



Sultana's Dream

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain , Durga Bai (Illustrations)

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The female narrator of *Sultana's Dream* wanders into a dream city that shuns war and violence. In this utopian world, women rule and men are content with their places in the kitchen. The queen of this kingdom explains how women won and kept their peace against men and their war-like ways.

This edition of a feminist utopian classic is a conversation across time; Durga Bai, a contemporary tribal woman artist from Central India, brings her own vision to bear on a Muslim gentlewoman's radical tale.

Sultana's Dream Details

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Author : Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain , Durga Bai (Illustrations)

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The premise and metaphors are rather impressive, for example the name *Sultana* by meaning is lady Sultan, King/Emperor. She playfully bashes the prevailing old school inclusiveness of then male dominated society - 'zenana's, and denigrate 'weaker species' logic. At one point of the story, in Ladyland, 'zenana's are said to be replaced by 'mardana's (mard- male in hindi/urdu), thereby making the land a crimeless eco friendly 'Amazon'. The things that looked like science fiction in her 'wonderland', when observed now, were actually prophecies and solutions for 21st century- Solar Energy, Hydrogen weather balloons, Commercial Aviation and even competitive academics.

And there is a special charm in her writing, a narrative cuteness that keeps men from being offended, be it then, be it now.

☞???? [Punya Reviews...] says

I've read this amazing book a few years ago and could hardly believe that a woman from 1905's Bangladesh, when women were rarely given education, wrote something in English and a really good piece too! But that is the specialty of Begum Rokeya, who was a very gifted personality on her own right... Who flourished with the support of a generous, open-minded family behind her. She was a feminist writer (both fiction and non-fiction), critic and renowned social worker, whose bibliography isn't very big in that sense but whatever she wrote, she wrote with remarkable grace, wit and style. We still remember her, we've grown up knowing her as a part of our culture, history, education but most of all, as a part of the woman we are today. This is by no means a review of *Sultana's Dream* but I'll do something later hopefully after I re-read the book. If you don't already know about her, you should BTW.

Claudia says

Really bold subject considering when and where it was written. The blurb says pretty much all, so I won't get into details; it's a 10 minutes reading anyway.

I'll just say that it's pretty amazing what this woman did achieve in a conservative society like that one. And nowadays, most of us, having all the freedom we need, do nothing but complain of everything...

Utsav Bansal says

A feminist piece re-imagining the world as a matriarchal utopia, it is difficult to believe it was written in 1905 by an Indian author!

Manab says

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Lydia says

Short and packs a punch.

Written by a Bengali Muslim woman, this satirical short story imagines a world where women are allowed to live to their fullest intellectual and economic potential. A sultan's wife travels to LadyLand, where the women run the world, for lack of a better term.

It was written in 1905.

This story was written, it was published, but more astonishingly, it survived. Science fiction is a testament not only to who we are, but who we can be. It allows us to shed our supposed rigid social barriers and imagine who we could be if we didn't have those constraints. Here is a woman of colour imagining a future in which other women of colour exist, contribute, are listened to, are an integral piece of society.

I... honestly really don't like when people say sexist / racist / homophobic comments or views were just 'products of their time'. Sure they were. But we had allies and we've had people who were at the forefront of all of that prejudice since the beginning and we will always have people like that.

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is one such example.

Imagine reading this the year it was published. Feeling validated, feeling seen, feeling as if you could've come from LadyLand, as if you were suddenly made of star stuff, infinite in all your opportunities.

This story isn't just important 'for its time', it's important because it survived.

Kavita says

I just came across this very short book while reading an article on the Taj Mahal. I was interested enough in a story taking about men in the purdah and women running the State to check it out. What is impressive about this book is that it was written by a Muslim feminist woman in 1905. The author herself has done a lot of social work by spreading awareness on women's education and has fought for the right of women to choose a career of her choice. Note, not just the right to work, but the right to choose an actual profession on her own terms!

That said, the story itself lacked complexity and hence failed to retain interest. Some of the sentiments expressed were unworkable and some others made no sense. Crime would not just disappear if women were in charge, nor would accidents and death of youngsters vanish. The science fiction ideas were barely explored. The story is a rather naive look at a different kind of world. A lengthier story with more showing and less telling, complex male and female characters, and an actual tale of how the tables turned might have been so awesome!

This short story just whets your appetite for more, but unfortunately more is not forthcoming.

Nicole says

It was really interesting reading this short feminist utopia from 1905 India. The story is understandably very simple as it is only a few pages long, but lays out various aspects of this role-reversed female-led society. Ladyland's resemblances to Herland were many (peace and no crime, vegetarianism/veganism, efficiency, freedom, highly prizing education, etc), though I'm not sure how much that is to do with the shared idea of what a specifically feminist utopia might look like verses common ideas of utopia in general.

Reem says

How come this is not as famous as it should be? A 1905 science fiction short story written by a Bangladeshi Muslim feminist at the time when most women had no access to education! And it was written in English not the writer's mother tongue!

Despite being an extremely short story, it still succeeds in making a strong point. Injustice is terrible and religion, in this case Islam, is no excuse! Women have the right to walk the streets with no fears. They have the right for the best education opportunities because they are as much capable of inventing as men are. They can rule countries and defend themselves and their lands. They can even drive flying cars!

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain you deserve to be well-known. I will translate your story into Arabic!

Lata says

Interesting, in that the author was writing about women's rights at a time when women were still not seen as people legally in many societies. I guess her purpose in describing men in purdah in Ladyland was to highlight how ridiculous it is to control, contain and diminish half the population.

I did find the energy generation methods of Ladyland a little amusing.

The author doesn't take a nuanced view on power, instead stating that containing and controlling the men of Ladyland results in wonderful things (no crime, etc.), unlike Naomi Alderman's *The Power*.
