



THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S BODIES IN *BEFORE SHE SLEEPS*: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF REPRODUCTIVE EXPLOITATION, AUTONOMY AND TRAUMA

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the reproductive exploitation, limited autonomy, and the trauma in Shah's *Before She Sleeps* (2018). It investigates these harsh realities from a feminist perspective, while drawing on Kate Millet's work *Sexual Politics*. Through a dystopian narrative, it discloses a regime set in Green City that exploits, manipulates, and controls women's bodies to serve the state's reproductive needs. It critically examines the deep-rooted societal institutions that facilitate patriarchy to maintain its hegemony. While existing scholarship has explored resistance, rebellion, and gendered exploitation in this text extensively, limited attention has been given to Shah's work within this critical framework of Kate Millet. This research addresses this gap by analyzing how the novel portrays the resistance against reproductive exploitation and the societal expectations imposed on women's bodies in a compelling critique of patriarchal structures of society. It also uncovers the trauma women face while going through these horrendous experiences. Using qualitative textual analysis, this research applies Millet's idea of patriarchy as an institution that regulates gender and sexuality. It contributes to feminist dystopian studies by illustrating how literature can challenge the entrenched patriarchal norms by criticizing reproductive slavery and the social construction of gendered power.

Keywords: Control, Female Autonomy, Patriarchy, Reproductive Exploitation, Resistance, Sexual Politics, Trauma.

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1. Introduction

The political nature of reproduction and female autonomy is emphasized extensively by feminist scholars in the present times. Reproduction is now widely known as a process that is deeply shaped by state, institutions, laws, and their respective interests, while once it was a sacred, private, and biological matter. Historically, controlling women's reproductive function has been one of the most effective ways through which patriarchal domination is maintained, according to feminist theories. To explore how power works on women's lives, bodies, and identities, reproductive politics has emerged as an important site. Reproductive exploitation is examined extensively through a biopolitical lens in contemporary feminist discourse. As Power (2011) argues, by regulating people's bodies, sexuality, reproduction, and health, the state exercises and maintains dominance over their personal lives. The body of a woman becomes a site of surveillance, intervention, and discipline during times of crisis like war, economic instability, demographic, and other emergencies. Feminists argue that in favor of such collective survival, often women's autonomy is suspended, and such regimes legitimize coercion for their gains (Ginsburg & Rapp, 1995).

The harsh realities of reproductive authoritarianism are exposed extensively by literature, particularly through feminist dystopian fiction. These dystopias warn against the further normalization of such exploitation by imagining the most extreme yet believable future, while criticizing present age social structures. However, most of such existing work is centered on Western contexts; it leaves narratives of the global south comparatively underexplored. In literary traditions, this novel, *Before She Sleeps*, by Bina Shah, takes a very significant position. It is set in a dystopian future that gives insight into a society that turns fertile women into reproductive resources controlled by the state. Moreover, it portrays a society that institutionalizes reproductive exploitation. *Before She Sleeps* presents a very technocratic and secular system that defends this control through scientific logic and demographic necessity. This distinction makes this novel relevant, particularly to the contemporary issues and debates regarding population management, women's bodily autonomy, and reproductive rights.

Reproductive exploitation is present in every aspect of patriarchal society in Shah's *Before She Sleeps*. Women's bodies are constantly treated as property of the state, and their fertility is abused. The novel takes place in a world where a declining birthrate is a national concern that takes away personal freedom. This study adopts a qualitative approach, employing textual and thematic analysis grounded in feminist literary criticism. It is guided primarily by Kate Millett's work *Sexual Politics*, meanwhile, supplemented by broader feminist works. Millett's concept in "*Sexual Politics*" argues that the state makes the private sphere political, which is the key theme of Shah's novel as well, and is therefore essential for analyzing it. Key themes like reproductive exploitation, sexual

manipulation, bodily autonomy, resistance, collective agency, trauma, and surveillance are explored. It also analyzed narrative forms such as limited perspective, fragmentation, silence, and other dystopian structures.

The novel foregrounds the lived experiences of women in the novel, such as Sabine, Lin, and Rupa, whose lives are continuously shaped by reproductive surveillance, sexual regulation, and psychological trauma. Through their lived experiences, Shah exposes how reproductive politics extend beyond physical coercion to include emotional dispossession, identity fragmentation, trauma, and moral injury. The creation of Panah's secret place, built especially for women who refuse reproductive exploitation, introduces a feminist counter-space that resists the inevitability of patriarchal control and reimagines autonomy as collective resistance.

The significance of this study also lies in the relevance of the novel with real-world issues like population crisis, intervention of the state in women's bodies, along with debates on reproductive rights. This research, through literary analysis, highlights how fiction can be used as a crucial tool for uncovering and resisting real-world issues of gendered oppression. Moreover, *Before She Sleeps* has a limited scholarly work that examines it with a specific focus on reproductive politics and autonomy. The novel's representation of oppression, reproductive exploitation, and systemic medicalized control has not been discussed enough in relation to feminism.

1.1. Research Questions

This research is going to answer the following questions:

1. How *Before She Sleeps* depicts state control over women's reproductive functions?
2. In what ways do the female characters of the novel assert autonomy and resist oppression within a patriarchal society?
3. How does Shah's portrayal of reproductive exploitation reflect contemporary feminist concerns about trauma?

1.2. Research Objectives

To critically examine the politics of reproduction and resistance in Shah's *Before She Sleeps*, the study pursues the following objectives:

1. To examine Shah's portrayal of reproductive exploitation and how it reflects contemporary feminist concerns about trauma.
2. To analyze how *Before She Sleeps* depicts the state's control over women's reproductive functions.
3. To explore how female characters of the novel assert autonomy and resist oppression within a patriarchal society.

2. Literature Review

As described by Solinger (2013), reproductive exploitation refers to the idea of control over reproductive capabilities and the constant struggle to maintain that power. Various range of issues like reproductive labor, control on population, access to abortion and contraception, and coerced sterilization are covered under this idea of oppression. These concerns are deeply connected to the state, and tied to political policies, capitalism, gendered oppression, and racial inequality and are no longer private matters. Therefore,

Ross and Solinger (2017) demanded a “reproductive justice” that goes far beyond traditional ideas to include the right to have children, not have children, and parent them in a sustainable and safe environment. Furthermore, feminist theorists such as Firestone (2015) and Federici (2004) have also considered reproductive exploitation at the base of women's oppression under patriarchal society and capitalism, which collectively exploits women. Firestone envisioned that in the future world, technological advances could play a key role and help liberate women from the traditional biological burden of reproduction.

However, Federici (2004) on the other hand, also emphasized that unpaid reproductive labor has been devalued historically. Through birthing, caregiving and raising children, women are exploited to sustain capitalist and patriarchal economies. They are robbed of their autonomy, be it bodily or social. When coupled with autonomy, it generally refers to a woman's capability to make a conscious decision and to act upon it. In social theory, it is the combination of self-determination, free will, and freedom from any kind of external pressure and control (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Therefore, Beck et al. (2024) argue that women can never be solely free if they don't have bodily freedom; they should have the right and free will to have children, abortion, use birth control, or raise families. This concept of freedom does not exist in isolation but intersects with gender, race, class, nationality and sexuality. Therefore, women's autonomy should be understood in relation to cultural norms, power structures, and interpersonal dynamics (Westlund, 2009).

As discussed above, in the feminist context, autonomy is rather a more complex idea. As it is often relational and dependent on context, it is chained in social and societal structures. Fiss (1991) criticized how the traditional view of freedom is different from what women feel. This liberal view suggests that as long as no one stops you directly from acting or doing a thing, you are free. But feminism suggests that women are not completely free in their choices and opportunities are limited due to societal structures like patriarchy. Legally, they may seem to be free but real freedom is restricted by cultural norms, social expectations, and economic independence. Scholar argues that such kind of freedom is actually hollow because of inequality. In the understanding of autonomy further complications came with Butler (2004). She emphasized that dependency and vulnerability are inherent aspects of human existence. She argues that autonomy is negotiated with systems, it is never absolute. This idea is particularly more useful for

examining dystopian narratives, in which under extreme conditions women exercise little to no resistance.

In all ways, women are still somehow under control and are conditioned to live with this manipulation. This constant state of exploitation and oppression not only affects them but changes their mental trajectory. In this horrendous context trauma theory emerges in medical and psychological frameworks, emphasizing a person's responses to extreme experiences and events. According to Herman (1992), prolonged exposure to powerlessness often produces trauma, especially in a feminist setting, exposure to violence, abuse, harassment, and exploitation, etc. Moreover, Sheridan (2006) argues that trauma related to women's reproductive capacities is often considered invisible because it is presented as culturally natural and normal. Therefore, the traditional notion that trauma is accidental or exceptional is challenged by feminist trauma theory. Rather, it emphasizes that trauma is an outcome of systems that normalize the oppression and exploitation of women. This transfer to structural causation from individual pathology has been very helpful and influential in feminist literary criticism. Reproductive trauma is actually the psychological effects and harm that is a result of violence, harassment, forced pregnancies, denial of consent, reproductive coercion and sometimes separation from children as well.

To examine such kind of reproductive control and politics, dystopian fiction has emerged as a powerful genre. Theorists have analyzed extensively how gender inequalities are exaggerated by dystopias to expose power dynamics (Walters, 2005). In particular, this kind of reproductive dystopia questions how the fertility of women becomes a site of political manipulation and national anxiety. To portray such kinds of chained experiences, dystopian fictions are considered a mirror to real-world ethical puzzles and political anxieties. Claeys (2017) points out that every dystopia exaggerates fears about power, technology, and control of the present and has traces of historical moments.

Existing study on dystopian work, *Before She Sleeps*, uncovers such patterns as those of Bashir and Tanveer's (2024) analysis, which describes the ways Green City uses fear as a method for submissiveness and reproduction is considered a national asset; it crafts a regime where fertility is constantly exploited. Moreover, Naseem et al. (2023) analyze the ways women in *Before She Sleeps* have internalized objectification, mainly through the polyandrous regime brought by the state, which has reduced them merely to tools for male fertility. Furthermore, Kanwal and Iqbal (2024) illustrate that Panah's retreat became not only a symbol of resistance to traditional gender norms but also of empowerment of technologies. Despite the academic work done on *Before She Sleeps*, limited literature is available on the areas concerning reproductive exploitation, control and trauma. This work will explore reproductive politics and female autonomy in *Before She Sleeps* while exploring the impacts of state control on the mental health of the population.

3. Research Methodology

By employing the qualitative, textual analysis and interpretive research design, this research tries to explain the gendered, ethical, and socio-political female experiences present in this text. The purpose of this research is to describe how power structures and resistance are represented, constructed, and negotiated through the text's thematic patterns, characters' development, and narrative. This research privileges interpretation over quantification and meaning over measurement by utilizing the qualitative paradigm. The novel is studied as a socio-political and cultural text that showcases individual and collective experiences of exploitation, resistance, and struggle for autonomy. It helps the researcher to examine the novel's criticism of traditionally established norms, explore the consequences of reproductive control, and the emergence of female autonomy.

In this study, reproductive exploitation is not treated as a biological issue but as a cultural construct that is intertwined deeply with patriarchal power and state control. In the same way, female autonomy is viewed as a fluid concept, which is shaped in relation to societal expectations, resistance, and technological constraints. This method enables the researcher to investigate how Shah shows the psychological impact of control and the constant struggle for autonomy and self-determination. The interpretive orientation recognizes that texts are culturally embedded and that meaning is produced through the interplay between author, text, and reader. It also acknowledges the researcher's active role in constructing meaning through critical engagement and theoretical framing. The analysis pays attention to thematic identification by identifying and isolating key themes such as exploitation, bodily control, surveillance, and resistance. Moreover, close reading provides a deep focus on language, narrative details, and dialogue. So, this research design locates the representation of reproductive exploitation in vast ethical and socio-political frameworks, stressing how control over the female body shows the desire of the state for absolute authority.

This study draws upon Feminist theory as a broad framework with a primary focus on *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millet. Feminist theory provides a very important political and socio-cultural dimension to this analysis. It is crucial as it investigates the gender inequality and works for the interests and rights of women. Feminist theory in the context of this novel is used to explain that the control over women's mobility and reproduction in *Before She Sleeps* is deeply connected with patriarchal systems in the state. It also highlights the idea of female autonomy, emphasizing that bodily integrity and agency are basic rights of women, while examining how this autonomy is restricted. Moreover, it puts forward the idea that female exploitation and oppression operate through interconnected systems like the state, patriarchy and social norms. Feminist theory thus acts as a framework which helps to interpret how identities, bodies and autonomy are constrained, contested, and shaped in this novel.

However, the research mainly utilizes Millet's *Sexual Politics* (2016) for theoretical analysis. Defining patriarchy as an institution of state politics that tries to control women's reproduction, biology and mobility, Millet states that "sex" is a status with political involvement and to maintain its power, patriarchy utilizes ideology, which automatically internalizes the ideas of female inferiority and male superiority. This is used to analyze how society in *Before She Sleeps* uses distorted history, propaganda and religion to justify the subjugation of females. It helps to point out the importance of family in reinforcing the societal norms related to patriarchy. Thus, the study will utilize this lens to analyze the polygamous system and the state's control over sex, pregnancy, and childbirth, which, instead of being personal matters, are treated as political. By integrating Millet's *Sexual Politics* (2016) with a wider feminist theory, the study will deeply explore reproductive politics as both a political and personal issue through a distinct framework.

4. Findings

Bina Shah's work showcases a dystopian world where a fertility crisis has rebuilt society around reproduction and pushing women's bodies into instruments against this survival. The novel highlights reproductive politics and female autonomy as main concerns, portraying how the patriarchal and socio-political state regulates, exploits and appropriates the reproductive abilities of women. Utilizing a feminist lens, this novel uncovers how controlling reproduction becomes a tool for institutional dominance and reinforcing gender hierarchy.

Before She Sleeps is set in a post-war South Asian metropolis named Green City that is facing an extreme fertility crisis. To face this demographic collapse, polygamy is enforced by the government, and the state maintains a reproductive registry to manage and monitor women's cycles along with their reproductive activity. Women's primary value in such a patriarchal society is measured by their ability to bear healthy children, and their fertility is controlled by the state. A different model of resistance and survival is offered by women of Panah, who live underground and have rejected these practices.

This novel differentiates itself by setting its plot within a South Asian context; it challenges feminist narratives that are Western-centric by presenting reproductive manipulation and control in militarized and postcolonial spaces. Shah departs from Euro-American settings. These differences and shifts are important as it emphasizes global issues like environmental collapse, disease and war. Moreover, it intensifies such global crises by showing women's bodies under patriarchal governance.

Moreover, Shah criticizes capitalism, patriarchal society and the state, and showcases that reproductive violence is not only limited to extreme religious practices but also comes through a complex mess of trauma, ideology and faulty policies. In the novel, reproductive politics are evident in every aspect of patriarchal society. Women's bodies are constantly treated as property of the state, and their fertility is abused.

In *Before She Sleeps*, the government made the private act of reproduction as a matter of state law by forcing women into polyandrous marriages. Marriages in this dystopian fiction are not based on love, but on the state's pairing, sex is considered compulsory, and the women who reject getting married or reproduction are hunted. This idea aligns with Millett's critique of how societies based on patriarchal systems use reproductive capacity to exploit and dominate women. A woman's body is their primary site of exploitation and control.

Instead of romanticizing the reproductive labor or motherhood, Shah showcases it as an instrument of constant exploitation, oppression and control. This dystopian fiction is driven by politics, the state's involvement in managing populations, health and body, unlike religion which is the dominant force in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Shah constructed a system in this dystopia where women's fertility is not only a political weapon but also a national resource. Continuous reproductive tracking, DNA scanning devices along with surveillance utilizing high technology replaced the traditional family structures with a state-controlled one. This concept of control reflects Millett's (2016) idea that patriarchy is continuously trying to manipulate technological advancement to create systems of control.

Reproduction is showcased as a political obligation rather than a personal, intimate choice in *Before She Sleeps*. Following the gender emergency and fertility crisis, the state relocated fertile women into spaces like wife houses to maximize childbirth in society. These places rejected the traditional notions of consent, marriage and intimacy, while they functioned as reproductive facilities where every woman is assigned to multiple men. Millet argues that women are controlled by controlling their sexuality and reproductive abilities, and through this control, patriarchy operates as a political system of domination. The state's reproductive policies in *Before She Sleeps* are exposed as women's bodies are monitored and regulated, institutions again have access to sexual matters and reproduction is portrayed as a civic duty. In this system of reproductive regime, Panah emerged as a resistant body.

Women of Panah interrupt the hierarchy, which helps this system survive by being unavailable for mandatory sexual and reproductive participation. The women of Panah overthrew this by refraining from both romantic and reproductive obligations. Their rejection of traditional ideas became an act of rebellion in the state, reclaiming their bodily autonomy, which Millett identifies as a radical feminist resistance. Shah's women of Panah destroy and flip this traditional idea by controlling psychological and emotional intimacy, while rejecting the idea of providing their bodies and womb. This practice exposes the idea that denying sex and reproduction can be a powerful political act, which Millett (2016) calls "sexual contract refusal".

Panah emphasized Millet's claim that sexuality is a site of political control as well as its struggle when it transformed women into subjects rather than objects of sexual governance. Moreover, in Panah's sexuality is dissociated from obligation and surveillance. This aligns with Millet's idea that freedom requires the removal of power dynamics in sexual spheres of life and Panah destroys this structure by allowing women to withdraw altogether from the mandatory sexual relations. It not only revises the idea of domination by rejecting the state's policies, but also redefines and represents sexuality as a private, consensual matter.

Similarly, in the Green City, a woman's identity is reduced completely to their reproductive ability. While individuality, desire and personal identity are considered irrelevant, fertility becomes the only marker of social value. As the official Green City Handbook for Female Citizens states that, "You will be its foot soldiers, working hard to fulfill your role as the mothers of the new nation." (Shah, 2018, p. 3). This label "mothers of the new nation" emphasizes that women are only managed according to their biological usefulness; they are carefully categorized and monitored, reflecting a patriarchal logic. This statement also incorporates the feminist critique at the base of the novel that women's worth is tied to their wombs; they are reduced to their reproductive capacity. One of the main arguments of feminist theorists is that patriarchy defines women through their biological role, most particularly motherhood. In this Shah's dystopia, this logic is magnified and bureaucratized, transforming the intimate process of reproduction into a state-managed institution.

Autonomy lies at the heart of feminist theory because it is one of the fundamental tools of patriarchal control and women's struggle. Generally, autonomy refers to one's ability to make choices and decisions about one's own life without any external force or threat. But it is a long-discussed argument that autonomy cannot be simply understood as individual freedom. Since it is context-based, it must be analyzed within cultural, social, economic, and political systems that continuously define women's lives and choices. Usually, women's autonomy is limited in patriarchal society because of control of their emotions, bodies, mobility, sexuality, reproduction and labor. That's why feminists treat autonomy as an achievement rather than a mere abstract moral idea because of its political nature. This relates to *Before She Sleeps*, which presents a dystopia where autonomy is threatened by institutionalized power rather than individual men.

From its depiction of surveillance, sexual regulation, reproductive coercion, and enforced motherhood, this novel highlights autonomy as a fundamental concern of feminist scholars. Rather than portraying women as victims, Shah explores shattered, collective and internal kinds of autonomy that lead to creation of Panah, a space that rewrites autonomy beyond personal and individual choices. It not only imagines feminist resistance but also exposes the systemic destruction of female autonomy. Autonomy is

deconstructed in the novel through Millet's argument that patriarchy is a collection of systems that rule women by control of their freedom of reproduction. This control in *Before She Sleeps* is institutionalized and systemic at the highest levels. The state is guilty of moral responsibility for claims regarding the reproductive abilities of women.

In the novel, reproductive politics operate through biopolitical control, where the bodies of women are managed at the biological level. It starts from regular medical examination, fertility tests and pregnancy monitoring to reducing women to simple clinical subjects rather than human beings. The novel shows how women of Green City are given fertility drugs, they have to come for regular fertility checkups and have to update their public profile accordingly from time to time. These procedures are considered normal, emphasizing how deeply control is embedded in women's everyday life.

Illona Serfati, founder of Panah, in one of her voice notes, vents out the frustration towards the nature of this surveillance in one of her voice notes as she states, "Nobody can experiment on our ovaries and wombs, pump us full of fertility drugs, monitor our menstrual cycles and ovulation patterns." (Shah, 2018, p. 63)

In this work, women's bodies are treated as a system that needs to be monitored, optimized and corrected if necessary. This highlights the utilitarian logic governing reproductive policy, where consent, emotional well-being and psychological health of women receive no attention. In Shah's dystopia, constant use of medical discourse helps to depoliticize oppression and exploitation by showcasing it as a technical necessity. This idea aligns closely with how science and medicine are very often mobilized to legitimize patriarchal control. At another instant, Illona mocks the new rules for surveillance by the Bureau as, "Regulating the minutes a Wife spends with her Husband: How will they measure that? Will they have a man from the Agency in the bedroom, stopwatch in hand?" (Shah, 2018, p. 33). This constant medicalization and monitoring of reproduction takes away women's bodily privacy while reinforcing institutional power. Feminist work on reproductive justice foregrounds that publicizing and making reproduction a matter of state interest results in disproportionate psychological and physical costs that women have to bear. In the novel, medical authorities work to ensure reproductive efficiency rather than care for women.

Autonomy is gradually diminished not through violence but through ideological brainwashing and conditioning. Thus, the regime in the novel is showcased as a necessity for survival, which highlights Millet's argument that patriarchy makes women obey by disguising this dominance as duty and making them mothers of the nation. The state makes sure that autonomy is considered as illegitimate rather than denying it. A woman's choice to control her body is considered a major threat to the existence of state; in this way, such liberation is defined as immorality.

Before She Sleeps highlights the importance of psychological autonomy, as external autonomy is almost largely denied. Under authoritarian systems, feminist theory widely recognizes internal resistance as an important form of agency as a refusal to internalize such kind of oppressive ideology. Characters like Sabine demonstrate this form of autonomy through awareness, memory, and emotional detachment from the state's moral narratives. Even when compliance is unavoidable, psychological autonomy allows women to retain a sense of self distinct from imposed roles. This aligns with feminist analyses of oppression that highlight consciousness as the first site of resistance. Autonomy begins not with rebellion but with the recognition that domination is unjust.

Before She Sleeps by Bina Shah may be presented as a dystopian novel, but it is rooted deeply in reality; it deals with the real-world political, social, and reproductive control. Feminist dystopian fiction is known not to be an escape from reality but as a mirror to realities. This novel reflects contemporary issues like population decline, surveillance, and the state's control of women and intervention in their bodies. It exposes the dark, manipulative side of patriarchal authority. It makes the point evident that reproductive exploitation continuously shapes women's lives in every corner of the world. The powers are manipulated, and reproduction is controlled through abortion laws, denial of reproductive healthcare, forced sterilization, or sometimes forced pregnancies, population policies, and cultural pressure for a male heir. *Before She Sleeps* reflects the realities through Green City, it presents a society where social worth is determined through reproductive abilities and autonomy is denied.

Trauma in the novel is not portrayed as a psychological response to one single event; it is showcased as a condition produced by structural domination and authoritarianism. Since trauma emerges from prolonged exposure to its trigger, Shah depicted how trauma was induced in women through continuous oppression, exploitation, and emotional deprivation. The trauma of all characters is not about their isolated experiences; instead, it is connected and is deeply embedded in the system of their society, where they are treated as resources rather than humans.

Sabine's trauma is very crucial to the narrative as she is someone who first experienced her mother's trauma through state policies, then her mother's suicide, and more importantly, when she saw her mother's fate going to be her fate in the near future, and decided to escape. As a girl who saw her mom getting assigned to multiple men even when she refused and the experiences she went through left her with deep trauma. This shows her later detachment issues, as she still thinks her body is the state's resource that will go back to its place sooner or later. Trauma affects all individuals body differently, for her insomnia was a punishment that she thinks she got for disobeying state. But in reality, it was the trauma that was keeping her awake throughout.

Her trauma is not only obvious through her dissociation but also through her emotional numbness, which, according to trauma theory, is a common response to such prolonged experiences. Her emotional detachment is a survival mechanism that she developed as a response to restricted bodily autonomy. Similarly, Rupa is also a victim of this cruel system. As a child, when she needed her mother the most, her mother sent her to Panah. Even though her mother sent her away for Rupa's safety, her trauma started when her mother accused her of lying when she reported her father sexually harassing her. Her trauma not only showcases the trauma of a woman but also a child who is deprived of love and care when the state forces their mother to have repetitive pregnancies. To keep her safe from her father. Rupa's hunger for love and her attachment to people outside of Panah show her symptoms of trauma.

The trauma of the characters aligns strongly with the women who have experienced a life under such reproductive authoritarianism. Their mental state, emotional numbness, psychological fragmentation, internalized oppression and guilt are documented through these characters. Most importantly, *Before She Sleeps* emphasizes the idea that from within such oppressive systems, resistance emerges. It emphasized that resistance is not always a glorifying heroic act; sometimes it is subtle yet more impactful.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This analysis has examined Shah's novel as feminist dystopian fiction that highlights reproductive manipulation and politics as a central tool of patriarchal domination. It exposes the way autonomy is eroded systemically through regulation of women's intimate lives in the name of survival. With the help of Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (2016), the analysis emphasized that oppression in the novel is not accidental but manipulated deeply through politics and sustained through ideological brainwashing, institutional power and constant surveillance. *Before She Sleeps* presents a very powerful criticism of such reproductive authoritarianism; it reminds its readers that every society that does not let women control their own lives and denies autonomy ultimately destroys its own foundations. It lets readers experience this oppression and exploitation through every page they turn, and get to know about such political manipulations that are normalized in the present world.

The most important areas within feminist theory are reproductive exploitation and control, particularly in relation to patriarchal dominance and state power. Feminist scholars have long argued that reproduction has never been a purely private matter, it has been controlled and regulated historically by religious, social and political institutions, that decide how, when and with whom a woman should reproduce. Patriarchal societies maintain their hegemony by regulating gender roles and controlling the population. Therefore, the governance sustains by exploiting women's reproductive capacities.

This conclusion brings together the major insights and synthesizes the major arguments and findings of the study. This study set out to explore Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps* from a feminist perspective, while particularly focusing on reproductive politics and female autonomy. By utilizing *Sexual Politics* (2016) by Kate Millett, it employs a qualitative, textual and thematic analysis to investigate how novel constructs reproduction as a political process and mechanism through which women's lives, identities, bodies and choices are controlled. It further uncovers characters' experiences, how they faced trauma, navigated hardships, negotiated restricted autonomy and resisted authority both individually and collectively.

One of the important findings of this study is that in *Before She Sleeps*, reproductive exploitation is the primary organizing force of this fictional society, not a mere backdrop to the narrative. The green city in the name of collective survival operates as a biopolitical place, a space where women's bodies are instrumentalized, regulated and monitored. The social value of a woman is determined through her fertility and the number of healthy children she can bear. Rather than getting recognized as autonomous subject's, women are reduced merely to biological functions. Thus, the novel exposes that reproductive exploitation is a form of structural violence, a form that is normalized and framed as a necessity. This emphasized the feminist criticism of reproductive governance present in the real world. Places where, during times of crisis, women's autonomy is suspended.

Another important contribution is in its study of female autonomy as a fragile and congested concept. The study explored autonomy within a system of constraints, rather than treating autonomy as an individual choice or freedom. In *Before She Sleeps*, women continue to exercise limited forms of freedom through silence, covert acts and psychological resistance, even when they are denied bodily, spatial and reproductive autonomy. It further demonstrated that autonomy in the novel is not individualistic, but relational. Women's resistance and survival are interdependent on networks of trust and care. Panah is a reimagination of autonomy as a collective determination rather than isolated independence.

A major aspect of this study is its emphasis on resistance, especially the creation of Panah and escape from Green City. Sabine's escape with the help of Dr. Bouthain and Dr. Julien revealed that even in such rigid systems, there are ethical fractures. Despite being a part of such a rigid system, they chose to resist it, even if it was through covert assistance. This challenges the notion of oppressor vs victim, it highlights the moral complexities under such regimes. It focuses on the feminist idea that resistance is not always an open rebellion; it often comes in subtle and risky acts of refusal.

One of the main aims of this research was to show real-world feminist concerns through this literary analysis. The novel reflects all the contemporary issues related to

women's reproductive capacities and gives us insight into the experiences faced by women who are targets of such injustices. Despite all cultural and political differences, women in all parts of the world are affected by such inequalities. In conclusion, Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps* emerges as a powerful narrative that uncovers the ethical cost of such reproductive authoritarianism, and it emphasizes the importance and necessity of resistance and solidarity. It affirms a foundational feminist idea that societies that deny women freedom undermine not only their lives but also the moral foundations of humanity itself.

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