

Coercive or Discursive: A Critical Study of Carceral Dystopian Society in Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps*

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ABSTRACT

The term *dystopia* describes a society where all conditions appear to be working against individuals. The concept of dystopia has been present since time immemorial. However, the previous century of world wars, natural disasters, and the worst human conditions like pandemics, famine, and mass atrocities make it more complex in today's world. This study investigates Bina Shah's novel *Before She Sleeps* of dystopian account through the theoretical framework of Michel Foucault's concepts of panopticism and carceral society while contesting the panoptical nature of power. It carefully observes the selected text by focusing on how surveillance mechanisms, power structures, and punitive procedures align with Foucault's ideas of coercive and discursive power structures in relation to dystopian fiction's ability to offer a sight of subversion and negotiation. However, a keen examination of novel's plot and characters reveals that the *Green City*—which represents power—substantiates its role as a coercive agency exercising its control by means of social institutions, but at the same time it goes against Foucault's idea which says, 'power is discursive', especially when we come across the structure of *Panah* (an illegal safe-haven for rebel women). It also highlights the ability of dystopian genre to offer a sight of subversion and negotiation by creating strong and rebellious characters, such as the women of *Panah*, even in the face of acute coercion and censorship. This exploration adds to a profound comprehension of dystopian writing and its importance in the contemporary discourse on oppressive society, authoritarian government and the misuse of advanced technology.

Keywords: Panopticism; Carceral Society; Rebellion; Plague; Dystopia

INTRODUCTION

The term dystopia was first used by John Stuart Mill to taunt the British government in a parliamentary discussion about Ireland in 1868. It was then taken up by the literary world by different writers and scholars. For example, Benjamin Kunkel (2008) called dystopian works part of or "subgenre of the gothic horror novel" (p. 96), while Adam Stock (2016) called dystopian

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writings “future history” (p. 3). Building on these views Galán (2015) called it “a subgenre of science fiction” because it also predicts a futuristic world shaped by current societal trends (p. 6). On the other hand, M. Keith Booker in his work *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature Fiction as Social Criticism (1994)* gives an example of utopia as a “Disneyworld theme park” and connects it with the concept of dystopia. He maintains that such fancy parks represent a hyper-real world which temper the real one, and the tendency of people succumbing to these parks is indeed very “frightening” (Booker, 1996, p. 1). Visitors, with no sense of individuality are handled like “cattle or inmates in the park by the authorities” (Ibid). For Booker (1996), Disneyland exemplifies the “American dream and a utopian state of a carceral society of consumer capitalism” (p. 3). He argues that utopia and dystopia are not entirely opposite concepts. As both these genres criticize and analyse the contemporary socio-political evils of a society. As George Claeys (2016) observes, “like the snake in the Garden of Eden, dystopian elements seem to lurk within Utopia” (p. 6). It also predicts the potentially dangerous events that will probably happen in the future. Booker sees that dystopian fiction frequently reflects real-world societies. He maintains that “the treatment of imaginary societies in the best dystopian fiction is always highly relevant more or less to specific real-world societies and issues” (Booker, 1994, p. 19).

Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps* becomes relevant in this regard because it represents a real-world society and its issues through the dreaming vehicle of imagination. It represents a dystopian society which is controlled through the limited access to data and the utilization of its promulgation. Generally, in such a society, freedom of speech and independent thinking are suppressed. The individuals in these societies are under constant observation. They live in fear and their reality is dehumanized. However, these societies are presented as perfect under the disguise of utopian characterization. Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps* depicts the same situation, where the authorities of the *Green City* present the society as perfectly disciplined. Through different manoeuvres like *The Official Green City Handbook for Female Citizens*, the government wants to control and manipulate its women. In other words, Shah’s novel exploits its characters to forefront themes of power dynamics, gender inequality, and struggle against societal restrictions in a dystopian context. In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1975)*, Michael Foucault, discusses different ideas which are directly related to dystopian literature. Especially his concepts of panopticism and carceral society, which are part of his larger criticism related to how modern societies are working and who controls them.

Panopticism is a constant observation of individuals in a society, where they are monitored and watched by omnipresent government officials. This surveillance is enforced through official government institutions like prisons, “schools, hospitals, and churches” (Foucault, 1977, p. 199). We suggest that in the novel, the Perpetuation Bureau, the Agency, and the hospital where Sabine (the protagonist of the novel) receives medical treatment, represent Foucault’s concept of panopticism. The concept of carceral society imposes rules and regulations on everyone, not through any institutions, but through socio-political discourse and education. *The Official Green City Handbook for Female Citizens*, a book of rules for the female citizens of *Green City*, exemplifies one of the strongest tools of a carceral society through which it takes control over its women. Michel Foucault’s theoretical underpinnings about a ‘carceral’ and ‘disciplinary societies’, therefore, becomes pivotal to understand Bina Shah’s selected dystopian fiction. Even though there is scholarship available on Shah’s novel in the dystopian context (Afzal, 2021; Alvira, 2021; Mortaza, 2023; Mehraj, 2023; Safdar, 2023; Naseem, et. al., 2023; Chambers and Lowden, 2022), but it focuses only on the theme of feminism with a traditional feminist point of view. There also appear other studies (Asif, et. al., 2021; Hamid, 2024, and Kullu, 2025) which discuss the

power aspect of the selected novel but to a very limited extent, mostly relating it with spatial resistance, postcolonial feminism, and physical surveillance. Overall, the entire range of scholarship, which has been published in the context of Shah's selected novel, escapes from studying the textualization of governmental tyranny, the misuse of advanced technology, and the use of discursive power by the authoritarian regimes. It also fails to highlight the distinctive play of coercive and discursive power tactics as well as the way they impact a society, especially within the context of Shah's dystopian world. This study aims at addressing this problem by carefully examining the dystopian society of *Green City*, its characters as well as the mishandling of advanced technology, against the backdrop of Foucault's concept of panopticism. In the process of doing so, this study proposes to highlight the system of power structure and draconian laws in a dystopian setting, while also examining the rebellion of these characters against the status quo.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers consider Bina Shah's novel *Before She Sleeps* as one of the best dystopian novels in the recent past, especially in the South Asian context (Mortaza, 2023; Mehraj, 2023; Safdar, 2023; Naseem, et. al., 2023). Using a New Historicist Approach, Afzal, et. al. (2021) analyse Bina Shah's novel *Before She Sleeps* to examine feminist viewpoints. They focus on the *Aurat* March (the feminist movement in Pakistan), and analyse the way novel's dystopian setting represents the feminist struggle in Pakistan. They draw comparisons between the plight of women in Pakistan to that of *Green City*, where both face problems such as early and forced marriages, no abortion rights, and constant domestic abuse. Alvira, et. al. (2021), on the other hand, also examine the condition of women in Bina Shah's novel, but their research focuses solely on the protagonist of the novel Sabine. They aim to shed light on the challenges that women face, especially in the form of severe inequalities and social distinctions in a society. They reiterate that the society of *Green City* as a whole is oppressive to the extent that even the highly educated people, like Sabine's parents, also restrict women's freedom. Furthermore, this discussion about women's rights and the injustices they face in South Asia was put forward by Mortaza (2023), in his research *Commodification of Women in Bina Shah's Before She Sleeps: A Feminist Critique*. According to him, South Asian society is a patriarchal society, where all the values are restricted and the society is deeply discriminatory towards women. Women are considered commodities and merely reproductive machines. All the restrictions, subjugation, and suppression are imposed on them by the male-dominated society, where they are considered as "being others and being subalterns" (Mortaza, 2023, p. 37). The researcher with the help of feminism theory discusses this commodification of women in Bina Shah's narrative where women are not considered as human beings but instead as objects, that can only be used for the benefit of society.

In addition to this, Prem Chand Mehraj (2023) critically analyses the novel from a post-colonial feminist perspective. He maintains that the novel carries a feministic voice which is prominent in South Asia and especially in Pakistan. Even though the era of colonialism is ended in South Asia, women of South Asia are still living under colonialism. In the 21st century, women are still considered as others; they are marginalized, and face subaltern treatment. The way Bina Shah represents her female characters is "deplorable". She exactly "represents the plight of orients as she sees it" (Mehraj, 2023, p. 07). Similarly, Naseem, et. al. (2023) highlight the issue of polyandry in the novel. They discuss the concept of polyandry through female objectification and identity. They render that the problems related to women are increasing over time. They are

marginalized in the society. They are not able to live freely. They are deprived of education, work, and many basic rights. On top of it, they face the issue of polyandry in the society of *Green City*. They suggest that Polyandry is the root cause of all evil. Women are not allowed to work outside. They are only preserved for reproduction purposes. A woman has no right to love. She has to share her feelings with multiple husbands. Whether she likes to do it or not, the rules of the society are imposed on her. According to the researchers, it is of great irony that “it is a capital crime to hit or abuse a woman” (Naseem, Naqvi & Safdar, 2023, p. 08). It means men are not allowed to hurt women physically, however, they use them for “sexual satisfaction and torment them mentally” (Naseem, Naqvi & Safdar, 2023, p. 08).

Chambers and Lowden (2022) in their research *Infection Rebellion in Bina Shah’s Before She Sleeps* provide commentary on Bina Shah’s novel from the perspective of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like Afzal, et. al. (2021), they also draw parallels to the situation of women in the society of *Green City* and that of South Asia, especially of Muslim Women. Most of the dystopian works are related to post-pandemics, incurable illnesses, nuclear wars, and climatic disasters. The *Green City* is also a disease-ridden society where the virus killed most of the female population. With all the advancements in technology, medicine and progress in science there are still no equal rights for women in the *Green City*. Chambers and Lowden (2022) maintain that the same is the situation of women in the present-day Pakistan where despite the progress in many fields the situation of women is no better. Covid-19 disrupted the whole world order. It affected the female population to a worse degree. Quarantine restrictions were imposed, and people were only limited to their homes. Women faced abuse from their men in their homes. All the frustration is taken out on them: just like “wars give an excuse for turning the city into a police state” (Chambers & Lowden, 2022, p. 191). Chambers and Lowden suggest that the same is the case with the pandemic in both the cases of Pakistani society and that of Bina Shah’s society of *Green City*.

Hassan Muayad Hamid (2024) attempts to examine surveillance in Shah’s *Before She Sleeps* by using Foucault’s concept of power. There is an attempt to analyse surveillance mechanism, but it is done to a very limited degree. On top of it, on many occasions Foucault’s idea of panoptical gaze is misread and is confused with an act of actual physical surveillance. For example, the paper did not provide any commentary on the way different social institutions help the Agency of the *Green City* to maintain its control. The paper could not encapsulate the idea that these institutions were coercive, even without being the eyes of the Agency in the literal sense. The paper also could not shed any light on the role of discourse to form ‘ideological-self-regulated selves’ with the help of discourse(s). On the other hand, Abhilasha Kullu (2025) presents a feminist critique on the politics of reproduction in Shah’s selected novel. It focuses on systematic subjugation and commodification of women by using postcolonial and feminist theoretical frameworks. Similarly, Asif, et. al. (2021) highlights ‘spatial resistance’ in a dystopian setting invoking Lefebvre, Hicks, and Foucault. Despite the claim made in the abstract about the inclusion of Foucault, the paper failed to engage him throughout the course of this paper. However, the paper puts more emphasis on the concept of Urban space and the way it is exploited to practice authority in a postmodern context.

Bhanbhro, et. al. (2025) publish a similar article as of Kullu (2025) in which they too go from resilience to resistance to present a dystopian feminist critique of Shah’s novel. Their research utilizes Elisabetta Di Minico’s feminist theory to reiterate the same theme of women suppression and subjugation as already highlighted in most of the previous studies. There are other such articles whose prime aim is to discuss feminism in our selected literary context. For example, Zahra, et. al. (2024) explore gendered space in Shah’s novel. The research exploits Henry Lefebvre’s *The*

Production of Space (1991) to contextualize the formation of gendered space in the context of *Green City*. Ashraf and Rabbani (2025) compare *Shah's Before She Sleeps* with Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* from a feminist stylistic perspective. The researchers utilize Sara Mills' feminist stylistic approach and strive to examine the impact of linguistic culture as well as linguistic choices in the unique creation of dystopian narratives produced by women. Bashir and Tanveer (2024) by using Foucault's concept of 'discipline', examine government's control over female body. Finally, at this stage, we came across a change of phrase from 'resilience to resistance' (Bhanbhro, et. al., 2025) to 'Reluctance to Rebellion'. However, the paper by Saba and Ali (2024) is found to be slightly different in its scope as it highlights the use of graphological elements in *Shah's Before She Sleeps*. By utilizing Leech's theory of foregrounding, they analyse graphological deviations in the novel. They maintain that the capitalization of different words in the novel, such as *Client, Agency, Flashes*, etc., indicate commodification of female body.

In summation, it can be seen clearly from the critical review of the aforementioned scholarship that the research insights on *Shah's Before She Sleeps* is feminism heavy with its focus on the traditional themes of feminism and gender studies. There appear other studies which attempted to analyse the novel with Foucault's critical lens but in one way or the other they too landed on the theme of feminism or they completely misread Foucault's idea of panopticon which raises another grave issue about the existing interpretations of *Shah's* selected novel. Researchers have escaped from looking at the novel with a broader perspective of dystopia and the power dynamics. It is therefore affirmed that no research has been done on the selected text from the perspective of dystopia and the power dynamics, especially against the backdrop of Michel Foucault's critical theories of panopticism and carceral society. The present study will not only fulfil this research gap, but will also offer new areas and themes to be explored by future researchers and scholars.

FOUCAULT'S PANOPTICISM AND CARCERAL SOCIETY

The study is qualitative in nature and adopts textual analysis as its primary method to highlight the coercive and discursive power patterns in Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps*. It examines the novel against the backdrop of Foucault's idea of coercive and discursive power. It will present a close reading of the novel with special emphasis on its characters and plot. Foucault's theory of panoptic gaze has been appropriated as our theoretical framework. This section provides the theoretical framework of this study, and by utilizing it the analysis has been done in the next section.

Foucault's theory of panopticism is built on utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. The word panopticon is named after the Greek mythological giant Argus Panoptes, who had 100 eyes and had the ability to see everything. The word 'pan' means all and 'optic' means seeing, so the term refers to 'seeing all'. In this way, Bentham gives the idea of a circular prison tower that will watch and keenly observe the inmates/prisoners all the time. In this design, these prisoners or animates "are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible" (Foucault, 1977, p. 200). The prisoners will not be aware of how and when they are under surveillance. They will also be separated from each other and will not know the situation of other fellow prisoners. This will compel them to act mannerly, even if no one is watching them. Hence, the disciplinary power and spatial division will control and regulate their habits into good citizens. Foucault builds on this concept and extends it from the prison to include other institutions. According to C. Fred Alford (1977), whatever

Foucault says about the prison, clinic, and asylum, “subsequently migrating to the rest of society” (p. 127). All these institutions will minutely observe and regulate every move of the citizens. They will be constantly under surveillance; the government will have all the data and information about them. The citizens will not have total freedom but rather their every act will be according to and for the benefit of the government. According to Jacques-Alain Miller, the panopticon is just the concept of “materialized classification” (1975, p. 1-27). As real power does not require one to look at something, because once one needs to look at something to control it, then it means that there is no absolute power.

Furthermore, the concept of carceral society as presented by Michel Foucault goes beyond government institutions, interfering personal relationships and citizen’s privacy. Foucault argues that modern societies symbolize constant surveillance, laws of detention, and discipline, which are similar to the situation of a prison. It can use different mediums to regulate and control peoples’ behaviours. He gives the example of Victorian sexuality and how linguistic discourses limit individual freedoms. In Victorian society, there was no discussion on sex, which in turn created no discourse, and hence, there were no customs related to it. However, in modern societies, people are forced to follow the notion of what is acceptable and what is not, related to sexuality. Although Foucault does not criticise carceral society measures taken by the governments rather he discusses how to make them suitable for a perfect society. However, wherever there is excessive power to control others, there is always the risk of misusing it and changing the utopian concept of perfect society into a dystopian, imperfect society. This same situation can be observed in the novel *Before She Sleeps*, where a discourse is created and distributed among women, which they must follow and make part of their lives. There is an official book for women to follow named *The Official Green City Handbook for Female Citizens*. Through education and behavioural conduct, the authorities of *Green City* want to control the female population for their benefit.

According to Foucault, the perfect development of a carceral society was that of the official opening of the institution of *Mettray*. The *Mettray*, a private reform institution in a small French village, which has no walls, meaning it is controlled behaviourally and not by direct force. It is a rehabilitation centre for young adults from age 6 to 21. Foucault describes *Mettray* as “the disciplinary form at its most extreme”, represents different sections like military, judicial, familial, and educational (Foucault, 1977, p. 293). These institutions regulate and control human behaviour, turning them into obedient subjects. This new method of controlling society brings discipline and regulation. However, it gives rise to new forms in the art of punishment and control. Foucault expands this concept beyond old-fashioned prisons and creates a carceral continuum that includes various institutions of society. These methods of control, regulation and normalization can be found in many dystopian societies. In such societies there is extreme control of masses by the authorities. Hence, these elements will be discussed with reference to Bina Shah’s novel *Before She Sleeps* in the next section. In the novel, institutions like the Agency, Perpetuation Bureau, schools, and even hospitals are used to control mass behaviour. Ultimately, the society of Foucault’s *Mettray* and its mechanism mirror those in Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps*, Where government institutions are used to exert power over citizens’ behaviour.

COERCIVE AND DISCURSIVE POWER STRUCTURES IN BINA SHAH'S *BEFORE SHE SLEEPS*

In *Before She Sleeps* the characters attempt to internalize and regulate their behaviour. They follow the discipline announced by the government and try to manage their behaviour according to it. However, in places where there is no direct observation, the characters continue to discipline themselves, assuming that they are being monitored. We suggest that this carefulness on their part is also a result of coercive reiterative measures taken by the Agency, making this gaze coercive in nature. As Sabine mentioned, women are not allowed to “befriend one another, they didn’t want us to talk, to question our roles in life, or to dream of another life for ourselves” (Shah, 2018, p. 25). These women are unable to go against such instructions because of this coercive panoptic gaze that Foucault describes in his concept of a society of surveillance and discipline. Foucault explains in a panoptic system “everyone [is] locked up in his cage... two ways of exercising power over men, of controlling their relations, of separating their dangerous mixtures” (1977, p. 196-98). Hence, women of the *Green City* have no way to go. They follow these rules and regulations without transgressing them. This panoptic gaze is everywhere in places like “hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons, whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals... the panoptic schema may be used” (Foucault, 1977, p. 205). Even at Shifana Hospital, Julien, the doctor who operated on Sabine, was under constant surveillance: “Julien’s stomach clenched at the idea that [Sabine’s] protector was watching their every move” (Shah, 2018, p. 110). Every aspect of the Shifana hospital was controlled and under surveillance. Even if Julien was not reported by anyone, he would still be caught by the authorities, as the hospital is under constant surveillance: “Everything from the oxygen and drugs, the IVs, the monitors, the syringes, even the doors opening and closing” are observed in the hospital (Shah, 2018, p. 113). This is exactly the kind of institution Foucault refers to in his panoptic principle which he built on Jeremy Bentham’s idea of a circular prison tower that would watch and keenly observe the inmates/prisoners all the time. To be more specific, these prisoners or inmates “are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible” (Foucault, 1977, p. 200). However, the prisoners will not be aware of how and when they are under surveillance. They will also be separated from each other and will not know the situation of other prisoners. This will compel them to act mannerly, even if no one is watching them. Thus, the disciplinary power and spatial division will regulate their behaviour, shaping them into good citizens. The above-mentioned case of Dr. Julien is a perfect example in this regard. The coercive measures taken by the Agency over the period of years had made him paranoid. He would think if he were being watched even before performing his duty as a doctor.

The society of *Green City* was deliberately structured in a way that supports and facilitates the concept of panopticism. Every aspect of life was controlled and observed by the omnipresent and omniscient government of the *Green City*. As Foucault mentioned “the Panopticon is a marvellous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power” (1977, p. 202). Those places are beyond human control that cannot be directly surveilled, but still, the authoritarian government wants to control them. As in the novel, Ilona Serfati while talking about the government’s new rules, wondered how the authorities would be “regulating the minutes a Wife spends with her Husband: How will they measure that” (Shah, 2018, p. 38). This shows the extreme kind of control the authorities exert. Even private matter like intimacy was also regulated by the oppressive government. The authorities equipped homes with monitoring devices through which the citizens were always under the watchful eye of the state. It

compelled people to behave as if they were always being observed. Their higher authorities were in the position to watch over and observe others. A good example of hierarchical surveillance can be seen in the hospital, where Bouthain's office was at the top of the building, "he perched up there like a bird, keeping an eye on everything that happened down below" (Shah, 2018 p. 183). This example reflects Bentham's concept of that central tower presented in his model of panopticon. Citizens of the *Green City* were trapped in this panoptic system, under strict government restrictions: "No citizen is permitted to write or maintain a personal journal or diary, this rule applies to all citizens, but for Green City's girls and women", it is of prime importance (Shah, 2018 p. 01). The situation of the women in *Green City* was exactly what Bentham described in his panoptic project. "He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (Bentham, 1994, p. 60-64). In the novel, these women were taken care of only for reproductive purposes, there was no way that they could express their feelings. Rupa's diary in the Panah was symbolic of the women's freedom in this regard, where strict prohibitions were placed on them. She wrote in her diary and expressed her feelings. She even criticized Lin, the head of the Panah, and penned down her strong defiance about the rules of the *Green City* as well as of the Panah itself.

Any movement within the *Green City* was examined and monitored by the authorities. The cameras and Artificial Intelligence (AI) robots observed and controlled the whole population. Sabine, the protagonist of the novel, took extreme care so that she could avoid the artificial intelligence and cameras of the *Green City*. Society was breathing heavily under the gaze of the omnipresent force that women like Sabine were shoved in the darkness of prison for many years. At the Shifana Hospital, she realized that women like her were insects in the *Green City*. While these "skyscrapers are built for the rich and powerful, and we crawl close to the earth" (Shah, 2018, p. 147). This, once again, is referring to Bentham's model the panoptic gaze from the above tower. Sabine, nevertheless, questioned the system: "I didn't know people could live this high and perform all their functions without the ground underneath to steady them" (Shah, 2018, p. 147). The city was so adamant on "hierarchies: the rich over the poor, the strong over the weak" (2018, p. 129). However, above all, are the Leaders, whose "watchful hawks [are] circling over" the whole society (Shah, 2018 p. 129-30). Michel Foucault calls it the "disciplinary pyramid", where everything works in a hierarchical manner (1977, p. 221). The concept of Michel Foucault's Panopticism, hence, becomes very relevant to the life at *Green City*. From schools, prisons, hospitals, roads, homes, everywhere there was an omnipresent force that monitored the whole city. The authorities was constantly assuring the people that "Green City residents were safer because they were always watched" (Shah, 2018, p. 143).

Furthermore, Foucault's concept of carceral society insists about the larger picture. The ideas and principles of panopticism are applied to whole society. According to him, the basic principles and disciplines used in prisons are applied to other social institutions in society, such as hospitals, churches, schools, and even homes, "the great carceral machinery was bound up with the very functioning of the prison" (Foucault, 1977, p. 247-48). It is not only limited to government institutions but to the personal relationships of citizens generally. According to Foucault, modern societies symbolize constant surveillance, laws of detention, and discipline, which are similar to the situation in a prison. It can use different mediums to regulate and control people's behaviours. These rules and regulations become part of that society, and the masses are following them unintentionally. It is spread out in society through discourse. The whole society is controlled like a prison, not physically but behaviourally. The same is the case with the *Green City*, where a book for women named, "*The Official Green City Handbook for Female Citizens*", is distributed among

them (Shah, 2018 p. 99). In the book, the women are encouraged to “exchange selfishness for selflessness, and sacrifice self-involvement for the care of others” (Shah, 2018 p. 09). After that, the government used discourse to make it almost impossible for women to reject such schemes. It falsely praised women as “foot soldiers” of the *Green City*, they were told that they must work “hard to fulfil” the roles of “the mothers of the new nation” (Shah, 2018, p. 09). Through discourse, the government of the *Green City* wanted to normalize inequalities enforced on women. Although Foucault does not criticise these measures taken by the governments, rather he examines how to make them suitable to maintain order in a society. However, wherever there is excessive power to control others, there is always a risk of misusing it and a threat of the transformation of utopian concept of a perfect society into a dystopian one.

The *Green City* represents a practical example of Foucault’s carceral society. It shows how some of the rules and regulations become ingrained in the daily lives of the citizens of a city. For example, in the *Green City*, pregnancy was an unceasing process for women, and it became so much a part of their lives that people were unable to imagine women without pregnancy being attached to their existence. When Sabine ran away from the *Green City* and found that the women of the Panah were not pregnant, she was taken up by surprise. She was “unused to the sight of women’s bodies, not swollen and distorted by pregnancy” (Shah, 2018, p. 29). In her mind, when she realized that women of the Panah were not pregnant, “it seemed wrong, at first, as if something was missing” (Shah, 2018, p. 29). It took her many weeks to realize that women are not always pregnant and that it is fine and normal. This is exactly what Foucault mentioned in his work regarding carceral society that it “combines in a single figure discourses and architectures, coercive regulations and scientific propositions”, which shape society into what he calls “real social invincible utopias” (1977, p. 271). This is how the concept of panopticism is applied to the whole society, transforming it into a carceral system. Just like in prison, the behaviour, ethics, emotions, and daily life are controlled by the authorities; the same is the case in a carceral society. Foucault argues that “the carceral archipelago transported this technique [of surveillance] to the entire social body”, turning society itself into a prison (1977, p. 298).

In addition to this, according to Foucault (1977), the rules of prison can be applied to the entire society through multiple institutions. The same happened in the *Green City* when the Leaders realized that the situation was getting out of hand. They built institutions like “the Agency and then the Perpetuation Bureau in quick succession” (Shah, 2018 p. 40). They declared a “Gender Emergency” in the city and within a few days the once “blessed dominion had turned into a police state” (Shah, 2018 p. 40). In such a situation, no one dared to question the new directives. Everyone obeyed the new rules, as already half of the population was lost to the climate, war, and disease, and “women were now the endangered species” (Shah, 2018 p. 40). Hence, the government gave them the task “to bring an entire nation back to life” (Shah, 2018 p. 40). For five years, no woman objected to such brutal and inhuman rules. One woman was being given in marriage to four or five husbands or even more as the Bureau wished. The story substantiates Michel Foucault’s theoretical underpinnings, but it also highlights some its shortcomings. In the novel, Ilona Serfati, the woman who wrote *The Official Green City Handbook for Female Citizens*, escaped along with her friend Fairuza. Ilona and Fairuza rebelled against these strict rules and established an underground place called *Panah*.

A DISEASED SOCIETY

Foucault also talks about a plague that occurred in seventeenth-century Europe. While discussing his views regarding the concept of panopticism in his book, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), he starts with historical examples of plague and leprosy. According to him, the plague became a new tool through which society was controlled during that time. In *Before She Sleeps* it also became a tool to control and dominate, “the Virus became the perfect pretext through which to smuggle a woman here and there out of the [Green] City” (Shah, 2018, p. 192). Foucault mentions the steps authorities took to respond to the plague. “First, a strict spatial partitioning: the closing of the town in its outlying districts” was imposed by the authorities (Foucault, 1977, p. 195). In his book, he discusses how people were separated from each other by government officials and were under strict surveillance. Interactions and movements were monitored by the authorities to prevent the spread of the virus. Initially, this was done to control the spreading of the plague, but with time, it became an important tool to control masses. The same situation is applied to the *Green City*. First, the plague kept women under strict control, but later it was merely a tool for the government to control women.

The *Green City* was engulfed by a dangerous virus; it was mostly carried by men, but ironically proved to be deadly for the female population, “the Virus was a disease that only women could catch” (Shah, 2018, p. 192). It was this virus that killed most of the female population of the *Green City* and hence the government imposed a gender emergency to restore the society. Strict rules were introduced for women to follow. As mentioned before, there was an official book named *The Official Green City Handbook for Female Citizens*, to control and educate women just for society’s benefit. Just like Foucault mentions that during a plague “each street is placed under the authority”. Anyone who wants to “leave the street”, that person “will be condemned to death” by authorities (Foucault, 1977, p. 195). Similarly, a Gender Emergency was imposed in the *Green City*, where women were encouraged to have maximum children and not only that they had to take four to five husbands also at one time. They were made commodities which must only be used for society’s benefit.

THE CONFRONTATION AND REBELLION OF CHARACTERS AGAINST THE OPPRESSIVE NATURE OF THE DYSTOPIAN SOCIETY

The characters in Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps* rebelled against the government of the *Green City*. They adopted multiple ways to confront this oppressive dystopian society. The totalitarian government of the *Green City* oppressed women. They were forced to take multiple husbands and produce maximum children. The society was confronted with severe gender inequality. Women were considered as reproductive machines for the *Green City*. They were bound by the book *The Official Green City Handbook for Female Citizens*, an ultimate dictation about their lives in the *Green City*. The book was written by Ilona Serfati, but ironically, she was the first one to rebel against the government of the *Green City*. It was Ilona Serfati who along with her friend Fairuza “decided to speak with [their] feet and escape” (Shah, 2018, p. 40). She held that “we women know how to do this without having to be taught”. She ultimately rejected the teachings of the *Green City* on how to mother a child (Shah, 2018, p. 24).

On the other hand, the government threatened all those who refuse to follow orders, “rebellious against our generosity is transgressing against society” (Shah, 2018, p. 99). The authorities made sure whoever rebelled against the rules would be dealt with an iron fist. They declared that “be mindful you do not even come near the limits of rebellion, in thought or action”

(Shah, 2018, p. 99). Despite all the threats from the government, some women rebelled and found a place named *Panah*. The *Panah* was a safe place for women, where they were living their lives according to their wishes. In the novel, *Panah* becomes the strongest symbol of rebellion against the state of the *Green City*. The women of the *Panah* rejected both the physical and psychological dominance of the government and stood up for their freedom. Although the women living in *Panah* had to pay the cost of their freedom in the form of providing un-sexed comfort services to some of the top-brass officials and that they were constantly living in fear and anxiety, their mere rejection of the *Green City*'s draconian laws stands out as the strongest form of rebellion against the city' norms. The protagonist of the novel Sabine also challenged the government's reproduction policy. She rebelled against such inhuman laws and escaped to the *Panah*. Her rejection of the state's policy is also a proof of rebellion and confrontation. Instead of accepting a life of subjugation and oppression, she choose a life of personal freedom and rebellion. According to Sabine, the government "didn't want us to talk, to question our roles in life, or dream of another life for ourselves" (Shah, 2018, p. 25). The girls of the *Green City* despite all the restrictions and regulations, started a little rebellion of their own: "we grew a little community that existed nowhere but in our heads" (Shah, 2018, p. 26).

As in any oppressive and authoritative society, there will always be rebellion and confrontation. In the *Green City*, the Perpetuation Bureau declared that anyone who was involved in drugs or medicine that "used to prevent or end pregnancy will be dealt with severely" (Shah, 2018, p. 146). In the presence of all these restrictions and warnings, a drug was still being used by the most powerful members of the society and it was given to Lin by Reuben Faro, one of the leaders of the *Green City*. She would then give it to Sabine, which subsequently became the reason for Sabine's miscarriage. The incident showed that some of the leaders of the *Green City* were also rebelling against the system. They used to invite the women of *Panah* to their homes for their satisfaction, knowing that these women had rebelled against the rules of the *Green City*. Lin explained to Sabine, "calling us to them is their rebellion, going to them is ours" (Shah, 2018, p. 36). This shows that both women and men of the *Green City* were against such oppression and were opposing it by their own means. Doctor Julien, nurse Manalac, and surgery assistants Ram and George, all rebelled against the system when they operated on Sabine. During that time, they were only thinking about Sabine's life and not about the rules. Later, Dr. Bouthain helped Sabine and Julien escape from the *Green City*, which was also an act of treason and rebellion.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion has shown the ability of dystopian genre to provide a holistic picture of the under-oppression Pakistani society. As maintained earlier, through dystopian works writers have the freedom and imaginative space to express their concerns. Bina Shah through her narrative sheds light on the evils of society, such as authoritarian government, the suppression of women's rights, climate change, nuclear wars, and pandemics. We suggest that it is one of the first major dystopian novels that is based in South [West] Asia which makes it unique, as this genre is predominantly popular in the Western world. Most of the South Asian societies are primarily marked by the oppression of women and patriarchy. This novel represents women of Pakistan, where they face all sorts of restrictions and oppression in society. Women in Pakistani society exist under a panoptic gaze, as described by Foucault, a gaze they are not able to hide. Their behaviour is controlled and monitored by the patriarchy. This mirrors the fictional society of Bina Shah,

where a book, *The Official Green City Handbook for Female Citizens*, is distributed to enforce control. Similarly, in South Asian societies, women are restricted to certain roles only, which are imposed by cultural and societal norms.

The examination of the selected novel also reveals that the role of the power is both coercive and discursive. In the novel, the agency through various social institutions substantiates Foucault's idea of panoptic gaze. It does not control them physically, but through reiterative assertions and enforcements it somehow becomes an omnipresent gaze which indirectly becomes so coercive that everybody in the *Green City* seems to be over conscious and over vigilant to the extent of becoming paranoid. On the other hand, the exploitation of discourse is also very visible in the story. The *Green City* attempts to control its population discursively as well. It introduces its people with a handbook just to romanticize polyandry and reproduction. This situation does not only reveal the intricate nature of power in Shah's selected novel but also allows us to differentiate between the coercive and discursive power structures. The role of power, as textualized in the novel, is found to be both coercive and discursive.

However, whenever absolute power controls people's freedom and sovereignty there is always the possibility of rebellion. This is reflected in the characters of Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps*, who rebels against the oppressive dystopian society. Same situation can be observed in Pakistani society, where women reject the patriarchal roles through initiatives like the *Aurat* (woman) March and other initiatives. Despite threats from right-wing groups, there is clear progress in the right direction. Moreover, Bina Shah portrays a world in her narrative where religion is a thing of the past because in Pakistani society wherever there is a constructive debate about women's rights, religion is often misquoted to suppress them. However, the fact that this novel is written by a female author is a demonstration of the current wave of the Pakistani feminist movement which is going to make a huge difference. Future researchers can draw inspiration from this research, because it sheds light on one of the most important contemporary topics, which will only become more significant over time.

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