

## **Empowering Women as the Means of Emancipation: A Critical Study of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream***

**Mst. Rahima Akter**

Department of English, National Institute of Textile Engineering and Research  
(NITER), Nayarhar, Savar, Dhaka-1350.

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ijahct.14/vol9n1921>

Published June 18,2023

---

**Citation:** Akter M.R. (2023) Empowering Women as the Means of Emancipation: A Critical Study of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*, *International Journal of Asian History, Cultures and Traditions*, Vol.9, No.1, pp.9-21

---

**ABSTRACT:** *Sultana's Dream* is a notable literary creation of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, where she delineates the nuanced picture of patriarchy, the distress of women caused by patriarchal oppression, and the way of women's emancipation. Women were denied every right and chance in life due to patriarchal oppression. The male authorities even ill-treated them in the confinement of four walls. In *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya emphasized women's empowerment for the emancipation of women from the manacle of a ruthless male-dominated society. Instead of a male-dominated society, she envisioned and strived for a developed society that included men's and women's cooperation and contributions. In the light of Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream*, this research study will seek to trace women's empowerment as a means of their emancipation from the shackles of patriarchy. This study will also focus on the context of women before their empowerment, problems with unempowered women, obstacles to women empowerment, and other relevant issues with women empowerment.

**KEYWORDS:** women empowerment, women education, women emancipation, economic freedom, patriarchal oppression.

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was a visionary, who dreamt of and worked for a fair and equitable society where women would be empowered, self-dependent, and beneficial resources of society. *Sultana's Dream* is one of her notable literary works that delineates her dream and vision related to women as empowered ones, free from the inhumane shackles of patriarchy.

Throughout her life, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, a women educationist, social activist, and a legendary worker of humanity, struggled for the equal rights of men and women in Bengal. To overcome the oppression and exploitation of patriarchal society, she felt women's education and empowerment as an urgent necessity. Rokeya established a

school for girls to take women at this length, namely Sakhawat Memorial Girl's School, and an association for Muslim Women - 'Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam.' The activities of these organizations were directly related to the education and empowerment of women. Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam offered vocational training for women from financially deprived backgrounds, provided aid for widows in distress, rescued and sheltered battered women, and helped low-income families to marry off their daughters. Rokeya also ran a slum literacy program in Calcutta to teach slum women reading, writing, personal hygiene, child care, and income-generating works. She presided over the Bengal Women's Education Conference convened in Calcutta, the first significant attempt to unite women to support women's education rights. Rokeya focused on the necessity of women's empowerment for the advancement of society in all her literary creations like *Motichur*, *Padmarag*, *Abarodhbashini*, etc. Her urge to demolish hindrances working in the way of women's empowerment is voiced everywhere in her writings.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* is a powerfully written story against the oppression of women. It portrays Rokeya's strong call for women's release from the prison of patriarchy. This story presents her firm belief that women's emancipation and participation in all walks of life are not just idle dreams. In this feminist utopia, Rokeya opens up the inherent capabilities of women. Here women are shown as confident and self-reliant with their education and empowerment. Through her portrayal of women governed territory, she establishes her belief that women are intelligent human beings and can even be good administrators if provided with the necessary opportunities. In *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya treats patriarchal reality as a threatening space, whereas this utopian story is presented as the liberating one. This visionary piece of Rokeya shows women's education and empowerment as the solutions to women's misery on a national level.

The writing style of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is also a way to raise popular consciousness. Humour, irony, and satire are used to focus attention on the injustices faced by women. Her writing style is not a bitterly attacking one. The treatment of menfolk is not like extreme opponents. Instead, she focuses on the oppressive social customs that hinder women's advancement and ultimate social development through her mild irony, humour, and satire. In her writings, the oppressive patriarchal psyche of men is condemned and advocated for modification. Her reformation movement seeks a harmonious world where man and woman will be the assistant of one another, and together they will walk towards the way of enlightenment and progression.

Rokeya's vision of women empowerment and a developed, equitable society is not a daydream. Empowered, self-dependent women of *Sultana's Dream* are the literary successors of her vision. These women prove their inner intelligence, turn themselves from burdens to resources of the society and flourish as devoted humanitarian workers for the social welfare.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The enriched storehouse of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's literary works is the source of interest and inspiration for many for being superior in merits and bearing incredibly courageous and resilient struggle for women's emancipation against the hostile, unfavourable conditions of the society. Consequently, many literary criticisms have been made of her life and works.

In the essay "A Not So Banal Evil: Rokeya in Confrontation with Patriarchy," Srimati Mukherjee of Temple University, USA, addresses Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's evaluation of the causes of women's misfortunes in the early twentieth-century India. She also shows the impediments created by patriarchal society to hinder the works of activist women and situates them within the limits of the authoritarian patriarchal vision.

Farzana Zaman, Mahbuba Sultana, and Marzia Shurovi define *Sultana's Dream* as an intriguing example of a feminist utopia in their literary study "Women in Virginia Woolf and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: A View from Western and Islamic Perspective." They analyze *Sultana's Dream* as an academic work exploring the feminine inner self and showing women as confident with their education and financial condition.

The essay "Sultana's Utopian Awakening: An Ecocritical Reading of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*" by Fayeza Hasanat, University of Central Florida, USA, examines *Sultana's Dream* in contexts of utopian fiction and ecofeminism. It also focuses on Rokeya's inherent desire to give the women of her society an illusory experience of freedom outside purdah and beyond the four walls of the zenana.

Shagufta F. Hakeem's "The Writings of Rokeya Hossain: A pioneer of her time whose writings hold relevance today" (2015) highlights a system in which men subjugate women based on religion.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research study on "Empowering Women as the Means of Emancipation: A Critical Study of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*" is a qualitative research by category and while conducting this study I have pursued the following methods and procedures:

To enrich this study I have analyzed both primary and secondary resources. As my primary resources I have examined the original literary piece of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain- *Sultana's Dream*.

Another literary work of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain- *Motichur*, true stories from her *Abarodhbashini*, critical texts, research papers, essays and articles of prominent critics and authors on Rokeya have been used as secondary resources for this study. For the

well accomplishment of my work I have also utilized library resources. To provide my study a theoretical framework I have gone through feminist literary theories and applied relevant ones in the development of my arguments.

## **CRITICAL STUDY ON *SULTANA'S DREAM* REGARDING THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AS A MEANS OF EMANCIPATION**

*Sultana's Dream* by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain tells the story of Ladyland, which is governed with the help of scientific knowledge and technological advances. New world order is established in this utopian land. Here, women are provided with educational, economic, political, and legal rights, while men are confined within the mardana. The empowered women of Ladyland have established this new world order and freed themselves from the earlier male-centred and dominated society where their needs were left unmet. Though the imagination in *Sultana's Dream* is delightful, the reality it bears underneath is unavoidable. The stark reality of patriarchy and in its opposition, Rokeya's advocacy for the emancipation of women from this dominant rule through achieving empowerment holds the centre of this literary fiction.

To confirm empowerment for women, Rokeya struggled all through her life. Behind this long struggle for women, the prevalent context of her era was the causal factor. The South Asian context of that era was to keep women at home and confine them to household chores. In Shamsun Nahar's depiction of the miserable condition of women in *Rokeya Jibani*, we find women of all creeds, castes, religions, and regions as the victims of ignorance and confinement. Rokeya dedicated her whole life to ending this horrible plight of women.

*Sultana's Dream* depicts so many evil practices of patriarchy that are working as hindrances to women's empowerment and, therefore, women's emancipation. The dominant ones are the deprivation of women from education, the seclusion of women by religious purdah custom, child marriage, demeaning attitude toward women's capabilities, denial of women from all sorts of social affairs, etc. The women of the Ladyland are now free of these obstacles caused by patriarchy. These empowered women are the inspirational models for all other women.

### **Women's Lack of Access to Education Stands as an Impediment to Their Empowerment and Emancipation**

*Sultana's Dream* delineates how women can advance with the assistance of education. It can be defined as a literary milestone in the case of women's education. Women of the Ladyland have not educated only in the basic sense; they are the intellectuals of their country. They are attending universities to sharpen their intellect and prove themselves useful to the country. The educated women of Ladyland emancipate themselves from the shackles of patriarchy successfully. Being conscious about their rights in every sector of life like politics, economics, social affairs, etc., they secure their rights effectively. They also contribute to the development of the country. With

the contribution of the educated women, Ladyland takes a new look. Their scientific learning and creative thinking assist them in using the various gifts of science like electricity, solar heat collector, water balloon, etc., in making their lives much more comfortable. Using their knowledge of horticulture, the women of Ladyland decorate their country like a lovely garden.

At the very beginning stage of their journey towards emancipation and empowerment, the women of Ladyland, therefore, endeavoured for education. However, we might presume that the ladies of the Ladyland were left in the dark of illiteracy before the queen of the Ladyland declared education compulsory for all girls. The women of Sultana's country are still in no better context. Likewise, almost all the women of Rokeya's time were drowned in the bottomless ocean of darkness. Only education could show the literary blind women of Bengal the light of emancipation and give them the strength of empowerment. But, between women and education, patriarchy always worked as a hindrance. In the essay "The Degradation of Women," Rokeya states the patriarchal obstacles in the way of women's education:

The sun does not enter our bedrooms, and likewise, our minds are not visited by the light of knowledge, for there are hardly any schools or colleges for us. Men can study as much as they like but will the doors of the storehouse of knowledge be ever fully open for us? If a generous and great soul ever comes with outstretched hands to lift us, there will be hundreds to put up obstacles in his way. One person cannot progress against a thousand. So a spark of hope is reduced to ashes in the darkness of despair before it can brighten into a flame. (21)

Rokeya's reality was similar, as she never had a formal education. In keeping with the sentiments of his time, Rokeya's father resisted women's education. He did not want his daughters to attend a school or pursue knowledge in any form, except for the skills to read the Quran without knowing or understanding its meaning.

On the other hand, her brothers, Ibrahim Saber and Khalil Saber, received good formal education. Thus in the case of women and their education, the treatment of patriarchy was one-eyed. Rokeya's intellectual consciousness got hurt to see such partiality in society which finds its expression in the essay "The Better Half":

Does a man who keeps four tutors for the son have two governesses for his daughter? His son might get three degrees (till BA), but does his daughter get even one and a half (Entrance and a failed FA)? You cannot count the number of boys' schools, but are there any schools for girls at all? The brother might get the title Shams- ul- Ulama but does the sister get the title Najamul Olama? (49)

Rokeya opposed long-held beliefs about women's education in her works, arguing that women are equal to men and that becoming independent thinkers would allow women to take control of their own lives rather than being a burden on their spouses or families. Rokeya claimed education as the fundamental right of women. In her article "God Gives, Man Robs," she refers to the famous saying of the great prophet of Islam, "Talibul Urn farizatu ala kulli Muslimeen- o- Muslimat" (It is the bounden duty of all Muslim males and females to acquire knowledge). (Hossain, 92)

### **Women's Seclusion is Another Hindrance to Their Empowerment and Emancipation**

Besides emphasizing the importance of women's education, Rokeya also takes concern about women's emancipation from the seclusion of society in *Sultana's Dream*. By secluding women at home, men deprive women of opportunities to enrich their minds and gain empowerment. Continued seclusion makes them ignorant and dependent. For this reason, Sultana is "no better than a frog in a well" (Hossain, *Sultana's Dream*, 6). Seclusion at home has made her ignorant and frightened about the outside world. As we see, Sultana agrees to come out of the house to have a walk with Sister Sara only when she knows that it is night, servants are asleep, and there is no fear of coming in contact with any man. Patriarchy has justified this seclusion by the name of religion.

Rokeya was also a victim of this seclusion custom and was brought up in the strictest purdah practised by elite Muslims. From the age of five, she was prohibited from interacting with men or even women outside her family circle. In *Sultana's Dream*, she delineates Sultana as the representative character of all the secluded women like her. Being brought up in an enclosed and segregated family environment, Sultana feels uncomfortable and looks timid in the outside world. These are the privileges the men wanted to draw from the seclusion system. Once women get habituated to this imprisoned seclusion and become uncomfortable in the outer world, men will gain an unhindered reign over society. At the fulfilment of their plan and intention, gradually, the captivated women accepted their inhuman secluded lives as their lot and part of their religion. But Rokeya believed that the women never received it to their heart's content. She presents it in *Sultana's Dream* in a reversed way. Sultana felt curious to know whether the men of the Ladyland did ever try to come out of the zenana. The assumed sister Sara then replied to her that they tried indeed. The men of Ladyland wanted to be free, but the queen discarded all their appeals. Since then, "they are accustomed to the purdah system and have ceased to grumble at their seclusion" (Hossain, *Sultana's Dream*, 11). This reverse presentation portrays a bitter truth of practical life where the patriarchal society does not care to know the agonized feelings of the secluded women.

The inhumanity of the purdah custom leaves us speechless as we go through Shamsun Nahar's quoted lines about Rokeya's personal experience of one of her aunts-in-law going from Bhagalpur to Patna on a train:

She had to change trains at one station. She became entangled in her borqa (long veil from head to feet) and fell on the track. She had a maid with her. There were no other women at the station at the time and when the coolies (male workers) rushed to help her, the maid forbade them to touch her even when she herself could not pick her up. After about half an hour she was completely crushed under the train. (qtd. in Dil and Dil, 25)

Such horror of purdah prevailed in every sector of society. In the essay "The Degradation of Women," Rokeya mentions such purdahnishin (veiled) women as 'living luggages' and portrays their miserable context in the following lines:

We have become such 'living luggages' that we are nothing but drawing-room ornaments. Dear reader, have you ever seen the living luggages called the daughter-in-law of a wealthy Muslim family of Bihar? I will show you the portrait of such a begum. She should have been kept in a museum to show fitting respect to women. There is this dark room with two doors, one of which is kept closed and the other open. So, (because of the ruling of purdah) fresh air and sunlight cannot enter the room. (19)

Rokeya's heart bled to see such pictures of women in purdah. In *Abarodhbashini*, Rokeya details 47 reports of women in confinement and the inhumanity of life in seclusion. Rokeya was often told that her stories sounded like myths, but she declared that every one of them was true. The Muslim women were the victims of this evil practice of the veil, which was also a reason for suffering for Hindu women. In his preface to the book Shamsun Nahar's *Rokeya Jibani*, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji wrote that he knew of the veiling custom among the Hindus of the western part of India who used to take their women in a palki to the Ganges for bathing. They used to dip the whole palki in the river so that no one would see the woman. Thus, the evil practice of veil custom grasped the entire society. It was nothing but one of the strategies of patriarchy to keep women secluded from the world of light.

This veil custom was a significant obstacle to women's empowerment and emancipation. Rokeya realized it by heart and continued her endeavour to stop this maltreatment of patriarchy. In her essay "The Burkha" ("The Veil"), she writes about the excesses of extreme seclusion. She was not against purdah for modesty and decorum, but in her view, purdah did not mean confinement. She writes: "We shall keep necessary and moderate purdah. We shall keep veils... We should refine and remodel the coarse burkha worn now." (Hossain, "The Veil," 73). Rokeya herself also maintained the purdah custom of her religion, Islam. She never encouraged women to be out of purdah. She was only against the seclusion tradition of patriarchy, which was often imposed upon women by the name of purdah. In the essay "The Better Half," Rokeya speaks about Parsee women brought outside by their males to imitate the West. "At present their purdah – slavery is gone, but has their mental enslavement also vanished? No, certainly not.....they remain the same living luggage's that they have

been earlier." (44). Rokeya's focus was on the mental development of the women and their necessary emancipation from seclusion.

I do not want to break their religious or social ties in order to bring them out into the open. There is no need for Hindus to forsake Hinduism and for Christians to forsake Christianity in order to bring about mental development. The mind can be set free while still preserving the distinctive feature of each group. (Hossain, "The Better Half", 52)

*Sultana's Dream* presents women carrying on their education and scientific research in women's universities. The essay "The Burkha" (The Veil) mentions Rokeya's suggestion that "with separate girls' schools and adequate teachers, we could both maintain the obligatory minimum of purdah and still educate our women." (75) In this way, Rokeya pointed out the obstacles to women's empowerment and provided society with possible solutions through her logical words and story depictions.

### **Child Marriage as an Obstacle to Women's Empowerment and Emancipation**

Child marriage was another curse for girls in a patriarchal society. It was one of the obstacles in their way of empowerment. In *Sultana's Dream*, before the generous queen of the Ladyland stopped the early marriage of the girls, this was prevalent there too. As the women began to walk on emancipation and empowerment, early marriage was consequently stopped. Through her writings, Rokeya wanted to raise consciousness against child marriage as it was a significant hindrance to women's education and empowerment. In her essay "The Better Half," Rokeya mentions that most girls get married before finishing their primary learning, let alone higher education and empowerment. As a consequence, they remain in the utter darkness of ignorance. They cannot work for the development of their country. Instead, they become obstacles in the way of its advancement. In the Ladyland of *Sultana's Dream*, the ruler declares, "No woman was to be allowed to marry before she was twenty-one" (Hossain, 7) as part of her concern for women empowerment and emancipation. This minimum age limit for marriage allows women to concentrate on self-development. They get the scope to carry on their study without any hindrance. They feel motivated to creative thinking and welfare activities for the country. Consequently, the women of Ladyland become successful in empowering themselves and contributing to their country's development. Rokeya discusses the Islamic prohibition of underage marriage and its unchecked continuation in society in her article "God Gives, Man Robs."

While Islam allows every freedom to women (so much so that a woman cannot be given in marriage without her consent of the free will, which indirectly prohibits child- marriage), we see people giving away their daughters in marriage at tender ages or giving them in marriage without their consent. (93)

Patriarchy misconstrued religion at times to conform to and perpetuate its reign of terror and oppression over women; at other times, it overtly broke religious standards and



demonstrated its defiance. Behind all these tactics, its sole intention was to resist women's emancipation and empowerment. But intellectuals like Rokeya always stretched their hands to save the women from this mire and empower them. Patriarchy never spared those intellectual reformers and their disciple women who wished and tried to improve their dismal context of its bitter criticism and demeaning attitude.

### **Demeaning Attitudes towards Women's Capabilities in Patriarchal Social Establishment**

Women were always discouraged and looked down on by men in all their endeavours of being empowered. They were treated as inferior beings and thought fit only for household work.

Rokeya delineates a literary land, Ladyland in *Sultana's Dream*, which women excellently administer to prove the menfolk wrong in their assumption of women as inferior beings. Moreover, to prove the worth of women's intellect, she keeps the men entirely apart from all its economic and political dealings. Here, she provides women with proper education and facilities. Then, she presents them as perfectly empowered women who achieved excellence in all spheres of life. In some cases, they even excel over their male counterparts. As we see, the female of Ladyland wins over their enemies on the battlefield by employing the rays of concentrated sunlight and heat. In this way, they avoid bloodshed and save their country's honour and liberty. The female university members' scientific discovery of the solar heat collector, which the men once laughed at and mocked as a 'sentimental nightmare,' now saved their land from the foreign invaders. *Sultana's Dream*, thus, breaks the long-cherished concepts of men about women as inferior beings and presents the empowered women as excellent contributors to social development activities.

Regarding women and their emancipation, the belief of Marxist feminists resembles the thought of Rokeya. The Marxist feminists believe women's economic freedom is the basis of their liberation. In "The Degradation of Women," Rokeya states- "There are many who think that women tolerate the mastery of men because they benefit from man's hard-earned money or wealth. This, to a certain extent, is true."(23) The statement implies that women have to remain subservient to men because of their economic dependency. For this reason, as Rokeya opines, men leave women unable to earn and dependent on them for financial issues. Women will earn only when they are well-trained and educated.

The book *Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: The Emancipator* (1980) by Hasina Joarder and Safiuddin Joarder focuses on *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft as a strong voice against writers like Rousseau who thought that women were inherently inferior. Wollstonecraft lashed against Rousseau, who remarked that little girls' fondness for dolls was inherently childish. She wrote that she had observed more girls in their infancy than Rousseau, and they had all

the rational and intellectual abilities as boys. She believed that with proper education and training, a woman could do as well as a man in any sphere of human activity. (Dil and Dil, *Women's Changing Position in Bangladesh: Tribute to Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain*, 28).

### **Rokeya's Witty Attacks on Patriarchal Evils**

In 1905, when Rokeya's husband read *Sultana's Dream*, he commented, 'A terrible revenge'! Here, Rokeya applies witty weapons of arguments to challenge the patriarchal evils. She coined the term 'mannish' to contrast with 'womanish.' The term 'womanish' is used to describe someone who does not fit patriarchy's definitions of manhood, which consists of unflappable attitude, aggressiveness, courageous actions, and so on. That means that patriarchy looks down on its womenfolk as inferior ones and wants its menfolk to be noticeably different from them. To stand against such irrespective behaviour of men towards women, Rokeya uses the term 'mannish,' which stands for defining anyone of the Ladyland who looks shy and timid like men. Rokeya also introduces 'mardana' to counter the existing patriarchal term 'zenana.' She mentions mardana as the proper place for men against the patriarchal claim of zenana as the appropriate place for women. In India, when Rokeya was carrying out her reformation movement of educating girls and making women free from seclusion, she was accused of bringing women out of purdah and breaking the rules of religion. The patriarchal social system was always favouring women's confinement at home. It found the society as a well-ordered one without a single woman visible in the outside world.

To give society a proper lesson, in *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya takes the turn of presenting the land of Ladyland as a beautiful one only when men are imprisoned at home. "Since the mardana system has been established, there has been no more crime or sin." (Hossain, *Sultana's Dream*, 11) It's only purity that reigns over the land. Further, Rokeya presents women's love for Beauty and Knowledge against men's thoughtless preference for militarism and war. Women save the land and adorn it in a commendable, healthy manner, whereas the men of Ladyland indulge in fruitless and continual combat, depleting themselves and their country's precious resources. So many other witty attacks on patriarchal evils are there in *Sultana's Dream*, all of which are meant to make men conscious of their follies and injustices to women and provide women with the taste of the delicacy of freedom through empowerment.

### **Women's Responsibilities to Themselves**

In its invocation of the empowerment and emancipation of women, *Sultana's Dream* does not spare women of their respective duties. Sister Sara does not feel convinced by Sultana's claim that women of her country cannot help themselves but stay shut up in the zenana as men's power is more vital than women's. Instead, she accuses women of irresponsibility regarding their duties- "You have neglected the duty you owe to yourselves, and you have lost your natural rights by shutting your eyes to your interests." (Hossain, *Sultana's Dream*, 5) Rokeya blames women for their degeneration in her essay "The Better Half." She states, "we have become inefficient because men

have deprived us of education." (Hossain, "The Better Half," 52) In the following lines, she further states- "the ladies do much less work than they should. We have become comfort-loving to an inordinate extent. We do not make proper use of our hands and feet, our eyes and minds and other faculties." (Hossain, "The Better Half," 52) Besides appealing to the patriarchal society to remove its hindrances from women's empowerment, she also appeals to women to wake up from their slumber and perform their responsibilities to themselves and society.

### **The Foresight of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain**

Women empowerment and emancipation were not idle dreams for Rokeya. She did not write *Sultana's Dream* only to amuse its readers. The frame of dreams mentioned in it was her vision of life, and she did not build the castle of her vision in the air. She had witnessed some of her dreams come true before her death. Shamsun Nahar's *Rokeya Jibani* (1937) provides the information:

When Shamsun Nahar earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Calcutta Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was so pleased that she arranged a big party in her honor and called it 'a success in her own life and that her dream of seeing a lady magistrate or a lady barrister was becoming a possibility'. In the words of Shamsun Nahar her joy was overwhelming. (qtd. in Dil and Dil, 24)

### **CONCLUSION**

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain wants to dismantle gender discrimination, the platform of all patriarchal evils and proposes that both men and women should equally contribute to the advancement of society. She does not treat men simply as women's enemies. Rokeya is strong in denouncing men who regard women merely as dolls and want to exercise unquestioned authority over them. She respects gender-egalitarian men who realize the cost society has to pay for the absence of female education and empowerment. Rokeya does not criticize men only for women's sufferings, as women are also responsible for their plight. So they should shoulder equal or even greater responsibility to improve their miserable contexts. Rokeya believes that women have to organize themselves to assert themselves in a patriarchal society. They have to believe that they do not belong to the class of enslaved people. Their goal should be the one to gain equality with men.

The consequence of Rokeya's life-long struggle is not confined only to the literary world. Her courageous voice to break the gender discrimination in society reaches every corner of the society and therefore shakes it towards a new awakening. Women of deep slumber, too, become aware of a change and begin to learn about their rights and duties. About one hundred years ago, women did not know their rights. As a result, men used the chance to suppress women as their inferiors. Rokeya's utmost attempt was to make people understand that the world cannot be a peaceful place without equal rights for

men and women. Women are now looking forward to shaping their own lives, households, communities, and nations. Thus, Rokeya's work, passion, and philosophy of life are not entirely in vain to establish in the people's socio-psychological senses that education and economic freedom form the foundation for women's empowerment and are unavoidable parts of social development.

Though to some extent, the situation has been changed, the sufferings, torture, challenges of obstacles, and fight for proper rights are still there in the way of women. Women are still suffering for fundamental rights. They are still struggling to vanquish the disparities between males and females. They are working to end violence against women. Women empowerment is still a term often unfairly associated only with feminism and female concerns, hindering its broader flourishing. Because of this cornered viewpoint, it escapes the concerns of many. *Sultana's Dream* invokes women's empowerment from a more general humanitarian view. It intends to show that although women's empowerment mainly focuses on women's rights, it sets its ultimate goal in the overall development of society. It also emphasizes women's responsibilities to their own lives and social welfare. Men's assistance and contribution to women's empowerment are highly regarded too.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, women experienced improved access to services, credit markets, and education. The women in the present societies of South Asian countries, especially Bangladesh, enjoy more freedom. However, despite the recent economic growth and changing social norms, women cannot enjoy freedom as they are always under the pity of a male-dominated society. While during the nineteenth century down to Rokeya's time, the predominant concerns of feminist movements in South Asia were child marriage, women's lack of access to formal education, purdah, and legal disabilities; in present-day societies, new problems have emerged, such as gendered domestic violence, dowry- divorce, dowry-death, exploitation of female workers etc. Women's lives are still conscripted by the choices and decisions of the men in their lives. They are considered fit only to deliver children and unfit to withstand critical situations. Over 100 years after *Sultana's Dream* was first published, the zenana still exists, not physically, but in the mindsets and attitudes of people.

Rokeya's dream of women empowerment as the means of emancipation and overall development will come true if men's traditional outlook and approach towards women are changed. Discriminating mindset between men and women should be turned away from thought and action to materialize the beliefs and views, dreams, and expectations of Rokeya. The women will be able to recuperate from the rigorous patriarchal society, make self-development and lead a happy life if they walk through the designed way of Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream*. Women still have a long way to go to achieve their goals. Distressed women may seek the course of emancipation and empowerment by following the directions suggested by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in her precious writing *Sultana's Dream*.

## REFERENCES

- Begum, Hasna. ed. *Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain the Feminist: Views and Visions*. Dhaka: *Sucheepatra*, 2011.
- Dil, Anwar and Afia Dil. *Women's Changing Position in Bangladesh: Tribute to Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain*. Vol.11. San Diego: Intercultural Forum; Dhaka: Adorn Publication, 2014.
- Falguni, Audity. "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, *Sultana's Dream* and Woman Power." *Daily Star* 11 Dec. 2010.
- Hasan, Mahmudul. "Commemorating Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Contextualizing her Work in South Asian Muslim Feminism." *Asiatic*. Vol. 7, No.2 (2013): 39-56.
- Hasanat, Fayeza. "Sultana's Utopian Awakening: An Ecocritical Reading of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*." *Asiatic*, Vol.7, No. 2 (2013): 114-124.
- Islam, Shafiqul, and Rama Islam. "Emancipation of Women through Education and Economic Freedom: A Feminist Study of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's Utopias." *SUST Journal of Social Science*. Vol. 18, No.4 (2012): 11-19.
- Jalil, Alamgir. ed. *Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain Rachanasamagraha* [Rokeya's Collected Works]. Dhaka: Emon Press, 2006.
- Kader, Ruhul. "Remembering Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: A Trailblazer in the Rights, Education and Modernization of Bengali Muslim Women." Web. 7 Mar. 2013.
- Miah, Moniruzzaman. "A Feminist Critical Evaluation of How Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's Language of Protest Deplored Patriarchy and Social Anachronism in the British Bengal." *Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 41-50. Web. 30 Oct. 2014.
- Mukherjee, Srimati. "A Not So Banal Evil: Rokeya in Confrontation with Patriarchy." *Asiatic*. Vol. 7, No.2 (2013): 82-93.
- Ray, Bharati. "A Feminist Critique of Patriarchy: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880- 1932)." *Asiatic*. Vol. 7, No.2 (2013): 60-80.
- Hossain, R. S. *Sultana's Dream and Padmarag*. Trans. Barnita Bagchi. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005.
- Hossain, R. S. *Motichur*. Trans. Ratri Ray and Prantosh Bandyopadhyay. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Sarkar, Mahua. "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and the Debate over Gender Relations among Muslim Intellectuals in Late Colonial Bengal." *Asiatic*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2013): 7-20.
- Zakaria, Rafia. "The Manless World of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain." Web. 13 Dec. 2013.
- Zaman, Farzana, Mahbuba Sultana and Marzia Shurovi. "Women in Virginia Woolf and Begum Rokeya: A View from Western and Islamic Perspective." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. Vol.21, No.2 (2016): 31-38.