

INCEPTION OF FEMINISM IN INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH: A STUDY ON *SULTANA'S DREAM* BY ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN

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Abstract

Women have been subjugated and considered as the second citizen for many centuries, but the scenario has changed gradually with time. And women have started changing their life priorities and have taken part in all walks of life. This phenomenal change has not come at once, and the only striking reason behind it is education. The women education, which started as a status symbol for modern men did bring a great change in women's lives. This paper explores *Sultana's Dream*, the maiden work by Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain. In *Sultana's Dream*, the author rendered the importance of women education and empowerment with great dedication. In this work, she sarcastically commented on male domination and finally concluded with the hope of emancipation.

Keywords: women education, *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain, women emancipation through education.

Introduction

There is no dearth of Indian women who set examples of gallantry and intellect. Despite male domination in society and at home many females left their emblem of worth on society. Medieval India experienced Islamic invasions and thereby Muslim ethnicity entered Indian society. Indian Muslim, a new sect formed in the course of time and acquired a new set of codes and norms. Many historians recorded that Indian Muslim women had a very glorious past in colonial and pre-colonial subcontinent and women were sent to universities to learn art and poetry. But in colonial India, resultant cultural amalgamation and alleged Islamic patriarchy doubled the constraints of Muslim women. Philosophies and beliefs represented by many Muslim women from influential families were remained unsung still women like Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain raised their voice. In *Sultana's Dream*, the author created a utopian world of the female where all women can tread freely as male tread in the actual world.

Rokeya Sakhwat Hossain belonged to an influential and wealthy Muslim family and was kept home confined as a Muslim cultural demand. But, she was fortunate to get support from her elder brother who taught her writing and reading secretly. After marriage, she was encouraged by her husband and learnt English. She was a social activist and found many girl schools in Bengal.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was born in undivided Bengal, in 1880. It was the time India was observing great societal and political changes. New classes of society (educated middle class, Badra Lok, Brahma Samaj followers etc.) were coming in being, and to cope with the changes, many local feudal families had sent their children to the Oxford and the Cambridge. In the process of modernizing their next generation, the feudal families had to welcome some undesirable and disagreeable changes that were brought about. This westernized young generation was fond of the western culture that gave them freedom and voice, and they welcomed female education and female leadership to some extent.

Background of the Work

When Rokeya published *Sultana's Dream* (1905) world was surging with revolutionary female authors like Virginia Woolf across the world. Rokeya wrote *Sultana's Dream* as a writing exercise during her language learning. This ironic piece of work shows her attitude towards patriarchy of Muslim society on which she commented openly and severely. Her husband, after reading it humorously remarked that she has taken revenge on men-folk. She blamed women for losing their self-respect and holds the Muslim patriarchal system responsible for denying equal opportunities to its women.

Rokeya blamed men for using religion and rituals as a hindrance between women and development. In *Sultana's Dream*, she criticized that men were fit for nothing and should be limited to Mardana (opposite to Zenana). In her work inside the utopian country, women took care of all political and social offices and men were limited to the house. In the story, she innocently castigated the patriarchy in society.

Brief Summary

Sultana's Dream is the first-person narration and the story starts in the author's house. One evening the author was relaxing in her easy chair lazily and fuzzily thinking over the condition of Indian womanhood, suddenly a lady came to her asked for going on a walk. She in her subconscious state of mind took her for sister Sara (her old friend). The author surveyed the ambience and thought there was no harm in taking a walk as all-male servants outside were fast asleep. When they went out, to author's astonishment it was bright and broad day. First, the author felt shy for not being in purdah and later gained confidence as there was no man in her sight.

The author asked Sara to where all the men had gone. Sister Sara answered her they were at their right place i.e Mardana (where all-male live in Muslim household) and she assured that the author need not bother about finding any man around. Finding some women were laughing at her, the author asked Sara what was the issue. Sara answered that they were talking about the author and were saying that she looked mannish that means timid and shaky. And Sara declared that it was a Lady-land.

The author found in the Lady-land everything was organized and wonderful the lawn on what she was walking was so soft and was like a velvet carpet. She admired the public gardens there and praised that they (citizens of Lady-land) had kept everything flawlessly perfect. The author found Sara's house pretty and nicely furnished. She observed

modern technology used for constructing the house with opening and closing roof she was awestruck after knowing they use solar energy for cooking.

The author was eager to know how and why all-male were made house confined. Sara explained the whole story as it was happened due to the inefficiency of the male. The queen of Lady-land started two universities for educating girls and encouraged female in the field of science and technology. Once male berated the innovative technologies what lady principals and some young scholars of the universities came up with. The young scholars were very furious, but the principals asked them to answer with the result, not with words, so they work hard and brought those technologies in real. Sara informed the author that they used solar energy to defeat their enemy in war. At that time, to make female came out of purdah and participate in war freely, all male of the country were sent into Mardana what they found it comfortable. Since then, all the male are remained in Mardana for taking care of household works.

The author and Sara travelled in a hydrogen balloon to meet the Queen and she found her very humble and honest. She was enthralled at the grandeur and splendour of gardens and houses there. The Queen said she is ready to trade with any country where its female is not restricted and put inside the four walls.

Validating the Theme Established

The storyline is directed towards the women-empowerment and their self-reliance that emerged from educating the female. To establish this idea, author etched the imaginary dreamlike platform. According to Sigmund Freud's theory, what one wants desperately in one's life sees it achieving in dreams. Similarly the author's desperation for learning upshot as her dream in the story. And she succeeded in bringing the sharp contrast between the dream world and the real world. The author's mistaking the bright day (positive and productive) as night (gloomy and negative) established the symbolic contrast at the beginning of the story.

As the story progresses, the author's doubts and exclamations about the Lady-land and sister Sara's revelation brought the expansive contrast between the author's desired dream world and the real world. Her inner cry for educating female drawn as two universities functioning in the utopian Lady-land. And her desire of female treading freely outside [what is possible in the absence of male] was established in limiting male to Mardana.

The author was vehement for girl education and she was not a great advocate of some of the unjustified practices what she subtly depicted in the story. Zenana, the practice that forced the female to limit themselves behind the four walls of the house, in the story was showed as eliminated without damaging the Islam code of law. It seemed the author had kept a careful eye on the Islamic customs before she had plotted this story so that she would be viewed as a polemicist. Through the character Queen, she had accomplished her idea of giving education to females and girls.

Quixotic Scientific Theories

The author's displayed a great imagination in etching romantic scientific thoughts what were not in vogue at the time she published this work. In the early twentieth century, no one would, in India have precisely professed using solar energy for cooking. And the controlling amount of water in clouds and thereby preventing storms is an unrealistic idea till today. Travelling in hydrogen balloons also a novel idea of that time. In the story, sister Sara explained to the author how they used solar energy for cooking and in defeating their enemies. The author made use of unrealistic technologies parallel with reversing gender conditions [to show unobvious possibility or condition].

Scaling the Theme with Contemporary Western works.

Even though many female writers like Marie de Gournay, Jane Anger, Mary Wollstonecraft produced their work before the nineteenth century, the first wave of feminism considered had occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. And it influenced many writers not only in Europe but also in many other parts of the world. This first wave of feminism focused on achieving the right to vote for female slowly it led to many other amused avenues of life.

Sultana's Dream finds some resemblance with Mary Bradley's *Mizora: A Prophecy*. In Bradley's work also the main character found her in some utopian magical land where she observed some unknown technologies. In *Mizora*, the author depicted the artificially prepared meat using chemicals and clouds can be made to rain by discharging electricity. It is also first-person narration as *Sultana's Dream* and the speaker Vera Zarovitch relates her experiences in magical lady-land. She says in *Mizora* people use videophones for talking to others. The Mizorans can make rain by discharging electricity into the air. Though *Mizora* has no domestic animals, its women eat chemically-prepared artificial meat. Apart from Bradley, many other authors tried their ideas of creating utopian cities and hoisting women empowerment in the theme a few among such are *New Amazonia: A Foretaste of the Future* and *Arqtig: A Story of the Marvels* at the North Pole.

Women authors of the early twentieth century camouflaged their ideas and thoughts behind some romantic themes so that they could not be condemned. Rokeya certainly had an influence of these authors while she was writing *Sultana's Dream*. Lately after independence, many female authors like Anita Desai, Shasidesh Pande, Kamal Markandeya, etc., started writing ferociously putting their feministic themes in deploy. However, *Sultana's Dream* stood naively unattended by many scholars, though it had admitted some graceful themes.

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