

Sultana's Utopian Awakening: An Ecocritical Reading of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*

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Abstract

The essay examines Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's seminal work in context of Utopian fiction, science fiction and ecofeminism. With *Sultana's Dream*, Begum Rokeya invites women of her society to have an illusory experience of freedom that exists outside *purdah* and beyond the four walls of the *zenana*. Centring its focus on the woman question in context of the Bengali Muslim society of her time, the satiric narrative of *Sultana's Dream* (1905) takes into consideration the issues of gender, science, education and religion, and as the story proceeds, the concept of restriction as a master tool is set in reverse in such a provocative manner that the apparently simple writing of a "veiled" Muslim woman unveils a path of discourse that challenges the very foundation of Muslim patriarchal systemisation. Needless to say, such an audacious attempt raises more questions than it can answer, especially when the questions that are raised are yet to be asked by her fellow contemporary women.

Keywords

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Muslim women in colonial Bengal, South Asian ecofeminism, Feminist Utopia in India, Islam and gender in South Asia, Women and *zenana*

The discipline of scientific knowledge, and the mechanical inventions it leads to, do not merely exert a gentle guidance over nature's course; they have the power to conquer and subdue her, to shake her to her foundations. (Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* 78)

But no trade was possible with countries where the women were kept in the *zenanas* and so unable to come and trade with us. Men, we find, are rather of lower morals and so we do not like dealing with them. 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-Noor, nor do we grudge a ruler for his Peacock Throne. We dive deep into the ocean of knowledge and try to find out the precious gems that Nature has kept in store for us. We enjoy Nature's gift as much as we can. (Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, *Sultana's Dream* 17)

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Restrictions imposed by religion are responsible for tightening the chains of our slavery. Men are ruling over women under the pretext of laws prescribed by religion. (Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, trans. Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India* 64).

The political construction of the subject proceeds with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims, and these political operations are effectively concealed and naturalized by a political analysis that takes juridical structures as their foundation. Juridical power inevitably 'produces' what it claims merely to represent; hence, politics must be concerned with this dual function of power: the juridical and the productive. (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* 3)

The New Atlantis (1624) was Francis Bacon's utopian dream institution which recorded man's super heroic research efforts to control production, reproduction and the bio-revolution that would only enrich the Baconian "masculine birth of time" (84) and give men the "power to conquer and subdue" (78) nature. If excellence in science and scientific research and the control of Nature were emblematic of men's power, then women in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* undoubtedly usurped that masculine space as they defied the masculine notion of power by gaining control over both man and nature. In fact, women of Ladyland in *Sultana's Dream* acquired the Baconian scientific knowledge so well that, in an ironic response to the above quoted Baconian call that encouraged men to find scientific ways and methods for the subordination of nature, they were able to invent scientific equipments "to exert a gentle guidance over nature's course" and achieve "the power to conquer and subdue [Nature], to shake her to her foundations" (*The New Organon* 78). The confirmation of such power is noticeable in the second quotation where the Queen of Ladyland explains the economic and political strategies of her country to Sultana – a Bengali Muslim woman – who was visiting in her dream the land where women ruled and enjoyed freedom in its fullest sense. The Queen's speech focuses mainly on four crucial aspects: (a) the economic and political empowerment of women, (b) the incompetence of men, (c) the rejection of colonial ideology and (d) the complete devotion to and valorisation of Nature. Taking my cue from the above mentioned aspects of the Queen's speech, I will argue that within a utopian structure that is quite strongly leaning on Swiftian "Gulliver Syndrome," Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultatana's Dream* can be read as a utopic science fiction that shows a strong adherence to a feminist ecocritical narrative long before utopian fiction, science fiction or ecocriticism offered to establish any links with gender politics, especially in context of the Indian subcontinent. *Sultana's Dream* erupted from a Bengali Muslim woman's attempt to scrutinise a life that she lived in a secluded cell built and controlled by the patriarchal power tools of gender and religion. Judith Butler's implementation of Foucauldian perspective of juridical power seems to be at play in *Sultana's Dream*, in which Hossain takes into consideration the

discourse of religion and gender and plays along with the juridical and productive game of power by simply subverting gender roles. The religiously and socially constructed gender identities in Bengali Muslim society are brought under Swiftian telescope as men are kept in seclusion and women are given the power to produce and regulate the social system in Ladyland.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain composed *Sultana's Dream* in English and published it in *Indian Ladies Magazine* in 1905. The text records her attitude toward Muslim patriarchy and was influenced by her beliefs that Indian men and women were, as Bharati Ray notes in her *Early Feminists of Colonial India*, “willing collaborators in their own oppressions” (61), and that men’s selfishness and women’s mental slavery were/are the two factors causing the degradation of women in India. In *Motichur*, Vol. 1 (1904), Hossain continues to blame women for losing self-respect and holds the Muslim patriarchal system responsible for denying equal opportunities to its women.² Rokeya also sharply criticises the Muslim system of secluding women in confined quarters and depriving them of the rights to education and physical and mental health. Rigid seclusion is nothing more than imprisonment to her and she harshly attacks a social system that abuses its power in the name of religion.³ In an essay on women’s degradation, Rokeya brings in the issues of gender and religion and

² Since much has been written on the condition of Muslim women and the colonial/Indian/Muslim Patriarch, I will refrain from writing in detail here on this issue. I can mention a few reference sources for the readers here. Azra Ali, for example, historicises the condition of Muslim Women during the early twentieth century British India, focusing mainly on the Urdu speaking Muslim community in *The Emergence of Feminism among Indian Muslim Women* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 2000). Shahida Lateef’s *Muslim Women in India: Political and Private Realities* (London: Zed Books, 1990) discusses the status and role of Muslim women in Northern India. With special emphasis on the history of Muslim women and Urdu literature, Gail Minault’s *Secluded Scholars* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1998), provides extensive research on Muslim women’s education and social reform in colonial India. On the other hand, Meredith Borthwick, in her *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal: 1849-1905* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), and Geraldine Forbes, in her *Women in Modern India* (London: Oxford UP, 1983), mostly historicise the woman question in colonial Bengal focusing on the rise of Hindu middle class women. They, however, have discussed briefly the life and works of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, who is hardly mentioned in the works of Ali and Lateef. Only Minault has analysed in some detail Rokeya’s contribution to the reformation movement of Muslim women in colonial Bengal. Dagmer Engels’s *Beyond Purdah: Women in Bengal, 1890-1939* does a socio-historic analysis of Bengali Muslim women’s reformation. In Ghulam Murshid’s *Reluctant Debutante* (Rajshahi: Shahitya Samsa, 1983), Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s role as the pioneer Muslim feminist is discussed along with Bengali Hindu women writers and activists of colonial Bengal. Bharati Ray’s book *Early Feminists of Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 2002), recognises Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s contribution. Another important source is Sonia Amin’s *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876-1939* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), and finally, Fayeza Hasanat’s *Nawab Faizunnisa* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009) has an extensive historiographic analysis of the Muslim woman question in colonial Bengal.

³ For a detailed discussion on Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s essays and responses to the Muslim woman question, see Bharati Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2002.

talks about the patriarchal systemisation of religion as a manoeuvring tool. She blames men for using religion as a shield between women and development, and tries to remind her female readers that religious scriptures are nothing more than a set of regulating systems imposed by men. The essay, in Bharati Ray's translation, continues to warn the female readers the following way:

You hear that the prescriptions were laid down by saints. If a woman could have become a saint, perhaps she would have prescribed opposite regulations.... We must not allow ourselves to bow down to the undue authority exercised by men in the name of religion. It has been seen time and again that the stricter the religious restrictions, the more severe are the women's victimization.... Some may ask me, 'Why do you bring in religion when you are only discussing social conditions?' To which my reply is: 'Restrictions imposed by religion are responsible for tightening the chains of our slavery. Men are ruling over women under the pretext of laws prescribed by religion. That is why I am obliged to bring in the question of religion....' (*Early Feminists of Colonial India* 63-64)

Such courageous assertions regarding the subjection of women are constantly reiterated in her essays, letters, fictions and, most powerfully, in *Sultana's Dream*, a satiric piece in which she makes men the subject of their own regulations and allows women to exercise the juridical and political power, in an attempt to reveal and redefine, in Butler's words, "the legitimating and exclusionary aims" (*Gender Trouble* 3) of the Muslim patriarch. The dual function of such juridical and productive power is best explained and the message is effectively generated through the complex structure of a multilayered text that encompasses the elements of utopian satire, science fiction and ecofeminism.

For the wishful utopist narrator of Rokeya's text, Nature and her abundant resources offer alternative power source and thus open the door to a new world where Woman and Nature stand as the unmistakable agents of power. As the story (or dream) proceeds, Sultana's dream about a land where women rule a country (and their men) transforms into an ecofeminist's vision for a harmonious world where Woman lives only under Nature's care. The rather short novella with a really abrupt ending records a dream in which the secluded Muslim heroine of the piece is invited to visit a land where women roam around freely, study at the universities, are in control of science and technology, and what is more interesting, keep their men in seclusion and involved in domestic activities. The aforementioned "Gulliver syndrome" works at its best as Sultana is amused to see no man outside and is reprimanded for her rather mannish shyness. Men in this land are small and insignificant like the Lilliputians, and Sultana, after being chided for acting like one, quickly trains herself to wander around like a gigantic Gulliver. Just as Gulliver's magnanimous persona got dissected by the Lilliputian King who labelled

Gulliver's species "to be the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth" (97), Sultana comes to realise the pretentious audacity of her own countrymen who treat women like a lesser breed, if not lesser than animals. Questions of religion, gender and social politics then slowly emerge as a curious Muslim woman treads freely through the paths where no man has any access anymore.

The idea of establishing a women's community or the utopian desire to develop and enrich women's lives was first noted in the writings of Margaret Cavendish in the early seventeenth century, with her publication of *The Blazing World* (1666), and the discourse started to take a prominent shape in the eighteenth century through the writings of Delarivier Manley, Sarah Scott and Mary Hamilton,⁴ among others, and reached its peak in early twentieth century, with the publication of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915). The politically ambitious yet ideologically limiting utopian writings of seventeenth century failed to propose any new agenda regarding women's rights and empowerment. Take Margaret Cavendish for example, whose *Blazing World*, even though run by a powerful Empress and governed by the laws of Natural Science and philosophy, followed the prescribed path of British colonial mind and its general attitude was by and large inclined to asexualize the female body and relocate the Queen as protector of [masculine] ideology. In 1709, Delarivier Manley wrote a [female] utopian text following the New Atlantean framework of Utopian novel provided by Plato and Bacon. Her text, entitled *Secret Memoirs and Manners of Several Persons of Quality of Both Sexes, from the New Atlantis, an Island in the Mediterranean*, was a serious political commentary on women and power. In Manley's utopian world, women "dote of the representation of men in women" (235), and in order to rebel against the social tradition, they cross-dressed, aspired to enjoy freedom like a man, and dominated and shut out their husbands (235). The eighteenth century utopian texts took a closer look at the domestic aspect of life and tended to create a genre that Christine Rees labels as "domestic utopia" (215), in her *Utopian Imagination and Eighteenth Century Fiction*. The utopian fiction reached its peak during the Victorian Era. According to Nan Albinsky, Olive Schreiner's *Three Dreams in a Desert* (1890) was considered a vital source of inspiration for the suffragists (48). Besides Olive Schreiner's *Three Dreams* and *Gloriana* (1900), Elizabeth Corbett's *The New Amazonia: A Foretaste of the Future* (1889) and Amelia Mears' *Mercia, the Astronomer Royal: A Romance*⁵ (1895) also offered the visions of socialist reforms while recording

⁴ For a detailed background information on Manley, Scott, and Hamilton, see Rees, *Utopian Imagination and Eighteenth Century Fiction* (London: Longman, 1996).

⁵ For a detailed historical analysis of women and utopian fiction, consult Martha Barter, ed. *The Utopian Fantastic* (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004); also, see Libby Jones and Sarah Goodwin, eds. *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), *Margaret Cavendish: Political Writing*, ed. Susan James (London: Cambridge UP, 2003),

their interests in contemporary awareness of Darwinian theory of social evolution.

British Utopian Fiction kept its focus on the issues of political and legal rights of women and worked to reform domestic relationships. While examining the nature and characteristics of British feminist utopian fiction, Nan Albinski notes in her *Women's Utopias in British and America Fiction* that "British women Utopians were reformists rather than revolutionaries"(51). The revolutionary ideology of utopian text emerged from the other side of the Atlantic, with the first critically acclaimed feminist utopian novel, *Mizora*, written in 1881, by Mary Bradley Lane, and the movement reached its finest shape in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's works. In Gilman's *Herland*, three men, with three specific male attitudes, arrive in a prosperous land run by "tall, strong, healthy, and beautiful women" (12), and then three different types of experiences are produced. Sexual interaction, idea of marriage, fear of rape, problem of parthenogenesis and possibilities of natural child bearing – all these issues are addressed in the text in which, as Bartkowski notices, "Gilman replaces religion with sacred motherhood and eliminates sexuality" (32). Unlike *Herland*, Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream* is not a narrative of Him in pursuit of Her and there is no happy ending; instead, there is only the awakening from a "happy dream." Rokeya's *Ladyland* does not totally eliminate religion. It replaces specific religious faith with one universal religion and seems to have eliminated motherhood and sexuality.

When Rokeya wrote her text, Gilman's *Herland* was yet to be published, but Lester Frank Ward's theory of gynocentric basis for evolution theory was already there. In *Pure Sociology* (1903), Ward's parthenogenesis reinvented the female body as the resource, protector and possibly a sole reproductive source of life. "If whatever is fertile is looked upon as female," he writes, "it therefore does no violence to language or to science that life begins with the female organism.... In all the forms of asexual reproduction, from fission to parthenogenesis, the female may in this sense be said to exist alone and perform all the functions of life, including reproduction" (313). The asexual domestic framework of Rokeya's *Ladyland* seems to indicate a possibility of such parthenogenetic society. The nineteenth century suffragist fantasy of reducing the power of man and then completely cutting him off after a short functional use is evident in Rokeya's text. Man is not a vital part of society, neither is he essential for the development or upbringing of the society. If the law of nature is to weed out the unfit and women are the unfit ones, then it becomes only natural to keep them in seclusion, veiled and occupied in domestic chores.

Qian Ma, *Feminist Utopian Discourse in Eighteenth Century Chinese and English Fiction: A Cross Cultural Comparison* (London: Ashgate Publishers, 2004), Lucie Armitt, ed. *Where No Man Has Gone Before* (London: Routledge, 1991), and Christine Rees, *Utopian Imagination and Eighteenth Century Fiction* (London: Longman, 1996).

Sultana's Dream acts like a reaction to this prevalent social Darwinism so aptly coated with religious doctrines in context of women's position in colonial Bengal. The structure of Ladyland in *Sultana's Dream* seems to unfold along the line of Darwinian theory of "Survival of the Fittest," and the idea of negative eugenics surfaces as we see no presence of children in Ladyland, where domestic space is occupied by men, and the women's secluded space, or *zenana*, is replaced with *mardana*, or man's space. Man – the fittest being of all species in Darwinian theory – is re-viewed as the cause of all evil. We are informed by Sister Sara that: "it is not safe so long as there are men about the streets, nor is it so when a wild animal enters a marketplace" (9). Social Darwinism keeps surfacing and then being subverted as Sister Sara and Sultana continue their discussion in which the Indian man is seen from the light of Darwinian theory, and then through the new theory of Sister Sara's Ladyland that subverts the belief of masculine supremacy. I am quoting their discussion in full here:

'Suppose some lunatics escape from the asylum and begin to do all sorts of mischief to men, horses, and other creatures: in that case what will your countrymen do?'

'They will try to capture them and put them back into their asylum.'

'Thank you! And you do not think it wise to keep sane people inside an asylum and let lose the insane?'

'Of course not!' said I, laughingly.

'As a matter of fact, in your country, this very thing is done! Men, who do or at least are capable of doing no end of mischief, are let loose and the innocent women shut up in the *zenana*! How can you trust those untrained men out of doors?'

'We have no hand or voice in the management of our social affairs. In India, man is lord and master. He has taken to himself all powers and privileges and shut up the women in the *zenana*.'

'Why do you allow yourselves to be shut up?'

'Because it cannot be helped as they are stronger than women.'

'A lion is stronger than a man, but it does not enable him to dominate the human race. You have neglected the duty that you owe to yourselves and you have lost your natural rights by shutting your eyes to your own interests.'

'But my dear Sister Sara, if we do everything by ourselves, what will the men do then?'

'They should not do anything, excuse me; they are fit for nothing. Only catch them and put them into the *zenana*.' (9)

In *Women and Economics*, Gilman talks about the "sexuo-economic relation" between man and woman that dictates men to develop the role of a protector and provider so much so that the woman "becomes little more than a decorative domestic servant, performing only those duties necessary for her

husband's comfort and thus being ignorant of the knowledge of the world" (141). Debra Benita Shaw remarks in her *Women, Science, and Fiction* that man jealously guards this knowledge of the world "lest she becomes dissatisfied with her position" (18). Such dissatisfaction could spark a fantasy of rebellion which, in Rokeya's case, provokes the women in Ladyland to oust their men, protect their country from the attack of a neighbouring kingdom, and then gain control of socio-economic framework of the country, leaving men in the space that they had so carefully crafted for their women folks. In this world, the *purdah* system is not eliminated but only subverted, and women seem to have shifted their focus from domesticities of life to scientific discoveries and education: the female fertile form (of Ward's theory) seems to have reinvented herself here through her connection with and power over fertile aspects of Mother Nature. Just as Mary Wollstonecraft, in her *Vindication for the Rights of Woman*, valued "reason as the basis for women's equal part in society and politics" (76), women in Rokeya's Ladyland also prove with their intellectual and physical skills that they are more qualified than men to protect their land and then run it peacefully. The basis of this supremacy is declared by Sister Sara, when she points out to Sultana, "While the women were engaged in scientific researches, the men in this country were busy increasing their military power" (12), and after men were put in seclusion, Sister Sara continues, "there has been no more crime or sin; therefore we do not require a policeman to find out a culprit, nor do we want a magistrate to try a criminal case" (13). In such a logically balanced country, religion should also be based on ethics and logic; hence, love and truth are the pillars of religion, and it becomes a "religious duty to love one another and to be absolutely truthful" (16).

In her seminal essay, "The Master's Tool Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," Audre Lorde points out that women's "need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered. It is this real connection which is so feared by a patriarchal world. Only within a patriarchal structure is maternity the only social power open to women" (111). It is quite interesting to observe the way Rokeya deals with the issue of motherhood in her text. The sisterhood that we notice between Sister Sara and Sultana is based on a redemptive notion. Sister Sara gives Sultana a tour around the whole city that nurtures elements of nature in all possible aspects: streets are replaced with gardens, the whole environment is woman friendly, Nature works for the benefit of women's progress and provides women with the resources they need to implement a harmonious relationship between science, women and environment, and instead of Mother Nature, it is women in Ladyland who control the climate and the whole ecosystem. More importantly, Sultana is given the opportunity to experience an outside world that is free from man's presence, where the domestic periphery is run by men who live in seclusion and

within the boundaries of home. Sultana also has the opportunity to visit the universities and science laboratories, which are the Foucauldian panoptic source of their power. This redemptive sisterhood is noticeably strengthened with the absence of any links to maternity or motherhood. Sultana's tour in Ladyland does not include any visit to a nursery, and there is no presence of children in this utopic world.

Ecofeminist philosophy claims that the treatment of women, nature and animals require an analysis which is not male-biased and which aims for an intimate connection between the three.⁶ The ecocritical view of the country becomes quite obvious as Sister Sara informs Sultana that women of this country only eat fruit and that their Queen is fond of botany and wants to "convert the whole country into one grand garden" (15). Science and Environment seem to bend under the laws of women in this land where fields are tilled "by means of electricity" (15), the floating water balloons distribute rain whenever required, and there are no dangers of flood or thunderstorm. "While gentlemen are kept in the *mardanas* to mind babies, to cook, and to do all sorts of domestic work," women "are all very busy making nature yield as much as she can" (15). In *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Susan Griffin explores the Western patriarchal philosophy's tendency to associate women with nature and its fertility while men are associated with culture and rationality (35). Such gendered definition of active domination of male rationality over passive female entity has contributed to the age-old ideology of masculine supremacy. Ecofeminists' attempt to subvert that egotistic ideology has resulted in a theory that links the domination of nature with that of women and invites an argument for equal rights for women and respect for nature. Even though ecofeminism as a movement did not take shape until late twentieth century, I am willing to link contemporary ecofeminist ideology⁷ with *Sulatana's Dream* because of the fact that the whole structure of the text is dependent on the relationship between women and nature. Women in Ladyland orchestrate a successful revolution against masculine domination and create a harmonious relationship with nature. However, despite the revolutionary movements of the country, the fact that Rokeya's utopian women were abusing nature's bounty is too prominent in the text. As the dream story reaches its ending, like the animal leader in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Sister Sara, the representative of powerful women folks of the land, delivers the victory speech that paints a

⁶ See Karen Warren, ed. *Ecological Feminist Philosophies* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996).

⁷ My thinking here is influenced by the following articles: Lori Gruen's "Toward an Ecofeminist Moral Epistemology," and Phillip Payne's "Restructuring the Discursive Moral Subject in Ecological Feminism," in *Ecological Feminism*, ed. Karen Warren (London: Routledge, 1994). I am also indebted to Maria Miles and Vandana Shiva, eds. *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 1993).

verbal picture of strong, asexual, and immensely powerful (if not oppressive) women who have taken full control over man, nature and science.

The irony therefore lies within the utopic framework of the text. If dream works as a reversal of reality, and if reversal of *purdah* system and the total control over nature is a satirical solution to women's oppression, then what hope is there for a disillusioned, yet secluded dreamer, who was "startled out of [her] dream," and found herself in [her] own bedroom still lounging in the easy chair?"(18). Christine Reese, in her *Utopian Imagination and Eighteenth Century Fiction*, comments that "Utopian satire is doubly insecure, peculiarly vulnerable to overthrow from within" (123). Utopian fiction is a subversive act that invites a writer to have a double vision, one is the nostalgic view of how life could have been, and the other, the view of possibility – the imaginative view of right or to right the wrongs. The utopian world is therefore a looking glass world that reflects the lacking and limitations. The Ladyland reflects the image of a desired perfection for Sultana, whereas Sultana's world is the negative mirror; however, reality (or dream) gets shattered from both angles as readers realise that the subversive loses its grip the moment it applies the master's own tool and rephrases the master narrative instead of dismantling it. The epistemological principle of Bacon that inaugurated the framework of scientific knowledge to have its base on violence and power is constantly at work in Ladyland, which is prominent in the women's violent method of disrupting nature's cycle and keeping nature a "prisoner" of experimentation in the laboratory. At the end of her journey, before she wakes up from her dream, the last places that Sultana visits are the laboratories and academic institutions. And it is at this point where the readers might question Sister Sara's intentions for arranging a tour that fails to properly guide and instruct her novice tourist; in fact, one can even take it a little further by comparing the dream/utopic experience of both the women and argue that the double mirror is reflecting the same image from a somewhat variant angles and draw a parallel between Sister Sara's free world, Sultana's bedroom, and the secluded quarters of men. In a speech earlier quoted in this essay, the Queen of Ladyland explains why her kingdom does not practice trade or business with other countries where women are kept in seclusion. Her speech makes it clear that the Ladyland has no connection with the outer world. Like the men who live in seclusion in Ladyland, and like Sultana who lives in a secluded Muslim household in India, women in Ladyland live a communal life of perfected seclusion, in a stagnant, utopic world. Since Sister Sara is confined in her own space, she can only appear in Sultana's dream, and as per her country's foreign policy, it is not possible for her to be involved with Sultan's reality which is stained by patriarchal domination. Thus, the abrupt ending of the dream and the awakening of the dreamer function as a warning signal to remind the readers that women's empowerment was nothing but a dream for the Muslim woman in colonial Bengal, that the whole utopian structure of a

perfect society was also stained by the essentialist patriarchal ideology, that such dream episodes would continuously recur and vanish until the awakened female consciousness reinvented the method and tool of her own discourse; after all, as Audrey Lorde said, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow [her] temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable [her] to bring about genuine change”(112). One Sister Sara’s westernised reformist utopian tool was therefore not strong enough to awaken the Sultanas of the third world.

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