



RESEARCH PAPER

Stylistic Analysis of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps*: A Comparative Study of Feminist Dystopian Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Feminist Dystopian Fiction has assumed great significance in recent years. In this context, this study probes the impact of culture(s) and linguistic choices in the creation of dystopian narratives written by women. The research explores how the portrayal of feminist issues by contemporary female writers, Margaret Atwood, in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and Bina Shah, in *Before She Sleeps* (2018), is influenced by the cultural settings and stylistic choices. For this purpose, data has been collected through purposeful selection of important sections of text(s) from these narratives and analysed using qualitative textual analysis and Mills' Feminist Stylistics (1995) framework. The study investigates how gender discrimination, reproductive control, loss of agency and identity are stylistically embedded in Feminist Dystopias. The study concludes that the culture(s) of both authors, namely, a white woman and a woman of color, impact their portrayal of gender discrimination, patriarchy, and loss of agency in their works. Future researchers can also integrate reader-response stylistics.

Keywords: Feminism, Feminist Stylistics, Dystopian Fiction, Feminist Dystopian Fiction, Gender Discrimination, Reproductive Control

Introduction

Dystopian literature plays a significant role in providing a critique on societal structures, and amid these narratives, feminist dystopian literature pays attention to the themes like gender inequality, resistance, patriarchy, power dynamics and female agency. *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), by Margaret Atwood, has become a foundation of feminist dystopian literature while on the other hand, *Before She Sleeps* (2018) by Bina Shah offers us a non-western perspective of feminist dystopian fiction, highlighting the contemporary issues. This study compares both fictional works through the lens of feminist stylistics to explore how the authors have used linguistic features to explain their perspectives, and establish their own dystopian worlds. The study progresses by locating the novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1995) and *Before She Sleeps* (2018), in the broader genre of feminist dystopian fiction, exploring their significance and overlapping themes.

The field of stylistics examines the style of an author. Stylistic analysis of a text involves examining the linguistic features, such as lexical choice, tone, and sentence structure. Stylistics is a form of text analysis in which language is the most important aspect (Simpson, 2000). The field of feminist stylistics focuses on why a particular writing style is selected by the author to present the specific perspective. On the textual level, women's writing may be similar to that of men, but the perceptions and themes promoted by women are definitely different to those of men (Mills, 1995). Blain et al. (1990) state that feminist stylistics ought to conduct a close linguistic investigation and search for a theory to develop the rationale for feminist textual interpretation, it manages to exemplify

how the writers develop perspectives and concepts in their texts and different meanings are portrayed in a specific text.

The present study provides a comparative analysis of cross-cultural dystopian fictions. Feminist stylistic analysis of the novels, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and Shah's *Before She Sleeps* (2018), has been conducted under the theoretical framework of Sara Mills' *Feminist Stylistics* (1995).

The study aims to examine how culture impacts the stylistic portrayal of feminist dystopian themes by white women and women of color. Furthermore, it explores the similarities and differences employed by contemporary women writers to communicate the feminist dystopian themes in the novels. The study provides insights to the effects of dystopian fiction on feminist literature. Through analytical study of works by a white woman and a woman of color, the study highlights the similarities and differences in patriarchal societies in both contexts, providing a deeper understanding of the ways in which dystopian fiction serves as a warning or a critique for a real-world society and their impact on women.

Literature Review

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and Shah's *Before She Sleeps* (2018) are significantly influential works in the field of Feminism and Dystopian Fiction. Numerous studies have been conducted on both works, some of them have been discussed below, but the researchers deem it pertinent to mention that the comparative stylistics study of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Before She Sleeps* (2018) has not been conducted in the past.

Tchaparian (2018) presented a paper where he compared the Handmaids in Atwood's Gilead and the Handmaids in the Holy Bible. The selective implementation of scripture in Atwood's novel reflects historical and contemporary impulses to obligate women to reproduce. Chen (2023) analyzed the Metonymy of Power in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). He shows how metonymy impacts systemic injustice in the patriarchal state by examining attire color, social classes, and Handmaids' naming custom. Esmailzadeh and Beyad (2024) explored how Atwood's protagonist, Offred, used her story to revolt against the oppressive government of Gilead at large. Imogen Tyler's idea of social abjection has been employed in the paper to illustrate how the narrative subverts the social structures that aim to degrade her.

Naseem et al. (2023) conducted a research that highlights the issues of objectification and identification of women in *Before She Sleeps* (2018). The aim of this study was to highlight polyandry and female subjugation. The researchers clarify that the word polyandry, meaning "many men," has been derived from ancient men. Naz et al. (2024) examined eco-feminist perspective in Shah's novel *Before She Sleeps* (2018) to interpret the worst consequences on women and the environment. The paper shows that technology, sexism, and scientific progressions are devastating for both—women and their surroundings.

Material and Methods

The research is qualitative in nature, it interprets how the linguistic and stylistic patterns are used to portray feminism in dystopian works. Through closed textual analysis the data is interpreted. The data has been collected through purposeful selection of texts, and further analyzed using qualitative textual analysis and comparative feminist stylistics using the framework of *Feminist Stylistics* (1995) by Sara Mills.

Results and Discussion

Mills' *Feminist Stylistics*

This research has employed Mills' ground-breaking work as the theoretical lens. Sara Mills' *Feminist Stylistics* (1995) is one of the subfields of stylistics that aims to study how gender concerns are linguistically encoded in texts. It provides a linguistic framework for interpreting the ways in which language is used to shape gender identities and power relation in literary and non-literary texts.

Feminist Stylistics interprets text at three levels: word level, sentence level, and discourse level. This study has been limited to analyses at the word and sentence levels; analysis at discourse level has not been dealt with in this paper. Word-level analysis analyzes gender discrimination and how language conveys sexism by addressing theoretical elements, including generic usage, and investigating individual examples of sexist language. Analysis on sentence level emphasizes how the context and background knowledge shape language meaning beyond words. Word's meaning relies on context, even if they have historical meanings. A feminist language analysis must "excavate" these influences (Kaifa, Yaseen, & Muzaffar, 2024). The authors will focus on ready-made phrases, jokes and comedy, and transitivity choices. Analysis at discourse level considers the interaction between textual elements and external ideological factors beyond individual sentences. This technique analyzes discursive structures and their effects on readers, unlike standard stylistic analysis, which focuses on lexical objects.

Analysis at Word Level in *The Handmaid's Tale* & *Before She Sleeps*

Analysis at Word Level analyzes gender discrimination in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Before She Sleeps* (2018). It explores how linguistic features are used to convey sexism by highlighting theoretical elements, like generic usage, and examining sexist language. At word level analysis, the researchers will analyze the terms used to promote sexism at word level in both works: Generic Pronouns, Naming and Androcentrism, Semantic Derogation of Women, and Endearments and Diminutives.

Generic Pronouns

The *Feminist stylistics* (1995) by Mills refers to Generic pronoun as the pronoun that erases women and their identities, or diminishes them. The researcher has located and analyzed generic pronouns from feminist stylistic perspective. For instance, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) opens with the dialogue by the narrator, "We slept in what had once been the gymnasium" (Atwood, 1995, p.3). The opening line demonstrates the stress on the word 'we', highlighting forced collectivity and shared experience. Atwood has frequently used the word we to immediately place the narrator in a group rather than as an individual. This collective pronoun is used to show how the Handmaids are viewed as a mass, with no sense of individual identity and agency. The use of 'we' supports the patriarchal system of Gilead by utilizing language to deprive women of their identity.

In the same extract, Serena has used the pronoun 'you' for Offred, "So, you're the new one" (Atwood, 1985, p.12). This use conveys distance and authority and further her disparity in power. She did not use it to provide her personal recognition; rather, it is used to show dismissive and impersonal designation, treating her as only another Handmaid who is interchangeable. She does not refer to her by her name that is Offred, rather she uses the pronouns diminishing her to her job, that is reproduction. Serena dehumanizes her and her function and shows how disposable Handmaids are in Gilead by implying that she is a replacement.

Another example is use of 'they' for government. Atwood has used the pronoun 'they' for the higher authorities of Gilead. Fear and uncertainty are reflected when the word they is used. "But they have to catch you in the act, with two witnesses" (Atwood, 1985, p.62). This use of 'they' demonstrates how surveillance and punishment are common in Gilead, referring to not just government figures but also the society. This portrays Offred's fear of being caught in an act that she is now allowed to choose to do on her own. 'They' is essentially used to establish Gilead's power structure as it is reflecting Offred's anxiety and doubt; it also depicts the facelessness of regime.

In Shah's *Before She Sleeps* (2018), the use of Generic Pronouns is also quite significant. "We steal our freedom when and where we can" (Shah, 2018, p.13), the 'we' in this sentence is a neutral plural, not used as a neutral pronoun. It is deliberately selected by the author to ideologically create identity for females fighting male oppression. The pronoun "we" is used to build female togetherness. It reflects collective oppression and patriarchy, but, on the other hand, it significantly shows resistance. The leaders and agents of the society that dominate politics are male, here the 'we' refers to a specific group of females seeking refuge in Panah. This gendered use of a pronoun depicts how casual language that appears to be non-gender may contain gendered implications. Mills' framework (1995) reveals where and how generic pronouns are used to reflect and support imbalance power structures. Unlike institutional or normal patriarchal discourses, Shah presented inclusion of female experiences and expressed them with neutral pronoun.

The 'they' in "they checkmated her," (Shah, 2018, p.115) serves as a generic pronoun, ideologically embodying the faceless patriarchal forces ruling over the Green City in the dystopian society. 'They' is not used to represent a specific person but it is ambiguously used for the oppressors, it contains a lot of ideological weight. The power imbalance is further elevated by the term 'checkmated', it implies that they stand no chance in front of authorities, 'they'. It shows finality, like the end, there are no more movements left. Sabine uses the phrase while talking about her mother, by using the anonymous generic pronoun 'they' with 'checkmated' she linguistically depicts that her mother is helpless in front of faceless oppressors. "We don't want you to burst your stitches" (Shah, 2018, p.116) says Dr. Julien, being friendly and compassionate to Sabine. 'You' generically removes Sabine's identity and blends her experience into a collective category of a female patient. The you is used for Sabine but it actually refers to all the women in that dystopian society getting major surgery. He reduced her to statistically average person by using the general terminology, instead of calling her by her name.

Naming and Androcentrism

Mills (1995) states that "Naming has always played a major role in feminist discussions of language" (p.78). In Feminist Stylistic Analysis, naming is defined as how language categorizes reality, specifically from a masculine standpoint. Androcentrism is when female perspectives are minimized or misrepresented, and language and knowledge emphasize male experiences. In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Atwood exposes androcentrism by the imposition of a naming system on Handmaids. The only reason they are given the names is to reduce them to a possession rather than a person. The handmaids are deprived of their own names and they are given names made from the possessive form of their Commander they are assigned to. For instance, Of-fred and Of-glen. They have no individual identities, this linguistic system upholds patriarchy over their bodies and agency.

Another act of naming that reflects androcentrism is the use of word 'Ceremony' in place of sex or rape. "Tomorrow's the Ceremony, according to the calendar, so tonight Serena wants me serviced, and if I'm not there she'll find out why, and then what?" (Atwood, 1985, p.263). The use of word 'Ceremony' shapes how repressive acts are

viewed. It is used to conceal the harsh reality of what it means, which is enforced violation of body space. Atwood has used this term to show how repressive societies use language to neutralize the violence. This way it is not referring to it as rape or forced procreation, but an organized and planned occurrence of the act.

In Shah's *Before She Sleeps* (2018), naming and androcentrism play a significant role. "Mrs. Faro—that's what it says on your records" (Shah, 2018, p.117), says Dr. Julien when Sabine wakes up. This is a prime example naming and androcentrism, ideologically loaded reflection of power structures. This reference calls Sabine married even though she does not own it. 'Mrs.' shows how female identities are defined by men. Unlike males, females are not called by their entire names. Sabine's name is denied by the caller, and she is called as Mrs. Faro, depicting patriarchy and male domination. According to Feminist Stylistics, this language game calls males as professional or superior and women as secondary creatures.

"You're married to Julia—I mean, Sabine?" (Shah, 2018, p.164), this sentence vividly powerfully depicts how patriarchal states use naming to dominate ideology. Sabine got the name, "Julia," by the male centered 'Panah' or superior male figures like Faro to diminish her original identity and give her the identity that fits perfectly with the system's objective to oppress women. This process of renaming shows Mills' discursive depletion of females to relational identities (1995). This happens when their names are used to reflect their duties towards men or patriarchal state. Sabine is now called "Julia," as it was convenient for the authority to manage.

Endearments and Diminutives

Mills (1995) states that endearment terms that are used to show affection can also be used to demean, the reason behind this is often hard to explain. Diminutives are used to express pettiness or smallness by morphological or semantic association.

"It'd only take a minute, honey." What he called his wife, once; maybe still does, but really it's a generic term. We are all honey" (Atwood, 1985, p.62). Doctor, while checking Offred, tries to seduce her and calls her honey, showing affection with deep overtones. Endearments are used to show affection and closeness. Normally, the term "honey" is used to show warmth and love between romantic couples, and other relationships. This use implies that there is a connection of true love and mutual affection, which this relation lacks. The Handmaids are limited to reproductive roles in Gilead's structure. The doctor's use of "honey" is to depict his power rather than warmth. He tries to convey familiarity and establish a fake relation with Offred that she cannot reciprocate.

In Shah's narrative too, endearments figure quite significantly. "So you see, my dear. It's you who keeps me human—and alive" (Shah, 2018, p.68). The use of 'my dear' serves as an endearment while it also carries some ideological weight, being a diminutive. It seems nice and sweet at first, but it implicitly undercuts Rupa's authority and independence. 'My dear' acts as a recognizable and sweet expression that presents intimacy, and love. As from a stylistic point of view, the term softens the speaker's tone and signals a sentimental opening for his demand from Rupa. According to Mills (1995), such endearments are usually manipulative. In patriarchal settings, males use endearments more often to manipulate women and to lay some emotional groundwork, usually in intimate or hierarchical settings.

"Darling Sabine," Joseph says (Shah, 2018, p.85). The word 'darling' serves as an endearment. The adjective assumes a performative and patronizing role. More than Joseph's compassion towards Sabine, the tone discloses his authority and attitude. He claims emotional ownership over her by the use of darling. Under the act of compassion, the word is used by Joseph strategically to strengthen his dominance; it does not serve as a

symbol of closeness. Sabine herself states that he calls her by endearments like darling and sweetheart. This mention plays a significant role in undermining any emotional resonance from these endearments.

Semantic Derogation of Women

Semantic Derogation of women is a linguistic process when terms linked with women slowly become negative or sexualizing while, at the same time, identical terms associated with men often conserve positive meanings. One of the key instances of semantic derogation is the use of word “Handmaids” for females and their functions. Linguistically, the word Handmaid is used for the female servant who carries out the chores of the house and reports to the head of the family. The term has its roots with religious or historical settings and is associated with obedience and humility. In Bible, the term Handmaid is used to depict females who work for their mistresses. However, in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the original meaning of the term is stripped off and is reduced to forceful reproduction alone. Another term used for Handmaids is “two-legged wombs” (p.137), exclusively used to depict their capacity to conceive and carry children for them.

The Gilead's reinterpretation of “Wife” is an essential example of Semantic Derogation using power hierarchy. The only role that wives have is to keep the home going and their only power is due to their husbands' political standing, with no personal agency. Their role is elevated from other women, they do not have regular jobs, they are supposed to rule by subjugating other women. On the other hand, handmaids have no sense of dignity or agency loss due to semantic derogation.

The semantic derogation also emerges strongly in Shah's narrative. “The smile that manages to smooth things over” (Shah, 2018, p.6), says Sabine as she was trying to fake a smile in front of mirror, so that she can please the men around her. The expression seems professional, however, it is clear that even a smile is faked or militarized in the context of a dystopian patriarchy. The environments of patriarchal societies perfectly exhibit the cultural expectation from women in order to satisfy men. The smile is no more a spontaneous or genuine expression, it becomes a forced act planned to serve the job.

“Woman in his arms was like pulling a time bomb close” (Shah, 2018, p.158), the expression deprives Sabine of subjectivity and minimizes her to a sign of upcoming danger as she is compared to a time bomb. This portrays how females are linguistically viewed as dangers or burdens, specifically those who possess sentimental histories or traumatic experiences. Julien compares her to a dangerous explosive device, to be used with caution and not as an emotionally human person. This elevates the idea that sentimentally injured females are unstable and dangerous to men. The semantics here employs danger and violence, not intimacy or empathy. In this expression, semantic derogation is claimed by defining Sabine from a male-centered framing.

Analysis at Sentence Level in *The Handmaid's Tale* & *Before She Sleeps*

Analysis at Sentence Level is used to analyze and interpret linguistic use beyond word level (Mills, 1995). Sometimes, words represent history, they play a complete role of conveying the message, but other times the meaning is not fixed; instead meaning is constructed by other factors. This section analyzes the ready-made sentences and their impact and the hidden ideologies behind humor and jokes in both narratives—*The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Before She Sleeps* (2018).

Ready-Made Sentences

Mills (1995) states that there are certain phrases that are pre-constructed, and they convey sexism, certain proverbs have underlying sexist messages. They vividly

demean women and make them seem inferior to men. Ready-Made Sentences are culturally developed, they are stated as impersonal and irregular to the speakers and listener, implying indirect criticism.

"Blessed be the fruit" (Atwood, 1985, p.19) is a ready-made or a pre-constructed sentence used as a greeting among the Handmaids in *"The Handmaid's Tale"*. The sentence appears polite and benign at first as it has biblical language. However, it implies patriarchal ideology and control. The sentence semantically highlights the meanings of "blessed" and "fruit" stating that female are exclusively limited to their reproductive functions. In biblical usage, it is used to refer to sacred experience of childbirth. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the phrase is stripped of its spiritual capability and only refers to the reproductive functions. The sentence becomes the marker of reproduction although it was used to evoke holiness and grace.

"Under His Eye" (Atwood, 1985, p.45) is another ready-made sentence/phrase used as an instrument of surveillance and submission. It is a linguistic process used to enforce patriarchal dominance by adding control in daily language use. It implies the presence of a divine figure, enforcing control by suggesting that He, the God, is watching. This phrase is used linguistically to discriminate against women as the pronoun 'He' is used instead of God's name, along with psychologically teaching them discipline. Thus, the phrase degrades females ideologically by implying that they are under male dominance.

In Shah's dystopian fiction, ready-made sentences play a dehumanizing role. "There's nothing less honorable than a man who doesn't honor his contracts, Rupa" (Shah, 2018, p.65), serves as ready-made sentence that carries a lot of social and ideological weight. It is grounded on an established cultural script that links honor and authority to rules, that are often viewed as logical or objective realities for masculinity. Even if she doubts Joseph's truthfulness inside, the sentence statement is not just descriptive, but it is also a performance, allowing him to show himself as an ethical guy. This turns into an instrument of power in this context. Joseph portrays personal and sexual interaction as a professional issue diminishing the emotional connection between them.

"Sex is love, if you do it right" (Shah, 2018, p.76) is a powerful example of ready-made sentence that reflects complex and socially rooted concepts. The phrase depicts regulating ideology, combining physical closure with emotional connection, by reflecting on old cultural concepts that romanticize sex as ways for achieving love. The concept of doing it right implies that a correct and moral way of having sex leads to love. The sentence gives ideological weight to the context, Rupa's illegally loves or sleeps with a client which is strictly against the rules of Panah. The statement becomes an opposite notion to the norms of the surroundings and to the warnings of the conversation.

Jokes and Humor

Mills (1995) implies that Humor is used to reflect sexism. It is often used to conceal and mask sexism, making it less obvious. "Habits are hard to break (Atwood, 1985, p.26)" becomes an example of strong yet subtle irony. Offred attempted to ignore her jealousy and envy towards Serena Joy, but when she fails to do so, she mocks herself by using the term habits for her emotions. At first, it seems as a normal statement, a word used to describe surviving behavior. But in Gilead's harsh identity and individuality removal, it becomes a critique of the state's idea of complete ideological control. The statement is used to minimize the state's brutal attempt to erase women's past emotions, memories, and bonds. "She was now a loose woman" (ibid., p.134), the sentence here is used as a criticism or stigma. The phrase "loose woman" is ironic in the patriarchal state, where females are controlled rigidly, making the idea of looseness completely absurd. From Mills' point of view, it ridicules language that depicts patriarchy and silently repels oppression using irony. In the context of a patriarchal state, the term "loose" degrades females who go

against the sexual conventions by calling them immoral, or promiscuous. Female body is usually defined by the sexual restriction they have in patriarchal society.

“What was he going to give me next? A girdle” (Atwood, 1985, p.157) is an ironic joke said by Offred when Commander, while playing Scrabble with her, offered her with prohibited things. These things include lotion or publications. Offred understands that these gestures are nothing; they only depict how the Commander longs for prohibited things from the pre-Gilead era. She ironically implies that what is the purpose of going back when there is still patriarchal authority. The statement becomes rhetorical as it employs comedy as a form of resisting the privileges.

There are interesting instances of the use of jokes and humour in Shah’s dystopian narrative. “He’ll make such a beautiful corpse” (Shah, 2018, p.20), the statement has disruptive potential. The dark morbid joke is used as a form of linguistic resistance. The statement ironically eliminates any emotional engagement that women in a patriarchal state might have for anyone. This emotional detachment counters gender norms, where women are supposed to show sensitivity. She imaginatively liberates females from patriarchal terror by secretly laughing at a man’s fictional death.

“That’s a great way of saying thank you” (Shah, 2018, p.118). The statement is satirical as it is a reply to Sabine’s comment to Julien that he is too young to be a doctor. This comment calls to question his credibility as a doctor, resulting in this dry and ironic response. Julien did not take in the criticism instead he calls it lack of civility on Sabine’s part. From a feminist stylistic point of view, the joke is grounded in the gendered expectations from females. They are supposed to be polite, respectful, and pleasant, particularly while interacting with men in positions of power. When a female says something that is moderately critical or mocking, it is not considered as a joke or constructive criticism rather it is considered as an insult. Thus Julien’s remark reinforces conventional power relations, where females who diverge from a male’s verbal expectations of obedience are gently rebuked.

Results & Discussion

Culture plays a significant role in shaping the representation of feminist fiction, particularly if the comparative focus is on a white woman, Margaret Atwood, and a woman of color, Bina Shah. The impact of culture can be depicted in the stylistic choices made by the authors, to portray patriarchal oppression and gender discrimination. Margaret Atwood, a white woman constructed her work in Christian, Western culture. Her dystopian fiction incorporates American gender roles and reproductive concerns of late 20th-century. Her stylistic portrayal is ironic and minimalist, it normalizes patriarchal control with Biblical intertextuality and preconstructed ideologies. The control of state over women and their bodies is portrayed by the use of gendered language which is emotionally detached and institutionalized.

On the contrary, Bina Shah is a woman of color, belonging to Pakistan, and her work portrays her postcolonial, Muslim-majority life experiences. She came from a land where gender roles, family honor, and reproductive roles are culturally different from that of West. The *Green City of Before She Sleeps* (2018) shows how patriarchy and governmental control over bodies and language, in South Asian countries, is twisted. Her use of language shows pain and revolt in an emotionally charged manner as compared to Atwood. There is absence of political revolt; the female resistance is shown covertly through physical metaphors and emotional togetherness. Shah has created feminist dystopian society that provides a culturally rich commentary on gender. The stylistic features used by her are greatly influenced by the culture within the context of Muslim postcolonial society.

Atwood focuses on the objectification of females with the use of stylistic devices like diminutive and semantic derogation like 'Handmaid' and 'Unwoman'. Other impersonal linguistic act is the naming system: Offred, and Ofglen, it stylistically depicts the erasure of identity and culture. She uses semantic defamiliarization in order to make normal and everyday acts like sex or shopping seem strange. In comparison to Atwood, Shah has used more emotional vocabulary, as she belongs to society where sexuality and gender roles are more of a national and institutional identity. Her representation of trauma and revolt is metaphorically linked to air and light. She used culturally rooted words, like *azan*, to create a South Asian Islamic society. *Before She Sleeps* (2018) depicts female oppression as intimately physical. The women are oppressed through emotionality, enforced marriages, and reproductive duties. Through small and subtle acts of disobedience, and revolt, Sabine becomes a mark physical resistance

The plot structure constructed by Atwood is fractured, containing flashbacks, this reflects the broken psychological condition of the protagonist. The tone of the current feminist literature is emotionally detached and self-reflexive, Atwood's cultural depiction allows her to use intellectual irony to challenge patriarchal principles. On the contrary, Shah has used a more linear narrative, her perspectives vary from first-person and third-person. Revolt and survival are reflected in her tone that depict postcolonial feminist tradition of writing.

Both authors emphasized the control over female body, emphasizing political institutionalization of females. In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), handmaids are treated and valued as wombs, their fertility defines their personalities. They have no agency of their own, they are being acted upon, they do not act on their own will. Similarly, in *Before She Sleeps* (2018), women went through post-nuclear infertility, making them biologically valuable. She reflects how medical and marital control can lead to enforced reproductive roles, instead of institutionalized rape as depicted by Atwood. Shah's characters like Sabine and other females resisted by showing physical gestures and spatial negotiation. Both authors artistically emphasized the politics of voice freedom, Atwood's work mostly used modal verbs, like 'I could', 'I would' and parentheticals in the protagonist's story, depicting self-doubt and fragmentation. Shah along with modal verbs also used silence, indirect speech, and clipped short sentences. Silence is strategic, not just enforced.

For Atwood, usually agency is introverted and artificial. Her protagonist sometimes takes actions, but other times she only reflects. In her work, feminist criticism is explored by psychological resistance, Biblical references, and ironic humor. On the contrary, Shah portrayed female agency as more relational or immediate. Her protagonist opposes the state oriented rules and gender restrictions. She portrayed agency as a source of survival. Shah purposefully situated her feminist criticism in Asian Muslim framework instead of universalized Western perspective of feminism. The Green City of *Before She Sleeps* (2018) builds on the real-world gendered issues, like Pakistani or Iranian issues, instead of just being fictional. She reflects on how these states actually control the movements and attire of females.

The feminism presented by Atwood is based on the reproductive restrictions and sexual autonomy. She used objectifying vocabulary, and clinical terms, depicting how patriarchal societies perceive women, "two-legged wombs" (Atwood, 1985, p.137). This verbal presentation of women as duties and not as unique people, is the major subject of interest for feminists. On the other hand, Shah includes psychological journeys, and shared traumas, broadening the perception of feminism. Her sensory and rhythmic writing and imagery is used to show resistance, intimate sleeping arrangements of females and their shared meals depict emotional intimacy.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Atwood employed first-person single narrator, the protagonist, emphasizing her broken identity under male domination. The fragmented

narrative depicts that she is trying to have control over her trauma. In contrast to this, Shah uses multi-perspective narrative; the narrative shifts from Sabine to other characters. This is non-Western feminist strategy of opposing in a collective manner rather than the individual one. Her stylistic strategies align with intersectional feminist models.

Atwood employed more of a cognitive resistance. She used wordplay and linguistic irony, for instance using words like Ceremony. Her portrayal of resistance is just restricted to the internal monologue of the characters. On the contrary, in *Before She Sleeps* (2018) Shah used emotionally charged language, and there is less use of ironic language. Her work contained more of imagery and repetition, she shows physical resistance, through actions and strong imagery. The stylistic choices of both authors, Margaret Atwood and Bina Shah, in the feminist narrative differ depending on the sociopolitical context, and culture. Atwood used linguistic features as both: the issue and the resolution. While Shah's language is greatly impacted by postcolonial and South Asian context where emotional depth and group resilience is used for survival.

Conclusion

The comparative stylistic analysis of *The Handmaid's tale* (1985) and *Before She Sleeps* (2018) concludes that both authors used stylistic strategies to challenge patriarchal domains in their feminist dystopian fictions. Although both authors employed similar strategies, their artistic choices were greatly influenced by their ideological perceptions and culture. Shah's *Before She Sleeps* (2018) contains emotionally charged language, active agency, and group revolt, depicting postcolonial and Muslim context. On the other hand, Atwood's *The Handmaid's tale* (1985) contains sarcasm, internal monologue, and fragmented narrative depicting the Western perception of feminism. Both authors highlighted the hideous reality of oppressed women in dystopian societies through their own creative writing styles.

Recommendations

The study on stylistic analysis of *The Handmaid's tale* (1985) and *Before She Sleeps* (2018) benefits the future researchers in the investigation of cultural impact on literature. It reveals how in Western and Eastern contexts, narratives are constructed. The researchers may also integrate reader-response stylistics to examine how readers from different cultures perceive and interpret feminist dystopian themes. This approach may highlight the cultural impact on reception of stylistic choices. Furthermore, the cultural analysis clarifies how feminist narratives function in cross-ideological landscapes. The study may further benefit from the examination of male characters from a feminist perspective. The exploration of representation of male characters in relation to female characters can provide a comprehensive picture of gender dynamics in feminist dystopian narratives. The future researchers can further analyze the stylistics of dystopian fictions, examining how the stylistics features and structures support feminist narrative. The researchers can highlight how the distinct narratives reflect cultural and geographical anxieties, and feminist critiques by exploring the stylistic construction of dystopias in Western and Eastern texts.

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