

Sultana's Dream: Religion as an Apparatus in Gender Role Assignment¹

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Abstract

Sultana's Dream, written by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in 1905, is a utopian novella that challenges established gender norms in a manner that effectively undermines the process of conventional gender stereotyping. Hossain's narrative unfolds in Ladyland, a society where women undertake responsibility for various aspects of life, while men are confined to purdah, secluded quarters designated for their isolation. The story, despite its brevity, explores the re-establishment of a matriarchal government, the peaceful stabilization of society, the widespread use of technology without male involvement, the celebration of intellect over physical strength, and the subversion of traditional gender roles, thereby underlining the inherent subordinate conditions of women due to their culture embroidered with religious attributions. Although the story occasionally favours women over men, its purpose, as is proper to the function of utopianism, is to inspire readers by demonstrating the possibility of a better future. This article, therefore, aims to explore the role of religion as an apparatus of the inherent Indian culture in oppressing and isolating women, with reference to Hossain's seminal work, *Sultana's Dream*.

Keywords: purdah, gender construction, religion, subversion of norms, *Sultana's Dream*.

SULTANA'NIN RÜYASI: TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET ROLÜ ATAMASINDA BİR ARAÇ OLARAK DİN

Öz

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain tarafından 1905 yılında kaleme alınan *Sultana'nın Rüyası*, yerleşik toplumsal cinsiyet normlarına meydan okuyan ve geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet kalıplarını yerle bir eden ütöpik bir öyküdür. Hossain'in anlatısı, çeşitli hayati sorumlulukların kadınlar tarafından üstlenildiği, erkeklerin ise kaçgöçe, yani tecrit edilmeleri için belirlenmiş gözlerden uzak bölgelere hapsedildiği bir toplum olan Ladyland'de geçer. Hikâye, kısa olmasına rağmen, kadın egemen bir hükümetin yeniden kurulmasını, toplumun barışçıl bir şekilde istikrara kavuşmasını, erkeklerin katılımı olmadan teknolojinin yaygın kullanımını, fiziksel güç yerine aklın kutsanmasını ve geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet atamalarının altüst edilmesini ele almakta, böylece kadınların dini atıflarla işlenmiş kültürleri nedeniyle doğuştan sahip oldukları ikincil konumlarının altını çizmektedir. Eser zaman zaman kadınları erkeklerden üstün tutsa da yazarın amacı daha iyi bir

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geleceğin mümkün olduğunu göstererek okuyuculara ilham vermektir. Dolayısıyla bu makale, Hossain'in ufuk açıcı eseri *Sultana'nın Rüyası*'na atıfta bulunarak, Hint kültürüne özgü bir aygıt olarak dinin kadınları baskı altına alma ve yalnızlaştırmadaki rolünü incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kaçgöç, toplumsal cinsiyet yapılandırması, din, normların yıkımı, *Sultana'nın Rüyası*

INTRODUCTION

Rokeya Hossain, a Bengali writer, educator, and prominent social activist, played a significant role in advancing the feminist movement for women in India and several Muslim nations. Throughout her more than three decades of literary achievement, Hossain demonstrated exceptional proficiency in a variety of genres, including critical essays, literary fiction, metaphoric narratives, social satire, burlesque, letters, and journalism pieces. Her productivity extended to both Bengali and English languages, earning her widespread praise (Quayum, 2013, p. 1). An extensive examination of her literary works, particularly her novels and essays, reveals her profound resentment against her family and the culture in which she resided. This resentment stems from the collective suffering endured by Hossain and other women in that society, which was seemingly dominated by an indomitable patriarchy. Muhammad A. Quayum (2013) also suggests that Hossain may be composing a response to her parents, reacting to their cold treatment with intense emotions of fury and resentment – sentiments that may have deeply affected her throughout her entire lifetime. Despite Hossain's Muslim aristocratic background, her lifestyle was comparable to that of other females from less affluent households during that era (p. xxi). Given that she was obligated to observe the purdah practice starting at the age of five, the impact of Islam on her family was a substantial factor in her social and familial denigration. Purdah, a practice observed in India, entails the systematic segregation of females from the broader population, irrespective of their age, marital status, or stage of life (Jahan, 1988, p. 45). Roushan Jahan provides a description of the practice as well as its consequences and puts forth that Muslims were deeply troubled by the loosening of purdah restrictions, an issue that had been prohibited by hadith (religious beliefs derived from the teachings of the Prophet) and authorised by the *Quran*. The initial directives, as stated in Surah 24 of the *Quran*, pertained to the observance of modest conduct. Women are expected to avert their eyes and refrain from showcasing their physical attractiveness, unless in the presence of men who fall within the permissible categories (such as husband, father-in-law, brother, sons, stepsons, uncles, children, or slaves). They are also advised to cover their heads and chests with a veil or shawl and avoid drawing unnecessary attention, such as by refraining from wearing conspicuous jewellery. Subsequently, there was a shift in focus towards limiting the freedom of movement and sexual autonomy of women (Jahan, 1988, p. 45).

In her work *The Zenana Women*, Hossain (2013b) explains that upper-class women in India were subjected to even greater seclusion due to the practice of purdah, for this system separates them not only from the males but also from the females (p. 80). Unwed women are prohibited from entering the company of any women, except for immediate family members and domestic servants. Girls from aristocratic families are required to don burkas even when they are in the company of

other women. The perpetual and vexing ordeal that women have endured as a result of cultural and religious restrictions on their individuality has emphasised their mere presence within their respective societies. Not only have they been isolated from others, but they have also been denied the fundamental right to education, which ultimately contributed to their decline and deterioration over time. In her lecture, Hossain vividly recounts the oppressive nature of the purdah practice and the profound impact it had on her life. According to her, if the purdah system were causing distress, the ladies would express their anguish by uttering fervent words of misery. The purdah custom may be more accurately compared to the hazardous gas carbonic acid due to its painless nature; people are unable to take any preventive measures against it, resulting in fatalities. Similarly, women who are confined in purdah are gradually perishing in silence due to the effects of this isolation, without undergoing any physical distress (Hossain, 2013a, p. 130).

This strategy is considered highly effective for confining women to their homes due to the deeply ingrained patriarchal system in India. Deprived of access to education, women remain unaware of their marginalized existence, afflicted by numerous instances of injustice and inequity. Their figurative slumber hinders their awareness of their own barriers, restraints, dehumanization, and lack of visibility; in essence, preventing them from understanding the experience of living as a woman. It is ironic that women can only overcome their ignorance by education, but the purdah culture and interpretations of Islamic rules hinder any educational efforts to enhance their awareness. Essentially, women in India are confined within the oppressive system of patriarchy, which is reinforced and strengthened by religious beliefs, leaving them with little opportunity to break free from their perpetual, systematically reinforced state of inactivity.

As such, this article aims to discuss the idea that gender roles, irrespective of where they are performed, are mere constructs which are prescribed by the accumulation of large and long historical, political, cultural and religious codes. In addition, misinterpretations and malpractices of religions pave the path to the deterioration of the female problem. Although Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* was written approximately seventy years before the second wave of feminism emerged, the work is inclusive of the footsteps of the approaching demand for change. Hence, through referential textual analysis as well as implementation of certain feminist thoughts, this article endeavours to find an answer to how Hossain's inverted universe and her astute novella call for the necessity for prompt implementation of social transformation, placing particular emphasis on its inevitability and attainability. The article also strives for manifesting the way the explicit depiction of "Muslim authoritarianism" in the work challenges the readers' preconceived notions regarding it. It is also the objective of this article to draw the conclusion that Hossain earnestly strives to motivate women to acknowledge their own potential and persuade them that their fate is not exclusively determined by their gender and that they are not inherently inferior to men as well as underscoring the impact that patriarchal impositions, including the purdah system and its limitations, and ideological frameworks that deprive women of their fundamental rights, have had on them.

1. BEGUM ROKEYA SAKHAWAT HOSSAIN'S LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE

Hossain's works can be categorized as spiteful and driven by personal resentment stemming from her familial and societal circumstances. It is noted that despite her aristocratic background, the Muslim nobility adhered to a highly normative and tradition-bound lifestyle, imposing the most stringent type of purdah on their female counterparts (Quayum, 2013, p. xvi). In addition to the pervasive practice of purdah, her resistance against particular religious doctrines, customs, and patriarchy is motivated by the mullahs' manipulation of the essence of Islam in order to preserve the present structure of power. Simultaneously, Hossain found herself linguistically confined inside the boundaries of her family's spoken language. Her privileged family,



Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

with the exception of Bengali, utilised Persian, Arabic, and Urdu as modes of communication. They denied Bengali because, according to Iranian immigrant families such as hers, it was deemed impure for Islam. Consequently, women were unable to reap the advantages of language; they were incapable of reading to become enlightened, nor were they able to vociferate their agonies with intensity. Hossain (2013a) fearlessly challenges these misinterpretations of Islam and eloquently highlights their deficiencies as follows:

Those who are familiar with the history will know that the Arabs used to bury their daughters alive during the barbaric jahiliyah period. Although Islam has successfully prevented the physical killing of baby girls, yet Muslims have been glibly and frantically wrecking the mind, intellect and judgement of their daughters till the present day. Many consider it as a mark of honour to keep their daughters ignorant and deprive them of knowledge and understanding of the world by cooping them up within the four walls of the house. (p. 128)

Undoubtedly, the notions put forth by Hossain in this work are profoundly autobiographical, given that she, too, was confined to her native Urdu and endured the deprivation of academic privileges at the hands of her father. As suggested by Quayum (2013), Abu Ali Sabre, the father of Hossain, steadfastly followed traditional values and customs concerning the academic instruction of his three daughters from his first marriage. However, in regard to the schooling of his sons, he thankfully exhibited a greater openness to progressive concepts. (p. xix). Hossain's personal experiences were particularly influential in her struggle against masculine dominance. She achieved proficiency in English, a language renowned for its influential role in addressing gender issues and its global reach, owing to her brother's private tutoring sessions that took place after everyone in the household had retired for the night. This linguistic prowess is attributed to the language's historical association with colonialism and capitalism, for as a female, Hossain was prohibited from learning English due to

concerns that her religious convictions and Muslim identity would be jeopardised. (Quayum, 2013, p. xxi). The dominance of religion over women is clearly evident, as not all individuals are subject to the same restrictions imposed by God. In other words, if something is prohibited for men, it is automatically forbidden for women as well. Nevertheless, if a certain activity is prohibited for women, it may be unrestricted for men. Put simply, while God views everyone as equal, religious affiliations are still influenced by one's gender. In parallel, in the 19th century, it was customary to stigmatize and see a female child as a burden, and in certain cases, even as a curse, to the family (Quayum, 2013, p. xxi). Hossain made significant efforts to develop awareness among women, enabling them to recognize the deceptive structures prevalent in their cultures. Her aim was to foster a collective consciousness that would empower women to collectively challenge and overcome the dominant ideology.

Hossain dedicated her efforts to found the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School in Calcutta in 1911, firmly believing that education is essential for women to achieve their collective aspirations. Despite facing numerous severe comments and threats, she remained resolute and persevered in order to bring to life her vision of achieving gender equality within her society. In spite of her lack of formal education and expertise in teaching and management, Hossain successfully launched the school with only eight students (Jahan, 1988, p. 42). Over the course of almost twenty years, the school thrived and achieved significant success despite the challenging circumstances. By 1930, the school had undergone a transformation from a primary school, which was established in 1911, to a comprehensive high school that encompassed all ten grades. The curriculum comprised a diverse array of subjects, comprising physical education, sewing, cookery, healthcare, household management, and gardening, in addition to the required main courses of Arabic, Persian, Bangla, English, and Urdu. She prioritized vocational training for girls, aiming to transform them into valuable contributors to their families' financial well-being rather than burdens (Jahan, 1988, p. 42).

In addition to offering the standard state curriculum, the school has implemented vocational programs that enable women to become self-sufficient. Having economic independence is crucial for asserting one's individuality and identity. Otherwise, women would face significant challenges in navigating their path of disenfranchisement. The establishment of the Sakhawat Memorial Girl's School was undoubtedly a significant initiative in promoting awareness among women. However, it was limited to women from the upper and middle classes who had the means to access this opportunity. Therefore, in 1916, Hossain opted to establish Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam, an organisation that could be defined as the Muslim Women's Association. This organization aimed to assist women from the lower socioeconomic class who faced higher levels of disempowerment and illiteracy. Hossain believed it was crucial for all women to comprehend the content and purpose of her writing, making this effort inevitable. Within this organization Hossain provided financial aid to impoverished widows, rescued and provided sanctuary for abused wives, facilitated the marriages of impoverished families' daughters, and most importantly, supported the education of underprivileged women (Jahan, 1988, p. 42). While her support for impoverished families in arranging marriages for their daughters may appear to contradict the feminist movement's fight against male dominance, it was actually necessary in order to reduce the prevalence of child brides.

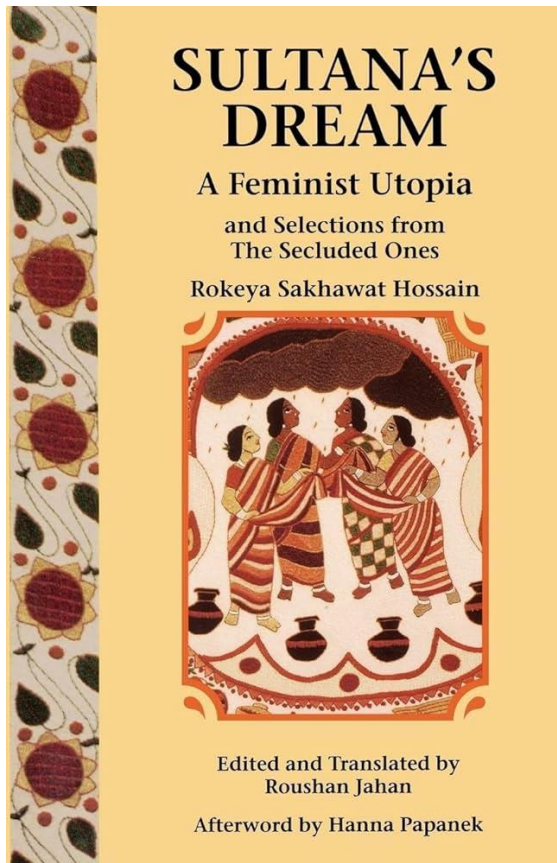
Marrying off young girls to much older men was seen as a means to alleviate familial poverty, as it would decrease the overall population within the family. Moreover, it was prevalent for fathers to engage in the practice of selling their daughters to wealthier people as a way of ensuring the survival of their family.

Therefore, Hossain's artistic methods in her writings are shaped by societal, traditional, cultural, and religious impositions. She strives to convey her ideas in the most straightforward and clear manner possible, ensuring that any woman who reads her works may comprehend her messages and experience a sense of enlightenment. She uses commonly used language, uncomplicated phrase structures, and intentionally plain writing style (Quayum, 2013, p. 4). Thus, in compliance with Horace's description of the purpose of literature which is "pleasure and profit, *dulce et utile, prodesse and delectare*" (Miner, 1978, p. 352), Hossain's writings aim to give her readers a bitter pleasure mingled with deductive ends. Therefore, she does incorporate humour throughout her pieces. One can easily find amusement in a wide range of occurrences and portrayals in her writings. However, her humour is acerbic, frequently characterized by satire, disdainful, and derisive because her humour serves a deep moral purpose rather than being intended solely for comic relief or gentle entertainment (Quayum, 2013, p. 5). Indeed, Hossain's perspective on literature was rooted in its ethical function, which is to evoke empathy for the downtrodden and exploited individuals in society. Furthermore, literature should enhance readers' awareness of the true nature of the human predicament (Quayum, 2013, p. 2). She utilized literature as a reflective tool to enable readers to see themselves clearly and ignite a desire for societal change. This was achieved by fostering an anticipated awakening, rational thinking, self-evaluation, and questioning of established norms. Her primary objective was to engage the reader's intellect and sway their judgement through a persuasive line of reasoning (Quayum, 2013, p. 4).

2. SUBVERSION OF NORMATIVE REFERENTS IN *SULTANA'S DREAM*

Sultana's Dream, written by Hossain, was originally composed in English and later translated into Bengali to accommodate a wider readership of women who faced educational limitations that prevented them from writing in English. Its initial publication appeared in *The Indian Lady's Magazine* in 1905, a period marked by a significant scarcity of female writers. The narrative significantly influenced individuals, eliciting an abrupt wave of astonishment, due to its direct and forceful critique of the typical "Muslim Indian patriarchy". The printing stage of *Sultana's Dream* is noteworthy due to the fact that it was authored by a Bengali woman during a turbulent era. The author was dissatisfied with the oppressive limitations enforced on women by Muslim society, as well as the women's reluctance and lack of resistance in challenging these restrictions. While Khan Bahadur Sakhawat Hossain, Hossain's spouse, was away on an official trip, she found herself entirely secluded in the residence and engaged in the composition of a work to take up her spare time. (Mamun, 2015, p. 236). An additional element of fascination surrounding this feminist utopian fantasy is the account of how her spouse consumed the entirety of *Sultana's Dream* in a single continuous reading experience while standing and exclaiming with a lot of passion: "A Terrible Revenge!" (Mamun, 2015, p. 236). Undoubtedly, *Sultana's Dream* specifically focuses on Muslim

Indian women who seek revenge, as the male characters in this utopian work serve as a reflection of the actual societal conditions experienced by women in reality. Yasmin Hossain (May 1992) presents her argument regarding the motive for Hossain's attack and puts forward that *Sultana's Dream* unveils the dismal state of women and envisions a utopian society where, with proper education, women can assume autonomy over their own lives (p. 1). Therefore, Hossain derisively satirised the Muslim community's situation as she observed it, in which one faction isolated and rendered powerless another faction.



Therefore, by utilising Lyman Tower Sargent's notion of the distorting mirror, Hossain's opus functions as one of these reflections, presenting alternative perspectives on gender roles and the struggle for liberation among women while challenging the deceptive nature of normative conventions (Sargent, 1994, p. 25). Hossain's utopian fantasy offers alternative perspectives with the intention of persuading readers, particularly women, that the inherent structure of our universe unequivocally indicates that the world in which we reside is likewise a product of human ingenuity, controlled by societal conventions that prescribe the expected behaviours of both genders (Ray, 2005, pp. 436 - 437). In *Sultana's Dream*, therefore, Hossain creates an alternate reality where traditional gender roles are altered and challenged. She criticizes false religious beliefs and cultural practices like purdah and abarodh, an invented system stricter than purdah

where women are subject to tight restrictions that prevent them from venturing outside their designated private regions, typically encompassing their dwelling or domestic environment. Particularly, the ultimate intent of abarodh is to strictly segregate and prohibit women from entering the public sphere (Basu, 2010, p. 49). Ultimately, Hossain's narrative envisions a future where men and women coexist on more equitable terms in readers' minds. As is proper to ends of utopian writing, future projection is expected to trigger the possibility of these equitable terms in real life although the projected desire is far too unrealistic for the indigenous circumstances.

The novella commences by appropriately acknowledging utopian conventions, indicating that while the narrative is now fictional, it could perhaps become a reality in the future. By emphasising the existence of viable alternatives and making an unambiguous reference to the utopian convention, the story's status as a dream underscores this point. The central character of the novella, Sultana, becomes entangled in a series of occurrences that transpire beyond her comprehension of the circumstances that have brought her to Ladyland, a fictitious country ruled by women and where males are socially isolated. The reader is apprised that Ladyland constitutes a fictitious society once

Sultana states “I am not sure whether I dozed off or not. But, as far as I remember, I was wide awake” (Hossain, 2005, p. 3). The story’s hazy introduction may be deemed customary in utopian conventions, given the requirement to establish a fictitious nation, metropolis, or appropriate setting in such literary pieces. In addition, Sultana has no recollection of her encounter with Sister Sara, whom she erroneously identifies as one of her acquaintances (Hossain, 2005, p. 3). Creating a depiction of an imaginary society holds great significance for utopian authors, as it allows them to illustrate how individuals in these literary works lead a comfortable existence devoid of the challenges seen in reality. Hossain’s approach compels readers to engage in critical thinking and actively seek out specific strategies for societal development. In other words, she organized her thoughts and arguments to challenge the established hierarchy, to cast doubt on commonly accepted truths, and to inspire others to take the required steps to reform practices she deemed immoral and unfair (Jahan, 1988, p. 3). In addition to seeking revenge for a lengthy past, Hossain was solely focused on achieving *nari jagaran*, which literally translates to rousing women (Shamsunnahar, 1996, as cited in Ray, 2005, p. 448). Hence, Hossain found the utopian legacy to be the most appropriate literary style to motivate people to pursue their aspirations, much like Sultana did.

The Bengali nation considers *Sultana’s Dream* by Hossain to be one of the most appalling and worrisome works of its time, primarily because of its depiction of the complete reversal of gender roles. As stated earlier, the narrative encompasses a variety of character reversals, including labouring outside the home, childcare, preparing food, performing domestic duties, ruling the nation, and undertaking research in the sciences. The purpose of these role shifts is to contest the notion that particular roles in society ought to be determined exclusively by biological gender. While it is fallacious to assert that there exist solely two genders, male and female, in the contemporary era, ignoring these two genders would probably result in the abolition of recognised roles that are predominately determined by genetic makeup. Judith Butler (2007) discusses this viewpoint and draws the conclusion that when the concept of gender is seen as completely separate from biological sex, gender becomes an artificial construct that is not tied to any specific characteristics (p. 9). This suggests that terms like ‘man’ and ‘masculine’ are acceptable to be employed interchangeably to refer to a female or male body, and similarly, ‘woman’ and ‘feminine’ may be utilised interchangeably to refer to a male or female physique.

Given Butler’s theoretical framework, it is therefore reasonable to contend that Simon de Beauvoir’s (1956) assertion, “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (p. 273), does not solely pertain to women, given that the pronoun ‘one’ could be alluded to both males and females. Moreover, gender is a construct that is manifested through actions and behaviours. Put differently, gender roles are likely to be flexible and not restricted to one gender alone if we consider gender to be an entity that transcends the confines of a particular species. This is because gender roles encompass all the historical and cultural influences that have shaped them. Furthermore, “if we view gender as an accomplishment, an achieved property of situated conduct, our attention shifts from matters internal to the individual and focuses on interactional and, ultimately, institutional arenas” (West & Zimmerman, June 1987, p. 127). To put it differently, gender, thus, turns out to be an individual’s performance, historically regulated by societal, cultural, and institutional

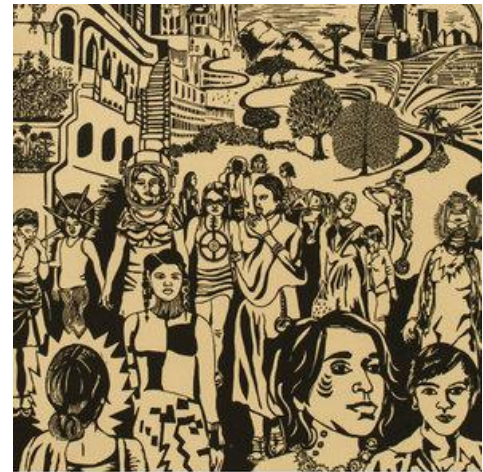
accumulations. Given this perspective, it is equally plausible to argue that gender is not inherently tied to biological sex; rather, it is shaped by various conceptions, which are easily deconstructed once the potent ideology is subverted, for “people act with the awareness that they will be judged according to what is deemed appropriate feminine or masculine behaviour” (Deutsch, 2007, p. 106), which, in the end, is a strong implication of how gender is what one does whereas sex is how one is categorized at birth in accordance with genitals or chromosomes. In other words, “the particular meanings attached to [...] gender-appropriate actions can derive only from the contexts in which all normative orders acquire their power: historically specific institutional and collective practices in the ‘natural’ (and thus ‘rightful’) allocation of material and symbolic resources” (Fenstermaker & West, 2002, p. 213). These resources are materialized as a consequence of the interaction of the societal entities within the society itself. As such, “various types of social activity are brought to adequate description and thus rendered ‘account-able’ [...] [since] ordinary members of society are engaged in descriptive accountings of states of affairs to one another” (Heritage, 2007, p. 136).

Therefore, Hossain aims to challenge the rigid definitions and establishment of gender roles, particularly within the Bengali Muslim society. This is to ensure that the limitations and restrictions imposed on women’s lives and freedom due to societal expectations based on their biological characteristics are eliminated. The author's aim is to engage in an active critique and confrontation of Bengali society. She acknowledged that to bolster her position, she would have to refute the conservatives’ opposite perspectives and educate women with regard to the requirement to transform (Jahan, 1988, p. 47). As a result, Hossain subjects males to their own rules and grants women the privilege to exercise political and legal authority (Hasanat, 2013, p. 117) in Ladyland. In other words, she discovers the remedy by offering women an improved society and transforming patriarchy into matriarchy, so capturing the attention and challenging the deeply ingrained conventions and traditions of both men and women.

At the outset of the novella, Sultana experiences indecision on whether to venture outside due to her status as a victim of the purdah system, which prohibits her from being in the presence of men. She opts to go for a stroll with Sister Sara alone after she presumes that the maids outside are in a state of slumber. Hossain effectively prompts her female readers to reflect upon their current circumstances and surroundings by employing a realistic approach that involves comparing and contrasting their social realities with the milieu depicted in the novella. Due to the inconvenient nature of Bengali women being conspicuously present in the presence of males, Sultana “was feeling very shy, thinking [she] was walking in the street in broad daylight” (Hossain, 2005, p. 3). Hossain effectively portrays the negative impact of zenana life on women’s mental well-being, illustrating the degeneration of women in society. In her argument, Yasmin Hossain (May 1992) discusses the impact of zenana and posits that the confluence of isolation and lack of knowledge led to cognitive stagnation (p. 5). Consequently, the women residing in Muslim zenana had mental and spiritual inertia, a deficiency in self-assurance, and a lack of a robust feeling of individuality or self-esteem. Hence, it is comprehensible that Sultana experiences a significant sense of insecurity while wandering the streets of Ladyland. Her lack of education stems from isolation, resulting in a lack of self-assurance, ultimately leading her to feel as though she is engaging in something morally wrong

or banned. This is the reason why she feels it is necessary for her to remain unseen, particularly during daylight hours. Therefore, she admits with her quivering fingers that “as being a purdahnishin woman [she is] not accustomed to walking about unveiled” (Hossain, 2005, p. 4). She has been culturally coded to avoid being seen in public, to remain confined to her purdah, and to diligently fulfil her daily responsibilities. She has been recognized as lacking a personal or unique identity; put differently, she is taught to feel that she holds no value in both social and cultural contexts.

Therefore, it is plausible to propose Butler’s (2007) Foucauldian assertion that legal and political authorities play a crucial role in shaping societies by imposing specific sets of values and norms that individuals are required to conform to (pp. 2 – 3). People who deviate from the established standards and normative references are marginalized and subjected to otherization. Foucault argues that legal systems of authority create the individuals that they later represent. To him, body is a machine that could be modified to meet the demands of modern life and the changing nature of existence. Referring to one phase of biopolitics as an “*anatomo-politics of the human body*” (Foucault, 1978, p. 139), Michel Foucault characterises the body as a sample that is subjected to testing through specific variants, including “its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls” (Foucault, 1978, p. 139). Consequently, the body serves as the primary battlefield for the overarching ideology to assert its authority since juridical concepts of power seem to govern political existence primarily by imposing restrictions, prohibitions, regulations, controls, and even ‘protection’ on individuals associated with the political system through the conditional and revocable exercise of choice. However, the entities governed by these structures are shaped, delineated, and perpetuated in alignment with the stipulations imposed by those structures (Butler, 2007, pp. 2 - 3).



PENGUIN CLASSICS

ROKEYA HOSSAIN

SULTANA'S DREAM AND PADMARAG

In *Sultana's Dream*, the authority in the legal and political realm can be accurately described as religion, as it is via religious associations that gender norms and the status of women are most appropriately defined. Women are indoctrinated with the notion that they must maintain their purity in order to shield themselves from harm and safeguard the well-being of the entire community. Thus, the purdah system effectively addresses the matter of safeguarding individuals. Julie Rajan (2006) clearly explains the religious origins of the purdah and hijab practices, as well as how the ongoing objectification of Muslim women is maintained. The purdah is founded upon the varied cultural interpretations of two specific verses from the Islamic sacred book, the *Quran*— Surahs 24 and 33—. Surah 24 prescribes the requirement for women to demonstrate discretion, whereas Surah 33 (verse 53) describes a spiritual event that transpired in 627 A.D. pertaining to the

'descent' of the hijab, fundamentally a covering, per the Prophet's command (Rajan, 2006, p. 155). The purpose of this event's description is to especially emphasize the importance of a man's privacy, particularly in relation to his marital chambers. Additionally, it aims to provide the Muslim community with a better understanding of the significance of spatial privacy. The historical analysis of those verses resulted in symbolic shifts between the personal domain of Muslim men, the Muslim woman's body as a location for the Muslim society's reproduction, and the private societal realm of the Muslim household.

As a consequence, women are obligated to adhere to limitations, prohibitions, and regulations enforced by a system that places emphasis on safeguarding the privacy of males. This is achieved by the confinement of women behind veils, hijabs, and similar measures. In other words, women who are appropriate are created to ensure the long-term existence of effective legal and political authority. Hossain's essay *The Degradation of Women*, originally published in 1903, faced strong opposition from the mullahs of that day, leading to its reprinting with a slightly modified title and the exclusion of certain parts, for Hossain (1903, as cited in Ray, 2005) provides further explanation about the theological claims made about women and protests that every time a woman has attempted to assert herself, she has been forcefully subjugated due to either religious irreverence or adherence to strict religious rules (p. 437). Women eventually had to acknowledge the validity of what they initially rejected, under the assumption that it carried the weight of a sacred decree. Throughout history, men have consistently disseminated religious texts as divine decrees in order to maintain women in a state of ignorance. The limitations enforced by religious beliefs contribute to the reinforcement of women's enslavement. Men exert dominance over women by exploiting religiously established regulations.

Consequently, women have a sense of transgression against divine teachings when they do not comply with religious directives issued by mullahs. This is precisely the reason why Sultana maintains that "it is not safe for us [women] to come out of zenana, as we are naturally weak" (Hossain, 2005, p. 5) upon learning that men in Ladyland are confined within mardanas for societal welfare. Women like Sultana are conditioned to feel that confining themselves to the zenana is not only beneficial for society, but also aligns with God's wishes. Consequently, any deviation from strict adherence would be considered shameful. These norms and necessities are carefully organized restrictions designed to ensure the continued existence of the dominant patriarchal society. In her same piece of work, Hossain discusses the seemingly unshakable dominance of these structures and claims that the scriptures can be understood as a collection of regulatory systems devised by humans. According to what we have been informed, saints established prescriptions. If it were possible for a woman to attain sainthood, it is conceivable that she might have advocated for norms that are contrary to the current ones.

It is apparent, in light of Hossain's assertions, that Ladyland, the utopian city, entirely embraces the contrasting regulations established by the female saints; males are confined to indoors within Ladyland in an effort to preserve social harmony. In addition, men are expected to take care of children, engage in cooking and cleaning, and handle all other domestic tasks which are regarded as trivial by the Herlanders since "they should not do anything, [...] they are fit for nothing"

(Hossain, 2005, p. 6). Men are also expected to avoid the company of women. However, this societal norm is actually the opposite of what is true during Hossain's time in India. She challenges traditional gender roles by subverting them, leading to a reinterpretation of the roles of women and men. Additionally, she highlights that these debates challenge orthodox patriarchal notions that assess women's social worth based on their adherence to the mother archetype (Rajan, 2006, p. 176).

CONCLUSION

The story, thus, holds great importance in emphasizing the idea that gender roles should not be followed or enforced, for they are mere constructs which are performed according to the impositions and expectations of each indigenous society. Therefore, it is not comprehensible or persuasive to argue that women should be confined to domestic roles only due to the weight of cultural, religious, and historical influences they bear. Although Jahan (1988) contends that the author's portrayal suggests that males are being punished in an ideal world by an all-powerful force, in accordance with the principles of poetic justice, for their unlawful mistreatment of women in the actual world, Hossain shows her readers a world turned upside down, and her deduction is certainly not the sole cause. Hossain's witty novella emphasizes the inevitability and achievability of social transformation, highlighting the urgency with which it should be implemented. This clear representation of "Muslim patriarchy" also allows readers to rethink their understanding of it. Hossain endeavours to conscientiously rouse women to recognize their capabilities and to convince them that they are not inferior to men, and that their destiny is not predetermined solely by their gender. In addition, she emphasizes that they have been affected by patriarchal impositions, such as the practice of purdah and its restrictions, as well as the ideological structures that deny women their fundamental rights.

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Rumlar Etnisite ve Kimlik



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Yaşamı, Yapıtları, Sanatı

H. Yasemin Mumcu



Günce Yayınları

FAİK ÂLİ OZANSOY

YAŞAM ÖYKÜSÜ, YAPITLARI VE ŞAIRLİĞİ

DOÇ. DR. SEVİM KARABELA ŞERMET



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