

Dragnetting the Invisible: An Exploration of Surveillance, Secrecy and Exile in Amar Bhushan's *Escape to Nowhere* (2012)

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ABSTRACT: Amar Bhushan's fiction *Escape to Nowhere* is based on a true story, rooted in the world of Indian intelligence that brings forth the harsh reality of the intelligence agency (CEU). This text highlights the agency's methods of investigation, its diplomatic dealings with foreign agencies on international matters, and the internal conflicts within the organization. The plot of this novel is centered on the character Ravi Mohan, a senior officer in the agency who has been placed under surveillance for some suspicious deeds, but what unfolds later is severe. He is illegally transmitting secret data to foreign agents and violating national trust. The novel presents betrayal not as a result of personal trauma or mental collapse, but as an ideological and political act that challenges the boundaries of state loyalty. It is a narrative that exposes the dynamics of betrayal and institutional control within India's intelligence community. Through the methodical internal surveillance operation mounted against Ravi, Bhushan highlights how bureaucratic institutions respond to

internal threats not through public confrontation, but through silent investigation, procedural containment, and institutional erasure. The novel depicts the state's power as embedded in its ability to detect and neutralize dissent invisibly, without the need for spectacle. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of surveillance and disciplinary regimes and Giorgio Agamben's theory of *bare life* this paper argues that Ravi Mohan becomes a subject excluded from the protection of institutional law but included within the scope of state control. His condition as a fugitive, untried yet condemned, reflects how modern states manage dissent by rendering individuals politically invisible. This study argues that *Escape to Nowhere* critiques both the act of treason and the cold, impersonal machinery through which the state isolates and removes disloyal subjects.

KEYWORDS: *Intelligence Agency, Surveillance, Betrayal, Bare Life, Control, Exile.*

INTRODUCTION

In the post-millennial era, Indian literature has witnessed a surge in spy thrillers. These narratives extend beyond the life-threatening adventures of heroes at home and abroad, delving deeply into the internal conflicts and complexities within intelligence agencies. Indian spy fiction is situated at the intersection of literary creativity, political intrigue, and national security. While it is believed that the worldwide narrative of espionage was shaped by the Western corpus of spy fiction, dominated by characters like James Bond and George Smiley, Indian spy fiction originates from a distinct set of historical, political, and cultural contexts. A

distinctive portrayal of secrecy, patriotism, and treachery on the Indian subcontinent is attributed to the genre, which is rooted in postcolonial anxieties, border tensions, and the covert operations of intelligence organizations such as RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) and IB (Intelligence Bureau). Unlike its Western counterparts that often glamorize the lone, morally ambiguous agent, Indian spy fiction frequently grounds its protagonists in institutional frameworks, where loyalty to the state is tested against complex bureaucratic, ideological, and personal dilemmas. The narratives are shaped not only by the Cold War legacy but also by India's own geopolitical realities, partition, insurgencies, terrorism, and cross-border espionage, particularly with Pakistan and China. Authors such as Amar Bhushan, Mukul Deva, and Hussain Zaidi have contributed to the emergence of Indian spy thrillers that blend realism with fiction, combining procedural detail with emotional and moral conflict. These texts explore the silent wars waged within and beyond the nation's borders, shedding light on how the intelligence community operates in the shadows, far from public scrutiny. The genre also raises critical questions about the limits of loyalty, the nature of surveillance, and the ethical ambiguities of statecraft. Unlike others here Amar Bhushan's *Escape to Nowhere* captures the intricate plot of bureaucratic surveillance on Ravi Mohan and also the inner conflicts within the agency. It is a fictionalized account of a real-life espionage case within India's intelligence agency, RAW (Research and Analysis Wing). The novel is set in New Delhi and follows the quiet, tense unraveling of an internal betrayal in the country's top-secret security machinery. The story centres on Ravi Mohan, a mid-level officer working in a counterintelligence unit. Despite his calm demeanour and decorated service record, Ravi's activities raise internal suspicions. The senior leadership receives an anonymous note suggesting he may be leaking

classified information to a foreign agency. Rather than arresting or confronting him directly, the agency decides to monitor him silently. Thus, begins a covert internal operation, led by Jeevnathan, the head of the internal security unit. Through intense surveillance, tailing, bugging, and psychological profiling CEU attempts to confirm Ravi's guilt without alerting him. As the operation unfolds, Ravi appears increasingly anxious and isolated, yet his motives remain ambiguous. The novel documents the systematic nature of this internal dragnet while keeping the actual betrayal frustratingly ambiguous until the end. Eventually, Ravi vanishes without a trace, escaping surveillance just as evidence begins to mount. His disappearance reinforces both the strength and the limitations of bureaucratic intelligence operations. He becomes a fugitive, a symbol of ideological and institutional breakdown. Keeping this narrative in this analytical study, some questions may arise – how does this novel represent the mechanisms of internal surveillance within state intelligence agencies and create paranoia in his mind? What led him to be a dissenter? And to what extent did the disciplinary apparatus attempt to normalize Ravi invisibly? This study will interrogate the ambiguity surrounding Ravi's isolation, whether it was a result of intentional withdrawal or a consequence of institutional exclusion. This study will also analyse to what extent Ravi Mohan can be interpreted as a figure of Agamben's "bare life," and how his erasure illuminates the logic and mechanisms of power within the modern state.

GOVERNING THROUGH CONTROL AND EXILE: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

In modern critical theory and political thought, the relationship between state power, secrecy, and surveillance has emerged as a significant area of inquiry. Michel Foucault's ideas about power, knowledge, and discipline are very important for understanding

how modern states run their governments through control systems that are often unseen but very common. He says, “Knowledge comes from power; power and knowledge directly imply each other” (Foucault 27). Foucault rethought power not as something that comes from a sovereign but as a network of relationships that are practiced through institutions, practices, and knowledge systems that affect how people act (Foucault 1977). The idea of surveillance is very important to this study, especially Foucault’s use of the “Panopticon” as a metaphor and model for modern disciplinary societies, where people internalize the gaze of power and self-regulate in response (Foucault 1977). People who are constantly aware that they are being watched are more likely to control their behaviour. Traditional sovereign power is shown in public and is often violent. Panoptic power, on the other hand, works through uncertainty and not being seen. This creates a state of awareness and permanent visibility that makes power work automatically (Foucault 1977). This invisible gaze is present in many places, such as jails, schools, hospitals, and the government’s control system as a whole. This makes bodies submissive that follow rules without being forced. It says in his writing, “He who is in a field of visibility and knows it is responsible for the limits of power; he makes them play out naturally on himself” (Foucault, 202). For Foucault, surveillance is a productive force that changes not only behaviour but also identity and social order. He says, “Power is exercised rather than possessed... it is a relation that can only be realized in action” (Foucault 1980, 98).

Regarding surveillance, it is said that “surveillance is not just a tool of control; it is also a mechanism that makes certain kinds of knowledge about people, which in turn makes certain kinds of subjects” (Lyon 2007). Lyon’s research builds on this idea from Foucault by focusing on spying as a form of power that changes the way people interact with each other and creates new

identities. People are always aware that they could be watched by the government's secret surveillance systems, which creates a panoptic awareness that changes behaviour and identity. But you cannot fully understand surveillance without also understanding the role of secrecy, which is a key technique in state apparatuses. Secrecy is the information that is kept secret and Coady (2012) looks at it critically and says that secrecy is more than just keeping information from other people. It is also a relationship idea that shapes political and social realities by defining the limits of what people know and what they do not know. In this situation, the government uses secrets to hide how it controls things and to give the impression that it is all-powerful and unpredictable, which strengthens its authority (Bigo 2008). It seems that secrecy and surveillance work together in a way that is like a dialectical relationship, as surveillance tries to make people visible to the government, but secrecy keeps the public from seeing the full scope and methods of surveillance, which keeps power imbalances in place. While talking of these, the one concept is very important to expound here is the "viewer society" which shows a change from overt discipline to more subtle and widespread forms of power that seep into everyday life and create a self-disciplined culture based on the fear of being watched (Mathiesen 1997). So monitoring is not just a way to keep people in line; it is also a complicated social technology that changes identities and social relationships, creating new kinds of subjectivity that both fit with power and fight it. Also, new research shows that privacy is lost and spying gets stronger in the postmodern state, where technological progress has made state control more widespread and subtle (Haggerty & Ericson 2006). These changes support Foucault's idea of the "disciplinary society" changing into a "surveillant assemblage" with widespread and constant surveillance that goes beyond the usual separation of public and private (Hag-

gerty & Ericson 2006). Bigo (2008) calls this the “ban-opticon,” which means that the government controls things by combining openness and privacy, keeping things safe by showing and hiding things. This duality makes traditional ideas of authority harder to understand and blurs the lines between what is legal and what is illegal. It is important to point out that secrecy in surveillance is not an accident, but a purposeful tool of power. According to Clive Norris and Gary Armstrong (1999), secrecy lets the government “control narratives, frame social realities, and govern populations through managed knowledge.” This shows that surveillance and secrecy work together to create a political technology of control. This way of handling information creates a tension between being seen and not being seen.

Foucault’s idea of “power-knowledge” also shows how monitoring and keeping secrets are connected to the rules that decide what people can know, say, and do in a society. *Escape to Nowhere* is a powerful case study that shows how surveillance technologies and hidden government operations work. The story shows how people internalize monitoring systems and figure out who they are while being watched all the time. The link between power and knowledge is what modern forms of government are based on and this interaction is clearly shown in *Escape to Nowhere*, where secret government information and covert surveillance practices create a culture of fear and control while also opening for resistance and subversion. This way of looking at things not only helps us understand the text better, but it also sheds light on important issues like pushback and the moral issues surrounding surveillance in the modern world. Within the panoptic framework, secrecy acts as a contrast to the openness of monitoring, creating a tension that keeps power in place. This imbalance keeps the state’s epistemic edge, which lets surveillance happen in secret while people don’t know what kind of sur-

veillance is going on or how far it goes. Because of this balance between secrecy and openness, the state's power stays hidden, which strengthens control through psychological and intellectual doubt.

Whereas Foucault examines how the body is disciplined (in prisons, schools, hospitals) through surveillance & normalization, Agamben builds on Foucault's concept of biopolitics; he critiques and reorients it through his own analysis of sovereign power and bare life. This philosophical transition shifts the focus from the regulation of life to the abandonment and exclusion of life. 'Agamben argues that although Foucault's analysis of power touches on the connection between legal (juridico-institutional) and biopolitical models, it never fully confronts their deep, hidden intersection. This intersection, where sovereignty (the power to rule and decide life and death) meets biopolitics (the management of life by the state) is the blind spot in Foucault's work and in Western political thought more broadly (Agamben 1995). Here, Agamben's project is to uncover this "vanishing point" the hidden origin of sovereign power, where the state includes "bare life" (pure biological existence without rights) within its political logic. Agamben says that modern politics is based on a strange situation called the "state of exception." In this situation, a person's life, which he calls "bare life" is kept outside the law, but at the same time, the state still controls it. So, bare life is both excluded from and included in politics. This hidden contradiction is actually the foundation of modern political systems. When the line between normal law and the state of exception becomes unclear, bare life enters the center of politics. It is no longer just something the state controls; it becomes part of political struggles. People who were once powerless have now become both the target of state power and the voice that challenges it. At the same time, two things happen. On one hand, the state continues to control peo-

ple as biological bodies with respect to their health, birth, death, and population control. On the other hand, in modern democracy, people start to demand rights not just as citizens, but as living human beings. These two movements of state control and people's fight for freedom may look like opposites, but Agamben says they are actually connected. Both are focused on bare life, which has now become the centre of political life. The life that was once pushed to the edge is now the heart of both power and resistance. He argues that modern states create a "state of exception" where they can strip people of legal rights without appearing oppressive. For him, exclusion is a legal-political decision on who is a citizen and who is "homo sacer" (excluded from law but still controlled). He uses "*homo sacer*" as a metaphor for modern individuals who are excluded from political life but still controlled by the state. People are taken under constant surveillance or control, but with no legal recourse. Although their works intersect, they also diverge in important ways. Both theorists emphasize how power today often works through invisible structures, surveillance, norms, and legal frameworks rather than overt force. For Foucault, the body is subject to disciplinary power (schools, prisons, hospitals) and for Agamben, the body becomes "bare life", stripped of legal and political identity. Both agree that the body is where power becomes visible. Foucault focuses on biopolitics and the discipline of how power shapes life through norms and institutions. Agamben re-centers sovereign power, the power to decide exceptions, i.e., who is excluded from the law and made killable.

READING *ESCAPE TO NOWHERE*

Amar Bhushan's fiction, *Escape to Nowhere* (2012), possesses a different kind of narrative structure as it is not divided by chapters but by days. It consists of 96 days and an epilogue. In 2023, Vishal Bhardwaj made a film on it named *Khufiya*; however, the

film differs significantly from the original novel. *Escape to Nowhere* is a gripping spy novel by Amar Bhushan, a former Special Secretary in the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), India's external intelligence agency. Set within the high-stakes world of espionage, the novel draws inspiration from a real-life incident involving the mysterious disappearance of an Indian intelligence officer suspected of spying. The story unfolds that Jeevnathan, the head of the Security Division, navigates a web of loyalty, betrayal, and institutional dysfunction when suspicions arise about a senior analyst, Ravi Mohan, possibly leaking sensitive information. What makes the novel compelling is its insider's view of the workings of Indian intelligence, its ethical complexities, and the psychological toll on those tasked with protecting national security. Bhushan presents a realistic portrayal of the bureaucracy, secrecy, and personal cost behind espionage, not through action-packed chase scenes, but through subtle tensions, conversations, and moral dilemmas. *Escape to Nowhere* is not just a spy thriller; it is a sobering meditation on the blurred lines between duty and deception, rules and relationships, and the cost of doing what is right in a system that does not always reward it. The narrative intensifies when Venkat, a young and junior officer in cyber operations, breaks the usual chain of command and directly warns Jeevnathan about the suspicious actions of Ravi Mohan, a senior analyst. Venkat says that Ravi has shown too much interest in secret cyber tools and had links in the past with a journalist who might have been working for another country. These actions suggest that national security could be at risk. Venkat's decision to speak to Jeevnathan also shows how difficult it is for junior officers to report wrongdoing in a system where accountability is often ignored. The bureaucratic agency is an institution that follows strict rules, codes of conduct, and a fixed ideology. Everyone who belongs to it is expected to follow these rules. If some-

one breaks them, they may be classified or labelled. According to Michel Foucault, such categorization is not neutral—it is a political act. Institutions label people and place them into fixed roles such as the mad, the criminal, the sick, the deviant, or the normal (Foucault 1978). This is what happens to Ravi Mohan: when he takes his position against the rules of the agency, he is labelled a deviant—a spy or traitor. Then Jeevnathan orders Kamath to start watching Ravi, but to keep it secret. After three days of spying on Ravi Mohan, the watchers give Jeevnathan a lot of reports and photos. Most of Ravi's meetings are with relatives or fellow officers, often in fancy restaurants, though not related to his own department and he does not meet anyone suspicious during travel. It seems to Jeevnathan that they are missing something, so he says, “You are missing out on two or more needles in the haystack” (Bhushan, 54). Jeevnathan cannot shake off a growing sense of unease; the thought keeps returning to him, making him feel increasingly uncanny. Once surveillance is initiated, it becomes evident that Ravi Mohan leads an unusually extravagant lifestyle. He frequently invites fellow desk officers to lunch or dinner at five-star hotels—behaviour far removed from that of a typical officer. His medical treatment, social connections, and general conduct suggest a life of privilege and access that seems out of place. Naturally, questions arise: where does he get the resources to sustain such a lifestyle? These questions continue to trouble Jeevnathan. Although Ravi has served in several foreign postings and making international contacts is expected in his line of work the extent of his connections and his overall lifestyle still appear suspicious. No other officer behaves in such a manner. To some extent, Ravi seems to be violating the agency's ethical norms or ideological framework. It is as if he deliberately resists or subverts the disciplinary structure of the organization. This deviation from institutional expectations raises red flags, making it

necessary to place him under surveillance.

Surveillance is the central theme in this narrative. The word *dragnetting* is used to show how subtly the investigation is carried out to uncover the suspect hiding in plain sight. As suspicion grows in Jeevnathan's mind, he deploys several operatives to find any unusual behaviour in Ravi Mohan's activities. When these efforts yield no solid results, he instructs Kamath to start phone tapping. From these intercepted calls, Ravi appears to have regular conversations with relatives and colleagues, gathering information on various topics. This phone tapping is the first major move by the CEU's higher officials. Some of Ravi's questions to other desk officers raise concerns, as they have nothing to do with his assigned duties. Ravi's repeated access to information from other desks reflects the concept of the "ban-opticon," which combines both openness and secrecy to create an atmosphere of constant suspicion and control. Although Ravi intentionally gathers information, not everyone around him is aware of his motives. However, some officials eventually understand what he is doing and bring him under suspicion. While Jeevnathan's team try to pinpoint any wrongdoing, they cannot gather solid proof, which increases their frustration. These covert operations are carried out without formal permission from Chief Wasan, though he is aware of them. At first, the Chief is hesitant due to ethical concerns. However, Jeevnathan's experience and stubbornness pushes the operation forward. Later, hidden cameras are installed in Ravi's office, which reveals terrible things. He often photocopied documents collected from other sources and stored them in his brown leather bag. The team collect data from the photocopying machine. Despite this, they still cannot find any conclusive evidence to arrest him. Even surveillance cameras were placed in his car and eventually in the corridors and rooms of his apartment. This shows how modern states use surveillance in private spaces to

gather secret information, thereby creating “zones of indistinction” where legal and moral boundaries become blurred. This enables governance through uncertainty and ambiguity (Stoler 59). Still, all efforts lead to a wild goose chase. Meanwhile, agents also follow him to the places he visited and record the people he met. But none of this produces any concrete proof. To go even further with this Foucaultian view regarding deployment of agents, it is that modern surveillance is a “multiplicity of gazes” that are built into institutional and technological networks that work without centralized state control. This suggests that power is spread out and not centralized (Ball and Webster 56). The story shows a surveillance state that is not one central thing, but is spread out and includes bureaucratic agents, technologies, and social actors who are all involved in watching and controlling. The constant presence of the state and its desire to watch, control, and silence in *Escape to Nowhere* shows a basic idea of biopolitics, which is the modern form of power that, as Michel Foucault says, “takes life itself as its object” (Foucault 1978, 143). The story shows that power does not just control or stop people from doing things; it also sorts, manages, and organizes them through a set of tools that affect their lives on a personal and social level. Foucault’s idea of biopolitics is a big change in how power is used. It goes from sovereign power, which means having the right to kill, to biopower, which means having the power to “make live and let die” (Foucault 2003, 241). As the story goes on, the government’s actions of monitoring, identity theft, and movement restrictions are seen as biopolitical interventions that plan the lives of people who are both valuable and disposable in the national security system.

Ravi’s real paranoia and sense of moral dilemma surface when his personal assistant is caught with sensitive files, which are then kept for investigation. Around the same time, some officers and Kamath in the agency inform him that a senior official

was under surveillance for secretly dealing with foreign agents and transferring classified information. This fits with O'Malley's (1996) view of secrecy as an important part of the "carceral archipelago," where information is broken up and only some of it is shared to keep the logic of monitoring and discipline going (p. 74). So, the text's look at disinformation is not just about lying; it is also about how knowledge is strategically controlled to make people obey through partial exposure and hidden truths. Despite being under strict surveillance, Ravi Mohan manages to escape India with his wife. Two U.S. agents, Gilbert and Angelién, help them flee through Nepal. They change their identities and use fake passports to travel. They were promised permanent residency in the U.S., but it turns out to be false. As the novel states, "Ravi was left to fend for himself and live the remaining years of his life without any status — refugee, naturalised or illegal immigrant" (ibid., 325). He has no legal identity in the U.S. and he cannot get a job. He has to rely entirely on financial support from his children. The U.S. government gives him no help, and the Indian government completely disowns him, even though he once worked for it. The Indian government dismisses Ravi from service under Article 311(2)(c) of the Constitution, citing national security concerns. The Indian intelligence chief summons Douglas Walters, the CIA Station Head in Delhi, and demands to know whether Ravi's defection was an official CIA operation or the work of rogue agents like Gilbert. Walters denies any knowledge of Gilbert or Angelién and promises to investigate. A week later, Walters reports that the CIA has no involvement and that no one named Gilbert or Angelién works for them. He also says that U.S. immigration has no record of Ravi or his wife under either their real names or assumed names entering the country. The U.S. denies everything, leaving the Indian agency powerless and uncertain. Ravi Mohan's condition, as described in this extract from

Escape to Nowhere, is one of complete ruin—both personally and politically. After defecting from India to the United States with the help of foreign agents, he becomes a man without a country, without a legal identity, and any official protection. The Indian intelligence agency sees him as a traitor who leaked classified information, but they are unable to formally prosecute him because the evidence is too sensitive to reveal in public or in international courts. As a result, the agency's attempts to arrest or extradite him fail repeatedly. To cover their failure and show that they are still in control, Indian officials stage a superficial campaign to track him down, but collapse when agencies like Interpol and the U.S. State Department demand proof that cannot be shared without exposing intelligence operations. Even Ravi's assumed name—Roben Singh—becomes part of a failed asylum plea in the U.S., where judges go back and forth on whether to believe his story. Despite his escape, he finds no stability in the U.S. either. He is stuck in a legal and political limbo, unrecognized by official documents, with no job, no legal status, and a life dependent entirely on his family's support. Meanwhile, the Indian media turns the entire case into a spectacle, criticizing the intelligence agency for incompetence, infighting, and even possible complicity. Journalists and commentators accuse senior officers of either helping Ravi escape or failing to stop him due to their internal power struggles. Speculation spreads that Ravi had information that could expose a wider network of corruption and espionage involving top officials, and that is why arresting him was never seriously pursued. This exemplifies what Giorgio Agamben (1998) calls the "state of exception," a place where the law is suspended to protect the law and life is left without any political value but still under sovereign control (Agamben 6). Here, there is no longer a clear line between enemy and citizen. Life is dangerous, depending on the government's decisions and smart hiding. As the story goes on, the char-

acters become bio-coded beings that can be moved, watched, and erased. In this condition, a person's life—what Agamben calls “bare life”—is placed outside the protection of the law, yet it remains under the control of the state. This means that bare life is simultaneously excluded from and included within the realm of politics. This shows a dark parallel between keeping secrets and controlling life itself. Foucault's study of biopolitics also shows that modern states depend on more than just force. They also depend on making norms, which include how to classify populations, their health, their identity, and their danger. Nikolas Rose (2007) goes into more detail about this by saying that biopower works through “vital politics,” which means that people are forced to control their own biological existence in a way that makes sense for the government (52). This relationship is clearly shown in *Escape to Nowhere* through the conflict between people's free will and adopting identities that the government gives them. Biopolitical calculations constantly tell the characters whether they should be loyal, patriotic, or traitor. This shows how life is entangled in a surveillance system that sorts existence into three groups based on usefulness, loyalty, and risk. The government thinks it knows everything about people, including their moves, thoughts, and pasts. This is not just an epistemological claim; it changes what lives are worth living and what bodies are disposable. In the book, the government makes sure that the lives of spies, migrants, and double agents live in a constant zone of non-recognition, somewhere between being legal and being thrown away. Their deaths are not recognized, their identities change, and their lives are used for statistics or strategy, but they are never fully human in the moral world that the government approves of.

In the end, Ravi's life becomes a portrait of betrayal turned back on itself. He betrayed his nation, but the country he defected to denies knowing him. He becomes a ghost in both countries—

unwanted, undocumented, and forgotten. His condition reflects a tragic fall from a high-ranking intelligence officer to a man without a name, status, or future.

CONCLUSION

In *Escape to Nowhere*, the narrative of Ravi Mohan's betrayal is not merely a personal act of disloyalty but a revealing case study of how modern states function through systems of surveillance, secrecy, and categorization. The novel exposes the underlying operations of state power, where visibility and invisibility, inclusion and exclusion, are strategically manipulated. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theories, we see that Ravi's actions and eventual erasure are shaped by a disciplinary society that regulates individuals through constant observation and internalized control mechanisms. Institutions like the intelligence agency operate not only through coercion but also through the normalization of behaviour—producing obedient or “docile” bodies. When Ravi breaks the code, he is immediately reclassified, not as a rational subject, but as a deviant and a threat. This reflects Foucault's notion that categorization is a political act, shaping identities and determining who is deemed normal, sick, criminal, or disloyal. Furthermore, the novel also resonates with Giorgio Agamben's concept of *bare life*—a form of existence that is excluded from legal and political protections yet remains under state control. Ravi, once part of the institutional system, is cast out when he no longer serves its ideological interest, becoming a figure who is both inside and outside the law. His disavowal symbolizes the modern state's capacity to operate in a “state of exception,” where traditional rules are suspended, and individuals can be stripped of all rights while still being subjected to surveillance and control. The state thus governs not only through visible laws but through zones of indistinction, where moral and legal boundaries

are blurred. Secrecy and surveillance function together in a dialectical relationship: the government keeps its methods hidden while demanding complete transparency from its citizens. This asymmetry preserves the epistemic advantage of the state, reinforcing power through uncertainty. The spy system, as shown in the novel, does not just monitor enemies but also creates them through suspicion and categorization. Ravi's fate illustrates how individuals are reduced to functions within the security apparatus, and once they fall out of line, they are rendered invisible—erased both physically and politically.

Ultimately, *Escape to Nowhere* is more than just a spy thriller. It is a critical text that dramatizes how contemporary governance operates through invisible networks of control, how knowledge and secrecy are tools of domination, and how individual lives can be turned into expendable bodies—*homo sacer*—at the altar of national security. Through the lens of Foucault and Agamben, the novel can be read as offering a chilling commentary on the nature of power in the modern world: diffuse, calculated, and embedded in the very systems we trust to protect us. In this sense, Ravi Mohan is not just a traitor—he is a reflection of how modern states produce betrayal, suspicion, and abandonment as a part of their functioning logic.

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