



**UNVEILING PATRIARCHAL SUBJUGATION OF  
WOMEN: A FEMINIST STUDY OF BINA SHAH'S  
*BEFORE SHE SLEEPS***

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**Abstract**

Patriarchal systems exert a profound influence on societal structures, frequently reducing women to the status of objects or commodities within cultural, political, and social frameworks. This entrenched condition necessitates rigorous scholarly inquiry. Within this context, the present study undertakes an analysis of women's subjugation in Bina Shah's dystopian novel *Before She Sleeps*, employing feminist theoretical perspectives. Shah, an acclaimed Pakistani author, constructs a stark depiction of a society in which women's agency, identities, and bodies are subjected to systematic regulation, surveillance, and commodification under male-dominated authority. The research critically interrogates the socio-political mechanisms sustaining such commodification, highlighting the resulting marginalization and dehumanization of women. Concurrently, it foregrounds the resilience of female characters, illustrating their persistent struggles for autonomy and acts of resistance against entrenched objectification. The analysis of the selected text demonstrates that in Shah's fictional society, women are denied recognition as fully realized individuals and are primarily valued for their reproductive function. Moreover, the novel's portrayal of gender-based oppression offers a salient contribution to contemporary feminist discourse, particularly in relation to women's rights, bodily autonomy, and modes of resistance within dystopian literature. In doing so, this research affirms the capacity of dystopian fiction to serve as a critical site for challenging and deconstructing patriarchal ideologies.

**Keywords:** *Patriarchy, Feminism, Women's subjugation, Marginalization, Commodification, Resistance*

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## 1. Introduction

Patriarchal society distributes the power unevenly between men and women in which men have the advantage of being superior to women. In society the power of decision making and to dominate is given to the males of the society. In Indian society the women have been trapped in the boundaries set by the patriarchal system. The condition of women in India is majorly affected by the patriarchal system. (Trivedi & Tiwari, 2016, p. 1)

Contemporary societies remain entrenched in androcentric structures, sustained by value systems that systematically privilege men and perpetuate the relegation of women to subordinate positions. Within these frameworks, women experience sustained discrimination, are denied fundamental rights, and are constrained to marginal and dependent roles. They are frequently perceived not as autonomous beings but as commodities, “others,” subaltern figures, and instruments of reproduction. As Qasim et al. (2024) observe, patriarchy perpetuates “the suppression, oppression, and mistreatment of women, manifesting in their social, political, emotional, sexual, and physical exploitation” and actively hinders women’s emancipation in political, social, and educational domains (p. 171). Within this system, men occupy dominant roles while women are relegated to subordinate positions. Such patriarchal arrangements have historically marginalized and victimized women, perpetuating their oppression and suffering (Mumtaz & Kaurp, 2022, p. 16).

“To continue a feminine legacy, Shah is one of the recent Pakistani writers who probe their female protagonists to become face to face with their social and moral circumstances so that they will be able to heal the wounds inflicted upon them by violent masculinity” (Kanwal & Iqbal, p. 23). *Before She Sleeps* by Bina Shah is a feminist dystopian narrative that delivers provocative and intellectually engaging reflections on the challenges faced by women in repressive, restrictive cultures. Set in a post-apocalyptic world shaped by environmental collapse and nuclear catastrophe, the novel is located in Green City — a fictional South Asian metropolis that distinguishes Shah’s vision from the predominantly Western tradition of dystopian settings. This shift in geographic and cultural context offers a fresh perspective for interrogating entrenched patriarchal norms and gendered hierarchies. Central to the plot is a biological crisis: a deadly virus that devastates the female reproductive system. In response, the ruling authorities establish the Perpetuation Bureau, an institution that enforces strict population control and legalizes polygamy. Women — now officially designated as “Wives” — are allocated to multiple husbands and reduced to reproductive instruments. While they are outwardly honored and

protected, they remain stripped of autonomy, their identities and bodies commodified under the guise of societal preservation.

“The depiction of ‘Women ‘in Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps* offers a feminist prism to examine and criticize gender norms, patriarchy, and female autonomy in Pakistani society” (Kanwal & Iqbal, p. 26). Shah (2020) dramatizes the tension between the façade of reverence for women and the underlying reality of repression. Within this oppressive regime, a clandestine group of women known as Panah (meaning “refuge”) rejects the assigned roles of subservience and invisibility. Operating in secrecy beneath the city, they create a sanctuary where they reclaim a measure of agency by offering non-sexual emotional companionship to influential men — an inversion of traditional gender norms that subtly undermines patriarchal authority. The story of the novel unfolds through multiple perspectives, most prominently those of Sabine and Lin, the enigmatic leader of Panah. These shifting viewpoints illuminate themes of resistance, complicity, and survival in a society governed by totalitarian control. However, the minimal representation of the Wives’ own voices produces a notable narrative gap, slightly constraining the scope of the feminist critique. Nevertheless, *Before She Sleeps* merges dystopian speculation with feminist inquiry in a manner deeply informed by South Asian socio-cultural realities. Its layered exploration of reproductive control, systemic gender oppression, and modes of female resistance positions the novel as a critical intervention in the discourse on women’s subjugation within speculative fiction.

## 2. Review of Literature

Zubair et al. (2020) highlight that feminism seeks to dismantle long-entrenched patriarchal structures that subordinate and suppress women (p. 600). Within English literary traditions, feminist writing and criticism have played a crucial role in interrogating and deconstructing patriarchal ideologies. Analyses of male dominance — rooted in historical and social power asymmetries — span multiple literary periods and cultural contexts, revealing patriarchy as a persistent and multifaceted concern in literary studies. Mahajan (2016) positions feminism as a vital element of contemporary literature, framing it as a socio-political, economic, and cultural movement that confronts “the exploitation of women by the patriarchal system of society” (p. 738).

Patriarchal systems are sustained through social institutions that reinforce male authority and female subordination. In many contexts, the family serves as a key site for such reinforcement, with figures such as fathers and husbands occupying central positions of control and authority, thereby perpetuating gender hierarchies (Fauzia & Rahayu, 2019). As Bhat and Riyaz (2022) argue, within a patriarchal structure, women have consistently

been treated as secondary, facing systemic barriers to empowerment through entrenched social codes and customs (p. 297). Sakina et al. (2017) emphasize that patriarchy is not merely a contemporary issue but one deeply rooted in history. Historical records consistently depict men as rulers of ancient kingdoms, while women frequently appear in subordinate roles — often as concubines or objects of desire — reflecting their reduced social value. Patriarchal practices are so deeply ingrained that they are often perceived as natural, shaping norms and expectations across diverse aspects of life. In many societies, cultural and social conventions discourage women from participating in politics or governance, reinforcing the perception that leadership and decision-making are male domains (Nurcahyo, 2016).

“Literature has always been an effective medium for raising the voices of those marginalised by society and giving them a forum where they are able to express their experiences and get the credit they deserve” (Bashir & Tanveer, 2024, p. 201). Patriarchal dominance has long been a recurring theme in English literature, both reflected and critiqued in literary works that address the societal norms privileging men over women. Feminist literature and criticism have played a pivotal role in analyzing and challenging these entrenched hierarchies. From early literary traditions to contemporary narratives, the exploration of patriarchal dominance remains a central and enduring concern, underscoring the persistent nature of gendered power imbalances. Mahajan (2016) observes that the female characters in *Ice Candy-Man* illuminate both the mistreatment of women and the societal pressures that confine them to predefined gender roles, thereby exposing the patriarchal biases embedded in traditional social attitudes. Within this system of structural discrimination — where women are conditioned for perpetual subordination — the novel’s female characters reveal an acute awareness of their desires and a determined assertion of independence.

Similarly, Goyal (2020) highlights how patriarchy fundamentally shapes the protagonist’s hardships in Meena Kandasamy’s *When I Hit You*. The protagonist’s marriage shifts from an ostensibly egalitarian relationship to one dominated by control and abuse, illustrating how patriarchal values undermine personal autonomy. These values extend to the protagonist’s parents, whose concern for social reputation overrides their daughter’s well-being, thus reinforcing patriarchal norms. The protagonist’s journey reflects a broader feminist critique of patriarchy, charting a progression through the phases of imitation, protest, and self-discovery common in feminist literary traditions. Fitriani and Sulasih (2022) make a parallel observation in their study of *Girl of the Southern Sea*, where the protagonist Nia endures multiple forms of injustice rooted in entrenched patriarchal culture. These include the marginalization and subordination of women, as well as the

perpetuation of harmful gender stereotypes — all of which underscore the pervasive nature of patriarchal oppression in literature and society.

In the context of *Before She Sleeps*, existing scholarship has explored the novel through various critical frameworks. Alvira and Setyowati (2021) investigate gender-based discrimination, focusing on the protagonist's lived experiences and the broader sociocultural implications of inequality in a dystopian setting. Asif et. al., (2021) adopt a postmodern urban perspective to examine spatial resistance, analyzing how characters reclaim and reshape urban spaces as forms of defiance.

While these studies provide valuable insights, much of the existing research addresses the novel's dystopian features or its reproductive politics in a broad sense. There remains limited engagement with the more nuanced ways in which Shah depicts the interconnected processes of women's subjugation, commodification, and resistance.

### 3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in feminist literary criticism to examine the subjugation of women in Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps*. Through close textual analysis, it investigates how patriarchal structures within the novel facilitate the objectification, commodification, and marginalization of women. The analysis is informed by key feminist theories — particularly those articulated by Simone de Beauvoir — and considers how characters, narrative strategies, and thematic elements convey both oppression and resistance. Secondary scholarly sources are also incorporated to contextualize these interpretations within broader feminist discourse.

Feminism critiques the male-dominated structures that shape women's experiences, actively opposing their systematic exclusion from political, economic, educational, and social opportunities. It also promotes the achievement of equal rights for women in all spheres of life. As a social movement, feminism seeks to empower women by advocating for equal rights and opportunities alongside men. (Qasim et al., 2024, pp. 175-176)

Feminism challenges the entrenched male-dominated frameworks that shape women's experiences, opposing the systematic exclusion of women from political, economic, educational, and social opportunities. At its core, it advocates for the full attainment of equal rights for women across all areas of life. Emerging as a response to the pervasive structures of male dominance, feminism seeks to dismantle the mechanisms that sustain gender-based oppression. Broadly defined, it constitutes a movement aimed at resisting the marginalization, subordination, and denigration of women, as imposed by dominant cultural forces operating within political, economic, and social spheres (Regina

& Setyowati, 2020). Kealey (1979) defines feminism as “an ideology of women” and broadly as “anybody of social philosophy about women” (pp. 6-8). This definition allows for the inclusion of multiple strands of feminist thought, encompassing a wide range of positions, such as “right-wing, left-wing, centralist, left of center, right of center, reformist, separatist, liberal, socialist, Marxist, nonaligned, Islamic, indigenous, etc.” Talbot (2010) frames feminism as a political movement dedicated to initiating social change and dismantling systemic gender-based inequalities “between men and women” (p. 16). She highlights the intersection of language and gender as central to feminist inquiry, operating in tandem with other social practices and institutions that “reflect, create, and sustain gender divisions in society” (p. 16). Tandon (2008) similarly notes that feminism carries diverse meanings, ranging from a radical desire to overturn the existing social order to more moderate aims of establishing balanced equality between the sexes. At its core, feminism seeks “a respectable individual liberty for women with their natural instincts, characteristics and intact” (p. 25).

Females are still not yet at par with males in almost every sector because there is only a stereotypical assignment of roles and duties to the female folk despite the incessant struggle of many brave and bold women for attaining their dues, getting back their lost power, space, time and privileges. (Chaudhuri, 2021, p. 131)

Patriarchy continues to impose significant restrictions on women’s autonomy and opportunities, a reality underscored by Beauvoir’s (1949) assertion that women can only attain genuine emancipation through both economic independence and social equality. She contends that women have historically secured only those rights and freedoms that men have been willing to concede, rather than claiming them through self-determination. The question “What is a woman?” lies at the heart of many feminist theoretical explorations. Beauvoir (1949), in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, famously cites the Latin phrase *tota mulier in utero* — “woman is a womb” (p. 1) — to underscore the reductive ways in which women have historically been defined by their reproductive capacity. She describes how, upon reaching puberty, girls often come to regard their bodies with “horror and shame” (p. 333), a social conditioning that positions them as sexual objects. Beauvoir further argues that men’s attitudes toward women are frequently 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). While men free from such anxieties may be more inclined to recognize women as fellow human beings, Beauvoir contends that even they often cling to “the myth of women, the other,” a construct that remains “precious for many reasons” (p. 25).

According to Beauvoir (1949), patriarchy perpetuates a hierarchical divide between men and women, positioning women on “the lowest tier of society” (p. 390). Within this framework, women are regarded as “the other” — a subordinate group whose identity and agency are secondary to men, who are positioned as the default “self.” This binary reflects patriarchy’s tendency to define women as “inferior” and men as “superior,” thereby legitimizing structural inequality. Beauvoir asserts that such conditions condemn women “to a mutilated and frozen existence” (p. 390), confining them to roles that deny full autonomy. She maintains that true liberation requires “complete economic and social equality, which will bring about an inner metamorphosis” (p. 686). These theoretical insights form the foundation for this study’s feminist reading of *Before She Sleeps*, enabling a nuanced understanding of how Shah’s narrative exposes, critiques, and reimagines women’s position within patriarchal systems.

#### 4. Textual Analysis

“[*Before She Sleeps*] is a feminist dystopia which depicts a futuristic society in eastern region of the world where women face so much oppression and repression” (Shaheen et al., p. 597). Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps* envisions a dystopian patriarchal order in which women’s subjugation is systematically institutionalized through reproductive control, constant surveillance, and enforced domestic roles. From a feminist standpoint, the novel interrogates deeply entrenched mechanisms that reduce women to instruments of population regeneration and emotional labor, thereby stripping them of autonomy, subjectivity, and self-definition. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir’s conception of woman as “the Other,” Shah depicts how patriarchal structures define women exclusively in relation to men, rendering them secondary, voiceless, and commodified. Female figures — most notably Sabine and the members of Panah — articulate diverse responses to systemic oppression, spanning from quiet endurance to discreet acts of resistance. Their defiance transcends mere physical survival, engaging in the ideological contestation of the dominant narratives that seek to define and constrain them.

Sabine’s reflections as a Panah companion underscore how her worth is constructed through the intersecting forces of male desire and the commodifying gaze. Her observation that clients are captivated by the tactile allure of her “shimmering skin,” described as containing gold dust, positions her body as both an object of erotic fascination and a luxury commodity. This dynamic reflects the fusion of sexualized appeal with material opulence, revealing how female subjectivity in Green City is mediated through market logics. Her subsequent remark — that they value her because the gold is “real” and thus imbues her with a status “even more precious than gold”— functions as a nuanced critique of the city’s value hierarchies, in which human worth is measured through the

symbols and aesthetics of wealth. In this way, Sabine exposes the cultural economy of Green City, where desirability and economic value are mutually reinforcing constructs.

The gold metaphor underscores the artificial inflation of women's worth through material and symbolic markers, framing them as ornamental luxuries rather than autonomous human beings with intrinsic individuality. This commodification is intensified through Sabine's account of Lin's intimate surveillance over their physicality: "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). Here, the precision of bodily knowledge signifies the systematic cataloguing and regulation of women's corporeal existence, reducing them to meticulously maintained commodities whose value is determined and preserved for male consumption. Such intimate surveillance signals the erosion of bodily autonomy, casting women as meticulously managed assets — "like racehorses she sends off into the night and takes us back into her safekeeping in the morning" (Shah, 2020, p. 29). Though Lin's oversight is framed as protective, it ultimately reproduces the same structures of objectification and control that the larger patriarchal order enforces.

"Shah portrays the socio-political implications of this commodification, by highlighting the dehumanization and marginalization of women" (Mortaza, 2023, p. 37). This commodified form of care extends into Sabine's interactions with Joseph, whose persistent offers of alcohol — framed as a means to help her rest — expose a subtler yet more insidious mode of coercion: "Joseph always tries to get me drunk. He says it'll make me sleep" (Shah, 2020, p. 24). Here, the guise of concern masks an underlying exertion of control, illustrating how patriarchal authority often operates through ostensibly benign gestures that, in effect, compromise women's agency and reinforce their subordination. Lin's seemingly casual question — "Aren't you ever tempted?" — suggests a deeper psychological test of Sabine's compliance. Her response — "I know this is a test, so I feign ignorance" (Shah, 2020, p. 24) — demonstrates a conscious strategy of self-preservation in the face of unrelenting observation. Even rest, Shah implies, is subject to patriarchal regulation, with women's bodies, emotions, and mental states managed as part of a larger system of control. Through these moments, *Before She Sleeps* reveals how women's existence in Green City is shaped by the dual forces of commodification and surveillance, where the illusion of care operates as an extension of patriarchal domination.

In *Before She Sleeps*, Green City emerges as an oppressive space in which women are burdened with both biological and ideological expectations in the aftermath of war. The suffocating environment reflects the devastation of other war-torn nations — a barren, depleted landscape in which a catastrophic virus has decimated the female population. In this context, women are conscripted into the state's "Gender Emergency" program, their

reproductive capacity instrumentalized to restore demographic balance by producing an equal number of men and women in the future (Nadia et al., 2024, p. 23).

Sabine's personal narrative illuminates the lasting emotional and psychological costs of such commodification. Recalling her father's impulsive decision to marry her off, she reflects: "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 a profound sense of betrayal, as Sabine grapples with both emotional abandonment and the transactional nature of her marriage. Her self-interrogation — "Am I sorry that I came here?" (Shah, 2020, p. 24) — highlights the internal conflict that follows coerced choices. While reluctant compliance may be socially permissible ("you can go into your household as a reluctant bride — that's only a minor infraction"), Green City leaves no space for internal dissent: "there's no way to bow down to Green City when there's rebellion in your heart" (Shah, 2020, p. 24). Her acknowledgment — "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) — articulates the enduring psychological toll of enforced conformity and the suppression of autonomy.

Sabine also offers a nuanced reading of interpersonal dynamics within Panah, particularly in her observations about Rupa. Aware of Rupa's abrasive demeanor — "I have felt the sharp side of Rupa's tongue as much as the others have here" — she nonetheless perceives the unspoken struggles beneath it: "but then I know things about her that the others don't" (Shah, 2020, p. 25). This awareness fosters empathy, prompting her to defend Rupa against Lin's dismissive remarks about her being "difficult" (Shah, 2020, p. 25). Sabine's reflections distinguish between those institutionalized within Panah from an early age and those, like Rupa, who arrived from the outside: "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). This recognition highlights how personal history shapes emotional resilience and adaptation, and how institutional judgment often fails to account for the hidden trauma of women who have lived beyond its walls.

Green City's outwardly protective policies further reveal the paradox of patriarchal "reverence." As the narrator 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). This ostensible safeguarding masks deeper exploitation. Women endure grueling physical demands, including the use of "fertility drugs" that result in high-risk pregnancies and multiple births, leaving them physically depleted (Shah, 2020, p. 35). Their movements are restricted — "discouraged from taking up too much activity outside the

house, in fresh air”— and they are exempt from traditional domestic work, which is instead performed by “domestics” (Shah, 2020, p. 35).

Sabine’s early desire to reject this treatment — “I was burning to tell my father I wouldn’t be sold like a slave” (Shah, 2020, p. 37) — ultimately gives way to calculated silence: “But I kept my silence after I’d gotten over the initial shock” (Shah, 2020, p. 37). Her strategy becomes one of inward resilience: “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 institutional grooming of women, who receive instruction 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,” Sabine aligns with “others, like me,” who “pretend enthusiasm while secretly feeling nothing but a sense of impending doom” (Shah, 2020, p. 37). Through Sabine’s perspective, Shah deftly reveals the layered realities of women’s oppression in Green City: a system that cloaks coercion in the language of reverence, normalizes surveillance as care, and cultivates outward compliance while suppressing inner dissent.

Patriarchal norms prescribe rigid gender roles and expectations for men and women, reinforcing stereotypes and inequalities. Women are often relegated to traditional roles as caregivers, homemakers, and subordinate members of the family, while men are expected to be the primary breadwinners and decision-makers. (Hiwarkhedka & Sharma, 2024, p. 1228)

The novelist poignantly depicts the internal conflict of women navigating the gulf between imposed societal roles and personal desires. This contrast — between those who embrace their designated functions and those who quietly resist — exposes the broader commodification of women’s identities and ambitions. Within a system that privileges tradition over autonomy, women’s agency is systematically eroded. Sabine’s impassioned plea to her mother, “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), crystallizes this struggle. Her determination to reject objectification, even at personal risk, reveals how deeply patriarchal systems dictate the fate of women, forcing them to sacrifice individual aspirations for survival.

Within the Panah, women are not only valued for their physical presence but also for their capacity to provide rare emotional intimacy. Sabine recalls her preparation — rigorous training in “all the security protocols for arrivals and departures” (Shah, 2020, p. 43) — for the performative role of an unattached woman in a post-war society devoid of such freedoms. “We’re the only ones who can give it to them... free women, unattached

to anyone else” (Shah, 2020, p. 44), she explains, underscoring the illusion they offer: a fleeting fantasy of possession that no longer exists beyond the walls of the Panah. This performance commodifies not just their bodies, but also their perceived autonomy, reinforcing Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion that women are constructed as “the Other” for male consumption.

Lin’s counsel to Sabine — “You’re there for companionship, not sex. Don’t trespass the limits and you’ll be fine” (Shah, 2020, p. 45) — reflects the delicate boundaries that define their work. By stressing emotional over sexual exchange, Lin reveals a paradox at the heart of their commodification: men may claim to control women and view them as weak, yet they remain dependent on “our love and care, our human warmth, our physical presence” (Shah, 2020, p. 45). This dynamic illustrates a feminist critique of patriarchal exploitation, where emotional labor is extracted and monetized alongside physicality, deepening the layers of control.

Acts of quiet resistance emerge through solidarity. Lin’s choice to accompany Sabine to a Client’s home, despite Panah protocol, reaffirms her belief that “we only survive because of the rules we’ve made” (Shah, 2020, p. 45). These rules grant a semblance of agency while challenging Clients’ assumptions about women’s roles. Sabine’s first encounter with a Client—marked by apprehension, vigilance, and the symbolic readiness to flee—embodies the vulnerability that underpins their apparent poise. Yet the Client’s unexpected kindness, likened to “a grandfather who’d had a wild youth but wanted to cap his life with a sedate, chaste courtship” (Shah, 2020, p. 46), complicates the binary of oppressor and victim. By depicting such moments of humane connection within a commodified system, Shah reveals the layered, often contradictory realities of women’s resistance and survival under patriarchy.

*Before She Sleeps* collectively maps the intricate emotional and social architecture of commodified companionship, presenting a layered narrative in which women’s lived experiences, resistance strategies, and Clients’ reactions intertwine within systems 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) — captures both the inevitable toll of time and the relentless societal demand for youthful beauty. Her admission that vanity is her last link to youth underscores how women are primarily valued for appearance, reinforcing the commodification of their bodies. This commodification extends into state regulation: newly imposed Bureau rules restrict the time a Wife may spend with her Husband, with intimacy measured by a literal stopwatch. The absurdity of this policy satirizes a bureaucratic logic that reduces women to reproductive instruments. Similarly, the phrase “a new hope for Green City and South West Asia” (Shah, 2020, p.

49) frames women's primary social worth as their capacity for childbirth, erasing individual agency and emotional needs.

Shah (2020) situates these measures within the broader context of the "Gender Emergency," a moment of radical societal transformation in which "women were now the endangered species" (p. 50). This metaphor conveys both the demographic scarcity following war and disease and the intensified vulnerability to institutional control. The Perpetuation Bureau exploits this scarcity, enforcing obedience through fear and propaganda. The apparent elevation of women onto a "pedestal" (Shah, 2020, p. 50) is revealed as a hollow performance, masking manipulation and coercion. Behind the rhetoric of national revival lies a calculated system of submission, with dissent punished by elimination. The Bureau's readiness to "sacrifice a few women for compliance" (Shah, 2020, p. 50) reveals the brutal calculus underpinning its governance. Sabine's reflection — "The gamble worked; within five years, no woman voiced opposition when she was directed to marry once, twice, thrice..." (Shah, 2020, p. 50) — frames these measures as a strategic risk that successfully extinguished female autonomy.

Acts of resistance emerge, though they are sharply constrained. Sabine's statement — "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) — embodies both physical and metaphorical entrapment. "Speaking with our feet" signals an attempt at agency through flight, while "sealed" borders indicate absolute state control. The sole remaining direction — "down" — suggests an underground existence, literal or symbolic, highlighting the shrinking spaces for women whose worth is defined solely by reproductive function.

Within this oppressive order, Shah (2020) crafts Sabine's mother as a figure of quiet defiance. She initially resists by feigning infertility to preserve family life from state intrusion and refuses "to take another husband" (p. 156), rejecting the Bureau's mandate to reproduce. This subversive stance is met with betrayal and relentless surveillance, culminating in an implied suicide — her final recourse when "checkmated" by a regime that constructs dissenting women as existential threats. Her fate crystallizes the latent violence of the system, wherein acts of defiance are met with ostracism or eradication, and women's lives are rendered expendable in the service of population regulation.

## 5. Conclusion

Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps* presents a stark and unsettling depiction of patriarchal domination, revealing how women's identities, bodies, and emotional lives are subjected to systematic regulation and commodification under the pretext of preserving

societal order. Viewed through a feminist critical framework, the novel delineates interlocking mechanisms of control — ranging from reproductive governance and state surveillance to domestic confinement and the appropriation of emotional labor — that collectively undermine female autonomy. The experiences of Sabine and the women of Panah encapsulate both the psychological trauma and the nuanced strategies of resistance that emerge within such repressive structures. Shah’s narrative resonates with Simone de Beauvoir’s theorization of woman as “the Other,” illuminating the ways in which institutional and cultural systems position women as subordinate, ancillary, and instrumental to male-centered objectives. Nevertheless, even within this dystopian milieu, moments of insubordination — manifested in covert defiance or the preservation of selfhood — reveal the inherent fragility of patriarchal authority. Ultimately, *Before She Sleeps* operates simultaneously as a speculative cautionary tale and a compelling feminist critique, urging a confrontation with and dismantling of entrenched forms of female subjugation in both imagined and actual contexts.

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