

Guest Teacher's name: Shriya Pandey
Department: English

Day: Saturday
Date: 2020/04/25

Subject: GE-6: Women and Empowerment in Contemporary India
Class: B. A (P), Second Semester.
Time- (11:45 a.m.- 12:45 p.m.) & (1:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m.)

FOR THE 11:45 a.m.- 12:45 p.m. E- SESSION

'SULTANA'S DREAM': AN ANALYSIS
by Brati Biswas and Ranjana Kaul

ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN

“The author of the short story ‘Sultana’s Dream’ was a social activist and a pioneer in the field of feminist activism in late 19th Century Bengal” (Page 167, First Paragraph)



- ❖ Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was born into a Bengali Muslim upper-class family in the small village of Pairaband in the district of Rangpur, north of present day Bangladesh, then a part of the colonial British province of Bengal Presidency.
- ❖ Rokeya at age 16 was married to a widower in his late 30's, Syed Sakhawat Hossain, who was then a district magistrate in the Bihar region of Bengal Presidency.
- ❖ Syed, who was convinced that the education of women was the best way to cure the ills of his society, encouraged his willing wife to write, and set aside 10,000 rupees to start a school for Muslim women. In 1909, 11 years after they had been married, Syed died and Rokeya immediately started the school in Bhagalpur in his memory.
- ❖ The school in Bhagalpur had to be closed. Rokeya moved to Calcutta where she re-opened the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School on March 16, 1911. The school was inspected by Lady Chelmsford, wife of the Governor General and Viceroy of India.
- ❖ In Calcutta, she became very involved in civil affairs. In 1916, she founded the Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam, Bangla (Bengali Muslim Women's Association). In 1926, Rokeya presided over the Bengal Women's Education Conference held in Calcutta. She was active in debates and conferences concerning the advancement of women until her death in December 9, 1932, shortly after presiding over a session during the Indian Women's Conference in Aligarh.

ANALYSIS

Sultana's Dream, first published in 1905 in a Madras English newspaper, is a witty feminist utopia—a tale of reverse purdah that posits a world in which men are confined indoors and women have taken over the public sphere, ending a war nonviolently and restoring health and beauty to the world.

"The Secluded Ones" is a selection of short sketches, first published in Bengali newspapers, illuminating the cruel and comic realities of life in purdah.

"A clever and appealing story of reversed purdah (seclusion of women) in Ladyland, where women overpower men through brains rather than brawn. Accompanying this story are selections from "The Secluded Ones" (1928), a factual account of extreme cases of purdah. Commentaries by scholars put the works of the little-known Hossain in a global and historical context. An interesting and informative work for Asian studies and women's studies collections." —*Library Journal*

"This short book is a window opened too briefly onto a world whose exoticism is overshadowed only by its oppressiveness. Particularly chilling is Hossain's work's relevance to our times, as pointed out in the afterword when purdah and its variants are being revived in different social and religious movements." —*Publishers Weekly*

Sultana's Dream is a story of **creation of 'Ladyland'**. A land where women are at the helm of Socio-political and economic matters and men are confined to 'mardana'. The highly educated society of 'Ladyland' is free any armed conflict. Rokeya ingeniously devises **an alternative socio-political and economic model**, where people live and progress (scientifically & technologically) in close contact with nature.

The **imagining of feminist utopia** focuses on if a gender equal utopia can exist. A world without patriarchal oppression and gender binaries which is beyond the violence of gender discrimination. A feminist utopia imagines a world without gender binaries and gender discrimination. **Radical feminism** explains that a feminist utopia cannot exist if inequalities exist due to gender binaries and discrimination. It advocates for imagining a feminist utopia which criticizes the stereotyped gender role itself. *Sultana's Dream* is a feminist attempt at imagining **a feminist utopia**, named 'Ladyland'. The story in itself draws a lot of incidents from her own life experiences as a Muslim girl child born to an upper class Muslim family. The women of the family were under restrict observance of **Purdah system** that secluded them to the domestic realm.

'Ladyland' is an imagined space where women seem to have access to public spaces without being **restricted by social or religious customs**. The conversion of Ladyland from a male dominated space was conceived as unrealistic by Sultana, for the first time **she is not a subject to male gaze and surveillance**. The story reveals **various emotions felt by women** facing

patriarchal oppression. The emotions of anger, fear and constant urge to challenge male authority. The story attempts to **remind women of their own worth and question the patriarchal power** that confines them to the domestic realm. **The author draws information from her own childhood memories** where women including her mother and other female members of the family observed the **Purdah system** and the way her sister was **married off before the age of fifteen**.

In the story, women are shown as more rational and scientific than men. Sara is a scientific researcher who considers women as superior to men. When it comes to **discussing women's traditional work**, Sultana is taken by surprise with Sara's assertion of men being unworthy to work for women. Sultana is delighted to see the way women manage and control everything. **We are constantly made to acknowledge the debilitating social and religious customs plaguing women's emancipation**. The author focuses on **women's need to attain more education** simultaneously also **challenging customs like child marriage and Purdah system**.

IMPORTANT

READ:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294118151_A_Contemplation_on_'Sultana's_Dream'