

Perception of Dystopian Elements in Suzanne Collins *The Hunger Games Trilogy*

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Abstract

Social and political issues like domination, exploitation, oppression, poverty, and conflicts are the most common issues that exist in the contemporary society. Therefore, most of the modern writers mainly focus on such issues throughout their novels. One of such novels is *The Hunger Games Trilogy* written by Suzanne Collins. The novel is written based on the real world problems, and its political and social elements. The sufferings of the people in the midst of these problems are also analysed in the novel. It mainly focuses on the power which the Capitol exhibits on the people and the way chosen by the Capitol in executing its power over the people. The concept of survival is the main aspect throughout the novel. The Capitol survives by exploiting their own district people. On the other hand, the district people engaged in life and death games, in which either they get survived nor they get destroyed.

The Hunger Games Trilogy of Suzanne Collins depicts a dystopian environment. *The Hunger Games* is set in the world of Post- Apocalyptic time in which the Capitol controls the twelve districts of Panem, in North America. As punishment for a revolution in the past, the Capitol has created the Hunger Games. In this Game, a boy and a girl between the ages of twelve to eighteen are chosen from each district to fight on live telecast until one child remains. The main character is Katniss Everdeen, who volunteers in the place of her younger sister Primrose for District Twelve. The male “tribute” for the district is Peeta Mellark, the son of a baker, who is in love with Katniss. During the Games, Katniss uses his love as an advantage to impress the audience, so that the wealthy audience will send food and medicines to her in the Game field. All the citizens from Districts Four to Twelve hate the Capitol because of the oppression, poverty and violence they suffer. Katniss becomes angry towards the Capitol during the Games when her new friend Rue from District Eleven is killed, and she shows compassion by laying flowers on her body. Furthermore, at the end of the Games, only Peeta and Katniss remain, so each of them refuses to kill the other. Instead, they agree to eat poisoned berries together so that there will be no winner for the Capitol. In response, rather than being humiliated in front of the districts, the Capitol allow the couple to win together.

The Hunger Games trilogy is different from Collins other works because in this series she uses the idea of Game as a tool to explain about the dominant society. Her main inspiration of the novel came from the Greek myth and the Roman life. In the Greek myth of “Theseus and the Minotaur”, the King of Minos of Crete requires the city of Athens to send seven boys and seven girls and they were thrown into the labyrinth to be eaten by the Minotaur. Therefore Theseus travels to Crete as one of the youths and decides to slay the Minotaur. After experiencing lot of troubles, he succeeds the Minotaur. Thereby, Collins uses the similar concept to her novel *The Hunger Games Trilogy* in which twelve districts must send a boy and a girl every year to the powerful Capitol. In the Capitol, these people were treated miserably and later they were thrown into an arena to fight to the death. Thus the novel demonstrates the Capitol’s power over the district which is similar to the myth that states the power of

King Minos. Both the myth and the novel focus on all cruel deeds done for the entertainment of the people who have power.

The power and domination of capitalistic system is clearly seen in the famous American novel *The Hunger Games Trilogy*. In this novel Suzanne Collins powerfully analyzes the class struggle and the exploitation committed by the Capitol against its people. She also explains how far the Capitol controls the life of the entire citizens. The novel *The Hunger Games Trilogy* mainly focuses on the competition between the exploiter and the exploited as well as the ruler and the oppressed in the post-apocalyptic nation of Panem in North America. The class struggle reflected in *The Hunger Games Trilogy* is between the powerful Capitol and the twelve poor districts. The Capitol is considered as the ruling class and the twelve poor districts as the classes that are ruled. In fact the Capitol represents the bourgeoisie Capitol who owns the means of production and employs the wage for labour. Meanwhile the districts represent the proletariat (workers) who does not own the means of production but only its labour power (Aliani 5). In the novel, the Capitol separates the districts as wealthier and poorer in order to show its power as well as to create a rift within the districts. Aliani says that to maintain power, the Capitol uses the political strategy which is similar to the strategy of the Roman Empire that is “divide and conquer” (7). Hence the relation between the Capitol and the districts reflects the relation between the consumerist and the employees in the capitalist society.

Moreover, in *The Hunger Games Trilogy* Collins mentions about the Game created by the Capitol to explain the power of the capitalist system. The Game describes about the amount of power the Capitol has over the twelve districts. In fact, the Game is considered as a punishment for the past rebellion of the districts. As a result of the rebellion, the district 13 is completely destroyed and the Capitol has brought the remaining twelve districts under its control by introducing the Game. According to this Game, a lottery is held every year and a boy and a girl from each district is chosen to be a tribute. These tributes are all teenagers between the ages of twelve to eighteen and they must fight with each other to death. Katniss, the protagonist and the narrator of the novel, *The Hunger Games Trilogy* describes the punishment given by the Capitol for the past rebellion as “In punishment for the uprising, each of the twelve districts must provide a girl and a boy, called tributes, to participate. The twenty-four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena...the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins” (*Hunger* 18). In reality, the introduction of the fatal Game and the sufferings of the people are an entertainment for the Capitol. Therefore the Game shows the cruelty of the Capitol as well as the inability of the district people against the Capitol’s cruel attitude. The lack of wealth, exploitation and poverty in a capitalist society show people’s powerlessness. In fact all these factors make the people to feel defenseless. At the same time the Capitol telecasts the Game lively to the district people to show their control and ability to change the fate of each and every life in the districts (Collins 18). Furthermore, the Capitol also uses the power of media to increase their power over the districts.

Moreover, Katniss also examines the malicious settings of the Hunger Game arena. The place where the Hunger Game occurs is actually covered with lot of dangerous mutated animals which was created by the Capitol to attack the tributes to make them suffer more. These mutations of dangerous animals show that the Capitol has high advanced technology. Using these technologies they put together the tributes as preys to these mutations. Not only like mere preys, but also the tributes face dreadful experience of death in the Game arena. Every year the tributes face such kind

of malevolence in their life. Collins briefly explains the different characteristics of death they face in the arena: “They tossed everybody into a landscape of noting but boulders and sand and scruffy bushes... Many contestants were bitten by venomous snakes or went insane from thirst... freeze to death (*Hunger* 39). In Panem, the district persons already know about the setting of the Game as well as the possibility of death. However, they are voluntarily participating in it. This ability of making them to participate in the fatal Game shows the power of the capitalist system in Panem. In addition, it also shows the skill of the capitalist class in deciding the fate of the people for their entertainment.

The main motive of the Game is also to discourage humanity from the minds of the people. Finally, the twenty four tributes arrive at the Game arena. On the first day itself eleven tributes lost their life in the arena, because the first rule is that before starting the Game, each tribute must collect some useful things from a large Cornucopia. These things are very useful to get survive in the arena. So, the tributes engaged in fighting with each other and they lost their life before playing the Game. In fact, this rule is employed by the Capitol to see the sufferings of the people, their killing each other and losing their humanity. The tributes who selected for the Game are from the same district as well as from nearby districts and they may be friends and neighbours. However, to get better life they were killing each other and behaving like animals. Therefore, the Capitol entirely dominates the fate and the character of the people. The people remain like puppets in the hands of the Capitol.

However, the Hunger Game is all about the physical and mental tortures given by the Capitol to the own district people in order to show their power of wealth and dominance. To establish this dominance, the Capitol uses the power of media, because media is the most powerful weapon in the society. Moreover, Panem clearly shows the present capitalist society. As Sara points out capitalism changes the human world into an animal kingdom by controlling the behaviour of the people. In animal kingdom, animals kill each other for food as well as for pleasure by using their strength. But in the capitalist world, men torture other men physically and mentally for getting more entertainment and they get entertainment through their power of wealth (14). ”. Accordingly, the novel *The Hunger Games* presents capitalism as a negative factor which is the reason for the sufferings of the district people. However, Sara argues that the word ‘Panem’ itself has many interpretations. She says that Panem has a connection with the word “Pan-American”. In fact “Pan- American” is a possible interpretation of Panem, because the prefix Pan means “including all people” (9). Similarly in Panem, the Game includes all the people.

Work Cited:

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