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Defamiliarizing Privilege: A Journey from Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* to Greta Gerwig's *Barbie*

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Abstract

When Hossain published *Sultana's Dream* in 1905, it was read as a fantasy, a science fiction, or even a dystopian worldview by some. As I see it, it is an ironic as well as an iconic defamiliarization of male privilege. Its depiction of "Ladyland" illustrates that women were capable of everything men were capable of and more. In 2023, Gerwig's *Barbie* presented a similar defamiliarization – a presentation of the utopian "Barbie Land", a world run for the women and by the women. The two discourses have similarities in the sense that they both present a world where women take centre stage – and both make the point that a world run by women would not be less successful than a world run by men. While *Sultana's Dream* only presents this world as a possibility, *Barbie* expands on the concept of "Barbie Land", by taking its characters on a journey to the "real world", one that is run by the patriarchy. This journey brings Barbie and Ken to the realization that any world, when it privileges one gender over the other, is an unfair and imbalanced one. This paper aims to compare the two texts in the light of defamiliarization, and analyze the processes by which they problematize the gender inequalities of their contemporary times in both parallel and divergent ways.

Keywords: Defamiliarization, male privilege, gendered power, female empowerment, patriarchy

Introduction

Defamiliarization (or estrangement) as a technique, or a device, was first named and discussed by Shklovsky in his 1917 seminal essay "Art as Technique". Shklovsky asserted that the phenomena or objects that have become overly familiar to us in the course of living our lives, start to lose meaning, and start to become invisible to us. He states:

> Habitualisation devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. "If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been". And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (1917/2004, p. 16)

Shklovsky's assertion tells us that for us to see something anew, we need to be shown familiar objects or phenomena from a new perspective. The realization that we knew the specific object or phenomenon all along, but learned to be indifferent to it, is supposed to dawn upon our minds slowly but surely. The slower the realization is, the more profound the changed mindset regarding the phenomena. This can be an

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eye-opener in terms of oppression and injustice – people can become oblivious to the cruelty and unfairness manifesting in plain sight around them. In this state of things, the literary technique of 'defamiliarization' can help make readers aware of social injustices, especially those in positions of privilege, as it helps them experience what the underprivileged go through. As an example of this, Shklovsky presents Tolstoy's use of a horse as a narrator in "Kholstomer" (or "Strider"), where normal human conventions are strange in the horse's eyes. The horse is unable to make sense of the fact that human beings can own other living beings, such as himself. The inequality between humans and animals is baffling to the horse, and through the horse's eyes, it becomes clear to the human reader that the system of ownership of animals is not fair to the animals, who are living beings just like their human owners, and have a claim over their own lives.

We can see an example of this technique applied in Swift's satirical essay "A Modest Proposal" (1729/2009). He proposes a "fair, cheap and easy method" to solve Ireland's issues of poverty and hunger – to breed the children as livestock and to eat their flesh. He brings a slow realization of his horrid proposal, and in the same vein, a self-realization of the cruel indifference set in the minds of his affluent British readers through these lines:

> A Child will make two Dishes at an Entertainment for Friends; and when the Family dines alone, the fore or hind Quarter will make a reasonable Dish; and seasoned with a little Pepper or Salt, will be very good Boiled on the Fourth Day, especially in Winter. (Swift, p. 277)

Defamiliarization in *Sultana's Dream* and *Barbie*

This deconstructionist approach popularized by Shklovsky is also taken up by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in her work *Sultana's Dream* (1905/2006) to depict a utopian irreality from a female perspective. She herself has referenced Swift's work, *Gulliver's Travels* in her short story "The Mysteries of Love" (1904/2013). She equated Swift's 'Yahoos' to men, in the sense that Yahoos may be disadvantaged and ruled over by Houyhnhnms in his novel, but in the real world, the lesser beings, namely the men, rule over, "women, the best of creation" (Hossain, 1904/2013, p. 144). This informs us that Hossain was aware of Swift's work and the techniques Swift uses to defamiliarize in his works – a technique she uses in *Sultana's Dream*. In this vein, Rajan (2015) opines that "Swift's satirical fantasy may have given her [Hossain] the idea of constructing an imaginary, alternative world and exploiting its potential for the play of ideas" (p. 39). The contemporary Bengali society was hostile towards women in every sense of the word – women had access to very little education, were unwelcome in most professional arenas dominated by their male counterparts and were deemed as lesser beings who were best kept inside the confines of home, in the safety of *purdah*. In her feminist essays, Hossain (1905/2006) has argued against these misogynistic attitudes of men towards women using logic and rhetoric, trying to make her male and female readers challenge the notions of the gender roles they have been assigned by society. While the essays are strongly worded and pose a direct affront to the status quo of society, Hossain employs defamiliarization as a device to develop the satire we see in *Sultana's Dream*. Analyzing the satire, Mookerjea-Leonard (2017) focuses on the language in her remark, "Hossain's diction in *Sultana's Dream* is simple, with satire replacing the anger so palpable in her essays" (p. 145). Thus, *Sultana's Dream* is geared towards achieving the same result as her strongly written essays: a complete change in how gender roles are seen by the men and women of the early 20th century Bengal.

A similar approach is again found in the motion picture *Barbie* (2023), directed by Greta Gerwig and released and distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures. Gerwig presents a fantasy land of women called "Barbie Land" where women of different ethnicities, sizes, and styles live perfect lives as Barbie dolls. These women occupy all the important roles of society, from the President of Barbie Land to the cleaning women taking away the bins of the protagonist, "Stereotypical Barbie" played by Margot Robbie. The function of presenting such a matriarchal Barbie Land is to provide an epiphany to today's patriarchal audience. When the roles are flipped, many have felt that the "Kens" or the men of Barbie Land have very little to "do" in society as their lives are deemed completely dependent on their female counterparts. The lesson, or the message that this defamiliarization is trying to convey – very similar to that of *Sultana's Dream* (1905/2006) – is that women are made to feel the same way in a patriarchal world and that it is natural for women to ask for a world of equality in their position.

It is important to note here that there is a 118-year-wide gap between the conception of these two pieces of work, not to mention that they belong to two different art forms entirely, with *Sultana's Dream* (1905/2006) being a work of fiction while *Barbie* (2023) is a motion picture. The origins of the two works of fiction are also vastly different – one emerging as the brain-child of a South-Asian feminist who pioneered social change for women, and one using the concept of a mass-produced toy to expose the lingering gender inequality in modern-day "land-of-the-free" America, a country where many harbor the belief that feminism has become irrelevant. The two works have one obvious converging point: the depiction of the female utopia – a world where women are self-sufficient and men are secondary and irrelevant. Concerning this, we find other common themes and techniques used in the two discourses – the most important being the use of defamiliarization. Hossain presented a female utopia in *Sultana's Dream* in 1905 for the first time. *Barbie,* released in 2023 presents a similar female utopia which tells us, quite clearly, that the 118 years that passed between the publication of *Sultana's Dream* and the theatrical release of *Barbie* has not been able to create a world where women's emancipation has actualized. In fact, in many cases, with the degradation of women's rights in America being a case in point, the world has moved backward on several issues of women's rights in recent years. Women are still fighting for rights over their bodies, their reproductive rights, and the right to make their own choices – such a situation prompts the necessity for works like these to be still made.

Consequently, the production of such works which are similar in their depiction of the female utopia while making use of the technique of defamiliarization, prompts us to study how they could converge in such a way while being so different in terms of time, form, and origin. This is noticed by Thapa (2014) who remarks,

> Both Hossain and Gerwig belong to different backgrounds and created works of fiction with vastly different regional contexts. But their central premise and the creators' satirical disdain towards the male agents of patriarchy are interestingly similar. (p. 1)

Such a view leads us to the impression that *Barbie* (2023) serves as the spiritual successor of *Sultana's Dream* (1905/2006), a cross-continental continuation of Hossain's ideas. The form that Hossain chose to depict her female utopia is a story written in English, which she later translated into Bangla. It serves as the perfect medium to convey an impactful and thought-provoking idea. The format allows her to show us the makings of the female utopia, without delving too deep into the details,

letting the women dream with Sultana – dream, and ponder and wonder at the possibility of a reversal of the male-dominated society of 20th-century Bengal. As the written form was the most popular at the time, it reached her target audience easily and disseminated her radical ideas. On the other hand, *Barbie* is a motion picture, and that too, with a huge publicity campaign in tow, which proved successful as it became a household name and a blockbuster hit immediately after release. One can argue that the format of a movie is the perfect one for the message that *Barbie* wanted to deliver – it aimed to make its audience laugh and be entertained while relating to the ideas presented that are much deeper than they seem to be on the surface – the ideas of contemporary female criticism. The "plastic world" of the Barbie dolls and the real world of Los Angeles juxtaposes the presentation of the female utopia with that of a male one. The movie duration is just under two hours, reflecting again a certain "short story"-like appeal where there is no room for boredom. This modern movie aims to enthrall its contemporary audience's short attention spans with scenes packed with car chases, relatable humor, and moving ideals. The pacing of the plot progression takes the audience on a wild ride, slowing down only to deliver its poignant messages of resistance. The outward "happy-go-lucky vibe" that Barbie exudes is intentional, and that makes its use of defamiliarization more effective. The audience, expecting an entertaining but shallow movie, is taken aback by the complexity of the ideas presented and the way they find themselves taken in by them. Hence, the two forms in which the works appear, serve particular purposes for their respective readers/audiences of the era and place of origin. With that being mentioned, the two works will be juxtaposed in the following sections – with their parallels discussed first, and their divergences next.

The Parallels

The first parallel between Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* (1905/2006) and Gerwig's *Barbie* (2023) can be noticed in the way both works establish a world created for women, by women, at their respective beginnings. Hossain's fantasy science fiction *Sultana's Dream* opens on a starry night when Sultana is visited by Sister Sara and invited out on a walk in a garden. Sultana immediately thinks, "the men-servants outside were fast asleep just then and I could have a pleasant walk with Sister Sara" (Hossain, p. 477). Her immediate thought of the absence of men creates a sense of security, implying that women have nothing to fear when men are not around to cause them trouble. The role reversal soon comes into view when Sultana is walking the streets in broad daylight, and is mocked for her shyness. In this land, she is "shy and timid like men" (Hossain, p. 477). According to Bhattacharya (2006), "The first thing Rokeya [Sakhawat Hossain] does is to invert the very concepts of 'masculine' and 'feminine'; and thereby, highlights the fact that these concepts are mere constructions, fabricated by and in favour of the 'powerful' sex'" (p. 173).

Hence, Hossain's initial defamiliarizations help us realize that gender roles are arbitrarily assigned by the sex that wants to assume power, and in this fictional piece, it is the women who have the power to do that. It is meant to help bring the reader to an epiphany that "shy and timid" are not attributes assigned to any gender at birth. We see Sultana being told by her companion, "This is Ladyland, free from sin and harm. Virtue herself reigns here" (Hossain, 1905/2006, p. 477). The personification of virtue as a 'woman' is telling here. As the journey into this Ladyland progresses, we see Hossain delineate the immense possibilities of a world ruled by women. Ladyland, ruled by its Queen and built by its women, is a land of aesthetics, science, and intellect. The women are portrayed as successful scientists

(which is very unladylike for the contemporary readers of *Sultana's Dream*) who have solved all of their land's problems using science.

A similar notion is noticed in *Barbie* (2023), where a reversal of the patriarchy and its implications have been portrayed by director Gerwig. The movie opens with a fantasy land of living, breathing Barbie dolls presented as humans, ruling over Barbie Land, where the 'Kens' or men are secondary. The narrator is heard introducing Barbie as a doll that changed how little girls played, "Yes, Barbie changed everything. Then, she changed it all again" (Gerwig, 2:51). To introduce Ken, Barbie's male counterpart, she remarks, "Barbie has a great day every day, but Ken only has a great day if Barbie looks at him" (Gerwig, 7:59). Hence, the similarities between Hossain's Ladyland, and Barbie Land start to become apparent. The narrator informs us, "She has her own money, her own house, her own car, her own career" (Gerwig, 3:09). In this perfect Barbie world, the dolls brought to life believe that their existence has solved all problems for women everywhere (a notion that is debunked later on in the movie). Gerwig showcases the world of Barbie to be full of women who win the Nobel Prize in every category who run Barbie Land as presidents, who clean the streets and take away the trashcans – these Barbies are achievers and go-getters. They celebrate their female power every day and every night as "girls' night" (Gerwig, 15:08).

The second clear parallel between the two works lies in the trivialization of men in a female utopia. In the 'zenana' of *Sultana's Dream* (1905/2006) men are not even trusted with sewing work because they are not thought capable enough to undertake such intricate work that needs creativity and focus, "But we do not trust our zenana members with embroidery!" she said laughing, "as a man has not patience enough to pass thread through a needlehole even!" (Hossain, p. 479). While telling Sultana about the origin of Ladyland, Sister Sara points out that their men, defeated by an enemy nation, resignedly accepted the offer to enter 'Mardana': "They bowed low and entered the zenanas without uttering a single word of protest" (Hossain, p. 483). The men are portrayed to have been bested at bravery, strength, and intelligence. The removal of men from the public sphere of life also results in a reduction of crime; since "the 'mardana' system has been established, there has been no more crime or sin; therefore, we do not require a policeman to find out a culprit, nor do we want a magistrate to try a criminal case" (Hossain, p. 483). This implies that the removal of men also leads to the removal of jobs that were created to keep these men in line, creating efficiency in the governing system of Ladyland, and leaving more time for pressing matters to be addressed in society. According to Bhattacharya and Hiradhar (2019), "... while the men are constantly seen in terms of their animal brutishness and rapacious behaviour, the women's scientific enterprise aims at transforming the material world into an aesthetic domain of pleasure" (p. 9). This tells us that while men are usually satisfied with living rudimentary lives ailed by ineffectual systems, women would strive to revolutionize the system to improve the overall quality of life.

In the case of *Barbie* (2023), the presence of men is also underemphasized and posed as secondary to women – the Kens, or the men of Barbie Land exist to complement the Barbies; they are given little to no attention or validation, and they compete with one another to get the attention of the Barbies, who are central to Barbie Land. The profession ascribed to Ken is reduced to the word 'beach'. All the other professions of the society are delegated to the Barbies. The Kens are about as important in *Barbie* as Bond girls are in the *James Bond* franchise who are secondary

to James Bond in *Bond* movies, placed conveniently to appease and excite the male gaze with sensual aesthetics and to complement the manliness of Bond. Similarly, the handsome but useless Kens are treated as irrelevant, to reverse the prevalent dynamic where the blockbuster, big-budget movie protagonist is almost always male, rugged, depicted as a hero, with a female supporting character who is sexualized as a damsel-in-distress, and depends on the said male protagonist while harbouring no agency of her own.

The third parallel between the two texts is in the criticism of men and their behaviour in patriarchy. The justification for locking men up in this land is based on the shortcomings of men in Sultana's society: "Men, who do or at least are capable of doing no end of mischief, are let loose and the innocent women, shut up in the zenana! How can you trust those untrained men out of doors?" (Hossain, 1905/2006, p. 479). It seems that in Ladyland, the physically 'weaker' gender is not reprimanded for their weakness, rather the physically stronger men with their greed and lack of control over their own selves are put away into the confines of home. Sister Sara is even heard chiding Sultana for letting the patriarchy establish control over women in Sultana's society, "You have neglected the duty you owe to yourselves and you have lost your natural rights by shutting your eyes to your own interests" (Hossain, p. 479). Patriarchal society is criticized in the remark that the men "dawdle away their time" by taking smoking breaks – ugly habits that have no place in Ladyland (Hossain, p. 480).

A similar criticism of male lifestyles under patriarchy is portrayed in *Barbie* (2023) when Barbie and Ken visit the real world to fix the problems occurring in Barbie Land. This is where the characters themselves experience defamiliarization, in the sense that they start to realize what patriarchy is like for the first time. Barbie, who is accustomed to being inherently respected, admired and welcomed everywhere in Barbie Land, notices a strange reaction to her when she appears in matching comical outfits (pink and blue outfits contrasted with their neon yellow roller-blades) with Ken. In the real-world patriarchy, Barbie is an easy target for men's teasing and women's judgement. Male onlookers ogle her, and women burst into laughter. She is catcalled by one of the men, "Give us a smile, blondie" (Gerwig, 27:58). Barbie, flabbergasted by the very un-Ken-like behaviour of these men, reacts with, "Why are these men looking at me?" (Gerwig, 28:01). On the other hand, Ken starts to realize that this world is much kinder to him. He feels complimented when a man, quite harmlessly, goes, "Oh, yeah!" (Gerwig, 27:53), after looking at his outfit. As a response to Barbie's question, he gleefully replies, "Yeah, they're also staring at me!" (Gerwig, 28:03), clearly feeling validated by the attention he is finally receiving as an individual. The ensuing conversation between the two is very telling:

> Barbie: I feel kind of ill at ease. Like… I don't know the word for it, but I'm…
>
> Conscious, but it's myself that I'm conscious of.
>
> Ken: I'm not getting any of that. I feel what could only be described as admired. But not ogled. And there's no undertone of violence.
>
> Barbie: Mine very much has an undertone of violence. (Gerwig, 28:08)

At least three men comment on Barbie's body or appearance during this short exchange. It is no wonder that Barbie feels an immediate "undertone of violence" (Gerwig, 28:26). The patriarchy is not an inherently safe place for Barbie, but it is for Ken. Not only is it safe for him, but it is also a place where he feels seen, admired, and welcomed. This is a pleasantly defamiliarized world for him, unlike Barbie. He

comments, "Everything is almost like… reversed here" (Gerwig, 29:13), connoting their defamiliarization from the *Barbie* world, which is a female utopia.

The Divergences

The function of *Sultana's Dream* (1905/2006) is to defamiliarize patriarchal society in the eyes of both men and women of its contemporary time through the establishment of a utopian Ladyland. Manchanda (2001) remarks on the utopian nature of Ladyland: "Rokeya's vision (albeit, the mischievous reversal of dichotomous gender roles) is inspirational, for critical theorizing of alternative political, economic and social realities" (p. 1956). Manchanda is right to say that Hossain has put forth an 'alternative' social reality. This alternative itself is where the defamiliarization of the text takes place. When Hossain's readers (no matter their gender) read the text of *Sultana's Dream*, they are bound to reimagine society at the very least and question their pre-existing beliefs on how and by whom it should be run. Hossain's utopian fantasy seems to be her way of exploring the dystopia where only men rule and women are kept out of sight. According to Mookerjea-Leonard (2017), "Hossain's utopia allows her to explore the dystopia that is her own patriarchal society" (p. 148). This would indicate that direct criticism (which appears plentifully in her non-fiction essays) seems to be ineffective in bringing about an actual realization about the state of women in society. For it to be effective, the members of the said society have to imagine themselves in a similar position that their own society deems fit to inflict on its women, and then come to the organic realization that such a lop-sided system cannot be right or just. At the very end of the work, Sultana wakes up in her armchair, realizing that her utopian dream was just the work of her subconscious, filled to the brim with the desire for freedom. The implications of the ending and the interrupted dream are manifold. Mookerjea-Leonard (2017) puts it this way:

> Hossain indicates that no simple inversion of patriarchy can be genuinely emancipatory. By suggesting that a woman living in a (dystopic) patriarchal world dreams of matriarchy, Hossain challenges her readers to think beyond what exists, beyond even what seems thinkable. By accepting dichotomous thinking, Hossain, in envisioning utopia, provokes precisely a subtle critique of Utopian thinking that assumes an inversion of patriarchy would be any less dystopian than the status quo. (p. 145)

Hence, she identifies the effectiveness of the satire in Hossain's work – it makes us, the readers, realize that any utopia, while it favours one gender over the other, cannot be anything but a dystopia for the oppressed gender. This is the very vein of thought which is developed in Gerwig's live-action movie, *Barbie* (2023).

The ending of *Sultana's Dream* (1905/2006) prompted its readers to ponder on the dystopia that is created when any one gender is given undue privilege, but *Barbie* (2023) presents the initial utopia and has it turned on its head very soon, to make this very exact point. While *Barbie* defamiliarizes the world of patriarchy by presenting a matriarchy so overwhelmingly all about women, the narrator breaks the fourth wall and comments on what is to come, "Thanks to Barbie, all problems of feminism and equal rights have been solved. At least that's what the Barbies think... Who am I to burst their bubble?" (Gerwig, 03:33). While doing so, Gerwig sets up a way to create internal defamiliarization. The movie first presents the matriarchy to create its first layer of defamiliarization, the first shock factor for an audience used to a world of patriarchy. After that, the movie familiarizes Barbie Land and sets it up as the norm to defamiliarize the real-life patriarchy.

As the movie progresses, we see the "Stereotypical Barbie", played by Margot Robbie, going through problems that simply do not occur in the perfect lives of the perfect Barbies, who are supposed to live their "best day every day". Barbie is met with a barrage of problems that range from irrepressible thoughts of death to flat feet, causing the character to seek help from "Weird Barbie". In a world of perfect Barbies, the isolated but important "Weird Barbie", is an exception, and the example of an internal defamiliarization in Barbie Land. Weird Barbie helps Stereotypical Barbie leave Barbie Land to find her owner, who is responsible for her malfunctions. While Barbie is leaving, Stereotypical Barbie's admirer, Ken (played by Ryan Gosling), secretly joins her travels to the "Real World" with her.

As mentioned before, the exposure to the real world acts as an internal defamiliarization in the movie. The sexist men of the real-life patriarchy show Barbie and Ken two very different pictures – Barbie realizes her utopian Barbie World is nowhere to be found in the real world, and Ken realizes that it treats him better than he has ever been treated before, thereby helping him get on the pedestal that he has only ever seen Barbie stand on. As the two of them try to solve the problems navigating the real world, Barbie treats Ken like an unwanted burden to keep around, someone she has to mind and take responsibility for; she trivializes his ability to be independent of her. While she concentrates on her mission to find her owner, she dismisses Ken, allowing him to fully experience the defamiliarized "real world". Ken sees, feels, and absorbs patriarchy for the first time, helping the audience experience it from the eyes of the uninitiated. As Shklovsky (1917/2004) had remarked in the case of Tolstoy's writing, "He describes an object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time. In describing something he avoids the accepted names of its parts and instead names corresponding parts of other objects" (p. 16). This same principle has been used in Ken's experience of the real world as well. Ken, in his walk, comes across the Century City Center of Los Angeles, a huge business hub overrun by men in gyms and men in corporate buildings, seemingly talking about important things and dismissing women who seem to be working beneath them. A montage of images plays as Ken smiles widely: flashes of US banknotes with several American presidents' faces on them, men playing golf, a dancing John Travolta, a very buff and young Sylvester Stallone, men working out in the gym and men riding horses, among other similar images associated with 'male power'. The effect is to produce a complete contrast between the depiction of the utopian Barbie Land and real-world patriarchy. Ken later goes to a school library, and checks out books with titles such as, "Why Men Rule (Literally)" and 'Horses' for comic effect. He asks a passing woman, "Why didn't Barbie tell me about patriarchy, which, to my understanding, is where men and horses run everything?" (Gerwig, 2023, 42:02). His innocent but stark reaction to his first exposure to patriarchy is this: Ken realizes this is his chance at being in the spotlight, of finally feeling enough as himself, not only when Barbie deigns to look at him. The audience realizes with Ken, a newcomer to the patriarchy, to what extent this system favours men and the privilege the system is engineered to provide for men. A conversation between Ken, and a corporate man he goes to, asking for a job without any qualifications, enlightens Ken and the audience about how the system is biased to favour men in a patriarchal society:

> Corporate Man: Okay, you'll need at least an MBA. And a lot of our people have PhDs.
>
> Ken: Isn't being a man enough?

> Corporate Man: Actually, right now, it's kind of the opposite.
>
> Ken: You guys are clearly not doing patriarchy very well.
>
> Corporate Man: [laughing] No! No. We're, uh…We're doing it well, yeah. We just… hide it better now. (Gerwig, 42:14)

After failing to get a job in the real world, Ken realizes, "I need to find somewhere where I can start patriarchy fresh" (Gerwig, 43:21). He decides to go back to Barbie Land, and train the other Kens in patriarchy.

Meanwhile, Barbie is told by her owner's teenage daughter, "You represent everything wrong with our culture. Sexualized capitalism, unrealistic physical ideals". (Gerwig, 2023, 40:37). Sasha ends her belief that the Barbie doll has made everything easier for real women by calling Barbie a fascist. Barbie is captured by Mattel, the company that had created the Barbie doll, and taken to their headquarters. Barbie is shocked to find that the entire executive board is made of men, and the CEO stammers to utter politically correct assurances. The only woman she meets is the ghost of her creator, Ruth Handler, but she does not know her identity. This is Barbie's journey of defamiliarization, her coming face-to-face with the reality of the real world. She runs away with the help of her owner Gloria, and her daughter Sasha. She takes them to Barbie Land, hoping to get away from the patriarchy that did not sit well with her. While on their way, she exclaims, "Women hold all major positions of power, control all the money. Basically, everything that men do in your world, women do in ours" (Gerwig, 56:13). However, when she arrives in Barbie Land, the Kens have already brainwashed all the Barbies, established control over everything, and re-made Barbie Land into "Kendom Land". The establishment of this Kendom is at first unfathomable to Barbie who remarks "Oh. That's strange!" (Gerwig, 57:27), when she first notices that the Kens had suddenly taken centre stage of all the action, leading to her this is her second defamiliarization, this time, in her own world. Ken is seen coaching the other Kens about a patriarchal world, "Everything, basically everything exists to expand and elevate the presence of men" (Gerwig, 58:55). They have taken over all property - once owned by the Barbies.

During Barbie's confrontation of Ken, we see his frustration with having been the gender that is discriminated against in Barbie Land. He screams that Barbie has failed him and that the patriarchy had made him feel better about his identity, "Out there, I was somebody. And when I walked down the street… people respected me just for who I am" (Gerwig, 2023, 01:02:11). Ken's legitimate feelings are the feelings felt by women in a patriarchy. By having them spoken by a man, Gerwig gets her male audience to sympathize with what is essentially a feminist narrative, delivered through a male character, making it more relatable through the device of defamiliarization. Ken makes the bold claim that every night is going to be "boys' night" (Gerwig, 01:04:42), hoping to wound Barbie for neglecting him and treating him like an inferior to her all this time.

The inevitable realization that Barbie Land was forever changed beyond recognition crushes Barbie – makes her feel insecure, imperfect, and powerless. It is Gloria's powerful speech that snaps her out of her stupor:

> It is literally impossible to be a woman. You are so beautiful and so smart, and it kills me that you don't think you're good enough… You have to never get old, never be rude, never show off, never be selfish, never fall down, never fail, never show fear, never get out of line. It's too hard, it's too contradictory, and nobody gives you a medal or says thank you... And if all of that is also true for a doll just *representing* a woman… then I don't even know. (Gerwig, 2023, 01:13:51)

The clincher of Gloria's speech is the ending – Barbie dolls have been victim to the patriarchal disapproval towards womanhood itself. Moved by Gloria's strong words, one by one, all the brainwashed Barbies awaken and conspire to take back Barbie Land, and succeed by fooling the Kens into fighting each other. However, during the fight itself, the Kens also come together in self-realization that they do not need to settle for being "number two" all the time. Through this song "I'm Just Ken", the Kens strengthen their intentions to liberate themselves from the matriarchy, they decide that being "just Ken" is enough. Contrarily, they fail to stop the Barbies' plan, resulting in Ken crying and having a breakdown just like Barbie when Barbie Land became Kendom Land. Barbie takes this opportunity to talk to Ken, and realizes that Barbie Land had not been a fair place for the Kens. She concedes, "I'm really sorry I took you for granted. Not every night had to be girls' night" (Gerwig, 01:34:00). This is Barbie's and the audience's moment to realize that just as the real world with its patriarchy is unfair for women, Barbie Land with its matriarchy is unfair to its Kens. Barbie helps Ken realize that his existence is not complementary to Barbie's, "Maybe it's Barbie *and*… it's Ken" (Gerwig, 01:35:54). With this she liberates Ken from always "being number two", and helps him gain his identity, irrespective of the presence of a female counterpart in his life. The President of Barbie Land echoes this same sentiment with, "I don't think that things should go back to the way that they were. No Barbie or Ken should be living in the shadows." (Gerwig, 01:38:03). This connotes that the future of Barbie Land will welcome change – allowing both its Barbies and Kens to pursue their full potential.

Conclusion

The resolution of *Barbie* (2023) actualizes the lesson that the ending of *Sultana's Dream* (1905/2006) had hinted at – that no lop-sided utopia is a fair one, even if the female utopia is far superior to the male one. While *Sultana's Dream* invites its readers to critically examine the necessity of a world where both genders are given inherent respect, safety, and acceptance, *Barbie* shows quite directly, with repeated defamiliarizations and reversals of matriarchy and patriarchy, that the right answer is a world of equality – where both men and women look out for each other and protect each other's rights, helping individuals of both genders to thrive as confident citizens of the same society.

As discussed before, *Sultana's Dream* is a short story written by a South-Asian woman in the early 1900s. *Barbie*, on the other hand, is a blockbuster movie, directed by Gerwig and released in July 2023. The two works appear in very different formats – Hossain had used the short story format to appeal to her male and female readers, hoping to convey a striking message or lesson through the 'dream' of a more equal society where women were no longer trapped indoors and barred from the rest of the world due just to the fact that they were born female. Gerwig, on the other hand, used the form of a movie that encapsulates many reversals of matriarchies and patriarchies and finally settles on the lesson that both are wrong. Lastly, although the two works came out of vastly different backgrounds, contexts, and nations, they both utilized defamiliarization as a literary tool to convey their target messages. In both texts, the presentation of the respective matriarchies is subverting the necessity of any society that unjustly privileges one gender over the other. While the abruptly ended dream of Sultana only indicated the notion that the most upright or desired society must be an equal one, *Barbie* tries to imagine how men and women, by acknowledging the humanity in each other, can create a society where true equality can be achieved through an existence where both genders have identities that go

beyond their identities as men or women and the gender roles that are assigned to them accordingly. This provides a continuation of the 118-year-old legacy of Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* which was the first time when a female utopia was depicted as art.

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