

Literary Depiction of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's Vision of an Equitable and Developed Society with The Cooperation of Empowered Women in *Sultana's Dream and Padmarag*

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ABSTRACT: *Sultana's Dream and Padmarag* present us a model of the envisaged world of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain-an equitable and developed society with the cooperation of empowered women. She draws this model as realistically as possible. Like any utopian land, everything is not smooth and beautiful here. Women empowerment does not occur in a magical way. All the possible hindrances that may appear on the way of the women trying to be empowered are clearly foretold here. Yet the portraits of the empowered women, who successfully achieve independence, self- dignity, the right to voice their own opinions, and the ability to serve the society are indeed inspirational for all, particularly for the captivated women of patriarchy.

KEYWORDS: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, women empowerment, patriarchy, socialist feminism

INTRODUCTION

Our society is constituted by the participation of two types of sexes- male and female. They both are the unavoidable, essential constituent parts of nature. The constituent parts which are equally essential cannot be considered as superiors and inferiors. But the natural balance and beauty of creation have been destroyed by the male part of the society. They have taken the role of superiors by themselves and overthrown their other halves in a certain corner of the society- within the four walls of their residences as inferiors. They have deprived the women folk of all the rights and privileges of human lives including the very basic ones like education, empowerment, opinion expression and decision about their personal issues like marriage, divorce from torturer husbands, property right and so on. To the worst extent, most often, women also suffer from physical torture by their male family members. They are simply treated as sub-humans by men and often pushed to the brink of

abnormal death because of inhuman physical and psychological tortures or suicidal attempts. Even though they survive, they just carry on their lives as inanimate objects. Thus, the patriarchal society has snatched from women their definitions as human beings.

The male-dominated society has fueled its torture wheel over women by the misinterpretations of religion. As religion is one of the sensitive issues of human lives, men folk selected it for the fulfillment of their intentions. Through creating its various distorted interpretations they succeeded to imprison women within four walls by the name of purdah. This misinterpreted purdah system has deprived women even from the sunlight and air of nature and numbed their sense of questioning firstly out of terror and then gradual habituation.

The patriarchal authority has internalized its psyche among some women too. These women fail to detect the mechanics of oppressive patriarchy. Though they themselves are also victimized, they still obey and accept the unjust male dominance as the ultimate truth and end of their lives. These ignorant followers of patriarchy often become troublesome for other women. Instead of sympathy they bear antipathy to their fellows and thus create much trouble for those. Their ignorance, lack of enlightenment and improper privileges are the working reasons behind such attitudes and the problems created by them.

The society is so entrapped with all these widespread problems that if someone comes forward to speak for the emancipation and improvement of all, particularly of women, he/she is scrutinized first, then categorized as social enemy and treated with so many ill treatments. Thus, social welfare activists find themselves in unlimited hurdles and humiliations though they work for the sake of common humanity, going beyond their personal interests.

All these prevalent social problems are working as major obstacles on the way of its development. As half of the society's total manpower is kept behind and out of its construction activities, its progression is not running smoothly as it is supposed to be.

To awake the society from its slumber and superstitions Rokeya made best use of pen and paper. In all of her literary creations she focused on the necessity of women empowerment for the advancement of society. Her urge for the demolition of the hindrances working on the way of women empowerment is voiced everywhere of her writings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theories used in this research study are Socialist Feminism, Patriarchy and Women Empowerment.

Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism is a branch of feminism that focuses upon both the public and private spheres of a woman's life and argues that liberation can only be achieved by working to end both the economic and cultural sources of women's oppression. They see economic dependency as the driving force of women's subjugation to men. Further, socialist feminists see women's liberation as a necessary part of larger quest for social, economic and political justice. In 1972, the Chicago Women's Liberation Union published "Socialist Feminism: A Strategy for the Women's Movement," which is believed to be the first to use the term "socialist feminism," in publication.

Rokeya's ideals and beliefs regarding women's emancipation echo the focal point of the socialist feminism- its urge for women's economic independence as a means of their liberation from the subjugation to men. In her literary creations, *Sultana's Dream* and *Padmarag*, Rokeya portrays the economically independent, empowered women as liberated ones from the unjust domination of men. In *Sultana's Dream*, the women of the country of Sultana, have no hand or voice in the management of their social affairs. That is, they are dependent on men for economic support too. Utilizing this advantage, men have become the lord and master of the land, shut up the women at homes and taken to themselves all powers and privileges. Whereas the economically self-reliant women of the Ladyland of *Sultana's Dream* and Tarini Bhavan of *Padmarag* are free from any subordination to men. They can meet up their economic necessities by themselves. Further, they are capable to help others in distress. In *Padmarag*, the inmates of Tarini Bhavan financially support Latif Almas to go home when he is robbed of all his money.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a social system in which society is organized around male authority figures. In this system only males have authority over females, children and property. It creates its base on female subordination. Most forms of feminism characterize patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. In feminist theory, the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women.

This social patriarchy has been minutely delineated through Rokeya's writings. The Ladyland of *Sultana's Dream* was also a patriarchal one before its establishment of female authority as the country's ruling power where women used to be married off at their early ages without their consent. Male guardians thought women's education as unnecessary and useless one. Even when they came to know about the achievement of educated women like the invention of solar power it seemed no better than a laughing stock to them. In such way men used to underestimate the women in every walk of life. Similar contexts prevail in the

country of Sultana of *Sultana's Dream* and the society of *Padmarag*, which are still patriarchal ones. Here, women are considered as inferior human beings and kept under male authoritative powers as domestic animals. When the sisters of Tarini Bhavan take some initiatives for the social welfare, they are bitterly criticized and laughed at in every of their paces. The guardians of the students of Tarini school bring illogical complains against the teachers and impose false blames on the female authority for their own faults. That is, the scenario of every patriarchal society complies with each other. Everywhere in patriarchy, women are oppressed, dishonored and deprived.

Women Empowerment

Women Empowerment is one of the main concerns when addressing human rights and development. Empowerment provides women the opportunity to be accepted as equal members of the society. Through this, they can achieve more self-respect and confidence by the contributions to their communities. Political participations like the ability to vote and voice opinions, play a huge role in the process of empowerment. However, before the participation in the realm of politics, one needs to achieve her participations in the household activities and decisions, in schools, communities and all other related sectors of life. Empowerment provides a woman the ability to make choices for herself. When women have the agency to do what they want, a higher equality between men and women is established in social arena. Besides the fulfillment of women's interests, women empowerment has its economic benefits for the society and the nation. As women represent almost half of the world's population, their empowerment is essential and urgent to reduce global poverty.

The ladies of the Ladyland of *Sultana's Dream* and the women of Tarini Bhavan of *Padmarag* are empowered ones. The achievement of their empowerment has brought them self-respect and confidence as equal social entities. They have also gained the strength to voice their opinions. In *Padmarag*, when Latif's mother wants the sisters of Tarini Bhavan to convince Siddika to marry Latif, they reply in straight words that until and unless Siddika gives her own consent, no one can marry her off. This dignity of her opinion is the achievement of Siddika's empowerment. As we have seen earlier, this very family of Latif Almas once threw out Siddika out of her marital joy just for the sake of their own interests. Further, these empowered literary female characters engage themselves in various social welfare activities. Women of Ladyland do immense development of their nation. Inmates of Tarini Bhavan take the initiatives of girls' education; give shelters to the poor, distressed and ailing. Thus, empowerment of these women has brought tremendous progression in their own lives and also in their countries.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study on “Literary Depiction of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s Vision of an Equitable and Developed Society with the Cooperation of Empowered Women in *Sultana’s Dream* and *Padmarag*” is a qualitative research by category. As primary resources, two original literary textbooks of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain- *Sultana’s Dream* and *Padmarag* have been read and examined critically. To enrich this study further, other literary works of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, critical texts, research papers, essays and articles of prominent critics and authors on Rokeya have been used as secondary resources. To provide the study a theoretical framework, feminist literary theories too were analyzed carefully.

LITERARY DEPICTION OF ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN’S VISION OF AN EQUITABLE AND DEVELOPED SOCIETY WITH THE COOPERATION OF EMPOWERED WOMEN IN *SULTANA’S DREAM*

Along with the emancipation of women, women empowerment leads the society to its highest peak of development as it leaves no workforce of the society unused anymore. *Sultana’s Dream* shows us an immense development of the society as the outcome of its women’s empowerment. It is nothing but the reflection of Rokeya’s vision of an equitable and a developed society. As a humanitarian worker, a social reformer, she always dreamt of such a society and struggled hard to bring the neglected half of the total workforce (the women) of the nation into utility. She drew a sketch of her envisaged society in *Sultana’s Dream* in order to inspire her countrymen to work together to build such a society. Politics, economy, religion, education, health concern, decoration, concern for natural calamities and other sorts of accidents, crime and administration etc.- nothing of a complete social construction is left out of her touch.

Rokeya’s total life span (1880- 1932) was included in her country’s colonial period by British Empire. Therefore, her political concern was primarily consisted of her anti-imperialistic outlook. In *Sultana’s Dream* the queen of the Ladyland embodies Rokeya in this regard. She mentions the anti- imperialistic political strategy of her country to Sultana- “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- nor, nor do we grudge a ruler his Peacock Throne.” (Rokeya, *Sultana’s Dream*,14). As war falls upon Ladyland, which may fall upon any land anytime, Rokeya gives a view about war strategy. Like the non- violent revolution of Mahatma Gandhi, Rokeya too shows her female warriors of the Ladyland as the victorious ones over their enemy without any bloodshed. They defeat the enemies through concentrated sunlight and heat towards them. Thus, Rokeya encourages the exercise of the intellectual faculties not militarism. Above all, on the national level, Rokeya’s political vision consists of her advocacy for patriotism and the avoidance of bloodshed as far as possible.

Regarding the economic state and affairs of the land that Rokeya dreamt of; the literary delineation of her envisaged country reflected that she dreamt of a prosperous country, devoid of any need or poverty. She had a preference for economic dealings with foreign countries. The queen of the Ladyland expresses to Sultana that she “had no objection to permitting her subjects to trade with other countries” (Rokeya, *Sultana’s Dream*, 14). Further, the essay “The Fruit of Knowledge” bears Rokeya’s views of trades as good means of gaining prosperity for a country. “One day a few djinns, driven by hunger, drank a little sea water. At once their ignorance vanished. The problem of food that had troubled them for ages was solved in a trice. The lights of knowledge made the way clear to them. That very day they decided to set sail for trading.” (Rokeya, “The Fruit of Knowledge”, 196). These few lines carry her invocation for the exercise of knowledge, as knowledge vanishes ignorance and leads a nation to the way of prosperity. And here the light of knowledge sheds focus on trading as the most beneficial means of achieving fortune for a country.

Rokeya laid her sincere concern on the pursuit of education. She wanted every man and woman of her country to be engaged in the exercise of their intellects, to dive deep into the ocean of knowledge. The exercise of education rather than militarism was encouraged by her in *Sultana’s Dream*. Instead of dwelling at an age when women education was a utopian dream, when women were deprived of even the very primary education, Rokeya dreamt of women universities for higher study of women. In *Sultana’s Dream*, there are a number of schools and separate universities for women. In the essay “Ardhangi” (“The Better Half”) too, she expressed her hope that in future there would be universities for women where they would study under female teachers. Unfortunately, this great enthusiast of education was herself deprived of education facilities. Whatever, any of the obstacles of patriarchy could not hurt her enthusiasm. Later on, she started her study again to prepare herself for the Matriculation examination. She also worked hard to educate the ignorant women of her country as she realized it as one of the basic urgencies of life. Further, it was badly needed for women for the sake of empowerment and emancipation.

Education assists the female rulers of the Ladyland to succeed over all sorts of epidemic diseases. Their neat and clean organization of the land, well- instructed health concern turn the country into a free one from any kind of epidemic disease and mosquito bites. In this land, no one dies in youth except by rare accident.

Ladyland is also free from natural calamities and any sort of transport accidents. “As the water was incessantly being drawn by the university people no cloud gathered and the ingenious lady principle stopped rain and storms thereby.” (Rokeya, *Sultana’s Dream*, 8). As they use air- car, which works by electricity, as their prime transport, there is no rail road or any paved street in this land. Consequently, “neither street nor railway accidents occur here” (Rokeya, *Sultana’s Dream*, 12).

As it is mentioned earlier that Ladyland presents a complete picture of the construction of an ideal country envisaged by Rokeya, crime and administration too which are also important sectors of a country do not escape her notice. Rokeya dreamt of a country free from crime and sin. Therefore, there would be no requirement of a policeman to find out a culprit or a magistrate to try a criminal case. The quoted lines given below further explains Rokeya's policies of crime and punishment:

If any person lies, she or he is...

'punished with death?'

'No, not with death. We do not take pleasure in killing a creature of God, especially a human being. The liar is asked to leave this land for good and never to come to it again.'

'Is any offender never forgiven?'

'Yes, if that person repents sincerely.'" (*Sultana's Dream*,13).

Thus, Rokeya was against death sentences as punishment. Instead, she wished the offenders to repent sincerely and to come back on the right way. Regarding crime and punishment she wanted an administration, comprised of both strictness and kindness. It will deal with crimes strictly and be merciful towards the repenters.

Along with Truth, Rokeya was a worshipper of Beauty too. Her sense of beauty finds expression through her dream of a well- decorated country. While enjoying the grand beauty of the Ladyland, Sultana mistakes a patch of green grass for a velvet cushion. Feeling as if she is walking on a soft carpet, she looks down and finds the path covered with moss and flowers. The women of Ladyland have studied horticulture and decorated their country. By placing this endeavor as an example, Rokeya wanted to encourage her countrymen to study and utilize horticulture to decorate the country. Descriptions of house decoration too are found here. Sister Sara's house is situated in a beautiful heart- shaped garden. Rokeya narrates the decoration of Sisters Sara's house- "It was a bungalow with a corrugated iron roof. It was cooler and nicer than any of our rich buildings. I cannot describe how neat and how nicely furnished and how tastefully decorated it was." (Rokeya, *Sultana's Dream*,6). Sultana, the visitor of the Ladyland expresses her utmost astonishment at the decoration of the house of her companion- the assumed Sister Sara. Even the kitchen of Sister Sara catches her surprised praises for its ornamentation. "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 or fire." (Rokeya, *Sultana's Dream*,7).

Now, it becomes much clear how the female administrators of the Ladyland succeeded to get rid of all sorts of epidemic diseases and mosquito bites. Dusts, rotten things, stored water etc. are the major sources of diseases and living places for mosquitoes. As the country is a neat and clean one, free from dusts, it is also free from diseases. In order to decorate a country including its houses, even the kitchens based on essentialism and proper taste, education is a must need. Similar message is found in her essay "The Good Housewife". Here Rokeya states:

One needs intelligence in order to keep the house clean and well- arranged. The housewife will have to show her taste in the very beginning when the house is being built.....After the house is built, one needs furniture. Discrimination is needed in arranging them. One should know where each piece of furniture would look the best and where it will not. (Rokeya, "The Good Housewife", 57).

On the other hand, what may happen to the kitchen room of an uneducated housewife is also stated by her- "You can often see cobwebs decorating the store- room like awnings. Tamarind and rice are mixed up and so are different spices. It takes an hour to find sugar. As the room is kept entirely closed you get a suffy odour the minute it is opened. The housewives are used to it." (Rokeya, "The Good Housewife", 57). The descriptions of this kitchen room and the one of Sister Sara's- both are sketched by the same person. By placing them both side by side, we can clearly grasp why Rokeya advocated for women education relentlessly.

Sultana's Dream breaks the long- cherished concepts of men about women as inferior beings and presents the empowered women as excellent contributors in social development activities. To break the blind traditional norms of patriarchy it applies witty weapons based on unchallengeable logical arguments. In broad daylight, as Sultana walks in the street with her companion Sister Sara she feels very shy. Being a purdahnishin woman she was never accustomed to walking unveiled. Looking at her uneasy state other women cut jokes at her saying that she looks 'mannish'. Sister Sara explains the term 'mannish' to Sultana as being an inhabitant of a patriarchal society Sultana is unfamiliar with such term. In the Ladyland, someone is called mannish when she looks shy and timid like men. Rokeya uses 'mannish' in against of the term 'womanish' which is often used in patriarchal societies as a weapon to attack on somebody's manhood. The patriarchal notion of manhood is comprised of undaunted attitude, assertiveness, courageous behavior etc. If a man shows a little bit different attitude than these ones like if he feels psychic weakness, cries in sorrow etc. he is poked by his companions as a 'womanish' one. As the reversed form of 'mannish', 'womanish' stands for the meaning that the concerned person is looking shy and timid like women. That is, patriarchy looks down at its women folk as inferior ones and wants its

men folk to be noticeably different from them. In order to stand against such unjust notion and attitude of patriarchy towards women, Rokeya uses the alternative term in her writing. A conscious and intellectual mind like hers could not but protest such irrespective behavior of men to women. In the essay “The Degradation of Women”, she discourages women to wear ornaments as men think ornaments to be the signs of defeat of women. She writes- “when they argue about anything they say, If I cannot prove what I say, I will wear bangles”. (Rokeya, “The Degradation of Women”,17).

Rokeya dreamt of a society devoid of any gender discrimination. She wanted both men and women to walk side by side. In order to bring this dream into reality, she felt the abolition of any type of superiority complex, even the ones based on naturally gifted physical characteristics as mandatory conditions. With the acknowledgement of women’s physical weakness, in “The Better Half” Rokeya asserts that even then men should not claim themselves as the lords of women:

I acknowledge the fact that women depend upon others because of their physical weakness. But that does not mean that men should become ‘lords’ over us. We can see that everything in the world takes help of some kind from another; one cannot go on without the others. If plants want water then in the same way the clouds want plants. A river depends upon rains and the rain- giving clouds depend on rivers. So is the river the ‘lord’ of the cloud or vice- versa? (51).

Though, Rokeya’s own experience as a woman made her sensitive toward the condition of woman yet she worked for a total development of the society with the mutual contribution of its two sexes.

“One should know the disease before one treats the patient” (Rokeya, “The Better Half”, 44). The journey with *Sultana’s Dream* says that Rokeya had perfectly diagnosed the diseases of the society first then prescribed its recovery treatments. Women empowerment, therefore, has been included as the first condition of women’s emancipation and a developed society. From the part of women she declares in “The Degradation of Women” – “we constitute half of the body politic. If we wallow in mud, how can society stand erect?” (25). Regarding Rokeya’s diagnosis of social problems and suggestion of solutions Hasna Begum makes her compliment in the article “Rokeya’s Literary Writings: Politics in Different Perspectives” –

Rokeya rightly diagnosed the cause of the weaknesses of Muslims and also of all other citizens of India to the way their female population were being kept in veil as well as in ignorance. She repeatedly mentions the metaphor

of 'a cart with two broken wheels' which cannot move forward with its non-functional two wheels. The Indians are like this cart, unable to move forward because they ignored the development of their females. (18).

For the development of the female and therefore, to make the society move forward, *Sultana's Dream* can be our ideal that we should strive towards.

LITERARY DEPICTION OF ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN'S VISION OF AN EQUITABLE AND DEVELOPED SOCIETY WITH THE COOPERATION OF EMPOWERED WOMEN IN *PADMARAG*

Now, to establish the fact that women empowerment plays great role in overall development of the society; this study will shed focus on the social welfare activities of the inmates of Tarini Bhavan.

Rokeya speaks through the voice of Usha:

A woman is taught the principle of self- sacrifice from birth. When she is a spinster, she sacrifices her own interests for the sake of her father and her brothers. When she marries, her husband's needs take precedence. And, finally, she sacrifices her own needs to those of her children. The self sacrifice of certain woman remains confined to domestic life; that of others encompasses the whole world. (*Padmarag*,118).

Women can spread the light of their self- sacrifices in the whole world only when they themselves are enlightened and empowered. Otherwise their sacrifices remain unrecognized within the four walls of their domestic lives. Tarini sister's empowerment is the sole working source of encouragement behind their social services. It is through their empowerment the Tarini sisters have gained that inner strength to defy the criticisms and humiliations of the society on the way of their dedication to social welfare activities.

The social services of Tarini Bhavan are depicted by Rokeya as the shadowy ones of the services of Anjuman- i- Khawatin- i- Islam. Among its services, the most prominent ones were the setting up of vocational training centre's for women from financially deprived backgrounds, providing aid for widows in distress, helping young girls from underprivileged backgrounds to settle down by getting them married off and persuading educated women to teach in slums and train their residents for different kinds of income-generating work.

Tarini Bhavan shelters the distressed widows of the society, irrespective of their background identities. As we know from the context of Rokeya's time that widows do not have any home. No matter how old she is, a young girl of fifteen or an old woman of fifty,

as soon as her husband is dead and she is a widow, she has nowhere to go except her father's home. At her father's home, then she has to live at the mercy of her brothers or nephews. Even though he is a brutal torturer, a husband is always precious for a woman to survive at her husband's home. How cruel a reality it is that a husband's memory becomes the constant companion of a woman's life, though, probably he was a brutal torturer to her. Because, a hard life of a woman turns into a harder one when she becomes a widow.

In a life that had thorns strewn all the way along the path, a husband's memory was a widow's only form of sustenance. When the world bloodied her soul with wounds, thoughts of her husband would act as a soothing balm. They would be her consolation. Brothers- in – law and sundry other relatives might use cunning ploys to wrest her property from her. But they would never rob her of the feeling that the husband of the devoted wife is her lord and her life's essence.” (Rokeya, *Padmarag*, 187).

The quoted lines sound like the personal grievances of Rokeya. After her husband Sakhawat Hossain's death, her step-daughter and the husband of that girl forced Rokeya out of her home in Bhagalpur. Here in *Padmarag*, Shyama, the maternal aunt of Saudamini's step children is “a widow without a home to call her own” (Rokeya, *Padmarag*, 75). So she comes to live at the home of Saudamini's husband. Latif's widowed aunt too comes to live in Latif's family. So many other literary and real women characters are there who are surviving with their distressed fate. Tarini Bhavan shelters these widows.

Tarini School occupies a branch of Tarini organization. It is run by the inmates of Tarini Bhavan and dedicated for the educational enlightenment of the illiterate girls of the society. To achieve this goal the teachers of this institution have to face infinite baseless, false accusations of the guardians of the students. Sometimes they are also threatened by the name of police administration. Though the society is directly benefited by the school as it is preparing educated, understandable housewives like Banu and Shahida (it is a great achievement at the early stage) yet it is always remorseless in its criticism of the school and its female organizers. Amidst everything, the Tarini sisters relentlessly carry on their mission of enlightenment.

Tarini School is the literary portrait of Rokeya's founded school for girls- Sakhawat Memorial Girls School. She had to fight hard against restrictive patriarchal society in order to establish the school as it was an era when women's education was frowned upon. Rokeya first established a school for girls in Bhagalpur. When adverse circumstance forced her to leave town, she settled the school again in Calcutta with the registration of only eight students. This pioneer of women's liberation movement in undivided India laid all her efforts on behalf of women independence and education.

Rokeya's literary works express her views and opinions as an educationist and a leader of women liberty. The attitude of males towards contemporary female education is highly criticized in one of her essays entitled "Degradation of Women". She finds this resentment against female education resulted from the prevailing superstitions in society. Hence, her standpoint against the so called complaints against female education is apt and she confronts them logically:

Our society apologises hundreds of faults of the uneducated women without hesitation, but in the case of ordinarily educated women, though there be hardly any fault, the society manifests those so called faults hundreds of times and establishes those as the wretched impact of female education. Then there were hundreds of voices chorusing and teasing with — 'Salute to Female Education! (Rokeya, "Degradation of Women", 21-22).

As a matter of fact, Rokeya clarifies the extent to which an uneducated woman can do harm to the society since she does never have education on her own health, baby care, managing the households, control the child death etc. Clutching the point of Muslim child death, in her essay "Childcare", Rokeya puts further importance on the need of female education drastically on the plea that it could enable Muslim women to save their heredity.

In the essay "Fruit of Knowledge", Rokeya shows utmost boldness in favor of female education. Here she depicts how Adam takes the fruit of knowledge through getting tempted by Eve. Adam also gets enlightened after he has taken the scarps of food offered by his wife. Then he starts to feel his own miserable condition from the core of his heart. "Is this Heaven? A loveless, jobless, idle life. Is this the bliss of Heaven?" (Rokeya, "Fruit of Knowledge",195). Then he finds him as a royal-prisoner having no power of stepping out even an inch beyond the boundary of the Eden-garden. He lives in a Palace, built of gold and silver bricks and decorated with pearls and coral dusts but he possesses not a pinch of it, not even a piece of cloth. "What kingly luxury is this?" (Rokeya, "Fruit of Knowledge",195). The ignorant-bred bliss then collapses down and there emerges out the awakening of Knowledge eventually. Rokeya attempts here a symbolic tale. She uses various allusions, imageries, symbols etc., towards describing a world where women are deprived of the fruit of knowledge by the descendants of Adam and the ultimate result of this deprivation are extreme sufferings, chaos, confusion and chain of dependence upon human race. However, a savior appears in guise of a monk at last in Kanakdwip, the dwelling place for the offspring of Adam. Paying most importance, the monk tries to bring back the conscience of people and makes them cautious vowing: "Be careful. Don't deprive the womenfolk. Remember a woman brought this fruit and women have every right over it". (Rokeya, "The Fruit of Knowledge",202).

In *Padmarag*, Rokeya's literary disciples work to change the fate of women and the whole society. Besides their endeavor to educate the girls, they also work for the overall betterment of women. There is another section of social service in Tarini Bhavan namely "Home for the Ailing and the Needy". A highly religious Brahmin Dhirendra Babu brings his son Saratkumar at this centre in the hope of getting better nursing care for his son. Saratkumar is a nine years old boy, who is suffering from pernicious diseases like malaria and an enlarged spleen for long two years. Dhirendra has lost faith in doctors and healers. The situation gets worse for him as there is no woman at his home to look after his ill son. Sarat's mother had died when Sarat was one year old. Dhirendra Babu has neither mother nor sister at home. Nursing Sarat tirelessly round the clock, Dhirendra becomes exhausted and highly disappointed. At this disastrous moment, the residents of Tarini Bhavan come forward to look after the ill boy. This solaces the father's heart a bit and the patient too gets intensive care.

The hero of *Padmarag* too gets the benevolence of the Tarini inmates at his worse moments. While having an evening walk he gets highly injured by robbers. The robbers snatch his watch, chain, spectacles and all other belongings. They attack him with knives and sticks as he shouts for police. It's the Tarini sisters who rescue him in that state from a bush, beside of the road and bring him to life from the verge of death through their tireless nursing at day and night. "Whenever he woke up at night, he would find what seemed like a heavenly creature seated at his bedside. It would make him feel that these were indeed 'sisters'". (Rokeya, *Padmarag*, 46). Even after getting complete recovery, as Latif fails to manage money to go home, once again the Tarini sisters stretch their helping hands to him. They all together collect the fund necessary for his going home. Latif's experience of the Tarini sisters' welfare activities makes him to think "if ever there was a place called Heaven, this was it" (Rokeya, *Padmarag*, 58).

The great hearts of the Tarini sisters are so well occupied with the social welfare activities that they do not count even an enemy as an enemy when he is distressed. The British colonizer Robinson who had murdered the innocent brother and nephew of Siddika and brought false accusation of murder against her, received Siddika's benevolence at the eleventh hour of his life. Even though she recognized her enemy who had destroyed her whole family, she nursed him at the hospital. Instead of seeking revenge she provided him solace at his guilty, tortured heart. While dying, Robinson expressed his utmost gratitude to her: "Zainab! I have seen that you are alive. Now I can die in peace. But you have repaid my debt beyond what I had hoped for. I had caused you much distress, whereas you have given me back my peace of mind- you have nursed me yourself. You are to be lauded! You are a valiant young woman." (Rokeya, *Padmarag*, 166- 167).

Valiant Siddika and all other women of Tarini Bhavan also provide relief, which includes nursing services, to areas affected by natural disasters like famine and flood.

Thus the self- dedicated welfare services of the women of Tarini Bhavan encompass the whole society. They are indeed the soldiers of humanity. Ishan speaks about them:

The sound of poor people weeping
Once penetrated the gates of heaven.
The lord of the world took pity
And rained flowers on them.
The various and beautiful flowers of heaven
Fell to the earth;
Here and there. Where they could,
They flowered in the groves of humanity.
People are so mired
That they do not love to care for flowers.
The flowers said to God,
“Why did you send us to man’s abode?”
So the lord, the sea of compassion,
Wove a garland with the flowers fallen from heaven,
From then on in Tarini Bhavan are found
Daughters of the gods, the “sisters of the poor”.(Rokeya, *Padmarag*, 59).

CONCLUSION

The complete sketch of Rokeya’s ideal country needs its total workforce- both men and women, to get its practical form. It will be left as nothing but a utopian land until and unless half of its presently inactive workforce- the women folk, is turned into empowered ones. In other words, a completely developed country is an unattainable one without the empowerment of its womenfolk. That is why Rokeya makes a heart- ridden urge to her country women to wake up- to wake up for the good of society. Rokeya had always thought about the ways of emancipation of women from the patriarchal prison. From her early age, she dedicated herself to seek the treatment for the sores of society. She dreamt of and worked for making women equal of men in the treatment of every right and opportunity. Empowered women of *Sultana’s Dream* and *Padmarag* are her literary embodiments.

Rokeya's soldiers are the soldiers of humanity and their war is declared against the injustices, injuries, mires, corruptions of the society. Ladyland and Tarini Bhavan are not forts of weapons; instead these are forts of love, affection, tenderness, humanitarian values and deeds. All distressed are embraced here. Even enemies get the treatment of brotherhood. The empowered women are unconditionally devoted for humanity and the welfare of the society. They are not burden for others. As, the one, who himself/ herself is a burden cannot work for others. Thus, empowered women abolish everything that is devilish and establish the enlightened good in the society. Their aim is to reach the harmony of life with the harmony of men and women, enlightenment and empowerment.

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