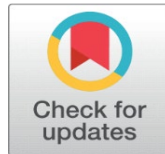


DISTURBING REDEMPTION: VIOLENCE AND POWER POLITICS IN SUZANNE COLLINS' THE HUNGER GAMES SERIES

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ABSTRACT

The genre of speculated fiction rose up with the sole idea of projecting the present political system into the far future thereby allowing the writer to imagine the implications of the futuristic setting and exercise the need to look into the immediate political inconstancies in an essentially futuristic scale. The works like Orwell's 1984, Jack London's *The Iron Heel* or Zamyatin's *We*, reflected the fears of fascism over powering the global political dictum of collective ruling and warned against the dangers of science and technology in case the society progressed the same way or its ways left unchecked. Louisa Mackey Demesian in the work, *The Age of Dystopia: One Genre, Our Fears and our Future* observes

The twentieth century dystopian fiction emerged not as an off shoot or as a foil to utopian fiction. The work did not concern itself to highlight the reflections of an imagined reality, where a society stands tall and immaculate. It was rather an outcome of the imagined projection and psychological transition from dream to a nightmare. The first and the second world wars had instilled into the minds of the writers and the readers a sense of political decadence brought out through moral degeneration. The pace of technology reaching unimaginable heights prompted writers of literature to imagine surveillance which would result in the dehumanization of human values and make life an existential mechanism than deriving from it a sense of optimism and opulence.

The genre of speculated fiction rose up with the sole idea of projecting the present political system into the far future thereby allowing the writer to imagine the implications of the futuristic setting and exercise the need to look into the immediate political inconstancies in an essentially futuristic scale. The works like Orwell's **1984**, Jack London's **The Iron Heel** or Zamyatin's **We**, reflected the fears of fascism over powering the global political dictum of collective ruling and warned against the dangers of science and technology in case the society progressed the same way or its ways left unchecked. Louisa Mackey Demesian in the work, *The Age of Dystopia: One Genre, Our Fears and our Future* observes George Orwells'1984 is an expression of mood and it is a warning. The mood it expresses is that of near despair about the future of man and the warning is that , unless the course of history changes, men all over the world will lose their most human qualities will become soulless automations and will not even be aware of it. (1)

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The dangers and hazards of the apocalyptic and war-ridden society has reached such great heights that the possibility of imagining a bleak future as projected by the writers of dystopian fiction than by the writers of utopia. The most striking irony is that, the society progresses more towards dystopia and can therefore not imagine a prospective utopian imagination.

Suzanne Collins in her Hunger Games trilogy has set the world to a haunting horror of reality shows and its repercussions on the young adults and their psyche. The novel series decries the loss of humaneness and empathy in the minds of the people with the progress of technology and the passage of time. The novel is set in the post apocalyptic period, during the time when the hunger and poverty have become the byproducts of the dire consequences of continuous warfare and loss of life. The locale of the novel is Panem, which is divided into a set of twelve districts. The state is ruled by a despot, President Snow who is the power absolute in Panem. He has divided the districts on the grounds of wants and needs as desired by him. Each district is specialized to produce a particular commodity and the people are forbidden to think and act anything against the government. There were 13 districts in total and during an upsurge, the 13th district formed a rebellion and the government had to put the rebellion down with an iron fist. As a consequence to their consequent pre mediated action, each year two teens from each district, totaling to 24 assemble for a combat and each of them has to kill so as to survive in the blood shed. Written entirely in the present tense narrated in the present tense, the novel tells the after math of the rebellion of district 13, causing it to be removed from the geographical demography of Panem.

History as an entity has been entirely abolished except for the fact that the state of Panem records the sole event of rebellion as the only painful reminder of the consequences of going against the government and the president. V.Arrow in his book, *The Panem Companion: An Unofficial Guide to Suzanne Collins Hunger Games* locates the fictional Panem as Panem is likely best seen as its own continental island nation, like Australia is today, with North America at its precursor. It would take at least 3000 years according to the best estimates of the ecologists, meteorologists and other global warming scientists to see a major disaster or a chain of disasters extensive enough to change the topography of North America drastically (4)

One of the important facets of the novel series is the interpolation of power with violence. Although Collins underscores her writings with the quest for power mongering, one finds a deeper tendency inclined towards violence as means to reach the ends of power struggle. Sigmund Freud, the famous psychoanalyst propounded the idea that man by nature is sexual. Violence is his second nature which surfaces mostly during sex and the rest of the quality comes during everyday life. The most famous novel of Golding, *The Lord of the Flies* is an excellent example to the innate nature of man which is violence. The novel reminds one of going back to savagery in the name of forming a civilization. Collins reinstates the very idea and brings forth a one to one combat where the winner becomes the sole survivor. The entire duel is televised and the audience are entertained in the blood shed of the killings.

The most important Kernel to the novel writing is the idea of violence which is shown through the psychological sublimation of power and authority by making the people of the Capitol submit, succumb and surrender to the governing body on the whole. The novel is a reflection from the biographical experiences of Collins. Her father fought the Vietnamese War and since then he had shared his war time experiences to his children. The novel is a manifestation of these experiences and asserts the idea that war is something which must not be concealed from children. It is therefore the bounden duty of every parent to disclose the fears, follies and other predicaments of war. Collins also wants to highlight the idea of poverty and squalor through the novel. To her, the byproducts of violence are starvation and penury which are to be accepted in the struggle for power. She brings down another violent version of the most pithy saying of Acton, "Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely" (quotegarden.com).

The Hunger Game looks at another facet of gender –bender studies and questions the key concern which arises across every human being's thought processes, are women violent too? is violence a more male quality? does gender construction alter the tendency of violence in a given scenario? to answer these questions, it is mandatory to take the quote of Judith Butler on gender construction as laid down in her book, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination* as Gender ought not to be constructed as stable identity or locus of agency from which various act follows, 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 mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and style of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (25)

Katniss, is the heroine and the narrator of the novel series. She is forced to become the bread winner of the family after the untimely death of her father. The lessons, she learnt in hunting during the time when her father was alive, helped her get into the woods and poach for preys. The only source of income to her family was the catch she got while hunting. Almost all the population are good hunters and their bread depended on the take away from hunting. The government of the Capitol forbids its citizens to get into the forests which is why people get to poaching.

One of the key features of the young adult fiction is the need to become more self reliant and independent. It is a customary practice in the United States after the first ship May Flower left England and sailed towards the waters of the United States, the people made it a point to be more self reliant and create a brave new world according to the dictums of self made experiences. Collins therefore wants the young adults to stand up for themselves and resolve their own problems. To her, the teenagers must be taught to experience the world themselves and become more aware of the society and the problems around them.

The narrator katniss had no choice but to choose to become a tribute, a name designated by the government to designate the fighters. These fighters were the direct representatives of their districts and their victory or otherwise depended on the size of the fight they were up to. Katniss had no clear idea to fight for she took the place of her tribute instead of her sister. The government selected the tributes through a stringent system of lots so as to keep its subjects under constant threat and uncertainty. Katniss had none to take care of her family except her own self. Her mother became psychologically instable and remained mute all through , unable to stand the death of her husband. Psychologically, it could also be inferred as a sense of defense mechanism exhibited by her mother so as to conceal her dependency on her daughter.

The novel is a more coming of age for katniss and her will to win after having lost her father in a mining mishap. Her dexterity in the use of bow and arrows and her resilience to save her sister Prim and her mom from the clutches of violence and poverty become the key elements of independence and self –reliance in the novel. The locale Capitol is segmented into two kinds of hunger, the one is the hunger for food, the one suffered by all the citizens of the twelve districts, who face acute shortage of food and supplies. The other is the hunger for amusement where the rich and the elite are elated to watch the killings and blood shed. To them, people die to entertain them. The novel underpins the idea of power and violence as the main reason for political instability and governance in any country. Katniss fights not the battle of blood shed but rather the battle of brains to survive in the arena of murderous treachery. She comments I don't know how to say it exactly. Only, I want to die as myself... I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster, I am not....only , I could keep wishing, I could find a way to show the Capitol, they don't own me. "That I am more than just a piece in their games", says Peeta. Katniss says, " But you are not. That's how the games work. (Hunger Games 171).

Karl Marx felt that wealth was the reason for all the problems which surfaced in the world. To Freud, sex was the motive behind all the commotions around the world. To Collins, power and the will to control cause all problems in the world. She therefore gives a piece of advice to all her citizens that it is their sole responsibility and their prime duty to question the ways of the government. She asserts that the violence which surfaced in the United States during the twin tower attacks and the wreaking of vengeance by the terrorists was the result of the lust for power which America exercised across the world by intervening into the internal and external affairs of any country.

Collins calls for a peaceful coexistence between a man and a woman and does not seek to question the capability of each other in terms of gender superiority. Although set in the far future, one finds that Katniss at the end of the novel does not intend to become a ruthless fighter but rather a woman who bears the children of Peeta. She wants to rest and live the life of domesticity than live a life of a tribute. The closing lines of the novel, "There are more worse games to play" (361), exhibit the idea that life begins when war and the lust for power ends.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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