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From Reproductive Control to Ecological Refusal: An Ecofeminist Study of Bina Shah's Before She Sleeps

[1]Anosh Rehman

English Instructor, English Nexus EDU

https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0412-0160

[2]Kainat Batool

PhD Scholar, English Linguistics and Language Studies, University of Sargodha

https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6582-7188

Abstract

Before She Sleeps (2018) by Bina Shah has been interpreted as a feminist dystopia, pandemic story, and critique of surveillance. The reproductive regime and the environmental imaginary it uses, with their common extractive logic, have received less attention. This study contends that Green City makes female fertility and desert ecology useful tools for technocratic nation-building. The study applies theory-guided reflexive thematization together with close reading, taking inspiration from Griffin's (1978) ecofeminist critique of patriarchal dualism, and extending Julieta Chaparro-Buitrago's idea of reproductive extractivism to literary analysis. Selected passages were chosen for the analysis of the novel's representations of the Markaz, reproductive conditioning, surveillance, conquest of the desert, and Panah. The analysis focuses on four interconnected operations: the transformation of reproduction into demographic labour, the representation of desert transformation as conquest, the subjection of bodies, mobility, memory, and desire, and the emergence of refusal through secrecy, care, and body autonomy. Panah takes women out of the state's need for reproductive productivity, but the enclosure and unequal emotional work of Panah is an ambivalent haven and not a fully realized ecofeminist alternative. Shah connects gendered and environmental domination in a political rationality that prioritizes the utility of life, and resistance in relational practices that disrupt, yet do not fully resist, the extractive order.

Keywords: Bina Shah; Before She Sleeps; ecofeminism; reproductive extractivism; feminist dystopia; bodily autonomy; environmental humanities

1. Introduction

The feminist dystopia has asked multiple times what happens when political authority turns reproduction from an embodied and relational power into a public good. In these stories, the State does not exercise birth control on its own. It rearranges the organization of reproduction, sexuality, marriage, space, language, and medical knowledge within the framework of education. Shah's *Before She Sleeps* (2018) explores this question in the speculative, technologically advanced, and authoritarian Green City, where the gender ratio has been significantly skewed due to war and a virus. The demographic emergency is used as a justification for compulsory plural marriage and reproductive regulation by the state. Women are officially valued because they are scarce, and scarcity does not allow freedom. It increases the institutionalization of their bodies.

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The political power of the novel is in this apparent discrepancy of value and dispossession. While Green City's policies are framed as being essential for "collective survival," this "survival" is understood in terms of the continuation of the state – not the autonomy or well-being of its citizens. Women are schooled for reproduction, monitored by the Agency, classified in marital capacities, and deprived of the right to choose what intimacy, marriage, or motherhood should be. Instead, the women of Panah withdraw to a hidden sanctuary and offer non-sexual companionship to their powerful male clients. Their absence from the official reproductive order is a material rejection of the fertility of a state that claims fertility. But Panah is not power beyond power and not completely free. It hides its citizens and keeps them enclosed; it limits their freedom to move, and it relies on emotional labor that is gendered. The other option is then ethically and politically incomplete.

While this conflict has been given a feminist and governmental discourse, its environmental dimension has been less sustained. The official history of Green City is the triumph of the desert, the triumph of the man-made urban order. Technological power makes the land fertile, and the nation is figured as giving birth to itself. These images are not background images. They show how the state speaks about the land and fertility in a language of utility and productivity, conquest and controlled generation. At the same time, the society which takes the metaphor of birth for its own glory reneges on women's power to give birth. This contradiction calls for an ecofeminist analysis, but not one as vague as a blanket "women and nature are both oppressed.

Previous studies have set a few contexts that are important for the novel. Afzal et al. (2021) discuss power, subversion, and containment in the context of women's empowerment and Pakistani feminist politics. In a study on spatial resistance and heterotopic features of Panah, Asif et al. (2021) examine how the spatial resistance of the city can be understood through the heterotopic features of Panah. Chambers and Lowden (2022) "read" the novel within the frame of pandemic inequality and misogyny and the future potential for rebellion after infection. The body in Green City is also a politically contested space, as evidenced by the work of Mehraj (2023), Naseem et al. (2023), and Naz et al. (2024) on female objectification, identity, and gendered violence. Using the Foucauldian concept of discipline, Bashir and Tanveer (2024) tie surveillance to the assigned social roles, reproductive control, and a shift from reluctance to rebellion. These actions make clear what it means to discipline a woman in Green City and what it means to subvert in Panah. They do not, however, provide a complete account of why the novel juxtaposes reproductive government with a triumphalist narrative of environmental conquest, nor do they provide an explanation for the various ways in which both may be considered as forms of extractive valuation.

This problem is tackled in this research by the term reproductive extractivism. Chaparro-Buitrago (2025) applies this imagery to link environmental harms from extraction to the reproductive abilities of human and nonhuman communities. Her work is not a literary dystopia; it is a work of material struggles connected to the issue of mining and reproductive justice in relation to other species and beings, and this is not something that can be transferred without qualification. The idea, however, offers a useful interpretive vocabulary for a fictional regime that sees human reproduction as a state asset and transformation of the desert as a matter of technological control. Reproductive extractivism in this study is an extractive political rationality that appropriates, reconfigures, and assesses reproductive potential in relation to institutional

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needs for population, continuity, and productivity. It is not as though pregnancy is exactly like mining, or women have an innate connection to nature. It refers to the common process of various modes of generative life being transformed into manageable products.

1.1 Research Questions:

The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does *Before She Sleeps* describe reproductive governance and environmental conquest as two kinds of extractivism?
2. How do conceptions of productivity, containment, artificial order, and national survival transform the lives of women, the desert, and their bodies into manageable resources?
3. How does Panah establish an ecology of refusal through the autonomy of the body, through the secret, through care and solidarity, and where is the refuge lost?

Green City's approach to fertility and its domination of desert ecology reflects an extractive political rationality: life becomes institutionalized when it can be made productive, measurable, and controllable. Panah explores relational practices of refusal in opposition to this order. It is where inhabitants regain some control over sexuality, speech, and affiliation, but the unevenness of its survival and its emotional work show the gap between survival and liberation.

2. Background of the Study

The concepts of ecofeminism can be used to examine the organization of gendered and environmental relations in structures of domination. It might be the strongest argument in favor of women's closeness to earth is that it is a historical argument, and that historically specific systems warrant different modes of subordination by means of interrelated hierarchies and dualisms. In Griffin's Woman and Nature (1978), the languages of science, philosophy, religion and social order all discourse on masculine reason as superior to the feminised body, emotion, matter and nature. Her hybrid critical form brings speech back to what patriarchal discourse has considered mute material.

In developing this critique, Plumwood (1993) demonstrates that dualism is more than simply a way of separating culture from nature or reason from body. It creates hierarchical difference by backgrounding, incorporation, instrumentalism, and denial of dependency. The dominant term thinks that it's autonomous and at the same time depends on what it denigrates. This is seen in Green City. The state is perceived as an agent of rationality, but without the ability to survive unless the ability of the women it makes subservient is exploited for reproduction. Likewise, the city is a state in which it is separated from the desert, yet its technological and material life takes place in a place imagined as conquered and overcome. In both instances, the desire to master is a cover for dependency. Ecofeminist material and social scholarship also warns against metaphorizing environmental conflict. It is suggested by Agarwal (1992) that the gender-environment relations need to be situated in the material division of labour, access, property and power. Similarly, Gaard (2011) suggests that an ecofeminism must be both an essentialist critique and one that does not ignore material bodies, species and social inequalities. These interventions are important because if the woman-nature association is presented as a universal feminine characteristic of caring, reproducing, and ecological sensitivity, it can generate the very logic it is trying to critique. *Before She Sleeps,* women do not resist, as they are pure nature to society. They rebel because their political system has given them a

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reproductive role, limited their social options, and tried to turn their bodily capacity into social duty.

Merchant's concept of the mechanistic modernity adds another element to the framework. Merchant (2006, 1980) outlines a cultural re-description of animate nature as inert matter to be managed and exploited. Green City is not a historical place, nor did it exist in the nineteenth century, but its rhetoric shares some elements with Merchant's European archive, which sees technological change as progress, and the desert as a passive material, the city as the active force that gives shape. When the language of mastery is used to talk about environmental transformation, it becomes a natural good, and the problem of loss, reciprocity, and ecological limit is pushed off the political agenda. These insights are incorporated into the notion of reproductive extractivism, which is a more specific account of generation. Franklin and Inhorn (2025) hold that in addition to being individual biological experiences, fertility and infertility are impacted by political, technological, economic, familial, and environmental influences. They have their "new reproductive order" that renders reproduction an optic to investigate national projects and social change. In this collection, Chaparro-Buitrago (2025) conceptualizes reproductive extractivism as the interdependency between human and nonhuman reproduction in the face of mining-induced destruction in Peru. Her multispecies approach cannot and does not isolate the harm done to land/earth, water, animal life, and human reproductive life. It also demonstrates the impossibility of private body containment of reproductive politics.

The use of extractivism is thus analogical, but not loose. It is different from a general oppression in three ways. A life-generating capacity is defined as a resource. Second, institutions become capable of getting access to that capacity through reorganisation of space, knowledge, mobility and consent. Thirdly, the output is legitimated as contributing to an allegedly higher collective project, and the costs are externalized onto the bodies and environments being used. The three conditions are all present in Green City. Women are being made a national asset; access is granted through the Markaz, the Agency, and the marriage system; and repopulation of women becomes a justification for harm in the process of surviving. The desert is structured like any other: land is the raw material for urban success, the technology that enables transformation, and national development that disguises ecological erasure.

The language of refusal is also conceptual. There is a distinction between refusal and simple escape, as the refusal is to the terms upon which recognition is granted. The primary identification of the green city for women is as Wives, as reproductive resources. The inhabitants of Panah reject these identities by rendering official space illegible and themselves un-reproducible. It is a refusal, not an essentialism. It tries to reconstruct life around interdependence, care, body constraints, and the right not to be put to work for the State. But the novel does not afford readers the easy option. Panah remains steadfast in his use of a secret, confinement, money, client, and emotional service. Its ecology of refusal is in practice, not a pure world beyond domination. The scholarship surrounding *Before She Sleeps* has quickly grown as the novel has combined feminist dystopia, postcolonial modernity, pandemic crisis, surveillance, and resistance. There are a few studies that have a gender focus on how the state regulates gender. Afzal et al. (2021) place the novel in the context of women's empowerment in Pakistan and analyze the conflict between the power of patriarchy and the subversion of women. They are important because they offer a counterpoint to an "abstract" or "Western" definition of feminist dystopia. Despite Green City's inability to be read as a straightforward window-dressing

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of one national society, it demonstrates the speculative nature of Shah's world, which speaks to political struggles concerning women's visibility and agency in Pakistan.

Postcolonial feminist interpretations further focus on the particular context from which Shah is altering traditional dystopian conventions. While the analysis of gender representation elucidates the issue in the light of postcolonial feminist idiom, the examination of the internalisation and negotiation of categories in the regime by women is achieved by the study of self-objectification and identity. Asif et al. (2021) understand Panah as a resistant urban space, thereby articulating the opposition between official and hidden geographies as central to the novel's politics. Bashir and Tanveer (2024) read Green City within the Foucauldian framework of discipline and reveal the nature of compliant bodies created by surveillance, regulated routines, reproductive roles, and institutional punishment. From disaffection to defiant subjectivity is a process they trace through; it is the evolution of resistant subjectivity.

The most influential interpretation that focuses on the pandemic is provided by Chambers and Lowden (2022). According to them, the novel's virus aggravates misogyny as well as provides opportunities for rebellion. In times of COVID-19, when the public-health crisis revealed and exacerbated gender and racial inequities, their analysis rang true. The pandemic reading is very clear that when crisis comes, it does not give birth to an entirely new social order. It allows entrenched structures to claim to be "respondents to emergency. The present study relies directly on this insight: Reproductive coercion is not the only reason for Green City's demographic crisis. Politically, the crisis is effective because patriarchal institutions already know women's bodies as the means to secure the continuity of society.

Naz et al. (2024) clearly present an ecofeminist analysis of violence towards women in the novel. It can hardly be denied that *Before She Sleeps* has not already been analyzed from an ecofeminist perspective in their work. The other one is then not only topical but conceptual too. The question isn't if women are oppressed, but how is it that the novel formally links women and nature together in a relationship of generation in terms of political economy. The present work is different from the wide-ranging ecofeminist narratives of patriarchy and violence because it focuses on reproductive extractivism, conquest of the desert, and ambivalence of Panah. It reads environmental and reproductive projects in the state as illuminating expressions of extractive value. This is also a recognition of the contribution to spatial scholarship. Panah has already been confirmed as resistant and heterotopic. The present study does not state that classification again. It asks what Panah denies, what life-forms it allows, and what extractive relations remain within it. This is a new question, and one that is not whether Panah is resistant to how refusal is materially organised. Being in the refuge guarantees that women are not subjected to forced reproductive labour, but also to solitude. It helps its clients with men to make emotional intimacy an exchange. Panah is against one economy of reproduction and caught up in another economy of care that is gendered.

3. Methodology

The method of this research is qualitative literary analysis, which is carried out using the methods of literary analysis and reflexive thematic analysis. The technique applied in this research is a qualitative literary analytical technique that combines reflexive thematic analysis and close reading of *Before She Sleeps* (2018) by Bina Shah. The chosen method for data analysis was Reflexive thematic analysis, as the study is about patterned meanings and not about the frequency of the data. Similar to Braun and Clarke (2006/2021), coding was considered an

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interpretative practice that is influenced by the research questions and theoretical framework. Themes were not viewed as objective entities to be identified or as inter-coder reliability. Rather, it aimed for clarity by keeping track of the passages chosen, the development of the codes to themes, and the connections between textual evidence and theoretical assertions. This analysis was carried out in five steps. First, the novel and the original eighteen extracts were read simultaneously to determine whether there are parts of the novel that correspond to the revised research questions. Secondly, the passages chosen were coded for resource conversion, conquest, artificiality, containment, embodied damage, refusal, relationality, and ambivalent refuge. Third, codes were compared in the two main spatial patterns of the novel – Green City and Panah. Fourth, close reading explored the use of metaphor, naming, narrative voice, institutional language, spatial opposition, repetition, and affective language. Fifth, interpretations were contrasted with negative or complicating evidence. Resistance would not be a conclusion made beforehand and, in particular, passages that would seem to be limiting rather than liberating were included.

3.1 Table 1 Analytical Functions:

Passage	Initial Codes	Analytical Function
Departure before dawn	darkness, agency, fear, regulated mobility	Surveillance and gendered fear
Women discouraged from talking	silence, role, imagination, reluctance	Prevention of collective consciousness
Boys attend university; girls attend Markaz	gendered knowledge, training, reproductive sciences	Institutional preparation for reproductive labour
Entry into Panah makes return impossible	stolen choice, criminalisation, exile	Ambivalence of refuge
"I'm suffocating there"	confinement, breath, pleading, dependency	Embodied cost of enclosure
Sex as a means to repopulate	conditioning, demographic output, aversion	Conversion of sexuality into state labour
Green City's "artificial calm"	artificiality, repression, instability	False order of technocratic control
The city has "defeated" the desert	conquest, emptiness, birth metaphor, achievement	Environmental mastery and appropriated generation
Sabine's desire for silence	noise, emotional labour, clients, limits	Persistence of extraction inside Panah

Table 3.2: A theory-guided linguistic analysis of lexicalisation, metaphor, transitivity/agency, institutional discourse, affective language, and spatial language in Before She Sleeps.

Textual Passage	Linguistic Feature	Initial Linguistic Codes	Ecofeminist / Reproductive-Extractivism Interpretation	Analytical Function
"Household Technology,	Lexical choice; institutional register;	science, technology,	Scientific terminology	Institutionalisation of reproductive

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Health, and Reproductive Sciences"	nominalisation	reproduction, institutional knowledge	gives reproductive control an appearance of neutrality and rationality, masking its disciplinary function.	labour
"girls go to the Markaz"	Transitivity; spatial positioning	assignment, gendered movement, institutional destination	The verb *go* occurs within a predetermined gendered educational pathway, constructing girls' movement toward reproductive training as socially normal.	Gendered allocation of knowledge
"Wife"	Capitalisation; nominalisation; identity label	wife, categorisation, function, reduction	Capitalisation transforms a social role into an institutional identity, reducing the individual woman to a reproductive function.	Reduction of personhood to reproductive utility
"repopulate a broken city"	Metaphor; lexical field of population	repopulate, broken, repair, demographic output	The verb *repopulate* frames sexuality as a corrective mechanism for a damaged national body rather than as personal intimacy.	Sexuality converted into demographic labour

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"Means"	Instrumental lexicalisation	means, purpose, utility, function	Sexuality is linguistically constructed as an instrument for an external objective, reflecting extractive valuation.	Instrumentalisation of sexuality
"misgiving"	Affective vocabulary	doubt, aversion, discomfort, internal resistance	The affective response shows how institutional reproductive ideology becomes internalised in women's emotional experience.	Internalisation of reproductive control
"in reluctance"	Affective phrase; semantic field of silence	reluctance, fear, hesitation, restricted speech	Reluctance represents the psychological effect of surveillance while also creating space for covert communication.	Suppression and tactical use of language
"school each other"	Metaphor; lexical repetition	school, learning, informal teaching, collective knowledge	The institutional verb *school* is reappropriated by women, turning a mechanism of reproductive discipline into collective knowledge-sharing.	Emergence of counter-discourse
"sold like a slave"	Economic metaphor; simile	sold, slave, commodity,	The language of commercial	Commodification of the female

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		exchange	exchange constructs the female body as transferable property and exposes the economic logic embedded in reproductive governance.	body
"nothing but sand"	Negation; minimisation; lexical erasure	nothing, sand, emptiness, absence	The desert is linguistically stripped of ecological value before its transformation can be presented as legitimate achievement.	Discursive erasure of ecological value
"defeated the desert"	Violent metaphor; personification	defeat, conquest, enemy, victory	The desert is represented as an opponent, allowing technological transformation to be framed as triumph rather than ecological intervention.	Construction of environmental conquest
"a city pushing itself out of the ground"	Birth metaphor; personification	birth, emergence, ground, creation	The city is given reproductive agency and appears self-generating, concealing its dependence on land and human labour.	Myth of autonomous technological creation
"a nation giving birth to itself"	Reproductive metaphor; reflexive construction	nation, birth, self, generation	The reflexive *itself* erases dependency and	Appropriation of reproductive power

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			appropriates reproductive language for national self-creation.	
"achievement"	Evaluative noun; progress discourse	achievement, success, development, mastery	The noun legitimises environmental transformation by assigning positive value to technological domination.	Naturalisation of technocratic progress
"artificial calm"	Oxymoronic/contrasting lexical construction	artificial, calm, order, instability	*Artificial* destabilises the apparently positive noun *calm*, suggesting that social order is manufactured through containment rather than genuine flourishing.	Discursive construction of false stability
"human nature not being contained"	Metaphor; containment schema	nature, containment, control, disorder	Human desire, grief and autonomy are conceptualised as forces that must be contained, linking bodily governance with environmental mastery.	Containment of unruly life
"darkest part of the night"	Temporal deixis; affective language	darkness, time, fear, surveillance	Time becomes a linguistic marker of restricted mobility:	Surveillance and regulated mobility

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			movement is possible only when surveillance is weaker.	
"spatially unavailable" / "reproductively unavailable"	Parallel construction; nominalisation	space, availability, reproduction, access	Parallelism connects physical mobility with reproductive accessibility, showing that controlling space also controls reproductive capacity.	Spatial control as reproductive extraction
"diary" / prohibition on diaries	Lexical field of writing and narration	diary, memory, voice, self-narration	Controlling private writing limits women's ability to construct alternative identities and histories outside institutional categories.	Control of narrative agency
"I'm suffocating there"	Embodied metaphor; first-person voice	suffocation, enclosure, breath, distress	Bodily language exposes the experiential cost of refuge and complicates its representation as an uncomplicated site of liberation.	Embodied limits of alternative space
"high-tension wire, packed with words"	Metaphor; technological imagery	wire, tension, words, overload	Sabine's body/mind is represented as infrastructure	Extraction of emotional labour

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			under pressure, extending the study's extractive logic into emotional and communicative labour.	
"an hour of silence"	Temporal expression; affective contrast	silence, time, relief, exhaustion	Silence becomes a scarce resource, reversing the state's earlier use of silence as a disciplinary mechanism.	Silence as embodied refusal
"robbed"	Theft metaphor; transitive verb	robbed, loss, agency, deprivation	The verb constructs reproductive and marital choice as something actively taken from women rather than merely absent.	Language of dispossession
"criminal"	Institutional/legal label	criminalisation, identity, law, exile	The noun transforms refusal into deviance, demonstrating how the state linguistically delegitimises women who become unavailable to its reproductive system.	Criminalisation of refusal
"secret conversation"	Lexical opposition; clandestine discourse	secret, conversation, knowledge,	Private speech becomes a counter-	Language as ecological refusal

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		solidarity	discursive practice through which women reconstruct collective awareness.	
"body protected"	Passive construction; embodied vocabulary	body, protection, autonomy, safety	The body is repositioned from a resource to be extracted into something whose boundaries must be protected.	Reclaiming bodily autonomy

4. Analysis

4.1 Reproduction as an Extractive State Resource

The reproductive order of the Green City is initiated well before marriage and pregnancy. It is created within an educational division which assigns intellectual development to boys and reproductive functionality to girls. Upon completion of secondary school, boys go to college or university, and girls go to the Markaz, where they are taught "Household Technology, Health, and Reproductive Sciences" (Shah, 2018, p. 25). It's not just about the subject matter itself. It distinguishes people who are allowed to know from people who are cultivated to be useful in the biological and domestic sphere within a given system. The University suggests a future of specialisation and public engagement; the Markaz specifies a future of Wife.

This restriction appears modern and rational because of its terminology, "Reproductive Sciences". Science-based knowledge could help to understand the body or to achieve autonomy of health, but its institutional purpose is disciplinary. Girls are introduced to reproduction in an environment where a reproductive system has already planned the capacity for reproduction. Information becomes independent of decision-making. The state thus expects resistance, as it is creating subjects who recognize sex and health through the requirements of demographic recovery, and domestic technology through the requirements of the household. The state expects resistance, in the sense that it creates subjects who recognize sexuality and health through the requirements of demographic recovery, and domestic technology through the requirements of the household. Future reproductive labour is not the only thing the curriculum takes away from them; it also takes away interpretive authority: the meaning of the body is given to them by the institution, which they cannot give to themselves.

This arrangement is gendered and is explained by Griffin's (1978) critique. Often, patriarchal discourse attributes to women the biological role and gives to males the right to know and control the biology. Green City is a contradiction in itself. There is a reduction of women to their reproductive nature, but then the capacity to reproduce is not permitted to be embodied, variable, relational, or self-directed. It has to be scientifically administered. These two elements of rational state and reproductive body thus generate a differential dependency. The state claims to be the active intelligence of survival, which can survive only by appropriating capacities that the state considers passive resources.

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The implications of this training are made clear in the narration when it speaks of women in Green City being taught that sex is a way to "repopulate a broken city" (Shah, 2018, p. 73). In the phrase, intimacy becomes a tool, and the body becomes an infrastructural body. In "Means", sexuality is only valued if it has an external goal, and in "repopulate", the focus is no longer on an individual encounter but is one on an aggregate population. The "broken city" provides moral pressure: hesitation becomes selfishness since following the rules looks like they are required to heal a collective wound. This is the naked face of reproductive extractivism. A generative capacity is recognized as being in shortage, is claimed by institutions, and the output is deemed to be justified by the survival of the nation. The process is not constrained to the economic sale of women in a conventional market. Extraction takes place via compulsory availability and the transformation of reproductive time, sexuality, and the possibility of future into resources of the state. The system of multiple marriages in the state also spreads the availability of women to numerous men. In the name of Womanhood, womanhood is reduced to the official term Wife, used in capital letters, which renders the woman individual into a function.

The narrator's answer reveals the mental impact of the system. She asks herself why she should miss the physical contact and concludes that it evokes "misgiving" (Shah, 2018, p. 73). The regime has not only banned desire, but it has also redefined it. Contact is inextricable from reproductive responsibility, surveillance, and loss of control. Aversion thus expresses the state in the intimate consciousness. This illustrates the difficulty in applying a simple distinction between external coercion and internal freedom. The best way to get compliance is for the person to start monitoring herself. The novel also illustrates the inter-dependence of reproductive extraction with the control of women's collective imagination. Women are not allowed to speak, challenge their identity, or imagine an alternative future: they teach one another "in reluctance" (Shah, 2018, p. 20) without speaking. The term "school each other" reflects the formal education of the Markaz. The discipline is institutionalized when fear spreads within the ranks of women. A lack of willingness is not synonymous with passivity. It is an acquired survival behavior brought about by the threat of group communication. The state rules over reproduction by inhibiting women's ability to envision futures other than reproductive ones together.

But silence is not a politically stable thing. One such story is that of a woman who refuses to be sold like a slave in the first place and takes a proactive step to save herself through patience and cleverness (Shah, 2018, p.25). In the economic metaphor of sale, the body is referred to as a transferable value; strategic silence leaves room for the emergence of refusal on an interior plane. This difference between imposed silence and tactical silence is very important. The first separates the subjects from the system, and the second abstracts intentions from power. Shah's women make one of the tools of domination one of the means of survival. Reproductive extraction is more than forced birth. It involves capturing education, language, imagination, and desire, so that the future of the body seems to be preordained. Green City's success is ideological as well as administrative; that is, it makes the nation's demographic continuity appear more basic than the consent of women. The novel's criticism is about revealing the hidden price of an appeal to survival. One would not be able to say that he is a man who preserves life if he were to renounce the powers by which life is created. If he denies the living subject the powers by which life is created, he cannot say that he is a man who preserves life.

4.2 Desert Conquest and the False Neutrality of Progress

The state's approach to reproduction is echoed in its history of Green City's environmental beginnings. "*This is where there was nothing but sand, and the city has been built,*" says the official voice, celebrating a city that "*defeated the desert*" (Shah, 2018, p. 12). This affirmation makes the desert nothing, and then it becomes an enemy. These two actions give the green light to transformation. If land equals nothing, ecological value or relation becomes an irrelevant consideration; if land is an enemy, then technological alteration is a victory, not a defeat. The declaration also uncovers the politics of the seemingly innocent word "*achievement*." The city is being praised for being a model of human achievement, but humans behave differently. It's not about everybody's life in that order; it is about the

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institutions, technologies, and planners that have the right to change the land. The female citizens of the city are not represented in this universal subject. They are restricted in movement, communication, education, and expression of sexuality so that the state can state that they've won as a people. Shah sets environmental mastery next to gendered unfreedom to demonstrate that abstract humanity's victory might rely on the dispossession of specific humans.

The contrast is accentuated by all the images of reproduction in the passage. The speaker envisions "*a city pushing itself out of (the) ground*" and "*a nation giving birth to itself*" (Shah, 2018, p. 12). There is an appropriation of birth as a symbol of sovereign creation. The nation seems to emerge from itself, with no reliance on body or land or previous connections. But no city spawns its own life. The metaphor blots out labour and dependency when it celebrates creation. Plumwood's (1993) description of backgrounding serves as a cautionary tale here: the dominant subject does not count on the help of the subordinate other, and redefines dependent achievement as autonomy. The self-birth claim is particularly ironic for Green City, as birth is actually a public duty for the regime. The country has the metaphorical glory of the generation and gives a woman its burden. Female reproductive capacity is not honoured as independent creativity, but it's served as service. To be symbolic as a city is not to recognize mothers as political subjects. The uneven distribution of metaphoric and labor signifiers connects the environmental and reproductive plots. It is the land of the desert that gives rise to the city, and women'swombs that give rise to the nation. There is a sovereign fantasy of self-creation that is backgrounded by both types of generation.

The victory of the desert also evokes the image of the transformation from a living earth to manipulated matter as discussed by Merchant (1980). It is not about the oppressive nature of an urban settlement in a desert, or about the rejection of technological development. The novel's focus is a political rhetoric that equates technological triumph with dominance, and ecological otherness with value only when converted. The desert isn't depicted as a challenging environment to adapt to; it's a gap in need of filling. This type of language disables the state from acknowledging ecological limits, since all matter that resists is a challenge to overcome. The phrase "*artificial calm*" (Shah 2018 p. 11) is another case of this environmental logic. Calm is not made in justice, consent, or ecological balance. It is engineered by putting down disorder: violence, desire, grief, dissent, and uncontrolled nature. However, the story points out that such forces keep seeping through. The word "artificial" does not imply that technology is untrue or evil. It is a warning about the fragility of an order which mixes containment with stability. Green City's calm is perpetuated by policing, as it does not resolve the conflicts that it conceals.

An "ecofeminist reading," in other words, then focuses not on technology as an object, but on technocracy as a relation of power. The novel is not against science in general. It is through its educational and reproductive institutions that its oppressive nature is manifest when it is divorced from consent, ethical responsibility, and lived experience. Likewise, the remodification of landscapes does not necessarily coincide with exploitation. The extractive structure emerges when land is not granted a prior value, mastery is fetishized as the only relation to land, and the advantages of transformation justify coercion elsewhere in the social order. In this conjunction, what is at stake can be described in multispecies terms, as Chaparro-Buitrago (2025) does in his account of reproductive extractivism. Reproduction is not only about individual bodies; it is based on the broader context, which includes the human and nonhuman communities, that enables their continuity. Green City reduces reproductive capacity to the mere act of counting, and extols ecological change as a form of victory. It thus differentiates the continuity of human demography from environmental relationality. The state wants more births without cultivating a politics of care, the world the lives are lived in. In its form it is anti-ecological, and in its consequence it is ecological because it seeks output while it denies relationship. So the desert route is not a "decorative" world-building. It provides the regime with its ideology and the "*rules of the game"*. The words "*Nothing*," "*defeated*," "*birth*," and "*achievement*" chart a trajectory of erasure, conquest, appropriated generation. The same movement also applies to women: their individual

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experiences and dreams are silenced; their opposition is brought to terms; their reproductive powers are co-opted; and their social fitness is recounted as a survival. In Shah's environmental imagery, the patriarchy is always connected to the model of progress in Green City.

4.3 Avoidance and Absorbed Diminishment

Extractive systems must have secure access to resources they use. Access in Green City is through containment. The Agency controls what can be seen and how one can move; the Markaz controls the education of the women, sexuality is controlled by marriage law, and private diaries are prohibited, limiting the woman's memory and self-narration. These mechanisms are not only surrounding the body. They come in through fear, suffocation, noise, aversion, and fragmentation. The first section sets up surveillance by means of time. A woman tells Agency officers that she leaves a client's home in the darkest part of the night before dawn and tells them that that is the time she fears the most (Shah, 2018, p. 1). Darkness offers cover, but accentuates the feeling of exposure. Movement is only made possible by an unstable calculation of institutional weakness. The freedom now has been limited to the time that surveillance slows. The scene is thus inchoate, neither imprisoned nor free. The women of Panah walk around the city, but they do it in secret, on a schedule and with fear. This mode of control is found to be the disciplinary power (Bashir & Tanveer, 2024) as per the Foucauldian perspective of the novel. But an ecofeminist focus raises the issue of what is being protected: it protects the state's reproductive claim. But if women become "spatially unavailable," they are also "reproductively unavailable. Surveillance is more than just a marker of authoritarianism; it is the infrastructure that is used for locating, categorising, and sending bodies back to their functions. The two factors of spatial control and reproductive extraction are interdependent.

With the state's attack on private writing, containment seeks to enter memory. Any citizen can maintain a journal or a diary (Shah, 2018, p. 3). The rule is neutral in its universal language, but has a gendered resonance in the context of a story in which women's experiences are erased and replaced by those of Wife, patient, demographic resource, and criminal. The difference between institutional description and lived experience may be captured in a diary. Banning it cuts off the flow of self and restricts the opportunity of private recognition to become public witnesses. It is important to consider here Griffin's (1978) emphasis on silenced voices. Her approach brings together the fragments of patriarchal discourse to show how the voice of women and nature is heard only in categories designed for them. The city of Green City has enacted a prohibition on diaries, which makes this problem concrete. The state wants a monopoly on narration. Women can be reported by the Bureau, recorded by the Agency, or trained by the Markaz, but they cannot make an account that goes beyond these categories, though they may be defined by marital law. The control over representation is the control over reproduction, as a body without authorised personal history is more easily reduced to function.

Suicide, a case in point, is the institutionalization of the treatment of violence as narration by the Bureau. The public revelation and counting of a woman's death serves as evidence of the ramifications of "human nature not being contained" (Shah, 2018, p. 12). The state's afflictions are a type of propaganda. It is not condemning conditions of death but the body to be further contained. “Human nature” is a force to be confronted, a force to be controlled, and the place where the expectation is that you will encounter despair is the place you are likely to find order. The assertion further links women's governance to nature's governance. That women are identified as nature is not the problem. In lieu, the regime builds up the natural, which is outside administration: grief, desire, bodily autonomy, ecological difference, and life that is not predictable. Containment can provide an answer to all of these questions. This thinking will form a positive feedback loop. Suffering is meant to be a consequence of control; that uncontrolled nature is dangerous; and suffering brings more control.

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The embodied language is a remedy to this as it records what the institutional discourse does not. But after two years of no "proper life", one of the inhabitants of Panah implores to leave (Shah, 2018, p. 66). The enclosure is read as suffocation. What's the issue is that there is no lack of rights; it's an environment that is not conducive to flourishing. Not least, her pleading also implies that there is very little mobility, and even within the safe confines of the Refuge, one still has to negotiate one's mobility via male power. A need to move and touch seems like an outrageous request, one she never wants to make again.

This contrast of the oppressive city and the liberating Panah is complicated. Green City is a threat, and protection is confinement; hiding is important. The woman's body is an enigma: there are forces in it that make her feel unlivable and forces outside that keep her prisoner. This is why Panah can't be a "full solution". The refuge is possible to interrupt the state's access to the reproductive process without interrupting spatial and sensory autonomy. That's the same concept in Sabine's MentalNoise piece. She views herself as "*a high-tension wire, packed with words; and an hour of silence [is better] than currency, clothes, and carats*" (Shah, 2018, p. 58). The technology metaphor is a metaphor that transforms the psyche into an overloaded infrastructure. Sabine needs to listen to and present others' speeches all day (the women) and all night (the clients), without getting a break. We're comparing emotional labour to an electric wire here, and it is this extractive value that exists in the alternative community. Her listening, comforting, and absorptive nature is used all the time.

4.4 Panah and the Ambivalent Ecology of Refusal

The primary political gesture that Panah makes is to withdraw. It is a place where its citizens set themselves free from compulsory plural marriage and state-controlled reproduction. This is a denial of an assumption that scarcity grants the state a greater claim on women. For Green City, the demographic emergency is a request for availability, while Panah replies that collective need is not an excuse to disregard bodily consent. The refuge, then, redefines the word 'survival'. The state survives by numbers. For the state, survival is by the numbers. Intimacy and affiliation, and the sense of self-definition, must be under some control for the women if they're to survive. The novel is a reconfiguration of this refusal in terms of hiding and collective protection instead of the traditional public revolution. Women conceal, share information, manage risk, and utilize networks across the official city. But their acts, as described in the earlier scholarship, are passive or quiet resistance, although "passive" can be deceptive if concealment necessitates constant organization. If a person refuses, then he or she does so because the state plans to keep the person from doing so. When someone becomes unavailable, it's a political success.

In Panah, the speech also has a different function. Green City tells women not to speak, so they don't ask questions about their roles in the world or what other worlds might be like. Panah establishes an environment for holding common awareness. Voice is relational: One woman's experience allows another to realise that there are structural causes of her private suffering. This collective recognition is an opposition to the individualisation of deviance by the state. A woman who refuses forced marriage is not a failure to adapt; she's a reaction to an institutional structure that has made choice impossible. But the refuge is based on a painful foreclosure. While one narrator asks what would have happened if she had wanted an ordinary life outside, with marriage or a kid, another asks what would have happened if she had been a born male. She feels she is "robbed," that she becomes a criminal when she enters Panah, from which she can never come back (Shah, 2018, p. 50). The passage would not allow the resistance to turn into a celebration of non-marriage or non-motherhood. Bodily autonomy also refers to having the right to live a conventional, as well as an unconventional, life. Green City robs women of autonomy by forcing them to reproduce, while the conditions it creates also make it hard for those who run away to choose marriage and motherhood.

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This is a key tenet of reproductive justice. Being free cannot be limited to producing children or rejecting them. It demands social circumstances that allow people to choose to enter into intimate and reproductive relations at the time, place, and conditions they wish. The narrator's reiteration that she did not make or accept the rules reveals that there has been no consent on either side of the choice. Exile is coming into Panah; reproductive capture is staying away. Her refusal must be made, but it cannot be made without being necessary. Therefore, there is a double understanding of Panah as an ambivalent ecology of refusal. In this context, 'Ecology' refers to a system of relationships, dependencies, spatial conditions, and practices in which life is sustained. The refuge is based on the principle of mutual protection, where there is no hierarchy, and sexual access is given to women to a certain level. Opposes the claim of the extractive to always have the power to reproduce. Its collective structure also arises from the state's attempt at isolating women and subjecting them to the compulsion of reproduction among themselves.

Meanwhile, Panah can't completely escape from Green City. It is in a political and economic environment; it has to negotiate with powerful men and safeguard itself by restricting. Its inhabitants are working with their clients and transforming their interactions into some valuable services of conversation, comfort, attention, and controlled intimacy. This work could potentially challenge the dominance of men, as women regulate sexual access, but it does not eliminate sexual demand. Emotional availability is another resource, as Sabine makes clear when she is exhausted. The refuge thus makes a distinction between refusal and purity. There is no uncontaminated exterior to power in resistance. It restructures relations under given conditions, resulting in benefits, concessions, and alternative risks. This has a more convincing political vision than a mere separatist utopia, as it acknowledges the material constraints of maintaining alternatives. Panah's women require secrecy, because the state is a criminal against them; they require clients as they need resources for a hidden life; and they require rules as they are not safe if they are exposed, threatening everyone. What makes it possible to live together can also limit the liberty of the individual.

Ecofeminist relationality can help to explain this tension. A model of autonomy based on separation, mastery, and denial of dependency is opposed by Griffin (1978). But Panah seems to have an alternative, as it acknowledges that survival is based on mutual support. Relationality is not just a relationship, though. Consent, reciprocity, and boundaries are important parts of any relationship. Relational survival becomes akin to containment when Sabine cannot step away from the words of others, or a resident cannot step away without catastrophic consequences. The novel therefore calls into question the ethic of its counter-community, as does Green City: does the collective recognise the embodied autonomy of those whose capacities sustain it? Refusal doesn't fail merely because Panah is incomplete. It shows that the liberation of women can't be achieved by merely taking them out of one institution. Reproductive justice should be linked to spatial freedom, economic alternatives, emotional reciprocity, and the right to tell their story. However, ecological justice can't simply be about rejecting the discourse of "conquering nature". It requires forms of collective organisation that recognise dependency but do not make it unlimited access.

The openness and fragility of Panah is thus the heart of the novel. It has not won the state's own military battle. They bring its power to a standstill. Each pregnancy that has been aborted, each secret conversation, each body protected and each preserved hope reveals that the state's claim is incomplete. Refusal eliminates the possibility of extraction by making some capacities unavailable, and also by asserting the value of life beyond its productivity. The sanctuary is still in jeopardy, but alternate relationships are still possible.

4. Discussion

From the analysis, the common structure of the novel's reproductive, environmental, and spatial narratives emerges. Green City first presents the crisis: the collapse of the population and an unkind desert. It then considers these resources, namely, generative capacities (female fertility and transformable

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land). Those resources are acquired through institutions and technologies. Last but not least, the state refers to its product as "national survival" or "human achievement". This series is about the transition from dependency to sovereignty. Women and land are the ground of the nation, whose story it tells as the one that controls, improves, and creates life. The result will complement previous studies on surveillance and resistance. Foucauldian approaches are right on target in discovering the disciplinary mechanisms that create compliant bodies (Bashir & Tanveer, 2024), and spatial readings explain how Panah is a counter-site (Asif et al., 2021). The mechanisms are structured as they are because of the concept of reproductive extractivism. There is no such thing as too much discipline. It allows for the maintenance of reproductive potential and the affordance of political continuity through output. Similarly, the spatial resistance of Panah is important because it takes the body out of the field of reproduction of the state.

The study also puts a new edge on the novel's ecofeminist reading. There is more than equality of vulnerability in the relationship between women and nature. It is made by a political rationality that treats lives in different ways as means to an end. The desert is “nothing” until it becomes a city; women's futures are secondarily considered until they become demographic continuity. They are deprived of their own histories, their own relations. However, the analogy itself needs to be sensitive to the differences. Land and women can't be substituted for each other, and environmental change is not the same as reproductive coercion. Their relationship is not part of the essence of self but rather of the justificatory structure of mastery. This structure is made visible in the recent concept of reproductive extractivism as it deems human and nonhuman reproduction as materially dependent and politically organised (Chaparro-Buitrago, 2025). Shah's dystopia is that the state has separated the reestablishment of populations from the conditions of their flourishing. It attempts to obtain birthhood and at the same time undermines consent, intimacy, memory, trust, and ecological relations. Reproduction moves away from the world-maintaining aspect to numerical reproduction. The novel thus anticipates the wider argument of environmental reproductive justice, which considers the capacity to reproduce not divorced from the environments, institutions and relations which enable life.

Panah is a partial alternative because it alters the value of the terms. Its inhabitants are not valuable as it reproduces them for the state. They must survive, talk, be friends and have their own restrictions – it is their value in themselves. This is the ecology of refusal, a relational space to interrupt compulsory productivity. The ambivalence, however, will be seen in the refuge, as counter-spaces can also be created through care work, enclosure and economic dependency, as extraction is reproduced. The finding guards against romanticising women’s solidarity. Emancipatory solidarity is one that is accountable to the differences of desire, exhaustion, and risk. The separation of survival and flourishing also changes the original emphasis of the thesis to break boundaries. Emotional, social, and political barriers are only one way of resisting. At times resistance means setting limits: to refuse sexual access, to reduce emotional needs, to maintain the secret, or to take a stony silence. The limit of the body is no sign of political weakness. It is the location where an extractive order is no longer allowed to be used.

5. Conclusion

Before She Sleeps is a book that is about reproductive governance and environmental conquest as co-extractivist processes. Gendered education, plural marriage, surveillance, and the redefinition of sex in ideology are all ways that Green City turns women's fertility into demographic labour. It is a rewriting of desert ecology as evidence of technological sovereignty and a characterisation of urban construction as the defeat of nature. The state's metaphorical self-birth relies on the backgrounding of the land out of which the city is born, as well as the women out of whom the population continues. These projects are linked together by containment. Movement is controlled by the Agency, knowledge is controlled by the Markaz, reproductive training is controlled by more, and the ban on diaries is controlled by memory. Their influence is felt in the novel's language of fear, suffocation, misgiving, noise, and fragmentation. These experiences argue against the state's claim to protect survival abstractly, demonstrating that there is numerical continuity in the midst of destruction of liveability.

Panah defies this succession by pulling women out of reproductive readiness and maintaining practices of concealment, care, talking, and mutual safety. It's an ecology of refusal, because it reorganizes the way of survival in relation to relations that the state cannot control fully. Regardless, the haven of Panah is still a double-edged sword. Entry can bring about long-term isolation; safety is safe to be locked up; and service to clients takes emotional interest away. There is no freedom in the refuge; it's a life-saver. It does not treat environmental degradation and gender oppression as two distinct phenomena, but rather sees a common extractive valuation that sees life as useful, measurable, and controllable. Shah's dystopia reveals the violence in stories of a demographic crisis and technological advance. It will not allow a cursory opposition between domination and liberation. Resistance starts when bodies, voices, desires, and environments are no longer infinite, but the making of non-extractive relations continues to be a collective unfinished task. This study focuses on one novel and a sample of passages that were interpreted. An examination of the lexical fields of birth, land, containment, technology, and care in contemporary South Asian climate and dystopian fiction also might be drawn upon with a corpus-assisted approach. This would involve experiments with the conjunction proposed here to determine if it is specifically Green City, or if it is a part of a broader literary grammar that brings together reproductive government and ecological crisis.

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