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A Panopticon Revelation of the Power and Self-Discipline in Orwell's 1984

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Abstract

The article aims to study and analyze Michel Foucault's concept of Panopticism and its implication in daily life and in literary texts. Panopticism is a concept where self-surveillance, distance surveillance and central control mechanisms are developed and implemented. Panopticism is the term used by Michel Foucault in which the surveillance, observations and monitoring systems are regulated in different ways and methods in different time periods. Panoptic surveillance of eighteenth century and the present systems of CC TV surveillance in Offices, Schools, Colleges and Banks is the mechanical representation of the panoptic concept. This panoptic observation creates power and controls people, create law and order, and also creates the dictatorial ruling over general people. This article follows the method of studying Jeremy Bentham and Mitchel Foucault's terms Panopticism and attempts to assimilate in the present concept of mechanics of distance surveillance through technology. It also applies the concept to study George Orwell's novel 1984. It concludes that the present concept of CC TV surveillance and others type of distance controlling systems resembles the idea as noted by Bentham, Foucault and applied by Orwell in the novel 1984. The issue of controlling people with Big Brother power in the novel is the panoptic observation and ruling over people by the rulers.

Keywords: architecture, authority, CC TV, Panopticism, self-discipline, surveillance

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Introduction: Discipline and Power

Mitchel Foucault's concept of Panopticism is for the observation and surveillance by the power to the general public. In the novel 1984 by George Orwell the similar concept of invisible surveillance by the ruler is created through the Posters in the streets with the visual picture and the caption written BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU. The picture and the caption in the street create panoptic observance to the people as depicted in the novel is the claim of this article. The term Panopticism is derived from the root word "Panoptos" in Greek language which means a guard man who holds the power of securing others and the huge property. Morphologically, the term combines 'pan' and 'optic' which means to see from distance. This term has been borrowed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham who was a social reformer and jurist. He used it in security and surveillance purpose. Panopticon is an architectural and institutional building in which there is a system of central control and security to the prisoners who are kept in the surrounding cells. Michel Foucault reused this term and applied it creatively in the context of control and self-discipline in the prison. This same concept and term has been borrowed by Mitchel Foucault in his essay "Panopticism" in the book *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Foucault used this term for obtaining power over mind and creating a type of self-disciplined system among people. Jeremy Bentham and Foucault both used this term in context of social discipline created by an invisible power or force. Foucault writes, "each individual, in a place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor... he is seen but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (486). The prisoners are not directly guard, but they are closely monitored and are put in a disciplined situation.

Man has the nature either to be controlled by self-discipline or by the control of power since long history of its civilization. In self-discipline system of controlling men fears within own self and remains in a system. But discipline always does not work everywhere and everyone. By nature, there are some people in every society who has criminal mind and acts. Such criminals are to be controlled by power and strong surveillances. During middle age there were not the different places to keep the criminals, mad and leprosy affected people in European countries. In some corner parts and outside the boundary of the city they were kept but only in the seventeenth century onwards they were started to be kept separately in the hospital and in the prisons as imagined by Jeremy Bentham. In Bentham's imagined prison the prisoners were closely watched from the center tower and self-discipline is created by force. The observer used to note down the criminal's activities, behaviors secretly and a recorded

truth is created which helped to construct knowledge about the mental conditions of the people inside the jail. Foucault's Panopticism is this same construction of power and discipline and the formation of knowledge about them.

Power is always not negative as it has positive and negative impact both. For Foucault, power is the source to construct social truth and knowledge whereas for Karl Marx it is the means of ruling the common people by the ruler class. Power is also the discipline, self-control and knowledge. Government, Laws, Politics, Army, and the Police are the visible powers whereas discipline, religion, knowledge are the invisible powers which control the people softly but effectively. The Police can control people for a while but Thought Police can control people everywhere and always. George Orwell writes, "The patrols did not matter, however. Only the Thought Police mattered" (6). This thought police is the self-discipline and self-controlling power.

Methodology

This article mainly focuses on the exploration of the concept Panopticism, its history and implication as discussed by Jermyn Bentham and Foucault and discusses and apply this concept in the novel *1984* by Orwell. Optic is the main word and pan is the prefix to mean to see from distance. This term is used by the architects of 18th century to construct the jails to control the prisoners. This concept is developed as CC TV surveillance in modern time and also adopted in the fiction like *1984* by George Orwell. The concept is defined and explained in the context of 18th century prison's observations and in modern surveillance of CC cameras. Such surveillances create power and the rulers also create such power to control the general public as in the novel by Orwell.

Foucault and the Discourse of Power

Foucault as a new historicist always talks about power which creates a discourse of truth in the history. There is a certain system of power function in the society, institutions or in organizations and that system holds the power and that power creates the truth which becomes the knowledge. The social, religious, political, administrative, legal systems create knowledge or the truth and that power and knowledge creates a discourse according to Foucault. For Foucault, power is not a negative force, but a positive one which moves the history forward with relative knowledge and truth. Every organization like religious, social, family, political, moral, economic, language come from certain power and they again create a system which is

a power again. So, power is a central mechanism to systematise the organization and society as a whole. Truth and knowledge for Foucault is a system of regulation, operation, circulation, production of the social system. So, truth creates power and power creates the discourse of truth. Foucault brings reference about medical institutions which also have a system and create a power like other institutions prison, administration, court and others. The institutions like hospitals, schools, office, and court have a power function over the persons related over there. Such institutions create a system to the general people that they create a truth and knowledge.

In the essay “Panopticism”, Foucault draws a metaphor of an architectural building, where invisible power is created to maintain a self-disciplined system. Janet Semple clarifies that “The Panopticon is ‘the architectural figure’ of the disciplinary mechanism of regulation, surveillance, supervision, and ostracism which surrounded the abnormal individual” (108). The term and concept by Foucault was borrowed and used to create a supervision and regulation mechanism to fight against the plague pandemic in the seventh century. To fight against pandemic a self-discipline system of self-controlling mechanism had to be created. Crowd of people and traditional lifestyle create the pandemic situation worse so that the panoptic power use was necessary. Foucault writes about panoptic discipline, “they are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately” (486). To fight against pandemic, a system of power had to be created that individuals are to be constantly and closely watched but from a distance. Foucault further suggests for avoiding those compact, swarming, howling masses in places to fight against the pandemic (486). The metaphoric and allegorical presentation of panoptic architecture and power system was appropriate to create self-disciplined system of lifestyle during such pandemic. In panoptic architecture the building is in a circle and there is a tower at the center. A guard watches all the prisoners from the centre and all the prisoners are under the surveillance of the authority of the guard.

David Wood writes that this concept of Panopticism is a modern concept of “self-monitoring through the belief that one is under constant scrutiny, thus becomes both a driving force and a key symbol of the modernist project” (235). Foucault’s this concept is like the modern CCTV surveillance and the notices that you are under the close observance of CCTV in big buildings, supermarkets, banks, schools, colleges, prison, highways and elsewhere which creates a sort of power and self-disciplined system among people. It is literally for

security purpose, but also for creating a power over the people so that they would maintain certain system of function. This creates a type of power against the unnecessary evil and maintains internal security system. Michael Yeo in reference to Foucault's Panopticism writes, "The term "Panopticon" comes from Jeremy Bentham, who used it to describe a building in which from a single point a single inspector could monitor many occupants. In the belief that they were under inspection, occupants would avoid behaviour the detection of which would have a penalty" (53). In modern architecture of some schools and hospitals too, such internal security system is managed and the observation is made easier from the center point by a security personal or the headmaster. The square, angle and arc shape of buildings of the hospital and schools are the examples of Panoptican observation by the authority. An invisible power of the authority is over the students and publics is maintained through the structure of the building itself. In reference to Panopticism Thomas Mathiesen writes, the life of young prisoners is regulated by rules down to the most minute details from morning to the night. It is carefully developed system of rules regulating life in full and complete detail (216). It means that Panopticism is a system of regulating life with every detail. Sometime power is to be adopted while regulating life and rules are to be maintained, observed and followed.

Eighteenth century pandemic had revived the panoptic observance to keep the people under discipline. Modern CCTV creates an invisible power that the individuals think we are being watched by invisible guard and the result is self-disciplined social system. A new term also was formed as panoptic discipline under which an appropriate behaviour of people is automatically formed during some special moments. Foucault writes; "the Panoptican, on the other hand must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning, away of defining power relations term of the everyday life of men" (489). Each individual when being at home, workplace, hospitals, schools, prisons, in the marketplace and everywhere a system of behaviour, discipline and consciousness works which is called the panoptic schema. In context of plague pandemic Foucault writes "the plague-stricken town provided an exceptional disciplinary model [...] against the power of death" (489). Death also is an invisible power but unusual death by pandemic is to be fought against by the human beings medically and socially too.

In the similar context, Habib writes "indeed the central theme of most of Foucault's works was the methods with which modern civilization creates and controls human subjects through institutions such as hospitals, prison, education and knowledge; corollary to these investigations was Foucault's examination of power, its execution and distribution (766).

For Foucault, power is the source of both exploitation and creation. Power has created the political, military, economic and cultural discourse so that colonialism and imperialism was possible. On the other hand, power forms, the new social truth through social changes and new knowledge. Truth and power are always relative which never remain static but social elements like history, politics, economy form new truths and power and they govern the social structures.

Power and Truth for Foucault and Orwell

Like Foucault's concept of invisible power control, George Orwell in his book *1984* also talks about the similar power of Big Brother and thought police (6). People are controlled by Big Brother concept as "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" (6) prevails everywhere. Big Brother and Thought Police in Orwell's book are the concepts of Foucault (how is it related? Justify it.), and Orwell also is connected with the idea of Sigmund Freud's concept of 'super ego' and 'ego' consciousness of mind. Our thinking, fantasy or the imaginations of life is close with 'super ego' which is not possible and achievable always and we are forced to behave in normal situation that is by the 'ego' part of mind. For example, in a classroom, a teacher behaves as a teacher's role, not as a dancer or a singer or s/he does not behave like a singer though s/he imagines to. An officer in the office, an army in the barrack and at home, their function and state of mind is different and a sort of different power discipline is maintained elsewhere. This self-discipline mechanism for Foucault is the theory of discipline which is the panoptic discipline.

In the modern time, each individual is free in the society but s/he should maintain a sort of self-discipline as well because elsewhere s/he is being watched by some surveillance. The dichotomy of freedom and surveillance is the very characteristic of modern life and society. It is the system which has created its power and discourse of knowledge. According to Foucault, the power and knowledge dynamics creates a system of truth (Rouse, 96). Richard J. Lane in this context writes, "Truth is regarded as something interior which needs to be extracted in the confessional act and sex is the primary topic of that act, but the power knowledge dynamic leads to the subject both speaking and being the site of that truth" (592). In the same way, truth is in the process of construction, it is never constant and always relative. Truth is relative and always in flux. Power creates truth and truth creates the power again according to Foucault. System creates power and that system also makes the truth. Every society has the system and many individuals are under control of that power. Religion, culture, law, social institutions all create system and power and the truth. Individuals are to be put under the power either by force

or by discipline. In Orwell's Novel *1984*, people are forcefully put under the power of political system of totalitarianism.

In course of human civilization and history the usual function of power relation does not work to control the situation and another power needs to be created. Pandemic, epidemic and war are such situations when such traditional power functions are disturbed and new power systems are to be formulated. Human beings as social animals have the characteristics of gathering, celebrating, dancing, feasting and so many communal works. In many functions public gathering is most preferred. These gatherings also have unique social and religious power functions and social truths. In course of human history, the society was under threat of such clinical problems of epidemic and pandemic which has threatened the traditional and historical power system. During plague pandemic in human history in European civilization millions of people were killed. The most effective non clinical method of controlling the pandemic to save human life is to break the chain of transmission by creating a new system of social power by maintaining self and public discipline as in the panoptic schema as defined by Foucault. Keeping the individual in certain physical distance, isolation as in panoptic cells, lock down, quarantine, clinical treatment is some of the new social power function to control and break the pandemic transmission chain. To maintain the self-discipline system, the metaphoric concept of Panopticism might work. We all are being watched closely by the authority and we need to remain in our own cell without contaminating others. "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" (6) is the concrete example in the novel which exemplifies that we all are being watched.

Panoptican Power and Discipline in *1984*

The novel *1984* by George Orwell is the product of dictatorial rule of Stalinism in Russia and Nazism in Germany. It was published in 1949 shortly after the Second World War and has pictured the possible development of authoritarian political system in the future of 1984. In the novel, the powerful dictator ruler has created the unlimited power and control over the people and the common people are under the threat and control. The novel presents the dystopian picture of life, culture, society and politics of the then Europe. The people in the dictatorial state are compelled to say and whatever the rulers command. People are forced to say peace for war, freedom for slavery, and ignorance for strength (Orwell, 30). The novel is set in Oceania, England with three states – Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia. Oceania is ruled by the totalitarian ruler called Big Brother who controls and keeps the people under the invisible Panoptican force like Thought Police and surveillance. Propaganda is created in the novel as a weapon to control people and their thought. Through propaganda people are politically

manipulated, institutionally controlled and monitored through media, instruments and types of communications (Hossain, 29). Through propaganda a type of power of surveillance is created in the novel as panoptic observance.

The main character in the novel is Winston Smith, 49 years old, lives in London and who is symbolically under control of the surveillance. He works in a government office and also writing a diary like book *The History of Truth*, but it is the tragedy that every truth is under the control of government. He cannot come out from his apartment and move around as throughout the city the posters are put saying “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU” (6). Government keeps clever eyes on every aspect of people’s life. Hidden cameras and microphones are put everywhere in the city. It is said that, “The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it [...] you were being watched at any given moment” (Orwell, 7). Government is watching outside and inside the home and TV screens are detecting the people’s activities secretly so that no one is free and everyone is closely being watched. People are not allowed to make friends, allowed to love, no dating, no sex, nothing at all. They all should support the government and they are not even allowed to switch off the Television. It is said everywhere to everyone that, “Al-ways the eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you. Asleep or awake working or eating, indoors or out of door, in the bath or in bed – no escape” (30). Very close Panoptican watch is made by the authority to every people in the country. Foucault’s concept of Panopticism is clearly visible here in the dictatorial system of government which is beautifully depicted by the Novel *1984*.

Winston falls in love with a girl named Julia. She is an attractive young lady, works as a mechanic in the same building where Winston works. Smith loves her as well as fears to love because of the Panoptican surveillance of the dictatorial government. Julia also loves him and secretly she notices her love towards him with the help of a paper. They challenge the government and love each other. With their secret love affair among danger and risk, against rule they want to revolt against the government and the Panopticism over the people like the prisoners. Another character in the Novel O’Brien who is the party member and an intelligent of the government also is acquainted with Smith but he fears with him because he guesses that O’Brien knows his thought of revolt and love it is because “the patrols do not matter, but the Thought Police matters” (6) is the beliefs that lurks in the mind set of every people. Smith could not make him the friend because of that same fear of Thought Police. Once O’Brien invites Smith in his apartment and Mr Smith and Julia go there. They talk and O’Brien gives

them a book to read. Police come and catch Smith and Julia red handed and takes them to the custody room no 101 in the Ministry of Love. They were punished severely and finally released in the condition not to love. Mr. Smith is forcibly made to take promise “Never again will you be capable of love, or friendship, or joy of living, or laughter, or curiosity, or courage, or integrity. You will be hollow. We will squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves” (272). It is the dictatorial Panopticon system to watch and control people in the country as proposed by George Orwell in the novel *1984*.

Bentham and Foucault only talked about the close observance over prisoners but Orwell's *1984* have created a wider surveillance over every common people all over the country. The ruler Big Brother is created in such a situation that everyone is under his close observation. Michael Yeo writes about Big Brother, “The belief that Big Brother's eyes and ears can reach even into the private domain Bentham delicately leaves for the “court above” makes for total Panopticism” (54). Orwell's Big Brother, Bentham's Court love and Foucault's Panopticon architecture are the similar concepts the arguments claim. This Big Brother, which has the omniscient power and watching power, is the invisible ruler over the people. Allegorically, this can be understood as a medium of discipline and system. In deep level, it is not only the dictatorial ruler but an invisible control to the people. In 2020/21 Corona Virus appeared as Big Brother in the world and warned the people not to go against natural laws and rules. Almost every country went to lockdown situation and everyone was inside the home like the situation of Winston in the Novel *1984*. So, in positive sense it should be understood as self-discipline, self-control and surveillance.

Winston is a representative character in the Novel *1984* as he is under the surveillance. But it can also be said that he is the most disciplined character in the state. In politics every rulers want to keep the people in domination softly or by force. It is the success of the ruler when they can keep the people in control and for dictators it is very common. They define it as the system of discipline and system. They want to put the people under some sort of discipline and Winston is the representative. James A Tyner writes, “For Orwell, a totalitarian system predicated on surveillance served to maintain discipline. Consequent was a regimented, predictable, hyper orderly society, one that negated human will, spontaneity and creativity. In short, discipline via corporeal control produced total conformity”(137). Through any means the rulers want to create discipline and good governance in their definition. There is also the argument that chain of command, law and order in the society, system and discipline is needed in every social governing too. For example during Corona Virus pandemic in the world in

2020/21 the self-discipline was maintained in the world during lock down in the countries. The virus was coming as the Big Brother in the world. So this Novel also reminds the self-discipline, self-control and self-governance as well.

Conclusion

The novel 1984 by George Orwell is a political, social and historical novel. The novel is strong in the use of allegory, language and political message. It is equally strong in the use of Bentham and Foucault's panoptic surveillance over the people. The novel clearly reveals that the dictatorial governments are so much strong that they can control the individuals by hooks and crooks. Winston the character in the novel represents the common people who are in the close surveillance by the invisible power of rule or the system. The invisible power of Big Brother in the novel is exactly similar with the observer from the tower in Foucault's Panopticism. Inside his own home, Winston is under the threat and fear of closely being watched by the modern gadget like television, telephone and others. Orwell has written this novel in 1949 A.D., but with the modern concept of CC Camera for the security observation purpose. Everything is under the observation of CC camera nowadays as it is in the novel in different form, but in similar content. Big Brother's watching and control over Winston and Julia is the real Panopticism as talked by Bentham and Foucault. This control and observation is of two types – power and discipline. Man is either controlled by power or by discipline and here in the Novel invisible and dictatorial power is controlling people as in Panoptican prison the criminals are observed and controlled. In positive connotation, this power is the discipline and system in the social functions. The novel is an allegory and positively it gives the message that everyone should be in strict self-discipline as in pandemic lockdown situation for some purpose but not always.

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