



What's the use of dreaming? We are women

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Of course, I thought about everything. But, in the end, it is Allah who gives. And our fate is predestined. I thought: "I will learn a lot. After my marriage I will have a house like this or that and the kind of husband that I have now." But if you look at my *sangsar*,⁸ you know we didn't get what we wanted. You just can't have everything.

My dreams? To improve my *sangsar*. To bring my children up properly. To educate them so that the *somaj*⁹ can say that he is the son of so and so.¹⁰ It will make me happy if my son gets at least a master degree. If he wants to go abroad,¹¹ I will let him, and if he wants to start a business, I will help him with it so that the *somaj* can see that he has been properly brought up.

My daughter? No, I won't send her to school for too long. I will teach her how to sew and she will also learn to read the Koran. I will probably marry her off at the age of twenty. I think: "As she is a girl, I will educate her less." She won't need to have anything to do with the outside world. Men should be more educated, because they have business with other men. They need more knowledge. She is a girl. She will stay at home. I will educate her up to class 12. I am less educated and I have suffered. Should she also suffer like me?

I didn't go to school for long enough, only up to the 6th class. That's not a problem. But if I were more educated, I could do my job better. I could have become a master tailor and got a job somewhere. Possibly in a government factory. They also employ those who are not so well educated. But if you are educated, you can get a better salary. Oh yes, there are women who work as master tailors. You can become one if you attend school up to the 8th class at least, because the numbers on the tape measure are in English. Me, I work at home. I can cut out dresses, but not men's trousers or English shirts. That needs proper training. There is a place for that in Narsingdi. But it is difficult for me to go there, to leave my house.

⁸ The *sangsar* (pronounced: shongshar) is the micro world of a woman. It covers both the sociological term "family" and the economic term "household". See chapter 2: The *sangsar* - a woman's world and economic unit.

⁹ Municipal council, which is usually made up of prosperous and influential men, who make decisions on behalf of the village regarding important matters of individuals and families, and on land ownership.

¹⁰ Women are rarely known by their own names. They are always "the daughter of", "the wife of", and finally "the mother of", (name of the first child or the first son if there is one).

¹¹ "Abroad" means leaving the village or the ward.



Oh yes, I like the poem "Determination" very much. I like the first line: "I will remain no more confined in a room - I want now to see the world." I do too, but I am a woman. Will I be able to do that? It is not within our power. Not that somebody is holding me back - but do I have enough money? Of course, I would like to know what the people in other countries do and how they talk. But what's the use of dreaming? We are women. Will it ever be possible for us? No, it won't. And I also don't like moving about in the area outside my home. No, I don't even want to go beyond the boundary and do other kinds of work. Men's work. Like grazing the cattle and goats. No, I never wish for that. I would rather prefer to do all kinds of work at home.

Yes, of course I like the words of the poem. But it doesn't apply to me. I can't simply go out and see the world. The poem is for men, not for women. Even though it is only for men, it is nice to imagine something like that. I can just imagine what the people do, why they go round from one place to another. I also ask myself why you are here asking me all these questions.

A poem for women? No. Poems are for everyone who knows how to read. But the men, if they want to, can do all these things. There are other things women can do. Not everyone's knowledge is the same. I will write down for you what I know.

Rokeya, in order to show us that she can not only read but also write, starts writing nine short poems expressing views suitable for women. She learnt them from older girls in the strictly religious orphanage. The last one goes like this:

"One might go on a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina,
But the essence of every pilgrimage lies at a husband's feet."