

# **The Empowering Indian Theatre: Assessing the contemporaneous Issue of Surveillance in the Control Society's through the Play *Untitled- 1*.**

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Modern man's life in this contemporary world of surveillance can most appropriately be defined as 'body, soul, and credit card' (Lyon 4). The control Society analyze its constituents, only as an array of coded numbers and letters. The precise details of the personal lives are processed, stored, retrieved and reprocessed within the huge databases, either by the nation state or by the corporations. The precise knowledge of being watched everywhere, and being unaware of what the authorities know about us and the lack of clarity with regard to the matter of sharing this knowledge about the individual with others, increase the dilemmas involved in the use of databases for processing the personal information. Though the modern type of surveillance had its origin in specific Institutions, as the quest for electronic verification intensified, it began to intrude into almost all areas of life. Being surveilled, is experienced by every single individual without any differentiation whether they lack or not the appropriate cards and numbers, though in a different way. In other words, the mere participation of modern man in any Social activity, counts upon his relationship with Electronic storage and communication devices, and more importantly on the information contained in the databases.

The role of power and its exercise at different layers of society, leading to resistance and Violence, adversely affecting the life of the powerless and their victimization have been discussed by many critics at the literary, political, cultural, and socio-economic levels. This research paper studies how the mass of men caught with in the power structures of the 'Authority', trying to establish a dominant ideology, resist the attempts of the authority at the physical, Social, cultural, emotional and sexual levels, to protect one's individual freedom of speech and expression. When power penetrates individual life by curbing freedom, the characters question and resist the ideologies of power structures, instead of getting tailored to imbibe the hegemonic ideology. The play *Untitled 1* by Annie Zaidi, question the authority's act of imposing unwritten rules and hidden ideologies both upon the individual and the Society. In reality, where Violence is omnipresent as it is inherent in a multitude of individual, institutional,

socio-cultural and religious practices of the contemporary society, memory also plays a significant role here. The delayed retrieval of the character's memories of the past makes their victimized life more miserable in the present.

Surveillance is a pattern of monitoring for the purpose of influencing, managing, or directing, by either observing from a distance by utilizing electronic equipments or interception of internet traffic, or by human intelligence gathering and postal interception. The authorities who favour surveillance points out that it helps in decreasing crimes by deterrence, observation, and reconstruction. Anyhow, the line between private and public is now- a – days as porous as tissue paper. Today, for the sake of security, we are deprived of our secured privacy. Covering a long distance from the days of human spies to the strange gadgets in Mission Impossible to microphones and drones to government funded agencies for National security with access to al telephone and internet transmissions, it can be safely concluded that privacy is an illusion today. In the play, Surveillance has two phases in itself. The first phase surveillance is often physical and spatial, involving centralized mechanisms of watching over subjects. The Panoptic structures function as architectures of Power, not only directly, but also through ( self-) disciplining of the watched subjects. The second phase surveillance is often networked and relies primarily on digital rather than Physical technologies. Finally the conceptualization of surveillance happens through dataveillance, access control, social sorting, peer- to – peer surveillance and resistance. By the datafication of Society, surveillance gets the physical combined with the digital.

The utter violation of privacy is depicted in the very first scene of the play where the protagonist Vishwas writing in his bedroom shuts his book in suspicion by hearing the noise of someone walking in. Though he is well aware of the fact that he is an artist and it is his function to dig his nose into the matters affecting the modern man's life along with mining into the 'self', he cautions Dina, his wife to: “ keep your voice down... Them. You. Down.” ( Zaidi, Act I, scene 1) He himself senses a dark place around the artist, at least around the interrogative attitude of his mind, created by the power structures of the Society. The close scrutiny of the authoritative structures fences the freedom of speech and expression, a condition faced by any writer in the modern scenario. Vishwas shifts on to a historical analysis wherein the Socrates was poisoned. He says “ They say “ Socrates chose to drink a cup of poison. It wasn't like he was

offered a choice. The prosecutor wanted the death penalty.” ( Zaidi, Act I, Scene 3) Infact, 'choice' is a trick word that plays at the hands of those with power.

Through an assessing of different institutions, the process of action in daily life is invaded with panoptical mechanisms of watching and being watched, and consequently of disciplining power. When everybody potentially seems to be under surveillance, people will internalize control, morals, and values- disciplining is thus a type of power, a strategy and a kind of technology. In this aspect of disciplinary society, power is dispersed and hidden in processes of conformity present in different places of Society. Because of these characteristics, discipline is not an exclusive machinery of the State rather, it moves across different institutions, links and prolongs them, making them converge and function in a new way ( Deleuze 19). Although this power operates somewhat independent from the judicial and government apparatus, it nevertheless requires institutions and the State, since it works through them- ' the State, the correctional institutions and Medical institutions ( need to) be regarded as coagulations of practices.' ( Valverde 18).

Satyajit, the investigating officer from the department of communications, who introduced intergenerational study for accessing the decision making habits of the people of their concern, questions Vishwas about the footnotes on history that he sent out last Thursday. The magnitude of the issue expands when he answers: “ In the end, we shall be nothing more, and nothing less, than the footnotes of history.” ( Zaidi, Act I, scene 3) The continuous scaling down of Vishwas' communication graph, makes the department suspicious of the sudden meetings that he host in his house with a limited number of people. Satyajit defensively points out the inability to believe his explanation while the graphs showcase only two points when coming into his conversation with his own wife for the past two weeks. The playwright effectively depicts the sickness of human spirit completely under surveillance in this post- political age. Vishwas feeling the officer probing too much into his privacy, tries to protect his personal space, cautioning him; “ The muses are tricky creatures. Slippery. You think you have tamed them. But no.” ( Zaidi, Act I, scene 3)

Foucault explains a phenomenon closely linked and resulting from the disciplinary process, is normation. By this he means the processes that force and create habits, rituals, and how things are done, thereby create norms of behaviour. In normation process, the norm is central. It

constitutes what one has to conform to and strive for; it is both standard and ideal ( Foucault 95). By shifting focus on to the individual rather than the overall Society, the individuals are continuously measured against the norm; they become fictional, representative, as they have to be registered and held against a fictional norm, rather than the real. In the process, the holder of power becomes less visible, and power structures get relocated and replaced among different institutions in which the individual behaviour is being watched.

Not only the writer, but his family too becomes subject of close scrutiny. While walking in an open space at night, Dina, Vishwas's wife is followed by the same officer, offering her a few 'choices' to prefer instead of walking.

SATYAJIT: wouldn't it be better to just join a gym?

You could also get one of these fully automated... It's got a tracker... in a crisis, .. there is someone who knows how to reach you (Zaidi, Act I, Scene 4)

Dina, understanding the restraints that these choices would place on her freedom denies them vehemently, and gives preference to her choice of walking. The communication departments philosophy- “Move your tongue to move the world”- is opposed by Dina by not paying heed to her continuously falling out graph. When she says that” My tongue is inside my head... it moves a lot.” ( Zaidi, Act I, scene 4), the department of communication, representing the monopolizing Nation- state, is seems to be more concerned about these 'invisible tongues' or 'frantic tongues', which though not cool or civilized, would exercise a measure of restraint, if let out. For Satyajit, the uncommon 'choice' of Vishwas' profession is itself a resultant of his genetic mutation- influenced by his parents who were both artists and academicians, making him vulnerable to many departments under the nation state. The authoritative influence also makes a look- see into the interspace between Dina and Vishwas. She walks forward being cautioned by the power structure that world exists only for those who exists.

The product or goal of these disciplining methods is to create docile bodies. This counts for more predictive and plannable societies in which docile bodies become units of information, and not communication. In the modern society, this format of disciplining is carried forth by the advent of scientific methods of registration, record- keeping, and normation, through continuous

examination and assessing. Docile individuals are just units of information to be moulded at the hands of those in power. Surveillance becomes a key concept here, as this moulding and reshaping is the result of the 'visibility'.

In the play, the memory is used as a tool to heal, blame, and legitimize Violence. Therefore, the memory of characters become a site of both constant struggle and identification, as it is an interpretative reconstruction influenced by many factors. The memorizing of events and incidents from the history by 'vishwas', becomes a tool for self- interrogation. The characters are always caught in a struggle for retaining the 'self' amidst the forceful exertion of the dominant ideology or the authority. The language and narration of incidents have a crucial role in the representation. The fragmentation of the self is a prominent technique in the play. A collaboration of self-reflectivity, irony, faction, intertextuality, and cross- cultural as well as cultural readings is available in the play, along with the playwrights experiment with memory techniques in multiple and unusual ways like postmodern dramatist. The play finally project how the implicit operation of power structures seems to influence the process of representation.

The playwright reminds us that many metaphors would arise from the stories that we tell about ourselves. Depicting the story of ancient Roman Mithridates VI, he tell the readers that poison is terrifying as death is delivered through the vehicle of trust. "Like suspicion; Like fear... it touches the next generation too." (Zaidi, Act I, Scene 5) To live under the complete surveillance of the nation- state is too poisonous, even for the generations to come as they too would face an intellectual death, trained to think alike the absolute power. Even the objective of communication between the immediate members of family happens for maintaining the flow of their respective graphs. In the current scenario, a 'like' and a 'comment' becomes necessary for establishing oneself socialized. Infact, the activities in social media defines one's earthly existence.

The condition of modern man under the surveillance state is depicted through the metaphor of poison. The poison used as a provision for unacceptable insects do have an impeding function with the nervous system; having an effect on the entire muscles and glands of the body. The interfering of toxins at the juncture of your system, jam the signals sent to- and- fro through it. This invokes a sense of complete eruption/ seizure. The intensity of this eruption will depend on the duration and dosage of these eradicating toxins. The creative mind, becoming infertile,

“fail to produce or the seed growing within you gets damaged.” (Zaidi, Act I, scene 7). Thus, the creative vision of the future becomes still born.

Violence is accessible to an extensive range of people and sometimes a violent act is considered rational if it reaches an end which defends that peculiar act of Violence. However, violence is an inescapable fact of human existence. Violence can be complicated in nature and is inseparably linked to the concept of power. Generally, violence has been categorized into visible or overt violence- something visibly happening in the physical world, recognized ; and invisible or covert Violence- less spectacular, but more dangerous with deep mental/ intellectual and emotional impact. The play cautions its spectators towards the self propagating nature of Violence through it. It in a way seems to conclude that only one form of Violence can cease another.

Vishwas gets continually cross- examined by Satyajit. On being continuously interrupted, Vishwas says that these interruptions chance him to get a flight back from fantasy to the planet Earth. The compulsions to produce within the restraints imposed by the authorities, tortures Vishwas intensely. Having not generated even a single book for the last two years disappoints the authority and puts him on the top of their close scrutiny list. It is the consistency of the citizens, especially with regard to their output, that is being demanded and rewarded the most, by the authority. Here, not only the products, but even the producers are commodified and is made to traverse at a pre- decided and fixed pace through the conveyor belt, designed especially for the purpose. Though Vishwas looks for intriguing subjects to write, Satyajit the median to the power structure, is never ready to outgo the normal temperature and shock the system. While Vishwas thinks about Mars going to be habitable location in future and extends the same idea towards people in search of a new land, wanting to build a new order, Satyajit cautions him to avoid unwanted influence and retain his own voice: “No jokes. No plots for future adventures. Save yourself. For the important stuff.” (Zaidi, Act I, Scene 8).

Anything in its extremity can be regarded as poison. An extreme idea can launch one imbalanced. The historical siting in the play projects Chandragupta Maurya felt off balance, because power was his poison of choice. But, certain toxins never destroy but always detain the scope or extent to reflect and think rationally. Certain extremist point of view makes one deprived of his/ her sense and raptures the entire balance. A lack of awareness of proportion, of

decorum. Such a person readily accepts orders and executes it ardently as he feels less pain in doing so. Thus, he/ she takes on the poison of obeying, renouncing his own truth.

Dina questions Satyajit's authority to search in their personal spaces. But, Satyajit confirms that the search is to assure whether Vishwas is writing on the grid or going off in his writing. The authority is keenly interested in looking into what its components are doing. Satyajit says that they are not bothered; "As long as it is not pornographic or disrupts the peace or break any of the laws." (Zaidi, Act I, scene 10). But Dina summons up that, each school has its own rules; "New schools imply the breaking or bending of norms." (Zaidi, Act I, scene 10) whereby Satyajit exists in a watchful silence.

The contemporary society can be called as a control Society rather than a disciplinary one, which is the resultant of new technologies and their connected methods of surveillance. Normation and internalization of 'doing good' are achieved through cameras, and citizens in any particular space can thus be moulded into behaving, according to the norm. Control societies de-individualization process evolve into a de-humanized one with in the process. The system of power is seen to lie less with the fundamental and formal institutions, and more with the ad hoc and informal networks; it works via representations that communicate and decide internally. As a result, the control societies not only exercise a different method of governing and as such form a fault-line in thinking about surveillance and the types of societies that surveillance creates.

The inability to be devoid of any proliferating presence of cameras or other 'watch-over' devices, the inevitability of official documentation as well as the resulting dataveillance and datafication of Society, has made the process of surveillance more perceptible. Simultaneously, the authentic and calculated nature of surveillance and its depth of intrusion into the private space, though said to be positioned within the protocols, makes it non-transparent except for a select participants at the authority. The silent audio- video recorders and the embedded sensors adds up to this invisible part of surveillance. A basic remedy of many issues of social concern makes everyone come under the close scrutiny of the 'Electronic- Eye'. However the same, instead of leveling the hierarchical structuring of the Society, infact increased the breach by privileging the powerful and reinforcing the discrepancies towards the marginalized.



Act Two starts with the trailing of Vishwas in the court. The judicial authority is represented in an abstract form, as a voice. Satyajit B., representing the State at the trial accuses Vishwas of numerous charges like- writing off the grid without communicating to any public agency and using automatic plot and word generator- “Infinite Monkey”; conducting meeting with non-family members deliberately to hide the actual meetings from the observers; publishing fifty stappled sheets of paper in handwritten format, which according to the norms of the dept. Of communication without a barcode can’t be considered either a book or booklet or a pamphlet; anonymous publishing of the same; digitally uploading the same while not making available to the internal grid; carrying graphic content within it without an advisory; creating a content deliberately obscure and confusing which generates public chaos and question the authenticity of the State- coming under the violation of different categories of act such as Public Safety Act, the Indecent Representation of Women and Children Act, the Conspiracy to create Disaffection Act and the Public Communications Act.

Vishwas decides to defend himself in the case, as he doesn’t want to cause any other citizen with good faith to suffer a moral crisis. He is well aware that moral crisis was never a matter of concern for the authority, even the judiciary, in a scenario where crisis as itself matters only to the material level. Also, the audience is made to witness the trial from the side of the judge, indicating the decision of the judge will be by- stander by the majority of spectators. The voice offstage, considering the magnitude of the case, takes up the charges of conspiracy and incitement of the citizens first. Satyajit points out that the work of Vishwas with neither a plot nor proper narrative and structure, is thoroughly rebellious, unruly and disordered. A number of disconnected reminiscences follow one after the other, even questioning the genre to which the work belongs. Being unable to classify the work into any of the standards set down by the authority, makes the State chaotic. Dina outrageously question the authority by posing herself in front of each and every camera within the vicinity. She speaks to the ‘Electronic eye’:

DINA: You must be bored? Or do you feel like the almighty?... You think you are the only one watching? I am watching You too. The difference between you and me is that

I can go away. I can shut my eyes. You are trapped. You think you have trapped me?

No, You have just trapped yourself. (Zaidi, Act II, scene 2).



Even inside the prison Vishwas' privacy is again intruded by the authority when he is questioned for not being in contact with his wife. . In the perspective of Satyajit, the State is trying to be humane with its prisoners whereas for Vishwas , the constant interrogation is hindering him from inhabiting his own truth. Satyajit poses an irony for his own name by calling Vishwas“a bit of a fraud.” (Zaidi, Act II, scene 2). Vishwas passionately claims himself to be inventive, which may vary to the extent of being a fraud according to the difference in perceptions, like how he is felt dishonest and abusive towards the power structure by some. In the play, Satyajit tries to make a deal with Vishwas- a reward of his freedom in exchange of the information about Kamal, the copier of his book. Unable to place one's self in moral crisis, Vishwas prefers to be a lunatic, by which anything he would say will be irrelevant or to be seditious, by which whatever said by him would be taken up with a suspicious eye. Since no eye contact happens between Vishwas, the writer and Kamal, his publisher but unauthorized by the State, Satyajit plots to testify one against the other.

Vishwas is denied the right to pursue his profession of a writer in the post- redemption period. He is advised not to write anything relevant either to the department of culture or communication. Though Vishwas agrees to accept Satyajit's offer if he could be publically acknowledged as the author of “ Untitled 1”, Satyajit denies it saying nobody can be recognized the author of a work that doesn't exist. The complete destruction of the creative mind is effectuated by the nation- state through its all encompassing power. Though Vishwas never becomes successful in winning over the authority of the monopolizing Nation-state, his oppositions towards it are never less in strength.

VISHWAS: You will read me,... you have been aching to be seen... And it is within you

... You keep reaching into other people's heads to try and grab it. To make

It tangible. Squeeze it in your fist... To feel whole by consuming the wholeness ....The other minds... I could be covering the walls of my prison cell with my own shit, even if I write In my own excreta, you would Still read me. ( Zaidi, Act II, scene 3).

Within this time Dina completely succumbs in front of the nation- state. Devoid of freedom and her own little space, Satyajit informs her of the sudden upraise of two red flags in her

communication graph by prolonging the actual time of thirty seconds to seven minutes for reading an article posted by the women' group ( indicating an element of violence) and by exposing the children of ten years to above age material. She desperately falls for the offer put forth by Satyajit by agreeing to help him in finding out Kamal. He advices Dina that only she can help her husband Vishwas out of the prison, by proving his insanity in front of the court and his habit of uttering meaningless words. She also confesses in front of the court that it was Kamal who insisted her husband Vishwas to publish his writing. Though Vishwas argues that it was he who insisted on “writing... about different tastes of ice-cream, depending on who was buying it.” (Zaidi, Act II, scene 5), all his arguments goes in vain. He desperately feels being silenced by offering the most prestigious fellowship of the State. He infers that sometimes too much light too blinds.

The text aims at deconstructing the existing standards, rationalizing, decentralizing the subject, character and inscribing realities and their subversion, projecting the self and its fragmentation, surveillance of the sensibility and related techniques, qualifying the play for a post modern political theatre in a post- political age. It makes a study on the impact of power, resistance and Violence, upon the characters and their psycho- Social impacts on the respective societies.

Without showcasing any improvement in the graph, even after getting released from the prison, Vishwas is visited again by Satyajit. Unable to apprehend the laws and regulations of the nation- stat, Vishwas is asked to make an appointment with the health facility for initiating a writing therapy wherein, he would be allowed to write whatever he wants and destroy it then and there. Thus, the investigating officer is getting suspicious of Vishwas' reluctance to get back to the normal. As the play ends, both exits the scene, failing the fundamental freedoms of individual speech and expression.

The concept of man lost in a world which has ceased to make sense and his voice not being heard is not a new theme. The sense of frustration and disillusionment which was a popular theme at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century continues even now in a different form. The contemporary world which is fraught with the horrors of wars, inundated with technology and products of mass consumption, affected by the manipulative power of mass media, the Nation- state and the newly emerged corporate powers, projects a totally different picture. The stance of

power is not only oppressive and negative as Foucault had opined, but also productive as its narration of incidents, events, community, or individual produces the intended knowledge, subject, truth, identity, and even reality. Today as we exist in a world devoid of individual freedom, where all social engagements are mapped, online interactions timed, moments of privacy precisely cautioned, every citizen constantly experiences surveillance, and the Nation-state or the power structure expects the citizens to be fine with it.

Deluze states that modulations happen in invisible or opaque networks that are unperceivable to individual citizens. As a result, surveillance also moves away from being a present and often physical force on individuals, to become more abstract and numerical ( Deluze 22). From watchwords in disciplinary societies to passwords in control societies, the point made by Deleuze in relation to surveillance is that individuals becomes less relevant as subjects of surveillance; it is no longer actual persons and their bodies that matter or that need to be subjected and disciplined, but rather the individuals representations. Where the Society is becoming fragmented, so does the individual.

The play *Untitled I* by Zaidi point at the intolerance of diversity and curbing of freedom by the power structures in the present world. The characters in the play are always daunted by the intrusion of power structures into both their ways of life and culture. The play reveals the political Indian theatre which is now gaining greater footage by trying to expose the conflict by exposing the hidden agenda of the nation-state. The play stand as an eye opener for the blinded public. The questioning of the whole issue of surveillance by placing it in a dystopian world shows the evolving narrative structure of the Indian Theatre. Moreover, projecting of the universal themes- beyond the geographical, demographic, linguistic, cultural, traditional, religious, and other diversified aspects of the nation, gives the theatre an International relevance especially in the present socio-politico- cultural context and portrays the potentiality of the Indian Theatre as a tool which is to be used as a 'Soft Power' of the nation.

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