

Surveillance, Gazing and Dehumanization in Dystopia

Mrs. Ujwala Pramod Solase¹, Prof.Dr.N.B.Masal²

¹Research Student, Assistant Professor in English, Institute of Civil & Rural Engineering Gargoti, Bhudargad, Kolhapur

²Guide, Associate Professor in English, Dr. Ghali College Gadhinlaj, Kolhapur

Abstract - Public sphere is a territory of our social life, which lies between the private sphere and the sphere of public authority. Citizens can get the chance to express their ideas and to form public opinion in the public sphere. They can feel to be a member of a team and behave as a public body. This paper discusses how totalitarian regimes use technology to break the borders between the private and public spheres through the study of some dystopian fictional works. It discusses how the authorities dehumanize the subject through constant control and suppress their freedom of expression through constant surveillance or gazing by using the panopticon technique.

Index Terms - Totalitarian regime, Dystopian fiction, Dehumanization, Panopticon.

INTRODUCTION

“YOU ARE UNDER CCTV “these words that we find at all public and private places remind the famous quotation “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU” from George Orwell’s classical dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty Four*. Which means constant surveillance or gazing on the behavior of people. In modern society, we experience a panoptic gaze because we see ourselves under potential control. The most obvious example of the Panopticon in modern society is CCTV which has become a widespread and publicly accepted means of surveillance and crime prevention. The concept “Panopticon ” which has a Greek meaning “ all seeing eye ”is created by a prominent political philosopher in the 19th century Europe Jeremy Bentham . Panopticon is basically a prison tower that allowed prison guards to monitor a large number inmates effectively. With a high tower in the middle of a yard the concrete manifestation of the panopticon all the individual cells and prisoners would be under secret observation . The purpose was to internalize a watcher within the prisoners. Even if they are not constantly watched ,they would feel as if they

were , which would keep them docile and deviate them doing bad thing.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research utilizes a qualitative method in order to analyze the data in the select novels .In this research, two kinds of data i.e. the primary data and the secondary ones are used for analysis. The primary data consists of the narrations and depictions in the novel related to how the totalitarian government uses surveillance technique in order to achieve the power and authority in the society. Meanwhile, the secondary data consists of sources such as book and research paper especially those which are related to the use of control technique by the government . Firstly, the concept of surveillance is explained with the help of Jeremy Bentham’s concept of Panopticon explained by Michel Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish* . Then the selected dystopian novels are analyzed in the light of this panopticon concept and explained how the surveillance technique is used by the totalitarian governments in select novels to control and dehumanize society.

DISCUSSION

The philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault applied this concept of panopticon control in his own research about discipline and punishment in his book *Discipline and Punish* (1975). According to him ,panopticon involves two forms of control : exclusion and disciplinary partitioning . The separation of the citizens by definition of their choice determines the amount of surveillance and control that needed to be employed. . The more that one can see , the more one can control. He says that discipline is used as a technique to control the people . It first separates people from society and then confirms them in a place

in order to be ready for training. Through separation these organizations take control over the subject's body in a way their bodies become the body of those who are in power. As a result the subject lose contact with each other and lack information about those who share the same condition. So through separation the subject become an easy pray in front of the authentic power. According to Foucault, the major effect of the Panopticon is to keep the inmates always aware and assure about the permanent visibility of the automatic functioning of power as well as discipline by surveillance is important to ensure the subjects docility and keep and control over them. That is why, in prison surveillance is used as a major tool to examine subject's docility. In surveillance, personal details of people are collected, checked and transmitted to manage population. The totalitarian dystopia demands total commitment from society by keeping control over them in the disguise of a political ideology.

Michel Foucault defines Panopticon as, "the way in which citizens regulate their own behaviors". In majority of dystopian novels, the totalitarian regime has effectively used this panopticon surveillance technique to suppress the freedom of people and dehumanize them. In these novels, the power of gaze, the notion of seeing and being seen alternatively works itself in different ways within a totalitarian regime designed to supervise and monitor the citizens behavior. The basic idea of panoptical control is that people will obey the prevailing rules and norms when they know they are being watched. Use of the panopticon surveillance to control an individual actions and dehumanize the society through oppressive power is one of the important characteristics of dystopian literature.

In George Orwell's classic *Dystopia 1984*, the government possess total control over its citizen by using surveillance technique. The citizens not only spy one another but also on themselves. Through the implementation of surveillance, the government of Oceania has created a fear within the population to ensure that there is no sense of personal freedom or control exist within the lives of the citizens. To achieve a sense of control and oppression over people, fear is the most common tactics used by the governments. The fear tactic plays a prominent role in the traditional understanding of Jerny Bentham's prison building known as Panopticon.

In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* in the dystopian society of Gilead, the totalitarian Republic State of Gilead has constructed many buildings similar to Bentham's panopticon tower, towers with armed guards with high post. Gilead is outlined by walls and armed guards. Physical surveillance of this kind is important in order to internalize the watcher in their population. In Gilead people are isolated from friend and family and put into different social groups with different assignments. The Gileadean society in medieval Europe, Foucault calls a carceral continuum. At the top there are commander who practice all the power in the state. At the second highest layer in the society are the Eyes which is a fitting name for this male military group "who sees all". Next comes the Aunts, a female group who is responsible for the training of women into the Handmaids' center. Below them are different groups separated by skin colours, religion or occupation. Near the bottom the handmaids are found. All the groups have their uniforms. The handmaids wear long red dresses with long sleeves since it is important not to tempt anyone. This hierarchic network keeps everyone involved in commanders cause since everyone has someone to report to. Thus surveillance in Gilead is both physical and mental.

As they are under surveillance of the eye, the women in Gilead are found disciplined and organized. The guards, reporters, aunts are employed as Eyes to monitor women wherever they go. The 'Eyes' helps the authoritative power of Gilead to achieve complete control over women's body by permanently monitoring women's behavior, thinking and movements. The duty of these eyes is to report on any women who behave or speak negatively against Gilead's main stream. Therefore these eyes are everywhere such as Aunts in the red centers and the guards on the streets. This constant surveillance of the Eye ensures that all women in the state follow Gilead's rules that determined for them. The regime in Gilead uses the Eyes as Bentham's panopticon to regulate women's body through making them internalize fear of being watched. Since these eyes are everywhere the women in fear of being watched by the eyes automatically perform their work without questioning and even in the absence of the eyes.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the guardians, who are the representation of police in the

Totalitarian Republic of Gilead, try to control people in every level of society. It is kind of panoptic gaze, since the citizens do not know who is the “eye”. Thousands of eyes are everywhere with black vans. Even commander and his wife, who are from an upper class, are not safe from the eyes. Going to the parties secretly, buying forbidden goods from black market and other samples in the novel shows that they are not free to do what they want.

Both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid's Tale* include elements which correspond to the discussion of surveillance and the panopticon. The architectural structure in both of the novels resemble the panopticon. The two cities are designed in order to supervise its inhabitants and the supervising gaze are present in the hierarchical surveillance of the city. Both Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* experience disempowerment through the unequal power relation that is created from the hierarchized surveillance. For both of them, being seen by the controlling government, and thus becoming the object of the gaze, is disempowering.

In Suzan Collin's *The Hunger Games*, the primary panoptic mechanism used by President Snow, who represents the totalitarian, is the tournament of Hunger Games itself. Its visibility and constant reminders of its existence is exerted by mandatory televised proceedings. Bentham's architectural master plan for a building allows everyone to be watched without seeing the watcher. This creates a huge sense of suspicion and fear. This is shown throughout *The Hunger Games* when the protagonist of the novel Katniss Everdeen always thinks that someone is watching her every action as well as what she says and what she does because she believes she is always being watched. She is also a little self-centered in the idea that she believes she often holds the cameras attention, and by the cameras, the countries. The setup of the Hunger Games makes it so that every tribute can be seen, everywhere they go, and at any point in time. The topic of Privacy and the Government is strongly addressed throughout *The Hunger Games*. This is mostly done through the throughout use of media and surveillance. The situation is suggestive of "Big Brother," taken from George Orwell's novel *1984*, as the government is always watching the citizens of Panem. Through the use of video cameras, audio recorders, and other technological surveillance

techniques, the government is constantly monitoring Panem's citizens in each district. In this way, the citizens are repressed and any thoughts of rebellion are squashed before they are created.

A GPS tracker is implanted into the fighters via a needle under the skin to keep watch on their every move. While in the sports ground, Katniss discovers many of the hidden cameras and is aware that her every move she makes is transmitted not only to the government but also to the corporate sponsors and the general public. This type of surveillance is taken from the angle of shifting spectatorship. Katniss is the subject of the constant surveillance while the identity of her watcher is plural and unfixed rather than singular and stable. The surveillance now puts on an extreme number of pressures on Katniss. Katniss must: submit to the rules and regulations in the arena to keep the game makers from killing her, play the role of the star-crossed lover with Peta to attract gifts from her sponsors, as well as show some hostility and disdain to the games as her family and all other districts must watch as their children are slaughtered.

In the world of *The Giver* by Lois Lowry also surveillance is noticeable. Jonas, the protagonist, recalls an awareness of the increasing level of observation. In school, at recreation time and during volunteer hours, he notices the Committee of Elders, which represents totalitarianism, watching him and the other Elevens, as they are prepared to be assigned their community jobs. The constant presence of the authority is manifested through a strict surveillance system that monitors people at all times. Michel Foucault, says: This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, [...] in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, [...] all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism.”

The hidden tools for surveillance established by the state to address undesired behaviors or rebellious actions are more frightening and dangerous in the lives of the rebellious youth in these novels. In this novel, loudspeakers are present in all areas of the community and the hidden cameras as well as microphones allows centralized monitoring activities.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of all above discussed novels makes it clear that the presence of the state in the daily lives of the people through surveillance is the most important element of dystopian control which is commonly employed in classic dystopian literature. This hyper-awareness of the gaze of the state shapes the actions of young protagonists and other citizens. This creates an extreme sense of being watched and a system of intense pressure on the protagonist to constantly perform. This sense of being watched controls the human action and expression. It dehumanizes an individual by depriving his freedom of behavior. In order to remain all-pervading and have total control over lives of people, totalitarian governments implement a regulatory device of surveillance employed as a mode of discipline to ensure domination on a wide scale.

REFERENCE

- [1] Atwood. Margaret *The Handmaid's Tale*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1985 .Print
- [2] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1979
- [3] Gerhard, Julia. 2012. "Control and Resistance in Dystopian Novels: A Comparative Analysis". Unpublished Thesis. Chico: California State University.
- [4] Huxley, 1932, *Brave New World*. London. Chatto & Windus ISBN 0-06-080983-
- [5] Lowry Lois, *The Giver* ,London: Collins 2003 Print.
- [6] Orwell George (1949).*Nineteen Eighty Four*. A Novel. London: Secker & Warburg
- [7] Suzan Collin, *The Hunger Games* New York: Scholastic 2008 Print