



Before She Sleeps: A Hyper Realistic Dystopian Novel set in the Future and the Politics of Reproduction a Feminist Critique by Bina Shah.

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ABSTRACT

Bina Shah's Novel Before she sleeps presents a Dystopian future where gender imbalances and authoritarian governance lead to the systematic subjugation and commodification of women. It also examines portrayal of Gender Oppression, Patriarchal control and Female Resistance in a Post apocalyptic society. The study situates the Novel within the framework of Feminist Dystopian Literature and highlights its significance in contemporary Gender Discourse. Through an analysis of themes, narrative techniques and character development, Before She Sleeps critiques the consequences of extreme Patriarchy while offering a vision of resilience and collective resistance among women. This Novelexamines through a feminist lens, analyzing themes of female agency, resistance and the socio-political structures that enforce Patriarchal control. By situating the narrative within postcolonial and feminist theoretical frameworks, the study explores how Bina Shah critiques contemporary societal norms and envisions pathways to empowerment and autonomy for women. The Novel also has pervasive misogyny embedded in both societal structures and personal relationships, illustrating how this oppression manifests in the lives of women and affects their identities. Through the journey of her protagonists, Bina Sha highlights the complexities of Female Resistance and Resilience, ultimately calling for a reevaluation of Gender roles and the importance of women's autonomy in a world dominated by patriarchal constraints. The Novel also portray polygamous relationships, envisions a world where Gender imbalance, resulting from a catastrophic loss of women, leads to enforced polygamy as a mechanism of social stability. Polygamy serves as both a critique of patriarchal control and an exploration of women's resistance in oppressive systems. It presents a world where Patriarchal Oppression has reached its peak, transforming women's lives into a constant struggle for survival. The Green City, a totalitarian regime, exerts extreme control over women's reproductive rights and social roles forcing them into a rigid system of servitude. It also delves into the ways in which the female characters resist, both overtly and covertly, as well as the historical context and the cultural context that makes such resistance significant.

Keywords:- Patriarchy, Misogyny, Autonomy, Reluctance, Rebellion, Revolt and Resistance.

INTRODUCTION

Now talking about the Author Bina Shah is a Pakistani Fiction Writer, Novelist, Journalist and Columnist. She was born in Karachi to a Sindhi family and was raised in Virginia as well as Karachi. As a child her experiences around her surroundings were not great. She faced many problems regarding the culture and tradition of the society. And it was not easy for her to accept this. The food, clothes and language confused her in her country, and also she says that she had a different feeling and ethos for Pakistan where she was raised. But for her higher education she moved to Wellesley. As an adolescent she resented the deep rooted Patriarchal Traditions of South Asia. But as a grown women she learned to resist through her writing. There was a deadly combination of Dictatorship and Patriarchy stayed with her as she went to United States for college. At Wellesley, she read The Handmaid's Tale but couldn't relate to Margaret Atwood's vision of a Fundamentalist Christian Republic. Her own experiences were far more visceral than Atwood's visions. Today much is being written about how parts of "Handmaid's Tale" are an actual reality for many women in the world, especially in orthodox Muslim societies. Bina shah extensively writes about Pakistani culture and society, Women's Rights, Girl's Education, Female Exploitation and Freedom of Expression. Bina Shah has written many Books and has received many Awards for her publications. She received Agahi Award for the excellence in Journalism, 2013, 2014/2015. In 2022, She was presented by the Ambassador of France to Pakistan, Nicholas Galey with the insignia of a

Chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Letters, an honorary award given the French Government. And also for “Before She Sleeps” she was recognized as part of a new canon of Feminist Dystopia pioneered by Booker Prize winning Author Margaret Atwood and relevant to the Global Fight for Women’s Rights and Empowerment Worldwide. The Novel was also being praised by “Margaret Atwood” as “a fascinating new angle on emotional work”. She has written many other notable works specializing in Pakistani and Muslim culture, Women’s Rights and Girl’s Education.

Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps* presents a compelling Dystopian Narrative set in a future Middle Eastern society where Gender imbalance, Strict Government control, and reproductive exploitation define women’s lives. In the realm of Dystopian Literature, narratives often serve as cautionary tales that reflect and critique existing societal issues. Bina Shah’s “*Before She Sleeps*” contributes to this tradition by envisioning a future where Gender disparities have escalated to oppressive extremes. Set in the fictional Green City, the Novel portrays a society grappling with the aftermath of war, disease and environmental degradation, leading to a drastic reduction in the female population. In response, the governing authorities impose strict reproductive mandates, compelling women to enter polyandrous marriages to repopulate the community. Amidst this coercive environment, a clandestine group of women rebels against the systems, seeking refuge and asserting their autonomy. This Novel explores Gender Politics, Authoritarian and Feminist Resistance. Drawing upon Feminist Theory, Postcolonial criticism and Dystopian Literature analysis, this study examines *Before She Sleeps* critiques Patriarchal oppression and imagines alternative possibilities for Female Agency and Survival. Dystopian Literature often serves as a critique of contemporary societal structures, exaggerating present concerns to explore their possible consequences. Bina Shah’s “*Before She Sleeps*” is a striking example, portraying a world devastated by war and environmental collapse, where women have become a scarce and controlled resource. The Novel follows a clandestine group of women who resist the state’s reproductive mandates by choosing to live outside the sanctioned societal order. This Novel argues that “*Before She Sleeps* is a powerful Feminist Dystopia that engages with themes of bodily autonomy, resistance and gendered power dynamics. The construction of Dystopian society, the world of *Before She Sleeps* is built upon the remnants of a Patriarchal structure magnified by crisis. This Novel explores how the explores its Dystopian setting, analyzing the socio-political political mechanisms that enforce control over women. The concept of “Gender Dystopia” is examined through the lens of Margaret Atwood’s “*Handmaid’s Tale*” and other Feminist Dystopian Texts. Additionally, the role of Technology and surveillance in sustaining the regime’s control is scrutinized.

Gender and Power a central concern of “*Before She Sleeps*” is the manipulation of Gender roles to maintain societal stability. This Novel depicts women’s bodies as sites of state control, echoing real world reproductive Politics. The ways in which Bina Shah’s female characters navigate oppression through compliance, subversion or escape are examined to understand the complexities of Power and Resistance. The Novel’s portrayal of masculinity and its intersections with authority and violence are also discussed. Female Resistance and alternative communities, the secretive refuge of women in “*Before She Sleeps*” offers a striking counterpoint to the dominant order. This Novel explores how Bina Shah envisions resistance, focusing on the significance of female solidarity, underground networks and the act of reclaiming one’s body. The novel’s engagement with ecofeminism is considered, particularly in how environmental degradation parallels Gender Oppression. Reimagining the Future Dystopian Fiction often oscillates between despair and hope. The Novel discusses whether it offers a vision for liberation or remains trapped within the grim realities of its world. The Novel ambiguous ending is analyzed in the context of Dystopian and Utopian Literature Traditions. Shah’s work is situated within the broader scope of South Asian speculative Fiction, considering how regional histories and politics shape its themes. This analysis postcolonial feminist theories, particularly the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, to dissect the novel’s portrayal of women’s experiences under patriarchal and imperialistic structures. Spivak’s critique of imperialism and Mohanty’s examination of western-centric feminist discourses provide a foundation for understanding the intersectional oppressions depicted in the narrative. These framework facilitate a nuanced exploration of how global power dynamics and cultural hegemonies shape the lives of marginalized women.

The Dystopian Framework and Gender Oppression

The Novel examines the Dystopian elements of “*Before She Sleeps*” focusing on how Bina Shah constructs a society that reflects and exaggerates real world Gender inequalities. The Novel’s portrayal of a government that controls women’s bodies through policies such as mandatory marriage and reproductive laws serves as a critique of patriarchal systems that strip women of autonomy. This novel also explores the role of technology and surveillance in enforcing these Gender Norms, drawing parallels to contemporary issues such as reproductive rights and the policing of women’s bodies. Commodification and control of women, states response to the gender imbalance involves the commodification of women’s bodies, reducing them to mere instruments of reproduction. The enforced polyandry and reproductive quotas exemplify how patriarchal systems exert control over women’s autonomy and identities. This institutionalized objectification reflects broader societal tendencies to dehumanize women, treating them as commodities within both domestic and global contexts. The novel critiques these practices by highlighting the psychological and physical toll on the women subjected to such exploitation. The Novel “*Before She Sleeps*” situates within the tradition of Dystopian Literature, drawing parallels with “*The Handmaid’s Tale*” and “*The Gate to Women’s Country*”, where women are coerced into polygamous arrangements under the guise of repopulation efforts. It also shows how Polygamy in the Novel functions as an instrument of male dominance, its role in institutionalizing polygamy, its psychological impact on women, and how it reinforces power hierarchies. Drawing from the Feminist theory, it discusses the ways in which polygamy is linked to reproductive control, emotional subjugation and economic dependency. Despite the rigid constraints of polygamy, the Novel

presents female characters who resist systemic oppression, underground network of women who reject polygamous marriages, choosing exile or submission. It also has the protagonist's personal struggles highlighting acts of defiance and the reclamation of agency in a world designed to suppress it. Reza, one of the Novel's key male characters, occupies a unique position within this oppressive system. His character serves as a contrast to the brutal men of Green City and his relationship with the Protagonist Sabine, plays a crucial role in exploring themes of resistance, gender roles and human connection. Reza is portrayed as a high-ranking official in Green City's bureaucracy, yet he exhibits traits that set him apart from the city's most oppressive men. Unlike the Government figures who enforce harsh reproductive policies, Reza is depicted as sympathetic, particularly toward Sabine. His character embodies the tension between complicity and morality, he benefits from the system yet struggles with his conscience. Unlike other male figures in the novel, who treat women as property, Reza recognizes Sabine's agency. His attraction to Sabine is not purely physical or transactional; it carries emotional depth, hinting at a more humanistic approach to relationships. However, his position within Green City limits his ability to challenge the system outright. He exists in a liminal space neither a full oppressor nor a true revolutionary.

The Subversion of Traditional Gender Roles

I analyze how Bina Shah subverts traditional Gender roles through the characters of Lin, Sabine, Rupa, Ilona and other "secret women". These characters challenge the Patriarchal expectations placed upon them by embracing alternative forms of femininity and rejecting the roles of wife and mother. The novel's portrayal of male characters, such as Julian and the Bureau of Reproduction, also highlights the ways in which patriarchal system harm men by perpetuating toxic masculinity and suppressing emotional vulnerability. Shah argues that her characters serve as models of resistance, demonstrating the possibility of redefining Gender roles and relationships. Shah's narrative also engages with postcolonial themes, examining how historical and geopolitical forces influence contemporary Gender dynamics. The depiction of Green City as a post-war society grappling with reconstruction invokes parallels to postcolonial nations navigating the legacies of imperialism. The Novel critiques not only local patriarchal practices but also the global systems that perpetuate inequality and exploitation. By situating the story in a South Asian context, Shah challenges Western-centric narratives and amplifies voices from the Global South, enriching the discourse on Feminist Dystopian Literature. It assesses how the fictional world mirrors existing gender inequities and examine the broader implications of enforced polygamy as a global issue. It deconstructs established Gender norms by challenging the societal expectations of femininity and masculinity. Here women instead of being passive figures, become active agents of Rebellion. The traditional Gender Roles focusing on the oppressive structures that dictate women's roles and the ways in which the female protagonists resist and redefine these expectations. The Panah, a secret underground group of women who refuse to conform to society's reproductive demands, represents a radical subversion of gender norms. These women live in hiding and reject the roles assigned to them, actively resisting through their choices. Unlike traditional Dystopian heroines who may work within the system to instigate change, the women reject the system altogether, creating an alternative mode of survival and sisterhood. While it focuses on women's resistance, it also deconstructs traditional masculinity. Certain male characters, such as Rupa, defy the hyper-masculine ideal promoted by Green City's ruling class. Their sympathetic stance towards the Panah women and their rejection of toxic masculinity that aligns with equality rather than domination. Sabine epitomizes a new kind of strength that is not rooted in physical prowess but in emotional resilience, intelligence and strategic thinking. Unlike traditional heroines who rely on physical rebellion, Sabine's strength lies in her ability to navigate a hostile world through calculated decisions. It also redefines the strength challenging the traditional binary of masculine power and feminine vulnerability. It reimagines Gender roles in a Dystopian setting to highlight the dangers of extreme patriarchal control while offering a vision of resistance and alternative societal structures. By subverting traditional expectations of femininity and masculinity, it challenges the readers to rethink conventional Gender norms and consider new possibilities for Gender relations in both fiction and reality. The relationship between Reza and Sabine is central to understanding his character. Reza seeks her out not just for physical companionship but also for emotional connection, suggesting his dissatisfaction with the cold, transactional nature of Green City. While he does not overtly harm her, he does not actively work to dismantle the system that oppresses her either. This makes him an ambiguous figure both an enabler and a reluctant participant in Green City's Authoritarianism. His protection of Sabine is conditional; he cannot fully remove her from danger, only shield her temporarily. This dynamic reflects the broader struggles of men who oppose oppressive regimes but lack the courage or ability to enact meaningful change.

Resistance and Reclamation of Autonomy

This area focuses on the theme of resistance in "Before She Sleeps" exploring how the "secret women" reclaim their autonomy through acts of defiance and solidarity. The Novel's depiction of the underground, a network of women who support and protect one another, underscores the importance of collective action in the fight against oppression. It also examines the sacrifices made by the characters in their quest for Freedom, emphasizing the cost of Resistance in a society that seeks to control every aspect of women's lives. With this analysis Shah's work offers a hopeful vision of Resistance, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable. Despite the pervasive oppression, the novel centers on the resilience and agency of women who resist subjugation. The protagonists establish an underground sanctuary, Panah where they reclaim control over their bodies and choices. This act of defiance challenges the dominant power structures and asserts the possibility of alternative social configurations. Through their solidarity and covert operations, these women embody resistance against systemic patriarchy,

illustrating the potential for collective action to subvert oppressive regimes. Despite systemic oppression, “Before She Sleeps” presents resistance in the form of an underground collective of women who refuse to comply with state-sanctioned norms. It also analyzes the dynamics of female solidarity, focusing on how Sabine and her companions find empowerment through secrecy, shared knowledge and emotional support. The novel also presents different forms of resistance, from passive defiance to active rebellion and how these efforts contribute to the reclaiming control over their bodies, choices and future is central to their fight against patriarchal dominance. Dystopian Fiction often serves as a reflection of contemporary societal anxieties, offering insight into the dangers of unchecked power structures and systemic injustices. Within this oppressive environment, women resist by seeking alternative modes of survival, forging alliances and reclaiming their bodies and identities. The Historical and Societal Context draws upon historical and contemporary realities of gender-based oppression, paralleling policies and practices in real-world societies. The Green City’s laws, which systematically strip women of their freedoms, echo restrictive measures seen throughout history, including China’s One-Child Policy, forced veiling in Middle Eastern regimes and legal limitations on reproductive rights in various nations. The Novel functions as a cautionary tale, warning against the consequences of institutionalized gender control and the perils of ignoring systemic oppression. It also explore the real world parallels to Bina Shah’s Dystopia, highlighting the historical precedents that inform her world-building. Case studies of government enforced reproductive policies, restrictions on female autonomy, and patriarchal legal frameworks will serve as evidence of how Before She Sleeps reflects ongoing struggles for Gender Equality. Resistance in Before She Sleeps manifests in diverse ways both subtle and overt. Sexual and Bodily Autonomy, Women reclaim agency over their bodies by rejecting traditional reproductive roles. By denying their assigned roles as birthers, they assert that their existence is not solely defined by Procreation but by personal choice and self-determination. Characters like Sabine embody mental defiance by retaining their sense of identity and refusing to be psychologically dominated. Their ability to nurture hope amidst repression underscores the importance of inner resilience shows psychological and emotional resistance. Women find ways to challenge authority through seemingly small yet significant acts—secret relationships, knowledge sharing and even acts of passive non compliance. These everyday resistances collectively build toward a broader rebellion. The Novel’s shifting perspectives provide a multi-dimensional portrayal of resistance, ensuring that the voices of women-who would otherwise be silenced-are heard and validated and also serves as a stark reflection of contemporary Gender struggles.

CONCLUSION

In Before She Sleeps, reluctance is a pervasive force that shapes the actions of both the oppressed and the oppressors. Sabine and the women of Panah display reluctance as an act of defiance, refusing to submit to a system that seeks to control them. Men like Reza reveal how complicity often stems from reluctance to challenge an unjust system. Meanwhile, the society’s initial reluctance to recognize and address female resistance proves to be a weakness in its authoritarian grip. Through these layers the Novel explores the complexities of power, agency and survival in a Dystopian world that reflects real world gender struggles. Ultimately we see that reluctant resistance can be powerful and that the refusal to comply, however quiet is an act of revolution in itself. We also see that Rebellion is not just a Political act, but it is a means of survival. Whether through secrecy, bodily autonomy or collective solidarity, the women of Panah resist an oppressive system that seeks to erase their agency. It is also a powerful critique of Gender Oppression while also offering a testament to the resilience of those who refused to be controlled. In a world where Authoritarian forces seek to strip individuals of their autonomy, the act of saying “no” becomes a revolutionary act. It also reminds us that even in the most oppressive circumstances, Rebellion-whether quiet or loud is always possible. It also envision where rebellion is both a necessity and a deeply personal struggle. It is a harrowing yet deeply insightful exploration of misogyny and its consequences. Through the Panah’s quiet resistance, it highlights the power of defiance in even the most repressive societies. While the rebellion is not a full-scale revolution, it represents the seed of future change a testament to the endurance of the human spirit in the face of systemic oppression. It also serves as a warning and a call to action, reminding readers that in every Dystopia, resistance is not only possible but inevitable. It also highlights the resilience and agency of women in the face of oppression, the novel contributes to the ongoing discourse on feminism and resistance. It is a medium for exploring contemporary Gender issues and advocating for social change. Additionally, it emphasizes how the characters resistance is intricately linked to their reclamation of Autonomy, reinforcing the message of empowerment and survival. It also presents Autonomy not as an absolute state but as a spectrum of choices shaped by power, survival and resistance. The structures that deny women control over their lives while acknowledging the complexities of rebellion and self-determination. While the women of Panah may not achieve complete freedom, however small represents an assertion of agency in a world that seeks to erase it. It is a powerful reminder that autonomy is not just about grand revolutions but also about the everyday acts of resistance that challenge systems of control. It serves both as a warning and a call to action. It highlights the dangers of unchecked patriarchal control and the ways in which women resist, even under the most oppressive conditions. It reminds the readers that patriarchy is not just a relic of the past but a force that continues to shape contemporary societies. It also urges readers to question the structures that govern women’s lives and to recognize the importance of resistance. It is not just a Dystopian vision- it is a reflection of real struggles faced by women around the world, making its themes deeply relevant to contemporary feminist discourse.

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