

Dystopian Women: The New Woman in Popular Culture Dystopian Novels and Mother Goddess Image**K. A. Rabia**, Guest Lecturer, Vypin Government College, Elamkunnappuzha, Kerala

Abstract: This present study portrays Dystopian Women: The New Woman in Popular Culture Dystopian Novels and Mother Goddess Image. Women- the symbol of love, care, compassion and sacrifice, willing to perish so as to provide for her dear ones, the popular image associated with women. This paper is trying to read this image of the stereotypical woman in contrast to the depiction of women as warrior goddesses. The contrast is between the stereotyped notion of women in culture and the depiction of warrior women at the helm in times of peril. This imagery is seen not only in these dystopian novels but also in the world war depiction of Mother Country warrior goddess.

Keywords: women, culture, image, goddess, sacrifice

Women in cultural representations are usually depicted as inhibited, demure and given the status of the second sex in society. In popular culture representations and in tradition women are associated with peace and love, but, at times, they are accorded the status of the warrior, at times of distress and war, when the world as we know it is on the verge of collapse.

During the world war the great nations were depicted as warrior goddesses fighting for the liberation of the country, unifying the country and its people under a common mother who until now was just a regular stereotyped sacrificial mother, but in times of war or unrest she takes on the figure of a protector, warrior who will not rest until her children are safe.

At a time when political imagery like the national flag or the Jacobin's cocarde became potent symbols, the human body itself took on symbolic meaning. With the second half of the eighteenth century, Western Europe was entering an ever more visually oriented age, exemplified not only by national symbols but also by the effect of sciences such as physiognomy and anthropology, with their classification of men according to standards of classical beauty. (Mosse 5)

We can find nearly every country with such a figure/image of a woman holding the key to liberation and victory. Mother India, Germania, Britannia are just some examples. The mother exemplifies the trait of sacrificial motherhood, selfless love that has to be returned by fighting for her honour.

Women as national symbols, however, did not embody generally valid norms such as the virtues that masculinity projected but, instead, the motherly qualities of the nation, and pointed to its traditions and history. Such feminine images usually wore ancient dress, looking backward, like Germania, Britannia, or even Marianne, who after the revolution was for the most part matronly.... unlike the female national symbols, women as individuals had no place in public life. This division of labor did not mean that women were necessarily inferior to men, but that they had different functions: men and women were thought to complement each other. (8-9)

But, why is it that the aggressive sex or the predominant sex is never portrayed as holding the key to the success of a country at times of peril? David Dierdre in his *Rule Britannia* offers an explanation to this mystery: "a metaphor for imperial rule evoking an authoritative father country begetting virile colony sons implies the filial usurpation of patriarchal power" (182).

Women are resilient and strong, may not be physical strength but mental strength and a power to protect ones that we love even if it pushes us to our limits. The women are a constant force of goodness and peace and show the fragment of human civilization that is stable. In a world where the manly virtues of courage, adventure, nobility had produced nothing but war and the very ideals of human society and civilization were on the brinks of death, the image of woman placed on the helm of power representing the nation was seen as a constant force of good.

Dystopia is a world created as a warning to human society, a warning signifying the decadent state of the civilization and can represent the fears of society, fear of religion, science, technology, fear of losing the basic humanity that has bound the world. Keith Booker's description of the dystopian genre in his introduction to *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* "by focusing their critiques of society on imaginatively distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable (3-4) summarizes dystopian defamiliarization.

In new age dystopian novels like *The Hunger Games Series* or *The Divergent series* we find women who are at the helm of revolutions within their world. An isolated, dystopian world, a world where change occurs through the bravery of the main women characters. These women have to face great adversaries in their

journey towards change and new life and they become symbol of hope and revolution within their society instigating within others the courage to face the system.

In *The Hunger Games* Katniss Everdeen was the symbol of resistance, the personification of an independent feminine spirit of the districts against Panem and its sickening method of sending tributes to games where each district sends a boy and a girl tribute and they have to live or die in the hunger games. This was a cruel tactic of the government to build fear within the people of the consequences of rebellion. It is through Katniss volunteering to be tribute in place for her sister that the act of defiance begins. This act of defiance gains her respect as she is sacrificing her life for her sister's. She repeatedly defies and questions the law and in turn become the mocking jay, the symbol for change. It is her love for her sister and her defiance that led to a bloody rebellion that ended the cruel government. Harney in his introduction to *The Artemis Archetype in Popular Culture* equates Katniss to the Greek Goddess Artemis "Mockingjay, reflect the Artemisian behaviors of acting as the physical savior of those in need; she is an icon, the representative of a rebellion" (4).

The image is created by pulling on the strings of people's heart and manipulating their felt love and respect for Katniss. Even at the height of the fever of revolution Katniss's value was only as a symbol and the resistance group worked to showcase the rebel goddess image. District 13 is filming propaganda videos with directors, cameramen where she has to act as the image." The Mockingjay is an invented image presented as the face of an actual war" (26) and even at her proclaimed death the only concern of the government is to showcase her as a martyr symbol calling on people to fight for what she stood. President Coin hacks into the Capitol's television feed and says, "Dead or alive, Katniss Everdeen will remain the face of this rebellion. If you ever waver in your resolve, think of the Mockingjay, and in her you will find the strength" (Collins *Mockingjay* 87).

In *The Divergent* series people are locked up as part of a human social experiment where society is divided upon a list of human virtues and those that do not fit, the divergents are deemed too dangerous, a risk to the society and are eliminated. Tris Prior the main protagonist is a divergent and though there had been other divergents in the society no one raised a voice against the injustice nor did anyone ask the question of where the divergents vanished. It was her compassion and sense of right and wrong that forced her to rebel. She recalls, "One of the lines I remember from the Dauntless manifesto is, 'We believe in ordinary acts of bravery, in the courage that drives one person to stand up for another.'" (Roth 206) and it is she who stood up for the divergents and later for the whole society selflessly even accepting death for the right thing. Nancy Jennings in the chapter "One Choice, Many Petals" throws light on Tris: "Tris's strength comes from her journey to discovery and her resilience to adversity. She never gives up and finds her inner spirit despite the efforts of the dystopian society in which she lives to categorize and constrain true identity. As such, she can provide a model for coping with identity, sexual realities, and changes in parental and peer relationships for Roth's readers" (Gender(ed) Identities 111).

Such a glorified warrior image is found in the world war imagery of women warrior goddesses looking after the country even when women themselves were not allowed in the army. This imagery signifies the shift and a latent need for women's protection and reality that women will burden them with love for their family by protecting those they love even with the sacrifice of life.

Women- the symbol of love, care, compassion and sacrifice, willing to perish so as to provide for her dear ones, the popular image associated with women. This paper is trying to read this image of the stereotypical woman in contrast to the depiction of women as warrior goddesses. The contrast is between the stereotyped notion of women in culture and the depiction of warrior women at the helm in times of peril. This imagery is seen not only in these dystopian novels but also in the world war depiction of Mother Country warrior goddess.

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