

## **A Foucauldian Power Structure Analysis of *Goat Days***

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### **Abstract**

Benyamin, the notable Malayalam novelist has written *Aadu Jeevitham* in Malayalam and it has won Kerala Sahithya Akademi Award in 2009. The work has been translated into English by Joseph Kayippally, under the title *Goat Days*. The novel *Goat Days* is analysed in the light of Foucauldian power structure. It employs disciplinary power and panoptic surveillance for the analysis. Describing panoptic structure in the form of “desert prison”, the novelist tries to construct the way in which how power is attributed to a labour diaspora. In a disciplined society individual freedom is curtailed with the effect of application of power. The extort of individual freedom is visible in the work. Each activity of the victim was keenly observed by the arbab without his knowledge. The arbab created a feeling in his mind that he is always in a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.

**Key Words:** Labour Diaspora- Desert Prison- Panopticon- Disciplinary Power- Surveillance-self Disciplining

Benyamin, the notable Malayalam novelist has written *Aadu Jeevitham* in Malayalam and it has won kerala Sahithya Akademi Award in 2009. The work has been translated into English by Joseph Kayippally, under the title *Goat Days*. The novel is narrated in the first person narrative which portrays the life story of a labour diaspora named Najeeb.

Najeeb was an aspiring young man who desires to go abroad for a better living. He was a man who lived in the midst of poverty. In the railway station he met another labour diaspora named Hakeem from southern part of kerala. Both of them were received by an arbab (savior) at Soudi Airport and they were shifted to different masaras (house of goats). Agony of Najeeb began in the masara where he was ill treated by the arbab. Najeeb felt the masara as a “desert prison” where he was always observed by the arbab with a surveillance system. Finally he escaped from the “desert prison” with the help of Ibrahim Khadiri whom Najeeb sees as a messenger from God. Herein, Benyamin uses surveillance devices in the form of an observational device in the “desert prison” to explicate his views on disciplinary power which is exerted on individual that dehumanizes the individual freedom within a social hierarchized system of power relation.

In this work, panoptic surveillance acts as disciplinary power system over an individual, rather than disciplining a society. It acts upon individual freedom and leads to the dehumanization of particular person in the masara of Arabian country. The physical and mental torture which he faced in the masara is described by the victim. Foucauldian concept of panoptic surveillance and disciplinary power can be seen throughout the novel. As the novel tells the story of a labour-diaspora, there can be seen elements of power relations; the power relations between the owner of the masara (arbab) and the victim (Najeeb).

Foucauldian power is neither a force nor any capacity nor any authority. Foucault's view on power is that it is impersonal. Foucault views power as a set of relations. Power is attributable and it can be exercised by agents over other agents. The power relations always have an immediate hold upon the body. A body becomes productive only when the body becomes subjective.

Subjection could be obtained not only through violence but also without involving violence. But the power is exercised rather than it is possessed. It is a network and not a collection of isolated points each localized struggles induces effects on the entire networks. Struggle cannot be totalized. Power is everywhere and it embraces everywhere.

Foucault was very much interested in the ways in which power and authority functions, although large organizations were capable of exerting power. Foucault argued that power could be exerted on the micro level. In his view, group of ordinary citizens could be powerful entities in society. Najeeb, the ordinary man could feel the application of power everywhere even in the masara or in the police station. The body of this ordinary man was subjected to the power, but he feels the differences of application as Foucault's notion that if the body is productive and at the same time subjected. Also it is seen that, power in society is related to the type of dominant knowledge at the time and also to the types of discourse used. He states that, power relations are productive rather than destructive. He also advocates that if there is power there is resistance along with it. As Foucault observed, resistance is the only way to respond against the hierarchical power structure in a society, here in *Goat Days*, resistance of the person happens not in the form of violence; but in the form of silence.

Michel Foucault uses "panopticon" as a metaphor for modern "disciplinary" society and its pervasive inclination to observe and normalize. The modern form of punishment is just informed by and illustrated for Foucault by Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. It reverses the principle of a dungeon. It is building designed for complete, constant, anonymous surveillance of its subjects. Under the surveillance, never knowing if or by whom one is being watched, the subjective strained to resist any impulse of misbehavior. Thus the body is made to an object of knowledge and can be studied and completely individualized in every way available to the human sciences. The concept of the design is to allow an observer to observe all prisoners without the prisoners being able to tell whether they are being watched. It conveys what one architect has called the sentiment of an invisible omniscience.

Najeeb in *Goat Days* was a victim of panoptic surveillance. He was under the power of the arbab. He was always conscious that he was being observed but could not understand by whom or where he was being observed. Foucauldian concept of power becomes the central theme in *Goat Days*.

Benyamin explains in the novel, how a person becomes object and instrument for the exercise of power. Najeeb becomes the object and instrument for the exercise of power. Objectification of an individual is evident in the novel. Najeeb was treated as an object rather than a human being. Panopticon acted as a form of laboratory in *Goat Days*. Binoculars in the hands of the arbab become the instrument of surveillance. A scary figure present in the masara also becomes a part of the surveillance.

A way of self disciplining is illustrated in several part of the novel. Najeeb, the protagonist becomes self disciplined to the disciplinary power of the arbab. Arbab acts as the force of supreme power and Najeeb becomes the representatives of the powerless. Attribution of power by powerful over a powerless subject is well illustrated by the novelist.

Initiation of control of activity is the key element of the novel. For every activity in there, masara and arbab maintained a systematic order for Najeeb. Najeeb performed all duties of the masara in a systematic way. Though his life was hazardous, a systemic behavior is expected by the arbab from Najeeb. Such a systemic control is an indispensable part of a disciplinary power.

Najeeb's alienation and loneliness becomes the striking element of the novel. It conveys nostalgic emotions to the diasporic life. He always had reminiscence about his family and native land. Benyamin presents loneliness and alienation through Najeeb and transfers it to the minds of readers. By the brutal application of disciplinary power and self disciplining, the novelist could transfer the entire expectation of an ordinary Malayali about the peripheral life of gulf countries to the bitter experience of its deepest level.

Rude reality of "desert prison" and lonely young man's attempt to escape from it becomes the point of attraction in the work. The entire novel deals with the panoptic surveillance and the disciplinary power. *Goat days* portrays the representations of two forms of prison: one is the "desert prison" where as the other is an authentic prison with an authority. Representation of "desert prison" by Benyamin is in a brutal way whereas the authentic prison is represented in liberal way. The image of desert has the image of prison in Najeeb's mind. Benyamin presents desert as a prison throughout the novel. He gives an unpleasant image to the desert and transfer in to the mind of readers through Najeeb's voice.

In the work, *Goat Days*, panoptic surveillance acts to discipline an individual, rather than disciplining a society. It acts upon individual freedom of a labour diaspora named Najeeb. It leads to the dehumanization of particular person in the masara of Arabian country. The physical and mental torture which he faced in the masara is described by the victim. The victimized person describes the experience of surveillance as a panoptic system:

He shot at the sky with his gun, demonstrated the range of the binoculars, observed me from top of his vehicle whenever I went out, and drove around me when he felt that I had gone too far. I feared he would never let me escape from this hell. (100)

Najeeb was always under the surveillance of the arbab (savior). Binoculars in the hands of arbab and the vehicle which he used to patrol around the masara act as a form of surveillance. Najeeb had to perform his daily chores under the surveillance.

Najeeb's doings inside and outside the masara was always been controlled by the omniscient presence of the arbab. He had a fear in his mind that, he was always being observed by someone. So a fear has been generated in his mind that he would never escape from the arbab.

Panopticon was also a laboratory: it could be used as a machine to carry out experiments. Binoculars in arbab's hands function as a machine to carry out the surveillance. Arab was always wandering in his vehicle with his binoculars. With the binoculars he could trace Najeeb's locality. Masara and the region around masara that extends to a large portion were under his system of surveillance. Najeeb felt this desert as a prison. Foucault asserts that prison is a form of surveillance. According to him the aim of the prison is to impose a disciplinary power over the prisoners, to normalize them so they can be returned to the society. Here normalization means to condition Najeeb from a normal life which he experienced in his native land to a life what arbab desires in the masara. So here the life of an individual who reached in the desert aspiring for a better life fallen into the solitude of "desert prison" is presented. The conditioning happens here is through arbabs 'hidden eyes'. Such a process of conditioning can be seen in several instances of the incidents that happen in and outside the masara. For instance, once when Najeeb took goat for rearing, he noticed that one of the goats looked sluggish and weary. It was pregnancy fatigue. Najeeb stood to help the goat, mean while, the other goats were already scattered in the desert. As he returned, more punishment awaited, he was severely beaten and reproached.

Discipline "makes" individuals. It is the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and instruments of exercise. One of discipline's concerns is with producing docile, healthy bodies that can be utilized in work and regulated in terms of time and space. Discipline worked through a system of punishment and gratification. People could be punished, or they could punish themselves for various indiscretions. Disciplinary power, along with its accompanying discourses, progressively colonized various fields of society and the subject bodies that occupied them. In *Goat Days* Najeeb becomes object and instrument for the exercise of power. His first experience in masara with a scary figure gives evidence for the kind of surveillance and punishment from the authority. Najeeb describes him as:

He had matted hair like that of a savage who had been living in a forest for years. His beard touched his belly. He had on the dirtiest of Arab clothes. Also that horrible stink that can drive anyone away. (61)

On seeing Najeeb, the contorted figure was lamenting at Najeeb's fate and wailing. Then after, he became the guide of Najeeb for the daily chores in the masara.

Najeeb has become part of disciplinary power. He undergoes the process of self-disciplinary. He strictly adheres to the orders and laws of the arbab. Eventually he becomes part of goat life. In the process of taming himself to the goat life he made goats as his companions. He expressed his agony and emotions to them. He gave names to each goat in the masara that helped him to scold them and to make cuddling easier. People from Najeeb,s locality like Aravu Ravuthar, Marymaimuna, Indipokkar, Njandu Raghavan, Parippu Vijayan, Chakki, Ammini, Kausu, Raufat, Pinki, Ammu, Razia, Thahira, Pochakkari Ramani and public figures like Jagathy, Mohanlal and even EMS were part of his masara. Najeeb identifies goats' face with that of human. Najeeb named the goats not only by looking at their faces but also by relating their names to some character traits, their gait, the sounds they made and also by some incidents that reminded him about them.

Benyamin's *Goat Days* presents panoptic surveillance and its effect on individuals. The brutal application of disciplinary power and self-disciplining becomes evident in the novel. Harsh reality of the "desert prison" and the attempt of a young man to escape from "desert

prison” is the theme of the novel. The entire novel deals with panoptic surveillance and disciplinary power.

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