

## Begum Rokeya and Intersectionality: the Multiple Layers of Bengali Feminist Utopias in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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At its very essence, utopianism is a discipline that strives to counter oppression, as there is no way for the good life to be legitimately achieved without providing solutions for, and agency to, the most marginalised. Utopian works have traditionally reflected this by responding to the challenges faced by their creators in radical ways. This paper will explore the writing of Bengali utopianist and reformer Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain with a focus on the ways in which she responded to the oppressions of her time.

Popularly known as Begum Rokeya, Hossain was a pioneer of intersectionality in feminist critique. Her works *Sultana's Dream* (1905) and *Padmarag* (1924) typify this multi-faceted approach with two very different plots. The former is a science fiction short story about a country run entirely by women while the latter is a novella about a women's boarding house in her native Bengal. Both stories are radical and innovative for their time and would even be considered so in the modern era.

In this paper, I analyse the following common threads between the two pieces, which are also present in Begum Rokeya's personal life: (1) the strong anti-colonial politics; (2) the need for Islamic reform and secularism; (3) the importance of education; (4) the rejection of classism; and (5) the strong criticism of social conservatism. In doing so, I hope to provide a multi-faceted reading of an important and oft-overlooked innovator of feminist utopian thought.

**Keywords:** Anti-colonialism, Gender/feminism, Intersectionality

## The Absents in *The Shipwrecked of Tromelin Island* by Irène Frain (2009)

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In 2009, Irène Frain received the Palatine Grand Prix of the historical novel and in 2010 the Grand Prix of the Marine Academy for her novel *The Shipwrecked of Tromelin Island*. This true but unlikely and disharmonious story takes place in 1761, between Madagascar and Mauritius. As a literary critic, how can one read and interpret a history of race rooted in the 18th century and reported in the form of a historical novel in 2009? What about power relations between white men and slaves? What can be said today of the vision of this era of the white man on the blacks? What can be added knowing that these white men did not consider other races as human at the same level as them? Between ethics and historicism, this paper explores how to judge in the 21st century a story from the racial vision of the 18th century. It will evaluate the differences between what is historically known from this story and its writing as a novel, what the author chose to develop: the stranding, the construction of the boat, the rescue of the whites, and what she chose to ignore: the point of view of the blacks and their life on the island after the departure of the whites. We will also wonder how this tragedy has contributed to the abolition of slavery. While slavery was in full swing, some enlightened philosophers of the eighteenth century, like Voltaire or Condorcet, thought in an ethical manner close to ours.

Keywords: Robinsonade, Race, Eighteenth century