

# Begum Rokeya's Sultana Dream – a change of tradition.

Shivani Pandey

*Research Scholar, Manav Rachna International Institute for Research and Studies, Faridabad, Haryana*

**Abstract-**An early feminist writer from the Indian subcontinent – Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. The topic gender inequality taken up by her shows the creative bend of her mind. Her works portrays the discriminations she herself faced as a woman. Her work addresses both problems and solution the woman went through in those times.

Rokeya's most remarkable work Sultana's dream has been dealt with in the paper. She tries to bring to the light the conditions of women and has shown the World of women by reversing the traditional role of women hence bringing in a new outlook to the society. Sultana's dream deals with breaking the stereotypical thinking about women and Rokeya always wanted to break the shackles of patriarchy hence ending the discrimination against women.

The paper explores Sakhawat visions of upgrading the conditions of womanhood.

**Keywords:** changes, women, patriarchy, traditional, role reversal, feminism, subjugation, liberty

## INTRODUCTION

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain fostered a keen interest of women and their education. In the early twentieth century, feminism was pivotal point in her writings. Rokeya was brought up in an orthodox family where girl's education was never an area of discussion. The women were only taught Quran, thus limiting their horizons of exploration of the outside world. But Rokeya was always interested in the broadening her knowledge and delve deep into education. She received most of her education from brother who taught her English and Bangla for which Rokeya has expressed her gratitude in Padmarag- 'You have moulded me from childhood... Your love is sweeter than honey which after all has a bitter after-taste, it is pure and divine like Kausan < the stream of nectar flowing in heaven mentioned in Quran> (p-7) (Preface, Padmarag)

After her marriage, her husband supported her writings which gave wings to her dreams. We see

Rokeya bringing out the concept of oppression of women in her work. Sultana's dream worked around the concept of disparity of sexes and this became the major reason for the attention it drew from people – she not only focused on exploitation and oppression of women but also her need to focus on equal rights of women. Sultana's dream emphasized on the need of education and self-employment for women.

Role reversal in Sultana's dream

Sultana's dream is a portrayal of a nation of women. It starts with a dream sequence where the central character enjoys a World of freedom where she is seen breaking the four walls of women world and is living her utopian dream. The women have found their freedom through scientific advancement and education.

The women of those times were only supposed to be in purdah, Sultana's dream invites women to see the world outside the four walls. But the story doesn't have a happy ending rather an awakening from the dream depicting that the freedom of women is only a temporary dream.

Lord Audrey says-

"The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow (her) temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable(her) to bring about a genuine change". (Audrey, 112)

Rokeya always felt that a woman does not have any place in the society due to lack of education as men don't want women to know anything about outside World. Men shield women with love and affection leading women to lose their confidence and courage. Rokeya's work 'God gives man robs', we see her referring to a famous saying Hazrat Muhammad 'It is a bounden duty of all Muslim men and women to acquire knowledge. (English translation)

In Sultana's dream, Rokeya shows women's rights through Utopia. She has reversed the role in her Lady land which is a dream sequence. Her writings can be seen as an outlet to the prejudices that women have

been facing since time immemorial. In this Utopian ladyland, women are seen as the masters of the house taking all the important decisions. Women are here to run universities, to discover scientific enterprises, to practice the rules of hygiene, so that they take the ultimate control of ladyland learning their male counterparts subservient. She always wanted women to find some work and not remain idle and wanted quality life for both sexes. Sultana's dream fictionalizes her desires, she has for women. The idea that are regular practices in women's life are not permitted in ladyland, the women are not allowed to marry at a young age and education is compulsory for women. Thus, the marginalized women of the real world are dreamt as enjoying the realities of their lives namely education and marriage.

#### Dream to liberate the women

The sequence of dreams that individual experiences are the activities which we cannot do in real life. As Freud's briefs, we are all forms of "wish fulfillment" which connects unconscious with the conscious. The human thought has no boundaries. Sultana, the protagonist of the ladyland, where the women emerge as victorious in every sphere of their lives. The actions where more specific than words. Women's empowerment, their emancipation and the development. She has created a utopian land to make the society more progress and to make place for women. The women are inventors and have delved deep in the scientific world. The human thought has huge horizon and people and can think in all ways. The men and women are the two divisions of the society but women are looked down upon and are not allowed to exercise equal rights in the society, they are considered inferior to men. Sultana through her ladyland wants women to have a place in the society and an identity of their own.

Women's empowerment was the major theme of the book, through the dream sequence she brings out the hidden thoughts of every women. In the dream sequence, the women have a world of their own, where they are exceeding and excelling in everything. The girls who have walked out of imagination are all very well educated and capable of achieving everything on their own.

#### Utopia of feminism

The utopian literature is a vast study in which feminist utopia is a sub genre to understand the utopian world,

single gender worlds needs better understanding. Most writers started using female only worlds that allowed the exploration of female independence and freedom from patriarchy.

#### Sultana's ladyland – a role reversal

The story is a satire, in which we see that as it progresses, Sultana, the protagonist. The story opens where it briefly points out that women are leading their lives in sheer ignorance as they are not aware about the time of the day (day/night). The ladyland which is introduced to Sultana by her sister Sara, to her surprise at ladyland the women were free to explore whereas men were put in seclusion. All this has been made possible only because women were educated here. Sultana is surprised to see all the progress that women have made in ladyland, and there are no men as they were considered to be kept indoors. The society which is ruled by the patriarch has ingrained the feeling of dependency in women, they themselves have started to consider themselves inferior to men. Men have confined women in the four walls.

She says: "we have no hand or voice in the management of our social affairs. In India man is lord and master. He has taken to himself all powers and privileges and shut up the women in zenana."(p-5)

#### Importance of science

The men have been called lord and master time and again to project the subjugation of women of women in the real world.

Rokeya in her ladyland have given women the freedom to ask any question and they can explore their scientific knowledge, she believes that women would succeeded much more than men and world have achieved much more than must men have achieved till now.

The scientific explorations as shared by Sara are what men would not have thought about like using solar cooker to cook meals. Using water from water from water balloons to sprinkle in hot weather. Rokeya also tries to put light on the fact that can women protect themselves from the enemies by using their brains, they might not be physically as powerful as men but their innovative ways can help them win any battle.

She envisions a land where women can make scientific discoveries and run a government to establish a belief that women are capable of handling any situation calmly and win losing their own instinct.

### POSITION OF MEN IN SULTANA'S DREAM

The satire is a direct attack on men and their treatment towards women, the story shows the capabilities of women and how men are trying to subdue the women. The men are at the opposite end of what they do in reality; here they perform the duties of women and always stay in mardana (taken in context of zenana). In the ladyland, men are threat to women. They still consider women as inferior to men by showing their masculine powers. Through the entire presentation of me in the story, Rokeya presents her inner desire to take a rightful revenge on the men. Rokeya successfully constructs a structure where the role of 'master' is snatched away from men folk.

Imprisoning men in mardana is revenge from men against the women imprisonment in zenana in real life .But Rokeya also has stated many times that men are able to suppress women only because women are giving in and because women don't fight for themselves and their rights . They just submit to the demands of men without knowing / asking the reason which only results to their sufferings.

Rokeya has presented the ladyland as an idol place for the women to fulfill their dreams and desires and emphasis that interest in educating women and remove ill practices like early marriage.

To which we see sister Sara explaining and giving a brief history of the ladyland:

"Our good queen liked science very much. She circulated an order that all women in her country should be educated. Accordingly, a number of girl's school when founded and supported by the government education was spread far and wide among women. And early marriage was also stopped. No women were to be allowed to be married before she was twenty one" (p-7)

### EDUCATION TO EMPOWER WOMEN

Rokeya has mentioned again and again that women can only be successful if they are educated and that we see is the main force in ladyland. Women empowerment can be achieved through education and in the ladyland the progress has been achieved only through imparting education. Women are using their skills to overpower men's might, they are able to achieve by using their brains. But Rokeya also understand that no single gender can work in solidarity

and gain great heights for its society, hence she always wants equal participation.

We see Rokeya criticizing the women also for being subservient to men. She points out that women have accepted their defeat in the hands of men and have forgotten their rights and duties as humankind which gives strength to both the gender to participate equally and not just one gender being superior to other.

Rokeya also points out that women should do household chores but they should also be educated so that they can manage their household better.

Education develops the mental faculty of a person and education also helps in differentiating between right and wrong.

### CONCLUSION

Begum Rokeya has always been the advocate for the basic rights for women. She has portrayed her disgust for the purdah system time and again as she pin points that it restricts the mobility of women. She believes that if women are given proper education, she will outshine men in all fields and hence they are not given equal opportunity. Women are told to be Subservient with men. Men subjugate women. They don't think 'one is not born, but rather becomes a women '(Simone de Beauvoir).

Virginia Woolf, a famous English feminist writer said in her A Room of one's own, "a women must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction".