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**Response to:**

**Before She Sleeps**

**(by Bina Shah)**

Bina Shah is the author of the Sci-Fi novel *Before She Sleeps*. Being a feminist in Pakistan, Bina introduces herself as,

“I am a threat to the system, to the status quo that dictates where women ‘should be’ in our society.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

After reading first few chapters of her book, I began to question her introduction as well as her idea of feminism itself. In the novel, the Panah is apparently a safehouse for women who were forced to follow the Green City’s rules, a place where they finally get freedom. But to me, Panah seems like just another place where women are dictated how they should live their lives and use their bodies.

Panah is not very different for these women compared to the outside world. In Green city, the bureau assigns women to multiple husbands, in Panah the women get assigned to multiple ‘clients’ as well, the only difference being that in Green city, women are forced to become wives and child production machines, while the Panah restricts women from having sex with these clients and giving birth. Both the Green City and the Panah, seem to have no consideration of ‘consent’ and ‘rights’ of these women.

In fact, Panah is like a service to men, providing them women so they can experience ‘affection’, while it should have been a support center for the heartbroken and abused women. Panah is, in no way, a *Panah* (shelter/shield) to these women.

In my opinion, women living in Panah are not living normal lives. There is Lin, who herself desires to have a life with Rueben, but the responsibility of other women is stopping her from doing so, there is Sabine, who says that she does not have any feelings or desires, but secretly breaks rules and accepts Joseph’s offer to drink alcohol. Then there is Rupa, who understands that Panah is taking away these women’s rights, believes that Lin is jealous of her youth and beauty, but ignores her own selfishness and jealousy towards Sabine, and provokes Joseph to sexually abuse her. these women are living mysterious lives, lying to each other and hiding things from each other. It is very hard to be able to relate to these women and understand them.

Rupa’s story, however, is a clear representation of the unfair real world, where women are sexually harassed even by their own close relatives, and if that is not enough of a torture, they are forced to stay silent. And when the situation goes too out of control, it is the victim who either gets abandoned or killed in the name of protecting honor.

One thing that I find really nonsensical yet very interesting is how the Green City appears to be very advanced in science specially genetics, they have developed genetic switch chips, can cure liver cancer with just one injection, yet they do not have any solution for the women-killer virus HPV. The novel shows how science is used by men to develop a patriarchal society in the Green City.

But there are a lot of illogical concepts and loopholes in the novel. The idea that Panah is able to survive because their ‘clients’ are powerful men of the outside world, in itself is very wrong. It is just an indirect of expressing that women are nothing without alliance of men, the dominant beings. Also, implying that women are not child production machines, but they are affection sources, is just another way of forcing gender roles. It looks like Bina Shah’s feminism is very selective feminism, which takes only some aspects of the issues into consideration, neglecting the rest, hence giving rise to many other issues.

1. <https://thefeministani.com/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)