Surveillance Schools: Understanding From Michel Foucault Perspectives

Abstract:

Surveillance schools make use of modern technologies to keep an eye on children and their actions. These modern technologies include Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), fingerprint identification and RFID (radio-frequency identification). The main focus of this paper is to understand the impact of the modern techniques of surveillance on students in Dibrugarh District (Upper Assam) Schools from Michel Foucault perspective. Michel Foucault was a French philosopher and one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century. Discipline and Surveillance are the two core ideas of Foucault. He analyzed the emergence of modern institutions such as Schools that have played an increasing role in controlling and monitoring students. Power is coercive but also works in consents therefore the students in the schools learn to comply and behave under the supervision of the School authority. In Schools, the children function under strict supervision and surveillance. Under the stringent surveillance of the school authority the students end up being robots despite being innovators and creative. The schools operate in a more sophisticated discipline fashion similar to the prisoners in dungeons. The existence of surveillance helps to grab lawbreakers by recording their movement. Surveillance techniques are used to ensure that the school rules are followed. But Foucault believed that it has huge negative implications. He claimed that awareness of being observed stifles individuality and created conformity. People end up acting, thinking and being the same for fear of being caught out or being punished.

Key words:

Surveillance, Schools, Students, Foucault, Discipline, Power.

Introduction:

School is an institution that reproduces human societies which enables students to innovate and change. The Scholastic achievement of the student relies on the School environment. The School has a huge impact on the Socialization and cognitive development of the Student. Generally, students execute on the basis of School and classroom climate. In the papers, Indian education system are said to be comprehensive in nature but in reality the student’s improvement and progress are determined through his/her academic accomplishments. In this contemporary era in India the schools tend to overlook students emotional intelligence, reaction to life-stress and self-concepts. Nowadays most of the Schools in India use numerous new technologies which would constantly monitor the student’s activities. This encourages students to act artificially which results into decreasing social ties among the students. Such control mechanisms in this modern era discipline our behaviours through constant surveillance. Various educational institutions in Dibrugarh District (Upper Assam) are adopting diverse technologies to constantly monitor the student’s activities. Schools are gradually becoming technologically advance and creating surveillance cultures in the educational system. Shivani Nag stated that, “The very imagination of a classroom that has CCTV cameras and mikes fixed in them appears

nightmarish, irrespective of whether I try to imagine it from the location of the student or a teacher. The very mention of cameras recording and streaming the classroom transactions live brings to my mind an image of a reality TV series where nothing appears to be spontaneous and each participant seems to be performing for the cameras. For a moment, try to imagine you as a teacher in a classroom that has a CCTV installed and whose recordings are being viewed live both by the school principal and parents. What kind of a pedagogic space can unfold in such a situation? Can a teacher feel inspired to experiment, considering that some experiments would succeed and some may even fail? Can a teacher feel free to encourage a passionate discussion or a participative group activity in the class, considering that the enthusiasm generated will make her look as less in 'control' of her class? Will a teacher ever be able to relax and take a pause or share a joke, a song, a story that may not always have a direct bearing to the contents of the syllabus, fearing that she may be seen as wasting time or engaging students in purposeless activities? Can a teacher be seen as encouraging students to critically reflect on a superstition or a social practice entrenched in patriarchy or casteism, knowing that some parents who still hold on to these are watching her. The children may have it worse. No more opportunities to play innocent pranks or share secrets with friends that are tightly held. No more the space to err and be guided to learn from them. In an age where both school and home have become active advocators of hyper-competitiveness, imagine the plight of a child when the surveillance gaze of the parents fall on the- "Why did you not raise your hand when the teacher asked that question?", "Why didn't you answer the question the way I had made you rehearse at home?" "Why were you looking out when the teacher was teaching", "Why are you sitting in the second last row instead of the first row?" Educational spaces should encourage in us self-reflexivity – an ability to examine our own actions, the underlying assumptions and their impact in a larger relational context. CCTV cameras, however, can only encourage us to be cautious 'for the while' the other is watching us." [2] [2: Nag, S.(2018, January 29). CCTV should have No place in School Classrooms. Communist Party Of India(Marxist-Leninist) Liberation. Retrieved from cpiml.org/first-page-category/.../cctv-should-have-no-place-in-school-classrooms/ NOTE: The Chief Minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal ensured parents to provide access to the CCTV footage in the classrooms to assure safety of their children.]

Delhi-based Lawyer Apar Gupta said on the Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal's plan to install CCTV cameras in Schools would disobey on Children's Civil Rights, following India's Supreme Court decision in August 2017 to make privacy fundamental rights for both Children and adults. [3] [3: Subramanian, S.(2018, January 20) India installs CCTV in Classrooms after brutal Crimes. The National. Retrieved from https://www.thenational.ae/.../india-installs-cctv-in-classrooms-after-brutal-crimes-1.69...]

Michel Foucault approach:

Michel Foucault was a French philosopher born in 1926. He was a multidisciplinary Scholar. He stated that one of the techniques of regulatory modes of power was the Panopticon. In his work "Discipline and Punish" refers to "panopticon" as icon of surveillance and disciplinary society. Firstly, we need to understand Bentham who designed hypothetical prison to understand Panopticon. He explains panopticon as circular building with tower from where the prisoners would be constantly under surveillance. Foucault realized that the panoptican is more than a building. His idea of the panopticon is on systematic disciplining and controlling of the population through hidden forces. Instead of using violent methods to regulate the citizens in

monarchical states centuries ago, such as torture, placing prisoners in dungeon, but modern democratic state use various technologies to regulate its citizens. Therefore, modern institutions, such as schools were built in a fashion where the students could be monitored and make out who is doing what under constant supervision. His argument is that discipline is used to construct non-democratic power relation in a democratic society. Discipline in schools is operating in a fashion that restricts students to act freely. Small technology (CCTV) regulates and makes students behave in a fashion which is conducive to the school authority. The school authority which decides how students should dress, walk, act and talk is a certain kind of discipline. Surveillance in School encourages self- disciplining among the students that restrict them to act freely as per to their wish.

Avjit Pathak(2018) in one of his insightful work “India’s Schools need the light of inner Discipline, not the Militarisation of Consciousness” argued that “With hierarchical observation, normalising judgment, time tables and examinations, discipline, Foucault said, establishes constant visibility over us, works on the depths of mind and consciousness, and produces docile(yet ‘productive’) bodies that receive commands almost instinctively. Yes, from Jeremy Bentham’s ‘panopticon’ to the latest CCTV camera, the technologies of discipline are everywhere- from military barracks to schools. It is not that this power discourse is bad. After all, power generates knowledge, and each regime of truth has its own discourse of power. Yet, through Foucaultdian eye we see the other side of the discipline- the ‘military dream of society’.” [4] [4: Pathak, A.(2018, July 24). India’s Schools Need the Light of Inner Discipline, Not the Militarisation of consciousness. The Wire. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/amp/s/thewire.in/education/pmo-hrd-sainik-school-model-militarisation-education/amp/]

Pathak stated that the present educational system must not encourage coercive disciplining, but it must polish the creativity and critical analysis of the students. Strict surveillance results into mechanized and subservient outlook of the students.

Denisse Cante in her pioneering work “Schools Have Become Prisons” she stated that “In the book, Discipline and Punish, Michel Foucault describes how people become domesticated by being put into institutions and they can eventually become tame bodies. A few measures used to organize people are by controlling their space, controlling their time, and constant supervision. Due to this, at best these children will cut their misconduct and behave as told, but they will forever have issues interacting with others, thinking for themselves and lack personality/individuality. When an individual has become too disciplined they are no longer themselves but instead robots of the social order. For a nation that takes pride for being the land of free, we seem quite controlled.” [5] [5: Cante, D. (2016,17 February), Schools Have Become Prisons, Your Philosophy Class. Retrieved from https://medium.com/your-philosophy-class/schools-have -become-prisons]

The Hindu Business Line on 13th September 2018 reported that the High court of Delhi declared that having CCTV cameras in classrooms is not wrong and children right to privacy would not be affected. While, some of the professors are against the installation of CCTVs and online streaming of classrooms as it does not create a trust, creative, innovative and good learning environment. Some teachers had express their apprehension saying that such continuous surveillance will take away joy of teaching. The fact they are being watched all the time will make teachers and student both uncomfortable. Therefore, the installation of CCTV cameras in educational institutions is an ongoing debate.

Leia Clancy and Sam Goodman maintained that “Eroding standards in Schools and deteriorating discipline are down to a broken society and the failure of the education system. The fact is that we are whatever the generation before us has produced. If you criticise us, we are your failures; and if you applaud us we are your success, and we reflect the imperfections of the society and of human life. If you want to reform the education system, if you want to raise the education standards, then watching children every hour of every day is not the answer. The answer is to encourage students to learn by creating an environment in which they can express their ideas freely and without intimidation”. [footnoteRef:6] [6: Clancy & Goodman.(2009, june 3), We don’t need CCTV in our Classroom, The Guardian. Retrieved from theguardian.com]

The objective of the Study:

1. To understand school surveillance using Foucault lens
2. To study the impact of School surveillance on students

Research methodology:

Both primary and secondary data were collected for the research. Primary data were collected mostly by personal interviews. The study undertaken was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. It is Qualitative in nature because some data and personal experiences cannot be quantified. Likewise, the qualitative study does not capture the entire study I have done, thus I choose quantitative study as well .The data for the study was collected using a semi-structured interview schedule. The study was confined to Schools of Dibrugarh district (Upper Assam). For this research purposive sampling has been used for drawing the participants. There were total 24 respondents.

- Male Students 6
- Female Students 6
- Teacher 6
- Parents 6

Data Analysis and interpretation:

Surveillance system in India is gradually increasing in Schools. Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan stated that “The importance of education is not only in knowledge and skill, but it is to help us to live with others.”

Santosh Kumar Behra mentioned in one of his pioneering work on Radhakrishnan that, “The meaning of education is to emancipate the individual and we need the education of the wholeness- mental, mental, physical, intellectual and spiritual. He did not want to educate the children and youths of the country for their self-interest and self-aggrandizement, but for the natural development and prosperity. Radhakrishnan’s educational philosophy is based on the principles of universal love and humanity, mutual help and cooperation and self-sacrifice. [7] [7: Behra,S.(2015,March). Educational Thought of Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS)]

The comparison between prisons and schools was mentioned by the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1995) said, “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks,

hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" Students in Schools are expected to act in scrupulous ways at all times, and under regular surveillance of the School authority. Every student performs same routine and in a same way. This is how the student's heterogeneity has been ironed out and transformed into homogeneous population. Every student behaves in a similar way with adherence to the school authority.

Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar stated in one of his insightful works that, "Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's decision to install close-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in all State government school classrooms has apparently been triggered by violence against children in school premises in and around Delhi. This was an initiative to make whole system transparent and accountable as well as to ensure safety of kids. But it has come across criticism from some academics and lawyers cautioning against generating a culture of surveillance. Dhruv Rathee urged the government to reconsider the move. He claimed that every child deserves right to privacy. This constant fear in children will hamper their development. Real time surveillance is a dystopian nightmare. A lawyer stated that a real time video tracker in school will lead to policing of children not to prevent crimes but their moral choices and behaviour. Eg. Social interaction. It will condition children into fearful client not full individual. Constant monitoring in classroom can turn teachers into nervous wrecks." [8] [8: Bhatnagar, G.(2018,January 18). Kejriwal's Move to Install CCTV in Classrooms Raises Concerns about Impact of Surveillance. The Wire. Retrieved from thewire.in]

In the research out of 24 respondents, 21 respondents have CCTV cameras at their schools. The rest 3 respondents belong to government schools. Therefore, we can understand that private educational institutions are adopting new technologies at a fast pace compared to government schools in Dibrugarh District (Upper Assam).

Respondents replied to the question, do you support CCTV at Schools?

- Yes 24
- NO

Source: Interview

Throughout the interview, it can be understood that students, teachers and parents are not against surveillance at schools. But privacy of the teachers and students must be taken into consideration. The prudent approach would be taking into account both the pros and cons of the CCTV cameras, as Students accomplish more when learning is full of ecstasy. The productivity of the students would decrease when they are chained and loaded with monotonous routine.

Do you support CCTV at Classrooms?

- YES 6
- NO 4
- BOTH 14

Source: Interview

All the parents are supportive towards installing CCTV cameras at Classroom for the security and enhancement of their children. Out of 6 Teachers in the interview, 4 teachers were against

CCTV in the classroom. Miss Rohini (named changed) said, “Teaching becomes boring when we are constantly under supervision of the Principal, both the teachers and students become spurious.” Mr. Deep (named changed) conveyed that “Due to surveillance in schools Students have become more real and expressive in the virtual world through WhatsApp, Twitter, Youtube and Facebook. Social media becomes more tempting for them.” Rest of the respondents were in paradox as the CCTV cameras has both pros and cons. Mrs. Anu (name changed) stated that “CCTV cameras is essential in corridors and other premises of the schools for safety purpose, but we have to understand School beyond safety, I am not comfortable as I cannot get close to my students even when I find them in a trouble. Even in staffrooms I cannot express myself to my colleague. Therefore, we end up being artificial all day long.”

Conclusion:

Due to the stringent surveillance the inner world of the students are generally left unexplored as it increases fear among the students. The surveillance breed an uncomfortable environment for both the students as well as teachers. The surveillance is not necessarily bad but increasing surveillance might decrease emotional connections among the students and teachers. CCTV cameras are essential to monitor the actions to improve the safety standards but we also need to questions that “Can students and teachers behave natural in class? Is it like not trusting teachers and students and spying their movements?”

Technology has altered the way in which we gather, network, and stay in touch with one another. Students have become more isolated, socially. The increase in the use of Surveillance in Schools have dragged students away from traditional social settings, neighborhoods, voluntary associations and public spaces that have been coupled with outsized and diverse hub of networks. The communitarian way of life, which was core of our value system, has given way to atomized individuality. It is true that technological growth is important for development but the development must be sustainable and increase moral values. In the present scenario, the minute technologies are disciplining and controlling our spiritual values which I would like to denote as “Conceit of the Technology”.

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