

Commodification of women in BinaShah's before she sleeps: a feminist critique

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Abstract

The society we live in is a patriarchal society in which women are treated as objects and commodities. This issue has assumed an alarming position. So the purpose of the present study is to explore the theme of commodification of women in *Before She Sleeps*, by applying feminism theory. Bina Shah is a distinguished Pakistani writer who, in her novel, offers portrayal of women as commodities, examining the ways in which their agency, identities, and bodies are commodified and controlled by the patriarchal system. Shah portrays the socio-political implications of this commodification, by highlighting the dehumanization and marginalization of women. She too emphasizes the characters' struggles for autonomy and resistance against their objectification and commodification. The findings substantiate that the women are treated no longer as human beings rather they are stigmatized as objects and commodities, having only the reproductive capacity. Further, the gender-based oppression offers insights into the broader discourse on women's rights and agency within dystopian narratives. The study is a fruitful addition to the already existing literature in the domain of feminism.

Keywords: Commodification of Women, Feminist Critique, Bina Shah, Portrayal of Women As Commodities

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1. Introduction

The society we live in is a patriarchal society dictated by patriotically root and regulated by patriotically values in which there is a heavily discriminatory treatment towards women. The women face subjugation, suppression of even basic rights the stigma of being commodities, being others, being subalterns being only reproductive machines. All bans and restrictions exist for women. Bina Shah, a notable Pakistani writer and thinker, was born in 1972. Through her novels, short stories, and thought-provoking essays, she deals with the themes ranging from Pakistani culture to women's rights, education, and societal intricacies. Possessing an educational foundation in psychology and educational technology, Shah's impactful contributions to literature and journalism have garnered esteemed recognition. She is the winner of awards including the prestigious Agahi Award for journalistic excellence, along with the distinguished *Chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*.

The emergence of *Before She Sleeps* within the realm of contemporary literature is notable for its distinctive exploration of the commodification of women, a theme deeply intertwined with feminist discourse. Set in the aftermath of natural disasters and nuclear turmoil, the novel unfurls against the backdrop of Green City, a unique dystopian enclave situated within the South Asian context. This geographical departure from the Western-centric dystopian narratives introduces a fresh perspective, rendering the work particularly noteworthy in the literary landscape. Central to the narrative is the relentless scourge of a perilous virus that ravages the female reproductive system, catalyzing an unprecedented societal response. In this orchestrated bid to sustain population levels and safeguard women, the Perpetuation Bureau engineers a draconian framework where women are consigned to multiple husbands and prescribed fertility regimens. Relegated to the term 'Wives,' these women navigate an intricate web of shared husbandry, subverting established norms of multiple spouses in a manner both astute and thought-provoking.

Bina Shah (2020) paints a canvas where women, ostensibly revered and attended to, remain ensnared within a framework bereft of genuine autonomy and agency. Notably, a subset of women within the narrative

challenges this paradigm, seeking refuge beneath the surface in an enclave aptly titled ‘Panah,’ a term resonating with the refuge, they seek. This clandestine sisterhood subsequently offers a unique form of companionship to men of stature, an inversion that upends conventional narrative conventions and casts a revelatory spotlight on societal norms. Employing a multi-faceted narrative perspective, the novel sheds light on the vantage points of diverse characters, each casting illumination on distinct facets of this constructed world. Viewed through a multifaceted perspective, readers are encouraged to grasp the different viewpoints of key characters like Sabine and the mysterious Lin who leads the secret group. The story of the novel also follows various women in this secretive world. However, a significant aspect missing is the voices of the Wives, which slightly affects the narrative’s inclusiveness. In a nutshell, *Before She Sleeps* is a captivating introduction to speculative fiction, blending dystopian elements with the complexities of South Asia’s cultural fabric. It skillfully tackles themes of gender, empowerment, and society’s rules, making it particularly relevant in feminist literature. This analysis dives into how women are treated in the story, exploring the intricate layers of this social commentary.

Research Questions

1. How does Bina Shah portray the theme of objectification and commodification of women within the context of a dystopian society?
2. What are the implications of the commodification of women depicted in *Before She Sleeps* for discussions surrounding gender roles, agency, and power dynamics in dystopian fiction?
3. To what extent is the study a strong critique of commodification of women in patriarchal society?

Objectives:

1. To critically analyze the portrayal of women as commodities in *Before She Sleeps*, examining how the novel’s setting, characters, and narrative strategies contribute to this thematic exploration.
2. To elucidate the multifaceted implications of the commodification of women in the novel, including the negotiation of agency, the deconstruction of traditional gender roles, and the critique of power dynamics within a dystopian framework.
3. The study a strong critique of commodification of women in patriarchal society

2. Review of Literature

According to Tandon (2008), providing an exact definition for feminism poses a challenge. However, in a broader context, feminism encompasses women engaging in actions, discourse, and written expression concerning women’s rights and issues. It involves recognizing social inequalities within the existing norms and contributing their distinct viewpoints to address these matters. Haug (1986) pinpoints that Commodification, within the realm of social theory, signifies a multifaceted process whereby not only tangible goods and services, but also the intangible dimensions of human existence, such as interpersonal relationships and individual identities, undergo a transformation into commodities that are amenable to commercial exchange and economic valuation. Lury (1996) argues that commodification encompasses the reconfiguration of diverse facets of societal interactions into commodities, thereby rendering them susceptible to acquisition, transaction, and quantification within the context of a market-centric culture. This process implicates intricate sociocultural ramifications, as it engenders shifts in perceptions, relationships, and norms, molding the ways in which individuals perceive themselves, their connections, and their roles within a consumer-oriented milieu.

Goldman, Heath, and Smith’s (1991) engage with the concept of ‘commodity feminism’ within the context of media and communication studies. The authors delve into intersections between feminism and

consumer culture, exploring how feminist ideas and ideals are appropriated, commodified, and marketed in various media platforms. Within this framework, they deal with the tension between authentic feminist goals and their commercialization, shedding light on the ways in which feminist themes and imagery are employed to sell products and narratives. They contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding feminism's place in consumer society, media representation, and the challenges posed by the commodification of social and political movements.

Roberts' (1998) focuses on connections between gender, consumption, and the prevailing culture of commodities. Situated within the expansive landscape of historical analysis, the researcher critically examines how gender dynamics intersect with consumer culture, influencing patterns of consumption, representation, and societal norms. Roberts (1998) sheds light on the ways in which commodities serve as both reflections and shapers of gender identities, relationships, and power structures. Likewise, Hartsock's (2004) offers a concise contemplation on the interplay between women and their portrayal as commodities. Anchored within the domain of feminist discourse, the researcher engages with the multifaceted ways in which women's identities, roles, and agency are frequently commodified within societal constructs.

Alvira and Setyowati (2021) offer a discerning examination of gender-based discrimination against women as depicted in Shah's novel *Before She Sleeps*. The researcher's center on a comprehensive analysis of the main character's experiences, by offering the portrayal of gender discrimination, critically evaluating its manifestations, impacts, and broader sociocultural implications within the context of the dystopian narrative. Asif, Qaisar, and Iftikhar (2021) examine intersections of spatial resistance within the framework of postmodern urban spaces as depicted in Shah's novel. They unfold within the realm of a hetero/dystopic lens, inviting readers to scrutinize the narrative's portrayal of resistance strategies. By focusing on spatial dynamics, they engage with the ways in which characters navigate, contest, and manipulate their urban environment within a dystopian setting.

Chambers and Lowden (2022) analyze the concept of "infection rebellion" within the context of Shah's novel. Situated within the realm of postcolonial discourse, they critically examines the subversive responses and actions of characters in the novel against the backdrop of a dystopian society ravaged by a hazardous infection. They delve into the intricacies of this phenomenon, unraveling its symbolic implications, and contextualizing it within the larger themes of resistance, agency, and defiance in a postcolonial context.

The existing literature has extensively examined the commodification of women within consumer culture, media representation, and societal norms, as evident in works by Goldman, Heath, Smith, Roberts, Hartsock, and others. However, despite this extensive research landscape, there appears to be a research gap in exploring the commodification of women from a feminist perspective specifically within the context of Shah's novel *Before She Sleeps*. This gap highlights the need for an in-depth feminist analysis that critically evaluates how the novel depicts the commodification of women and its broader implications within the narrative's unique dystopian setting.

3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The research methodology employed for the study involves a qualitative analysis of the novel with a view to investigating the theme of objectification and commodification of women by using feminism as a theoretical underpinning. Drawing on feminist literary theory, the study critically examines character interactions, settings, and narrative strategies to unearth instances of gender commodification. Secondary sources supplement the exploration, enriching the understanding of the novel's portrayal of women as commodities and objects.

Singh (1997) explains that the etymology of the term 'feminism' traces back to the Latin word 'femina,' denoting womanhood. The term signifies "having the qualities of females" (p. 13). Additionally, Singh (1997) establishes that feminism encompasses a stance supportive of women's rights. Notably, Ellen Du Bois' research into feminism and suffrage unveils that the term 'feminism' gained prevalent usage around 1910, specifically to characterize the political movement advocating for women's rights (p. 21). West (2019) remarked that she had never been able to pinpoint the exact definition of feminism. She wryly noted that she only recognized herself being labeled a feminist whenever she voiced opinions that set her apart from being "a doormat or a prostitute". As per Talbot's (2010) insights, feminism represents a political endeavor aimed at

instigating societal transformations and, in the long run, halting the perpetuation of systematic “inequalities between men and women”. The intersection of language and gender holds a pivotal role within feminism, existing alongside various “other social practices and institutions...reflecting, creating and sustaining gender divisions in society”. (p. 16). Tandon (2008) remarks that:

Feminism means different things to different people, ranging from a wish to change and challenge the whole existing order to things to the desire to bring about a more balanced and saner equality between the sexes and achieve a respectable individual liberty for women with their natural instincts characteristics and intact. (p. 25)

Mills (2010) comments that:

At the center of Second Wave feminism in the 1960s was the concept of the ‘problem without a name’ as Betty Freidan termed it—the experience of living as a woman in patriarchal society, where individual women assumed that the problems that they were experiencing were specific to themselves. (p. 46)

Women face the stigma of being commodity in the society. Feminism is a platform to combat this stigma. Brownmiller points out that “Awareness of discrimination between men and women results from the growth of the feminist movement” (p. 32). The question, “What is a woman?”the core of the writings of numerous feminist theorists. Beauvoir (1949) first answers this question in the introduction to her book *The Second Sex* as, “Totamulier in utero,’ that means, ‘woman is a womb’ (p. 1).” Beauvoir (1949) discusses that “when the girl enters the stage of puberty, her body becomes to her a source of horror and shame (p. 333). Here is the implication of women as being sex objects. Further, Beauvoir (1949) states,

No one is more arrogant towards women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility. Those who are not fear-ridden in the presence of their fellow men are much more disposed to recognize a fellow-creature in women: but even to these the myth of women, the other is precious for many reasons. (p. 25)

That is why commodification is an outcome in a society that suffers from gender inequality. It is a weapon for patriarchy to continue spatial politics as the fear it induces ensures women’s expulsion from the public field. Woolf (1966) remarks that “The word ‘feminist’ is the word indicated. That word, according to the dictionary, means ‘one who champions the rights of women’”. Walters (2005) argue that in 1920, feminists were just starting to formulate and discuss “women’s special problems: issues to do with childbirth and child-rearing, or the strain on women who had to combine housework and/or childcare with work outside the home” (p.2). Walters (2005) pin points that in the 1960s and 1970s, the term “feminism” regained traction in common language and took on an expanded meaning. While there persisted valid concerns were “civil and legal equality had not been fully achieved, the new movement tended to concentrate on problems specific to women in their reproductive and social roles” (p. 3). Kealey (1979) elucidates

Feminism, an ideology of women; is anybody of social philosophy about women. This definition of feminism gives us enough leeway to encompass various types of feminisms : right-wing, left-wing, centralist, left of Centre, right of Centre, reformist, separatist, liberal, socialist, Marxist, nonaligned. Islamic, indigenous, etc. (pp. 6-8)

Barry (1995) claims that Capitalist globalization in the present era has brought about an unparalleled process of “commodification” of human beings. Over the past three decades, there has been an extensive global expansion of the sex trade, reaching levels of “industrialization” on an unprecedented scale this industrialization, manifesting in both legal and illegal manifestations, is responsible for generating staggering profits that reach into the billions of dollars. Poulin (2003) argues that Capitalist g Globalization “has created a market of sexual exchanges in which millions of women and children have been converted into sexual commodities. This sexmarket has been generated through the massive deployment of prostitution” (p. 38). Poulin (2003) discusses that:

Kidnapping rape, and violence continue to act as mid-wives of this industry. They are fundamental not only for the development of markets, but also for the ‘manufacturing’ of these ‘goods’, as they contribute to making them “functional” for an industry that requires a constant supply of bodies.(p. 39)

These fundamental principles of framework enables to explore the multifaceted implications of women’s commodification in the novel, fostering enhanced comprehension and critical examination.

4. Textual Analysis

In the novel, characters like Sabine and Lin navigate a post-apocalyptic society where women have been commodified due to a gender-based crisis. The Panah, a secretive organization, offers companionship services to men. Sabine, a newcomer, grapples with the emotional toll of her role as a companion. Lin, an experienced member, guides Sabine through the complexities, revealing the exploitation, control, and rebellion woven into their lives. This exploration underscores the dehumanizing effects of commodification and the resilience of women seeking agency within such a system. Sabine reflects on her role as a companion within the Panah:

My Clients are always fascinated with it, stroking their fingers against my shimmering skin. Some even say it’s an aphrodisiac, but I think they like that its real gold dust: we signal to them that we are even more precious than gold.” (p. 29)

This attention reinforces the idea that women like her are commodities valued for their physical attributes. The comparison to gold emphasizes their perceived worth, further illustrating the theme of objectification and the association of women’s value with their external appearance. Sabine metaphorically characterizes Lin’s intimate knowledge of the women’s bodies:

Lin knows the ins and outs of our bodies, our secret birthmarks and tattoos, the days of our cycle, how often we wash our hair. We’re racehorses she sends off into the night and takes us back into her safekeeping in the morning. (p. 29)

Lin’s familiarity extends beyond physical aspects, encompassing their individual characteristics and routines. Sabine likens the women to racehorses, suggesting they are controlled and managed for specific purposes. The metaphor emphasizes the women’s lack of autonomy, being guided by Lin, and subsequently returned to her guardianship. This portrayal underscores the theme of commodification, where women’s agency is diminished as they are maneuvered like assets within a confined environment. Joseph’s, a character from novel, persistent attempts to intoxicate Sabine in order to induce sleep. Lin’s query about Sabine’s temptation reveals an undercurrent of manipulation. As Sabine mentions “Joseph always tries to get me drunk. He says it’ll make me sleep.” “Aren’t you ever tempted?” Lin asks me. I know this is a test, so I feign ignorance” (p. 24). This dialogue touches on the aspect of seeking ways to manage or control women’s experiences, even resorting to substances like alcohol to induce sleep. The exchange between the characters reflects the broader theme of external influence and manipulation that can be connected to the commodification of women’s well-being. Sabine contemplates her history and the outcomes of her father’s haste in arranging her marriage:

I often wonder about my father: I wonder if he misses me, if he wishes we could see each other again. Does he realize the cost of his greed to get me married quickly? Is he sorry? Am I sorry that I came here? You can go into your household as a reluctant bride—that’s only a minor infraction—but there’s no way to bow down to Green City when there’s rebellion in your heart. I had no choice, but five years on, I’m still not at peace with my decision. Maybe insomnia’s my punishment for my reluctance. (p.24)

This passage delves into the inner conflict and emotional struggles of the protagonist, shedding light on the complexities and consequences of societal expectations placed on women, which can be linked to the

commodification of their lives and choices. The insomnia she experiences is viewed as a potential punishment for her initial reluctance to conform to societal expectations. Sabine imitates her unique perspective regarding Rupa's behavior within their shared environment, acknowledging her awareness of Rupa's undisclosed struggles:

I have felt the sharp side of Rupa's tongue as much as the others have here, but then I know things about her that the others don't. So I feel sorry for her, and often defend her when Lin remarks drily on how Rupa's being 'difficult.' It's not easy when you've come to the Panah from the outside. Lin doesn't remember because she's always called it home. (p. 25)

This text touches on the dynamics between women within a confined environment and how they interact based on their shared experiences. It provides insight into the challenges and empathy that can arise among women who are commodified or subjected to certain rules and expectations. Sabine mourns the loss of her cousin Hanna, recognizing the insignificance of their bond in a society that prioritizes a woman's allegiance to her husbands above all else:

My poor cousin, my precious Hanna... Such things count for nothing in Green City; the only loyalty a woman's supposed to have is to her Husbands. The only reason we're allowed to grieve her death is because it's the loss of another precious woman from this corrupt society. The ones who die should consider themselves lucky to be done with it for good. (p. 27)

Sabine's words suggest that death is viewed as an escape from the oppressive expectations placed upon women, underscoring the grim reality of their existence within this system. In Green City, harming or mistreating women was a severe offense, given their esteemed value as essential contributors to repopulation. As the novelist mentions in text of novel:

It was a capital crime to hit or abuse a woman: women in Green City were precious resources, to be treasured and protected, looked after and provided for, in return for their bodies given to the cause of repopulation. The fertility drugs took their toll on the women's health; women started giving birth to triplets and quadruplets because of the high doses, and the high-risk pregnancies wore them out quickly. So they were discouraged from taking up too much activity outside the house, in fresh air. Work was considered beneath them and domestics did a lot of the household chores. (p. 35)

This passage underscores the commodification of women as vessels for reproduction and the societal norms that place them in a constrained role. It portrays women's bodies as resources to be utilized for a specific purpose, and it highlights how their value is linked to their reproductive capacity rather than their individuality or autonomy. Initially, Sabine wanted to protest being treated like property. The novelist weaves this protesting by Sabine as:

I was burning to tell my father I wouldn't be sold like a slave. But I kept my silence after I'd gotten over the initial shock. Something in me told me to go deep inside myself, to squeeze out every last bit of patience and cleverness that I had, and to rescue myself if my father was not going to help me... The girls are given classes in Household Technology, Health, and Reproductive Sciences. Most girls are thrilled to begin the process of their elevation in society and barely pay attention to the classes, distracted by the idea of their impending first marriages. Others, like me, pretend enthusiasm while secretly feeling nothing but a sense of impending doom. (p. 37)

The novelist highlights the internal struggle of women facing societal expectations and their own desires. The contrast between those who eagerly embrace their assigned roles and those who quietly resist, feeling trapped by the impending reality of their situations, reflects the commodification of women's lives and aspirations within a system that prioritizes traditional roles over individual agency. Sabine desperately mentions her mother and her wish to not become a commodity:

My name is Sabine. I'm sixteen, almost seventeen. My mother killed herself when I was only twelve. She didn't want to be married to anyone but my father. I don't want to be married to anyone. I don't want to be Wife to three or four or five men. I'm terrified. I know you don't know me, but I'm begging you to help me. I will do whatever you tell me to do, if you can help me escape. (pp. 38-39)

Shah (2020) highlights the desperation of a young woman who is seeking to escape the predetermined roles and fate assigned to her by society. The plea for help and the willingness to do whatever it takes to escape underline the sense of commodification and lack of agency that women like Sabine face within their society. The excerpt reflects how they are willing to sacrifice their own wishes and follow a new path to avoid being reduced to mere commodities. The women of the Panah become a rare source of emotional fulfillment for men, demonstrating the ways in which women's bodies and emotions have been commodified and exploited in their society. Sabine, the protagonist gives vent to her feelings poignantly:

A few months after my eighteenth birthday, Lin said I was finally ready for an assignation. Over the last year, she'd schooled me in all the security protocols for arrivals and departures... we're the only ones who can give it to them because there are so few of us left: free women, unattached to anyone else, our loyalties belonging to no one but the Panah... We let them believe that possessing one woman, just for a short while, is still possible in Green City, even though that kind of life went extinct the moment the bombs went off in the Final War. (pp. 43-44)

This excerpt explores how women of the Panah play a role in providing companionship and emotional solace to men in a society where such connections have become scarce due to the commodification of women. The passage highlights the contrast between men's physical and emotional needs, emphasizing how the limited availability of women who can offer genuine emotional connection creates a sense of longing for the past, even though that era has long passed.

In the novel, the character, Lin offers Sabine advice that encapsulates the essence of their roles within the commodified society. When Lin tells Sabine, "You're there for companionship, not sex. Don't trespass the limits and you'll be fine," (p. 45), she emphasizes the boundaries that must be maintained to navigate their engagements with Clients. Lin's satisfaction with her guidance is evident as she inspects her work, guiding Sabine to uphold her prescribed role while preserving a semblance of control over their interactions. Lin imparts a crucial insight to Sabine: Bear in mind, Sabine that regardless of their assertions "to control us", and despite their characterization of us as 'weak', there remains a fundamental dependence on us. It's not our physical forms or sexual attributes they seek, "but our love and care, our human warmth, our physical presence. These men are unwilling to jeopardize "what you offer them" (p. 45). Lin's words reveal a deeper layer of their commodified existence – the emotional labor and connection they provide that extend beyond the mere physical aspect. This insight showcases the paradox of their role: while being commodified, their value lies in the emotional and relational facets that they bring to the Clients.

Lin's decision to accompany Sabine to a Client's house, defying Panah protocol, reflects the sense of solidarity and defiance that exists among the women. Lin's words, "Remember, we only survive because of the rules we've made," (p. 45), emphasize how these rules are a form of self-preservation, allowing them a degree of control over their circumstances. Lin suggests that their presence disrupts the Clients' worldview and challenges the lies they've been told about the women's role. Sabine's initial apprehensions about her first Client highlight the fear and vulnerability that come with their situation. Despite Lin's assurances, the fear of exploitation and harm is a constant presence. Sabine's vigilance, as she sits with one foot on the floor, underscores the precariousness of their interactions and the emotional toll it takes. However, Sabine's encounter with her first Client presents a surprising twist. He behaves with courtesy and kindness, dispelling Sabine's fears. His demeanor contrasts with the expectations of commodified relationships, as he treats her with respect and even resembles a caring figure, like a "grandfather who'd had a wild youth but wanted to cap his life with a sedate, chaste courtship," (p. 46). This unexpected encounter further complicates the notion of the women as mere objects for the Clients' desires.

Text of the novel collectively showcase the intricate web of emotions, strategies, and nuances within the world of commodified companionship, revealing how the women's actions and the Clients' reactions create a

multi-layered narrative of power dynamics, resistance, and unexpected connections. The older woman's musings on her appearance, "shirking bones" and "withering flesh," (p. 49) underscore the physical toll that time takes on the body. She highlights her vanity as the last vestige of her youth, illustrating the societal pressure for women to maintain a certain image even in the face of aging. This speaks to the pervasive influence of appearances and the way women are valued for their youthful beauty, perpetuating the commodification of their bodies. The criticism of the newly released Bureau rules, which regulate the time spent between a Wife and her Husband, sheds light on the extent of control exerted over women's lives. The cynicism regarding measuring such intimate moments with a stopwatch highlights the absurdity and invasion of personal privacy within this system. The Bureau's attempt to regulate and quantify the most private aspects of relationships showcases the reduction of women's roles to reproductive functions, further exemplifying their commodification. The mention of "a new hope for Green City and South West Asia" (p. 49) in novel's text reflects the underlying notion that women's primary purpose is to bear children for the betterment of society. The narrator questions the feasibility of obeying these rules, emphasizing disconnect between the Bureau's regulations and the complexity of human emotions and relationships. This underscores the dehumanization and oversimplification of women's experiences within the society's framework.

Shah (2020) highlights the transformation of Green City into a place of strict obedience during the Gender Emergency. "... Women were now the endangered species" (p. 50). The dire circumstances, including war and disease, have led to the devaluation of women's lives. The phrase "endangered species" underscores the vulnerability and scarcity of women, a situation that the Perpetuation Bureau exploits to exert control. Obedience, emphasized as a hallmark, illustrates how women's compliance has become essential for the societal goals of repopulation and control. As novelist, Shah (2020) mentions that Women are placed on a "pedestal," a superficial elevation that masks the manipulation and coercion at play. The facade of reviving the nation contrasts with the reality of women being coerced into submission. The threat of accusation and elimination, coupled with the willingness of the Leaders to sacrifice a few women for compliance, underscores the harsh consequences women face if they resist the commodification imposed upon them. Sabine mentions that "The gamble worked; within five years, no woman voiced opposition when she was directed to marry once, twice, thrice, as many times as the Bureau told her to" (p. 50). The absence of opposition among women to the directive of multiple marriages reflects how thoroughly the system has ingrained obedience. The term "gamble" suggests that the strategy of control involved risk, yet it effectively suppressed resistance and dissent, solidifying the commodification of women's roles in the societal structure. Sabine says "Just when it seemed that women had no choices left, Fairuza and I decided to speak with our feet and escape. But the borders were sealed and there was nowhere to go. Except down" (p. 51). The sealed borders and the notion of "speaking with our feet" emphasize the confinement of women and the lack of viable options. The only available escape route is "down," hinting at a subterranean existence, both literal and metaphorical, that women find themselves trapped within due to the commodification imposed upon them.

Shah (2020) provides a poignant portrayal of the commodification of women within the oppressive society of Green City. Sabine's mother initially resisted being treated as a mere reproductive asset, going so far as to deceive the system by feigning infertility to preserve a semblance of normalcy for her family. Her choice to defy the Perpetuation Bureau's rules, reflected in her determination to "refuse to take another husband" (p. 156), was an act of asserting her autonomy against becoming a commodity. Tragically, her defiance was met with exposure and betrayal, leading to her apparent suicide, a portrayal that suggests she was "checkmated" by the authorities, who perceived her as a threat to the established order. This sequence of events starkly exemplifies how women's agency and lives are subjugated within a system that views them primarily as tools for reproduction, ultimately underscoring the dehumanizing consequences of such commodification.

5. Conclusions

In the tapestry of Shah's novel, the commodification of women resonates as a chilling theme, vividly portraying their existence within a society that has reduced them to roles dictated by societal imperatives. The Panah's enigmatic world serves as a microcosm, reflecting the broader dehumanization and control imposed on women. Sabine's journey, guided by Lin, exposes the details of their lives as "companions,"

revealing the emotional toll, manipulation, and exploitation inherent in their roles. The physical allure, captured by Sabine's shimmering skin compared to gold dust, underscores their objectification. Lin's intimate understanding of their bodies and routines extends the notion of control, as they are managed and safeguarded like assets. The interaction between Sabine and Joseph unveils the manipulation women endure, where substances are used to manage their experiences. Sabine's inner turmoil, her cousin's fate, and her own desperation underscore the stifling impact of societal expectations. Sabine's poignant plea to escape reflects the inherent commodification, where individual desires are subjugated. The Panah's provision of emotional solace to men speaks to the dual exploitation of women's emotions and bodies. Lin's guidance, emphasizing companionship over physicality, reveals a complex layer beneath their commodified roles. The rules and regulations imposed by the Perpetuation Bureau strip away agency, compelling compliance. The poignant saga of Sabine's mother's defiance and tragic end encapsulates the heart-wrenching outcome of resisting this commodification. Throughout, the novel weaves an intricate narrative of women's resilience and the dark implications of their commodified existence, echoing the unsettling echoes of a world where autonomy and humanity are sacrificed for societal survival.

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