



A Comprehensive Study to Women's Rights and Progress in Sultana's Dream

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at examining women's rights and progress of early 20th century and the vision of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain portrayed in Bengali feminist utopian story Sultana's Dream. The story encompasses the women who are modern architects, scientists, engineers and something like that of the Ladyland where men are kept in purdah namely Mardana. Besides, it brings out a utopia far more technologically advanced, efficient and peaceful world than the one we live in the reality. The article also observes the Ladyland under female rule that transforms into a utopian vision of idyllic life where crime is eliminated, agriculture flourishes, science and technology develop and religious practices are practiced through love and truth. Education spreads gradually and the women are able to live without fear and obstacles, which capture them within four walls in the present world based on male domination.

KEYWORDS: Liberty, education, science, skills, technology, decoration, power, feminism.

INTRODUCTION

Begum Rokeya who lived during the last years of colonial rule in East Bengal, was determined of Muslim feminist thought and writing championing Muslim women's rights to education and freedom. Begum Rokeya was born in 1880 into a Zamindari family in Pairaband, Rangpur district and lived in present-day Bangladesh. Rokeya or Raku, as she was known to her intimates, had an orthodox father, but loving supportive siblings. She was from an upper-class Landowning Muslim family, she could not attend school and learn Bengali and English to prevent "contamination" by Non-Muslim ideas. Instead, she learned Arabic and Urdu, koranic study and books on proper conduct for women. She wrote Sultana's Dream in 1905 to test her proficiency in English only after she was secretly taught it by her brother. It was originally published in Indian Ladies magazine, Madras in 1905. It is a classical work of Bengali feminist science fiction. At age eighteen Rokeya married Khan Bahadur Sakhawat Hossain. Her husband encouraged Rokeya to continue writing in Bengali and English. In 1905, while her husband was away Rokeya wrote 'Sultana's Dream' to pass the time. When her husband returned and read the story he encouraged Rokeya to publish it, and in the same year the story manifested in the Indian Ladies magazine. In 1908, the story was republished. In 1911 Rokeya opened the Shakhawat Memorial Girls' School in Calcutta and in 1916, she founded the Bengali Muslim Women's Association. Rokeya passed away in 1932 as a result of heart problems.

METHOD

As qualitative method captures 'social life emerging in response to theoretical developments that encourage new methodological thinking' (Dowling, 2016), it has been applied in this study to find out women's condition of early 20th century and the vision of Begum Rokeya concerning rights and progress of women rendered in the famous short story 'Sultana's Dream'. Since it is qualitative research, an in-depth scrutiny is made to test the hypothesis and get findings. The original text of 'Sultana's Dream' is used as the primary source of this research. And several essays, articles, thesis and online publications are considered as secondary sources. The discussion and analysis on feminist criticism is also presented in this research.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND WOMEN

From the very beginning of the story "Sultana's Dream" we come to know the liberty that the women enjoy in the utopian Ladyland wherein they share their freedom in every aspects of life as men in the real world. Emancipation comes from the voice of the narrator as she observes;

"I looked again at the moon through the open window and thought there is no harm in going out at that time. The men servants outside were fast asleep just then and I could have a pleasant walk with Sister Sara" (Line 13, page 3 Sakhawat Hossain 2005)

Here we notice the rights that women of the Ladyland



provide. They can go wherever they want and there are no barricades like before when the women had to stay at home behind purdah within four walls. At the time when the story was written women were banned from most of the activities as men participate.

Besides, they were not allowed to go outside and enjoy the surrounding, the author herself bears this testimony "I had to maintain purdah even at the age of five"(Translated by the author and quoted in Syed 19 authors translation). But here we see the speaker along with her imaginative sister Sara walks together and discovers themselves in the land of freedom though she feels somewhat different and shy;

"When walking I found to my surprise that it was a fine morning. The town was fully awake and the streets alive with bustling crowds. I was feeling very shy, thinking I was walking in the street in broad daylight but there was not a single man visible"(page3 Sakhawat Hossain 2005)

Actually, Rokey as utopian Ladyland presents an opposite picture of the real world that is male dominated. In the real world, we observe men are free to go anywhere and enjoy the outside while women are not always allowed to go outside and participate in activities rather they have to hide themselves and feel shy if they do so next to men. But in Ladyland it is a man who has to feel shy and the behaviour he has to maintain with the women is called "Manish". As a result, they are not afraid. Sister remarks:

"You need not to be afraid of come across a man here. This is Ladyland , free from sin and harm. Virtue herself reigns here". Here is the different we follow between men and women in the utopian Ladyland and find out the rights of the woman who deserve this over man and become progressive through their activities, skills and life style as Mary Cappe traced in 1645 " the time is coming when not only man but woman will lead "(Trans by author,qtd in Muhammed,2005,21).

In the land everything has got an architectural touch that decorated this utopia as a dreamland in which every object gets more enjoyable and memorable the teller rightly remarks;

"By and by I was enjoying the scenery. It was very grand. I mistook a patch of green grass for a velvet cushion. Feeling as if I was walking on a soft carpet. I looked down and found like path covered with moss and flower".(page 4 Hossain Sakhawat 2005)

Though the story was captured decades ago the materials that we figure out are ultramodern and splendid with design and decoration which makes it a dreamland " Sultana's Dream" is concise and generally structured as a dreamvision. Here, the utopian imagination is light, fresh and delightfully witty"(Bagchi, 2005). The whole place looks like a garden with sweet flowers. And they are planted so skillfully so that

travellers treading will not harm them. The architecture of the woman in the Ladyland becomes far better when the storyteller enters the dweller's house;

"By this time we reached sister Sara's house. It was situated in a beautiful heart-shaped garden. It was a bungalow with a corrugated iron roof. It is cooler and nicer than any of our rich buildings. I cannot describe how neat and nicely furnished and how tastefully decorated it was".(page 6 Hossain Sakhawat 2005)

In this depiction, the writer proves that women are not only able to acquire their rights but also capable of doing anything more skillfully and nicely than men. The exact object we can explore these days in the real world wherein there is no more difference between men and women in skills, merits and profession as well. There are few sectors in work or activities for women beside men to prove their talent and power that they are no less than men. Nowadays women are ready to take any challenges along with men according to their age qualification and opportunity from the grass-root to the high level. And their success is nothing but an issue of jealousy not to these men but the world. Even sometimes it is unbelievable as the speaker expresses, "But we do not trust our zenana members with embroidery"

MEDICAL SCIENCE AND WOMEN

By earning the rights to participate in any activities, and discover things the women of the utopian Ladyland have kept their footsteps in the field of medical science. They have been able to cure difficult diseases and prevent epidemics. The speaker points out;

"We talked of various objects and I learned that they were not subject to any kind of epidemic disease, none did suffer from mosquito bites as we do. I was very much astonished to hard that in Lady land no one died in youth except by rare accident".(pag7 Hossain Sakhawat2005)

Despite having incredible success in the field of medical science in the real world, people dying day by day through several known and unknown diseases, pandemics and accidents. But in the Ladyland this sort of crisis is rare. They are more developed and more professional in their knowledge and responsibilities than male dominated world.

ENVIRONMENT AND WOMEN

Environment plays an important role in the development of a country. It also keeps a good balance between human and surroundings in which women have shown their excellence. The narrator finds out;

"With pleasure said I, and we went to see it. Of the men had been asked to clear off when I was going there. The kitchen was situated in a beautiful vegetable garden. Every creeper, every tomato plant was itself an ornament. I found no smoke nor any chimney either in the kitchen, it was clean and bright, the windows were decorated

with flower gardens. There was no sign of coal and fire". (page 7 Hossain Sakhawat 2005)

Unlike the world atmosphere, the Ladyland is genial. There is no pollution of air, water and something like that. Everything is clear, crystal and well decorated. It is their right to design freely and materialize them. In the present world where we live pollution has become a burning problem that is increasing gradually day by day. Deforestation is the major reason behind this. On the contrary, in the Ladyland, garden is everywhere. The environment is surrounded by gardening. The kitchen is situated in a beautiful garden, the windows are decorated with flower gardens. Also street sides are decorated with flowers. They have decorated themselves with their rights and environment with their skills which we can figure out through the description of the storyteller. The whole environment and surrounding are like a picture painted by a skilful artist. Frankly speaking, though "Sultana's Dream" is an imaginative utopia but Begum Rokeya attempts to give it a real shape, Jean Pfaelzer argues that our "incapacity to imagine utopia is related to the fact that utopian visions challenge conscious experience because they attempt to represent what cannot be fully represented" (Response, 193).

EDUCATION AND WOMEN

Education, the basic requirement of human life, is the main theme that the writer depicts in her utopia Ladyland "Sultana's Dream" in which women have been able to bring out the revolutionary change in their life style and activities. Education is the root cause that alerts them about their limitation and assures the rights of their own. Besides, it enables them to know their strength and makes them stronger not only in words but also in works than man in each and every sector of life. Otherwise they had to capture within four walls in strict purdah. The writer mentions;

"Our good Queen liked science very much. She circulated an order that all the women in her country should be educated. Accordingly, a number of girls' schools were founded and supported by the government. Education was spread far and wide among women. And early marriage also was stopped. No woman was to be allowed to marry before she was twenty-one. I must tell you that, before this change we had been kept strict purdah". (page 7 Hossain Sakhawat 2005)

The importance of education in mankind cannot be described in a single word while it is saying that education is the backbone of a nation what is enlightened by education from its darkness. More importantly we can recall the world famous leader Napoleon and his remarkable doctrine, "Give me educated mother, I will give you educated nation". The exact thing we can explore in the voice of the Ladyland Queen who stopped early marriage and ordered all the women should be educated. Actually the writer has fought for her

entire life for female education and gave the dream a real shape in her works Lyman

Towen Sargent anatomizes "The process of sharing the dream on the utopian visions through the literary text, means that individual ideas move into social discourse. Thus, the idea of social dreaming is not a paradox rather it brings together the private and the public, the individual and the public in one space". (The Three Faces, 3,9)

SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND WOMEN

Women have earned the right to engage themselves into the age of science. Education enables them to take their footsteps in the world of science which is not a sentimental nightmare but marvelous. Through the expansion of the educational institutions the inventions of science begins;

"In the capital where our Queen lives there are two universities. One of those invented a wonderful ballon to which they attached a number of pipes. By means of this captive ballon which they managed to keep afloat above the cloud land, the cloud draw as much water from the atmosphere as they pleased. As the water was incessantly being drawn by the university people no cloud gathered and the ingenious Lady Principal stopped rain and storms thereby." (page 8, Hossain Sakhawat 2005)

Their scientific knowledge and research get the pinnacle of success. They have been able to prevent rain and storms. As a result, there is no mud here. Here is not all, after inventing one scientific knowledge and success they continue their efforts to do something new while male dominant present world where we live men take much time to celebrate their so-called success. Even sometimes the men forget their main purpose behind their arrangement. But the Lady landers stick to the aim and invent an instrument by which they could collect as much sun-heat as they wanted. And they kept the heat stored up to be distributed among others as required. Though they are trying hard and soul to create something new and already have succeeded but the men do not take them seriously and mock them by saying "a sentimental nightmare". Actually they still don't know that "women's brains are somewhat quicker than men's". And with this quality, they are able to deliver any sorts of solutions and success that include various scientific discoveries.

TECHNOLOGY AND WOMEN

Begum Rokeya has extended the idea of knowledge and its usage through the women of the Ladyland where females instead of males have proven their scientific ideas and turned them into technology that has been successful to conquer the war over the enemy who almost captured the Ladyland the speaker discloses,

"The heat and light were too much for them to bear. They all ran away panic-stricken not knowing in the bewilderment how to counteract that scorching heat

when they fled away having their guns and burnt down by means of the same sun-heat. Since then no one has tried to invade our country anymore". (page 10,11 Hossain 2005)

In present world, when countries are engaged in war with each other or one another that times they use dangerous weapons, the war turned into nuclear destruction that costs hundreds, thousands even sometimes millions of lives and the surroundings as we experienced in the last two great wars namely World war I and World war II but in the "Sultana's Dream" we find the opposite picture. Here there is no destruction, no battle that costs plenty of lives but victory is achieved by one over another based on technology without any harm not only mankind but also other objects. Even the tactics they have applied in the art of war are not costly and artificial rather natural and suitable to atmosphere. As a result, the men get punished. They have to retire into Zenanas as one scrutinizes, "the given punishment to the men by putting them in a complete isolation is called "Mardana" which is the mirroring of the image of Zenanah that existed in colonial British period" (Walsh). Also, the touch of technology is found in the field of agriculture of the dreamland. The use of technology has flourished their cultivation, harvesting and so on. They have brought revolution in their agriculture;

"Our fields are lifted by means of electricity which supplies motive power for other hand work as well and we employ it for our aerial conveyance too. We have no rail road not any paved street here."(page12 Hossain 2005)

Street accident is a common issue in the real world and increasing day by day. But to the author, at Ladyland there is neither road street nor railway. So, there is no accident neither railway nor road. This is not all, their technology and tactics have been able to capture rainwater and use it when necessary. They do not even suffer from flood or thunderstorm. Rather they are always busy making nature yield as much as she can.

RELIGION AND WOMEN

Though every religion talks about love, sympathy, truth, virtue, right, wrong and something like that, in man-made real world, we learn the misuse of religion which stands to them only for their personal interest and motives. Even the one religion have several flowers who explain religion in their own way without thinking others while the religion of the dreamland "based on love and truth". And it comes to them as their religious them to love one another through absolute truth. Truth acts as their major concern and if any one violates this term she or he has to accept penalty with death while manmade present world deserves a trading based society on lie, cheating, hypocrisy and so forth.

TRADE AND WOMEN

Trade and commerce plays a vital role to develop a society,

country or a nation. But in the real world, it is all done by men while women are always stay within four walls and cannot go out let alone business. On the other hand, the Dreamland permits not only the women participate in trade but also run it according to their ability. They believe liberty and have some business principles in which they do not compromise and allow any trade with men who dominate women. The writer explores,

"The Queen told me that she had no objection to permitting her subjects to trade with other countries. But, she continued, not trade was possible with countries where the women were kept in the zenanas and so unable to come and trade with us. Man, we find, are rather of lower morals and so we do not like dealing with them."(Hossain 2005, p.14)

In spite of running business, they do not hanker after money or property and seek for profit. They have no headache for other land and do not fight for other assets though it may be expensive diamond alike Koh-i-Noor. They always attempt to wander into the deep ocean of knowledge and try to explore the precious gem which nature has kept in store for them. They embrace and enjoy nature's gift as much as they can not only in personal life but also in activities that make more happy, prosperous and successful life than the present world where we live, indeed.

FEMINIST UTOPIA

Feminism is a modern term, a movement that took place in 1970 that denotes the belief that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. Nayar (2011) rightly defines,

"both a political stance and a theory that focuses on gender as a subject of analysis when reading cultural practices and as a platform to demand equality rights and justice. Feminism key assumption is that gender roles are determined and the women trained to fit into those roles."

At the beginning of the story, we see the speaker enjoys walking with Sister Sara outside in the Ladyland where there is no single man. It defines the equality right of women besides men. Again feminism exists in Sister Sara's words when she quotes; "I finish my work into hours the same attitude that we find in another feministic character Nora, I have other duties equally sacred ... My duties towards myself" (Ibsen,2009. P-167). Further, fundamental right is also achieved by the women of 'Sultana's Dream' where all the women should be educated and "no woman was to be allowed to marry before she was twenty one". Last but not the list claims of women to equality with the men are proved through the narration of the Sister Sara,

"Then the lady principal with her two thousand, students marched to the battlefield, and arriving there directed the ways of the concentrated sunlight and heat towards the enemy."(Hossain 2005, p.10)

Finally, evaluating the female image is the core thing of the story. From my point of view that tale has been told on the basis of female image as the Sister claims; "This is Ladyland, free from sin and harm. Virtue herself reigns here."

CONCLUSION

This paper explores women's contribution and achievements to every sector and also reveals that women are not foolish and uninventive; rather they are always busy with their activities and researches to invent something new. And if they ran the society, they would do even better than men because men are commonly limited by competition, whereas women tend to think and operate more as a group than men. The study also compares the real world with the utopian Ladyland to find out women's art, wisdom and education. Bringing out the feminism in the study we have anatomized that women are no longer to be counted inferior to men at any situation, competition and estimation rather they are always equal even sometimes more qualified to knowledge, skills and power. We presume that the science fiction futurism of the story is an agreement that women could be elite and powerful if women were more empowered in socially and domestically that is what the writer quests for, from the very beginning to the end.

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