



Patriarchy and Politics of Subjugation: A Feminist Critique of Bina Shah's Before She Sleeps

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Abstract

The world continues to be shaped by patriarchal norms in which women are often reduced to mere objects and commodities. This pervasive issue has reached a critical stage, necessitating scholarly attention. Therefore, this research examines the patriarchal subjugation of women in Bina Shah's dystopian novel *Before She Sleeps*, through the lens of feminist theory. As a prominent Pakistani author, Shah presents a powerful depiction of a society where women's autonomy, identities, and bodies are systematically commodified and regulated by patriarchal forces. The novel critically reflects on the political and social dimensions of this commodification, drawing attention to the resulting dehumanization and marginalization of women. At the same time, Shah illustrates the characters' resilience, focusing on their pursuit of self-determination and defiance against objectification. The analysis reveals that women in the narrative are not regarded as complete individuals but are instead valued solely for their reproductive function. Moreover, the novel's portrayal of gender-based oppression offers meaningful contributions to ongoing conversations about women's rights, agency, and resistance in dystopian literature. This research adds valuable insight to feminist literary discourse by highlighting how dystopian fiction can serve as a critical space for challenging and exposing patriarchal ideologies.

Key Terms: Patriarchy, Women's subjugation, Dehumanization, Gender-based oppression, Resistance



Introduction

“In patriarchal societies, men maintain control on multiple aspects of life, resulting in the marginalization, exploitation, suppression, and othering of women” (Qasim et al., 2024, p. 171). We live in a patriarchal society deeply rooted in male-dominated structures and governed by values that systematically privilege men while marginalizing women. Within this framework, women are subjected to widespread discrimination, denied fundamental rights, and reduced to subordinate roles. They are often perceived not as autonomous individuals, but as commodities, the “other,” subalterns, and reproductive tools. “[Patriarchy] fosters the suppression, oppression, and mistreatment of women, manifesting in their social, political, emotional, sexual, and physical exploitation. It obstructs women’s liberation in social, political, and educational spheres” (Qasim et al., 2024, p. 171). These oppressive dynamics of patriarchy are central to Bina Shah’s dystopian novel *Before She Sleeps*, which powerfully critiques the mechanisms of female subjugation in a patriarchal regime. Bina Shah, a distinguished Pakistani author born in 1972, is widely recognized for her contributions to literature, journalism, and feminist thought. Her work explores complex themes such as gender inequality, cultural identity, education, and the social structures that restrict women’s agency. In *Before She Sleeps*, Shah (2020) draws from this intellectual and cultural background to portray the far-reaching consequences of women’s subjugation in a fictional world that chillingly mirrors contemporary patriarchal realities.

Before She Sleeps by Bina Shah is a feminist dystopia that provides thought-provoking and provocative insights on the problems faced by women in cultures that are repressive and restrictive. In dystopian literature, society is often portrayed as being in a condition of decline or decay, with the people fighting against the oppressive system or trying to survive. (Bashir & Tanveer, 2024, p. 201)

Before She Sleeps marks a significant contribution to contemporary feminist literature through its compelling depiction of women’s commodification within a dystopian society. Set in a post-apocalyptic future shaped by environmental collapse and nuclear devastation, the novel unfolds in Green City—a fictional South Asian setting that distinguishes the narrative from the predominantly Western-centric tradition of dystopian fiction. This shift in geographical and cultural context offers a refreshing lens through which to examine entrenched patriarchal norms and gendered power structures. At the heart of the story lies a biological crisis: a deadly virus targeting the female reproductive system. In response, society enforces extreme population control measures under the auspices of the Perpetuation Bureau. This institution institutionalizes polygamy, assigning women—now called “Wives”—to multiple husbands and reducing them to instruments of reproduction. Though superficially honored and protected, these women lack autonomy and are confined within a system that commodifies their bodies and identities in the name of social preservation.

“Patriarchal system has significantly influenced the societal status of women. It is inherently male-centric, being man-made, and it relegates women to the status of the ‘second sex,’ subaltern and even slaves” (Qasim et al., 2024, p. 171). Shah (2020) vividly illustrates the tension between perceived reverence and actual repression. Amid this restrictive regime, a secret collective of women known as *Panah* (meaning “refuge”) rejects the imposed roles of subservience and invisibility. Hidden beneath the city, these women establish a covert sanctuary where they reclaim some agency by offering non-sexual



emotional companionship to elite men—an inversion of traditional gender dynamics that subverts dominant patriarchal scripts. The narrative is delivered through multiple perspectives, particularly those of Sabine and Lin, the enigmatic leader of Panah. These varied viewpoints enrich the reader's understanding of resistance, complicity, and survival in a deeply controlled society. However, the near absence of the Wives' perspectives creates a narrative gap, slightly limiting the inclusivity of the feminist critique. On the whole, *Before She Sleeps* offers a powerful blend of dystopian speculation and feminist inquiry, rooted in the socio-cultural realities of South Asia. Through its nuanced exploration of gendered oppression, reproductive control, and female resistance, the novel adds a vital voice to the discourse on women's subjugation in speculative fiction.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

1. How does *Before She Sleeps* portray subjugation and commodification of women in a patriarchal dystopian society?
2. In what ways do female characters resist or reclaim agency within the oppressive system depicted in the novel?

Research Objectives

Objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the representation of patriarchal control over women's bodies and identities in Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps* through a feminist theoretical framework.
2. To explore the strategies of resistance employed by female characters and assess their significance in challenging systemic oppression.

Review of Literature

Tandon (2008) suggests that defining feminism with precision is complex; however, in a broader sense, it refers to the practices, dialogues, and writings through which women address their rights and related social issues. Mahajan (2016) emphasizes that feminism holds a significant place in contemporary literature, representing a modern social, political, economic, and cultural movement that critically addresses "the exploitation of women by the patriarchal system of society" (p. 738). "Feminism tries to dismantle the long-established patriarchal system that subordinates and suppresses women" (Zubair et al., 2020, p.600). Feminist literature and criticism have been instrumental in challenging and deconstructing patriarchal themes within English literature. The investigation of male dominance — reflecting enduring historical and social power imbalances — extends across different literary periods and cultural contexts in English-speaking societies. From classical to contemporary texts, patriarchy remains a complex and recurring focus of literary analysis. Patriarchy is linked to structures that uphold male dominance and female subordination. It is perpetuated through familial systems, where roles such as fathers and husbands serve as central authority figures, maintaining control and reinforcing gender hierarchies (Fauzia & Rahayu, 2019). "In a male-dominated and patriarchal structure, women have always been treated as secondary. There is no upliftment of women in a patriarchal and male-dominant structure, as this structure has created hurdles through the so-called social codes and customs" (Bhat, & Riyaz, 2022, p. 297).

Alvira and Setyowati (2021) examine gender-based discrimination in *Before She Sleeps*, focusing on the protagonist's experiences and the broader sociocultural implications of inequality within a dystopian context. Asif, Qaisar, and Iftikhar (2021)



explore spatial resistance in the novel through a postmodern urban lens, analyzing how characters navigate and reshape urban spaces as acts of defiance. Chambers and Lowden (2022), applying postcolonial theory, discuss “infection rebellion” as symbolic resistance to systemic control, linking it to broader themes of agency and subversion in postcolonial societies. Existing studies often focus broadly on dystopian elements or reproductive politics but fail to fully investigate the nuanced ways in which Shah portrays women’s subjugation, commodification, and resistance. This research aims to fill that gap by providing a focused feminist analysis of the novel, contributing to both regional literary discourse and global feminist criticism.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in feminist literary criticism to explore women’s subjugation in Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps*. Through close textual analysis, this research investigates how patriarchal structures in the novel contribute to the objectification, commodification, and marginalization of women. Key feminist theories — especially those by de Beauvoir — inform the analysis of characters, narrative strategies, and themes of resistance. The study also incorporates secondary scholarly sources to support and contextualize its interpretations within existing feminist discourse.

Kealey (1979) elucidates that “feminism, an ideology of women, is anybody of social philosophy about women.” This broad definition allows for the inclusion of diverse strands of feminist thought, encompassing “various types of feminisms: right-wing, left-wing, centralist, left of center, right of center, reformist, separatist, liberal, socialist, Marxist, nonaligned, Islamic, indigenous, etc.” (pp. 6-8). Talbot (2010) asserts that feminism constitutes a political movement committed to initiating societal change and, ultimately, disrupting the ongoing perpetuation of systemic gender-based inequalities “between men and women.” The intersection of language and gender occupies a central position within feminist discourse, operating alongside “other social practices and institutions... reflecting, creating, and sustaining gender divisions in society” (p. 16). Tandon (2008) remarks that feminism holds diverse meanings for different individuals, “ranging from a wish to change and challenge the whole existing order of things to the desire to bring about a more balanced and saner equality between the sexes.” At its core, feminism seeks “a respectable individual liberty for women with their natural instincts, characteristics and intact” (p. 25). The question, “What is a woman?” the core of the writings of numerous feminist theorists. Beauvoir (1949) first answers this question in the introduction to her book *The Second Sex* as, “‘Tota mulier in utero,’ that means, ‘woman is a womb’” (p. 1). Beauvoir (1949) discusses that “when the girl enters the stage of puberty, her body becomes to her a source of horror and shame (p. 333). Here is the implication of women as being sex objects. Further, Beauvoir (1949) asserts that men’s attitudes toward women are often shaped by their own insecurities. “No one is more arrogant towards women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility” (p. 25). She explains that men who are not plagued by fear in the company of other men are “much more disposed to recognize a fellow-creature in women” (p. 25). However, even these men often cling to “the myth of women, the other,” which remains “precious for many reasons” (p. 25). Beauvoir (1949) elucidates how patriarchy constructs a hierarchical division between men and women, relegating women to “the lowest tier of society” (p. 390). This pervasive gender inequality and systemic discrimination have fueled the feminist movement’s efforts to challenge



oppression and advocate for women's equal rights across all spheres of life. Within a patriarchal framework, Beauvoir (1949) argues that women are regarded as the "other" — a subordinate and marginalized group whose identity and agency are seen as secondary to men. She asserts that men are viewed as the default "self," whereas women are defined in opposition as "the other," a dichotomy that reflects patriarchy's tendency to label women as "inferior" and men as "superior." Further, Beauvoir (1949) asserts that women are condemned "to a mutilated and frozen existence" (p. 390), trapped within societal roles that deny them full autonomy. She strongly opposes this inequality and argues that true liberation for women lies in achieving "complete economic and social equality, which will bring about an inner metamorphosis" (p. 686).

Textual Analysis

Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps* presents a dystopian vision of a patriarchal society in which the subjugation of women is institutionalized through reproductive control, surveillance, and enforced domesticity. From a feminist perspective, the novel exposes deeply entrenched systems that reduce women to tools for population regeneration and emotional labor, stripping them of autonomy and subjectivity. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "the Other," Shah illustrates how patriarchal structures define women in relation to men, rendering them secondary, voiceless, and commodified. Female characters, particularly Sabine and the women of the Panah, represent diverse responses to this imposed subjugation—ranging from silent endurance to covert defiance. Their resistance extends beyond physical survival to challenging ideological domination, thereby asserting limited but significant agency within oppressive structures.

Sabine, reflecting on her objectified role as a Panah companion, reveals how her value is tethered to aesthetics and male desire: "My clients are always fascinated with it, stroking their fingers against my shimmering skin. Some even say it's an aphrodisiac" (Shah, 2020, p. 29). However, she simultaneously critiques this treatment, observing, "but I think they like that it's real gold dust: we signal to them that we are even more precious than gold" (Shah, 2020, p. 29). This metaphor underscores how women's worth is artificially inflated through material symbolism, reducing them to luxuries within a dystopian patriarchy. Their perceived value is not rooted in humanity or individuality but in their commodification, masked by the illusion of reverence. The illusion is further unraveled through Sabine's comment, "Lin knows the ins and outs of our bodies, our secret birthmarks and tattoos, the days of our cycle, how often we wash our hair" (Shah, 2020, p. 29). This intimate surveillance exemplifies the loss of bodily autonomy. Sabine likens their existence to that of "racehorses she sends off into the night and takes us back into her safekeeping in the morning" (Shah, 2020, p. 29), reinforcing the image of women as regulated assets—trained, deployed, and retrieved according to patriarchal demands. Lin's control, though portrayed as maternal or protective, ultimately mirrors the system's objectification and surveillance.

This dynamic of commodified care is further evident in Sabine's interactions with Joseph, whose repeated attempts to intoxicate her under the guise of comfort represent a subtler form of coercion. "Joseph always tries to get me drunk. He says it'll make me sleep" (Shah, 2020, p. 24). Lin's probing question — "Aren't you ever tempted?" — suggests a deeper form of psychological manipulation. Sabine's response — "I know this is a test, so I feign ignorance" (Shah, 2020, p. 24) — reveals her strategic compliance in the face of surveillance. Even rest and consciousness, Shah suggests, are not beyond patriarchal



regulation. This moment encapsulates the novel's central theme: how women's well-being, bodies, and emotions are not their own but are constantly shaped, managed, and commodified within the structures of control that define Green City.

The Green City stuffs the women in the novel with revolt to redress the system that is un-left after the waves of war because of its suffocated environment. Like all the war-stricken nations of the world, this is a waste and dead land where a great number of women have been engulfed by the virus. They expect women to repopulate the city to make an equal number of men and women in the future as women have died of a fatal plague by making a grand snare of 'Gender Emergency'. (Nadia et al., 2024, p. 23)

Sabine reflects on her past and the long-lasting consequences of her father's impulsive decision to marry her off. She ponders, "I often wonder about my father: I wonder if he misses me, if he wishes we could see each other again. Does he realize the cost of his greed to get me married quickly? Is he sorry?" (Shah, 2020, p. 24). These questions reveal her unresolved emotional conflict and a lingering sense of betrayal, as she grapples with the emotional abandonment that accompanied her commodification. She further questions herself, "Am I sorry that I came here?" (Shah, 2020, p. 24), exposing the internal struggle and enduring regret tied to choices made under coercion. Sabine recognizes that while societal norms may tolerate reluctant compliance — "you can go into your household as a reluctant bride — that's only a minor infraction" — they leave no room for inner resistance: "there's no way to bow down to Green City when there's rebellion in your heart" (Shah, 2020, p. 24). This confession reflects the persistent tension between personal agency and institutional expectations. Her admission — "I had no choice, but five years on, I'm still not at peace with my decision. Maybe insomnia's my punishment for my reluctance" (Shah, 2020, p. 24) — illustrates the psychological toll of forced conformity and highlights the long-term emotional consequences women endure in a society that suppresses autonomy.

Sabine offers a nuanced perspective on Rupa's behavior within their shared environment, recognizing that her sharpness conceals deeper, unspoken struggles. "I have felt the sharp side of Rupa's tongue as much as the others have here," she admits, "but then I know things about her that the others don't" (Shah, 2020, p. 25). This insight fosters empathy in Sabine, prompting her to "feel sorry for her, and often defend her when Lin remarks drily on how Rupa's being 'difficult'" (Shah, 2020, p. 25). Her reflection reveals the tension between those who have been institutionalized within the Panah and those, like Rupa, who arrived from the outside. As Sabine observes, "It's not easy when you've come to the Panah from the outside. Lin doesn't remember because she's always called it home" (Shah, 2020, p. 25). The passage underscores how emotional resilience and adaptation differ based on personal histories and how judgment often ignores the hidden trauma of women who have experienced the external world.

In Green City, harming or mistreating women was considered a grave offense due to their perceived importance in the national repopulation effort. As the novelist notes, "It was a capital crime to hit or abuse a woman: women in Green City were precious resources, to be treasured and protected, looked after and provided for, in return for their bodies given to the cause of repopulation" (Shah, 2020, p. 35). However, this supposed reverence masked a deeper exploitation. The women endured severe physical tolls from "fertility drugs" that led to multiple births such as triplets and quadruplets, and "the high-risk pregnancies wore them out quickly" (Shah, 2020, p. 35). As a result, they were "discouraged



from taking up too much activity outside the house, in fresh air,” and traditional labor was deemed “beneath them,” leaving “domestics” to handle most household tasks (Shah, 2020, p. 35). Initially, Sabine felt an intense urge to resist the treatment she was subjected to, desiring to reclaim her agency. The novelist captures this inner turmoil as Sabine reflects, “I was burning to tell my father I wouldn’t be sold like a slave” (Shah, 2020, p. 37). However, despite this initial resistance, she chose silence over confrontation: “But I kept my silence after I’d gotten over the initial shock” (Shah, 2020, p. 37). Rather than act outwardly, Sabine turned inward, relying on her resilience and resourcefulness: “Something in me told me to go deep inside myself, to squeeze out every last bit of patience and cleverness that I had, and to rescue myself if my father was not going to help me” (Shah, 2020, p. 37). This quiet rebellion is set against the backdrop of institutional grooming, where “the girls are given classes in Household Technology, Health, and Reproductive Sciences” (Shah, 2020, p. 37). While “most girls are thrilled to begin the process of their elevation in society” (Shah, 2020, p. 37), Sabine stands apart. She joins “others, like me,” who “pretend enthusiasm while secretly feeling nothing but a sense of impending doom” (Shah, 2020, p. 37).

The novelist poignantly portrays the internal conflict experienced by women as they navigate the tension between imposed societal expectations and their personal desires. This contrast—between those who enthusiastically accept their designated roles and those who covertly resist, burdened by a sense of inevitable subjugation—reveals the broader theme of the commodification of women’s identities and ambitions. Within a system that privileges traditional gender roles over individual autonomy, women’s agency is systematically diminished. Sabine articulates this resistance in a moment of emotional intensity, expressing to her mother a desperate plea to escape objectification: “Mama, I don’t want to be bought and sold like a piece of meat. I don’t want to belong to anybody. I don’t want to have babies. I want to have a life” (Shah, 2020, p. 38). Shah (2020) highlights the desperation of a young woman determined to break free from the restrictive roles and predetermined fate imposed upon her by a patriarchal society. Her plea for assistance, coupled with a readiness to do whatever is necessary to reclaim autonomy, reflects the profound commodification of women and the erosion of their agency. This depiction illustrates how women like Sabine are forced to abandon personal aspirations in favor of survival within a system that objectifies and controls them. Furthermore, the women of the Panah emerge as rare sources of emotional intimacy for men, revealing how both their bodies and emotional capacities are commodified and exploited to fulfill societal and patriarchal demands. Sabine, the protagonist, poignantly gives voice to her internal turmoil and the weight of her role within the Panah: “A few months after my eighteenth birthday, Lin said I was finally ready for an assignation” (Shah, 2020, p. 43). Over the preceding year, she had been rigorously trained in “all the security protocols for arrivals and departures” (Shah, 2020, p. 43), preparing her for a role steeped in performance and secrecy. The illusion they offer to men is powerful and deeply symbolic— “we’re the only ones who can give it to them because there are so few of us left: free women, unattached to anyone else, our loyalties belonging to no one but the Panah” (Shah, 2020, p. 44). Their mere presence offers a fleeting fantasy of autonomy and intimacy in a post-war society where such freedom no longer exists. As Sabine notes, “We let them believe that possessing one woman, just for a short while, is still possible in Green City, even though that kind of life went extinct the moment the bombs went off in the Final War” (Shah, 2020, p. 44).



In *Before She Sleeps*, Lin offers Sabine counsel that encapsulates the complex boundaries of their roles within a commodified, patriarchal society. When Lin instructs, “You’re there for companionship, not sex. Don’t trespass the limits and you’ll be fine” (Shah, 2020, p. 45), she emphasizes the necessity of maintaining professional detachment while providing emotional intimacy. Her satisfaction in preparing Sabine for her role reflects the performative precision expected of women who must navigate male desire without fully surrendering to it. Lin further imparts a vital truth that unveils the paradox at the heart of their commodification: despite male assertions “to control us” and their perceptions of women as “weak”, there remains a profound and inescapable dependency. As Lin explains, “but our love and care, our human warmth, our physical presence. These men are unwilling to jeopardize what you offer them” (Shah, 2020, p. 45). This revelation underscores that the value women provide extends beyond physical or sexual utility; it is the emotional labor—care, warmth, presence—that sustains their perceived worth. The passage reflects the feminist critique of how patriarchal systems exploit not only women's bodies but also their capacity for relational and emotional sustenance, thereby deepening the layers of commodification they endure.

Lin’s decision to accompany Sabine to a Client’s house, defying Panah protocol, reflects the sense of solidarity and resistance that exists among the women. Lin’s words, “Remember, we only survive because of the rules we’ve made” (Shah, 2020, p. 45), emphasize how these rules act as a means of self-preservation, allowing the women some control over their circumstances. Lin suggests that their presence disrupts the Clients’ worldview and challenges the dominant narratives they have been taught about women’s roles. Sabine’s initial apprehensions about her first Client highlight the fear and vulnerability inherent in their situation. Despite Lin’s assurances, the potential for exploitation and harm remains ever-present. Sabine’s vigilance, as she sits with one foot on the floor, symbolizes the fragile nature of their security and the emotional toll of constantly having to remain alert. However, Sabine’s encounter with her first Client introduces an unexpected dimension. He treats her with courtesy and kindness, dispelling her initial fears. His demeanor contrasts with the anticipated dynamic of commodified interaction, instead presenting him as a respectful and gentle figure, like a “grandfather who’d had a wild youth but wanted to cap his life with a sedate, chaste courtship” (Shah, 2020, p. 46). This unexpected behavior complicates the simplistic categorization of the women as mere objects of desire, instead highlighting the tensions and ambiguities within their commodified relationships.

Before She Sleeps collectively reveals the complex emotional and social architecture of commodified companionship, illustrating how women’s experiences, resistance strategies, and the Clients’ responses form a layered narrative of power, control, and unexpected human connection. The older woman’s reflection on her aging body — her “shirking bones” and “withering flesh” (Shah, 2020, p. 49) — underscores the physical toll of time and the persistent societal demand for youthful beauty. Her admission that vanity is her last link to youth highlights how women are valued primarily for their appearance, reinforcing the commodification of their bodies. Moreover, the critique of newly implemented Bureau rules regulating the time a Wife can spend with her Husband further exposes the extent of systemic intrusion. The mockery of using a stopwatch to measure intimacy satirizes the absurdity of such control, reflecting a dehumanizing policy that reduces women to instruments of reproductive function. The mention of “a new hope for



Green City and South West Asia” (Shah, 2020, p. 49) illustrates how women’s primary social value is framed as their ability to bear children, with little regard for their individual agency or emotional needs.

Shah (2020) further describes the Gender Emergency as a moment of radical societal transformation in which “women were now the endangered species” (p. 50). This metaphor captures both the physical scarcity of women following war and disease and the heightened vulnerability to institutional control. The Perpetuation Bureau exploits this scarcity, enforcing obedience through fear and propaganda. While women are nominally placed on a “pedestal,” this elevation is exposed as a hollow facade concealing manipulation and coercion (Shah, 2020, p. 50). Behind the narrative of national revival lies a calculated mechanism of submission, with severe consequences for dissent. The threat of punishment, including elimination, and the Bureau’s willingness to “sacrifice a few women for compliance” expose the brutal tactics used to suppress resistance (Shah, 2020, p. 50). Sabine reflects on the systemic nature of this oppression, noting, “The gamble worked; within five years, no woman voiced opposition when she was directed to marry once, twice, thrice, as many times as the Bureau told her to” (Shah, 2020, p. 50). The use of the word “gamble” signals the calculated risk behind state strategies that ultimately succeeded in quashing female autonomy.

Finally, Sabine’s observation — “Just when it seemed that women had no choices left, Fairuza and I decided to speak with our feet and escape. But the borders were sealed and there was nowhere to go. Except down” (Shah, 2020, p. 51) — captures the physical and metaphorical entrapment faced by women. The phrase “speaking with our feet” suggests an act of resistance through escape, while the “sealed” borders reflect the state’s absolute control. The only possible direction left— “down”— hints at an underground existence, both literal and symbolic, illustrating the confined spaces women are forced into when their value is defined solely by reproductive utility. Together, these passages depict a dystopian society where obedience is manufactured through fear, emotional labor is commodified, and resistance is rendered almost impossible.

Shah (2020) provides a poignant depiction of the commodification of women under the authoritarian regime of Green City, where female autonomy is systematically suppressed in favor of reproductive utility. Sabine’s mother emerges as a figure of quiet resistance, initially attempting to subvert the system by feigning infertility in order to maintain a sense of normalcy and protect her family from state intrusion. Her refusal “to take another husband” (Shah, 2020, p. 156) is a deliberate act of defiance, signaling a rejection of the Bureau’s mandate that reduces women to reproductive vessels. However, her subversion is ultimately met with betrayal and surveillance, culminating in what is implied to be her suicide — a consequence of being “checkmated” by a regime that perceives dissenting women as existential threats. This tragic outcome powerfully illustrates the brutal consequences faced by women who attempt to reclaim their agency. Her story highlights the system’s underlying violence, where resistance is punished through social ostracization or elimination, and women’s lives are rendered expendable in the service of state-driven reproduction. Shah’s narrative thus underscores the dehumanizing implications of a society that commodifies women, revealing how even the most personal acts of defiance are neutralized by institutional power.



Conclusion

Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps* offers a chilling exploration of patriarchal oppression, revealing how women's identities, bodies, and emotional lives are systematically controlled and commodified in the name of societal stability. Through the lens of feminist critique, the novel highlights the various mechanisms — reproductive regulation, surveillance, domestic confinement, and emotional labor — used to strip women of autonomy and agency. Sabine and the other women of Panah symbolize both the trauma and quiet resistance of those forced to navigate these oppressive structures. Shah underscores that even in the bleakest systems, moments of rebellion — whether internal or external — persist, exposing the cracks in patriarchal dominance. By drawing on feminist thought, particularly Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "the Other," the novel critiques how institutional and cultural forces render women secondary and subservient. Ultimately, *Before She Sleeps* serves as both a dystopian warning and a powerful feminist narrative, urging readers to recognize and challenge the enduring realities of female subjugation in both fictional and real-world societies.

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