

WALLS, PURITY, AND DIGITAL CONTROL: SURVEILLANCE, GENDER, AND SPATIAL POLITICS IN PRAYAAG AKBAR'S *LEILA*

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Abstract

This paper examines how Prayaag Akbar's *Leila* reimagines surveillance through the intertwined frameworks of gender, spatial segregation, and ideological control. Moving beyond traditional models of surveillance that emphasize visibility and observation, the novel constructs a dystopian landscape where surveillance is embedded within the architecture of everyday life, through walls, gated communities, purity codes, and social divisions. The paper argues that surveillance in *Leila* operates not only through digital mechanisms but also through spatial regulation and patriarchal norms that discipline the female body and identity. By analysing the intersections of surveillance, gender, and space, this paper demonstrates how the novel critiques contemporary socio-political realities in India, where technological monitoring merges with cultural practices of exclusion and control, including those structured by caste and religious difference. The paper contributes to emerging discussions on surveillance realism by defining it as a literary mode that captures the lived, embodied, and spatial experience of surveillance beyond algorithmic systems, locating it within everyday practices of power.

Keywords

Surveillance, Spatial Politics, Gender, Segregation, Surveillance Realism, Behavioural Governance, Habitus

Introduction

Surveillance has increasingly become an everyday condition, embedded not only in digital technologies but in social, spatial, and cultural structures. Contemporary fiction reflects this transformation by portraying surveillance not merely as a system of observation, but as a pervasive force that shapes identity, relationships, and lived experience. In this context, literary texts provide a crucial space for examining how power operates beyond visible institutions, extending into the textures of ordinary life.

Prayaag Akbar's *Leila* offers a compelling representation of this shift. Set in a dystopian future marked by rigid segregation, the novel imagines a society divided by walls, governed by

purity codes, and sustained through both technological and ideological control. While the narrative includes elements of digital monitoring, its most powerful critique lies in how surveillance is spatialised and gendered. Control is exercised not only through technological systems but through physical boundaries, social norms, and patriarchal structures that regulate movement, behaviour, and identity.

This paper situates *Leila* within the emerging framework of surveillance realism, a mode of literary representation that moves beyond abstract or purely technological models of monitoring to depict how surveillance is lived, embodied, and internalised. Surveillance realism, as proposed here, is distinct from dystopian realism and from existing analyses of surveillance capitalism in important ways. While dystopian realism typically extrapolates from present conditions to imagine future regimes of control, often emphasising large-scale authoritarian structures and systemic collapse, surveillance realism shifts the focus to the experiential and the everyday. It is less concerned with speculative futures than with how surveillance is already embedded within lived social relations, shaping behaviour, perception, and identity in intimate and often imperceptible ways. At the same time, unlike frameworks such as *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, which foreground the role of digital infrastructures, data extraction, and corporate power in shaping behaviour, surveillance realism attends to the ways in which technological systems intersect with pre-existing social hierarchies, including gender, caste, and spatial segregation. Rather than privileging algorithmic control alone, it highlights how surveillance operates through the combined force of material environments, cultural norms, and embodied practices. In doing so, it reorients surveillance studies toward the textures of everyday life, where control is not only imposed but inhabited and reproduced.

Recent critical engagements with *Leila* reflect growing scholarly interest in these concerns, though with certain limitations. Existing scholarship has largely focused on its dystopian representation of authoritarian nationalism, religious majoritarianism, and the politics of exclusion in contemporary India. Critics have read the novel as a critique of fundamentalist ideology and socio-political precarity, emphasising its portrayal of segregation, marginalisation, and the erosion of individual freedoms. Other studies situate *Leila* within the framework of dystopian and speculative fiction, examining its engagement with identity, caste, and patriarchal control, as well as its depiction of surveillance and resistance. Additionally, some scholars have explored the novel in relation to data-driven governance and technocratic control, interpreting it as a reflection of emerging regimes of behavioural regulation and digital surveillance. While these readings offer valuable insights, they tend to prioritise either ideological critique or technological surveillance, leaving relatively underexplored the ways in which surveillance operates simultaneously through space, gender, and everyday social practice.

This paper addresses this gap by arguing that *Leila* redefines surveillance as a spatially embedded and gendered system of control. It proposes surveillance realism as a literary mode that captures how surveillance is lived, embodied, and internalised within everyday structures of power. By analysing the intersections of spatial regulation, gendered discipline, and digital governance, the study demonstrates how the novel constructs a multi-layered network of control that extends across environment, body, and consciousness. At the same time, it highlights how these mechanisms are intertwined with historically rooted structures of hierarchy, including caste and religious difference, which inform the ideology of purity and exclusion.

By foregrounding these dimensions, the paper not only expands existing readings of *Leila* but also contributes to broader debates in surveillance studies, literary theory, and postcolonial criticism. It ultimately argues that the novel invites readers to reconsider surveillance not as a

distant or purely technological phenomenon, but as an intimate and pervasive condition embedded within the everyday practices of contemporary life.

Plot Outline: *Leila*

The narrative follows Shalini, whose life unfolds within a society structured by division and control. The city is sharply segregated into unequal zones. The East Slum appears as a space of overcrowding and deprivation, described as “a river of blue and black tarpaulin roofs fed by a monsoon of migrants” (226). In contrast, privileged sectors exist under the Skydome, where “the dome makes the air sweet. Empty” (245). These spaces are not merely geographical but hierarchical, determining access, safety, and identity.

Control is maintained through coercion and surveillance. Authority operates arbitrarily, as individuals are “Men, women, they’re grabbing them off the road and tossing them into a blue van.” (225). Such moments reveal that surveillance is enacted not only through observation but through direct intervention in bodily movement.

The system also produces deep inequality. Sapna’s remark,

‘Remember that,’ she tells her daughter. ‘Remember this woman. The Towers is where they put high- borns. Sffffllllt. The people who broke their rules. Sffffllllt. Still they get big, big buildings . . . Our crime is being born. We don’t get anything. We don’t deserve it’ (233-234).

“Our crime is being born”, captures how marginalisation is naturalised. At the same time, surveillance extends into the body, as individuals are subjected to invasive searches and constant scrutiny. Shalini’s experience reflects how power operates simultaneously through space, the body, and the psyche. Despite these conditions, Shalini’s emotional life remains anchored in her daughter. Her repeated reflection, “It breaks my heart that Leila has grown up like this” (227), signals the persistence of affect in a system designed to erase personal bonds. Memory becomes a fragile yet significant site of resistance.

Surveillance Beyond Technology

Traditional models of surveillance, particularly those associated with Michel Foucault, emphasise visibility and the internalisation of observation. However, *Leila* presents a more complex structure in which surveillance operates through multiple interconnected dimensions: space, the body, and digital systems. However, as the preceding analysis of *Leila* demonstrates, contemporary surveillance exceeds this framework. It operates not merely through observation but through the organisation of space, the regulation of bodies, and the modulation of behaviour across interconnected systems.

Surveillance and Space

In *Leila*, surveillance is embedded in spatial organisation. The division of the city into segregated zones determines where individuals can live and move. The East Slum’s expansion, “squat and wet, through the eastern quadrant” (226), marks marginalisation as a spatial condition.

This understanding of space aligns with the work of Henri Lefebvre, the French Marxist theorist who reconceptualises space not as a neutral backdrop but as a social product shaped by power relations. As he argues, “Space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships” (*The Production of Space*, 73). Lefebvre’s formulation clarifies how space in the novel functions as an active agent that organises hierarchy, access, and exclusion. This spatial logic is further

reinforced through practices of regulated entry, where bodies are searched, classified, and disciplined, demonstrating how movement across spaces is tightly controlled.

Such structures are not only externally imposed but also internalised, as Shalini begins to interpret her own past through the ideological framework of the system, revealing how conditioning transforms external surveillance into self-regulation. Surveillance, therefore, operates not merely through observation but through the production and experience of space itself, embedding control within both the environment and the subject's consciousness.

Importantly, the ideology of purity that underpins these spatial divisions is not abstract but resonates with historically embedded structures of caste and religious segregation in India. While the novel does not always name these categories explicitly, its logic of contamination, exclusion, and hierarchical belonging echoes these social formations. Surveillance, therefore, intensifies existing systems of hierarchy rather than replacing them.

Surveillance and the Body

Surveillance in *Leila* is profoundly gendered. The female body becomes a primary site of regulation, subjected to both discipline and violation. This dynamic is evident in the invasive search Shalini undergoes, where her body is treated as an object of inspection.

While Michel Foucault describes how power produces “docile bodies,” Sandra Bartky highlights how such discipline is intensified for women. In *Leila*, this gendered dimension is explicit. The inspection is not merely a security measure but a ritual of domination that enforces submission. When Bartky asks, “Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the “docile bodies” of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men? (65) she is pointing to the ways in which women are subjected to forms of regulation that are not merely parallel to those imposed on men but are **more intimate, continuous, and body-focused**. Bartky extends Michel Foucault's model of discipline by foregrounding its gendered specificity, arguing that “the disciplinary practices that produce a ‘docile body’ in women are peculiarly feminine” (*Femininity and Domination* 65-66). This formulation underscores that women are subjected to forms of regulation that are more intimate, continuous, and body-focused, thereby producing a distinctly gendered mode of embodiment.

This insight is directly applicable to *Leila*, where the regulation of women's bodies is not abstract but violently material. The invasive search Shalini undergoes,

She puts her hand to the lips of my vagina, slides rubber fingers inside and deep and once all the way around, a rough forefinger over the tiny, soft ridges. Then she's out. She nods at the other two and walks away. I see her surreptitiously sniffing the gloves before peeling them from her hands (251).

Such moments produce compliance through humiliation and bodily intrusion, demonstrating that surveillance in the novel is not gender-neutral but operates through what Sandra Bartky identifies as specifically gendered disciplinary practices. The female body becomes the primary site upon which power is inscribed, transforming surveillance into an embodied experience that enforces submission, vulnerability, and self-regulation.

Moreover, Bartky's warning that ignoring these gendered forms of subjection “perpetuate[s] the silence and powerlessness” (65) of women resonates with the novel's broader depiction of a system in which women's experiences are normalised, unspoken, and structurally erased. The absence of resistance at the level of discourse, combined with the normalisation of such practices, ensures that control is not only externally imposed but also internally sustained.

In this way, *Leila* dramatizes Bartky's argument by showing how disciplinary power, when gendered, produces a specifically **feminine modality of embodiment**, one that is compliant, exposed, and constantly regulated.

This process is reinforced through normative frameworks of gender, as articulated by Judith Butler, who argues that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" (*Gender Trouble*, 43). In *Leila*, such regulation operates through everyday practices that discipline women's behaviour and bodily conduct. This is evident when Shalini recalls the policing of intimacy within her own household:

'That's different. Not this. There has to be some distance. Propriety. Who knows what's been in her mouth.' She squeezed my forearm tighter, eyes big as a hunting cat. 'They have so many diseases. Stop all this. Promise me'(229).

The above passage is doing far more than expressing personal discomfort, it reveals how **purity ideology, class anxiety, and gendered control converge at the level of the body**. At the surface, Dipanita's objection, "there has to be some distance. Propriety", frames intimacy as a matter of etiquette. But the language quickly shifts from *propriety to contamination*: "Who knows what's been in her mouth. . . They have so many diseases." This movement is crucial. It shows how **social hierarchy (employer vs. domestic worker)** is naturalised through a **biological discourse of pollution**, where the working-class body is imagined as inherently unsafe. Affection, kissing a child, is recoded as risk.

This aligns closely with Judith Butler's idea that the body is regulated through repeated norms. What appears here as a single reprimand is actually part of a **larger regulatory framework**: it dictates how a woman (Sapna) may use her body, where her affection is permissible, and how close she may come to a "higher" body. The instruction to "stop all this" is not just behavioural correction; it is the enforcement of **social distance through bodily discipline**.

At the same time, the passage resonates with Sandra Bartky's critique of disciplinary practices that shape women's bodies. Sapna's body is not only classed but also **gendered as serviceable yet controlled**, she may clean, nurture, and care "She washes her bum too"(229), but she must not cross into emotional or physical intimacy that would blur hierarchy. Her role is thus tightly scripted: **care without closeness, labour without touch that signifies equality**.

What makes the scene especially significant is its **internalisation by Shalini**. Although she initially resists, "What's the problem?"(229), she later admits that what unsettled her was "the thought of her saliva on my daughter" (229). This marks the transition from external policing to **self-surveillance**. The ideology of purity infiltrates her imagination, transforming an affectionate act into a site of anxiety. In this sense, the passage exemplifies how surveillance in the novel is not merely imposed from above but **reproduced within intimate, domestic spaces**.

Ultimately, the moment exposes how **the female body becomes a contested site where class, purity, and control are negotiated**, and how even love is regulated by invisible yet deeply internalised boundaries.

Similarly, institutional control over women's bodies is normalised through routine practices, as Shalini observes that entrants into high sectors must undergo scrutiny

So I'm to strip here, like the servants who enter the high sectors each morning. No problem. I pull the kameez over my head and hand it to the woman. She tosses it to a vacant chair. Another guard stands up now and walks to the front. As I'm unlacing my salwar, this woman upturns my

handbag, scattering the contents on to a long folding table. She calls out each object's name and a description, typed by a third uniform into a loud, labouring computer. The guard unwraps my sandwich, examines it, throws it in the trash. I'm in the middle of the tent in my underwear. I feel fat at my thighs, cold and exposed. 'That also,' the guard says. 'All of it.' Even upright she reaches my chin, not more. I unhook my bra and pad slowly to the chair over which my salwar-kameez is strewn. I drop the bra on the bundle and slide off my panties (250).

Indicating how surveillance is embedded in daily movement and access. These instances demonstrate how gendered norms are enforced not only through overt coercion but through repeated social expectations that regulate touch, proximity, and bodily presence. In Butler's terms, identity is thus produced through the reiteration of such norms. Surveillance, therefore, becomes embodied, as women internalise and reproduce these codes in their everyday lives.

Digital and Bureaucratic Surveillance

In addition to spatial and bodily control, surveillance in *Leila* operates through digital and bureaucratic systems. This reflects what Shoshana Zuboff describes as behavioural governance, where systems monitor and shape actions. Similarly, Gilles Deleuze conceptualises control as continuous rather than confined to specific institutions.

Zuboff's concept of behavioural governance highlights how systems monitor and shape behaviour, while Deleuze's notion of control societies emphasises continuous modulation rather than fixed enclosure. In *Leila*, this logic is embedded in everyday practices of identification and controlled mobility: "I flashed my identification card as the bus entered a lower gate. Once we were safely inside, I began to take deep lungfuls. "You won't be able to tell,' I told Riz, giddy, happy, 'the dome makes the air sweet. Empty. Like it used to be before the walls.'" (245) signalling how access is mediated through bureaucratic verification. Similarly, entry into elite zones is tightly regulated, as even visitors are subjected to scrutiny and procedural control before being allowed passage, demonstrating how identity is continuously checked, recorded, and authorised.

At the same time, the novel reflects Gilles Deleuze's concept of "societies of control," where power is no longer confined to fixed enclosures but operates through flexible, ongoing modulation, what Deleuze describes as a system in which "one is never finished with anything" (*Postscript on the Societies of Control* 4). In *Leila*, surveillance extends beyond bounded institutions into a continuous process of monitoring and adjustment, where movement across sectors, access to resources, and even personal encounters are subject to constant regulation. These mechanisms do not disrupt existing hierarchies but reinforce them, ensuring that divisions of purity, class, and gender are maintained through both technological systems and social practice. Surveillance, therefore, emerges as a dynamic and pervasive force, operating not only through visible restrictions but through an ongoing, adaptive control of behaviour and possibility.

Limits of Surveillance

Despite its reach, surveillance in *Leila* is not absolute. As James C. Scott suggests, resistance often takes subtle forms. In the novel, memory and emotional attachment function as sites of resistance. Shalini's persistent recollection of her daughter resists erasure. Her inner life remains partially inaccessible to the system. These moments reveal that surveillance, while pervasive, cannot fully capture human experience.

Finally, the novel foregrounds the possibility of resistance within surveillance systems, complicating any notion of total control. As Michel Foucault argues, “where there is power, there is resistance” (*The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, 95), indicating that power relations are inherently unstable and generative of counter-practices. This perspective is extended by James C. Scott, whose formulation of “everyday resistance” identifies dispersed, often imperceptible acts, memory, silence, endurance, as modes through which subordinated subjects contest domination (*Weapons of the Weak*). In *Leila*, resistance emerges not through overt rebellion but through interiority, where affect and memory function as sites that remain only partially accessible to surveillance. Shalini’s persistent recollection of her daughter, her refusal to relinquish that bond despite institutional erasure, suggests a form of resistance embedded within consciousness itself. Even her imagined conversations with Riz and her compulsive return to the past signal an insistence on meaning that exceeds regulatory frameworks. In this sense, the novel locates resistance within the very processes that surveillance seeks to discipline, revealing the limits of its reach.

Taken together, these dimensions suggest that surveillance in *Leila* is not a singular or self-contained mechanism but a layered and internally differentiated system operating across multiple registers. It is spatial in its organisation, as segregated sectors and controlled environments structure access and belonging; gendered in its discipline, as the female body becomes a primary site of regulation; digital in its operations, as identity systems and checkpoints mediate movement and behaviour; and ultimately incomplete in its reach, as interior life resists full capture. This integrated framework allows for a reconceptualisation of surveillance not as a static apparatus of control but as a dynamic and adaptive formation, one that shapes, constrains, and produces subjects, yet remains persistently unsettled by the very human capacities it seeks to regulate.

Walls and Segregation: Spatialising Control

One of the most striking features of *Leila* is its use of walls as both symbols and instruments of control, shaping not only the city’s geography but also the lives and relationships of its characters. The urban space is divided into sectors based on purity, class, and ideological conformity, and these divisions become violently real in Shalini’s own life. Her marriage to Rizwan, a man from a different community, is itself a transgression of these spatial and social boundaries, marking their home as a site of suspicion. When authorities invade their house, it is not merely an act of punishment but a reassertion of the logic of the walls, those who cross boundaries must be removed. The novel demonstrates that spatial segregation penetrates the intimate sphere, fracturing familial bonds and reconstituting them within ideological frameworks of blame and order. Shalini’s repeated insistence, “Sixteen years I’ve looked for her” (261) registers the persistence of maternal attachment against enforced separation, while her later reflection, “We invited trouble, the way we lived,” (256) reveals how the system redefines such loss as justified, transforming personal relationships into sites of moral and political regulation. This spatial ordering of society can be understood through Henri Lefebvre’s concept of the **production of space**, where space is not neutral but socially constructed to reproduce power relations and ideological hierarchies.

In this context, surveillance operates spatially rather than through constant visual observation. Control is exercised by determining where individuals can live, whom they can love, and how they can move. After her arrest, Shalini is forcibly relocated to a rehabilitation camp, a space designed to isolate and discipline women who have violated purity norms.

After her arrest, Shalini is subjected to invasive disciplinary procedures that reduce her body to an object of inspection, revealing how surveillance in *Leila* operates through intimate, embodied control. The system enforces purity not only through spatial segregation but through direct, intrusive regulation of the female body:

Then her fingers begin working. She starts with my hair, practiced fingers streaming through the strands, over the crown, behind my ears. She pats my neck and shoulders and arms. Moves to the torso, dancing her hand beneath each breast in case I've taped something underneath the flesh. She brushes my hips and lightly pinches the folds of skin at my thighs. Now she goes around, so she's behind me. My legs are trembling, knees losing strength. Nothing, this is nothing. Your daughter needs you. The guard squats heavily, with a strained breath, knees popping like corn, she puts either palm on the cheeks of my buttocks and prises the mounds apart . . . She puts her hand to the lips of my vagina, slides rubber fingers inside . . . (250-251).

This passage exemplifies what Michel Foucault conceptualises as the production of “docile bodies,” where power is exercised through minute, regulated control over the body. At the same time, as Sandra Bartky argues, such disciplinary practices are intensified for women, producing a specifically gendered form of subjugation in which the body is not only controlled but violated and exposed. The inspection thus becomes more than a security measure, it is a ritual of domination that inscribes power onto the female body, reinforcing both patriarchal authority and the ideology of purity.

Here, exclusion itself becomes a form of monitoring: by being placed outside the “pure” zones, individuals are marked, contained, and constantly identifiable as threats. This reflects Michel Foucault's notion of **disciplinary space**, where enclosure, partitioning, and distribution of bodies function as mechanisms of control. The inability to access certain spaces or reunite with her daughter Leila demonstrates how mobility is tightly regulated, turning geography into a mechanism of surveillance.

This spatial organisation reflects and intensifies anxieties around segregation and controlled urban life, where power is embedded directly within the environment. In the novel, space operates as a visible marker of hierarchy, particularly in the stark contrast between zones. The East Slum is described as having “crowded the road with shaky, single-room dwellings,” (225) highlighting how marginal spaces are physically compressed and precarious. Movement within such spaces is tightly controlled through coercive authority, as seen when the Repeaters “are grabbing them off the road and tossing them into a blue van,” (225) demonstrating how surveillance is enacted through the regulation of bodies in space.

This logic is further reinforced through the ideological contrast between sectors, where privileged groups are spatially protected even when they violate norms, while marginalised populations are harshly punished for far lesser transgressions. Such differentiation reveals that spatial divisions are not neutral but encode social value and privilege, ensuring that status determines both treatment and the degree of protection one receives. The built environment thus naturalises inequality, presenting segregation as both necessary and justified. At the same time, these divisions are internalised by individuals themselves, as Shalini comes to interpret her past actions through the logic imposed by the system, revealing how spatial control reshapes self-perception and turns externally enforced boundaries into accepted truths.

Taken together, these moments demonstrate that spatial divisions in *Leila* are not merely physical barriers but ideological structures that regulate movement, enforce hierarchy, and shape subjectivity, resonating with Giorgio Agamben's concept of "state of exception." For Agamben, such spaces are not outside the law but are produced through it: they are zones where normal rights are suspended even as sovereign power remains fully operative. In the novel, this logic becomes visible in the differential valuation of spaces and bodies, where entire populations are confined to marginal zones and subjected to arbitrary intervention. The actions of the Repeaters, who indiscriminately seize individuals from public spaces and forcibly remove them in vans, demonstrate how people in these zones can be detained or punished arbitrarily, their lives reduced to conditions of precarity and disposability.

At the same time, the distinction between zones such as the Slum and the Towers produces what Agamben would call a gradation of belonging, where some lives are protected while others are exposed to violence. Sapna's observation that "Even when they break the rules they're too good to be put out here with us"(234) reveals how spatial location determines not only living conditions but also the degree of legal and social protection one receives. Those in privileged sectors remain within the sphere of recognised citizenship, while those outside it exist in a condition akin to Agamben's "bare life", included in the system only through their exclusion from its protections. In Giorgio Agamben's terms, *bare life* refers to a condition in which individuals are reduced to mere biological existence, stripped of political rights and legal protection. Such lives are included within the system only to be controlled or exposed to violence, without the safeguards that define full citizenship. In this state, a person can be governed, punished, or excluded without recourse, existing at the threshold of belonging and abandonment.

Crucially, this spatial logic extends beyond external control to shape internal consciousness. As individuals come to accept these divisions as natural or inevitable, the "exception" becomes normalised. Shalini's gradual internalisation of the system, her attempts to rationalise hierarchy and order, demonstrates how power operates not only through coercion but through the production of belief. In this sense, the novel reveals that spaces of exception are not static sites but dynamic processes: they are continuously reproduced through spatial design, institutional practice, and psychological conditioning. Surveillance, therefore, is inseparable from spatial organisation, as the regulation of where one can live, move, and belong becomes the primary means through which power governs both bodies and minds.

Habitus and Internalised Surveillance

The psychological impact of surveillance can be understood through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Social structures become internal dispositions that guide behaviour and thought. In the rehabilitation camp, women are trained to internalise purity norms. They begin to see themselves as impure and in need of correction. Surveillance becomes self-regulation. Shalini's admission, "I have to remind myself that it could easily have been very different" (239), reflects this transformation. External control becomes internal discipline. Individuals reproduce the system through their own beliefs and actions.

Fear and conformity replace the need for overt enforcement, as individuals begin to reproduce the very divisions that oppress them. Through Shalini's fractured relationships, her loss of family, and her constrained movement across spaces, the novel demonstrates how walls do not merely divide the city; they actively construct a system in which surveillance, identity,

and social hierarchy are inseparably intertwined, operating simultaneously at spatial, social, and psychological levels.

Conclusion

Leila presents surveillance as a multi-layered system operating across space, body, and technology, where each dimension reinforces the other. Spatial segregation establishes the structure of control, bodily discipline enforces compliance, and digital systems regulate identity and movement, together producing an interconnected network of power that shapes both environment and subjectivity.

At the same time, the novel underscores that such control is never absolute. Emotional attachment and memory persist as subtle yet powerful forms of resistance, revealing the limits of surveillance in capturing interior life. Shalini's enduring bond with her daughter becomes a crucial site where affect exceeds regulation, challenging the possibility of total domination.

By proposing *surveillance realism*, this paper has argued that *Leila* moves beyond technological conceptions of monitoring to depict surveillance as a lived and embodied experience. The novel shows how individuals are positioned, classified, and governed within everyday structures of power, while also exposing the tensions and fractures within these systems.

Ultimately, *Leila* invites readers to question the normalisation of surveillance and to recognise both its power and its limits. In doing so, it reaffirms the role of literature as a vital space for interrogating and reimagining the operations of control in contemporary society.

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