

Slow Violence of Surveillance Capitalism in Samit Basu's *Chosen Spirits* (2020)

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Abstract

The term "Slow-Violence," coined by Rob Nixon, mainly describes the small or gradual harm and its normalization in society, having no legal recognition at a systemic level. In Samit Basu's *Chosen Spirits* (2020), this "slow violence" is inflicted in a dystopian setting by informational/surveillance/multinational capitalism, normalizing peoples' (netizens) discomfort and treating the human experience as a free raw material. This commodification of personal data by private corporations has led to a deterioration of privacy and a psychic numbing. Within the framework of "slow violence" and "Surveillance Capitalism," a term coined by Shoshana Zuboff, Basu contextualizes abstract forms of subjugation or harms like emotional distress, loss of privacy, constricted user behaviour, algorithmic marginalization, and traumatization to condition or normalize people. In Basu's fiction, the dystopian reflection of our society depicts the economy and digital culture as inextricably intertwined. While South Asian literature is characterized by diversity and plurality of different social groups – caste, religion, ethnicity, race, and so on – democracy and secularism uphold it. In Basu's *Chosen Spirits* (2020), the virtues that democracy is supposed to protect have been depicted to be under threat, especially in the 21st century, where surveillance capitalism of the IT paradigm is gradually replacing democracy.

Keywords : Surveillance Capitalism, Slow Violence, Dystopia, Science Fiction, Cyberculture

Chosen Spirits by Samit Basu is set in a futuristic version of Delhi, a world that feels eerily familiar. It revolves around the lives of two characters, Joey, and Rudra, who are navigating a society controlled by algorithms and surveillance, a theme that is increasingly relevant in our modern world. Joey, a

professional image-builder and storyteller, feels like her life lacks structure, a sentiment many can relate to, while Rudra, a talented cricket player with a promising future, represents the aspirations of today's youth. As they encounter socio-political unrest and personal challenges, their stories intertwine in a city struggling against fate and desolation. The novel offers a gripping portrayal of a dystopian society and the individuals trying to find their way, making it a compelling read for those interested in social commentary.

The theme of surveillance is a prominent and thought-provoking aspect of *Chosen Spirits* by Samit Basu. The protagonist, Joey, often feels her life is under constant surveillance, controlled by algorithms and captured through surveillance cameras. This sense of being watched and monitored reflects the pervasive nature of surveillance in the modern world. Joey's awareness of being observed and her cautious attitude while running in the park exemplifies the theme of surveillance, highlighting how it has become an integral part of everyday life. The presence of surveillance cameras in the park and using a decoder app to uncover the meaning behind a kolam further emphasise the theme of surveillance and its implications for individual freedom and privacy. Overall, the novel skilfully delves into the impact of surveillance on personal autonomy and the challenges it poses to navigating contemporary society. *Chosen Spirits* by Samit Basu is not just a story but a profound exploration of societal issues. The novel delves into the impact of technology on everyday life, societal inequality and injustice, the power of