



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Rhizomatic Muslim Futures in Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores Muslim futurist notions of identity and resistance in Shah's dystopian novel *Before She Sleeps* through the application of Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophical perspectives: 'arborescence', 'nomadology', 'de/reterritorialization' and 'desire-machines' for examining the potentiality of a Pakistani text in imagining rhizomatic future/s. Pakistani Speculative Fiction is an emerging genre which envisages alternative Muslim futures in the backdrop of the South Asian cultural and artistic imperatives. The novel is bereft of an escapist stance in favor of a critical and strategic one to envision collective possibilities for progress and coexistence. The study is qualitative and interpretive as it discovers meanings, patterns and cultural contexts through close reading of the novel to prove the rhizomatic identitarian ethos of the Muslim subject in a futuristic scenario. The study is significant as it focalizes intersectional outlooks for the creation of a cohesive and inclusive future by countering Western essentialist approaches to future and textuality.

**KEYWORDS** Rhizome, Muslim Future, Speculative Fiction, Postmodernism

## Introduction

Future is a tricky and hazardous terrain as far as it remains under the hegemonic control of the dominant culture and its variants. Muslim Futurism, highly influenced by the Afrofuturist cultural movement, struggles to reconstitute and reconfigure the Muslim identity by visualizing a cohesive and inclusive yet independent future in the shape of a futurist aesthetics which ultimately curates, enables and amplifies Muslim agencies in various forms, notions and mediums of art, literature and science. The effort is to counter the domesticated and institutionalized past, present and future which only creates either cloned narratives or replicas of western epistemological and ontological interests in the shape of non-western literary and artistic renderings. The conception of 'participatory democracy', in Naisbitt's terms as explained in his *Megatrends* (1990), authenticates motives of liberal capitalism which is a direct subversion of local and indigenous consciousness focused on the future as a single culture and civilization. Jameson in his *Archaeologies of the Future* also supports the idea of diverse and multiple futures by advocating the possibility and plausibility of better human futures when he contends that "...multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past or something yet to come" (2005, p.240). Foreclosing of future by linear and one-directional trajectories is what Sardar in *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures*, terms as a gridlock which has taken us all to a technological plateau that needs to be fractured by uncovering the rubric of globalization and westernization. He comments on the area of Future Studies by highlighting its fissures and gaps for the non-western domains:

...the future is being colonized in the way futures studies itself is being shaped into a discipline, with fixed boundaries, a set of basic principles and assumptions and

all the other trappings of a crystallized discipline: established authorities, designated areas of research and thought, learned and professional organizations, bibliographic tools and study guides (p. 251).

Interactions of notions such as time, being and knowing with dynamics of power, history and politics postulate tools and imperatives which carry the potential to make future an arena of action instead of letting it be the locus of the dominant forces. Alternative future/s can only be imagined and actualized if local past and traditions are taken as lacuna where ideals and aspirations reside. Sardar calls it a "chasm" which furthers "discourse of social involvement" to take "creativity" as a dynamic concept for the conception, growth and fertilization of a future consciousness that bolsters the confidence of other communities in shaping their own independent futures (p.255). For this purpose, the non-western societies, esp Muslim, need to recover their histories, dememorialize western advents, create interconnectedness within their societies, and consequently promote "incommensurability" for each culture has its autonomy and authenticity which should not be compared and contrasted (p. 257). So, for the non-western forces, the future is like a "kaleidoscope of visions" which fuses alternate imaginaries and imperatives by incorporating their local history and tradition for the cultivation of their own resonance and survival (p. 258).

Muslim Futurism as a cultural movement borrows its key tenants, memory, identity, resistance, community and liberty from an already established movement: Afrofuturism. In a broader view, it imagines a future which is not essentialist, absolutist, totalizing and vertical rather it is open-ended, fluid, holistic and horizontal in which the Muslim identity and subject can thrive on its own potential, past and present to construct a future which is multidimensional and, in a way, implements *ijtihad* for its evolution and progression. Further, this cultural movement strives to foreground Muslim artistic and creative agencies to set a counter hegemonic yet independent narrative which not only does revitalize Muslim consciousness but also invites critiques on its epistemological, ontological and paraxial aesthetics to look for better ways of representations. It exhibits fictive, artistic, and cultural unison of Muslims living in the US and elsewhere to reframe their identities in order to broadcast their separate yet inclusive consciousness with its own differences and specificities (Rattani, 2021). Muslim Futurism envisions futures as homogenous, contributory, diverse and multifarious where they create connections with the past, merge it with the present and the future and create a communal portal for Muslims ("Alhamdu muslim futurism," n.d.). It is a kind of transformative resistance which silenced, invisible, marginalized communities render in order to reestablish their authentic and autonomous identities. Sardar states:

Unless: we start to think more concretely and imaginatively about the future; we transform the future into a site of both real and symbolic struggle; and hence we change the future by opening it to non-western possibilities and move from one future to a plethora of futures. Changing the future means both questioning and resisting the forces, and the values and canonical myths associated with them, that have colonized the future (p.257).

## **Literature Review**

The Pakistani spectrum of Muslim futures is not as conservative as is of its Arabian counterparts. Tehseen Baweja acknowledges the conservative and orthodox environment does not let the imaginative faculties of authors reach its full bloom and potential but such fantastic flight must be taken in order to create a progressive literary environment. In the same connection, The SALAM AWARD for IMAGINATIVE FICTION is named after

Pakistani physicist Abdul Salam, Nobel Laureate. It is an effort to facilitate the process of contributions to the genre of Sci Fi and more broadly to Pakistani Speculative Fiction. Pervez Hoodbhoy and Salman Hameed serve as advisors for the same. The purpose of introducing this award is to promote local authorial enterprises, counter extremist doctrines and raise imaginative awareness regarding alternative futures in the readers. Further, diverse imaginative perspectives gain currency in the society which usually does not think out of the box and carries a conformist mindset. Other Muslim voices from Syria, Egypt and elsewhere are also very particular about their roles in the reestablishment of the genre for the critical faculties of the non-western readers (Determan, 2021, p. 10).

Bina Shah follows the league of reimagining and reconstructing identarian crisis associated with the women-folk and force of Pakistan by integrating the real and the fantastic in her feminist dystopic novel: *Before She Sleeps* (2018). Through her fictive and journalistic ventures, she generates a new kind of feminism which she terms as 'feministani' as it is deeply rooted in the Pakistani culture and has its own peculiarities. She believes that for her foreign readers the version of Pakistani feminism and woman identity may seem less-empowering and domineering but in a culture where issues like, language, dress-code, education, outreach, intimacy, marriage, divorce and parenting have divergent, different and varying meanings for all the female gender, such literary efforts definitely make a lot of difference in raising awareness and managing behavioral changes. Her oeuvre is an example of her continuous struggle and commitment to her feminist cause and in this novel, she delineates the character of Sabine in the late memory of Ms. Sabine Mahmud who was brutally killed for her awareness campaigns and other endeavors for women rights and welfare. Shah confesses of bursting out all the anger and pangs which she had gone through after the demise of Ms. Mahmud in her novel. Further, she also takes inspiration from the story of Malala Yousaf Zai whose diary under the authoritarian Taliban regime was foreclosed from public reception until it got broadcast by BBC as Gul Makkai.

The work under study has been analyzed critically through various theoretical angles and perspectives. A review of the already existing literature and research is necessary to substantiate the research gaps and the significance of the present work. Shah imagines the future in a seemingly myopic way but it is quite opaque as it takes dystopian and utopian visions critically. Authoritarian regimens from the local socio-political context of Pakistan and literary arrays of George Orwell and Miller both inspire Shah in the construction of a dystopian framework for her novel. Further, other symbolic and artistic baggage is taken from the South Asian cultural references, Sufi tradition of music and poetry and Islamic philosophy. Her speculative tendencies are in tandem with the recent times and futuristic approaches. Pointers like currency stick, genetic switch chips, virtual tunnels on the Deep Web, memory slips and other when mixed with issues of love, intimacy, identity, security, gender balance and future in the local scenarios create dystopias of their own kind. The Virus which emanates from the Green City is quite symbolic, Chambers in her recent article articulates the same: "the Virus is a figurative rendering of misogyny, which is the real societal sickness gripping nations and regions today" (Chambers & Lowden, 2022, p. 189). Shah foregrounds the dualistic nature of Islamic symbols of sanctity and piety like veil or hijab in the text to focalize the immediacy of thinking broadly and diversely about it. She terms it as 'gold silicon powder' to rescue surveillance prevalent in the Green City for women.

Feminist dystopian writings highlight the fractures in the status and identity of women in the futures imagined after some cataclysmic event. By keeping gender in spotlight, the issues of patriarchy, power dynamic and agency are also addressed in order to visualize futures with a critical lens of probabilities so that literalization may help

improve the positionality of women in the times to come. Shah imagines a dystopic future with the non-western comparative worldview to gauge the similarity and difference between the now and the future. Feminist Stylistics grapple with the linguistic representational variants that actualize the imaginaries into fictive realities in the context of feminism. Androcentrism, naming, endearments and diminutives are stylistically crucial in identity formation for women in any society. So is the case in the novel as Sabine is given names according to her relational identity in different scenarios such as 'Mrs. Faro' and 'Julia' to keep the patriarchal power dynamics performative and functional. Use of generic pronouns such as 'they', 'we', & 'you', creates imbalance in the polemics of gender and power and it keeps the trajectory of female positionality in different roles quite limited, fixed and subjugated: "The 'they'....serves as a generic pronoun, ideologically embodying the faceless patriarchal forces ruling over the Green City in the dystopian society." (Ashraf & Rabbani, 2025, p. 262).

Commodification of women through fictionality is another way of subjugation and control. Bodies, characteristics and working routines become a site of exploration, exploitation and misrepresentation for maintaining hegemonic control on a power-on-mode. Shah's projection of women centralizes the role of fertility and procreation which facilitates their survival as well as their revolt in the novel. Sabine criticizes the decisions of her father of marrying her off early and mourns the demise of her cousin, Hanna, whose loyalty and piety towards her husbands is unquestionable, to foreground the importance of bodies over human existence. Lin's discussion with Sabine on the distinguishing factors between sex and intimacy also highlights the objectification and commodification of their existence: "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" (Mortaza, 2023, p. 45).

## Material and Methods

Postmodernist thought embraces diversity, multiplicity and plurality for the creation, politicization and literalization of mini-narratives which touch upon markers of art, literature, race and gender for the fluidity they carry as constituents of representations from the so-called centers and margins. Lyotard in his *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, (1983/1988) terms such conflictual spaces as the differend as they create more room for expression and representation from the center and the margin simultaneously. Hutcheon in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) pronounces it as the 'dedoxification' of the 'doxa' in the liberal humanistic manner which supports anti-linear and multi-vocal narrativizations (p. 28). For Belsey the liberating and dialectical power of postmodernism lies in its ability of being a process which is under continuous construction phase. This sense of continuity prevalent in the postmodern thought and textuality counters verticality in support of horizontality for meaning making and dissemination. Barthes enunciates this condition in textuality as random play of word forms. Further, Butler seconds the approach by locating the incredibility of signs as referents due to the pervasive mediatization and marketization of all sorts of signification for consumer purposes ("Editorial introduction: postmodernism's sf/sf's postmodernism," 1991, p. 305-308). Foucault highlights the threads of power politics and associates them with his conceptions of bio-power and panopticon. He argues: "Power can be at work through the material environment in the form of technical mediation. From this perspective the subject in a technological world is a product not only of the metaphysical thinking but also of material mediation" (Koziol, 2023, p. 26).

Speculative Fiction with its major bent on Sci Fi shares a strong bond with Postmodernism because of the breakage of traditional boundaries of the genre. N. Katherine Halyes goes to the extent of calling the genre as a carrier of the culture of chaos due to its fluidity and capacity to encompass various polarities as wholes and crevices simultaneously. Keeping in view the oxymoronic state of the genre along with its fractured hierarchies with special focus on the mythical past, scientific advancements and cultural innovations, philosophers like Jean Baudrillard, Donna Haraway and Fredric Jameson term SF as a dream book of the age. Baudrillard, by incorporating the example of the Disneyworld, goes to the extent of diminishing the difference between the real and the fanciful because of the hyper-real simulations of postmodernism. Haraway's conceptions of "speculative fabulations" counter "situated knowledges" for establishing newer, diverse and plural worldviews on gender, race and culture through forming "other wordlings" (Truman, 2018).

Rhizome occupies the central position as a mode, medium and model of non-hierarchical and non-linear understanding of the exiting schools of knowledge and discursive practices in the philosophical ponderings of Deleuze and Guattari. Rhizomatic thinking and practice counters totalizing, fixed and absolutist worldviews which dominate the Western philosophical and literary traditions in representing marginal spaces and communities. The rhizomatic system carries multiplicity, polyvocality, horizontality and diversity to materialize its existence and substance which is a direct negation of the tree-like verticality and fixedness of any branch of knowledge. A rhizome has multiple entry and exit points which are fluid and grey and manifold. Deleuze and Guattari believe that the rhizome represents a more accurate model for understanding the complexity and interconnectedness of the world. It rejects the idea of fixed identities, binary oppositions, and linear progressions in favor of a networked and decentralized approach. They state in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relevant to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs and specialized languages (p.7).

A rhizome is different from a 'tracing' which has reversal to its entry points. A rhizome is more like a 'map' which is open, interconnected, reversible, detachable and diverse with its own 'plane of consistency' which is susceptible to new formation, structuration and literalization (p.12). Deleuze and Guattari believe that the rhizome represents a more accurate model for understanding the complexity and interconnectedness of the world. It rejects the idea of fixed identities, binary oppositions, and linear progressions in favor of a networked and decentralized approach. The rhizome also has implications for political and social activism. They suggest that the rhizomatic model can inspire forms of resistance and alternative social organizations. It encourages the creation of networks, collaborations, and heterogeneous assemblages that challenge established power structures and open up possibilities for change. Overall, the concept of the rhizome introduced by Deleuze and Guattari offers a new way of thinking about knowledge, systems, and social relations. It promotes an understanding of the world as a complex, interconnected web, constantly evolving and defying fixed categories and hierarchies.

The principles of the rhizome are a concept that challenges traditional hierarchical modes of thinking and offers an alternative way of understanding and organizing

knowledge, society, and culture. The rhizome is a metaphor used to describe a non-linear, interconnected, and multiplicitous system of thought. Non-hierarchical structures, multiplicity, connective and nomadic spaces and thinking, heterogeneity, assemblages, intensity and lines of flight are some key principles of the rhizome as detailed in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Structuration of non-linear and decentralized allows for the growth and spreading of knowledge mediums and corridors in multiple angles. As such epistemic forms are centerless so they create new centers and divergences for the presentation of manifold options. Entry and exit points are also very much pivotal for the rhizomes as they promote diversity in connections and interactions along with the negation of demarcating postulates of knowledge. It also paves waves of meanings, possibilities and connections.

Nomadic tendencies are also part and parcel of the rhizome. Nomads symbolize and actualize movement and counter permeance and fixtures. Same they perform in the rhizome with shifting and evolving temporal and spatial measures and mobility instead of being fixed in any point or space. The rhizomatic thinking also resembles the nomadic notions as it turns down the binary poles of identification and goes for developing diverse, complex, interconnecting and ambivalent contact zones by creating new connections. Heterogeneity is also an important feature of the rhizome as its defining tenant is difference. Diversification in perspectives, ideas, identities, and ideologies is a central point in the rhizome due to its annulment of homogenization and singulation of narratives and schools of thought. With such variation and diversity in the rhizome the temporary combinations and configurations are made which are termed as assemblages which advocate for the coexistence of multiple elements and possibilities. The co-existing factors fertilize newer connections and networks which open up ways and mediums of interpretation and comprehension for the back-and-forth mobility of knowledge.

Escape from the already established norms, traditions, representations and agencies is possible in the rhizomatic thinking and literalization by infusing affect and intensity in the formative and transformative phases of contact and connection building. Affect signals the emotive and spirited bondages which add intensity to the overall progression of the rhizome in a cyclic and circular motion. Further, the lines of light, which Guattari and Deleuze consider as pathways mandatory for harboring escapes from the normative and traditional thinking, generate new connections, ideas and possibilities for the actualization of multiplicity, mutualism and polyvocality in various modes of representation and narrative-building. Overall, the principles of the rhizome offer an alternative way of understanding the world, emphasizing non-hierarchical, multiplicitous, and interconnected modes of thought and organization. It challenges fixed boundaries and invites exploration, creativity, and open-endedness.

## Results and Discussion

Conceptual verities in Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy have a paradoxical and oxymoronic substance. They create opaque binarities which further undergo multiplications of thought, existence, being and becoming for de/reterritorializing existing patterns of the real/actual and the virtual. Deleuze and Guattari's pronouncement of the real and the virtual combines them in a vertigo of unison and differentiation on the basis of the rhizomatic thought. Alternative futures imaginary is a blend of these two components termed as the real-the virtual: "This distinction between the virtual and the actual corresponds to the most fundamental split time, that is to say, the differentiation of its passage into two great jets: the passing of the present, and the preservation of the past" (Albert, n.d.). Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps* is also a container of such conceptual varieties that get divested after the process of decoding and recoding of its taxonomy, textuality and discursivity.

Bina Shah is a female visionary voice of the postmodern times, based in Pakistan, who deals with the global trajectories of imagination, fiction, science and technology and women rights in her works. Her oeuvre along with her journalistic background foregrounds the ethos Pakistani Muslim women across the globe. Her speculative fiction utilizes foresight and futurism to imagine the plight of women across times to locate issues of identity, power-dynamics, and resistance. Her *Before She Sleeps* confirms her visionary faculties which helped her narrativize and predict the outbreak of the Virus before time in 2018. Her work is a kaleidoscopic spectacle of identitarian flips and splits, structural dualisms, and politicization of power in the Green City, a homogenous whole of the Muslim community in the future. Keeping in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the rhizomatics, this article circumscribes their vast philosophization to some core concepts, rhizome, deterritorialization, the nomad & desire-machines, which are detailed in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980/1987), translated by Brian Massumi.

Shah visualizes a future which challenges patriarchal and orthodox practices that suppress and marginalize role of women in the society. She is very careful and critical in her selection and incorporation of the cultural motives, the veil, the handbook, polygamy and patriarchy, and their strategic mutations in her novel. The grappling of South Asian and Islamic variables in the backdrop of womanhood is executed in a postmodern manner that it negates linearity and fixity. The text is rhizomatic as it contains multiplicities of perspectives, carries generic innovative clustering and occupies a significant space on the emerging canvass of the Pakistani Speculative Fiction. Deleuze and Guattari in their *A Thousand Plateaus* think on the same lines and believe that there are multiplicities to every identity, book, and discipline: "A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations" (p. 3). The alternative world which Shah imagines is also rhizomatic in essence and substance as it is not associative with the Muslim ideological paradigms essentially rather it connects with them in an affiliative manner by touching upon notions of Islam, spirituality and womanhood implicitly.

In *Before She Sleeps* Muslim identity is seen wavering between the arborescent structures of the Green City and the rhizomatic edifices of the Panah. Shah particularizes signifiers of veil, polygamy, human body and government from the Muslim doctrinal theses and asignifies them in paradoxical multiplications. Their politicization is visible to the local readers who are familiar with the significance of patriarchy, veil, modesty, and resistance. A homogenous set of audience cannot trace the originary linkages. Naming is crucial to identity politics; the characters are named after their Muslim origins from the South Asian/Middle Eastern region to suggest spiritual homogeneity and decline of faith in a dystopic world as the outcome of the Final War. Ilona Sefrati, Sabine, Rupa, Diyah, Dr. Asfour, Reuben, Fairuza Dastani and many other names dislocate exactness of locale but they confirm their Arab, Asian and Persian and most importantly Muslim origins. Shah's playfulness with the sections and narrative voices of the novel is also important as there are multiple voices giving multiple points of view to create a sense of subjective objectivity. There are three sections, Reluctance, Rebellion and Revolt which are nonhierarchic and ant-traditional. This sense of multiplicity is contrary or oppositional to arborescent imperatives of thought and being in Deleuze and Guattari's theorization.

Deleuze and Guattari state: "Arborescent systems are hierarchical systems with centers of significance and subjectification, central automata like organized memories. In the corresponding models, an element only receives information from a higher unit, and only receives a subjective affection along preestablished paths" (p.16). The multilayered arborescent mode of thought sets up its hierarchal and patriarchal modes of domination

through the scriptures like book, Official Green City Handbook, which is more of a manifesto for living an obedient life for the womenfolk. The signification of respectability and honor for women is assigned with the roles of mothers as nation-builders to address the gravity of issue of the decimation of the female gender and ultimately the next generations emphatically. For this purpose, the development of the Perpetuation Bureau creates yet another controlled arborsect structure which accords tags of eligibility and admissibility to fit into the system. The Bureau decides the matrimonial and procreational programs according to which the suitability is set for men and women differently keeping in view the overt decimating of the female gender in the Green City. Each woman is supposed to have multiple husbands in order to decipher the gender-imbalance created after the cataclysmic tragedy of the Final War.

Fear politics are exercised through panoptical surveillance over the women of Green City. Reuben confirms this pattern of subjugation and control: "Green City survived on hierarchies: the rich over the poor, the strong over the weak. And high above them all, the Leaders, watchful hawks circling over a society in crisis" (p. 123). Fear of loss overpowers us all and we give in so much in order to procure apparent stability. Deleuze and Guattari address this fear in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

We can guess what fear is. We are always afraid of losing. Our security, the great molar organization that sustains us, the arborescences we cling to, the binary machines that give us a well-defined status, the resonances we enter into, the system of overcoding that dominates us – we desire all that (p.229).

This domination is not limited to their participation in various activities rather their bodies are kept under control through multiple marriages and childbirths. Sabine's mother exemplifies the victimhood aptly by being non-compliant to the system. Because of the state of emergency women are expected to marry as many times as possible and become mothers. In the given scenario, Sabine's mother bribes the medicine department to prove her infertility through medical tests and other procedures which the department does and ultimately gets caught and all the stakeholders including the nameless mother face the music. She is manipulated in a way that her death is declared to be a suicide. Sabine mourns her death: "they checkmated her, and left us to live with it forever" (p.115). Another such maneuvered killing is of Nurya Salem who declines to marry for the sixth time. After her sudden death the Perpetuation Bureau plans everything from taking her children under custody to managing a facility for their trauma therapy. And after the designated time for mourning passes her husbands get a new wife assigned. Ilona Sefrati demystifies the craftiness of the Agency behind such incidents: "... accusation of reluctance or revolt. A swift trial and elimination. The Leaders did not mind sacrificing a few women in order to make the rest of us compliant" (p. 35). On the other hand, a respectable funeral is given only to those women who remain chaste and ensure loyalty towards their multiple husbands. Hanna, cousin of Ilona Sefrati and mother of Lin is typified as one. Her house and windows are turned black to observe mourning.

Sexuality of both men and women is restricted and channelized according to the Perpetuation Bureau's plans for creating gender balance. However, even in the future, the female body is a site of exploitation, polarization and commodification through different modes and mediums of power politics in the Green City. For men the Perpetuation Bureau institutionalizes prostitution in a posthuman manner by facilitating the unmarried single men with 'prosbots' in the 'Red Town' to manage their adolescence complexities (p. 111). Dr Julein Asfour is seen to be emotionally drained before the sudden arrival of Sabine as a patient because the only option for companionship or even friendship given to an unmarried emerging doctor is of robots or probots working in the Shifana hospital. His

disdain for the female robots is because of the lack of “spontaneity or vitality” and forming any relationship with them will ultimately give feeling of “cheating on an exam or stealing money (p. 111). On the other hand, Shah problematizes the potentiality of the female body in a far future where scrapers fill the skies, technologically advanced gadgets visualize the future image of a baby by just uploading a single snap to the system and robots function as peers in the Green City. Large tablet displays and cameras are installed in the markets, hospitals and workplaces as tools of surveillance used for record-keeping and tracking. Overtly the system is designed to facilitate the citizens and users for their safety and security and invisibly the system is structured to streamline control through constant monitoring in order to avoid any uprising. In the future scenario, the tools to gaze and gauge the female body have not changed rather they have improvised in a subversive manner. The text is replete with arborescent worldviews and the emergence of the Panah serves as rhizomatic intervention.

The Panah serves as a rhizomatic opposite to the Green City structuration for the female agency in all its forms and shapes. Etymological traces of the word and expression of Panah go back to the classical version of Persian in which it means refuge or shelter. In Urdu it is also used in the same sense. Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* symbolize rhizomes with underground burrows and rats: “Rats are rhizomes. Burrows are too, in all of their functions of shelter, supply, movement, evasion, and breakout. The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms..” (p. 6). The Panah is also an underground systemization of an alternative future possibility of being for womanhood to survive and thrive on its own by the subversion of the notions of marriage, sexuality, culture and overall existence. Ilona Sefrati and Fairuza Dastani develop this alternate mode of living for all the women who are oppressed, suppressed and misrepresented through different State driven apparatuses. Sefrati claims: “Firuza and I are the queens but we toil for a purpose which totally odds with the way nature works” (p. 60). Deleuze and Guattari find rhizomatic affinities and verities in nature and its multiple manifestations and they believe that human thought and mind do not follow arborescent ways as they are not “rooted” or “ramified” like trees and plants: “We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They’ve made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics...” (p. 15). Sefrati absconds Lin, her niece and gives her a new consciousness to live her life as a woman on her own terms. In her she envisions her successor who will not be subject to the infliction of atrocities at the hands of the Agency led by the Green City. She pledges to herself:

She will grow up in the Panah, and she will take over when I die. I wish it did not have to be this way, but I need a successor and I am not getting any younger. And this way, young Lin will be spared from having to become a Wife. I owe her mother that much (Shah, 2018, p. 19).

The Panah deconstructs the centrality of the Green City as a hallmark of certitude and perfection. As Reuben Faro claims it to be a perfect system while arguing with Lin over the existence of the Panah. This act of deconstruction is termed as deterritorialization in Deleuze-Guattarian understanding.

Panah as an affiliate imperative which connects older tradition with the newer ones, concocts variable scenarios and possibilities and circulates discursivity cyclically in *Before She Sleeps*. Lin emerges as the successor and leader of the Panah after the death of Ilona Sefrati to continue her legacy because she had helped her escape the clutches of her fathers after the unfortunate and untimely demise of her mother when Lin was in her infancy. She makes sure that the rules and regulations and the overall code of conduct designed by her aunt is followed in letter and spirit in the Panah.

Sexuality and intimacy are synonymous in the arborescent worldview of the Green City while in the Panah both stand independently with different rewards are retributions. Sexuality is a state-operated tool for reproduction which lack the elements of selfless intimacy. While in the Panah women are expected to be intimate with men without being sexually involved and getting pregnant. Pregnancy is a bane in the Panah while it is considered a blessing in the Green City. After being rescued and operated on for her ectopic pregnancy, Sabine indulges in a self-dialogue to imagine the severity of being pregnant in the context of the Panah rules: "How hard it is to say the taboo words; in the Panah, we never talk about it, as if mention of the word is enough to bring about conception" (p. 148). Rhizomatic human pairings on the basis of intimacy are seen in the text as Lin-Reuben, Joseph-Sabine, Rupa-Joseph and Sabine-Dr. Julien Asfour. Their social strata pronounce them invalid for each other on the basis of pro/anti Agency choices but through rhizomatic webbing of relationing such interactions become possible. Deleuze and Guattari state: "A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (p. 7).

Panah encompasses assemblages which decodify normative ways of being. Panah is at the same time a place, a sanctuary, an underground system and a home and shelter to many. Assemblages occupy multiplicities, each component becomes meaningful by connection, interaction and becomings. A network of a variety of components such as bodies, objects and desires in the same sequence and otherwise. Rhizomatic motherhood and sisterhood emerges in the Panah when women take other women as family members after leaving their loved ones back in the Green City in order to maintain their individuality. Such interactions make space for the 'lines of flight' that transform the existing identities and conditions into new multiple forms and shapes. Deleuze and Guattari define: "An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections" (p.8).

In the same way, Lin serves as an activist, a successor, a leader, a daughter, a niece, a beloved and a citizen simultaneously creating multiplicities on the plane of flight. The rhizomatic motherhood can be seen vividly through various incidents in the text. Ilona Sefrati also personifies multiplicities for different roles and hues she carries within her. She stresses: "I will mother her as I mothered her own mother; we women know how to do this without having to be taught" (p. 19). Another rhizomatic family formation can be observed in the Shifana hospital. Sabine is admitted to the hospital after being doped and raped in Joseph's abode. Dr. Julien and his nurses go out of the way to operate the stranger, the patient and the woman, Sabine, going through profuse blood loss due to ectopic pregnancy. With love, attention and proper medication, Sabine starts recovering and it all becomes possible due to Dr. Asfour and his team. Sabine feels a strange comfort in his company as he is unlike other men who use her and her body for their gratification. She starts considering him and his staff her family though in the arborescent and hierarchic sense of structures such a family formation is unacceptable: "Yet Sabine needed to know there was a family of a sort, a temporary one, that she could trust in, here in the hospital.... Her surrogate kin" (p. 162).

Crisscrossing of the arborescent and rhizomatic modes of thought and experience is a frequent happening which keeps the paradox floating and flowing. Deleuze and Guattari clarify:

There are knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots. Moreover, there are despotic formations of immanence and channelization specific to rhizomes, just as there are anarchic deformations in the transcendent system of trees, aerial roots, and subterranean stems (p. 19).

In *Before She Sleeps* a longing for the arborescent and rhizomatic state of existence is traced through many incidents. Rhizomatic parallelism is in the fabric of the textuality and discursivity of the novel. It bifurcates both the genders in the categories of the bearers and the providers which keep on flipping and tossing according to the situations. Rupa while living in the Panah desires to go through the matrimonial rituals and become a wife in the normal sense of the Green City. She dislikes the Panah but stays there because she wants to survive. Rupa says with a lot of agitation: "What if I wanted to be a Wife, to bear a Husband a child? My choice was robbed from me. Once I set foot inside the Panah, I became a criminal. I could never go back." (p. 50). On another occasion she questions the sincerity of other inmates of the Panah for Lin, claiming that the rules are set by her and have nothing to do with their choices. Such transgressions are denoted in the decisions of Reuben Faro as well. He is one of the higher-ups of the Agency who maintains check and balance in the Green City but at the same time he is the facilitator for the Panah. He has a family and a job to look after but he falls for an illicit intimate relationship with Lin who is the leader of the Panah. In his personality, flickering of arborescent and rhizomatic modes is quite opaque yet clear. Lin also goes through the same ideological dwindling when she accepts support from Reuben on multiple occasions but most importantly when Sabine goes missing and without help from him Lin cannot trace her back: "She'd thought they were escaping the system, but when it came down to it, she'd still had to ask Reuben for help. Truth be told, she was dependent on a man if she'd been married to one" (p. 170).

Contrary to it, nomadic desire shapes another type of community in the text which showcases desire-driven actants who go beyond their grasps to actualize their immanence over transcendence. Deleuze and Guattari argue: "Nomadic waves or flows of deterritorialization go from the central layer to the periphery, then from the new center to the new periphery, falling back to the old center and launching forth to the new" (p. 59). In *Before She Sleeps* the Panah women build a separate nomadic community by deterritorializing already existing social space for them which demands polygamous interactions to rise reproductive manifestations. They develop an identity which exuberates dependence of men for recognition and place in the society. They provide services which the Green City women are barren of: intimacy. Sexuality in all its magnanimity and triviality is valueless if there is no intimacy. Women of the Green City remain under the pressure of fulfilling their matrimonial and state-oriented duties that offering intimacy seems a far-fetched idea. The half dozen women of Panah provide that intimacy which the higherups, bureaucrats and politicians of the Green City find missing in their lives.

Additionally, and more predominantly, desire stimulates the nomadic thought in Ilona Sefrati, Lin, Dr. Julien Asfour and Dr. Bouthian as individuals. Sefrati forms a nomadic community in the underground to establish a to and fro movement of defiance and reliance which keeps the process of desire active in the novel. She claims:

We need to record our own history and tell our stories, if only to each other. We need to know that we can survive, even if we are outcasts and criminals. And I am the keeper of the Panah's history, the guardian of its secrets, as Lin will be after me (p. 35-36)

After Sefrati, Lin confronts the normative stylization of the Green City for women and succeeds the legacy of her aunt in the Panah as a leader and caretaker. In her resides a leader, a mother and a caretaker who marginalizes the center and reconnects with it new mini central margins which further activate more margins. She argues with Reuben when he finds out the outrageous act of the formation of a separate fully functional community for the womenfolk: "Don't you already know my crimes? Reluctance, rebellion and revolt.

I have committed them all" (p. 133). Same goes for Dr. Asfour and Dr. Rami Bouthian who defy their prescriptive roles and become nomads to rescue Sabine from the claws of Reuben Faro. Dr. Asfour feels a strange urge triggered by the nomadic desire to subdue his role as a doctor and take Sabine in his arms for the rest of his life. His affirmation to let Bouthian induce him with "Ebriatas" is desire-driven and it confirms his nomadic tilt (p.200). On the other hand, Dr. Bouthian goes out of the way, keeping aside his professional stature and academic rigor, to help Dr. Asfour and Sabine in managing their absconding from the Shifana hospital.

## Conclusion

Shah's *Before She Sleeps* imagines a rhizomatic Muslim future which is anti-hierarchic and non-linear as it serves as a counterpart to the hierarchal and linear fictional worldviews set and represented by the West. It subverts the Muslim discursivity into multiplicities by avoiding fixedness and monolithism in the textualization of the work which goes beyond the contemporary boundaries of time and space and still exhibits cultural rootedness. There is no direct invocation of theological and scriptural imperatives but the indirect linkage is demonstrated through cultural references and mythic orientations, carrying symbolic affinities and significance. The text in itself is a rhizomatic entity which avoids fixity in every sense of the word by giving voice to all characters for ensuring multiplicity of points of view. The underground construction of an independent nomadic clan of women, the Panah, is an act of deterritorialization and reterritorialization which also indicates the presence of a rhizome in its literal sense. Overall, the novel envisions the Muslim future as a rhizomatic, nomadic and immanent plane of multiplicities which is centerless but develops centrality of various margins without rooting them explicitly in the Islamic theological traditions.

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