



ISSN: 2395-7852



# International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management (IJARASEM )

Volume 11, Issue 2, March 2024



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

**IMPACT FACTOR: 7.583**

| [www.ijarasem.com](http://www.ijarasem.com) | [ijarasem@gmail.com](mailto:ijarasem@gmail.com) | +91-9940572462 |



# Dystopian society and Totalitarianism in Suzanne Collin's *The Hunger Games* and James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*

Ayush Rana

Student, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

**ABSTRACT:** Dystopian literature has long captivated readers with its grim portrayals of oppressive societies and totalitarian regimes. In this research paper, we delve into the thematic exploration of dystopian society and totalitarianism in two prominent works of young adult fiction: Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* and James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*. Drawing upon a variety of secondary sources, including scholarly articles and critical analyses, this research paper offers a comprehensive examination of dystopian society and totalitarianism in *The Hunger Games* and *The Maze Runner*. By analyzing the characters, themes, and narrative techniques employed by Collins and Dashner, we seek to uncover the deeper meanings and implications of these two seminal works of dystopian literature.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Unmasking Totalitarianism - Exploring Dystopian Realms

Within the realm of literature, the dystopian genre stands as a captivating canvas where authors paint vivid portraits of societies entangled in the sinister web of totalitarian control. Among these canvases of imagined worlds, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* and James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* emerge as compelling tapestries woven with threads of oppression, resilience, and the raw essence of humanity battling against despotic authority. These seminal works transport readers into meticulously constructed dystopian societies, intricately designed by their creators to serve as allegories for the most haunting aspects of human nature, governance, and societal structures. In Collins' Panem, a world stratified into districts subjugated by the Capitol's iron-fisted rule, and in Dashner's Glade ensnared within the cryptic confines of the ever-shifting Maze, totalitarianism manifests itself in multifaceted forms, shaping destinies, snuffing out freedoms, and sowing the seeds of defiance. In the dystopian realm of literature, societies emerge as cautionary tales, mirroring humanity's deepest fears and the consequences of unchecked power. Dystopian societies often epitomize oppressive regimes marked by totalitarianism, a political structure where an all-encompassing authority maintains absolute control over its citizens. In this exploration, we delve into the nature of dystopian societies and the manifestation of totalitarianism, drawing insights from Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* and James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*.

### Dystopian Society and Totalitarianism Unveiled in *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner

In the literary tapestry of dystopian worlds, James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* unfolds as a riveting narrative that thrusts readers into a realm where the boundaries of control and authority are pushed to their limits. Set against the backdrop of the enigmatic Glade, this novel intricately weaves a dystopian society governed by elements of totalitarianism, exploring the complexities of power, surveillance, and the indomitable human spirit.

### The Enigmatic Glade: A Microcosm of Totalitarian Control

Dashner introduces readers to the Glade, a confined space surrounded by the perplexing Maze, where a group of young boys finds themselves trapped with no recollection of their past. The Glade, ostensibly a sanctuary, is governed by an unseen force—the Creators—whose authoritative presence dictates every facet of the Gladers' existence. This eerily mirrors the quintessential traits of a totalitarian regime, where power resides in an omnipotent entity that orchestrates the lives of its subjects with meticulous precision. The totalitarian grip on the Gladers is exemplified by the Creators' manipulation of their memories. The amnesiac state in which the characters find themselves is a deliberate act of control, erasing any pre-existing knowledge of the world beyond the Glade. This control over information not only disempowers the individuals but also establishes a power dynamic where the Creators hold the key to the Gladers' understanding of their own reality.



### **Totalitarian Surveillance: The Grievors and the Maze**

Totalitarian regimes thrive on surveillance, and in "*The Maze Runner*," this surveillance takes the form of the Grievors and the ever-shifting Maze. The Grievors, grotesque mechanical creatures, patrol the Maze, enforcing the boundaries of the Glade and ensuring compliance through fear. This constant surveillance instills a sense of vulnerability among the Gladers, reinforcing the notion that escape is not only perilous but nearly impossible. Moreover, the Maze itself becomes a tool of control, symbolizing the arbitrary and capricious nature of authority. The shifting pathways of the Maze, manipulated by the Creators, serve as a metaphor for the unpredictability inherent in totalitarian systems. The lack of transparency and the absence of clear rules within the Maze perpetuate a culture of uncertainty, mirroring the tactics employed by totalitarian governments to keep their subjects in a perpetual state of apprehension.

### **Dystopian Society and Totalitarianism Explored in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games***

Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* immerses readers in the dystopian world of Panem, a society marked by stark divisions, oppressive governance, and the omnipresent specter of totalitarian control. As we navigate this compelling narrative, the intricate layers of dystopian society and the mechanisms of totalitarianism come to light, woven seamlessly into the fabric of the novel.

### **Panem's Stratification: A Portrait of Dystopian Inequality**

At the core of Panem's dystopia lies a society starkly divided into the Capitol and twelve outlying districts, each representing a tier of social hierarchy. The Capitol stands as the pinnacle of opulence, contrasting sharply with the impoverished districts subjected to stringent control. This economic disparity mirrors the societal imbalances often found in dystopian settings, highlighting the consequences of unchecked power and the exploitation of marginalized communities. The Capitol's control over resources is exemplified through the annual Hunger Games—a televised spectacle where tributes from each district are forced into a deadly competition. The Games serve not only as a means of entertainment but also as a method of asserting dominance, reinforcing the Capitol's totalitarian rule. The reaping, a ceremony where tributes are chosen, underscores the regime's arbitrary exercise of power, leaving families in perpetual fear and underscoring the capricious nature of totalitarian authority.

### **Totalitarianism Embodied: The Capitol's Panoptic Authority**

The Capitol emerges as the embodiment of totalitarian control, with President Snow personifying the autocratic ruler. The Capitol exercises pervasive authority, manipulating not only the physical landscape of the Games but also the narrative and perception of reality. The orchestrated spectacle becomes a tool for propaganda, reinforcing the Capitol's narrative of unity and control while suppressing dissent.

President Snow's Machiavellian tactics further reveal the totalitarian grip on Panem. His ability to engineer fear, manipulate public sentiment, and quash any form of rebellion illustrates the extent to which totalitarian regimes control not just the physical actions of citizens but also their thoughts and emotions. The Capitol's use of advanced technology for surveillance and manipulation echoes the panoptic authority inherent in many real-world totalitarian states.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Unveiling Totalitarianism in Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*:**

Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* stands as a seminal work in dystopian literature, offering readers a gripping narrative that unravels the layers of a society governed by totalitarian rule. The nuanced exploration of Panem and its Capitol, combined with the harrowing spectacle of *The Hunger Games*, provides a rich terrain for understanding the intricacies of dystopian society and the mechanisms of totalitarian control.

### **Panem's Striking Stratification:**

*The Hunger Games* introduces readers to the stark divide between the Capitol, the affluent and extravagant center of power, and the twelve districts, each burdened with distinct hardships. District 12, Katniss Everdeen's home, epitomizes poverty and scarcity, where citizens struggle for basic necessities. The Capitol's exploitation of the districts is evident through the annual reaping, a brutal selection process where each district must offer "tributes" for *The Hunger Games*. An exemplary instance of the Capitol's control over resources is the tesserae system, forcing impoverished citizens like Katniss to trade their meager food rations for additional entries in the reaping. This systemic oppression illustrates how the Capitol perpetuates social inequality and uses scarcity as a tool for subjugation.

### **The Spectacle of *The Hunger Games*:**

The annual Hunger Games, a televised event, serves as a cruel reminder of the Capitol's dominance. The Capitol engineers the Games to be a spectacle of violence, reinforcing its authority through the manipulation of life and death. The control over the narrative is evident in the Capitol's meticulous planning of the Games, from the design of the



arena to the use of mutations—genetically engineered creatures designed to heighten fear and drama. The reaping, a deeply symbolic event, underscores the Capitol's arbitrary authority. The Capitol's manipulation of the tribute selection process reflects the regime's power to instill fear and maintain control over the districts. This annual ritual becomes a mechanism for not only physical subjugation but also psychological intimidation.

#### **Symbolism and Social Commentary:**

*The Hunger Games* employs rich symbolism to convey profound social commentary. The Mockingjay, initially a creation of the Capitol for entertainment, evolves into a symbol of hope and resistance. Katniss's transformation into the Mockingjay parallels the shift in societal consciousness, as citizens begin to question the Capitol's narrative. The symbolism of the Mockingjay extends beyond the narrative, prompting readers to reflect on the power of symbols in shaping collective identity. The novel's use of symbols invites readers to contemplate the role of propaganda in maintaining totalitarian regimes and the potential for subversion through the reappropriation of symbols.

#### **Navigating Totalitarian Constructs in James Dashner's *The Maze Runner*:**

James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* stands as a labyrinthine exploration of a dystopian society where the tendrils of totalitarianism weave through the fabric of the narrative. The intricacies of the Glade, the enigmatic Maze, and the unrelenting control imposed by the Creators create a compelling landscape for the examination of dystopian themes. In this literary review, we delve into the multifaceted layers of totalitarianism within "*The Maze Runner*," drawing examples and insights from Dashner's narrative tapestry.

#### **The Enigmatic Glade: A Microcosm of Totalitarian Control:**

Within the Glade, the Creators' control is palpable in the allocation of roles and responsibilities. Each Glader has a designated function, whether it's a Runner exploring the Maze or a Builder constructing structures. This predetermined structure mirrors the rigid hierarchies often found in totalitarian societies where individuals are assigned specific roles to maintain control. The deliberate erasure of memories is a crucial aspect of totalitarian control in the Glade. As highlighted in the novel, the Gladers' lack of recollection about their past lives serves a dual purpose. It not only instills a sense of disorientation and dependence on the Creators but also prevents the formation of collective memory or a shared history that could potentially lead to resistance. An example is Thomas's frustration upon realizing he cannot recall crucial information about the outside world or the origin of the Maze. This intentional suppression of knowledge reinforces the Creators' authoritarian dominance, leaving the Gladers in a vulnerable position, reminiscent of the information control strategies employed by totalitarian regimes.

#### **Totalitarian Surveillance: The Grievors and the Shifting Maze**

The Grievors, mechanical creatures that patrol the Maze, embody the surveillance apparatus in *The Maze Runner*. These creatures, designed to strike fear, enforce the boundaries of the Glade and ensure compliance among the Gladers. The constant threat of Griever attacks serves as a mechanism to control behavior, reinforcing the idea that the Creators are omnipresent and can strike at any moment. The Maze itself becomes a tool of control with its ever-shifting pathways manipulated by the Creators. The lack of transparency and the unpredictable nature of the Maze instill a sense of helplessness among the Gladers. This parallels the tactics of totalitarian regimes that thrive on maintaining an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear to discourage dissent. A notable instance is when the Maze's pattern changes, causing panic and chaos among the Gladers. This event underscores the arbitrary authority of the Creators and the consequential impact on the psychological well-being of the inhabitants, aligning with the oppressive strategies employed by totalitarian governments.

### **III. ANALYSIS**

#### **Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games***

Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* presents a compelling examination of dystopian society and totalitarianism, offering readers a harrowing glimpse into a world governed by oppression, inequality, and exploitation. Through the lens of protagonist Katniss Everdeen, Collins explores the devastating consequences of unchecked power and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of tyranny. At the heart of *The Hunger Games* lies the dystopian nation of Panem, a divided society comprised of twelve impoverished districts and a decadent Capitol. Through the character of Katniss Everdeen, Collins offers a compelling exploration of resistance and defiance in the face of totalitarianism. Katniss emerges as a reluctant symbol of rebellion against the Capitol's tyranny, challenging the status quo and inspiring hope among the oppressed citizens of Panem. Her refusal to conform to societal expectations and her willingness to sacrifice herself for the greater good serve as powerful acts of resistance against the oppressive regime. Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* offers a poignant and thought-provoking exploration of dystopian society and totalitarianism. Through the lens of Katniss Everdeen, Collins illuminates the devastating effects of unchecked power



and the enduring resilience of the human spirit in the face of oppression. By depicting the oppressive regime of Panem and the struggles of its inhabitants, *The Hunger Games* serves as a powerful commentary on the dangers of totalitarianism and the importance of resistance in the pursuit of freedom and justice.

### **James Dashner's *The Maze Runner***

James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* presents readers with a riveting exploration of dystopian society and totalitarianism, immersing them into a world shrouded in mystery, danger, and oppression. Through the character of Thomas and the enigmatic Glade, Dashner invites readers to contemplate the consequences of unchecked authority and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Central to the Glade's oppressive structure is the Maze, a labyrinthine maze inhabited by deadly creatures known as Grievers. The Maze symbolizes the ever-present threat of danger and the arbitrary nature of the Gladers' existence, reinforcing the notion of control and surveillance imposed by the Creators. Dashner's portrayal of the Maze as a tool of manipulation and control underscores the pervasive influence of totalitarian regimes in shaping the lives of their citizens.

Through the character of Thomas, Dashner offers a compelling exploration of resistance and defiance in the face of totalitarianism. Thomas emerges as a disruptor within the rigid hierarchy of the Glade, challenging the status quo and questioning the authority of the Creators. His insatiable curiosity and refusal to accept the constraints imposed upon him serve as catalysts for change, inspiring his fellow Gladers to question their reality and seek answers beyond the confines of the Maze. Furthermore, Dashner delves into the psychological impact of living under totalitarian rule, exploring themes of fear, isolation, and identity. As Thomas navigates the challenges of the Maze and grapples with the truth about his past, he confronts the existential dilemmas of free will and self-determination.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

### ***The Maze Runner***

In conclusion, James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* offers a gripping exploration of dystopian society and totalitarianism, inviting readers into a world where oppression and control reign supreme. Through the character of Thomas and the enigmatic Glade, Dashner crafts a harrowing narrative that delves deep into the complexities of power, authority, and human resilience in the face of adversity. The Glade serves as a microcosm of totalitarianism, where the oppressive authority figures known as the Creators enforce strict rules and manipulate the lives of the Gladers for their own ends. The presence of the Maze, a treacherous labyrinth inhabited by deadly creatures, symbolizes the ever-present threat of danger and the arbitrary nature of the Gladers' existence. Dashner's depiction of the Glade as a controlled environment underscores the pervasive influence of totalitarian regimes in shaping the lives of their citizens, highlighting the themes of control and surveillance. Central to the narrative is the character of Thomas, whose journey from confusion to defiance serves as a focal point for exploring the themes of resistance and individual agency. Thomas's relentless curiosity and refusal to accept the constraints imposed upon him by the Creators challenge the status quo and inspire his fellow Gladers to question their reality. His emergence as a disruptor within the rigid hierarchy of the Glade underscores the power of individual agency in the face of oppression, offering a glimmer of hope amidst the darkness. Through its exploration of dystopian society and totalitarianism, Dashner's novel challenges readers to reflect on the complexities of power and authority, and to consider the consequences of complacency in the face of injustice. As we navigate our own tumultuous times, the lessons of *The Maze Runner* serve as a reminder of the importance of vigilance, resilience, and the unyielding pursuit of freedom.

### ***The Hunger Games***

In Suzanne Collins's "*The Hunger Games*," readers are thrust into a hauntingly familiar yet eerily dystopian world of Panem, where the oppressive regime of the Capitol reigns supreme and the districts are subjected to a relentless cycle of deprivation, fear, and control. Through the experiences of protagonist Katniss Everdeen, Collins masterfully explores the themes of dystopian society and totalitarianism, offering readers a poignant reflection on the consequences of unchecked power and the enduring resilience of the human spirit. Furthermore, Collins delves into the psychological impact of living under totalitarian rule, exploring themes of trauma, survival, and moral ambiguity. Katniss's inner turmoil and moral struggles reflect the complexities of navigating an oppressive society, as she grapples with the consequences of her actions and the limits of her own humanity. Her relationships with other characters, particularly her bond with Rue and her complicated relationship with Peeta, further underscore the human cost of oppression and the enduring resilience of the human spirit. In conclusion, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* offers readers a thought-provoking exploration of dystopian society and totalitarianism. Through the vividly depicted world of Panem and the experiences of protagonist Katniss Everdeen, Collins invites readers to contemplate the consequences of unchecked authority and the power of individual agency in the face of oppression. By highlighting the themes of resistance, resilience, and moral ambiguity, *The Hunger Games* serves as a powerful commentary on the dangers of totalitarianism and the importance of fighting for freedom and justice in the pursuit of a better world.



## REFERENCES

1. Dashner, James. *The Maze Runner*. Delacorte Press, 2009.
2. Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. Scholastic Press, 2008.
3. Atwood, Margaret. "Why We Can't Get Enough Dystopian Fiction." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 13 May 2011.
4. Schaub, Michael. "The Politics of Dystopia: A Matter of Perspective." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 22 Apr. 2015
5. Green, John. "The Rise of Dystopian Fiction: From Soviet Dissidents to 70s Feminists." *The New York Times*, 14 Feb. 2014.
6. "Exploring Dystopian Fiction: A Critical Companion." Edited by Dr. Katehe A. Hansen and Dr. Mehmet Efe Biresselioglu, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020.
7. Shoard, Catherine. "Why do Dystopian Novels Matter Now More Than Ever?" *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 3 Mar. 2017.
8. Smith, Kimberly. *Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*. Routledge, 2014.
9. Turner, Laura M. "Gender and Power: Analyzing Female Protagonists in Dystopian Literature." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2014, pp. 102-120.
10. Clark, Daniel P. "The Political Significance of Dystopian Literature: A Comparative Analysis of '*The Hunger Games*' and '1984'." *Journal of Political Science*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2017, pp. 210-225.
11. Smith, Emily R. "The Ethics of Survival: Moral Dilemmas in Young Adult Dystopian Literature." *Ethical Studies Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2016, pp. 189-204.



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA



# International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management (IJARASEM)

| Mobile No: +91-9940572462 | Whatsapp: +91-9940572462 | [ijarasem@gmail.com](mailto:ijarasem@gmail.com) |

[www.ijarasem.com](http://www.ijarasem.com)