

The Tapestry of Masculinities: A Critical Analysis of Heterogeneous Masculinities in Begum Rokeya's *Padmarag*

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Abstract

This paper illustrates a convoluted exploration of the portrayal of hegemonic masculinity in Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Padmarag*. Through the depiction of diverse male characters in *Padmarag*, Rokeya deconstructs the perception of universal male privilege in patriarchal society and challenges the monolithic and unidimensional representation of masculinity. Through deploying Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and an intersectional lens, this paper scrutinizes how socio-cultural, financial, and colonial aspects frame and situate men within patriarchy. The paper illuminates that through *Padmarag*, Rokeya unveiled the fluid nature of masculinities. It also extensively portrayed how Rokeya challenged the colonial paradigm that situates Western men as sophisticated and reveals the moral and social fraudulence immanent in colonial masculinities in *Padmarag*. This paper endeavors to enhance the academic discourse by highlighting new discernments about *Padmarag*, which focuses on the fluid, multifaceted, and heterogeneous nature of masculinity in colonial Bengal.

Key words: Hegemonic masculinity in *Padmarag*, patriarchy, intersectionality, colonialism.

1.1 Introduction

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is acknowledged as the pioneering advocate for women's liberation in Bengal. The motivation of her literary work aims to address the history of the suppression, oppression, and domination of women in Bengal by men.¹ She aimed to expand female education among Bengali Muslims, and her literary works advocated Muslim women's education and empowerment in colonial Bengal.² *Padmarag* is one of the distinguished feminist texts, which focusing on the diversified socio-cultural realities faced by women in colonial Bengal.³ The story of *Padmarag*

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¹ T. Alam, *Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: Trends of Thoughts and Social Works* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1992), p. 45.

² R. Mahmud, "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: Tireless Fighter of Female Education and Their Independence—A Textual Analysis", *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, Vol. 4, No. 9, 2016, pp. 40–48.

³ Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, *Padmarag*, in *Rokeya Rochonaboli* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1924)

revolves around a group of women in *Tarini Bhavan*, where they share their untold stories, experiences of patriarchal and domestic abuse with each other.⁴ However, she also portrayed diversified forms of masculinities in the novel, which usually remain concealed and obscured. *Padmarag* not only illustrates the multifaceted oppressions faced by women but also highlights the multiple manifestations of male characters in its narrative to depict the intricate dynamics of gender relations. The novel highlighted how Bengali masculinities were heavily influenced by the colonial discourse, which represented Bengali men as effeminate and weak. To validate the colonizing endeavor, colonial officers propagated that Bengali men were not adequately masculine and too effeminate to fit into the standards of colonial hegemonic masculinity.⁵ Through the portrayal of characters such as Rafia's husband, Abdul Gofur Mia, and several other male characters, Rokeya illustrated the influence of colonial standards on reshaping local masculinities. Rokeya also showed how Bengali men internalized some of the colonial standards, and embarked on careers that involved a degree of Western education and training. This is what led them to travel to the UK to study for the Bar, or careers in government civil services and so on. But as far as women were concerned, they wanted to keep women away from internalizing western culture. Thus, women's education was confined to learn a smattering of English, aimed at creating suitable wives for the emerging professional men. At the same time, they expected women to be submissive and dutiful wives. On this ground, Partha Chatterjee (1989) argued that during the latter part of the colonial period, women's education was concerned to safeguard traditional values in the spirit of nationalism, and women were to refrain from internalizing Western culture. This selective approach to modernization of women's questions embodied the dynamics of a new patriarchy.⁶ Besides this, through the portrayal of a white man's abusive behaviour in *Padmarag*, Rokeya deconstructs the established notion about the colonizer as a symbol of modernization, civilization, and instead discloses their active role in consolidating established patriarchal norms. As evident from various studies that despite the discourse that claimed Europeans to be the epitome of civilization, European women's rights had to be fought for, and their

⁴ Md. M. Hasan, "Intimate Revelations: Conversations among 'Evil' Women in Rokeya's *Padmarag*", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 1, 2022, pp. 83–101.

⁵ Sahelee Parveen Dipa, "Subversion of Colonial Masculinity and Manifestation of Gendered Nationalism in *Letters of 1971 (Ekattorer Chithi)*", *Crossings*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2022, pp. 27–41.

⁶ Partha Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India", *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1989, pp. 622–33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/645113>.

voting rights were denied for many years.⁷ Moreover, brutal practices such as witch-burning had been practiced for a long time.⁸ Though *Padmarag* is more often read as an example of Rokeya's feminist vision and a portrayal of women's empowerment, the depictions of various male characters have not received similar inspection. These characters play a significant role in shaping the novel's interpretations of gender relations. Through presenting a spectrum of male characters who, instead of conforming strictly to ideals of hegemonic masculinity, exhibit diverse behaviors, including allies or oppressors, Rokeya portrayed the construction of varied forms of masculinities in the socio-cultural context of colonial Bengal.

The representation of male characters in Rokeya's *Padmarag* illustrates how men's identity and behavior are shaped by patriarchal norms, which signifies that masculinity is not uniform and homogenous; rather, it is fluid and dynamic and influenced by socio-cultural factors. The parallel existence of progressive and oppressive male characters in *Padmarag* demonstrates that masculinity is not monolithic. This article aims to shed light on how Rokeya not only challenges patriarchal authority but also visualizes diverse forms of masculinities that harmonize with feminist values.

1.2 The Selective Male Characters of *Padmarag*

Latif Almas- Latif Almas is the key male character of *Padmarag*. He is the husband of Siddika, the novel's lead female character. Latif's family was raised by his uncle Zamindar Haji Habib Alam, who exercises patriarchal control over him. Though he was generous to look after Latif's family, his greed and tactics influenced the tracks of Latif's life. When Latif reached the age to get married, his mother arranged his marriage with his sister Rasheda's sister-in-law Siddika. Their *Akdh* programme was completed, and it was decided that after three years, they will officially receive the bride. Latif went to England to study law to become a barrister, which was a popular profession for men in colonial Bengal. After becoming a barrister, Latif's uncle Haji Habib Alam became extremely greedy and exercised his patriarchal control over his niece's personal life. He decided to utilize Latif's degree in law as a functional asset to get favorable marriage proposals. Haji wrote a letter to Latif's brother-in-law, Soleman that he had to transfer all the property to Latif, and if he refuses, he will settle Latif's marriage somewhere else. Soleman replied that he can do whatever he wants, but he will do no such thing. Initially, Latif did not agree to marry somewhere else

⁷ Shakhawat Liton, "The Long Struggle of Women to Achieve Voting Rights", *The Daily Star*, 2017.

⁸ "Early Modern Witch-Hunts 'Left Britain with Collective Wound'", *The Guardian*, 2022.

because he thought it would be an injustice for Siddika, though he had not seen her for these years. But Latif was continuously pressured by his family to marry another wealthy widow, and he was being criticized for not following Haji's order. Latif ultimately marries the widow named Saleha, with whom he shares a son named Hamid. But it was an unhappy marriage.

Rafia's Husband- It is one of the male characters of *Padmarag* whose actions exemplify the patriarchal and masculine norms prevalent in Colonial Bengal. He went to England to pursue his degree in Law, leaving his wife, Rafia, and two daughters behind in the country. Earlier, he used to send letters to Rafia regularly, but gradually it became a rare occurrence. Despite his negligence, Rafia used to wait for his letters and even learnt English, hoping for his love and commitment. A full decade passes by, and Rafia's prediction for his return remains unchanged. Finally, after ten years, she receives a letter from him. To her astonishment, she came to know that it was a divorce notice in conjunction with the shocking revelation that her husband had married a *Mem Saheb* (British Woman). Rafia went through an emotional breakdown, which led to madness for a period of time. The action of Rafia's husband demonstrates the ubiquitous patriarchal culture where men's decisions are given precedence and women are expected to remain submissive.

Abdul Gofur Mia- He is a lawyer, but is an irresponsible and morally corrupt man. His elder brother attempted to reform him but failed. To bring stability to Gofur's life, his elder brother decided to make arrangements for his marriage. Though Gofur initially rejected but he ultimately agrees under the condition that the bride should be beautiful. Unaware of Gofur's involvement with a woman named Bela, who had a crucial influence over him, Bela accompanied Gofur on the day of his wedding to Sokina. During the occasion, she whispered to Gofur that the bride was not beautiful, and without verifying it, Gofur believed her, abandoned Sokina, and the very next day, he fled with Sokina's bridal ornaments. Later, Bela passed away, and he remarried a widow. Concurrently, Sokina's brothers pressure him for the payment of *Denmohor* (dower money). Gofur decides to take her back. At this point, Sokina was very ill, and Gofur took proper care of her. However, after her recovery, Sokina refuses to go with him since he never respected her and obviously believed Bela's narratives about her. Gofur's conditions of getting married, his ability to abandon his wife Sokina and then easily remarrying, and his attempt to reclaim her for his own needs illustrate the privileges that patriarchy provided to men.

Usha's Husband- Usha's husband is represented as a cowardly and irresponsible male character who abandons his wife during danger. When their home was attacked by bandits, Usha's husband fled, leaving Usha to face the bandits alone. However, the bandits did not cause any physical harm to Usha; they only took the family's wealth, kept her captive for a period, and returned her home. After returning home, Usha received the utmost humiliation from her mother-in-law and other women of the family. They questioned her character and purity and shamed her for being under the custody of bandits. In the meantime, her husband remains entirely absent from the whole scenario. Despite his failure to protect his wife, which is considered to be one of the traditional masculine roles, he faces no consequences; rather, Usha is being shamed.

Mr. Joseph- He is Helen's husband, who is marked by troublesome illustrations of masculinity, which include abusing his wife, negligence, getting drunk, and emotional exploitation. After three years of knowing each other, Helen married him. The first year of marital life went well. However, from the second year, he gradually changed into a violent man, frequently got drunk, and physically abused Helen. Despite his toxic behavior, Helen hoped for his potential change and remained committed to him. Later, she got news that Joseph got involved in a murder case in Kanpur, and because of having mental instability, he was sent to England. Helen also followed him to England by selling all her assets. She was again in an emotional shock that Joseph got involved with another woman named Riva and was accused of another murder case. He was kept captive in a criminal lunatic asylum. However, despite this toxicity, Helen could not obtain a divorce from him due to legal loopholes, and the newspapers published news about their situation under titles like 'Tied for Life to Lunatic'. Through the portrayal of a white man in *Padmarag*, Rokeya illustrated that, though the colonizer white people of England claimed themselves to be civilized and progressive, the patriarchal treatment of women is universal, which surpasses national and cultural boundaries.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study positions *Padmarag* within the analytical framework that intertwines the postcolonial school of thought, feminist literary criticism, and hegemonic masculinity to investigate the non-uniform constructions of masculinity. Reconfiguring the readings that are more likely to promote female subjectivity, this study explores how Begum Rokeya formulated and situated masculinity within the broader socio-cultural and colonial hegemonies of Bengal.

The theory of hegemonic masculinity of Connell is embodied as the key theoretical framework and interpretive lens for this study to identify the shifting power dynamics among male characters in *Padmarag*. Connell defined hegemonic masculinity as how a certain group of men gains power and wealth and how these forms of dominance and social relations are legitimized through it.⁹ Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity offers a vital framework in this study for analyzing how Begum Rokeya deconstructs the privileges and vulnerabilities woven within male identities. Through the adoption of this theory, this paper investigates how Rokeya confronts hegemonic masculinity and brings forward alternative masculinities that diverged from traditional patriarchal and gendered norms in Colonial Bengal. This conceptual framework facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how Rokeya not only defied traditional androcentrism but also suggested alternatives and introduced reformed and progressive masculinities that adhere to the feminist ideals. Corresponding to this, the intersectional lens employed by Crenshaw positions these masculinities within intersecting systems of class, colonial culture, and education, which highlights the heterogeneous experiences of men in Rokeya's world. Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Crenshaw, highlights the fact that multiple social identities- sociocultural background, age, etc. intersect to shape an individual's experiences and opportunities within patriarchal systems.¹⁰ This study follows a textual analytical approach, emphasizing the male characters of *Padmarag* not as distinct figures but as intertwined threads in an intricate tapestry of gender relations. Textual analysis is one of the methods that is employed to interpret language, symbols, or images presented in texts to examine the communication patterns of people.¹¹ Among various male characters of *Padmarag*, this paper solely examines selected male characters- Latif Almas, Rafia's husband, Usha's husband, Abdul Gofur Mia, and Mr. Joseph to emphasize manifold responses to patriarchal authority, colonial modernity, and reformist ideals. Various scholarly books, research papers on *Padmarag*, and arguments about South Asian masculinity were reviewed to procure an extensive insight into the portrayals of male characters within the broader socio-cultural context

⁹ Robert W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept", *Gender & society*, Vol. 19, No. 6, 2005, pp. 829-859; Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, "Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique", *Theory and society*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2001, pp. 337-361.

¹⁰ Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics", In: *Feminist legal theories*, 2013, pp. 23-51, Routledge.

¹¹ J. Hawkins, "Textual Analysis", In: *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, Vol. 4, ed. (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2017), pp. 1754-56

of Rokeya's time. This framework thus enables a dialogic reading where masculinities are understood relationally, how one mode of masculinity defines itself against or alongside others, and how these negotiations reimagine gender justice in Rokeya's feminist vision. The study prioritized limited key male characters, which the researcher deliberately overlooked, solely emphasizing the portrayal of masculinity of certain male characters of *Padmarag*. Since there are lack of literature on the portrayal of masculinity in *Padmarag*, this paper endeavors to catalyze new pathways for further research on the representation of masculinity and its intersection with socio-cultural and historical context, colonialism in *Padmarag*.

3. Masculinities in *Padmarag*

3.1 Latif Almas- The Victim of Patriarchal Domination

Through the portrayal of the character Latif Almas, Rokeya unveiled that even men can be victims of patriarchal domination, which often remains unexplored. Despite being a man, he is under the control of his uncle Haji Habib Alam, manifesting that patriarchy does not privilege all men; rather, there are absence of arguments about how patriarchy burdens men. In the novel, though Latif does not wish to remarry, he ultimately remarries a wealthy widow due to family pressure, which eventually leads to an unhappy marriage. This demonstrates the financial dimension of hegemonic masculinity, where financial resilience takes primacy over the emotional aspect. It is evident from a study that demonstrated how men become victims of forced marriages due to the existing patriarchal structure.¹² On this ground, by analyzing two modern American stories *Seize the Day* (1956) and *Death of a Salesman* (1949), a study presented how men become the prey of patriarchy along with women.¹³ However, application of an intersectional lens signifies that the intersection of variables such as age and socio-cultural identity of Latif made up more vulnerable in the patriarchal system. The head of Latif's family was his uncle Haji Habib Alam, and the socio-cultural norms expect Latif to adhere to the instructions of his uncle, as he is the head of the family. One of the most significant insights of this character is the duality of visibility and invisibility of Latif's burden under patriarchy. Patriarchal society's partial nature is reflected in celebrating men's roles as providers and protectors and

¹² M. M. Idriss, "Abused by the Patriarchy: Male Victims, Masculinity, 'Honor'-Based Abuse and Forced Marriages," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol. 37, No. 13–14, 2021, pp. NP11905–NP11932

¹³ Rifat Binte Joynal, "Men Are Also Victims at the Hand of Patriarchy: A Study of Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*", *Advances in Literary Study*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2023, pp. 296-305.

condemning the concurrent burdens and sacrifices. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity proposes that this invisibility is a deliberate component in upholding patriarchal systems, as recognizing men's challenges and burdens would challenge the existence of the patriarchal system and male privilege. The representation of Latif's character by Rokeya confronts the notion that all men are privileged by patriarchy and reflects that patriarchy as a structure does not affect all men in a uniform way, rather it creates a heterogeneous burden for them.

3.2 Rafia's Husband: An Epitome of Dominant Masculinity

Rafia's husband epitomizes a form of dominant masculinity that is certified and validated by the patriarchal system. As a barrister educated in England, he represents a form of dominant masculinity where individual and professional success take ascendancy over familial responsibilities. His negligence towards his wife Rafia and their children accentuates that patriarchal norms certify men to emphasize their careers while expect women to be submissive and prioritize familial responsibilities. His actions of sending a divorce notice to his wife, Rafia, after a decade of negligence and marrying a *Mem Saheb* (British woman), illustrate his alignment with status elevation, reinforcing the dominant form of masculinity. By portraying this character, Rokeya highlighted how the dominant form of masculinity enables men to emphasize professional ambition and grants the privilege to evade familial responsibilities and legitimizes it without any consequence.

3.3 Abdul Gofur Mia: The Morally Corrupted and Misanthropist Patriarch

The masculinity of Sokina's husband, Abdul Gofur Mia inextricably embedded with moral corruption and misanthropist, and opportunistic behavior. Being a barrister, his professional status gave him more social privilege in colonial Bengal. His persistence in marrying only if the bride is beautiful accentuates the objectification of women, consolidating patriarchal norms about marriage that emphasize beauty over agency. Through his actions, Rokeya illustrated how hegemonic masculinity is more about maintaining social and professional status and less about morality. On his wedding day, his trust in Bela's claim of Sokina not being beautiful highlights how men often devalue women based on the narratives constructed by others. Additionally, his actions, such as abandoning Sokina the very next day of the wedding, fleeing with her bridal ornaments, and remarrying again, illustrate how hegemonic masculinity grants men the privilege to deflect familial responsibility. However, his return to Sokina was not driven by his regret and remorse, but rather by the rising concerns regarding dower money, which reflects his opportunistic behavior. It aligns with the masculine norms,

which signifies that men can claim their control over women anytime when it complies with self-interest. Besides this, by viewing Gofur's actions through an intersectional lens, it becomes obvious that his masculinity is also shaped by class and professional status. His professional status provides him with more privileges in society and validates his moral corruption. Rokeya's illustration of the character Gofur discloses the opportunistic aspect of masculinity, which grants men the privilege to do anything that aligns with their self-interest.

3.4 Usha's Husband: The Failure to Fit in Hegemonic Masculinity

Rokeya portrayed a failed masculinity through the representation of the character Usha's husband. The hegemonic masculinity expects men to play the role of the protector of women and family, which contradicts the decision of Usha's husband when he fled away in fear of the bandits that attacked their home. However, despite his failure, it is only Usha who faces societal stigma and humiliation for being kidnapped by the bandits, which highlights the victim-blaming culture imposed by patriarchy. Concurrently, her husband's absence from the whole scenario reflects not only his cowardly nature but also illustrates how patriarchy protects men from accountability and obscures their deficiencies.

3.5 Mr. Joseph: Breaking the Stereotypes of Civilized Colonial Men

Through the portrayal of the character Helen's husband, Mr. Joseph, Rokeya disassembled the narratives about colonizers as inherently civilized and just. He encapsulates the violent form of masculinity, i.e., being an alcoholic, violent, and exploiting his wife both verbally and physically. By depicting this character, Rokeya deconstructed the colonial claim of cultural and moral dominance, elucidating that the European men could be violent, uncivilized, and oppressive. Joseph's engagement in crime in Kanpur and sending him to England, his further engagement in a murder case, and institutionalizing him in an asylum portray the loopholes of the colonial legal system that often exempt European men. His case alters the colonized hierarchy established by the colonizers, which positioned British men as civilized, enlightened, and protagonists to gender equality and Bengali men as uncivilized and antagonists to women's liberation. Besides this, due to judicial constraints, Helen's incapacity to dissolve the marriage with him unveils the universal structural barriers that kept women engaged in abusive marriages. This reveals Rokeya's comprehensive critique of colonial legal systems, which uphold gendered oppression despite their claims of justice and progress. Additionally, the media representation of Helen's case as '*Tied for Life to a Lunatic*' signifies the tendency of society to disparage women's suffering.

Thus, by illustrating the colonial legal system's failure to liberate women from abusive husbands, Rokeya challenged both native and colonial cultures, which share concurrence in sustaining male privilege.

4. Intersectional Analysis of Hegemonic Masculinity in Colonial Bengal through the Lens of *Padmarag*

The portrayal of male characters of *Padmarag* also signifies the major components that men needed to adhere to fit into the hegemonic masculinity of colonial Bengal. One of such significant markers of hegemonic masculinity during colonial times was the barrister identity, which embodies elite status, symbolizes Western education, and validation from the Western world. Men who endeavored legal education in England were augmented both within colonial and native structure, which certifies them to exercise dominance both over women and native men. However, through *Padmarag*, Rokeya revealed that though barristers were often portrayed as the agents of progress and modernity, their medium of progression did not ensure gender justice; rather, it legitimized the actions of exploiting, abandoning, and controlling women masquerading as modernity and progress. Nonetheless, the nature of masculinity was not homogeneous among all men. The application of an intersectional lens reveals how factors such as class, age, financial dependence, and individual temperament shaped men's responses to hegemonic expectations in *Padmarag*. Latif Almas, regardless of his privileged position as a barrister, experienced patriarchal dominance in contrast to other male characters due to his age, personal inclination, and financial maintenance of his family by his uncle, Haji Habib Alam. Contrary to the barristers who exercised power over their wives in *Padmarag*, Latif was forced into marriages that aligned with his family's interests rather than personal choice. Latif's uncle Haji Habib Alam, was greedy and used Latif's professional privilege as a medium to get a marriage proposal for him, which would bring financial support. Latif had no choice but to follow his instructions since his uncle financially maintained his whole family from his early childhood. In contrast, Abdul Gofur Mia exerts his masculinity through exploitation. As opposed to Latif's uncle, Gofur's elder brother always tried to guide him to the right path, but Gofur, being adamant, always denied it. Gofur's actions, such as commodifying women based on beauty, discarding his wife Sokina based on Bela's narratives, remarrying, and later returning to Sokina for financial benefits, signify his narcissism. His actions and treatment of women completely differed from Latif's. Similarly, Rafia's husband, another barrister who abandons his wife, Rafia, and their children, embodies a masculinity that affirms the privileges provided by the colonial legal structures. He used his Western education to sever ties with his native culture and

solidified his status through his marriage with an English woman. His detachment from Rafia and the family signifies that hegemonic masculinity not only embodies domination but also applies a strategic approach to sustain within colonial power structures. In contrast, the portrayal of the character Usha's husband, who fled away during danger, underscores a failed masculinity that negates the construction of ideal men as protectors. This portrayal by Rokeya revealed that, amidst the patriarchal system, not all men epitomize hegemonic standards successfully. Besides this, through *Padmarag*, Rokeya also challenged the colonial discourse that presented the Western notion of modernity as liberating for women. Through the portrayal of the abusive English character Mr. Joseph, the novel highlighted how both traditional and Western masculinities functioned within the same patriarchal schema. Men across different racial, social, and educational backgrounds exerted power over women, whether through violence, negligence, abandonment, or arranged marriages.

5. Concluding Remarks

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Padmarag* exhibits an intricate tapestry of masculinities through the portrayal of various male characters, each shaped by the varied intersections of class, familial expectations, financial dependence, and colonial influence. Through the application of Connell's theory of masculinity and an intersectional lens, this paper illustrates that masculinity was never a unilateral and monolithic construct, but it is fluid and transitional, which is intricately showcased by Rokeya in *Padmarag*. *Padmarag* is frequently analyzed for its rich contribution in portraying various radical issues, including *Tarini Bhavan*, introducing outcome-based education curriculum, and stories of women of various backgrounds. But the way Rokeya portrayed diverse forms of masculinities in this novel is rarely present in any study. In this novel, Rokeya not only portrayed the diversified oppressions faced by women but also how masculinity operates in a patriarchal system. By bringing these discussions into focus, *Padmarag* not only endorses women's liberation but also sheds light on how masculinity is shaped and embodied in colonial Bengal.