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1. Do you agree that Begum Rokeya's Sultana's Dream is a feminist text? Why? Find out the feminist element in the text.

Answer: "Sultana's Dream" by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is undoubtedly a feminist text, as it challenges traditional gender norms and advocates for women's empowerment, education, and liberation from patriarchal constraints. This short story, written in 1905, presents a striking reversal of gender roles and provides a thought-provoking vision of a society where women have achieved dominance and equality. Through its narrative, themes, and underlying messages, "Sultana's Dream" embodies several feminist elements that emphasize the importance of gender equality, women's agency, and the need for social change.

"Sultana's Dream" is a fictional short story written by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, a Bengali Muslim feminist and social reformer from British India (now Bangladesh). The story was first published in the Indian Ladies' Magazine in 1905.

The story is set in a dreamlike world called "Ladyland," where gender roles are reversed. In this society, women hold positions of power and authority, while men are confined to the domestic sphere. Women have advanced technologically and intellectually, and they have created a utopian society free from many of the limitations and injustices that women faced in the author's contemporary society.

The protagonist of the story is a woman named Sultana, who falls asleep and finds herself in Ladyland. She marvels at the societal transformations and becomes acquainted with the advanced technologies and ideologies that have led to the empowerment of women. The story explores themes of gender equality, women's rights, and the potential for societal progress when women are given equal opportunities and rights.

Begum Rokeya was a pioneering feminist writer who used her work to challenge the traditional gender norms and advocate for women's education and emancipation in a patriarchal society. "Sultana's Dream" remains a notable example of early feminist science fiction and continues to be celebrated for its visionary ideas and thought-provoking themes.

At its core, "Sultana's Dream" is a feminist text because it offers a powerful critique of the oppressive patriarchal structures that dominated society during the time of its writing. Through the creation of Ladyland, a world where women are the dominant gender and men are confined to the domestic sphere, the author provides a provocative alternative to the reality she and her contemporaries faced. By presenting this reversed reality, Rokeya highlights the absurdity of the traditional gender roles and the limitations they imposed on women's lives.

The central feminist element of the story is the concept of women's empowerment. Ladyland is depicted as a society where women have access to education, technology, and positions of authority. This portrayal challenges the prevailing notion that women are intellectually inferior or incapable of leadership roles. It underscores the potential of women when provided with equal opportunities and education, aligning with key feminist principles of gender equity and dismantling stereotypes.

Moreover, the story advocates for women's agency and the ability to shape their own destinies. In Ladyland, women are not mere passive participants in their lives; they actively contribute to the advancement of society through their knowledge and skills. This stands in contrast to the traditional roles assigned to women, where they were often confined to domestic duties

and had limited control over their lives. By presenting women as active agents of change, the story encourages readers to rethink and challenge societal norms that restrict women's roles and aspirations.

The theme of education is another significant feminist element in "Sultana's Dream." Rokeya emphasizes the transformative power of education for women, which is evident in Ladyland's progress and technological advancements. Through education, women in Ladyland have gained knowledge and skills that have led to societal improvements. This mirrors Rokeya's real-life advocacy for women's education and her belief that education is essential for women's liberation and empowerment. In a time when women's access to education was limited, Rokeya's story promotes the idea that education is a key tool for breaking free from gender-based oppression.

Additionally, the story challenges traditional gender stereotypes and expectations. In Ladyland, men are depicted as dependent and submissive, reversing the traditional power dynamic. This reversal serves to highlight the absurdity of rigid gender roles and underscores the importance of recognizing that gender is not a determinant of one's abilities or potential. By portraying men in a marginalized role, Rokeya encourages readers to question and deconstruct the societal norms that perpetuate such inequalities.

In Ladyland, the confinement of men to the domestic sphere serves as a powerful commentary on the traditional relegation of women to household duties. This reversal highlights the inequality embedded in these roles and challenges the assumption that domestic work is solely women's responsibility. By depicting men struggling with mundane tasks, the story critiques the gendered division of labor and emphasizes the need to redefine societal expectations regarding household responsibilities. The story subtly introduces an ecological dimension to its feminist narrative. Ladyland's clean and serene environment contrasts with the polluted and chaotic world outside. This ecological balance is attributed to women's responsible and thoughtful management of resources. Through this, Rokeya suggests that women's involvement in decision-making can lead to more sustainable and ecologically conscious societies, further underscoring women's competence and capability in various spheres. Ladyland is characterized by its emphasis on empathy, cooperation, and nonviolent resolution of conflicts. This stands in contrast to the often aggressive and competitive nature of historical patriarchal societies. This portrayal suggests that a world influenced by women's leadership might prioritize communication, understanding, and peaceful resolutions, rather than relying on power dynamics and aggression. While primarily focusing on gender roles, the story also hints at the empowerment of other marginalized groups. In Ladyland, there is a reference to the upliftment of lower-caste women through education and opportunity. This subtle inclusion speaks to Rokeya's broader vision of social justice and equality for all oppressed communities. By highlighting the potential of education to uplift marginalized individuals, the story aligns with intersectional feminist perspectives.

By crafting a narrative that imagines a world where gender roles are reversed, Rokeya engages in a form of literary activism. She uses the speculative fiction genre to create a space for readers to question their assumptions about gender and society. This imaginative approach allows her to convey her feminist message in a way that is both compelling and thought-provoking.

"Sultana's Dream" also raises questions about the role of religion in perpetuating gender disparities. While the story doesn't explicitly criticize religious institutions, it prompts readers to consider how interpretations of religious texts and traditions have been used to justify the subjugation of women. Begum Rokeya challenges Western narratives and perceptions of women in her society. The story critiques the Western perception of Muslim women as passive and oppressed, offering an alternative perspective of capable and empowered Muslim women. This challenges colonial and orientalist perspectives that often painted women in the Global South as victims in need of saving. Rokeya's narrative asserts that women from her culture are agents of their own change. The depiction of a progressive society in Ladyland suggests that societal progress can be achieved while still respecting cultural and religious values, challenging the notion that feminism is incompatible with faith.

In conclusion, "Sultana's Dream" by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is undeniably a feminist text due to its critique of patriarchal norms, advocacy for women's empowerment and education, and challenge to traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Through the lens of science fiction and speculative fiction, Rokeya presents a vision of a world where women are in control and have achieved social, intellectual, and technological progress. By doing so, she encourages readers to reflect on the injustices and limitations faced by women in her society and offers an inspiring and hopeful portrayal of an alternative reality where gender equality and women's agency are prioritized. The story's lasting impact and relevance continue to solidify its place as a significant contribution to feminist literature and social discourse.