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## Perpetuation of Female Performativity through Panopticism in Jagmohan Mundhra's *Provoked: A True Story*

### ABSTRACT

Jagmohan Mundhra's *Provoked: A True Story* (2006) shows women's subjugated status and their inability to step out of this imposed boundary as their actions remain under the surveillance of the dominant force. The dominant force also tries to nullify or neutralize any attempt of rebellion from women. In the film, Kiranjit Ahluwalia, the protagonist, is forced to act according to the normative gender roles of a mother, a wife and, above all, a subjugated woman even when she is being severely abused by her husband and thus becomes a prisoner at her own home. Later, she becomes a prisoner of H. M. Prison Mullwood Hall when she tries to break free from the imposed identity. Thus, the dominant patriarchal force tries to reform her actions to ensure the continuity of gendered behavior. The paper draws theories on Female Performativity from Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* and *Gender Trouble*; and ideas on Panopticism from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. The aim of the paper is to explore the convergences between the two theories to show how the oppressive forces of the society limit and control the actions of women through perpetual surveillance by examining the journey of Kiranjit Ahluwalia.

**Keywords:** Female Performativity; Panopticism; *Provoked: A True Story*; Gender; Surveillance

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### Introduction

A major part of human history chronicles the oppression, discrimination and exploitation of the minority. This label 'minority' is not always based on mere numbers but rather identified in terms of power, gender, status, geography, ethnicity and so on. Louis Wirth says, "A minority group is any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination" (347). Thus, Helen Meyer Hacker establishes women as a minority in her essay "Women as a Minority Group" by quoting Louis Wirth's definition of "minority group" (60). As a result, these people from different minority groups, including women, are put under such surveillance that controls their actions and performances. The character of Kiranjit Ahluwalia in Jagmohan Mundhras's *Provoked: A True Story* (2006) is a woman under such surveillance. The aim of the paper is to explore how the oppressive forces of the society limit and control the actions of women through surveillance by studying the reel-life experiences of Kiranjit Ahluwalia.

*Provoked: A True Story* (2006<sup>1</sup>, starring Aishwarya Rai as Kiranjit Ahluwalia and Naveen Andrews as Deepak Ahluwalia, depicts a fictionalized account of Kiranjit's real life experiences. The film offers a close look at the plight of women enduring domestic violence as part of South Asian diaspora in the United Kingdom. Diaspora is essentially an alienating condition where one renders him/herself as a minority. Prolonged political conflict and the allure of the western world providing financial opportunities are major reasons behind the widespread South Asian diaspora. Movies delineating such phenomenon explore the circumstance of being outside one's comfort zone and hence the protagonists navigate themselves in an unfamiliar and oftentimes hostile host culture. Stephen Frear's *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985) focuses on the search for livelihood of Omar, a Pakistani immigrant, with his British lover Johnny. The movie "interrogated and redefined the meaning of "British" from a variety of positions" and it "foregrounded not only racial, but also class, sexuality and gender politics" (Desai 375). It also focuses on Omar's father Hussein's spiraling into depression and blaming his diasporic condition for it. Deepa Mehta's *Sam & Me* (1991) juxtaposes two subjects of diaspora, a recently immigrated 23 year old Indian man named Nikhil and an elderly Jewish man

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1. The film is based on the real life events of Kiranjit Ahluwalia, an Indian woman, who fatally burnt her husband in England in 1989. After trial, Kiranjit was convicted of murder but later it was overturned into voluntary manslaughter. In 1992, she appealed on the ground of a mistrial and won. Thus, the conviction was overturned again, setting her free.

named Sam, in a relationship of caregiver and patient. Set in Canada the film represents both men's shared sense of displacement and their yearning for homeland while it also comments on class differences and material inequalities. Gurinder Chadha's *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002) chronicles Jasmin Bhamra's (known as Jess) journey of being a football player in England and eventually going to USA to study on sports scholarship while battling her conservative Sikh family and racial biases of the surroundings. While having a light hearted tone, the film brings out diaspora related anxiety to the fore. Mira Nair's *The Namesake* (2006) is a narrative of "upwardly mobile immigrants torn between tradition and modernity as they are absorbed into the American melting pot" (Holden). It presents the problem of assimilation into the host culture through Ashima's humorous discovery of modern household appliances as well as her son Gogol/Nikhil's painful negotiation between his Indian and American identities. Mira Nair's film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012) sheds light on the incessant scrutiny and humiliation faced by a Pakistani immigrant in USA. Changez Khan, a Princeton graduate, believed in the equal opportunity provided by America, but, "[A]fter Sept. 11, though, he begins to see himself a stranger in a strange land, and alienated from America and its conquering (call it fundamentalist) capitalism" (Dargis). Similar to the characters experiencing diaspora, In *Provoked: A True Story*, Kiranjit's location in an alien setting heightens her conflict and helplessness. It is not just her domestic environment that is hostile, rather she does not find any point of convergence in the British culture.

In the film, Kiranjit immigrates to the United Kingdom at the age of twenty-four after marrying Deepak Ahluwalia unbeknownst of the journey of domestic and sexual abuse she was about to embark on. After ten long years of abuse at the hands of her husband, she tries to break free. She burns her husband which ultimately leads him to his death. The film then depicts how Kiranjit is promptly brought under strong surveillance after she tries to do something out of the boundaries of her assigned activities. In the film, Kiranjit gives birth to two children while going through domestic abuse. This indicates how she had to maintain the socially assigned roles of being a married woman and mother even when she was enduring marital rape. She could not leave her abusive husband as such an act would be considered a disgrace to her family in the Indian society. Thus, she had to perform the roles, follow the rules and adhere to the behavioral pattern of being a docile South Asian woman living abroad. If this phenomenon is explored through the lens of Judith Butler's concept of female performativity, it can be cited as Kiranjit performing according to her gender. After the violent act of burning her husband, and violence being outside a woman's performative zone, Kiranjit is put under surveillance in prison to get her reformed as a

gendered subject. In prison, Kiranjit is only allowed minimal actions and mobility. This scenario can be compared with Michel Foucault's explanation of Jeremy Bentham's concept of 'Panopticism'. Foucault's explanation of panopticism gives us the impression that there is an operating Panopticon inside our society which penetrates the boundary of actual prisons. It must be noted that, the idea of performativity is applicable to both male and female gender; which means that men, like women, are also inside the social Panopticon where they must conform to gendered role. In this research, the focus is solely on how Panopticon perpetuates female performativity.

#### Theoretical Foundation

The word 'Panopticon' originates from Greek 'Panoptes' which means 'all seeing'. In 1791, Jeremy Bentham designed a model of prison using the idea of his younger brother, Samuel Bentham, who used to work as a shipbuilder for Prince Potemkin in Russia. Samuel was in charge of a factory for making sailcloth, rope and other ships' fittings (Steadman 2). In that factory, he had to supervise a group of unskilled workers. To train and regulate them effectively, he used to sit in the middle of the factory and assign position for his workers in a circular fashion so that he could supervise all of them and see who was doing what at any given time. Jeremy Bentham saw this application of central inspection while visiting his brother in 1786. Bentham applied this principle of central inspection to design a model of prison which later came to be known as the Panopticon model. Basically, this architectural figure consists of a circular building (or rotunda) with a watch tower in the middle. The prison cells are positioned inside the rotunda in a circular fashion against the wall and a prison guard is positioned in the central tower. The guard in the tower becomes an omniscient figure inside the architectural structure and thus his power of surveillance is amplified. Even though this model of prison was never accepted by the authority in Bentham's lifetime, the principle involved in it was later applied in asylums, hospitals, military training academies, schools, factories and in many other places (Steadman 1-6). Foucault's explanation of Bentham's 'Panopticon' in *Discipline and Punish* echoes the notion of there being an operating Panopticon inside our society, which transgresses the boundary of actual prisons. Thus, Foucault labels our society as a 'Panoptic machine' when he writes, "... but [we are] in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism" (217). 21<sup>st</sup> century theorist Gary T. Marx echoes how Bentham and Foucault's ideas of Panopticism is relevant to ensure current "forms of social control" in present society in the form of "New Surveillance" (817).

A point of convergence between female performativity and panopticism can be traced through the notion of 'visibility'. Judith Butler asserts that gender is created through performance. There can be no

performance without partakers or an audience or in other words, without being visible, as suggested by Schechner in *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (250). For Foucault, inside the Panopticon model, “visibility is a trap” which results in the production of subjugated individuals (200). In this way, the concept of visibility connects the two theories in the similar process of subjugating individuals. Hence, the scenario of Kiranjit can be analysed as a subject who is trapped within gendered activities but cannot get out of it as the metaphorical Panopticon constantly surveils and tries to control her actions. In performance studies, according to Schechner, Performance has four components – sourcers, producers, performers and partakers (250). For Schechner, the term performativity is considered “to be hard to pin” (153). Judith Butler defines performativity in *Bodies that Matter* as “a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms” (95). According to Butler’s concept of performativity, women perform certain roles, follow certain rules and behave in particular ways according to their gender that are dictated or imposed by certain dominant political conventions. The assigned role is performed through acts, hence, gender is acted through activities assigned by the society. Butler writes in the 1999 version of the preface to *Gender Trouble*, “The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, positioned through the gendered stylization of the body” (Preface xv). In this way, Butler establishes that gender is performative. In the same preface, Butler states that gender is not substantial or concrete rather it is the ‘congealed’ form of the biological sex (xii).

Butler further establishes how gender is constructed by human actions done on or through the bodies in *Gender Trouble*. She articulates,

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (179)

In this manner, women such as Kiranjit (and men like Deepak as well) are forced to perform gendered activities which are regarded as conventions because of the perpetuation of such activities through repetition to stabilize their identities. Female performativity is thus carried out by the perpetual politicization of the female body. Butler also takes the help of Michel Foucault’s notion of ‘juridical power’ to show how the dominant force ensures this perpetuation. Butler writes, “Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms—that is, through the

limitation, prohibition, regulation, control, and even “protection” of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice” (*Gender Trouble* 4). Thus, an individual like Kiranjit is forced to perform her gender in accordance with the sanctioned and assigned activities for the particular gender. In such instances, the female body becomes a stage on which others perform. Hence, in her essay, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” Butler writes, “the body is an historical idea but a set of possibilities to be continually realized” (521). It must also be mentioned that in similar fashion, the exercise of power by men as part of the dominant force is gendered as well. As female performativity renders Kiranjit as a docile woman, male performativity compels Deepak to act an assertive patriarchal force.

Another convergence between female performativity and panopticism can be identified in the process of subjugating an individual. Foucault advocates that a subjugated individual can never question the predetermined role constructed by the exercise of power by the dominant force; rather, the subject adheres to the roles. Foucault writes, “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (202-203). A similar process of identity creation or subjugation of individuals similar to Butler’s ideas is found in the second chapter of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. In the chapter titled “The Means of Correct Training” Foucault states, “Discipline ‘makes’ individuals;” (170). According to him, this identification process consists of three stages – hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and examination (170). In this process, an individual is observed through the Panopticon model of Bentham. Then, his actions are measured against a set of normalized actions and a judgment is passed. Finally, through examination of the individual’s actions, the individual becomes formalized in the power structure. Thus, in the process of subjugating an individual, a connection and convergence can be traced between the two theories.

A limited number of research has been carried out on *Provoked: A True Story* and no research work on the film has given attention to how the social Panopticon perpetuates female performativity. In Ganga and Joseph’s essay “Marital Violence, Diaspora and Survival: Cinematic Representations in Jagmohan Mundhra’s *Provoked* and Deepa Mehta’s *Heaven on Earth*”, the former film is analyzed focusing on the issue of domestic violence faced by female Indian immigrants who are taught to conform to the rules of patriarchy and familial requirements” (102-103). In Shivani Vashist’s article “Unsilencing the Silenced: Kiran in Movie *Provoked*”, the film is dissected

from numerous points of view ranging from Laura Mulvey's idea of film and cinematography being patriarchal to the legal psychological idea of 'battered woman syndrome'<sup>2</sup>. Vashist explores how Kiranjit emerges as a 'New Woman' for her "revolt against the established norms" (7). In Esterino Adami's essay "Enduring Identities in Diasporic Cinema", *Provoked: A True Story* has been analyzed as a film depicting the metamorphosis of the identity of Kiranjit Ahluwalia which is caught between "two contrasting viewpoints" (57). Even though Adami's primary focus is on Kiranjit's identity, it must be noted that the notion of Kiranjit shifting from "her husband's jail" to the "jail of law" in the essay has been used as specific point of departure for this paper as it echoes the perpetuation of confined lifespans of women such as Kiranjit (Adami 62).

#### Kiranjit, Surveillance and Performativity at Home

Kiranjit's act of ultimate defiance opens the film. Apart from this opening scene, there are seven scenes set in Kiranjit's domestic setting throughout the film. The film shows Kiranjit in two different domestic settings, her maternal home in Punjab and 'her' home in London. However, two incidents of the film set in these two homes quickly prove that neither was her home in the purest sense of the word. Just as Butler's notion of performativity advocates that an individual's gender is constructed through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control, and even protection of such individuals, the film too depicts how Kiranjit's actions are controlled by such factors.

Deepak Ahluwalia, Kiranjit's husband, declares during one of their several physical altercations, "This is my house, my money" (*Provoked* 1:31:43-47). It implies that the home he shows Kiranjit earlier in the film so lovingly and affectionately never actually belonged to her. It always belonged solely to her husband. This is one instance of prohibition and limitation which ultimately creates and shapes Kiranjit's actions. In another instance, before Kiranjit's wedding, her sister mentions how she does not need to know Deepak as a person before their marriage (00:37:12-32). She suggests that as Deepak is a friend of Kiranjit's brother-in-law, Kiranjit should not try to inquire further about him. This again, shows how Kiranjit's maternal home was never really her home. She had to perform according to the assigned actions which originated from the earlier template of a docile Indian woman's actions and which ultimately result in converting Kiranjit into a docile Indian woman.

Another key incident concerning the limitation put on Kiranjit based on her gender is about the discontinuation of her education. At the wedding

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2. It refers to female entities killing their male partners as a result of long history of abuse, rather than a single and isolated act of abuse.

ceremony, Kiranjit asks her sister if Deepak would allow her to continue her education (00:37:33-34). Her sister assures her that Deepak does not mind and will allow her to continue (00:37:34-39). Kiranjit remains silent afterwards. The obvious and visible point here is that Kiranjit, being a woman, had to depend on her future husband's verdict for the continuation of her education. However, a deeper scrutiny of the film will allow one to see its silence about the discontinuation of Kiranjit's education after her marriage. No more arguments or conversation about Kiranjit's discontinuation of education is shown again. This silence can be considered as an echo of Kiranjit's silence as oppressed woman. She cannot have any say or utter one word once her husband, the dominant patriarch, has passed a verdict. Hence, this shows that her society and culture raised her as a woman without a voice of her own.

Kiranjit is forced to perform her gendered roles through her choice of clothing as well. In one scene, Kiranjit can be seen showing off her western outfit to Deepak. However, Deepak menacingly speaks these vitriolic words, "What are you wearing? You shouldn't try and copy white girls. It doesn't look right" (00:26:25-35). When Kiranjit tries to say something in reply, Deepak speaks with a certain air of finality and says, "Now go and get changed. Now!" (00:26:39-42). Deepak does not want Kiranjit to dress up as western white girls because for him she is a docile Indian wife. He tries to limit her performance through prohibition of a particular type of garment. In another instance, Kiranjit is coerced by Deepak to dance with another gentleman at a party. Initially, she is not much inclined to dance but Deepak insists on it and eventually, Kiranjit complies (00:30:05-09). The camera frequently intercuts between their dance and Deepak's transforming expressions ranging from joy to anger and finally to jealousy. After returning home, Deepak, enraged with jealousy, hits Kiranjit. This exercise of power further confines Kiranjit within the parameters of predetermined female performativity in her domestic life.

Kiranjit's body is also violated and exploited as a stage of performance. The most striking example of this is the marital rape scene (1:01:37-1:02:48). Deepak comes home drunk and he instigates physical intercourse against his wife's wish. Thus, Kiranjit's body is used against her wish and she cannot have any say in the act as the exploiter of her body is an agent of the dominant patriarchal force. Hence, her plea for prohibition gets silenced which echoes in her so-called 'home'. Every echo reverberates Deepak's ownership of Kiranjit's body as well as the house. Therefore, for Deepak, both the house he lives in and his wife are commodities which he can own. With this ownership comes the imposition of actions and roles, which eventually brings subjugation leading to the confinement of performance of the subjugated female individual such as Kiranjit Ahluwalia.



The constructed gender of a female must follow the accepted and normalized tasks and roles of a woman which are imposed by the dominant social force. This forceful adherence to the dominant social norms is seen in the case of Kiranjit within her domestic life. Deepak roars in her face, “You are a woman. You are nothing. You are a cunt. You are less than nothing” (1:32:11-20). These four sentences spoken by Deepak connect Kiranjit with Butler’s notion of individuals being subjugated through certain steps. First, the identification of gender is there when he reinforces the idea of Kiranjit being a woman. Then, her biological body is scrutinized and she is further established as a woman as Deepak describes her in terms of her genitals. Finally, she is labelled as a member of the inferior sex by her husband as he describes her as less than nothing. Thus, the biological label of being a ‘female’ determines Kiranjit’s value at home. That value of being less than nothing cannot be challenged by Kiranjit as the weight of women being less than nothing historically suppresses her. Her identity is shaped by the dominant force at home – her husband and because of being under the surveillance of her dominant husband, the subjugated Kiranjit, sans her act of defiance, cannot perform outside her assigned roles. This compulsion of performing certain tasks through surveillance can become more visible and transparent by scrutinizing Kiranjit’s actions in prison in the next section which may lead us to the converging point of Kiranjit’s home and prison life as being one in the following sections.

Kiranjit, Panopticon and Performativity in Prison

In the film, Kiranjit is imprisoned immediately after she verbally acknowledges her deviant and rebellious act in broken English, “I want...him [her husband] [in] pain, like he pain[ed] me” (00:11:11-21). This statement indicates how Kiranjit negated the template of female performativity by trying to harm her husband. Even though, in the following scene, the judge makes a remark on how Kiranjit’s acknowledgement is not a full confession yet her lack of denial is considered reason enough for imprisonment. Then, a prison van is seen making its way towards H. M. Prison Mullwood Hall. The prolonged focus of the camera on the road sign containing the name of the prison indicates impending sinister incidents.

Kiranjit’s subjugation by the Panopticon or surveillance operating inside the prison begins even before she gets down from the prison van. As soon as the door of the prison van opens, the jail guard says, “Alright you lot, out you get. Haven’t got all day” (00:13:24-27). Thus, immediate authority is established by the observing force operating inside the prison and the subjugation of the individuals such as Kiranjit in the prison begins. The reformation and normalization of Kiranjit’s behavior also start simultaneously at the prison gate in the same scene. When the guard takes attendance of the soon to be prisoners at the gate, Kiranjit replies timidly in

a soft voice. The guard orders her to speak loudly from next time. In this way, the Panopticon inside the prison quickly starts to subjugate Kiranjit by controlling her actions by nature and degree. This is further echoed when one of the guards shouts “this way ladies” and the prisoners including Kiranjit almost give a Pavlovian<sup>3</sup> response by moving quickly through the open gates as the first guard told them to do so while getting down from prison van earlier (00:14:16-17).

The film promptly establishes the fact that the prison is going to be a place where Kiranjit will have to follow certain rules and regulation; go through certain limitation and prohibition. It is exhibited in an obvious manner when she is handed ‘Prison Handbooks’ immediately after walking through the prison gates along with other prisoners. The guard says, “Everything you need to know are in these pages [of the prison handbook]” (00:14:49-52). This further implies how the prison will strip Kiranjit off her freedom (if she ever was free) and confine her within a set boundary. The guard’s succeeding warning in an ominous tone about not losing the handbook can lead to the interpretation of the prison as a trap or a maze where no prisoner can exist without the guidance of the handbook. Hence, the prison limits the world of Kiranjit and simultaneously it posits further boundaries within the limitation to reaffirm the disciplining process.

Next, the hierarchical observation process can be seen in the scene set at the examination room of the prison. At the examination room, a guard tells Kiranjit to take off her jewelries. Kiranjit can be seen to be slightly hesitant while taking off her *Mangalsutra*<sup>4</sup> and *Kara*<sup>5</sup>. However, because of her rebellious act leading to the negation of performativity, she finds herself at a position torn between two identities – a woman subjugated by the society and a prisoner subjugated by the Panopticon inside the prison. The balance shifts when Kiranjit adheres to the firm order of the guard to take off all her accessories including the *Mangalsutra* and *Kara*. Kiranjit gradually becomes a subjugated individual of the prison and the Panopticon inside it.

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3. Associated with I. P. Pavlov’s procedure of ‘Classical Conditioning’. The procedure is employed to cause an automatic or predictable response from a respondent through repetitive training.
  4. The word originates from Sanskrit ‘Mangala’, (meaning holy) and ‘Sutra’ (meaning thread). It is a necklace tied around the bride’s neck by the groom during Hindu wedding ceremonies in the Indian subcontinent. According to Hindu culture, the necklace symbolizes the holy conjugal union and the bride must wear the necklace until her husband’s demise.
  5. A bracelet made of iron worn by those who believe in ‘Khalsa’ or has total faith in Sikhism. It is one of the five K’s which must be adorned by a Sikh as commanded by Guru Gobind Singh.

The Panopticon further subjugates Kiranjit by normalizing her uniform or costume. After stripping Kiranjit off her jewelry, the guard bluntly says, "Now [take off] your clothes" (00:16:45-47). When Kiranjit shows no sign of complying, the guard firmly asks about the cause behind her unwillingness. Kiranjit replies, "Ten years married...never removed clothes even in front of [my] husband" (00:17:12-22). To this, the guard replies, "These are the rules" (00:17:25-26). Thus, the prison demands her subjugation to be identified with a new sign reflected in her dress replacing the old sign of her domestic life. In prison, Kiranjit's actions, even to the extent of her dress pattern, needs to be measured against a normalized standard.

The prison confines Kiranjit within a claustrophobic cell. The guard sardonically says, "Home sweet home" in front of her assigned cell (00:19:13-14). When the guard takes Kiranjit to her cell, she crosses the threshold of the cell's door and the guard locks the door. Then, the guard looks at Kiranjit for few seconds through the peephole which is closed with a reverberating sound. This whole act virtually gives the impression that Kiranjit is being confined within a cage. Later, Kiranjit can be seen looking at the walls of her cell and bursting into tears. The Panopticon working inside the prison further subjugates her by imposing a routine on her daily meals. Kiranjit misses breakfast on the first day although her cellmate Ronnie brings food for her. Thus, Kiranjit cannot perform the action of eating breakfast anymore as she did not adhere to the time frame. Another dimension of this type of imposition of temporal boundary can be seen in the scene set during playtime. Kiranjit's cellmate Ronnie notifies her about the playtime by sarcastically saying, "Here we are, prisoner playtime. Enforced. One hour" (00:51:13-20). Therefore, playtime for the inmates is not facilitated but enforced by the prison. The playtime is not meant to be there to help the inmates decompress, rather it is just another ploy of routine surveillance.

The prison also surveils Kiranjit around the clock with guards positioned almost everywhere. The film repetitively reminds the audience about the existence of the guards in every scene set inside the prison. For example, when Radha Dalal comes to meet Kiranjit for the first time in prison, the camera pans on the guard escorting Kiranjit for two seconds even before Kiranjit comes on screen (00:33:46-48). Another impactful camerawork to accentuate Kiranjit's confinement within the Panopticon inside the prison can be found during the scene depicting Kiranjit's lawyer's phone conversation with her about when Kiranjit can appeal for parole. As soon as Kiranjit hears that she will be eligible for parole after twelve long years in prison, she fearfully says, "So long!" (00:54:43-44). As the lawyer keeps talking on the other side of the phone, the camera zooms out slowly to

push Kiranjit's horrified face to the background and bring the bars of prison to the foreground. This purposeful camerawork highlights Kiranjit's ultimate subjugation through the Panopticon inside the prison.

The examination of Kiranjit's action during her reformation largely takes place at the courtroom and during Kiranjit's meeting with her lawyers. As Deepak dies before the first hearing, Kiranjit's rebellious act becomes re-examined and it is labelled as an attempt to murder. This examination is the last step taken by the Panopticon to subjugate Kiranjit. The reformation process inside the prison can be considered as another examination of Kiranjit's actions. However, in this case, her actions are examined to see whether they have been normalized or not. The surveillance inside the prison strictly examines Kiranjit's actions through amplification of economical visibility. Hence, a limited number of guards surveil all the prisoners in the dining hall. Therefore, Kiranjit's subjugation inside the prison is executed through hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and examination of her earlier actions and reformed ones.

#### Kiranjit's Homes as Prisons

Throughout the film there are subtle hints for the audience to discern how Kiranjit's domestic homes are not much different from a prison. Just as Kiranjit is observed by the literal Panopticon inside the prison, she is observed by a metaphorical one in her life outside the prison. For example, when Kiranjit is taken to her prison cell and the guard ironically says, "Home sweet home", the flashback takes Kiranjit back to the time when Deepak took her to their new home in England (00:19:13-19). This is a subtle hint for the audience to decipher how Kiranjit begins to discover similarities between her home and the prison. The home Deepak welcomed her to as 'their' home turned out to be a prison, which Kiranjit only realized after being confined in a real one. Much like the guards in H. M. Prison Mullwood Hall, her husband was the guard controlling her actions at her home. Similar to the H. M. Prison Mullwood Hall, there is hierarchical observation in Kiranjit's domestic life too. As mentioned in earlier section, Kiranjit's maternal home in Punjab also subjugates her. Then, she is oppressed by Deepak at their home in England. However, in court, her mother-in-law deliberately lies by saying that she never witnessed Kiranjit being hit by her son even though the flashback shows that she did (00:39:27-00:40:27). This is how Kiranjit's mother-in-law too becomes part of the hierarchy which dictates Kiranjit throughout her domestic life. Deepak and his mother can be considered as two guards of different ranks surveiling Kiranjit in her domestic life.

In another scene, Kiranjit is sent a dress in her prison. It promptly reminds her how Deepak forced her to change that particular western dress in an earlier incident at their home as it did not fit the characteristic of an

Indian housewife. With an ominous background music the camera slowly zooms in on Kiranjit's expression of reminiscence as the audience sees her oppressed domestic life shown in the flashback. Thus, Kiranjit's home and prison life converge again. Moreover, earlier in the examination room of the prison, Kiranjit is forced by the prison guard to change her clothes just as she was forced to change her dress by her husband. These exercises of power by different dominant forces on Kiranjit's body further converge her domestic and prison life. During Kiranjit's trial, her lawyer reads a letter written by Kiranjit for her husband which is translated from Punjabi to English for the court. The lawyer reads from the letter, "Deepak, if you come back, I promise you, I will do whatever you say. I won't drink black coffee. I won't watch television. The children need you. Please, come home" (00:41:17-29). Kiranjit's inclination to follow whatever Deepak orders and change her daily routine, even food habit only for his wish, shows how Deepak tried to confine her within a prison of his own. Just as Kiranjit was forced to change her daily routine and food habit inside the prison, she had actually gone through a similar process at her husband's home in England.

All of these limitations, prohibitions, exercises of power, confinement make one wonder if Kiranjit was in different prisons throughout her life. First, during her marriage she is stripped off her choice when her husband is chosen by her family. Then, her husband abuses her in their home in England. Finally, she is imprisoned when she unintentionally burns her husband to death. In none of these settings Kiranjit have any voice of her own. Her actions are assigned, imposed and regulated by dominant forces inside the prison and outside of it in her social life.

### **Conclusion**

After the thorough analysis of Jagmohan Mundhra's *Provoked: A True Story* under the light of Michel Foucault's notion of Panopticism and Judith Butler's notion of performativity, it can be stated that female performativity or gendered activities of women are indeed dictated and ensured by a metaphorical Panopticon operating in the society. Kiranjit Ahluwalia had to follow the template of female performativity under the surveillance of the social Panopticon and she was brought under a literal Panopticon – the prison – once she started violating her gendered stylization. In this manner, women are trapped within gendered activities. The Panopticon operating in the society vigilantly observes and surveils their activities that violate the gendered stylization. Thus, the continuation of female performativity is ensured by the dominant social Panopticon. Moreover, at present, the recurrent events of minorities being under strict surveillance has become alarming. From the killing of George Floyd, the oppression of minority communities in China to recent ban put on abortion in several states of USA,

the social Panopticon is very much active to control the performance of the minority groups. Moreover, as a minority, women are perpetual subjects of social Panopticon and hence, they are more frequent and easier victims of revenge pornography, invasion of private photos and domestic abuse. In this way, the social Panopticon not only dictates female performativity but it nullifies their rebellion through strict reformation as well.

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