

## Excerpts from the writings of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

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*Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) was a feminist author and educator who remains an inspiration to all Bengali Muslim feminists. Below is an excerpt from her utopian novel Sultana's Dream (1905), which depicts a society in which women rule. Sultana, an Indian Muslim woman, visits the utopian land called Naristan and converses with a woman called Sara who cannot understand the patriarchy she comes from.*

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

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

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

*Hossain also reinterpreted the role of Eve in the creation story believed by Muslims. Below is an excerpt from 'The Fruit of Knowledge', in Rokeya Rachanasamgraha, [Miratun Nahar ed. 2001, Calcutta: Viswakosh Parishad] 175–182.*

Eve requested him to eat the fruit which was in her hands. Adam too awoke to knowledge on eating the rest of the fruit from his wife. Then he began to feel his own deprived condition in every layer of his heart. – Was this paradise? This loveless, workless, lazy life – was this the pleasure of paradise? He also realised that he was a political prisoner...

Now the happy dream of heavenly pleasure, which was in fact ignorance, was shattered – he clearly felt the wakeful condition of knowledge

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