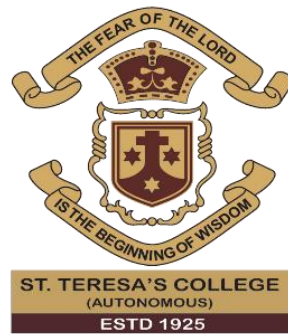


UNVEILING THE PANOPTICON OF SOCIAL NORMS: A STUDY OF *FLEABAG*



Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature

By

NITA TRESA JOE

Register No. AB21ENG024

III BA English Literature

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

Kochi – 682 011

Kerala

Supervisor

Dr. Jisha John

Assistant Professor

Department of English

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

Kochi – 682 011

Kerala


March 2024

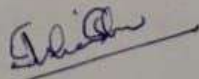


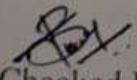
ST.TERESA'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS) ERNAKULAM

Certificate of Plagiarism Check for Dissertation

Author Name	NITA TRESA JOE
Course of Study	B A English Language & Literature
Name of Guide	Dr. JISHA JOHN
Department	English & Centre For Research
Acceptable Maximum Limit	20%
Submitted By	library@teresas.ac.in
Paper Title	UNVEILING THE PANOPTICON OF SOCIAL NORMS: A STUDY OF FLEABAG
Similarity	1% AI – Not Detected
Paper ID	oid:26696:52554067
Submission Date	2024-02-20 12:49:15


Signature of Student


Signature of Guide

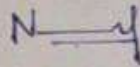

Checked By
College Librarian



* This report has been created on the basis of the result generated by Turnitin - Anti-Plagiarism Software

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project titled "Unveiling the Panopticon of Social Norms: A Study of *Fleabag*" is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Jisha John, Assistant Professor, Department of English.



Nita Tresa Joe

Register No. AB21ENG024

III B.A. English Literature

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

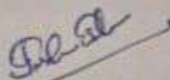
Ernakulam

Ernakulam

March 2024

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled "Unveiling the Panopticon of Social Norms: A Study of *Fleabag*" by Nita Tresa Joe is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.



Dr. Jisha John

Assistant Professor

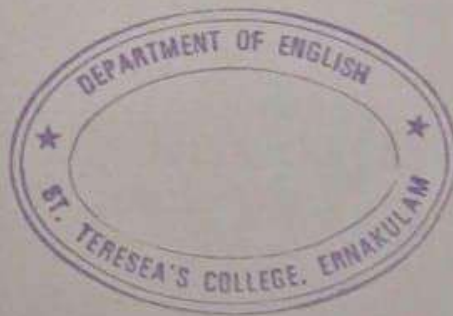
III B.A. English Literature

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

Ernakulam

March 2024



CONTENTS

Introduction		1
Chapter 1	Understanding the Panopticon: A Theoretical Framework	4
Chapter 2	The Invisible Eye and the Docile Body in <i>Fleabag</i>	12
Conclusion		24
Works Consulted		26

Introduction

Norms are cultural phenomena that prescribe and prohibit behaviours in specific circumstances. They are regarded to be in charge of controlling social behaviour. According to Gary Alan Fine, social norms “constitute a ‘frame’ within which individuals interpret a given situation and from which they take direction for their responsibilities as actors in that domain” (qtd. in Hechter and Opp 4). Norms are rules imposed on the subjects or individuals in a social environment. They encourage individuals to behave prosaically instead of merely for themselves which results in overall social cohesion and order in society.

In Phoebe Waller-Bridge's British television series *Fleabag*, there is an underlying exploration of social norms. The show focuses on the deviant behaviours exhibited by the titular character Fleabag. Her actions defy the rules of society and deviate from traditional expectations. She engages in lying, stealing and promiscuous behaviour, among other things, which are acts that are discouraged and looked down upon. Fleabag's portrayal of a deviant allows for the broader examination of deviants in society and it also highlights autonomy, societal expectations, and the consequences of deviating from established norms within the fabric of contemporary society. Fleabag's sister Claire on the other hand is a stereotypical conformist. Her actions that strictly abide by the rules of social norms are a stark contrast to Fleabag's rebellious choices and decisions. Claire's character provides a lens through which the project seeks to unravel the mechanisms through which social norms drive individuals to conform and the implications of such conformity within the broader sociocultural context.

This project aims to study social norms as a panopticon by deconstructing the characters Fleabag and Claire. With the use of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, this project analyzes the social norms through the lens of the panopticon.

The panopticon was a prison system proposed by Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. This prison concept with a central watchtower was created to enforce better control over the prisoners through the illusion of gaze. Due to the position of the watchtower and the design of the prison, the prisoners believe that they are under constant surveillance which forces them to discipline or regulate themselves in accordance with the rules without physical or external force. Michel Foucault takes the concept of the panopticon and applies it to the working of contemporary society. Foucault's work first published in 1975, is a genealogical study of the evolution of the "gentler" modern method of imprisoning criminals rather than torturing or killing them. According to Foucault, this new kind of punishment will act as a strong method to control society. Schools, hospitals and factories are examples of institutions which are built for harmless reasons but indirectly function as structures that exhort rules and ultimately play the role of disciplinary authority.

In the television series, *Fleabag*, the characters Claire and Fleabag exhibit conformity and deviance to social norms. Through the comparison of the actions of the two characters, social norms can be viewed as a panopticon. The two characters are a replication of people in society who are living their lives under the control of social norms without being aware of it. This is due to its invisible and all-pervasive form of control. Chapters 1 and 2 of this study try to understand the power of the panopticon, its connection to social norms and its effect or lack of effect on individuals.

Chapter 1 of this study provides a comprehensive exploration of the theoretical framework centred on social norms and Michel Foucault's concept of the panopticon. It begins by defining social norms as unwritten rules that guide behaviour, shaping a community's moral and ethical standards. It emphasizes the collective nature of social norms, highlighting their role in integrating individuals into society, maintaining order, and fostering coherence within social groups. The chapter draws parallels between social norms and

Foucault's panopticon, a conceptual design by Jeremy Bentham emphasizing constant surveillance and control. The panopticon's circular structure with a central watchtower is a metaphor for internalized societal surveillance, where individuals discipline themselves in the fear of being watched. This concept is extended to the internalization of social norms over time, leading to self-regulation aligned with one's values and identity. It concludes by introducing the concept of "Panopticism," where society is portrayed as a surveillance-based structure reinforced by power/knowledge relations. Social norms are likened to a central panopticon that invisibly shapes individuals' behaviour through internalized rules and surveillance.

Chapter two of this project analyses social norms through the lens of Michel Foucault's Panopticon. It emphasizes the significance of social norms as a panopticon that regulates behaviour and shapes the interactions and relationships of individuals within society. This chapter explores the portrayal of social norms in *Fleabag*, focusing on the complex relationships and interactions of the main character, Fleabag and her sister Claire. Furthermore, the chapter explores the concept of the "mental prison" created by the characters surrounding Fleabag, emphasizing the internalization of societal narratives and the impact of social norms on individual psychology and self-perception. By studying the two characters, this chapter tries to understand the panoptic nature of societal norms and their influence on human behaviour.

Chapter 1

Understanding The Panopticon: A Theoretical Framework

Social norms are unwritten rules that guide behaviour. They are collective beliefs and value systems that contribute to the integration of individuals into society. They are the shared expectations and rules that guide and constrain behaviour, ensuring a degree of order and coherence within a social group. Social norms represent the moral and ethical standards of a community, they shape the conduct of individuals and promote social cohesion. According to Durkheim norms are a 'social fact' (qtd. in "Social Factual Norms").

Social norms are not arbitrary but rather are the result of a collective agreement about how people should act in different situations. They emerge from expectations within a community. They can be prescriptive - indicating what behaviour is expected or required in a given situation or telling people what they should or not do, proscriptive- specifying what behaviour is forbidden or discouraged or telling them what is allowed or not allowed. People follow social norms for a variety of reasons, such as wanting to be accepted, being approved of, or avoiding punishment. These norms are enforced by both informal and formal means. Social norms can also vary depending on the culture or context. For example, what is considered appropriate in one culture may not be the same in another. On the other hand, social norms can also change over time due to changes in social values, technological progress, or other changes in culture.

Over time, individuals internalize these unwritten rules to the extent that they become part of their own belief system. This internalization results in self-regulation, where individuals conform to norms not just because of external pressure but also because these norms align with their own values and identity.

The characteristics of social norms as ‘unwritten’ and ‘internalized’ rules are parallel to that of Michel Foucault’s panopticon. The Panopticon prison was a conceptual design proposed by Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. The word “panopticon” is derived from the Greek word “panoptes” which means “all-seeing”. It essentially means surveillance. The principle behind the design was a reduction in security and observation of a maximum number of prisoners. The building is designed in a circular shape with a watchtower in the centre. The cells of the prisoners would be separated from the central watch tower by an open space. This would allow for an unobstructed view of all the surrounding cells or spaces of the prisoners.

This design is intended to induce a sense of constant surveillance and control. The prisoners are conscious of their surveyed state but unaware of when they are being watched. The authority is no longer a physical entity rather it is an internalized omniscience. The prisoners therefore discipline themselves in the fear of being watched, eliminating the need for physical power to accomplish the same task. Bentham only regarded his scheme as an improvement on the criminal justice system. However, Foucault takes the concept of the panopticon and uses it as a metaphor for a social control mechanism which would become a symbol of modern authority and discipline.

In the first chapter of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* titled ‘*The Body of the Condemned*’ Foucault opens with a brutal and graphic account of a man named Damien, who was skinned, burned and dismembered among other things. This kind of torture was meant to serve as a kind of deterrent, that is to keep people from deviant behaviour or doing bad things. This story was intended to set a tone for the author's exploration of torture and its transformation into a different form of punishment. It is a kind of punishment that would transition from one that inflicts physical pain to torture through psychological control. The transition of punishment took place to hidden torture as people began to see torture as worse than the crime itself.

Since people could not see the torture all they had was an image that the authorities wanted to maintain. So, they began imagining it and with that torture became an abstraction and took on an ideal form. Taking torture away from the public eye proved to be more effective. It allowed those in power to take control of the narrative and with that, the control of the mind. With the understanding of the power of the mind, we see the emergence of various disciplinary fields like doctors and psychiatrists who allowed their discipline to exert itself over the person being punished. (“Michel Foucault’s “*Discipline & Punish*” (Part 1/2)” 00:03:06-00:11:18)

Foucault studied how narrative or discourse establishes power/knowledge relations, which serve as the foundation for human thought and action. The collection of all writing, speech, thought, and action on or concerning a particular subject is called a discourse. Torture was a negative punishment as it sought to suppress people. However, this new kind of punishment based on the discourse of the experts who asked questions to the punished was positive. This is because this kind of discourse which was based on the knowledge of the experts would produce the matrix of power/knowledge. Their discourse produced knowledge of the body of the human and this knowledge gave power to these various experts who would inscribe its narrative onto the body. The fate of a person put in prison or a mental institution was in the hands of the experts (“Michel Foucault’s “*Discipline & Punish*” (Part 1/2)” 00:19:48-00:20:52).

He believes that all operations of power are based on these discursive forms of knowledge which then becomes the basis for action. Power is productive, not repressive; it creates situations, relationships, and subjects, rather than just punishing them. The goal of power is to create subjects who act properly on their own, who do not need the police or other enforcement agencies to use physical forms of restraint or punishment to get them to behave., What Foucault is trying to say is that the knowledge produced does not come from a scientific, objective stance but rather is a product of privilege afforded to these people who had a

certain power given to them by an authority or social body (“Michel Foucault’s “*Discipline & Punish*” (Part 1/2)” 00:21:05-00:21:56).

The downside of public torture by the sovereign was that it would create sympathy. People sympathized with the person being punished who would be allowed to say whatever he wanted before he was executed. There would also be sympathetic pamphlets sent around about the condemned that would invoke the public to retaliate against the punishment. The second half of the 18th century saw an increase in the retaliation of the punishment. So, they needed a new and humane form of punishment. Punishment therefore transforms from sovereign taking revenge against someone who wronged them to becoming a mode of correction. The reformers wanted to find a way to administer punishment more effectively or broadly and generalize it. Punishment was disassociated from the consequence of committing a crime to the sovereign to a punishment that was administered because someone wronged the people. This prevented people from sympathizing with the punished like before, instead, they started hating the punished because he had wronged them (“Michel Foucault’s “*Discipline & Punish*” (Part 1/2)” 00:38:32-00:43:27).

In chapter 4 titled “The Gentle Way in Punishment”, Foucault discusses the movement of punishment away from violence. Foucault here reiterates a few principles. One, the punishment must be equal to the crime which leads to a naturalization of punishment, so if people think about the punishment as they are committing a crime in a kind of spontaneous, natural way then punishment comes to occupy a new space in cultural imaginary. Two, it should make the punishment appear worse than what the benefits might allow for the person. Three, it must also be a temporal dimension like solitary confinement so that people know what exactly they should expect. Fourth, punishment must be sold as a good thing, a benevolent alternative to torture and it is necessary to correct those who committed the crime which the social body could benefit from. Fifth, it is supposed to link realities, as soon as the

crime is committed the punishment will follow and sixth, the crime is seen as a misfortune wherein the person who committed the crime is no longer received with sympathy but rather is viewed as a person in need of punishment or help. (“Michel Foucault’s “*Discipline & Punish*” (Part 1/2)” 00:47:20-00:50:51).

These steps serve the purpose of making punishment seem normal and in that case invisible because people cannot see it as it is ubiquitous. This is where prisons enter the scene, where people who commit crimes are cast away and taken completely out of sight. The prison then becomes a zone that is associated with this process and becomes a universal equivalent of all crime. The prison transformed punishment from a specific act against a specific crime to a homogenous punishment. The prison was not viewed as despotic as it made the prisoners productive through work and wages and when the prisoners were released, they would become productive members of the society. This narrative of the prison sold it in a positive light and it justify the existence of prisons to the public. Since prison was associated with punishment and is now associated with the act of correcting people to make them good for society, punishment would then be associated with correction. This in turn would make people obedient and follow order, which was the agenda of the prison on the surface. (“Michel Foucault’s “*Discipline & Punish*” (Part 1/2)” 00:50:56-00:55:37).

In Chapter 6 “Means of correct training” he discusses separation, analysis and differentiation accomplished through three instruments - hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and examination. In hierarchical observation, he discusses how the one who sees is in control. The act of seeing gives control and anyone who sees becomes powerful. In normalizing judgment, he discusses what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Supervisory people regulate what is normal and abnormal and for this to be truly effective it must work with punishment and reward. When people are rewarded for acceptable behaviour, it encourages them to exhort supervisory behaviour because then they get to be that authority

which is seen as a privilege. The individuals then become the perpetrators of the panopticon. The examination is a product of hierarchal observation and normalizing judgment. By perpetually examining people they discern how far away the individuals stray from the normal and then through that they are prescribed the right mechanism or the right correction to come back to normalcy.

The examination must be ubiquitous and perpetual which is closely related to knowledge/power. Examination produces knowledge and power in three ways. Firstly, visibility becomes an exercise of power and knowledge of the individual gives power. Second, examination introduces a kind of individuality to that person, however, the individual doesn't realize that this individuality is bestowed upon them to have better control. It also makes each person a sight for knowledge, where each person could be understood in their way and the expert gazes that seek to expand their discipline onto them finds new ways to understand what is wrong with people and new ways to correct them and bring them back to normalcy.

Documentation and observation are another important methods that Foucault discusses. It makes the individual a case and it validates the intervention of power. The power decides that there is something wrong with the person and that this person has to be corrected. The power recognizes a problem that they have created and therefore they must cure the individual and make them productive for the society. Instead of asking what is wrong with the world, they question what is wrong with the individual, so the guilt falls on the person. ("Michel Foucault's *"Discipline & Punish"* (Part 2/2)" 00:28:01-00:38:51).

In chapter 7 "Panopticism" Foucault talks about a society based on surveillance which stems from power/knowledge – which he says is typified by the 'Panopticon.' Foucault used Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon to describe a mode of power and surveillance that he associated

with the design principles of the Panopticon and to describe a broader phenomenon in modern societies. He used the term "Panopticism" to refer to the mechanisms of power and surveillance that extend beyond the physical architecture of the Panopticon to encompass various institutions and societal structures. He contrasts the structure of the Panopticon with the dungeon. The dungeon is meant to deprive people of light and keep them away from sight, the panopticon is designed to make them visible. It is through this visibility that homogeneous effects of power are produced. People's fear of being watched and being punished if they do not obey the rules makes them comply with power.

In chapter 5 of his work, Foucault brings in the image of a soldier, someone who is highly controlled and regimented. He uses this image to make a broader characterization of society. In the panopticon, there is an illusion of a gaze that the prisoners assume and they act by it. This affects people, it renders them docile. A docile individual is someone subordinate, willing to follow instructions, and malleable to the will of authority. A docile body may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved. This has an interesting effect because to be subject to a gaze means two possible things, firstly, it recognizes you as a subject which allows for a certain degree of autonomy but at the same time it renders you as an object. The autonomy given to the individual lies within the structure of the Panopticon and this illusion of the individual as an autonomous subject helps better control them. ("Michel Foucault's *Discipline & Punish*" (Part 2/2)" 00:39:38-00:52:45).

Foucault uses the structure of the Panopticon to explain society at large. A panopticon can be found everywhere from schools to factories. According to Foucault, the beauty of the panopticon is that it is always adapting to new understandings and changes that occur in society. Therefore the panopticon maintains control as its rules are shaped by the changes that occur.

In society, social norms act as the central panopticon that creates order and coherence. The expectations based on societal norms act as an invisible force shaping individuals' actions and choices. The rules of social norms are unwritten just like the invisible guard of the panopticon. In a panopticon, inmates internalize the idea of potential observation, leading to self-regulation. In society, individuals often internalize social norms, adjusting their behaviour to align with prevailing expectations even when not under direct scrutiny. While the panopticon operates on the principle of conformity that is driven by fear of surveillance, social norms create a sense of conformity as individuals are afraid of being ostracized or socially disapproved.

The power of the panopticon lies in the ability to observe. In society, structures such as family, government, media etc. act as a panopticon that reinforces social norms. Like a panopticon, where individual autonomy is limited by the awareness of possible observation, social norms can influence and also limit individual autonomy. It is the fear of deviating from norms that prevent an individual from expressing their true and unfiltered behaviour. Therefore, social norms can be established as a panopticon as it is a form of social control that maintains order within a society through internalized rules and internal surveillance.

The aim of this project is to analyze social norms by applying Foucault's panopticon in the British television series *Fleabag*. This study attempts to compare the characters of Claire, who leads a conventional lifestyle and the unconventional life of Fleabag through the panoptical lens. It also explores the effect and the lack of effect of panopticon in the contemporary world.

Chapter 2

The Invisible Eye and the Docile Body in *Fleabag*

This chapter focuses on analysing social norms as a panopticon through the series *Fleabag*. Social norms are invisible rules that help with the functioning of a society. These invisible rules and expectations control the behaviour of individuals which further creates harmony and unity in society. Social norms are essential for several reasons, it enables cooperation, maintains order and it also create among individuals a sense of a common identity within their culture. They are a guide that makes it possible for individuals to work out relationships and interactions in a social setting. When individuals follow these norms, it creates a sense of fraternity and it also creates trust. Norms produce a peaceful environment where people live without conflict.

The British television series *Fleabag* was developed and written by Phoebe Waller-Bridge. The 2016 television program is centred on the life of the character, Fleabag, a young lady from London. The character frequently breaches the fourth wall by speaking to the audience directly. She is clever, funny and unpredictable. Her battles with grief, guilt, and self-destructive behaviour are explored in the show. Fleabag navigates the problems of both her professional and personal lives throughout the two seasons of the series. The show delves into her complicated relationships with her family, particularly with her sister Claire. Claire is one of the central characters in this television series and the relationship between the sisters is a significant focus throughout the show. Claire's reserved, professional, and seemingly put-together appearance is a stark contrast to that of Fleabag who is impulsive and engages in self-destructive behaviour. Claire's lifestyle is characterized by commitment to professionalism and social expectations while Fleabag's lifestyle is more unconventional and is less concerned with societal norms.

In the series, the two sisters live under the gaze of an invisible prison whose structure is formed by the people in their lives. The characters are unaware of the existence of this structure and therefore the rules that it administers are also invisible. This enables it to effectively administer its regulatory rules. The characters that surround Fleabag and her sister Claire form a mental prison that tries to regulate their behaviour. Fleabag's prison consists of Claire, the dad, Harry, the godmother, the priest and, the bank manager.

Claire is part of the structure of the mental prison of Fleabag. Claire is constantly doubtful of Fleabag's actions and choices. In Episode 2 of Season 1, When Fleabag wants to talk to Martin, Claire's husband, she asks Claire "Can you leave us?" to which Claire replies "Why" (00:01:50-00:01:51) with a sceptical expression on her face. In the same episode of Season 1 when Fleabag is about to leave her sister's home, Claire looking at the toilet paper that her sister took from her house asks "Where did you get that?" to which Fleabag lies "Oh I brought it with me" and Claire replies "No you didn't give it back" (00:03:33-00:03:37). In Episode 3 of Season 1, while walking together in a graveyard Claire watches a man grieving in front of a tombstone and remarks "Christ. Look at that man. Tragic". Fleabag then says that he is a con to which Claire replies "You can't call someone who is grieving a con" (00:03:00-00:03:08) in an irritated tone. These are a few of the many examples of Claire exerting her supervisory role on Fleabag. Claire unsuccessfully exhorts her internalized norms onto Fleabag. Claire is aware of her sister's deviance and therefore Fleabag is constantly subjected to her gaze. During their encounters with each other Fleabag is under her sister's surveillance.

Fleabag's dad is also a source of discipline and regulation and plays the role of a supervisor to both Claire and Fleabag. The two characters have been subjected to the gaze of their father throughout their lives. Their first exposure to the rules of the invisible prison

stems from him and it is through the exertion of his internalized rules that the two sisters begin their initial internalization of the norms.

In Episode 2 of Season 1, the dad asks Fleabag with concern "Are you healthy" (00:08:36-00:08:37) to which Fleabag gives an underwhelming yes with a head gesture. The dad's question is an insinuation of her unhealthy or unconventional state that is discouraged. It is also an insinuation of the need to correct her state that is considered "unacceptable". In Episode 6 of Season 1, during an exhibition put up by her godmother, Fleabag creates a scene by throwing glasses of champagne on the floor. The dad arrives and he demands with anger "Will you stop making a spectacle of yourself and clean that up" (00:13:11-00:13:15). The dad here attempts to correct her, a mechanism used by the ones in power to bring back the deviating individual to normalcy. He enforces the disciplinary rules and acts as a regulator of the mental/invisible prison.

Harry, Fleabag's on-and-off boyfriend in Season 1 is part of the invisible structure that effectively perpetuates the rules of the prison on Fleabag from time to time. At the end of Episode 2 of Season 1, Harry leaves when Fleabag exhibits behaviour considered unacceptable in the relationship. He says "Do you want to be alone? Then you'll never see me again" (00:24:27-00:24:34). This is an instance of reinforcing the rules of the social norms. Harry leaving the relationship is a consequence or punishment for Fleabag for breaking out of the system and this kind of punishment forces her to re-evaluate her actions. It reinforces the idea that her behaviour is unacceptable. While having unconventional sex with a man, Fleabag feels uncomfortable, she begins to feel like getting back with Harry whom she feels is a "safe place". Fleabag here, has internalized that her behaviour is unacceptable as deemed by the power structure of social norms and with that she believes that her actions are "wrong". Using the words "safe place" is her subconscious or unintentional acceptance that her behaviour is unsafe. Harry on the other hand is a

representation of what is accepted. Her need to go back to Harry is her subconscious conforming to the rules of social norms regulated by the mental prison. It is a moment of self-regulation that occurs from the indoctrination of the norms and rules.

In the same episode of Season 1, Fleabag has an interview with a bank manager. During the interview, she takes her top off mistaking that she has clothing underneath and he asks her to leave for her inappropriate act which the bank manager thought was done intentionally. Similarly to Fleabag the bank manager used to show behaviours that goes against social norms, however in time he changes his ways and jumps into the panopticon and has now become a perpetrator of it. To Fleabag he is a representation of what life could be if she follows the norms and rules. Their friendship allows the bank manager to push the rules of the invisible structure. In Episode 4 of Season 1, she meets him during a retreat. He was told to attend it because he misbehaved with a colleague by touching her breasts twice. During their conversation, he tells Fleabag “I’m just a very disappointing man”. Fleabag then points to her breasts and he replies “No, thanks, I’m trying to quit.” (00:20:48-00:21:01). The bank manager has now accepted the rules of social norms. In this conversation with Fleabag the bank manager is a representation of the mental prison. His state is a reminder to Fleabag of the consequences that can occur if she deviates from the norms of the society. In this situation he becomes a reinforcer of the rules and his emotional state is a representation of the repercussions of deviation which further acts as a veiled enforcer of the rules.

These are instances of exerting discipline onto Fleabag by the invisible prison. This prison confines the body into an inescapable structure that deceives the individual of existence beyond it. The individual unaware of being stuck in a prison, views the prison as the entire world and therefore cannot escape it. This structure controls acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The characters are supervisory people who regulate what is normal and abnormal and it is administered effectively with punishment and reward.

They are representations of supervisory people in society that regulate what is normal and abnormal. They are the ones who observe and therefore are in control. Visibility becomes an exercise of power and knowledge of the individual gives power. The gaze that Fleabag is subjected to, produces both visibility and knowledge. And further examination and study of the individual is intended to turn her into a docile body that is malleable, transformed and improved.

In Episode 1 of Season 1 Harry, Fleabag's boyfriend caught her masturbating to a video of Obama giving a speech. Harry shouts "What are you doing?" She flips the laptop down quickly. Fleabag replies "Nothing!" (00:04:42-00:04:43). Harry gets out of his bed, grabs his bag and starts packing. Harry says "I know what you were doing" (00:04:49-00:04:51). In Episode 2 of Season 1, Harry confronts Fleabag about the history of the computer displaying pornographic sites that Fleabag used, he reads out to her "anal, gang bang, mature, big cock, small tits, hentai, teen, MILF, big butts, lesbian, gay, facial, fetish, bukkake, young and old, swallow, rough, voyeur, and public." (00:23:02-00:23:21). In the first instance Fleabag displays inappropriate sexual behaviour, while the second instance exposes Fleabag's addiction to porn, an activity that is discouraged and condemned. Fleabag's use of these pornographic sites is considered highly unacceptable behaviour. Here, Fleabag becomes the subject of Harry's gaze, rendering her an object.

The one who sees is the one who is in control, being subject to a gaze makes the individual under surveillance docile and at the same time it gives power to the observer. Harry, in this situation, takes the role of a judge, who possesses knowledge of the individual. His discourse/use of words that describe Fleabag's behaviour as unacceptable will begin to infiltrate her mind and her idea of unacceptable will be moulded into that of the idea presented by the supervisory authority who regulates the rules. Through this kind of perpetual

examination, the characters in *Fleabag* become the experts who inscribe their narrative onto her body and their knowledge creates a matrix of power/knowledge, wherein the power structure begins to take control of the mind of the individual with the knowledge that they use against their body.

It also creates a discourse around her body. In Episode 6 of Season 1, after the godmother's exhibition, Fleabag and Claire enter an argument. Martin, Claire's husband had kissed Fleabag during Claire's birthday party. Claire who initially believed that her husband was the one who was in the wrong, has now changed her mind. When Fleabag begs Claire to believe her, Claire replies "After what you did to Boo?"(00:15:12-00:15:13). Boo was Fleabag's friend who accidentally killed herself after finding out her boyfriend had cheated on her. She had only intended to injure herself by stepping into a bike lane. She decided to do this to get back at her boyfriend but the resulting crash killed her. The boyfriend cheated on her with Fleabag. The words of Harry and Claire are an example of taking control of the mind by imposing a narrative onto Fleabag. Their discourse creates an identity of a woman with an unhealthy obsession with sex and constantly being subjected to this kind of discourse renders the body docile. A docile body that is malleable will internalize this narrative imposed on them and it will form their identity. Fleabag therefore will begin to view herself as this identity created by the characters or the supervisory authority.

In Episode 1 of Season 1 Fleabag tells her dad "I have a horrible feeling that I am a greedy, perverted, selfish, apathetic, cynical, depraved, morally bankrupt woman who can't even call herself a feminist"(00:20:31-00:20:42). In Episode 6 of Season 1, she has a conversation with the bank manager about her state of mind, she says "I fucked up my family. And I fucked my friend by fucking her boyfriend. And sometimes I wish I didn't even know that fuck fucking existed." (00:21:46-00:22:02). Fleabag here has accepted her identity as one presented by the social panopticon. Fleabag is filled with guilt for her actions and this guilt

can only arise with the internalization of the rules pushed by the social panopticon. It is an indication of the acceptance of what is right and wrong decided by the power structure and this internalization of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour can result in feelings like happiness and guilt when the individual acts by it or against it. However, the mental prison has still not achieved its task as she still manages to deviate by performing acts that go against the disciplinary forces due to her lack of self-control.

Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime suggested that people engage in illegal actions when presented with an opportunity and when they fail to inhibit their impulsive actions. That is, criminal, immoral, and deviant acts follow from poor self-control. Indeed, people lower in trait self-control are much more likely to cheat, lie, steal, violate rules, and engage in otherwise counter-normative behaviour than people higher in trait self-control. (qtd. in DeBono et al)

Man is not born into the world with a set of norms. His social environment is responsible for the norms that he imbibes. While many conform to social norms, some individuals deviate. Deviance refers to behaviours that violate social norms. There are two types of deviance, the violation of formally enacted laws, referred to as formal deviance and the violation of informal social norms or norms that have not been codified into law, referred to as informal deviance. The character Fleabag engages in both forms of deviance.

In Episode 1 of Season 1, the scene begins with Fleabag indulging in sexual intercourse with a man as she quotes "at 2 o'clock on a Tuesday night" (00:00:24-00:00:25). This is the first introduction to the character Fleabag and it is a crucial scene as it reveals a very important trait of the character. The fact that it is the first attribute of Fleabag presented in the show is quite telling of her promiscuous nature, a major theme depicted in the series. Throughout the series, she engages in various sexual behaviour. In the same episode, Fleabag

is out on a date with a character named 'Bus Rodent'. It is their first date and she hints at wanting to have sex with him. There are other multiple instances where she makes sexual hints at strangers or sexual remarks that make the other individual uncomfortable. In Episode 2 of Season 1, Fleabag says " I'm not obsessed with sex. I just can't stop thinking about it"(00:05:12-00:05:16). In the same episode, she makes a sexual gesture with a cucumber towards a stranger in her café and makes an uncomfortable comment " Oh dropped my cucumber" which is a sexual connotation for penis.

In Episode 3 of Season 1, Fleabag takes pictures of her vagina in her café and she explains that she used to do it ten or eleven times a day for her ex-boyfriend during inappropriate situations. These acts of promiscuous behaviour fall under the concept of informal deviance. Promiscuity is a sexual behaviour wherein an individual has more than one partner outside of a committed relationship. The term is usually used in a negative sense and it indicates an individual's disrespectful attitude towards conventional standards. It also points to the lack of sexual morality within an individual.

Women's sexual behaviour has always been a topic that has been scrutinized throughout history. People in society idealize the virginity of a woman and it is society that decides how a woman should conduct herself, especially in the matters of sex. This is prevalent in religion. Jesus's mother, Mary is a key example of a woman who is glorified for her virginity. In European medieval and renaissance literature, the chastity belt is often referenced as a means of bringing comfort to jealous husbands when they are apart from their wives. Even today social norms push rules onto women to keep them from sexual behaviours that society has declared inappropriate. Women are not only expected to not engage in promiscuous behaviour but also to refrain from sex until their marriage.

Social norms are designed to maintain order in society. For the most part, its beliefs and values are ingrained in the minds of the individuals. Women who indulge in promiscuous behaviour receive mistreatment and social stigma, and the purpose of judgement or criticism is to prevent them from breaking out of these rules or repeating this behaviour. In other words, they are a form of surveillance that control behaviour. Fleabag's deviance however is a mark of her escape from this control.

Fleabag is depicted as a character who rejects many conventional societal norms. She challenges expectations related to relationships, work, and gender roles. Her actions and choices often deviate from the mainstream, reflecting a desire to live life on her terms. An important aspect of Fleabag is her habit of breaking the fourth wall and talking to the audience directly. This technique used in the film allows the audience to understand her better and get an insight into her inner thoughts. It also allows the character Fleabag to control her story.

Fleabag is not bothered about her sexuality. Her actions challenge the norms and taboos surrounding female sexuality. Throughout the series, she resists the expectations of her family, friends and society. Even her interactions with her family deviate from traditional family dynamics. She is not afraid to expose her flaws and her insecurities. The authentic nature of her character contrasts the polished image of an individual that social norms encourage. By embracing vulnerability, Fleabag disrupts the facade of social conformity.

In Episode 1 of Season 1, Fleabag and her sister Claire get together for a lecture called "WOMEN SPEAK". Fleabag is late for the talk and Claire in contrast to her sister is well dressed and has reached the lecture on time. Claire appears to be doing well in life, unlike Fleabag who runs a peculiar Guinea pig-themed café. Claire takes an antibacterial gel out of her bag when Fleabag touches her face and mentions that she was late as had to "do a

flash poo in pret” (00:09:18-00:09:19). During the lecture the lecturer poses a question to the audience, she asks “Please raise your hands if you would trade five years of your life for the so-called “perfect body”?” (00:14:33-00:14:46) to which the sisters raise their hands. They immediately notice that no one else in the audience has given their response and so they retrieve their hands.

Claire’s character is conventionally appealing and aligns with society’s expectation of a well-rounded individual. Unlike Fleabag Claire is disgusted by porn and promiscuous behaviour. Claire as described by Fleabag in the first episode of Season 1 is a “super-high-powered-rich-super-sister” (00:10:37-00:10:40) who adheres to the conventional rules of social norms that society encourages. She is a successful woman who conforms to social norms. She is well-behaved and follows etiquette. Etiquette is a social norm that plays a crucial role in the functioning of an individual in a society.

The display of etiquette can decide the integration of an individual into society. In this scene, Claire arrives on time and is disgusted by Fleabag’s lack of etiquette or in other words not washing her hands. Claire is a good example of an individual who conforms to social norms. She receives approval and validation from society which works as tools of control that results in her functioning under the panoptical lens of social norms. Fleabag on the other hand arrives late and does not care for etiquette. In other words, approval and validation have not functioned as effective tools of control and therefore have not created an illusion of surveillance in her mind, escaping the panopticon. However, the instance of both women in Episode 1 of Season 1 retrieving their hands when posed with the question “Please raise your hands if you would trade five years of your life for the so-called “perfect body”?” (00:14:33-00:14:46) and realising that no other person in the audience shared their opinion is a reflection of the power of conformity and self-regulation in the fear of disapproval which works based on the unwritten or invisible rules.

Individuals like Claire who receive acceptance and validation further encourage other individuals in society to follow the same path. It controls people's choices and it reduces deviation. Individuals in society watch other individuals and make decisions based on their observations. Social norms have created a system of punishment and reward that enhances its control over people. By contradicting its rules individuals may be socially ostracized, and when adhering to them, they are met with social acceptance and validation. This system of punishment and reward is an effective method of limiting an individual's thoughts and actions to the structure of social norms.

Validation is a positive reinforcement that becomes a method of invisible control that decides each individual's decisions that contribute to the working of a society. Ostracization on the other hand is a negative reinforcement that creates fear. In the panopticon prison, it was the fear of being watched that led the prisoners to the kind of self-regulation that was favourable to the authority, while in society, the fear of being mistreated or socially stigmatized led to individuals regulating and adjusting their behaviours to social norms. Here, condemnation functions as a form of surveillance that controls the way individuals choose to act or behave in a society.

The individuals are conscious of the consequences of deviating from social norms and to escape punishment they internalize these norms which leads to self-surveillance or monitoring oneself. Social norms therefore control and maintain order in society not by exerting physical power but rather through the control of the individual's mind.

In the series, Claire is the subject of a gaze of social norms. Her actions are confined to the walls it has created and yet within those walls, there is a level of autonomy. While Claire makes her own decisions, they are ultimately a product of the rules curated by norms.

Claire is subjected to the expectations of her family, particularly her father, and Fleabag. Claire plays the role of what society has deemed as responsible and her actions add on to the gaze of the panopticon.

Claire is aware of the expectations that her family has for her and these expectations make her behave and make decisions that align with norms. Claire's marriage to Martin is an important part of the series. She makes decisions that are influenced by his expectations and the expectations that come with the role of being a wife. This becomes evident when she initially turns down a promotion that she receives for a job in Finland. Claire is burdened with playing the responsible sister, wife and daughter.

During a conversation about the job in Episode 5 of Season 1, Claire states that she cannot leave her "Broken sister" (00:14:51). Her actions are a reflection of the internalization of what is considered acceptable of her role as a sister by society. It also marks Claire as a subject of the panoptical gaze of social norms.

Together, Fleabag and Claire present behaviours that deviate from and conform to societal norms. The characters are ultimately a representation of human experience. In the series, Fleabag is a subject of the panopticon that defies it. Through her actions, she criticizes the control that societal expectations and norms have on individuals. Claire on the other hand is a subject of the panopticon that falls under its control. She is a representation of the average individual whose actions lead to the smooth functioning of society. Her character demonstrates internal or self-surveillance that leads individuals to conform to expectations while Fleabag's character demonstrates individuals in society that escape the panopticon.

Conclusion

The impact of the panopticon has expanded from prisons to various institutions and social environments in society. The panopticon can essentially be found in almost all aspects of one's life. Individuals in contemporary society experience a kind of liberty and freedom that is superior to earlier times. They believe the freedom they enjoy is far better than the one experienced by generations before them. Therefore, they live under the illusion that they are autonomous individuals whose decisions and choices are solely theirs. However, this deception of liberty has been bestowed by the authorities to gain control over them. Those in power have always imposed their rules onto the subjects. Over time people have internalized these rules and it has transformed into their own beliefs and values. With this internalization, the power structures can enforce ubiquitous and perpetual control without the use of external force. Individuals begin to self-regulate on their terms without the awareness that these terms are ultimately enforced by those in control. The choices that they deem to be free of control are confined to the panopticon.

Social norms are unrecorded rules that exist in every society. Any individual who is part of the social environment becomes exposed to it. Norms are a form of social control that works like a panopticon. It is an invisible authority that imposes its rules onto individuals to regulate their behaviour. It decides what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Internalization of its rules enables the power structures to effectively control the individual.

Through the study of Fleabag and Claire, this project navigates the panoptical lens of social norms. The study of the two characters helps one understand the kind of control that

norms have on people. The panopticon is responsible for our restricted freedom but at the same time, it is also responsible for certain liberties one enjoys.

On one hand, the norms question the individual's free will, on the other hand, it has created a system of living that enables human beings to live in harmony and advance their lives. The effect of internalizing norms in society is that it brings about order throughout the world which in turn creates solidarity. It is a key factor that distinguishes human beings from animals and helps man evolve into morally superior beings. It has created selfless individuals who put others before them and work towards the welfare of the society instead of solely working based on meeting one's needs. Escaping this panopticon, however, results in individuals whose actions are driven by meeting their own needs. Although deviants do not meet the expectations of society, unlike the average individual, they experience a certain amount of freedom that conformists do not. Therefore, social norms are a panopticon that has both negative and positive control over individuals.

Works Consulted

- Becker, Anke. *On the Origins of Restricting Women's Promiscuity*. Oct. 2022, www.ankebeckerecon.com/uploads/1/3/9/6/139626230/main.pdf.
- Brown University. "Internalized Authority and the Prison of the Mind: Bentham and Foucault's Panopticon." *Brown.edu*, 2009, www.brown.edu/Departments/Joukowsky_Institute/courses/13things/7121.html.
- DeBono, Amber, et al. "Rude and Inappropriate: The Role of Self-Control in Following Social Norms." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 37(1), 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210391478><http://pspb.sagepub.com>.
- "Deviance - Normative and Non Normative Behavior - MCAT Content." *Jack Westin*, 11 Mar. 2020, jackwestin.com/resources/mcat-content/normative-and-non-normative-behavior/deviance#:~:text=Informal%20deviance%20refers%20to%20violations.
- Fleabag*. Created by Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Amazon Prime Video, 2016, *Amazon Prime Video app*, <https://www.primevideo.com/.in>
- Fleabag*. Directed by Harry Bradbeer, season 1, episode 2, Two Brothers Pictures, 28 July 2016. *Amazon Prime Video app*. <https://www.primevideo.com/.in>.
- Fleabag*. Directed by Harry Bradbeer, season 1, episode 3, Two Brothers Pictures, 04 August 2016. *Amazon Prime Video app*. <https://www.primevideo.com/.in>.
- Fleabag*. Directed by Harry Bradbeer, season 1, episode 4, Two Brothers Pictures, 11 August 2016. *Amazon Prime Video app*. <https://www.primevideo.com/.in>.
- Fleabag*. Directed by Harry Bradbeer, season 1, episode 5, Two Brothers Pictures, 18 August 2016. *Amazon Prime Video app*. <https://www.primevideo.com/.in>.
- Fleabag*. Directed by Harry Bradbeer, season 1, episode 6, Two Brothers Pictures, 25 August 2016. *Amazon Prime Video app*. <https://www.primevideo.com/.in>.

Fleabag. Directed by Tim Kirby, season 1, episode 1, Two Brothers Pictures, 21 July 2016.

Amazon Prime Video app. <https://www.primevideo.com/.in>.

Guignon, David. "Michel Foucault's 'Discipline & Punish' (Part 1/2)." *Www.youtube.com*, 14 Dec. 2019, youtu.be/zjRxbaY6JaU?si=SPF4JdasIIx3Vooc. Accessed 4 Feb. 2024.

---. "Michel Foucault's 'Discipline & Punish' (Part 2/2)." *Www.youtube.com*, 21 Dec. 2019, youtu.be/hYX4Bng8nI0?si=PW0HZtlOjXvS6hlN. Accessed 4 Feb. 2024.

Gutting, Gary, and Johanna Oksala. "Michel Foucault." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Spring 2019, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019, plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/#HistPris.

Hechter, Michael, and Karl-Dieter Opp. "Social Norms." *Google Books*, Russell Sage Foundation, 2001, books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=uPiFAwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=social+norms&ots=fM6telE6Vv&sig=RbIhg9xtf6lvfvz7d-8pro6H4CE&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=true. Accessed 5 Feb. 2024.

Kalra, Drishti. "Sexual Promiscuity in Anthropology | AnthroholiC." *AnthroholiC*, 19 Apr. 2023, anthroholiC.com/promiscuity.

Klages, Mary. *Literary Theory a Guide for the Perplexed*. London Bloomsbury, 2015.

Schofield, Philip. *Bentham: A Guide for the Perplexed*. 2009, books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ewcSBwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=related:A3WAXywkqrsJ:scholar.google.com/&ots=rPBAJ2XcV8&sig=jM-2Yiooy4Ung_rcfVWq0mqb44Y&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.

"The Social Factual Norms by Durkheim Sociology Essay." *Www.ukessays.com*, www.ukessays.com/essays/sociology/the-social-factual-norms-by-durkheim-sociology-essay.php.

Yadav (MA), Sourabh, and Chris Drew (PhD). "Informal Deviance (Sociology): Definition and Examples (2023)." *Helpfulprofessor.com*, 23 July 2023, helpfulprofessor.com/informal-deviance/.