

**Tracing the Governing Utopian Ideas in the novel of Begum  
Rokeya's novel 'Sultana's Dream'**

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**Abstract**

The satirical narrative of *Sultana's Dream* (1905), which centers on the question of women in the context of Bengali Muslim society at the time, considers gender, science, education, and religious issues. Begum Rokeya enables women in her community to experience an illusion of freedom that exists outside of 'purdah' and outside the confines of the 'zenana' with *Sultana's Dream*. As the story progresses, the concept of restriction as a master tool is set in reverse in such a provocative way that the seemingly straightforward writing of a "veiled" Muslim woman reveals a path of discourse that challenges the very foundation of Islam. She criticizes the patriarchal system for preventing women from speaking up in It also holds women responsible for not banding together and organizing to better the social status of women, marking this work as a feminist utopia. This paper is a hint of governing utopia in Rokeya's landlady land.

**Keywords:** Tracing, women, responsibility, restriction, freedom.

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Utopian literature began in 1516 with the first edition of the book of **Thomas More** entitled "*Utopia*" and the genre continues to the present day.

*"There are socialist, capitalist, monarchical, democratic, anarchist, ecological, feminist, patriarchal, egalitarian, hierarchical, racist, left-wing, right-wing, reformist, Naturism / Nude Christians, free love, nuclear family, extended family, gay, lesbian, and many more utopias [...] Utopianism, some argue, is essential for the improvement of the human condition. But if used wrongly, it becomes dangerous. Utopia has an inherent contradictory nature here. "*— Lyman Tower Sargent

There have been many utopias written since more gave impetus to the genre, some as mere Arcadian dreams, others intended as blueprints for social and technological improvements in the actual world. Utopias are protests against conventional wisdom, and grow up in the pores of the established society. They are often answers to crisis and show a

special explosive force in times of shifting epochs. The concept of utopia is elusive by nature. Three main areas of the idea of utopia can be identified-

1. The utopian thought, which is the theory of the Ideological aspects of the concept; the practical communities based on the ideas of utopianism; and the literary genre (Sargent, “Three faces”).
2. The utopian genre is characterized by a “willful transgression of time” (Sargisson1996, 57),
3. A temporal displacement technique which is intended to break with the linear perception of time and, consequently, to challenge accepted modes of thinking.

### **Types of Utopian Ideas**

Most utopian works present a world in which societal ideals and the common good of society are maintained through one or more of the following types of beliefs:

- Feminist ideas: It exposes the unfairness of patriarchal society and the mechanism of its perpetuation as well as the discrimination and marginalization of women.
- Governing ideas: Society is controlled by citizenry in a largely individualist, communal, and social and sometimes libertarian “government”. The term government is used loosely, as power is seen to corrupt, so constructed government systems are warned against.
- Technological ideas: In some cases, technology may be embraced to enhance the human Living experience and make human life easier and more convenient.
- Ecological ideas: Back to the nature, humans live harmoniously with nature and reverse the effects of industrialization. Present worlds where climate and natural resources no longer force the dire crisis they do today.
- Philosophical/religious ideas: Society believes in a common religious philosophy, some fashion their surroundings around the biblical Garden of Eden. In inter-religious utopias, all ideas of God are welcomed. In intra-religious utopias, a singular idea of God is accepted and practice by all citizens.

**Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s “Sultana’s Dream”** published in The Indian Ladies magazine in 1905, is a prominent short story where the author presents a utopian world- a form of ideal world that has no existence. It was considered a work “ahead of its time” and was published before Charlotte Gilman’s Western, Feminist utopian work *Herland* (1915). *Sultana’s Dream* is strikingly advanced in its critique of patriarchy, conflict, conventional kinship structures, industrialization and the exploitation of the natural world.

*Sultana’s Dream* is a novella with a writing style reminiscent of Gulliver’s Travels(1796). Researchers Anwar Dil and AfiaDil in Women’s Changing Position in Bangladesh: Tribute to BegumRokeya describe *Sultana’s Dream* as-

**“It is a beautifully and powerfully written story against the Oppression of women in the form of a delightful fantasy about a Utopian “Ladyland” where men rather than women were kept in seclusion. Women like men in other societies run the affairs of the Country.”**

The core inspiration of her literary work rests in her realization of the needs of taking measures against the suppression, oppression and domination of men over the women race for centuries in Bengal. Her mission of sowing the seeds of self strength in the mind of Bengal’s women has always been underlying in her literary works. She expressed the dream of female emancipation and the rise of woman conspicuously in *Sultana’s Dream* at the beginning of her literary career.

The story of the novel takes place in the female utopia Ladyland, where men are excluded from the community. In this fictional universe, women have furthered the progress of humankind in a considerable amount, especially technologically.

The queen of Ladyland is a progressive lady who advocates freedom and equality for women. The queen in the story supports efforts to dive into the ocean of knowledge and to enjoy the gifts of nature. She propounds the principles of Science. This aspect of the story can also be related to contemporary times as there is still a shortage of women in the field of education. Not only does the story of Ladyland bring up women’s education, it also talks about women holding positions of power, suggesting that men are overpowered not by the power of might but by the power of brains. While the men of Ladyland are busy increasing their military power, the women are engaging themselves in scientific research. For example, the story describes a battle wherein only women fighters are involved, harnessing the rays of the sun to be concentrated towards the enemy.

### **Rokeya’s treatment of Utopia as a vehicle of satire or social criticism**

*Sultana’s Dream* is delightful satire written by Begum Rokeya, the harbinger of Muslim women’s awakening and emancipation. In this satirical story, Rokeya depicts a feminist utopia, an imagined world where women are socially and politically dominant over men.

***“The humour appeals not only to our heart but to our intellect. After laughing at our heart’s content, we suddenly pause to ponder what we are laughing at. If it is the hierarchical structure we are laughing at, then we ought to laugh at the existing hierarchy, too.”***

Here to attack the male dominated society she has set male in female’s stand. This is most witty work of a wise reformer. As in “A Room of One’s Own” Virginia Woolf has set Judith Shakespeare as an imaginary sister of Shakespeare to show though she had the geniuses like Shakespeare yet she had to face tragic ending because the European society did not give her the freedom to flourish—there were lots of barriers that she had to struggle with. Mrs. R.S. Hossain had to take shelter of dream to establish her Utopia. A confined woman like her could do nothing than taking shelter of the dream. Her intention could get a shape

because of this .So, she hold the hand of a lady who at first seems sister then friend and ultimately unknown representative of a successful country where women could establish their position logically.

Here the author uses weapons such as humour, wit, Irony, mockery, ridicule, sarcasm to criticize social prejudices, religious bigotry, and social repression on women in the male-dominate society. Rokeya was always vociferous against the subjugation of women in the Muslim society of Bengal. She broke out of the fetters of the purdah system and advocated women's emancipation.

She knew that before women could be emancipated, people's attitudes had to change. Being well aware of her intellectual faculty, she took her pen to target these nonsensical practices and attempted to cure them. She spoke against the abuse of social and religious regulations that arrested the physical, mental, and psychological growth of women in almost all her writings including Sultana's Dream.

In Sultana's Dream Rokeya is unequivocal in her condemnation of male-dominated society. Her condemnation of the activities of the men in male-dominated society is clear in the following line:

***“Men, who do or at least are capable of doing no end of mischief, are let loose and the innocent women, shut up in the zenana!”***

***“A lion is stronger than a man, but it does not enable him to dominate the human race.”***

Here Rokeya is playing with conventional religious and cultural justification for the seclusion of women. She also compares the brain of the men with that of the elephants. The author expresses her disapproval of the character of the men who are not patient enough to do a simple task. She says,

***“.....a man has not patience enough to pass thread through a needle hole even!”***

Then the author makes fun of the men's negligence to their duties and waste of time. She says,

***“They (men) dawdle away their time in smoking. Some smoke two or three cheroots during the office time. They talk much about their work, but do little”***

The author, then, criticizes the failure of the male soldiers to protect the country from foreign invasion which was later rescued by the intellect of the women. Rokeya blames the men for being responsible for all kinds of sin and crime in society. She remarks that since female rule has been established, there has been no crime or sin .So purity and virtue reigns over the country. Referring to the greed, deception and other immoral traits of the male people, Rokeya shows women's unwillingness to deal. With the men, she remarks,

***“Men, we find, are rather of lower morals and so we do not like dealing with them”***

Throughout the novel, Rokeya satirizes the character of the male people and their activities in the society. She expresses the superiority of the women in all aspects of life. Considering all elements mentioned above, it can easily be concluded that Begum Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream* is a perfect example of satire. In fact, her satirical portrayal of the male-dominated society incorporates nothing but her utmost desire for a civilized society where the men and women are equally treated.

### Conclusion

In a nutshell, hailed as one of the early feminist science fiction, Begum Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream* (1905) advocates Women's secret desire to be on equal footing with man. Accordingly, the narrator, Sultana envisages a dream land that materializes a utopian scheme in which the male folk are positioned at a completely opposite pole to a society that is ruled by women. Putting men in such a position, Rokeya constructs a feminist social structure. The boldness, vigor, courage, or strength, pride or a loud voice at least, which usually men possess, are absent from among the men of *Sultana's Dream*. Creating a society reined by women, touching all the aspects of Utopian literature, the symbols as well as motifs such as Ladyland, garden also contributes to make it immaculately utopian work. It sets modern concepts for the welfare of ignorant, illiterate, misguided women of subcontinent. Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream* utopian work, in the alternative world that it depicts, dramatizes women and men in non-discriminatory, non-hierarchical societies, and redefine "women" and "men".

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