and postcolonial studies often focused on the examples of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o in African context; the South-Asian context did not get much attention, with the exception of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. Though Hossain was a strong postcolonial thinker in a colonial age, she was not studied as a postcolonial thinker. The scenario has changed recently; new scholars are studying Hossain's utopian text as a tool to reimagine a decolonized nation (Kuiti 240).

As a social reformer, Hossain wrote essays to argue about the consciousness men and women should possess in a society where colonizers were dividing them based on religion. She clarifies her religious belief through Sister Sara in "Sultana's Dream." When Sultana asks about the religion of Ladyland, Sister Sara replies their religion is based on "Love and Truth," and their religious duty is loving each other and being absolutely truthful. If anyone ever lies, that liar is asked to leave Ladyland for good (Hossain 16). Colonizing women by imposing the religious misinterpretation of purdah was exposed by Hossain in *The Secluded Ones*. She knew how conventional religions are misinterpreted for selfish reasons and ruin humanity in society; that is why she chose love and truth to be the religion of Ladyland. Humanity brings a pivotal concern about subalternity and power dynamics in Ladyland.

Usually the word 'subaltern' is associated with women because women are often kept behind and deprived of their rights. When Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak defines the agency of subaltern groups, she refers to the colonial discourse around women. In Ladyland, we see the dominant men becoming dominated. The subalternity of men in Ladyland, where women think they should not be "shy and timid like men" as they are leading the nation, is the reverse picture of real Indian women (Hossain 8). Hossain uses this reverse mechanism to demonstrate the image of her contemporary society so that readers can realize how awful it is for women to be

imprisoned in zenana not being a part of society. When Sultana is surprised to find no men on the roads of Ladyland, Sister Sara clarifies that the men are in their proper places, and she confirms, "We shut our men indoors" (Hossain 9). Before the readers feel sympathy for the men inside mardana, Sultana describes the subaltern state of real, contemporary Indian women who actually "have no hand or voice in the management of our social affairs. In India man is lord and master. He has taken to himself all powers and privileges and shut up the women in the zenana" (Hossain 9). But the opposite happens in Ladyland where men have no voice or power. They are not making decisions for themselves, and they do not hold positions in any administrative sectors; this makes them powerless.

As we can see in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*[8], colonial behavior prevails even after the colonizers are gone. The postcolonial impact does not disappear after colonialism ends; society cannot go back to how it was before colonization. Colonization creates a hybrid culture according to Bhaba's theory of hybridity, explained in the beginning of this chapter. Likewise, when women of Ladyland came out of zenanas, they adopt traits of the colonizers even as they retain their own culture. The purdah, for example, was imposed upon women based on misinterpreting what counts as decent clothes according to religion, but religious manners are not preached about or interpreted by Ladyland's women. The men in 'mardana' are separated because of their behavior and even choice. Hossain's feministic view does not suggest equality, insofar as men and women are not being treated in the same way; rather it wants *equity.* Women are taking more responsibilities than men in society, so they deserve more rights and privileges.

In this postcolonial era, women are still colonized and confined by the ideologies of men. Last names or family names are still an important way of colonizing women. Changing one's last

[8] Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a novel based on postcolonial Nigeria. This novel portrays the impact of pre and post colonial culture in Nigerian society.

name according to her husband's last name is a common practice both in Western and Eastern society, though it is less common than it used to be in the Indian subcontinental region. It almost breaks my heart to call Begum Rokeya as "Hossain" in this thesis as this is her husband's name, not hers. She deserves to be known by her own name and the formal system does not allow me to address her by her real name.

However, in modern day Bengal, especially amongst Bangladeshi Muslim women, the practice of using last name of one's father or husband is becoming unpopular. Women use names that are fully theirs. Hinduism still follows the practice of using the husband's last name, and it remains very common in Western society, feeding the male-ego of patriarchal society. This is how we understand that women are still confined by their own patriarchal practices. Emancipation is only possible through education and by realizing invisible chains that need to be broken.

BARBIE AND BARBIE'S FEMINISM IN HOLLYWOOD AND CONSUMERIST AMERICA

The Past and Present of *Barbie* and Barbie

The journey of Barbie doll started in 1959 when Mattel Inc., cofounded by Ruth Handler and her husband Elliot Handler, created an 11-inch-tall female figure made of plastic. The German Lilli doll was the inspiration behind the creation of Barbie doll. Robin Gerber, biographer of Ruth Handler, confirms that Barbie was not the first toy Mattel introduced to the toy industry; rather it was a 1947 miniature ukulele called Uke-a-doodle (13). The idea of Barbie came much later, when Ruth Handler observed her daughter Barbara playing with paper dolls. Made of cardboard that could be dressed in paper dresses, the dolls were images of women with faces of Hollywood stars such as Elizabeth Taylor and Debbie Reynolds. Still, Barbara and her friends preferred playing with those paper dolls than with the three-dimensional baby dolls. The paper dolls were an unrealistic hybrid between babies and teens that gave little girls a chance to imitate adults and imagine their own adulthood. Noticing their enthusiasm, Handler thought of making "a doll with a teenage figure" with different attires and accessories, conveying a message to girls that they can be anything they want. There were disagreements coming from her husband and other male engineers at Mattel about making a teenage-figured doll, but the Handler family's trip to Switzerland made Ruth Handler more confident about making Barbie when she saw the Lilli dolls in the market. Lilli dolls looked like a realistic version of those paper dolls. After coming back to the US, Ruth Handler met New York based designer Charlotte Johnson who made twenty-two outfits for Barbie. Eventually, Handler's determination led to her successful release of the first Barbie doll in 1959 (Gerber 17-25). Barbie was a successful toy and Mattel

broadcast advertisements of the toy on television networks as a marketing strategy. In 1961, Mattel brought Barbie's ultimate accessory to the market, the Ken doll, as her boyfriend. Barbie and Ken are named after Handler's daughter Barbara and son Kenneth. The Barbie doll and different versions of it were popular for breaking the image of stereotypical baby dolls that only taught gender roles, like nurturing children and being a mother, to girl children. Barbie doll's job resume does not stop with stereotypical Barbie; it includes astronaut, pilot, doctor, Olympic athlete and more, and later versions of the doll embody different racial identities, such as African American, Latina, and Asian.

However, M.G. Lord, author of an article on "Barbie" in Encyclopedia Brittanica, reports on 1994 research in Finland that showed that if Barbie were a real woman, she would not have enough body fat to menstruate. The impossible shape of Barbie dolls created concern in parents about the perspectives on female body their children may develop. The popularity of Barbie decreased in 2000, but this doll continued being a topic for writers who sometimes idealized and sometimes criticized the exaggerated femininity of Barbie (Lord). There are factors that go beyond the plastic world and impact the real lives of people. People take the beauty standards of this doll quite seriously and want those features in themselves. In the article "Barbie Doll Forehead: CAD Design from Silicon Block," plastic surgeons Shruti Marwah and Arjin Handa confirm that "Barbie doll forehead" is a common and popular surgery for forehead augmentation performed in countries like Korea (111). Barbie's impact is not limited to little girls, and the plastic surgeries prove that point right. In addition, Barbie has generated complaints about teaching materialism and capitalism to children via Barbie accessories, such as cars, housing, and clothing. Therefore, the facts and history of Barbie dolls are a fascinating topic to make a film

out of. Greta Gerwig, being a female and feminist film director, was responsible for shaping a story out of the background of Barbie.

Once Gerwig announced her film on Barbie, people waited to know the plot. Since she is famous for making films with female leads and feminist themes, such as *Lady Bird* and *Little Women*, audiences could already sense that *Barbie* would have messages about women. The storyline was not revealed to the media before the release, so audiences experienced the excitement of seeing the story for the first time. The reversed gender roles in the Barbieland narrative have brilliant humor. Whenever there are serious tones, a comic relief follows. Gerwig's directorial debut *Ladybird*, a 2017 film, featuring Saiorse Ronan as a teenage daughter who goes through an affectionate yet complex mother-daughter relationship, and eventually grows to be a responsible person like her mother, depicts the conflicts of adolescence. Audrey Mitchell in her review of *Ladybird* calls it "A Film That Changed Me," noting that Gerwig exploration of dysfunctional communication between the mother and daughter connected Mitchell to her own awkward teenage emotions (62). Unlike Mitchell, Helen Warner in "'An Indie Voice for a Generation of Women?': Greta Gerwig, and Female Authorship Post #Metoo," criticizes Gerwig, calling her "hyper visible in media" but consciously keeping herself away from talking about her experience as a woman director in Hollywood and avoiding standing with the ongoing #MeToo movement (291). Gerwig rather preferred to talk about her film *Ladybird* in media than making any political statement. Her film *Little Women*, an adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's renowned novel, is viewed as an enterprise of writing and directing a musical without music. Gerwig is called a "cinematic verbalist" for her auditory sensibility (Babel 10). *Film Quarterly* columnist Caetlin Benson-Allott calls *Ladybird*, *Little Women*, and *Barbie* Gerwig's "trilogy," as these three are female-centered coming-of-age stories (67). This trilogy can also be

thought of from the point of view of mother-daughter relationships. Jessica Bennet in her *New York Times* review "I Saw 'Barbie' with Susan Faludi, and She Has a Theory about It" writes that the center of the movie is about a daughter and a mother. Another reviewer, Robert Naylor predicts Gerwig's 2023 film *Barbie* to become a lasting classic for its "innovative, exciting, and highly unusual" storytelling (1).

Gerwig's *Barbie* opened in movie theaters on the same day as Christopher Nolan's historical and biographical drama *Oppenheimer*. Two most anticipated films of the year were supposed to come out on July 21, 2023; this single fact was enough to produce many memes as well as trailers calling this phenomenon as "Barbenheimer." The trailers mixed two totally different films based on different topics but worked as an attention getting marketing strategy for both films ("Barbenheimer— the Trailer (4K)"). Naylor finds *Oppenheimer* "falling short of the mark from realism," as the film being based on the Second World War atomic bomb explosion does not portray a single Japanese person, where *Barbie* holds onto realism as a core strength (Naylor 1). However, the comparison between these two seems unfair as the subject matters, production houses, and directors are distinct from each other. *Barbie*'s theme color is pink against the dark tone of *Oppenheimer*. The former one is about a utopian world, and the latter is based on making a destructive atomic bomb; the former has a lighter tone of narrative while the latter's is most serious. In fact, the only similarity in these opposite films is that both are based on world changing products, Barbie doll and atomic bomb. The two films were nominated against each other in almost every award program's major category. The critics and audiences gave mixed reviews because they were comparing two opposite films together.

Barbie became a blockbuster hit film. It grossed more than $160 million in its opening weekend; also, it has grossed over $635 million domestically and more than $800 million

additional overseas, which makes it one of the highest grossing films in both domestic and worldwide scenario (Millman 36). One critic, at least, did not like it: Pamela Paul calls *Barbie* a mean, bold, hateful and humorless film. *Barbie* is a boring movie to her. She argues that Hollywood box office numbers were weak, and when *Barbie* became a big hit, disliking the film was interpreted either as dismissing the power of patriarchy or dismissing modern feminism. Either one must be anti-feminist or too feminist, and there was no right kind of feminist to be (Paul). The famous film critic site of Roger Ebert, though, gave three and a half stars to *Barbie*, calling it a "dazzling achievement" and "a visual feast." The critic thinks there is so much to notice that it is not possible to "catch it all in a single sitting" (Lemire). Other reviews were mixed: IMDb, also known as the Internet Movie Database, shows a rating of 6.8/10 for Barbie, and IMDb reviewers have described the film as "Beautiful Film, but so preachy," "A Hot Pink Mess," "A Technicolor Dream," "Boring, mind-numbing drivel," "Overhyped," and "Ken out of ten" mocking Ken as nothing ("Barbie (2023) - IMDb").

The idiosyncratic theme of Barbieland in *Barbie* was also simultaneously appreciated and hated by the audiences. These mixed reactions were beneficial to the box office and to the producers of *Barbie*. This film depicts not only every type of Barbie in it but also reminds the audiences about the beginning of this popular doll. The film starts with a scene where little girls play with boring baby dolls with stoic expressions on their faces (see Figure 4). The serious faces of little girls look like they are not having fun playing with the baby dolls. They are not entertained with the thought of taking care of little babies and playing the role of being mothers. Therefore, they need a doll that can be fun playing with. In such a boring playtime, a giant Barbie, a kind of role model, stands in front of them and winks at those girls and they start

smashing the baby dolls. This very scene alone is an announcement and indication that Barbie is there to break the so called “gender role” for girls.

Figure 4. Still from Gerwig’s *Barbie.* Little girl smashing the baby doll after Barbie’s arrival.

The Barbie doll has had different taglines in different times; Gerwig’s opening scene recalls “You Can Be Anything,” which generated the idea for girls that being a mother is not all they should be learning by playing with baby dolls; rather they can play with Barbie dolls and dream of making their identity as somebody who does something other than the gendered duty of being a mother. Gerwig’s Barbieland stands as further proof of how women can do everything and become anything, but only in a “perfect” world, or one without the active presence of men. Female audience members celebrated the film by going to the movie theaters wearing pink attire. Some of them went to the theater with their mom and enjoyed it. At the same time, certain people were critical and thought the film was “not funny and light enough.” Some male audience members tried to reason with the film and said, “As a guy I felt some discomfort, and that’s ok” (“Barbie (2023) - IMDb”). Some male audiences burst out in social media; for instance, the comments “They won’t be happy until we are all gay,” or “The feminist agenda will kill us all” (Masia) show the hatred towards the film. My experience of the movie theater was similar to the

IMDb reactions where a major part of the audience was female; they were cheerful and having fun. A few male audiences were there; most of them came along with their daughters and some of them were not too comfortable.

Even Gerwig's feelings about *Barbie* seem to be mixed. Whether this film was initially conceived of as an extended marketing strategy for Mattel's popular product Barbie, Gerwig did not stick to the plan of showing perfection of Barbieland; rather, she brought the universal topic of decay into the discourse of a plastic world. She dared to call Barbie sexist and fascist through a real-world character Sasha, which is an assurance of Gerwig's knowledge about the negative ideas people have about Barbie. In an interview with *The New York Times*, she talked about being raised by a mother who was against Barbie, which means she was fully aware of the arguments against Barbie. She "didn't think there was any way to do this without giving that real estate and having well-articulated, correct arguments from a really smart character given to Barbie against Barbie" (Buchanan).

Barbie **Feminisms**

Barbie and *Barbie*'s feminism redefines empowerment by transforming an iconic doll into a symbol of strength, diversity and womanhood. Barbieland is forward and ahead of its time. *Barbie* portrays Barbieland as an ultramodern place where women are empowered from the beginning. The official website of Barbie assures us that Astronaut Barbie went galactic four years before man landed on the moon—in other words, in 1965 (Barbie Media). There are Barbies who were pioneers in many diverse professions. Barbie ran for the presidential election; she has also been a pilot, CEO, journalist, influencer and almost 250 inspiring role models for girls (Barbie Media). Being empowered would take women to their desired place, and Barbie has

been a role model for girls to believe in this. Barbies are astronauts, scientists, surgeons, and they study STEM subjects such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The idea that Barbie can be anything promotes pursuing any professions girls want, though not without the intention of selling new ideas to make profit for the company. Breaking the stereotypical gender roles is an iconic task done by Barbie.

Barbie seems to portray the approach of Liberal feminism. What separates Liberal Feminism from broader feminism, according to P. Priyadharshini and Tribhuwan Kumar, is that it addresses "both women's and men's equality and discrimination" (485). Gerwig tends to lean towards the liberal notion several times in her film. For instance, at Barbie's dreamhouse, Stereotypical Barbie tells Ken, "You have to figure out who you are without me. You're not your girlfriend, you're not your house... Maybe it's Barbie AND... it's Ken" (Gerwig and Baumbach 105). Moreover, liberal feminism operates within mainstream society to integrate women into its structures. Its roots can be traced back to the social contract theory of governance established during the American Revolution, with pioneers like Abigail Adams and Mary Wollstonecraft advocating for women's equality. Often aligned with liberal ideology, proponents work within existing systems, though progress can be slow due to compromises. Radical movements, such as the suffragist and radical feminist movements, have historically pushed these compromises towards more progressive stances (West).

Another term "Plastic Feminism" is used by Verity Ritchie, a reviewer, while talking about *Barbie* in a film review vlog. As described in Jane Hu's article "Plastic People," Ritchie insists that the plastic world of Barbies is not real. From the food to the house to the transport, everything is made of plastic in Barbieland. At one point, Barbie had an option to make a choice between the real and plastic worlds (see Figure 5). Hu notes that Gerwig explained in a *New York*

Times profile that she wanted everything in the movie "authentically artificial" (13). From the special effects to the backdrop, everything was designed in that manner. Even in this artificial world of Barbies, Mattel released some versions of Barbie dolls replicating famous female icons who inspire women; Frida Kahlo is one of them. This is such a cliched move for a capitalist toy producing company to try to sell a feminist icon's dolls when the icon herself was a communist, anti-capitalist and against gender norms. Barbies, who live in a plastic world and who do not really have any biological experience of women in general and yet who spread the message of feminism, is what plastic feminism about ("The Plastic Feminism of Barbie"). I do not agree with Barbie being plastic cannot have a feminist approach that can be applicable in the real world. Moreover, I believe, there is an applicable synthetic approach based on Barbie that serves today's feminist problems involving parallel worlds of virtual and augmented reality.

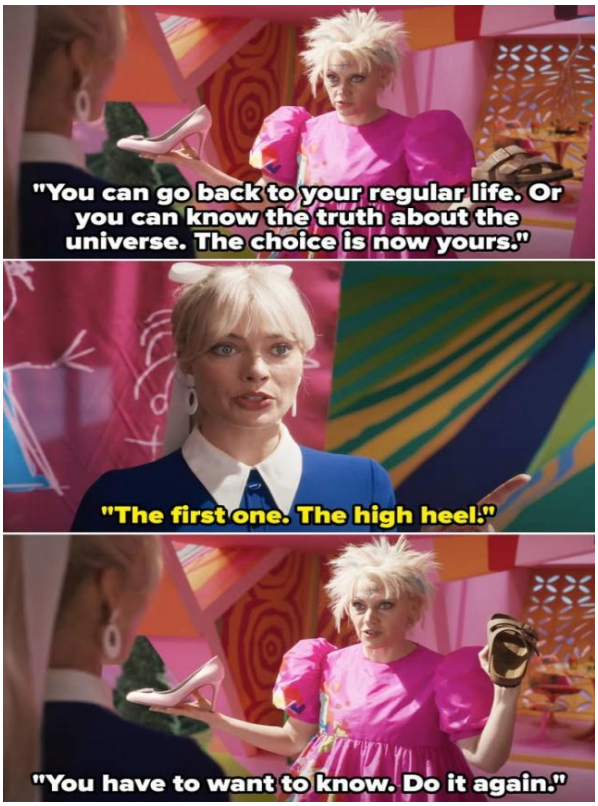

Figure 5. Still from Gerwig's *Barbie.* Barbie choosing high heels (plastic world) over flat shoes (real world).

Barbie is transformed into a human body in the film and does not seem plastic at all when she comes to the real world. The first time she encounters an old lady at a bus stop in the real world, she breaks free from the idea of perfect beauty. Barbies do not get old (Gerwig and Baumbach 35), so she has never experienced things like aging or wrinkles on her skin. The old lady looks beautiful with wrinkled skin. Barbie praises her and the lady replies that she already knows that she is beautiful. The definition of beauty is not limited to the perfection of the skin, body, or shape of a person or superficial physical perfection. Gerwig suggests that beauty has a broader horizon where someone could have cellulite and still be beautiful. In the scene, Barbie feels emotional and discovers a teardrop, which seemed imperfect yet beautiful to her. She finally chooses to be imperfect (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Still from Gerwig's *Barbie.* Barbie experiencing human feelings in the real world.

It is easy to throw *Barbie* into a mold of plastic feminism because Barbieland is literally made of plastic, and the discussion of liberal feminism is still valid as we can see how Gerwig tries to reason with gender equality. Defining Ken's individual identity goes beyond finding his self-worth and the audience finding Ken wearing a "Kenough" sweatshirt. Barbie's self-care

starts with prioritizing her decision on choosing a human life and eventually going to a gynecologist. Therefore, the characters of this film shift gears and mobilize the liberal view. It is not limited to blurring the lines of inequalities, but rather moves beyond to find individual identities to self-care and self-worth. This mobilized liberalism can be called neoliberal feminism. Cheryl Rottenberg suggests that Neoliberal Feminism is focused on the subject:

> Individuated in the extreme, this subject is feminist in the sense that she is distinctly aware of current inequalities between men and women. This same subject is, however, simultaneously neoliberal, not only because she disavows the social, cultural and economic forces producing this inequality, but also because she accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work–family balance based on a cost-benefit calculus. The neoliberal feminist subject is thus mobilized to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair (420).

The definition of neoliberal feminism, somehow, supports *Barbie* as a narrative that converts continued gender inequality from a social, cultural, and economic problem to an individual affair. But Rottenberg's claim that neoliberal feminism projects social justice "in personal, individualized terms" (Rottenberg 422) does not fully fit with Barbie's feminism because this film shows that social justice is a collective factor. The collaboration of Barbies with Gloria and Sasha enables them to achieve social justice in Barbieland. Therefore, we can see the concept of neoliberal feminism covering part but not all of the experiences of Barbies and Kens.

I would rather call the feminism we see in *Barbie* "Synthetic feminism." Barbie may be a toy made of plastic, but she exists in the real world. Barbie has her character and image, which are subjects no one can ignore. Children who play with Barbie and Ken dolls build a connection with the dolls and create identities for those inanimate objects. Barbies are neither what Donna Haraway calls cyborgs, "a hybrid of machine and organism" (3), nor living creatures of the real world, but they have an undeniable impact on little children through their characters and images. There is a connection between the doll and player that produces a very real feeling stemming

from the parasocial relationship. This is what Gerwig shows when the Stereotypical Barbie thinks of death—the thought comes from the player, Gloria. The player's mindset impacts the functionality of the toy's world. The feelings and emotions that are produced by existing virtually in one or more parallel worlds and that have direct impacts, such as a parasocial relationship with the real world in which we physically exist, can be called synthetic feelings and emotions. The idea of synthetic feminism involves these synthetic experiences. Synthetic feminism, I claim, can be viewed in two ways: one way is a synthesis of political feminism and parasocial relationship; the other way, is as synthetic performative feminism insofar as it is not organic and thus less materially impactful. Susan Faludi's comment on *Barbie* being a film about abortion (Bennet) points to the perspective of political feminism in *Barbie.* Faludi's opinion brings us to Gerwig's political perspective that draws the attention of audiences. Anna Gilarek thinks defamiliarization is drawing audience's or reader's "attention to problematic issues and granting them a fresh perspective" (34). Hence, the way Gerwig "defamiliarizes" feminism could afford the opportunity for satire. Gerwig's defamiliarization of feminism involves the combination of plastic feminism and human affection for toys, i.e., a parasocial connection, that may render a "synthetic" performative approach to feminism. Being a plastic doll, Barbie experiences many of the same things as biological women: confusion, sadness, etc. The feelings are not organic in the same way biological women experience them, because Barbies are not mothers, and do not experience menstruation or the maternal feelings that are vital parts of female biology; the fear of death, for instance, is a laugh line when spoken by a plastic doll who does not age, but the feelings are not invalid either, particularly as they relate to the audience, and to the player, Gloria, whose feelings we learn they really are anyway. The film says, what about being a woman who fears death or injustice, but it's hollowed out by the fact of it being

wondered by someone who cannot die and has never faced injustice. Therefore, this "synthetic feminism" performs feminism without having to confront the biological realities of women's bodies under an oppressive political system. We tend to believe that feminism needs to be biological because feminists emphasize on important biological experiences, such as pregnancy and rape, that cannot be experienced without being in a woman's body. Undoubtedly, without those extreme experiences of womanhood, we find it complex to call something feminism. Experiencing the mental or psychological feelings of being a woman should also be considered as feminine emotion, though, it may be dissociated with physical body.

An even more compelling interpretation of "synthetic" feminism is not as a synthesis but an engagement with a real world in which a parallel world is connected without physical existence, but the parallel non-physical existence feels almost real. The film *Barbie* portrays Barbie's struggle as a woman figured doll who goes through experiences of real women's anxiety and trauma without having proper organs or "genitals" of a woman's body. The feminist perspective and experience of such a character may not seem organic like a biological woman in the real world, but the feeling is not invalid either; rather a "synthetic" feeling prevails as a feminine entity, which can be called a synthetic feminist experience. So, this synthetic feminism comes from characters that are not physically organic but go through something near human experiences. Even if this synthetic feminism initially may not seem to work in the real world, it works perfectly in a fantasy world.

Furthermore, the idea of "synthetic feminism" is applicable to places like Barbieland where Barbies can feel the emotions of their players along with their non-biological common feelings. Synthetic feminism, however, is not limited to fantasy worlds; rather it has implications in our real, augmented and virtual worlds. In this twenty first century, when virtual reality and

organic reality have intersected each other's paths, women using virtual fantasy worlds such as "Meta," also known as metaverse, can relate to synthetic feminism. We cannot call this artificial feminism as the feeling of the user is almost real; nothing feels artificial inside the virtual world. For the user, according to MetaMandrill, metaverse is "a persistent living universe that is never turned off and exists in parallel and concurrently with the physical one" (Singh 604). This platform engages human brains in a high capacity that stimulates the pleasure/reward pathway; Mark Zuckerberg is widely quoted as saying of the platform, "*You're in the experience.*" Along with possible empowerment comes the vulnerability of being bullied or harassed by fake anti-social avatars (Singh 605). In January 2024, a young girl in the UK encountered a distressing "shared experience," which allegedly involved a gang rape (Sales). British authorities were investigating the sexual assault of the girl, who has been identified as under the age of 16. This incident is reportedly the first of its kind in the UK. According to reports, the girl was using a virtual reality headset to play an immersive game in the metaverse when her avatar was assaulted by multiple others (Sales). This is not the only case: within a few days, in January 2024, there was another case of gang rape in metaverse; the victim Nina Patel, a psychotherapist, was attacked by four anonymous male attackers within just sixty seconds after signing up for the first time. In Brooke Kato's tech report "I was 'gang raped' in the Metaverse — the attack may have been virtual, but my trauma is very real" on *New York Post*, Patel calls her experience "surreal" and "horrible" and argues that the aftermath can have "profound emotional and psychological impacts." Moreover, thinking of the future, she says, "I am not the first, and the British girl who recently experienced it and brought it to the police will not be the last" (Kato). Therefore, the trauma and shock of the victim should not be identified as artificial. In Caroline Krum's investigative article on "Rape in Metaverse," Ashley Gujuardo, a professor in the University of

Utah's games department, uses the term hyperrealism where the player of a game is "so immeresed... so close to real life" that, Gujuardo claims, it feels like being underwater (Krum). Such experiences cannot be ignored just by disapproving of them as "not real" and denying the sufferings that may come as consequence. In such cases, "synthetic experience" may be used rather than disregarding the serious impact by calling it artificial. The fact that an experience takes place in an artificial world does not limit the impact of that experience, which is nothing less than real.

As Barbie and Ken enter the real world, the first interaction is confusing for Barbie but enjoyable for Ken. Ken notices how everything is reversed in the real world and men are on the frontline of every sector. Barbie feels the undertone of violence when men look at her, but Ken feels happy to be seen, and he even says, "I feel it can only be described as admiring... there is no undertone of violence" (*Barbie* 00:28:18-00:28:26) as he was not ogled by them. This experience of Barbie becomes synthetic when she announces "I don't have a vagina" to the ogling men. She can feel the violence of rape culture, but as she does not have genitals, she cannot be physically raped or violated by those men. The uncomfortable feeling of Barbie cannot be denied in her expression (*Barbie* 00:27:46-00:29:03). The insecurity of a patriarchal real world does not have the secure vibe of Barbieland. Barbie's temporal dislocation in the real world brings an experience of patriarchy that she never had any idea about. Inversely, Gloria and Sasha, from the real world, also go through the defamiliarized experience of Barbieland by visiting Barbie's plastic world. They come to visit Barbieland because Barbie invites them to experience her perfect world, which is quite opposite to the real world. This displacement or defamiliarization characterizes the synthetic feminism of the film. Gerwig may not have consciously made her film a platform for nurturing the synthetic feelings of Barbie, Ken, Gloria, and Sasha, but the

film seems like a good example of synthetic feminism. Susan Faludi thinks this film is about reproductive rights or the political agenda of abortion (Bennet), but in my opinion, this film is about *being real while not being biological* in a world where we can be vulnerable in non-physical ways.

Gerwig in *Barbie* represented all the important questions. In fact, the human character Gloria's monologue where she is surprised to find out that a doll representing women goes through the hardships a real woman goes through only states the difficulties. Gloria's monologue depicts that it's practically impossible to be a woman:

> You're both stunning and intelligent, yet it's agonizing that you don't see your own worth. We're expected to be extraordinary, yet somehow always fall short. You're supposed to be thin, but not too thin; you can't openly desire thinness, only "health," yet thinness is still expected. You need money, but asking for it is frowned upon. You're told to be a leader, but not too assertive. You're expected to adore motherhood, yet not talk about your kids incessantly. You're encouraged to pursue a career yet prioritize others' needs. You're blamed for men's misbehavior yet criticized for speaking up about it. You're supposed to be attractive to men, but not too attractive. You're told to support other women yet stand out and be grateful. You're pressured to never age, never be rude, never fail, and never show fear. It's overwhelming, contradictory, and unappreciated. And worst of all, when things go awry, it's somehow always your fault. I'm exhausted from watching women contort themselves just to be liked. If this is true even for a mere representation of a woman, then I don't know what to think anymore! (Gerwig and Baumbach 86-87)

There is no solution or answer to the problems that are unpacked in the film. The suffering of women is depicted wonderfully but a solution to those sufferings is not discussed anywhere. It took Gerwig to make one film to discuss about universal sufferings of women. May be, she will need another film to find answers to solve those sufferings. However, the sufferings that the female figured dolls go through is another example of synthetic feminism, because there is no way of denying the emotions as artificial or unreal that they feel. If we do not consider Barbie's shock and horror, we will deny the virtual and augmented experiences of metaverse and

other virtual simulation gaming platforms, where people live another reality through their digital avatars but feel everything simultaneously in their human entity.

Gerwig's film opens a window for us to explore the parallel realities of the real world and the virtual ones. In a time when the synthesis of reality and utopia is very much present, we need a new way to look at it. Synthetic feminism gives us that scope to explore the novelty of today's world.

CONCLUSION

"Sultana's Dream" and Barbie are two depictions of feminist utopian worlds. When we bring these two texts together, we can see their similarities in gender-flipped society, women leadership, criticizing patriarchy, social justice, emphasizing on science for creating technologically advanced society, and using feminist utopia as the medium to express futuristic feminist visions. Hossain's "Sultana's Dream" makes more sense when it is studied alongside a similar text, such as Gerwig's *Barbie*. "Sultana's Dream" situates *Barbie* in a long history of women emancipation and *Barbie* creates an opportunity to celebrate "Sultana's Dream" anew. The popularity of Gerwig draws the attention of people towards a gender-reversed ideal utopian society that has been used for criticizing patriarchy, a technique used by Hossain as well, taken back to a hundred years ago. Today's pop cultural phenomenon of Gerwig's *Barbie* brings "Sultana's Dream" to the table for discussion to measure the history of such feminist utopian journey; this discussion can make people aware of Hossain, as a forerunner on the path that Gerwig is walking.

Gilarek's concept of defamiliarization works for the women's-only spaces of both Ladyland and Barbieland. Whether it is Sultana's exploration of Ladyland with Sister Sara or Barbie's contrasting "real" and fictional worlds, these narrative adventures take Sultana and Barbie to a "defamiliarization" or "displacement" of the worlds they exist in. They are introduced to parallel worlds that are not similar but rather reverse the rules that are applied in those worlds. Therefore, defamiliarization is a useful literary technique, for Hossain and Gerwig, to "criticize male-dominated social orders" by contrasting patriarchal oppression and

illuminating social equality through dystopian and utopian settings containing remote time and space (Gilarek 34).

The similarities in their representations of women's power and leadership are other reasons why Hossain and Gerwig need to be studied together. The undeniable feminine power gained through education and scientific innovation make these places look like perfect worlds of scientific imagination. Men in Ladyland were interested more in war and weapons than in paying attention to scientific progress toward a sustainable environment; the Kens were likewise more interested in having a dance battle between themselves rather than in investing their time on any productive activity. It was women who took care of their surroundings and therefore proved how deserving they are of power and leadership.

The similarities between Hossain and Gerwig may seem prominent; however, the contrasts are no less recognizable. Ladyland may seem like a place where men are marginalized and deprived of their rights in the beginning, but with Sister Sara's description of the history, it becomes clear that women did not force the men to stay inside mardana; rather men lost their chance to prove themselves worthy of leading and chose to be inside houses so that the women, who won in proving their capability to lead, can take charge. The distribution of deserved power and rights according to their performed responsibilities looks like a practice of equity. Especially, Barbieland begins as a neoliberal society where the power shifts from women to men and again from men to women; it becomes a society of equality where everyone can choose their identity and be what they want regardless of gender. When one of the Kens wants to be a part of Barbieland's judiciary system, President Barbie allows him to have a lower position, but assures him that he will be promoted when he becomes eligible and responsible. So, gender roles in Ladyland and Barbieland are not too similar, but in both places, leadership is ultimately achieved

by merit, as the people who deserve power and can best use it are given the chance to lead. The women of Ladyland proved their merit and ability, and the Barbies proved their deserved leadership by rescuing their land from the chaotic Kendom where nobody had an unclouded vision about leadership.

Most importantly, when seen together and across one hundred years of feminist theories, these two texts allow us to explore a variety of feminist theoretical perspectives, from postcolonial feminism to ecofeminism to "plastic" and "neoliberal" and what I call "synthetic" feminism. This map of feminism paves the way for understanding womanhood in both texts. Whether women live in the colonial era or Virtual Reality's era, feminism helps define the nature of womanhood according to their specific period.

Although "Sultana's Dream" was written during the first wave of the feminist movement, Hossain advances views on science, education, environmentalism, and colonial power that make her a part of second wave feminism in spirit. Being a colonial woman, Hossain thought about not following the colonizer's superficial development that excludes nature. Her thoughts were not exactly of decolonization, but her rejection of technologies, invented or used by the British colonizers, in Ladyland shows that she did not support the colonizer's way and that, if possible, she would replace and remove their technology. Hossain's thoughts anticipate the decolonization process.

In a way, even *Barbie* parallels this decolonization pattern when the Barbies fight against being brainwashed by Kens; their brainwashing by Kens is a colonizing act, and undoing the spell by reminding Barbies of their real identities decolonizes them. Eventually, the takeover of Kendom by Barbies and the restoration of Barbieland completes the decolonization process. Barbies live in a postfeminist era where they practice neoliberalism by discarding gender

discrimination and providing opportunities according to everyone's eligibility. And yet, they also dwell in a place of parasocial connections of toys and players, which make it a synthetic world of experiencing human emotions in a plastic land.

Most importantly, though, both texts together illustrate that some feminist desires seem simultaneously universal: for example, women want autonomy and have self-worth in both texts. "Sultana's Dream" and *Barbie* are culturally specific about representing their contemporary society, but both Hossain and Gerwig aim to present women's worlds and their capabilities as deserving of recognition. Women take care of the world thinking of it as their own home. People may criticize how immaculate Ladyland and Barbieland are and make this immaculateness a feminine attribute. These two places are taken by readers and audiences as perfect feminist utopias for their universality of containing womanhood in an ideal manner.

While feminism is the broad brush that we can use to paint Hossain and Gerwig in their creative worlds, they represent the culture and environment of their contemporary times through satire. Hossain's feminism satirizes the British Colonial Indian society where women are almost non-existent. Sultana's statement, "We have no hand or voice in the management of our social affairs" (Hossain 9), is enough to understand the real picture of Indian women. Gerwig's feministic view satires the neoliberal time where women are subjects perceived as attractive objects in the capitalist material world. For instance, the Mattel CEO lies to Barbie saying, "If you get in that box, you'll go back to Barbieland, and everything will be as it was" (Gerwig and Baumbach 53). He wants to entrap and then discontinue her because she has cellulite and flat feet, which may not be attractive to the buyers of Barbie dolls. Also, Gloria's proposal of creating an Ordinary Barbie is disapproved by the CEO, but when a board member gives an estimation that it would be profitable, the CEO instantly changes his mind and approves Gloria's

idea (*Barbie* 1:38:56-1:39:31). The CEO treats Barbies as objects to satisfy his capitalist agenda despite his suggestion that his relationship to them is maternal: he requests that everyone call him mother; none agrees to do so. This satirical moment shows that to understand female needs, it is important to be a woman. Nobody can be called mother without having motherly attributes in them. Therefore, satire is a useful technique in the feminist practice of both Hossain and Gerwig.

The Feminist approach of Hossain lets her reader know of her historical moment. She provided a perspective on an early twentieth century Bengal that needed to validate and recognize women as a part of society, and give them access to an education that could make women more capable than men. When she built a perfect society by reversing the gender roles in Ladyland and put men in mardana, it just mirrored her time and the consequences of secluding women in zenana. It seems impossible to understand Hossain without understanding her context, and she flawlessly represented the need for establishing a participatory society for Bengali women.

Gerwig, in addition, opens the door to a new and urgent moment for feminist engagement in the early twenty-first century when technology with artificial intelligence is on the rise. At present, concepts like parasocial relationships, and synthetic feminism are more relevant than ever. Gerwig's *Barbie* gives us a window to investigate the metaverse and parallelism of the real world to a utopian or imagined or augmented world. The insecurity of being a woman is equally severe in parallel worlds. "Sultana's Dream" and Barbie both explore the culturally specific vulnerability of women. The world needs the feminist suggestions of Hossain and Gerwig, now, more than ever, to give women the space to be treated as humans rather than lifeless objects.

WORKS CITED

ABC News In-Depth. "Greta Gerwig and Margot Robbie Discuss *Barbie's* Surprising Feminism | 7.30." *Www.youtube.com*, 12 July 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuWr-v3TOO8. Accessed 26 Feb. 2024.

Abshavi, Mojgan, and Zaman Kargozari. "The Discourse of Gender and Power in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*." *The Journal of Social Sciences Research*, no. 69, Sept. 2020, pp. 818–825, https://doi.org/10.32861/jssr.69.818.825. Accessed 30 May 2024.

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin Books, 1958.

Adams, Paige. "A Timeline of Feminism with Literary Influences." *The Uproar*, 30 Mar. 2020, https://uproarcsu.com/politics/a-timeline-of-feminism-with-literary-influences/. Accessed 10 June 2024.

Ahmed, Ibtisam. "Justice in 'Sultana's Dream': A Secular, Feminist, Anti-Colonial and Sustainable Utopia Embodying the Ideas of Indian Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity Print Plus*, edited by Adam Stock and Miranda Iossifidis, vol. 6, no. 3, May 2022, https://doi.org/10.26597/mod.0224. Accessed 8 June 2024.

Alam, Mahbubul, and Nawshan Ara Rima. "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's Sultana's Dream: An Avant-Garde of Economic Independence of Women Towards Freedom." *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching*, vol. 4, no. 2, Dec. 2020, pp. 185–195, https://doi.org/10.30743/ll.v4i2.2786. Accessed 6 Nov. 2023.

Alam, M. Shah. "Purdah in Islam." *The Daily Star*, 31 Aug. 2010, www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-152924. Accessed 3 Apr. 2024.

Alderman, Naomi. *The Power*. Back Bay Books Little, Brown and Company, 2016.

Alexander, Kerri Lee. "Feminism: The Second Wave." *National Women's History Museum*, National Women's History Museum, 18 June 2020, www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-second-wave. Accessed 2 Apr. 2024.

Anzaldua, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. McClelland & Stewart, 1985.

Ayyildiz, Bulent. "Reflections of Second Wave Feminism in the Female Man and the Left Hand of Darkness." *AKRA Kültür Sanat ve Edebiyat Dergisi*, vol. 11, no. 31, Oct. 2023, pp. 149–168, https://doi.org/10.31126/akrajournal.1282800. Accessed 30 May 2024.

Babel, Anika. "'Music Is like a Ribbon That Knits the Storylines Together': The Musicality of Greta Gerwig's *Little Women*." *The Soundtrack*, vol. 15, no. 1, Nov. 2023, pp. 9–28, https://doi.org/10.1386/ts_00024_1. Accessed 8 June 2024.

Bagchi, Barnita. "Speculating with Human Rights: Two South Asian Women Writers and Utopian Mobilities." *Mobilities*, vol. 15, no. 1, Sept. 2019, pp. 69–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2019.1667100. Accessed 12 Feb. 2024.

"Barbenheimer — the Trailer (4K)." *Www.youtube.com*, 4 July 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=KA6l2d_Z2v8. Accessed 23 Feb. 2024.

Barbie. Directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2023.

"Barbie (2023) - IMDb." *Www.imdb.com*, www.imdb.com/title/tt1517268/reviews/. Accessed 2 Apr. 2024.

Barbie Media. "Barbie Timeline." *Barbiemedia.com*, 2019, www.barbiemedia.com/timeline.html. Accessed 24 Feb. 2024.

Bennet, Jessica. "Opinion | I Saw *Barbie* with Susan Faludi, and She Has a Theory about It." *The New York Times*, 25 July 2023, www.nytimes.com/2023/07/25/opinion/barbie-movie-faludi-feminism.html. Accessed 12 June 2024.

Benson-Allott, Caetlin. "Greta Gerwig's Girlhood Trilogy." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 77, no. 2, University of California Press, Dec. 2023, pp. 67–72, https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2023.77.2.67. Accessed 8 June 2024.

Buchanan, Kyle. "Greta Gerwig on the Blockbuster 'Barbie' Opening (and How She Got Away with It)." *The New York Times*, 25 July 2023, www.nytimes.com/2023/07/25/movies/greta-gerwig-barbie-movie.html. Accessed 23 Feb. 2024.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 1989. Routledge, 1990.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. Modern Library, 1899.

Clark, J. P. "Political Ecology – an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics." *Www.sciencedirect.com*, 2012, www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/ecofeminism. Accessed 2 Mar. 2024.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 1990. Routledge, 2000.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Oxford University Press, 1949.

Dillon, Sarah. “Who Rules the World? Reimagining the Contemporary Feminist Dystopia.” *The New Feminist Literary Studies*, edited by Jennifer Cooke, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 169–181, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108599504.013. Accessed 8 June 2024.

Dorrian, Ryan. “Millennial Disentitlement: Greta Gerwig’s Post-Recession Hipster Stardom.” *Celebrity Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3, Dec. 2020, pp. 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2020.1848601. Accessed 12 June 2024.

Du, Yuanmeng. “A Feminist Reading of *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.” *Frontiers in Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 5, May 2023, pp. 93–101, https://doi.org/10.54691/fhss.v3i5.5042. Accessed 31 May 2024.

Flatau, Seb. “Mattel & Barbie Girl Lawsuit Explained: How 2023’S Barbie Movie Settled a 26-Year-Old Battle.” *Screen Rant*, 8 Aug. 2023, https://screenrant.com/barbie-girl-mattel-aqua-lawsuit-explained/. Accessed 12 June 2024.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1963.

Gerber, Robin. “Barbie: Her Inspiration, History, and Legacy.” *Google Books*, Epic Ink, 2024, https://books.google.com/books?id=bQfzEAAAQBAJ&source=gbs_ViewAPI&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false. Accessed 8 June 2024.

Gerwig, Greta, and Noah Baumbach. *Barbie*. https://assets.scriptslug.com/live/pdf/scripts/barbie-2023.pdf. Accessed 24 Feb. 2024.

Gilarek, Anna. “The Temporal Displacement of Utopia and Dystopia in Feminist Speculative Fiction.” *Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature*, vol. 3, 2015, pp. 34–46, https://explorations.uni.opole.pl/wp-content/uploads/GilarekAnnaText_Lit_Final.pdf. Accessed 7 June 2024.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1979.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Herland*. 1915. Pantheon Books, 1979.

Haraway, Donna. “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s.” *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1987, pp. 1–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.1987.9961538. Accessed 12 June 2024.

Haque, Md. Rezaul. “Educating Women, (Not) Serving the Nation: The Interface of Feminism and Nationalism in the Works of Rokeya Sakhwat Hossain: Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature.” *Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2013, pp. 95–113, https://journals.iium.edu.my/asiatic/index.php/ajell/article/view/372/348. Accessed 18 May 2024.

Hasanat, Fayeza. “Sultana’s Utopian Awakening: An Ecocritical Reading of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s ‘Sultana’s Dream.’” *Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 7, no. 2, Dec. 2013, pp. 114-125, https://journals.iium.edu.my/asiatic/index.php/ajell/article/view/321/302. Accessed 7 June 2024.

Hochman, Barbara. “Little Women on Film: Socks or Buttons.” *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists*, vol. 10, no. 2, University of Pennsylvania Press, Sept. 2022, pp. 231–240, https://doi.org/10.1353/jnc.2022.0018. Accessed 12 June 2024.

hooks, bell. *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Routledge, 1981.

Hossain, Rokeya Sakhawat. “Selections from *The Secluded Ones*.” *Sultana’s Dream A Feminist Utopia and Selections from the Secluded Ones*, edited & translated by Roushan Jahan, The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1988, pp. 24–36.

Hossain, Rokeya Sakhawat. *Sultana’s Dream A Feminist Utopia and Selections from The Secluded Ones*. The Feminist Press, 1988.

Hu, Jane. “Plastic People.” *Dissent*, vol. 70, no. 3, Sept. 2023, pp. 12–15, https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2023.a906664. Accessed 12 June 2024.

Jahan, Mitali. “Begum Rokeya: A Trailblazer in Women’s Rights.” *The Daily Star*, 9 Dec. 2018, www.thedailystar.net/opinion/tribute/news/begum-rokeya-trailblazer-womens-rights-1670908. Accessed 20 Feb. 2024.

Jahan, Roushan. “Rokeya: An Introduction to Her Life.” *Sultana’s Dream A Feminist Utopia and Selections from the Secluded Ones*, edited & translated by Roushan Jahan, The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1988, pp. 37–57.

Jahan, Roushan. “‘Sultana’s Dream’: Purdah Reversed.” *Sultana’s Dream A Feminist Utopia and Selections from the Secluded Ones*, edited by Roushan Jahan, translated by Roushan Jahan, The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1988, pp. 1–6.

Kapheim, Sara. “Female-Only Utopias in Sci-Fi/Fantasy Books We Want to Experience.” *The Portalist*, 16 Mar. 2023, https://theportalist.com/female-only-utopias. Accessed 2 Apr. 2024.

Kato, Brooke. “I Was ‘Gang Raped’ in the Metaverse — My Trauma Is Very Real.” *The New York Post,* 13 Jan. 2024, https://nypost.com/2024/01/13/tech/i-was-gang-raped-in-the-metaverse-my-trauma-is-very-real/. Accessed 13 June 2024.

Kuiti, Samadrita. “Decolonizing the Feminist Utopia: Interfaith Sisterhood and Anticolonial Feminist Resistance in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s *Sultana’s Dream* and *Padmarag.*” *Utopian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, July 2022, pp. 240–256, https://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.33.2.0240. Accessed 8 June 2024.

Krum, Caroline. “Rape in the Metaverse: The U’s Response to Virtual Sexual Assaults.” *The Daily Utah Chronicle,* 4 Mar. 2024, https://dailyutahchronicle.com/2024/03/04/virtual-sexual-assault-oeo-upd/. Accessed 14 June 2024.

Lakhi, Mukti. “An Alternative Feminist Modernity: Fantastic Utopia and the Quest for Home in Sultana’s Dream.” *Postgraduate English: A Journal and Forum for Postgraduates in English*, no. 14, 2006, pp. 1–28, https://postgradenglishjournal.awh.durham.ac.uk/ojs/index.php/pgenglish/article/view/61. Accessed 27 June 2024.

Lemire, Christy. “Barbie Movie Review & Film Summary (2023) | Roger Ebert.” *Www.rogerebert.com*, 21 July 2023, www.rogerebert.com/reviews/barbie-movie-review-2023. Accessed 2 Apr. 2024.

Lewton, Thomas. “Feminist Visions of Science and Utopia in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s ‘Sultana’s Dream.’” *Lady Science: Women. History. Science.* 2019. https://www.ladyscience.com/features/feminist-visions-science-fiction-utopia-rokeya-hossain. Accessed 1 July 2024.

Loots, Lliane. “Revisiting Gender Ecology and Eco-Feminism: A Profile of Five Contemporary Women Water Activists.” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, vol. 25, no. 2 (88), 2011, pp. 6–16, www.jstor.org/stable/41321411. Accessed 2 Apr. 2024.

Logan, Deborah Anna. *The Indian Ladies’ Magazine, 1901–1938: From Raj to Swaraj*. Lehigh University Press, 2017. https://EBSCOhost,search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=e000xna&AN=1540715&site=eds-live&scope=site. Accessed 22 Feb. 2024.

Lord, M. G. “Barbie | History & Facts.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 12 Nov. 2018, www.britannica.com/topic/Barbie. Accessed 23 Feb. 2024.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Penguin Books, 1984.

Mandelo, Lee. “‘More of Us Beyond This Room’: Feminist (Hi)Stories and Solidarity in *the Future of Another Timeline.*” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2022, pp. 173–195, https://doi.org/10.1086/720425. Accessed 30 May. 2024.

Marshall, John W. “Hybridity and Reading Romans 13.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 31, no. 2, Dec. 2008, pp. 157–178, https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064x08098279. Accessed 2 Apr. 2024.

Marston, William Moulton. *Wonder Woman: Vol 1*. DC Comics, 1942.

Marwah, Shruti, and Arjun Handa. “Barbie Doll Forehead: CAD Design from Silicon Block.” *Indian Journal of Plastic Surgery*, vol. 55, no. 1/2022, Feb. 2022, pp. 111–114, https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0041-1740524. Accessed 2 Apr. 2024.

Masia, Laura. “I Can’t Get Kenough of These Barbie Posters Created from 1-Star Reviews by Pissed off Men.” *Pedestrian.tv*, 26 July 2023, www.pedestrian.tv/entertainment/barbie-1-star-reviews/. Accessed 20 June 2024.

Mattel. “History | Mattel, Inc.” *Corporate.mattel.com*, Mattel, 2021, https://corporate.mattel.com/history. Accessed 31 May 2024.

Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. Columbia University Press, 1969.

Millman, Noah. “Barbie and the Franken-Feminists: The Recent Films Barbie and Poor Things Try to Reinvent the Woman and Fail: Modern Age.” *Modern Age*, vol. 65, no. 4, 2023, pp. 35–42, https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=263d57dc-690c-4f4b-b9b1-77ec32fc28b6%40redis. Accessed 2 Apr. 2024.

Mitchell, Audrey. “Greta Gerwig’s *Ladybird* (2017).” *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2023, pp. 59–64. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48738139. Accessed 8 June 2024.

Moers, Ellen. *Literary Women*. Doubleday & Co, 1976.

Mohan, Kamlesh. *Science and Technology in Colonial India*. Routledge, 2023. https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzMzNDEwNDdfX0FO0?sid=f23eeace-c83b-4fd0-a87c-500e2591632c@redis&vid=0&format=EB&rid=2. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

Mookerjea-Leonard, Debali. “Futuristic Technologies and Purdah in the Feminist Utopia: Rokeya S. Hossain’s ‘Sultana’s Dream’.” *Feminist Review*, no. 116, 2017, pp. 144–153. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44987318. Accessed 8 June 2024.

Naylor, Robert. “Why *Barbie* and Not *Oppenheimer*: A Film Review of *Barbie*, Directed by Greta Gerwig. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2023.” *Endeavour*, vol. 47, no. 3, Sep. 2023, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.endeavour.2023.100873. Accessed 12 June 2024.

Newitz, Annalee. *The Future of Another Timeline*. Tor Books, 2019.

Okoli, Al Chukwuma. “Exploring the Transformative Essence of Intellectual Feminism in Africa: Some Contributions of Amina Mama.” *Open Political Science*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2021, pp. 126–135, https://doi.org/10.1515/openps-2021-0013. Accessed 20 Feb. 2024.

Paul, Pamela. “Opinion | *Barbie* Is Bad. There, I Said It.” *The New York Times*, 24 Jan. 2024, www.nytimes.com/2024/01/24/opinion/barbie-movie-oscars.html. Accessed 2 Apr. 2024.

Perkins, Claire, et al. “Doing Film Feminisms in the Age of Popular Feminism: A Roundtable Convened by Claire Perkins and Jodi Brooks.” *Australian Feminist Studies*, Routledge, Nov. 2023, pp. 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2287205. Accessed 12 June 2024.

Porter, Bernard. “Married to the Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947 (Review).” *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2003, pp. 761–762, https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2003.0083. Accessed 2 Apr. 2024.

Priyadharshini, P., and Tribhuwan Kumar. “Unveiling the Power of Liberal Feminism in Namita Gokhale’s Selected Works: A Journey towards Gender Inclusivity.” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, Academy Publication, Feb. 2024, pp. 485–490, https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1402.20. Accessed 12 June 2024.

Rampton, Martha. “Four Waves of Feminism.” *Pacific University Oregon*, Pacific University Oregon, 25 Oct. 2015, www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism. Accessed 11 Feb. 2024.

Rottenberg, Catherine. “The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism.” *Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2014, pp. 418–437, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2013.857361. Accessed 12 June 2024.

Russ, Joanna. *The Female Man.* Bantam Books, 1975.

Sales, Nancy Jo. “A Girl Was Allegedly Raped in the Metaverse. Is This the Beginning of a Dark New Future?” *The Guardian*, 5 Jan. 2024, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/05/metaverse-sexual-assault-vr-game-online-safety-meta. Accessed 2 Mar. 2024.

Sargent, Lyman Tower. “Five Hundred Years of Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Utopianism.” *Utopian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2016, pp. 184–192. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.27.2.0184. Accessed 30 May 2024.

Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own*. 1977. Princeton University Press, 1999.

Singh, Divya. “Sexual Assault in the Metaverse: Caveat Universitates (‘Universities Beware’).” *Globethics*, 2023, pp. 603–619, https://doi.org/10.58863/20.500.12424/4276067. Accessed 13 June 2024.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory a Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 67–111, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315656496. Accessed 23 Feb. 2024.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. *A Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions*. 1848. Applewood Books, 2015.

Thapa, Shauriya. "Why *Barbie* Feels like a Worthy Spin on Begum Rokeya's Utopian Novel 'Sultana's Dream.'" *Www.dailyo.in*, 25 July 2023, www.dailyo.in/entertainment/why-barbie-feels-like-a-worthy-spin-on-begum-rokeyas-utopian-novel-sultanas-dream-40749. Accessed 7 June 2024.

"The Plastic Feminism of Barbie." *Www.youtube.com*, 24 July 2023, https://youtu.be/RToUZJ0l7Pk. Accessed 2 Mar. 2024.

Tiptree, Jr., James. "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" *Aurora: Beyond Equality*, edited by Vonda N. McIntyre and Susan Janice Anderson, Fawcett Gold Medal, 1976, pp. 36-98.

"UNESCO's Memory of the World Inscribes 'Sultana's Dream.'" *Www.newagebd.net*, 9 May 2024, www.newagebd.net/post/literature/234749/unescos-memory-of-the-world-inscribes-sultanas-dream. Accessed 8 June 2024.

Walker, Rebecca. "Becoming the 3rd Wave." *Ms*, Jan/Feb 1992, pp. 86-87.

Warner, Helen. "'An Indie Voice for a Generation of Women?': Greta Gerwig, and Female Authorship Post #Metoo." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2024, pp. 292–306, https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2023.2196605. Accessed 11 June 2024.

West, Rebecca. "Kinds of Feminism." *Uah.edu*, 2019, www.uah.edu/woolf/feminism_kinds.htm. Accessed 2 Mar. 2024.

Wilcox, Lauren. "Practising Gender, Queering Theory." *Review of International Studies*, vol. 43, no. 5, 2017, pp. 789–808. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26619165. Accessed 8 June 2024.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* Penguin Books, 1792.

Yadav, Nutan. "Tracing the Governing Utopian Ideas in the novel of Begum Rokeya's novel 'Sultana's Dream'." *International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES)*, vol. 5, no.5, May 2023, pp. 30-35, https://www.ijoes.in/papers/v5i5/6.NUTAN(30-35).pdf. Accessed 20 May 2024.

Zaman, Niaz. "From Islamic Feminism to Radical Feminism: Roquiah Sakhawat Hossein to Taslima Nasrin." *Asiatic*, vol. 10, no. 1, International Islamic University Malaysia, June 2016, pp. 4–26, https://doi.org/10.31436/asiatic.v10i1.781. Accessed 8 June 2024.