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Islamic University of Jakarta. Jl. Tarumanegara, Pisangan,
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The Imagined Ladyland in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*

¹Mst. Rokeya Khatun, ¹A. K. Zunayet Ahammed*

¹Asian University of Bangladesh, Bangladesh, ²R. P. Shaha University, Bangladesh.

Email: rokeyasays@gmail.com, zunayet1972@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author: A. K. Zunayet Ahammed

Abstract

This study investigates the imagined Ladyland in *Sultana's Dream* to show Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's vision of women's empowerment and emancipation. The Ladyland epitomizes the triumph of the scientific, righteous, progressive and benevolent ingenuity in women. It also serves as a symbol of women empowerment, and a critique of colonialism and patriarchy. In the Ladyland, there is no patriarchy, and only matriarchy prevails. While women avail all the rights, needs, and privileges, the women living in Rokeya's society are deprived of all these. They are confined to the domestic domain whereas men work outdoors. Therefore, to take women out of their shells, the writer emphasizes the necessity of empowering women through modern education and social reform. This article employs a qualitative descriptive method to provide a detailed textual analysis of the Ladyland and the Feminist Literary Theory to analyze the portrayal of the Ladyland which advocates for the emancipation of women of colonial East Bengal and beyond from the clutches of patriarchy and other traditional constraints through their empowerment, to build up a more equitable society. This study continues to make a significant contribution to world literature, offering future researchers valuable insights, ideas, and viewpoints on the writer and her works.

Keywords: Colonialism and Patriarchy, Female Education, Ladyland for Women, *Sultana's Dream*, Women's Empowerment and Emancipation.

Introduction

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932), also known as Begum Rokeya, was the Bengali Muslim pioneer of women's liberation, an educationist, a women's rights activist, and a legendary figure of humanity who had a vision for the emancipation of women, particularly Bengali Muslim women, in the colonial East Bengal during the British rule. Born into an educated, affluent, and influential Zamindar family in the village of Pairaband in Rangpur, East Bengal (now Bangladesh), Rokeya grew up in a society where the condition of women was very deplorable. The late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a time when women were largely believed to be submissive and subservient to men. At the time, in the South Asian context, women were kept inside the household. Then, the patriarchal structures defined the lives of women while patriarchy is a set of rules in which a male dominates over a female in every aspect of life. Women strictly followed the practices of purdah (veil) and were deliberately denied education and other rights and opportunities as well. Being despondent about this inhuman treatment of women, Rokeya wrote "*Sultana's Dream*" as a clarion call for the freedom of women.



Against a backdrop of growing anti-colonial resistance and communal tensions, Rokeya published *Sultana's Dream* in *The Indian Ladies' Magazine* in Madras in 1905. Written in English and later translated into Bengali by Rokeya herself, *Sultana's Dream* became an iconic work that challenged the established discriminatory gender roles of her time in patriarchal Bengal. Through this story, Rokeya envisaged an empowering alternative world named Ladyland for women where women governed, and men remained in seclusion. In this Ladyland, women's empowerment is ingrained in scientific and technological knowledge and rational thinking.

In that society, besides patriarchy, Rokeya also found misinterpretation of Islam and social conservatism responsible for women's miseries. Women found no outlet to share their feelings. Even, they had to prioritize the needs of others over their own. The role of them was also shrunken to mere domestic roles. The young rich Bengali Muslim woman Rokeya was also expected to conform to the societal norms like others, but she was different from others. She was a woman with progressive thoughts and ideas. "She defied the expectations of her middle-class Muslim upbringing by pursuing her education in the local Bengali rather than in Arabic or Persian and used her access to English education primarily as a means to critique the colonial enterprise (Ahmed, 2022)." In the pursuit of knowledge, her elder brother Ibrahim Saber helped her significantly but secretly. Her father, though educated, was very conservative about women education. He allowed Rokeya to learn Arabic at home only. On the contrary, his sons, "Ibrahim Saber and Khalil Saber, received good formal education (Akter, 2023)." Even, Ibrahim Saber was sent to Calcutta and later to England for higher studies. Thus, with regard to women and their education, the one-eyed practices of patriarchy hurt Rokeya's intellectual feelings. However, fortunately Rokeya got support for intellectual pursuit from her husband, Khan Bahadur Sakhawat Hossain, the deputy magistrate of Bhagalpur, Bihar, India. Mr. Khan, educated from the west, was a man of liberal and progressive ideas. Rokeya acknowledges her husband's contributions to her writing career, "If my dear husband had not been so supportive, I might never have written or published anything" (Mahmud, 2016)

The correlation between Rokeya's background and the story is deeply rooted in her personal experiences, her advocacy for women's rights, her critique of colonialism, and her challenge to patriarchal structures, all of which are reflected in the narrative. Rokeya's life story and struggles with the limitations imposed on women directly influenced her portrayal of the Ladyland. Rokeya revolted against the anti-woman customs of her community to ensure gender equality for the sustainability of society. She strongly believed in the importance of female education as a means to empower women and break the shackles of patriarchy. Her experiences as a self-educated woman, despite the constraints of her time and society, shaped her views on the transformative power of education for women.

However, the researchers in this paper have used the Feminist Literary Theory. This theory is a distinct branch of literary criticism that examines literature and cultural productions through a feminist lens, analyzing their language and structure to reveal how they reflect and perpetuate male dominance. It investigates the representation of gender, power dynamics, and societal norms related to women and femininity, scrutinizing how texts either reinforce or challenge patriarchal and colonial structures.



This approach examines the civil, social, economic, political, and psychological forces shaping literary works and society (Weedon, 2007; Moi, 2022; Eagleton, 2011). The theory calls for an end to gender inequality. Applying this theory, the researchers focus on how *Sultana's Dream* challenges traditional gender roles, critiques patriarchy and colonial systems, and imagines a utopian Ladyland for women.

Nonetheless, through an analysis of the Ladyland, the research seeks to answer several questions which may arise in the minds of the readers: How does the imagined Ladyland challenge the rigid boundaries of traditional gender roles and societal expectations? How does its governance differ from Sultana's society? In what ways are women empowered in the Ladyland? What scientific, technological, and political systems shape the Ladyland? Is Rokeya successful in speaking out for the women of colonial East Bengal and beyond? Is the Ladyland an alternate reality or a dream? The answers to these questions will offer an inclusive understanding of Rokeya as women's rights activist, and the lasting relevance of "Sultana's Dream" as a means for dreaming of a more equitable and harmonious society with the active participation of man and women, regardless of gender. While the story is set within the context of a dream, its underlying message of gender equality and social reform demands immediate action. This paper, using a qualitative descriptive approach, explores the significance of the Ladyland as a vision that encapsulates Rokeya's aspirations for a more just and sustainable society.

Method

This article used a qualitative descriptive study that integrates both primary and secondary sources to enrich the analysis. The primary text, *Sultana's Dream*, presents a visionary society where women play leadership roles in science, governance, and social development, while men are relegated to domestic duties. This work serves as the foundation for the study, providing insights into themes of women's empowerment and emancipation. In addition to the primary text, the study draws on critical analyses, essays, scholarly articles, and research papers by renowned scholars to offer a broader perspective and contextual understanding. These secondary sources, accessed through extensive library resources, strengthen the research by giving various interpretations and updates. The researchers have also critically engaged with diverse books, journals, and other academic materials to supplement and enhance their study.

To analyze and interpret *Sultana's Dream* and its themes of gender equality, empowerment, and emancipation, the researchers employed a systematic approach combining qualitative textual analysis with the Feminist Literary Theory. This began with close readings of the text to identify themes, characters, motifs, and so on. Secondary sources such as critical essays and scholarly writings added additional depth to the analysis. The use of the Feminist Literary Theory allowed for the exploration of gender role reversals, the intersection of colonialism and gender, and the critique of patriarchal and colonial systems. Central themes including matriarchy versus patriarchy were examined, interpreting the Ladyland as a feminist utopia that challenges both patriarchal and colonial domination. Ultimately, the study concludes that *Sultana's Dream* critiques gender inequality, presenting a vision of empowerment through education, social reform, and freedom from both patriarchal and colonial oppression.



Results and Discussions

The imagined Ladyland in *Sultana's Dream* offers an alternative reality which shows the fulfillment of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's dreams regarding women, their potential and emancipation. In the Ladyland, women's resilience, intellect, labor, and leadership have taken the society to a certain height. The society is characterized by equality, justice, and harmony. Women have made it a peaceful and progressive society. The Ladyland is free from the shackles of gender discrimination, imprisonment, religious strife, warfare, crime, poverty, frustration, and all forms of social inequalities. Here, women have achieved many, and even conquered the nature, using science and technology responsibly and ethically. They can easily prove their worth to the fullest as human beings. They hold the positions of power and influence, and their contributions to society are valued and celebrated. All these denote that women are capable of doing everything if they are allowed to pursue their dreams. In Rokeya's society, the patriarchal system confined women to the household, deprived them of the opportunity to enrich their minds and to engage in employment. That is why, Rokeya advocates for women's education in real life for their emancipation which was the demand of the hour.

However, Rokeya's efforts toward gender equality for the overall progress of society are highly appreciated. Similarly, *Sultana's Dream* not only reflects the oppressive realities of colonial Bengal but also presents a bold vision for transformative change. The gender inequalities, colonial oppression, and lack of education faced by women in colonial India are contrasted with the utopian world of the Ladyland, where women are free from the limitations of patriarchy and colonialism. Additionally, by imagining the Ladyland, governed by women, Rokeya questions the prevailing norms and inequalities that restrict women's opportunities and potential in the conservative colonial India of her time.

Sultana's Dream is the transcription of Rokeya's imagination and thoughts as to the potential of women. The story "starts with the protagonist, Sultana, encountering another progressive female character whom she addresses as Sara in her dreams. Sister Sara persuades Sultana to take a walk in the gardens (Nanda, 2019)." Sultana represents all the secluded women like Rokeya in the sense that the women in the outside world represented by Sultana experience confinement, where their roles are constrained to domestic spaces, their education is restricted, and they are largely powerless within the patriarchal structures of their society. This is also evident when Sultana and Sara, while walking together, talk about the imagined Ladyland in the garden which is free from all kinds of evils. The Ladyland is not like the traditional society of her time. It is free from male dominance. It also reflects Rokeya's viewpoint that education can liberate women from all sorts of anti-women customs. Women rule the land with their knowledge in science and technology. They are mostly engaged in outside workforce when men are confined indoors. As the core point of this story, Rokeya espouses the emancipation of women of East Bengal and beyond from patriarchy and other social constraints, through their empowerment in the Ladyland. The following quote reveals the characteristic features of the Ladyland,



in the far-off Ladyland, ladies rule over the country and control all social matters, while gentlemen are kept in the Mardanas to mind babies, to cook and to do all sorts of domestic work; and that cooking is so easy a thing that it is simply a pleasure to cook! (Hossain, 2005)

Here, the reversal of traditional gender dynamics shows the advancement of women in the Ladyland and simultaneously satirizes the patriarchal norms, and other social anomalies of the time.

Rokeya was the first woman in her society to talk about gender equality. What she wanted to express in *Sultana's Dream* was later stated in *Motichur* - "Though at present economically dependent on men for historical reasons, women are not innately inferior to them mentally or spiritually. Given equal opportunity, they can easily prove themselves men's equal in mental and spiritual endowments (Rafa, 2023)." Thus, through the portrayal of Ladyland, Rokeya shows how women can taste equality, empowerment, and freedom ignoring all the obstacles caused by colonialism and patriarchy. Moreover, colonialism and patriarchy have strong connections that effect woman in daily life (Iriqat & Safarini, 2024). She strongly believes that it is possible through modern education which was quite unimaginable for women to have in contemporary society. The secret of women's success and emancipation is their knowledge and its implication, but male dominance subjugated women's aspirations and deprived them of education.

As a result, women remained in the dungeon of ignorance and thereby remained unaware of their rights and privileges. They, it seems, were only destined for 'zenana' while 'zenana' refers to "an organized form of veiling, creating a separate domestic space solely for the women of the household, often divided from the main house by an actual physical veil or curtain (Ahmed, 2022)" in Rokeya's society. "*How unfair it is to shut in the harmless women and let loose the men* (Hossain, 2005)." Nowhere do women articulate their concerns and needs. Besides these, they had to depend most often on the decisions of their male counterparts. Even, they have no other identities beyond domesticity. How helpless and hapless women were at that time! In this respect, Rokeya's speech at "Bengal Women's Educational Conference" may be worth quoting:

I have been crying for the lowliest creature in India for the last twenty years. Do you know who that lowliest creature in India is? It is the Indian women . . . There are people also who feel for animals, so we see animals' rights groups everywhere. If a dog is hit by a car, we hear an outcry in the Anglo-Indian media. But there is not a single soul in the whole of the subcontinent to mourn for incarcerated women like us. (Mahmud, 2016)

Again, it may be mentioned here that the discrepancy of patriarchy in the treatment of women and men's education dismays Rokeya terribly. Like others, Rokeya's father also, though educated, did not give her permission to master the languages Bangla and English, or to pursue any other forms of knowledge. He just allowed Rokeya to learn Arabic to read the holy Quran without comprehending its meaning. However, he was quite positive and enthusiastic about his son's higher education. Deprived of equal education and other rights and privileges that her brothers enjoyed, Rokeya was disappointed and felt that the condition of women was nothing different from that of Nora in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* as reflected when Nora said to her husband:



Our house has been nothing but a playroom. Here I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I used to be papa's doll-child. (Miah, 2014)

Rokeya could not accept the subordination of women. She was a woman of revolutionary spirit. Self-motivated Rokeya resolved to make women free from their captivity, fighting against patriarchal injustices. She also fought against other age-old social prejudices regarding women. Therefore, she emphasized the power of knowledge. She firmly deemed that education could emancipate women from all the hindrances restricting them from time immemorial. Truly, an African proverb goes with Rokeya's sharp insight and thought - "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. If you educate a woman, you educate a nation (Akpety, 2022)." Rokeya also feels that if women are allowed to education, they (women) can be aware of their rights, needs, and duties, and thereby they will be empowered and emancipated. Consequently, they contribute to the progress of the nation using their knowledge in the practical realm of life. With this end in view, the writer portrays the Ladyland where women are free of all the impediments on their way to emancipation. Here, as Rokeya dreams, women are privileged with all sorts of educational, social, economic, political, and other rights and opportunities while men are downgraded to domestic roles. To enlighten the girls, the sagacious and far-sighted Queen of the Ladyland made education mandatory for them. Even, women education is given the first priority which ultimately leads to their empowerment and liberation. In this way, educational opportunities are expanded for women across the society. Women here have educated not only in the basic sense but also in the different branches of knowledge. They engage in intellectual pursuits without any challenges. Even, from the universities, they gather knowledge to contribute to the country.

The Ladyland also talked about women holding positions of power, which highlighted the supremacy of women's brain power over men. Women rule the country with "the help of scientific knowledge and technological advances (Akter, 2023)." Unlike traditional Indian women, the women of the Ladyland, with the light of education, take on new and meaningful dimensions, which the writer avidly dreams and strives to establish in reality, all through her life. The similarity between Rokeya's dream and the utopian society of Ladyland signifies Rokeya's firm belief in the transformative power of education and women's empowerment. Thus, the Ladyland is not just a fictional utopia but a reflection of Rokeya's progressive ideals, emphasizing her revolutionary spirit and commitment to creating a world where women are not only educated but also empowered to shape their destinies and contribute to the betterment of society.

At the time of Rokeya, everywhere women were in chains. The veil custom, a patriarchal imposition, subjugated women, limiting their educational and social opportunities. The veil's oppressive practices pervade the entire society. In disguise, the custom confined women to the household. Denying women access to public life and intellectual pursuits, the veil system keeps them ignorant and unaware of their basic rights, and thereby makes them dependent on men for their living, but Rokeya does not take it normally. Realizing the helpless plight of women, Rokeya attempts to stop this oppression toward them. She adheres to Islamic customs. She also maintains the purdah norm. She never discourages women from following it, but she opposes the patriarchal



practice of forced seclusion, often justified by the veil. Rokeya is against all the injustices of the society. She challenges the restrictive interpretation of Islamic law.

Early marriage is another barrier on the way to women's education, empowerment, and liberation. Thus, according to Rokeya's efforts, it was stopped in the Ladyland. No woman was permitted to marry before she was twenty-one. However, before this change, girls were married at an early age when they did not have any idea about marriage in the true sense. Then, women were denied opportunities to cultivate their minds and to embolden their spirit. They were disused and secluded in zenana by the name of patriarchy and religious bigotry. "From Sultana's perspective, the zenana was, therefore, a means of limiting women's involvement in the public sphere that was a part and parcel of traditional values (Ahmed, 2022)." Therefore, the seclusion restricted their movement, and kept them ignorant and reliant. For this reason, a woman without education was "*no better than a frog in a well (Hossain, 2005).*" On the other hand, men were lord and master there. They held all powers and privileges while women were powerless and docile. Women were restricted from engaging in any social affair. Remaining enclosed at home day after day, the women of the time also became afraid of the world outside their house. So, only after being assured that there was no risk of encountering any man on their way, Sultana agrees to go out of the house for a walk with Sister Sara.

Then, in the story, the creation of the secular Ladyland represents Rokeya's challenge of the traditional patriarchal interpretation of Islam that constrained women's roles in both colonial and Islamic societies of the time, as echoed in "Despite the Islamic etymological roots of the zenana/mardana, Ladyland is explicitly secular, with faith based on love and truth, rejecting both the Christian influences of colonialism and the Islamic influences of Bengali patriarchy (Ahmed, 2022)." The secularism in Ladyland also shows Rokeya's desire for an inclusive vision of a society that transcends religious and patriarchal divides. A secular society provides the space for education, self-determination, and intellectual empowerment without any interruption from religious dogma or gendered norms. Rokeya wholeheartedly felt that love is the best religion.

Truly, the Ladyland religion was not like the traditional religion. It was founded on love and truth, not on malice, enmity, or falsehood. If anyone tells lies, she or he is asked to leave the land permanently and never to return there. The motto of the Ladyland does not embrace the joy of taking the life of any of God's creatures, especially a human being. No capital punishment is there. Even, an offender is forgiven if that person repents. This religion allows a woman to see any man with whom she has a sacred relationship. The circle of sacred relations is very limited in Rokeya's society; even first cousins were not considered sacred there. But, in the Ladyland, the range of relations is very large; a distant cousin is also treated sacred as a brother. However, it can be said that purity reigns the Ladyland. In addition, misinterpretations of religion do not hold women back there. However, envisioning a world where love, truth, and reason form the basis of social interaction, Rokeya challenges the gender hierarchies enforced by colonialism, religion, and social conservatism, and provides a model for a more progressive, inclusive world, where women's rights and equality are paramount.

The Ladyland again shows the significant advancements women have made in various productive fields like science, engineering, and technology, and so on, which



women cannot think of in Sultana's country for patriarchy and other social barriers. Women of the Ladyland are moving forward using their knowledge in science and technology while the women of Sultana's country still lag deplorably. Here, the women are not only well-educated but also pioneers of scientific innovations. With the aid of science and technology, the intelligent and resourceful women of the Ladyland make use of various scientific advancements—such as electricity, solar heat collectors, and water balloons—to make their lives remarkably easier and more comfortable. They have developed flying cars, agricultural practices, weather-controlling devices, sustainable energy sources, and other innovative technologies.

These technological advancements not only give women convenience but also symbolize their capacity for innovation, their empowerment, and their capability to transform society. Using their expertise in horticulture, the women of the Ladyland beautify their land with lush gardens and vibrant plant life. Their whole country looks like a lovely garden. Rokeya believes that proper education and awareness of rights and potentials have developed in women's confidence needed to enter public life and helped them to accomplish a lot beyond the imagination of so-called men. Nowhere in the Ladyland have educated women lagged. Women of one of the two female universities invented a wonderful captive balloon by which they managed to extract abundant water from the atmosphere directly. Drawing water persistently they could even stop rain and storms together. Again, by their pipe, the women collected sufficient heat from the sun and stored up the heat to distribute among others. The men of the Ladyland satirically called women's scientific discoveries a sentimental nightmare but later these men were dreaming the sentimental dreams themselves. In the Ladyland, women's free access to knowledge, new skills, or technologies have improved the quality of their lives and contributed to the social and economic development. Thus, technologically and structurally advanced Ladyland challenges the notion that women are incapable of intellectual pursuits or scientific achievement.

For women's advanced knowledge and expertise, the Ladyland knows no want. In the Ladyland, the people never face shortages of rainwater, floods, or thunderstorms. Here, they are always busy making nature yield abundant resources. During cold weather, they keep their homes warm using solar heat, while maintaining a cool and comfortable atmosphere in the hot weather of summer. For them, the summer rainfall seems to be a divine blessing, nourishing the land and ensuring prosperity. Again, when the heat becomes excruciating, they sprinkle the ground with ample showers from the artificial fountains. Even the bathroom they use shows their intelligence. They made it with a removable roof. Any time any woman can take a shower bath, simply remove the roof and turn on the shower pipe's tap. The active participation of women has made these possible. How potential the women are in the Ladyland! In addition, the gracious Queen of the Ladyland is very fond of botany; she cherishes to convert the whole country into one grand lavish garden.

Many years ago, Rokeya dreamt of aerial vehicles for transportation when there was no sign of this type of vehicle at all. How progressive and insightful a lady she was! The Ladyland echoes that dream of the writer. Women here have invented the air car which works by the motive power electricity supplies as seen in the story when Sultana and Sara have reached the castle of the Queen in the Ladyland by the very car. More to



the point, Rokeya described women driving flying cars during a time when women were not even allowed to venture outdoors. Now, women are given the right to drive cars in Saudi Arabia. How relevant *Sultana's Dream* is still today! However, there are no railroads nor any paved streets in the Ladyland. So, no street or railway accidents take place here. Each street looks like a verdant garden. Besides these, with scientific knowledge, women can overcome the force of gravity also by hydrogen balls. They use balls of different capacities to overcome the different weights. All these were possible for the advanced knowledge and effort of the women of the Ladyland.

What type of society Rokeya wants to see in real life is again clearly shown in the juxtaposition of the utopian society of Ladyland and Rokeya's male-dominated society, through which she criticizes the militaristic tendencies of her contemporary society. In the Ladyland, there is no sphere where women fail to prove their potential. Even they can meet the invasion of the neighboring enemy state with their brain power. Walking through the land, Sultana learns about this invading force and also about how matriarchal power was established after the defeat of the enemy country by women scientists. The king of the neighboring country, who prioritized power over good governance, demanded that the Queen of the Ladyland would hand over the political refugees to his officers. But to turn out refugees was not the principle of the Ladyland.

However, handing over refugees went against the core principles of the Ladyland, where compassion and justice took precedence over political expediency. Truly, the motto of the Ladyland is very strong and different. It does not resonate with that of Rokeya's society. Naturally, the Queen refused to send them back. In response, the king declared war against the Ladyland, driven by his desire for control and disregard for the values of peace and justice that the Ladyland upheld. Then, almost all common men and military officers fought valiantly; even a boy of sixteen joined the war, while the enemy was too strong to be defeated. *"Most of the warriors were killed, the rest driven back, and the enemy came within twenty-five miles of the capital (Hossain, 2005)."* And the men, who were deemed 'fit for nothing' were sent to zenanas for the sake of purdah. Since then, they had been in seclusion. Here, one point may be noted that there is a symbolic undertone to the confinement of men to the zenanas, as women were enclosed indoors during Rokeya's time. Thus, the idea of men and women's reversal condition was something radical. However, when women were thinking that they *"were not trained to fight with swords and guns, nor were they accustomed to fighting with any weapons (Hossain, 2005)"*, the Queen, determined to protect her people and to uphold the values of the Ladyland, inspired them to make use of their technological advancements as weapon. Led by the Principal, her two thousand university students used the power of solar energy in innovative ways. Directing concentrated rays of sunlight and heat towards the enemy, finally they won the battle.

The heat and light were too much for them to bear. They all ran away panic-stricken, not knowing in their bewilderment how to counteract that scorching heat. When they fled away leaving their guns and other ammunitions of war, they were burnt down by means of the same sun-heat. Since then no one has tried to invade our country any more. (Hossain, 2005)



Thus, Rokeya proves the potential of women once again. Through their innovative and witty use of science and technology, women create defenses to prevent conflict between the countries without shedding a single drop of blood, such as using weather manipulation to neutralize external threats as opposed to Rokeya's society. The women of the Ladyland get success with their brain power. Just as women achieved a victory against an enemy state without bloodshed, so they can eliminate crime and corruption without violence or brutality. This portrayal reflects Rokeya's critique of traditional systems of justice and authority, suggesting instead a model of governance where wisdom, unity, and technological innovation replace the need for force, and where moral integrity is maintained without depending to the violent methods commonly employed in male-dominated societies.

However, more importantly, women's trend of avoiding bloodshed during the upheavals of political crises in the Ladyland can be connected to the current need for world peace especially in the context of ongoing civil wars. However, after the war, some of the police commissioners and district magistrates prayed to get back their respective positions as they sincerely did their duty and therefore, they should not be punished, but they were not allowed to come out of zenana by the Queen. *"Now that they are accustomed to the purdah system and have ceased to grumble at their seclusion, the system is called 'Mardana' instead of 'zenana' (Hossain, 2005)."* Through her portrayal of the women-ruled society of Ladyland, Rokeya establishes her belief that women are not only intelligent human beings but also just leaders. In Ladyland, women are portrayed as resourceful, educated, and competent administrators, able to use the power of science and technology to improve their lives and their society. By creating this type of world, Rokeya challenges the prevailing gender norms of her time, advocating for the recognition of women's potential in all spheres, including leadership and governance.

For the progress and advancement of the Ladyland, women there are ready to do any kind of hard work. Now, they are responsible citizens rather than commendable housewives. Therefore, they never sit idle, and they never misuse time. Motion defines their lives. Even, women "do their duties more diligently and more effectively than men (Nanda, 2019)." Moreover, in the Ladyland, in the absence of men in workforce, women do the official duties and manage the home smoothly without any difficulty. To finish office work, a woman needs only two hours a day while a man wastes six hours a day on smoking. Through this job nature, the women of the Ladyland demonstrate how time and effort can be utilized in productive, meaningful pursuits. The contrast based on working hours shows how Rokeya criticizes the societal norms which often misallocate time and resources among men and women. Men indulge in habits like smoking while women utilize their time to build a more prosperous society. Through this, Rokeya upholds her belief in the value of education, discipline, and purposeful work. Men spend their time uselessly in the name of work as viewed in the extract below:

They dawdle away their time in smoking. Some smoke two or three cheroots during office time. They talk much about their work but do little. Suppose one cheroot takes half an hour to burn off, and a man smokes twelve choroots daily; then you see, he wastes six hours every day in sheer smoking. (Hossain, 2005)



Sultana's Dream reflects the nature of power and peace of the Ladyland too. Sister Sara explains the way women won and kept their peace against men and their war-like ways. Here, educated innocent women have taken the Ladyland to a shape that Ladyland can be called a nonviolent society where disputes are resolved through dialogue and collaboration, rather than war or aggression. For this reason, the Ladyland does not need any police or magistrate for its smooth running. Peace-loving women have already overpowered mischievous men through their intellect. In the Ladyland, since men who are generally associated with crime, mischief, and sin are confined to the segregated space of Mardana, there is no more crime, violence sin, warfare, or bloodshed in the society. Therefore, society no longer needs a police to track down criminals or a magistrate to conduct trials. If any dishonesty or wrongdoing occurs, it can be swiftly and effectively dealt with, as the community possesses both the wisdom and the means to restore order without the use of force.

Furthermore, in the Ladyland, education has made women's confidence level so high that educated women, with confidence and knowledge, have conquered poverty, disease, theft, and even premature death. Thus, it is noticed that people are not subject to any kind of fatal disease there, nor do they suffer from any other manacles as people suffer in East Bengal. Astonishingly enough, no premature death is seen in the Ladyland except by rare accident. Here, death in youth is an exceptional rarity. The society, with its emphasis on science, health, and harmony with nature, ensures healthy lives for its citizens. The careful management of resources, combined with advanced knowledge in fields like medicine and agriculture, prevents the common ailments and dangers that often cause early deaths in other places. This portrayal upholds the accomplishments of the Ladyland's thoughtful and progressive society, where the focus on education, sustainability, and care for the environment creates a safe community.

Even, the kitchen they use in the Ladyland showed their charismatic talent and innovative capabilities. The kitchen is unique in its beauty, convenience, utility, and innovation. Women are aware of the preservation of *the* environment and also about the management of ecology. Unlike colonial Bengal where men thought horticulture to be a waste of time, in the Ladyland it is of immense importance and there is no smoke, or chimneys in the kitchen, as cooking is done with solar power. Thus, women can control pollution too. There is no sign of coal or fire anywhere. Further, there are no roads or railways in the Ladyland.

Instead, there is a green carpet on which people walk. Additionally, the noble Queen of the Ladyland is exceedingly fond of nature; she cherishes converting the whole country into one grand garden. In this context, Rokeya's description of the importance of nature in the Ladyland starting from the green carpet to using of solar energy and conservation of water bodies by utilizing only rainwater might be an attempt towards ecological balance and sustenance of the environment. In the Ladyland, science is utilized to sustain life, and environment is nurtured and not plundered. The nature is the tapestry of gifts in the Ladyland. The Queen supports efforts to dive into the ocean of knowledge and to enjoy the gifts of nature as reflected in the following extract:

We do not covet other people's land, we do not fight for a piece of diamond though it may be a thousand-fold brighter than the Koh-i-Noor, nor do we grudge a ruler his Peacock Throne. We dive deep into the ocean of knowledge and try to find out the



precious gems, which nature has kept in store for us. We enjoy nature's gifts as much as we can. (Hossain, 2005)

However, throughout the story, Rokeya emphasizes the power of education to pave the way of women empowerment and emancipation. She earnestly tries to prove that if women are given the opportunities, they can do anything with distinction as equally as men. In spite of taking her stand in favor of women, Rokeya is not a prejudiced feminist. For women entrapment, she does not spare to blame women for their unawareness of their rights and capabilities. She also finds faults with those women who are usually submissive and blindly believe that *"it is not safe for us to come out of the zenana, as we are naturally weak (Hossain, 2005)."* She further critiques those who believe men to be stronger than women. Defying the traditional belief, very cogently the writer argues,

A lion is stronger than a man, but it does not enable him to dominate the human race. You have neglected the duty you owe to yourselves, and you have lost your natural rights by shutting your eyes to your own interests. (Hossain, 2005)

Again, Rokeya expects that women can confine men to the zenana, overpowering them by their brains, not by arms. But, the women think highly about men's brains and say that *"their brains are bigger and heavier than women's (Hossain, 2005)."* On this count, the writer nicely explains,

An elephant also has got a bigger and heavier brain than a man has. Yet man can enchain elephants and employ them, according to their own wishes. (Hossain, 2005)

She also argues,

Women's brains are somewhat quicker than men's. So, with their brain power, women could easily suppress men in the Land. (Hossain, 2005)

Exactly, this happens in the Ladyland. They have suppressed men not by arms but by brain. Ultimately, women come out of ignorance and other prejudices to establish a balanced participatory society where women would no longer remain dependent on men for their living.

Whatever Rokeya did all through her life was only for uplifting the condition of the helpless women. Her efforts toward women's emancipation transcended region, caste, religion, and stereotypes. What happens in the Ladyland happens in dreams, not in reality. As Sultana wakes from her dream at the end of the story, she reveals this. Through the delineation of the dream-like Ladyland, Rokeya's stance is to create a sense of awareness among the girls and women about their rights, needs, and privileges and she also preaches progressive thoughts to repel the age-old social prejudices about women. However, underneath her dream, how avidly the writer endeavors to materialize those dreams into reality, through the change of the status of women of the British Bengal is undeniable.

Conclusion

In *Sultana's Dream* Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain presents a wonderful vision of the Ladyland which exemplifies the transformative power of education in breaking the



cycles of domination and repression of women in their everyday lives. The story celebrates the power of wit and intelligence as a means of navigating social situations and overcoming obstacles. Through this visionary writing, Rokeya valiantly fights against the colonial and patriarchal framework of society and imagines a future where women are empowered to create a world that values peace over violence, intellect over force, and compassion over conflict. The perfection and excellence of life and society as seen in the Ladyland is not a result of ruling it by women only. What Rokeya has done here is that she has depicted everything she felt was wrong or absurd in the real world, and portrayed its reverse in the Ladyland. The Ladyland is free from all sorts of manacles. It is replete with a lot more accomplishments. Importantly, the denial of women's education and their active participation in public life not only holds women back but also slows down the growth and progress of society as a whole. Truly, by keeping women away from education and the workforce, the overall progress of a nation is impossible. So, the importance of men's and women's cooperation and contributions to the gradual development of a nation is undeniable.

However, Rokeya is successful in speaking out for the women of the colonial East Bengal and beyond to a great extent. Despite that, the struggle of Rokeya is still going on. Men and women have not yet got equal rights in all sectors globally. The necessity of Rokeya's vision persists until women attain full dignity. Surely, Rokeya is one of the most influential pioneers of women's liberation in South Asia. No doubt, she does not claim that simply handing over the ruling power from men to women would immediately transform society. It may take some time. In this respect, it is also true that individual effort is not enough to uproot gender inequalities. Collective endeavors to strive for equal rights need to be acknowledged, encouraged, and respected. Considering all these, the imagined Ladyland not only challenges colonial, patriarchal, and other anti-woman customs but also serves as a beacon of hope for a more equitable and harmonious world, where the potential of every individual, regardless of gender, is realized. This study continues to contribute to literature significantly with its enduring appeal and relevance. The insights from this paper are expected to inspire further research in the field.

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