

*Super Sad True Love Story, Noughts and Crosses, “Sultana’s Dream” and Uglies as
Cautionary Dystopian Tales against Social and Moral Degradation*

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts in English



Tanzina Afrin

Date of Submission: Fall, 2018

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Preface

I came up with the idea of working on dystopian fictions while discussing about topics for my dissertation with my supervisor. As dystopian novels have always been intriguing to me, I decided to do my dissertation on this genre. I have selected these texts because all four of these deal with different social flaws and act as cautions to the readers, I am aware of the limitations of my work as the genre dystopia covers lots of aspects and I have been able to discuss only a few. However, I have tried my best to bring up different premonitory aspects of these texts accepting my limitations.

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to exemplify how dystopian literature cautions the readers about the plausible destruction of social order and human lives by foretelling the signs of socio-political, moral and scientific degeneration. The texts used for this analysis are *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010) by Gary Shteyngart, *Noughts and Crosses* (2001) by Malorie Blackman, “Sultana’s Dream” (1908) by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and *Uglies* (2005) by Scott Westerfeld. With a close analytical reading of these texts and Keith Booker’s approach to dystopian novels, this dissertation attempts at proving that dystopian writers warn their readers to be cautious about unbridled vices of their times to avoid a catastrophic end. The rising popularity of dystopian novels has drawn out different critical analysis depending on the aspects of dystopian novels. Almost all of them have agreed upon the premonitory aspect of dystopian novels because dystopian writers portray social evils of their own times. Similarly, all these four selected texts illustrate a dystopian society in a near-future setting. The reason behind the dystopian atmosphere of these portrayed societies is different social flaws existent in the authors’ own society. However, these authors not only criticize their own social errs, but also show the readers how to avoid the collapse by heeding the warnings stated in their narratives. This dissertation is a continuation of the analysis of dystopian writings as premonitory compositions. By bringing out different omens portrayed in these texts, I believe this dissertation could potentially enhance the chance of contributing to this genre. Additionally, the analysis of “Sultana’s Dream” will increase potential future research of other Bangladeshi dystopian writings.

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My eldest sister, Annie apu, who was the second victim of my grumpiness while writing the paper after my mother, thank you! Thanks to my brother, who was caring enough to feed me healthy food to keep up my strength. Also, Nishi apu and Shahriar vaia, even though you two are thousands of miles away, your presence was felt.

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Tanzina Afrin

October 2018

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work except for the citations and quotations which have been cited properly. I also declare that this work has not been submitted to any other institution previously or currently.

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Introduction

“Most dystopian, classic and contemporary, paints a future world that puts a twist on present society - a future world that could plausibly happen.”

Lauren DeStefano

Recently, dystopian novels have become a popular genre, especially among the young generation. Some of the most popular contemporary dystopian novels like – *Never Let Me Go* (2005) by Kazuo Ishiguro, the *Uglies* (2005) series by Scott Westerfeld, *The Hunger Games* (2008) series by Suzanne Collins, *The Maze Runner* (2009) series by James Dashner, *Divergent* (2011) series by Veronica Roth and *Super Sad True Love Story* (2011) by Gary Shteyngart have created a great impact on the minds of the readers not only because of their subject matter but also because they extrapolate social and political warning. In general, dystopian novels tell the story of a near future where the society, being the victim of some contemporary social, moral, technological or political incident, collapses. A government comes to the rescue but it turns out to be autocratic, which aggravates the deterioration of the situation. Usually, in contemporary dystopian novels, the negative aspects of technological and social media are depicted. The aim of this dissertation is to explore how dystopian novels predict the potential catastrophe for the readers based on the actual phenomena. This dissertation will further attempt to explore if the authors of these dystopian novels have written against the social and moral condition of their contemporary age and have used their literary works to predict the consequences of the social, moral and technological degradation in their novels.

I have selected four literary works for this dissertation for some specific reasons. First of all, the three novels, *Super Sad True Love Story*, *Noughts and Crosses*, and *Uglies* are specimens

of contemporary dystopian literature. Each of these three novels depicts the bleak social condition the readers live in and what the consequences might be if this condition remains unchanged. Just as Gordin et al. have stated, “Utopias and dystopias are histories of the present” (1), these three novels portray various social problems of the present time. The other literary work that I have chosen is “Sultana’s Dream”, a short story written by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. The reason behind choosing “Sultana’s Dream” is a humble endeavor to uphold the contribution of Bangladeshi literature to this genre. All these four literary texts relate to the contemporary readers and these texts scrutinize and criticize contemporary problems and ills of the society.

Dystopian literature cannot be explained without the discussion of utopia. In her book *Women’s Utopian and Dystopian Fiction*, Sharon Wilson defines dystopia saying that it “involves utopia’s opposite: a nightmare, the ultimate flawed world, or ‘a society worse than the existing one’” (1). In brief, the concept of utopia was first introduced by the Greek philosopher Plato. He was describing an ideal place dividing the citizens into four classes. Each class has to perform specific roles in the society to create a perfect city to live in. According to the Oxford Dictionary, utopia is “an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect,” (1705). In the English speaking world, the word was first coined by Sir Thomas More in his 1516 book of the same name where he describes a perfect place to live in.

On the contrary, the genre of dystopia is a relatively new one. Theories on dystopian literature are still insufficient and as a result, it is hard to give a specific definition of this genre. M. Keith Booker comments on the insufficiency of research on the genre, “Curiously enough, though, there seem to have been no book-length studies devoted exclusively to dystopian fiction

since Hillegas's 1967 book, which itself was somewhat limited in scope" (*The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* 18). In general, dystopia is opposite to utopia. Booker, in his *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*, asserts that dystopian literature "critically examine[s] both existing conditions and the potential abuses that might result from the institution of supposedly utopian alternatives" (3). However, Gordin et al. decline the idea of dystopias being the opposite of utopias. In his view,

A true opposite of utopia would be a society that is either completely unplanned or is planned to be deliberately terrifying and awful. Dystopia, typically invoked, is neither of these things; rather, it is a utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society (1).

The English word "dystopia" has derived from the Greek word 'Dis' (bad) and 'topos' (place). According to the semantic meaning of the word, dystopia means a bad place. In England, the word dystopia was first used by John Stuart Mill in his 1868 parliamentary speech, where he used the word during his opposition of the government's policy against Irish land laws; but the use of the words could be found even before Mill's use in different names, like cacotopia or anti-utopia. Generally, dystopia means a place that seems ideal but actually is not. One of the most famous dystopian novels of all time is George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*. The book gives the description of a futuristic society where a mysterious character named "Big Brother" keeps a vigilant watch on the inhabitants of Oceania so that they are not able to do anything against the authority. Some other classic dystopian novels are H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).

Literature is a mirror of society; every literature portrays the social picture of the author's time. Even if the author sets the novel in a futuristic time, they often depict the trends of a particular society to praise or critique that society. As a genre, dystopian novels portray a bleak picture of the current society criticizing different negative social aspects. Booker comments, "dystopian literature generally also constitutes of a critique of existing social conditions or political systems" (*Dystopian Literature* 3). In the past, the problems shown in the dystopian novels were the fear of the rise of a totalitarian government, mechanization of human life and the conflict between spirituality and science. In the latter period, dystopian novels began to explore the human condition in the aftermaths of two world wars. However, with the progress of modern society and change of the pace of life, different aspects of dystopian novels developed, which gave the genre a unique touch. As all of these aspects reflect the crux of twenty-first centuries, many critics now consider dystopian novels as presages of impending doom because dystopian writers delineate the outcome of uncontrolled social and technological vices. Dystopian literature stands out for its characteristics of social criticism.

As a genre, dystopian novels have certain distinctive traits, of which defamiliarization is a salient one. Contemporary novels do not usually tell the specific time frame of the setting or the plot, which according to Booker, is defamiliarization (*The Dystopian Impulse* 19). In Booker's view, "The principal technique of dystopian fiction is defamiliarization: by focusing their critiques of society on spatially or temporally distant settings" (ibid). Dystopian novels depict the worst kind of society the readers could live in. In classic dystopian novels, these societies are set in near-future, but contemporary dystopian novels are set in a time that is not much different from the readers' own time. When the authors do not mention when the ruination of the story takes place, the readers take the warnings narrated in the story more seriously as they

find similarities between their own time and the time of the novel. Booker describes defamiliarization as a tool used by the dystopian authors to increase the gravity of their forebodings.

Another major trait of dystopian novels is the portrayal of social and political control of the writer's time. Almost every dystopian novel portrays that in near future an autocratic rule will replace the democratic system. With the help of the military and technology, this autocratic government brings the whole nation under a vigilant surveillance. Booker talks about the scrutiny of the totalitarian government by giving the example of Vonnegut's work, who said that by the use of technology constantly, modern people are under surveillance. Vonnegut uses the example of credit cards, through which, the authority can track anyone any time. Booker remarks that such "computerized information systems which keep track of the intimate details of the lives of individual citizens" (*The Dystopian Impulse* 105) result in a complete control of the authority over the citizens. The surveillance process can be described precisely through Michelle Foucault's theory of Panopticism. In his article "Discipline and Punishment" Foucault describes how modern concept of control and punishment have changed because modern people do not need the presence of an authoritative figure to be scared of punishment, rather, the invisible, yet the omnipresence of authority ensures the maintenance of rules and laws by the citizens.

This kind of surveillance creates both censorship and a group of people who are devoid of freedom and individuality. Due to their lack of individuality, they fail to take any measure against the government's autocracy. Booker, using Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* as an example, comments on the lack of individuality in dystopian novels, "In short, citizens of Huxley's bourgeois dystopia lack real individual identities, despite the myth of individualism that informs bourgeois society" (*The Dystopian Impulse* 49). The citizens of this society are so

servile that no matter how illogical it is, they do not oppose any actions of the government. This is a group of people who are afraid to improve their condition and as they do not use their freedom of speech, the government takes full advantage of their subservient nature. Tragically, their agreeable nature only ensures the permanence of the government.

The government in dystopian novels ensures their permanency also by controlling every aspect of social life. This is apparent in the alteration of history. As history preserves the chronicles of a past that might show a way of escape from the present situation, the government orchestrates a distorted history to prevent such escape. Bringing out the traits of classic dystopian writings, Booker alleges that “the dystopian governments depicted by Zamyatin, Orwell, and Huxley clearly believe that the study of history might potentially yield knowledge that would be liberating to their subjects” (*The Dystopian Impulse* 43). That is why the dystopian authority puts an end to resort to history for a solution by altering history to fit into its own standards.

Another way to control the citizens is through language. Language is the major mode of expressing oneself, so the government controls the effectiveness of language. In Booker’s view, dystopian governments tend to focus on language not only because it is a potentially powerful tool with which to control and manipulate their subjects but also because language may harbor powerfully subversive energies (*The Dystopian Impulse* 81). In contemporary dystopian novels, this manipulation of language is done by the replacement of verbal signs by non-verbal signs (emoji, signs or abbreviations). Just like history, language might hold the power to overthrow the ruler, and that is why the dystopian ruler controls both of these.

Dystopian novels also portray a changed class system. Usually, the dystopian society is divided into different sections based on money. Depending on the unequal distribution of properties, dystopian societies are divided into elites and poor. Undoubtedly, the elites live a

luxurious life, whereas the poor spend their lives trying to imitate the elites' lifestyles. These societies are also corporate based, meaning consumption is the driving force of this society. Using the example of Disneyland, in his *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*, Booker points out the corporate and consumer mentality of modern people who tend to visit the Disneyland for a brief escape from reality (3) by enjoying the rides and buying unnecessary products. Other reasons behind the stratum of dystopian societies are gender role, race, generation gap, culture, and technology. The class division creates a group of marginalized people. The government tries to control and persecute only this handful of citizens to set an example of their dominance.

Science and technology play an important role in dystopian novels. The mechanization of human life has always been a concern of dystopian writers. Almost all of the dystopian novels deal with the dangers of scientific progress. The postmodern era has seen an evolution of scientific developments which have concerned the dystopian writers of all era. However, science and technology in dystopian novels are manipulated and controlled by the dictators. The regime creates a kind of mass dependence on technology to create a group of passive citizens. Booker asserts, "This encroachment of the technological into the human is, of course, a classic dystopian motif" (*The Dystopian Impulse* 149). Extreme development of technology is significant in dystopian societies. Contemporary dystopian novels elaborately depict the negative effects of social media. The influence of these media is so severe that people's lifestyles also evolve according to the perception and acceptance of other people. For example, people change their language, attire, and food according to the acceptance of other users of social media. Along with the negative effects of social media, the negative effects of television and the internet are also portrayed in dystopian novels. Manipulation of science is also apparent in the use of medical

science to create a mass of deluded civilians. By integrating science and technology in every aspect of human life, the authority creates a group of citizens who are over-reliant on technology so that no renegades could arise.

The development of technology and modern lifestyle create city centered people. Hence, almost every dystopian novel is city centered. The inhabitants of these cities are so aloof from the touch of nature that they are not familiar with even the common natural phenomena like full moon or the stream of rivers. The reason behind such ignorance is the excessive dependency on technology. Usually, the rebels who want social and political change, set their abode away from the city. The protagonists find a little solace in the lap of nature for a brief time. On the other hand, the 'hero' of dystopian novels traditionally belongs to the common mass. At the beginning of the novel, he is satisfied with the social system, but as the story progresses, he becomes aware of the faults of the society and gradually starts to defy them. Eventually, he gets involved with some rebellious group who help him to change his mentality. Getting influenced by them, the hero also tries to change the society and people, but according to the tradition of dystopian novels, no visible social or political change can be found. The insurgency of the rebels usually ends with the destruction of the society. At the end of the story, the self-change of the hero becomes the main aspect of the novels.

Classic dystopian texts like *Nineteen Eighty-four*, *Brave New World*, or *Fahrenheit 451* have set some specific traits for the genre. Dystopian novels of all era share some specific characteristics. However, with the change of the century, different socio-politico-technological problems arose, which compelled the writers of dystopian novels to change their themes. Contemporary dystopian novels now focus on the dangers of scientific developments, a shift in world power, economic downfall, and influence of social media. Contemporary dystopian novels

have also brought a great change by placing female protagonists at the center of the action. Another change that took place is the ending of the novels; whereas the endings of the classic dystopian novels were pessimistic, the protagonists used to get punished by the authority; the ending of the contemporary dystopian novels is rather optimistic in certain ways. The protagonists of current dystopian novels usually succeed in overthrowing the corrupted authority and even though the novels forewarn the readers of the dangers ahead, the novels end with the hope of a better future.

The four literary texts chosen for my dissertation depict these general traits of dystopian novels. This dissertation is divided into three chapters, each of which describes the main dystopian premonitions each text conveys. Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* predicts the social and moral degradation and degeneration of young people, specifically portrayed through the deterioration of language, because of the over-dependence on social media and technology; Malorie Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses* and Begum Rokeya's short story "Sultana's Dream" foresee the dire consequences of racial and gender discrimination; and Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* forebodes the catastrophe which may result from the existent beauty standards among the twenty-first century people. All the four literary texts that I have chosen, portray a society that seems to be a utopian one, but as the stories progress, it becomes clear that every negative habit imaginable for human beings are adopted by the citizens of these societies. Like other contemporary dystopian texts, these texts also portray the consequences of the faulty conducts of the current time. That is why I want to argue that *Super Sad True Love Story*, *Noughts and Crosses*, "Sultana's Dream" and *Uglies* can be taken as cautionary tales of the consequence of the conducts contemporary people.

Chapter One

Super Sad True Love Story: Premonition against Obsession with Technology

Super Sad True Love Story is a 2010 dystopian novel by Gary Shteyngart set in a near future America where every citizen's identity is based on their bank credits and social media data. The story revolves around the male protagonist, Leonard Abramov (Lenny), his love interest Eunice Park and his boss, Joshie Goldmann. In this novel, Shteyngart has satirized social media and technology-obsessed contemporary America. From the beginning till the end, the readers can see how technology and social media has changed the American society in a negative way. The military has dominance over the citizens; with the help of the army, the government has the citizens under social and technological surveillance. As the story progresses, Lenny experiences the bitter taste of scientific advancements. The social, political and moral decay of America is apparent in the interaction of Lenny with other characters. Though the story revolves around the love triangle of Leonard, Eunice, and Joshie, Shteyngart has actually written a social satire of a dystopian America based on contemporary obsession on technology. This chapter is going to argue that *Super Sad True Love Story* shows the consequences of over attachment of twenty-first century people to social media and technology. The chapter will further discuss the growing amount of the loss of individuality and the surveillance of the government which works as a premonition for the contemporary people in a dystopian manner.

The story begins with the diary entries of the protagonist, Lenny. He works in the division, Post-Human Services (Shteyngart 2), of a mega company, where his superior is Joshie. The division offers rich people the opportunity to become immortal. He was sent to Rome to find international clients but instead, he engaged himself in the libertine lifestyles of the Romans.

There, he got involved with Fabrizia DeSalva and at one of her parties; met the love of his life, Eunice Park. Eunice, however, rejects all his advances because thirty years old Lenny is an old man to her generation. Through her communication with her sister Sally, her mother and friend Jenny on GlobalTeen (Shteyngart 17), the futuristic version of social media, the thoughts of her generation become apparent. The futuristic world of Shteyngart is obsessed with GlobalTeen and the latest version of smartphone, *äppärät* (ibid. 3). People like Lenny feel out of place in this world because he still reads books. After returning to America, Lenny struggles to find his position in this technology-reliant world.

His struggles are apparent in his interactions with his social media obsessed friends, Vishnu, Noah and Noah's wife, Amy. Eunice finally accepts his amorous advances because she wants to torment her father for his negligence in her childhood. He tries to fit into her standard of lifestyle, by buying the latest model of *äppärät*, and by changing his attire. However, Eunice suffers from a dissatisfaction towards life and that is why she loses interest in him and falls for a renegade, David. However, David dies in a massacre conducted by the army. After his death, Eunice responds to Joshie's amorous advances and leaves Lenny for him. Lenny becomes disillusioned after the death of Fabrizia, Nettie Fine (his childhood acquaintance), Noah and Amy. He suspects the government is behind all these deaths. After a while, he moves to Canada where he would not be judged because of his old mind, Eunice leaves Joshie for another man and Joshie finally announces in public the futility of their immortal project. The story ends with the leaking of the GlobalTeen messages of Lenny and Eunice and his false and gruesome account of his and Eunice's death to the actors of a series named "Lenny ♥ Euny Super Sad True Love" (Shteyngart 211).

Like other protagonists of dystopian novels, Lenny does not question the validity or logic of the incidents happening around him, but after the true nature of Eunice and Joshie and the fraudulence of his company become clear to him, he becomes disillusioned about his infatuation with immortality and American society and leaves the country and starts a new life. Also, the deaths of Nettie Fine, Fabrizia, Noah, and Amy, which are undoubtedly the result of government manipulation, push him to his realization of the reality. Riven Barton says, “The protagonist of the post-modern dystopia is not just an outside observer evaluating society, but instead questions every aspect of what he previously considered his reality” (11). His love relationship stays unrequited and the plot justifies the title of the novel as this is surely a super sad love story set in an economically and morally collapsing America. The story also shows how technology and social media have drastically changed people’s lives. The new version of smartphones, *äppärät* have a negative influence on the people irrespective of age. These *äppärät* use data to identify people and create a new kind of class system based on bank credits and the physical appearance of the users. Because of the lack of moral and superficial lifestyle among the young generation, they ignore their seniors and as a result, old people now live in a miserable condition. The manipulation and control of the authority have also caused the lack of individuality among people.

The first thing to note in this novel is the desperation of the characters to become immortal. The theme of immortality is apparent in the very first paragraph. The futuristic society that Lenny lives in is afraid of death, so everyone wishes to become immortal. Lenny himself says so in the first sentence of the novel, “Today I’ve made a major decision: *I am never going to die*” (Shteyngart 1). Immortality is a very compelling issue in this society; Lenny’s division Post-Human Services even offers people the process of having an immortal life. The company’s

official term for the people who do not want to die is “Life Lovers” (Shteyngart 8). They try to enjoy their lives as much as possible so that they can forget the ultimate truth. Their mentality is similar to that of the Elois’ of *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells. To forget the inevitability of death, the Elois enjoy all day long by playing, singing, love making, eating, and drinking. The Elois are childlike creatures who think that they can avoid death if they keep enjoying life. The people in Lenny’s futuristic America is similar to these Elois.

Lenny himself is not excluded from the thought of the inevitability of death. In the opening paragraphs, he talks about how reluctant he is to die. To him, death means getting effaced from the face of the earth. He even denies the age-old notion that parents live within their children. He brings out the example of Whitney Houston’s famous song, “The Greatest Love of Them All” (Shteyngart 1) to negate the idea that children are the future. He interprets the song in his own depressed way by saying that “[t]he children are our future only in the most narrow, transitive sense. They are our future until they too perish” (ibid.). Not only this, Lenny even changes the lyrics according to his own demoralizing way that children could not preserve their parents. He rephrases the line “I live for my kids” to “I’m gradually dying for my kids” (ibid.). This kind of thought is an example of a life-obsessed and self-centered young generation who do not believe that they can live through their children and that is why Lenny’s company gets the chance to exploit these people by creating a sales gimmick – immortality.

The mentality of the inhabitants of this society to preserve themselves anyhow is apparent in Lenny’s diary entries. He first mentions this thought by saying that he wants to preserve himself through this diary, then after meeting Eunice for the first time, he claims that “she will sustain me through forever” (Shteyngart 2). Before meeting Eunice, he was an

overweight 'ITP, Impossible to Preserve' (Shteyngart 11), according to his company's lingo. However, after meeting her, he craves to become immortal; but this is a self-centered thought because he wants to be immortal alone and never thinks of making Eunice immortal too so that they can live together forever. He only thinks of conserving himself through his immortal self. Lenny knows that he does not fall into the category of "Life Lovers Outreach program" (Shteyngart 3) according to his company policy, but still he tries to create something immortal, in other words, his diary, through which he can live forever.

The second major theme of this novel is the characters' obsession with technology. Booker compares this kind of obsession towards something in the dystopian novels to the religious fanaticism proposed by Freud (30). In the novel, characters are nothing without the new technology called *Äppärät*, which Luna Dolezal in her paper, "Human Life as Digitised Data Assemblage: Health, Wealth and Biopower in Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*" describes this way:

A future cousin of the iPhone, the *äppärät* is a multifunctional communications device that is worn around the neck like a pendant. Each citizen is equipped with an *äppärät*, and it is used incessantly for online shopping, social interaction, 'verballing', 'streaming' and self-tracking (2)

Lenny comments on the young generation's infatuation with the small screen of their *äppärät*, "but the truth was, they didn't care. The world they needed was right around them, flickering and bleeping" (Shteyngart 54). His remark shows how the youth are engrossed by their *äppäräti*, ignoring everything else. The situation has gone so bad that people who do not use any of these media are thought to be some unusual creature. Shteyngart has used this obsession of technology

basing on contemporary people. The influence of social media is a major concern in the twenty-first century. The lives of contemporary people revolve around social platforms now; their lives are empty without these media. This situation is dreadful in Shteyngart's futuristic American society. He has predicted the consequence of the overuse of technology by contemporary people.

The concept of privacy is nothing to Shteyngart's futuristic generation. Every single information about a person is stored in *äppärät*. If anyone wants to know about anyone else, he/she can simply face the *äppärät* to the other person and every little detail about that person, even his/her preferences on sexual position will be shown on the little screen. A girl that Lenny meets at Cervix, a club, claims that she was molested by her father, and this is displayed on her social media account, which is visible to everyone. Nothing is private in this world. GlobalTeen helps people to find any information about a person; Dolezal defines this site as "an ominous evolution of Twitter and Facebook, mediates most communication" (2). When Lenny first tries to locate Eunice, he looks at her Globalteen account and goes through her life stories and photos which is visible to everyone. He even finds about her parents' bank credits, income, address, and even her cholesterol level. Such social media sites have made people's lives in this society an open book devoid of any privacy, which is nothing new to twenty-first century people. Sharing each and every detail of the users' lives have made lack of privacy a major issue among the social media users of contemporary societies.

The lives of the young generation are dependent on this little machine. They expose everything that goes on their lives to other people through this device. For instance, Lenny's friends, Noah and Amy stream live about their frivolous life incidents. Amy is a little chubby and she tries to receive sympathy from her viewers by telling them about her diet. She "spends about seven hours a day streaming about her weight" (Shteyngart 56). Noah, on the other hand, shares

his political beliefs in every way possible. He streams live the reunion with Lenny on his “The Noah Weinberg Show” (Shteyngart 49) on GlobalTeen and pleads him to talk about controversial things like politics and description of sex acts in Rome. Noah and Amy show every trivial thing happening in their lives to their viewers. That is why, when the riot breaks out and Lenny, along with Eunice and his friends try to board on a ferry, Amy and Noah still keep streaming live talking incessantly and commenting on the ongoing situation.

Amy and Noah appear like contemporary Instagram stars, who call themselves artists by showing their everyday activities to their fans. The over-exposure of the lives of contemporary people online has been satirized in Shteyngart’s novel, just like the way 2010 movie *Ingrid Goes West* parodies the impact Instagram has on modern people. The protagonist of this movie, Ingrid, breaks moral and social laws just to be friends with her Instagram obsession, Taylor, who only promotes those brands who pay her. Taylor is a social media fraud. This movie parodies how modern people try to appear as perfectionists to other people but are hollow inside. Taylor’s healthy choice of eating is only to show off her fans; her eating habit is nothing but a deception because she promotes foods of only those restaurants that hire her. Similarly, in Shteyngart’s novel, Noah, in his streams, advertises his six sponsors, “whom he struggled to mention casually throughout his rants” (Shteyngart 55).

According to Booker, following the current trend blindly is a dystopian motif. Using Scholes and Rabkin’s comment, he says, “In our time the utopian impulse has been largely replaced by dystopian projections of disastrous current trends” (5). The lives of Shteyngart’s portrayed generation are so engrossed in their gadgets that these apparatus have replaced face to face communication. For example, when Lenny was in Rome and was engaged in sexual activity

with Fabrizia, she was on her Äppärät, “having one of those very angry Italian äppärät chats” (Shteyngart 8). This gadget provides them with all the little amenities, like shopping online, meeting new people, knowing about other people’s lives, and reading books, with the minimal use of their fingers. These are similar to the use of smartphones and the Internet in the twenty-first century where everything is at our fingertips. In a survey conducted by Pew Research Center in 2018, it is found that, “some 95% of teens now say they have or have access to a smartphone, which represents a 22-percentage-point increase from the 73% of teens who said this in 2014-2015” (“Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018” n.p.). The usage of smartphones by teenagers is increasing at an alarming rate in the present era.

The feature of ranking people degrades everyone to a collective idea of being an ideal person. This ranking is based on the amount of money one earns and saves, their body weight, their fantasies and desires, sexual preferences, political and racial beliefs, and ethnicity, along with basic details like name and date of birth. Then, it ranks people according to these data to likeability or “fuckability” (Shteyngart 18) as Dolezal points out, “[t]hese personal data serve an important role in Lenny’s society, establishing criteria to measure one’s social worth and one’s political status” (2). Human identity is decided by a mere instrument. A person approaches another person based on this ranking. This is an instance of a judgmental mentality. “FAC” or “Form A Community” (Shteyngart 57) is an option that measures the pulse of a person who sees a girl and, “tells her how much [the person] want[s] to do her” (Shteyngart 56). RateMe Plus (Shteyngart 44), a technology, connects people by showing their attractive aspects on the gadget, and if everyone assents, they get involved with each other in amorous acts. Dolezal has very aptly articulated that, “In fact, personal data comparisons dominate social life in SSTLS” (2).

The various kinds of ranking create a new kind of class system in the society. Here, people get judged by their bank credit and the ranking on RateMe Plus. This ranking is used so profusely that apart from being judged by the *apparat*, people also get judged by the credit poles set on the road that display how much credit one has in one's bank account. This results in making other people perceive and put those people into separate social classes based on their financial position. Ranking people to different categories on the ground of their bank credits and physical appeal put them into a derogatory position, as Lenny comments, "The Credit Poles reduc[e] everyone to a simple three-digit numeral" (Shteyngart 35). People even get saved by Lenny's the company after the massacre based on their bank credits. Dolezal comments on this alarming situation,

Illustrating the perhaps inevitable conclusion of liquid surveillance though 'dataveillance,' or the imperceptible surveillance through data-generating digital technologies, SSTLS demonstrates how individuals are grouped into discrete categories or classes, and subsequently assessed (4)

However, ranking people based on their financial status and attractiveness is not unusual in today's society too. People frequently judge other people based on their economic condition and their demeanor.

Another danger of being dependent on this little apparatus is apparent in the use of language. Deterioration of language is a distinctive feature in dystopian novels. Booker talks about the control of language while referring to Meyers in *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*, "dystopias will seek in every way possible to exert an authoritarian control over language, preventing linguistic changes that might lead to heterodox thought" (81). In Lenny's

society, it is seen that not only the teens but also the children use indecent words. Shteyngart writes “An angelic seven-year-old girl in braids was shouting into her äppärät: “Nex” time I see her ass I’m gonna punch that nigga in the stomach!” (35). The quality of language has deteriorated irrespective of class and education. This is apparent especially in the messages of Eunice and her friend on GlobalTeen. They use indecent words and slangs in their daily conversation. Use of such language in everyday conversations indicates the dwindling of morality, especially among the young generation. Even elderly people use slangs and swearing words. The names of the shops and products also indicate the deterioration of language. For example, a lingerie shop is named “AssLuxury” (Shteyngart 24), or “JuicyPussy” (Shteyngart 29).

Additionally, the small push messages from the GlobalTeen inspire people to replace language with images. For instance, “*Switch to Images today! Less words= more fun*” (Shteyngart 16) or “*Harvard Fashion School studies show excessive typing makes wrists large and unattractive. Be a GlobalTeen forever-switch to Images today!*” [sic.] (Shteyngart 27). This shows how people are motivated to replace verbal words with non-verbal signs. Using Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf’s definition of language, Jens Van Gheluwe argues that the de facto government manipulate the population’s disposition towards society by managing and adjusting its everyday speech (12). The nicknames that these people give each other; or the usernames on their social media account, for instance, Eunitard or Grillbitch are also immodest. This decadence in language use demonstrates that education has become äppärät based in this society and people have forgotten how to read and communicate using proper words. All these accelerated the deterioration of language. The advent of äppärät, thus, has made books and newspapers obsolete. However, Lenny, being an avid reader, misses the proper use of language

and, that is why when he hears an old woman utter the word 'blustery' (Shteyngart 194), it reminds him how language used to be exact to express feelings and how that in turn, was related to the recollection of past memories, "its precision and simplicity, its capacity for recall" (194).

Another bad influence of the *äppärät* is the aimlessness of the young generation. The young people now have lost interest in education or manual work. They live in a virtual world created by the *äppärät*, captivated by the alluring falsehood offered by various companies. This has created a great number of unemployed young people, as Shteyngart depicts, "there was an added aimlessness to the population, the unemployed men staggering down the chicken-bone-littered street" (35). Throughout the novel, young people are seen wandering aimlessly on the road or using *äppärät* for meaningless conversations. They have no particular aim in life; most of them were mistreated by their parents in childhood and that made them lose the desire to love. Hence, they engage in meaningless relationships and shopping using credits and eventually, drown in debts. As a consequence, they end up becoming homeless and destitute. The lack of love and drive to live life to the fullest make them frustrated and dejected, as Jenny, Eunice's friend asserts, "Sometimes I walk around as if in a dream, like I'm on the outside looking in, and Gopher and my parents and my brothers are just these ghosts floating past me" (Shteyngart 73). They are so dependent on their *äppäräts*, that they cannot imagine living in a world without this device. That is why after the riot, four young men commit suicide, two of them wrote in their suicide note about, "how they couldn't see a future without their *äppäräti*" (Shteyngart 173). This extreme dependency on *apparati* can be compared to the devotion the contemporary youths have to their smartphone or social media accounts. Smartphones and social media are the new drugs for this generation. People, irrespective of nations and ages are now so dependent on these technologies that they cannot think of single moment without these devices. They live in a virtual

world created by these platforms. Nupur Mittal in her article “Cyber-D Subjects: Delillo’s *Cosmopolis* And Shteyngart’s *Super Sad True Love Story*,” comments on this condition, “Characters have no idea about how to deal with *actual* reality, which is posited in the novel as being a realm separate from the internet technology-determined, experiential reality” (272). The characters of this novel are thus devoid of reality.

One feature of postmodern dystopian novels is the hedonistic lifestyle of the characters. Booker comments that hedonism, intoxication, and indoctrination constitute Huxley’s dystopia (*The Dystopian Impulse* 52). Shteyngart’s novel opens up in Rome where Lenny goes on a company mission to attract foreign clients who want to become immortal. He thought that alluring the Italians would be an easy task as they are “Life Lovers,” but subsequently, he forgets about his mission and gets tangled in the lovemaking and merrymaking lifestyle of the Romans. He gets involved with Fabrizia, who hosts orgies in her house almost every night. Drugs and multiple sexual partners are available in these parties. The guests take drugs and engage themselves in debauchery to forget about death, and also old age, which to them, is worse than death and to feel younger.

The futuristic society portrayed by Shteyngart is a degenerated one. People in this degenerated society lack moral and ethical values. Their fear of death drives them to lead a life of frivolity. In an attempt to forget about death, they indulge themselves in shopping, sex, eating, drinking, taking drugs and using their precious *äppäräti*. Their only desire is to remain young throughout their lives. In their eyes, thirty is the new old, and that is why Jenny forbids Eunice to date Lenny because he is older than her. They also judge others by their credits and desirability showed on their *äppärät*, as Mittal states, “People are depicted as being entirely reliant on the internet in order to negotiate the world – they experience the latter through the lens of the

former” (271). This generation does not value aged people, which is why older people end up living in utter negligence and carelessness. They avoid their parents as much as they can; their parents have to keep working to earn money even at their old age to earn their livelihood. This ignorance of filial duties has been going for so long that even their parents take this normally. That is why they appreciate when one of their children takes care of them. After the massacre on Tompkins Park, Lenny’s parents starve because of the deficit. When he goes to visit them, he buys food for them and his father says, “No one care about the sick or the old anymore” (Shteyngart 186). This single sentence proves the way elder people are treated in that futuristic society. Ignoring parents is existent in this century too, where parents are only remembered on their birthdays or mother’s or father’s day. Otherwise, for most cases, parents live by themselves or in old homes.

Old traditional values – both social and moral, have no importance in this society. The change of lifestyle has alienated people from their parents and family teachings and as a consequence, they have no conscience. As a result, they ignore their parents; Eunice is so angry at her father that she tells her sister that she will forgive her father when he is seventy and homeless and comes to her and Lenny for money and then she will remind him of his past conducts and throw him some money (Shteyngart 130). Eunice also says that she is going to marry Lenny because her mother disapproves of him (ibid.). These youths are so deranged that Jenny has revenge sex with another man so she can earn her ex-boyfriend’s respect; she could not find any other way to receive his respect. One trait of these youths is that they are afraid of showing their feelings. That is why Eunice does not show her love for Lenny, rather she acts indifferent to him. She says to Jenny that she has broken up with Ben because he is perfect for

her, and has chosen Lenny because he is not. They also use products made from animal fur without any prick of conscience.

Lack of conscience in people helps companies like Post Human Services to grow. This company exploits people's desire to become immortal for their own business profit. They stalk their clients in their own country as well as in other countries too. For that reason, Lenny was sent to Rome. They offer various life-changing methods like healthy diet, healthy lifestyle and good morale as the process of becoming immortal. Lenny himself was naïve enough to believe this procedure. He says,

I just have to be good and I have to believe in myself. I just have to stay off the trans fats and the hooch. I just have to drink plenty of green tea and alkalized water and submit my genome to the right people. I will need to re-grow my melting liver, replace the entire circulatory system with "smart blood," and find someplace safe and warm (but not too warm) to while away the angry seasons and the holocausts. (Shteyngart 1)

The description of cheating Barry (fake name), a potential client of the company, proves that the company is only hoodwinking him for money. He was handed over to Lenny to handle, and Lenny tried to confuse him with a myriad of scientific jargons and taking him to the research center and scientists. This is just a method of making the client feel how advanced their technology is so that he falls victim to their trap and spend money. Lenny feels disgusted at the entire process of winning over the clients, but most importantly, he feels disgusted at himself for being a part of it. He says, "I felt shitty about Barry, but even shittier about myself" (Shteyngart 80). Lenny's boss, Joshie also believes this and tries to become younger for Eunice. He tells her

in how he is going to rebuild his arm and in two years he might have to remove his heart completely because it does not do anything except circulating blood (Shteyngart 190). He is seventy years old, but because of his skin and organ rejuvenation, he does not look old because he has reverse engineered his entire body and that is why Eunice falls for him. At the end of the novel, he also gets disillusioned from the idea of immortality like Lenny and announces that there is no way of going against nature to become immortal. In the end, it becomes clear that the immortality program is just a sales gimmick of the company.

Old things like books have lost their appeal in this society. Lenny is judged by other people because he reads real books and not the virtual version of books on his *äppärät*. When he and Eunice move out from his apartment in Manhattan to the Upper East Side, his displaced young coworkers, who also got residence there, stopped talking to them seeing his huge collection of books. The moment they “peeked in and saw that every square inch of [their] two rooms was stuffed with books, they [these coworkers] went into high avoidance mode” (Shteyngart 200). The young generation has forgotten reading books for pleasure, and that is why it shocks Eunice when she sees Lenny reading a book for the first time. Also, when Lenny gets ranked as the least attractive man in the bar, Vishnu comments, ““You’ve got to stop buying books, Nee-gro,” Vishnu said. ‘All those doorstops are going to drag down your PERSONALITY rankings’” (Shteyngart 57) and Noah calls him the “last reader on earth” (Shteyngart 57). When Lenny was returning to the USA, on the plane he opened a book, but he had to shove it back to the bag because other passengers were looking at him weirdly and the young man beside him told him the book smells like a wet sock (Shteyngart 23).

To the young generation of this novel, books are worthless. This generation is so alienated from the concept of reading books that as a result, they have forgotten how to read. At

end of the novel, when apparati stop working, Eunice learns how to read from Lenny, but when he catches her looking at a book, she feels embarrassed. Again, when they were getting evicted, Lenny felt the worthlessness of the books that once his father gave him so that he would look good in front of the girls who came to meet him, but the incapability of the books of changing the world made him doubt the worth of the books at all (Shteyngart 200). Inhibition to read books is a common phenomenon in the twenty-first century. The young generation is more interested in browsing their smartphones rather than reading books. Unfortunately, today's young generation is also getting detached from books; a great number of young people prefer reading books on electronic media. In a survey done by Pew Research Center, Kathryn Zickuhr et al. have found out that among Americans who read e-books, those under age 30 are more likely to read their e-books on a cell phone (41%) or computer (55%) than on an e-book reader such as a Kindle (23%) or tablet (16%). Many readers are concerned that e-books and electronic devices are replacing physical books.

Apart from the grim consequences of the apparat, the most horrifying aspect of this novel is the control the authority has on everyone. The government has everyone under total surveillance. Using apparat, and manipulating everyone's addiction to it, the government spies on people. Drawing connection between the dystopian government and the government of the reality, Booker in his book, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature Fiction as Social Criticism*, asserts that "the dystopian governments of fiction and the totalitarian governments of modern reality generally depend on precisely the sort of mass-delusion that Freud associated with religion" (11). Lenny himself becomes a victim of the surveillance at the beginning of the novel when he has to answer to a holographic otter about his whereabouts. The otter asks him personal questions about his visit to Rome and asks if he had any intimate relationship with

anyone. When his *äppärät* freezes, Nettie Fine tries to help him but ends up being in the blacklist of the government like Fabrizia. The government has such control over exchanging information that after suspecting Lenny, these two women disappear for a while. Lenny tries to contact them on their GlobalTeen account, but none of them responds. Then Nettie suddenly replies Lenny's GlobalTeen messages. They communicate for a while before he suspects her being someone else when she asks which boat Noah is on during the rupture, she had no chance of knowing that Lenny was with Noah. When Joshie and Eunice both leave Lenny, he finds out that Nettie Fine has died of pneumonia and Fabrizia died in a motor accident one week before the rupture. Lenny is puzzled and wonders, "I do not know who sent me those GlobalTeens messages from a "secure" address, including the one asking me which ferry Noah had boarded, seconds before it was destroyed" (Shteyngart 210). What happened was, the government was keeping him on their watch, and using his online information, was trying to find out any anti-government activities. That is why after suspecting Nettie and Fabrizia, they were taken into government custody and eventually they died in mysterious ways. Even though there is no clear indication of the government being the reason behind their deaths, Lenny still suspects the government's involvement. This proves that the government had him under their surveillance. This is a common phenomenon in contemporary times where the data stored in social media is easily accessible. To stop terrorism and illegal deeds, governments of different countries now have contracts with social media to access any information they want. People are not concerned about the privacy and security of their information, and social media does not offer much security.

Constant surveillance deprives people of individuality and privacy and shapes them an ideal identity set by the government. That is why a man on the plane Lenny was boarded got arrested because he did not have his *äppärät* with him. As he did not have his *äppärät*, the

military officers were not able to know who he was and why he was coming to the U.S.A, because an *apparat* stores all the information about a person and the government uses those information to identify everyone. As the *apparat* has curtailed a man's identity to an assortment of data, the man on the plane gets boarded off the plane and taken by the army to an unknown destination. No one, except some Italian passengers react because they themselves are afraid that they might get into trouble as they are being watched constantly by the government. Their reaction is just like what Michel Foucault describes in his paper "Discipline and Punish". Foucault comments on the modern system of surveillance, there is no need of constant surveillance, if the captives (the ruled) thinks he is being watched, that is why they do not protest. This becomes apparent through the signboard in the airport terminal which manifests the extent of manipulation and control over the citizens by the army. The signboard reads,

IT IS FORBIDDEN TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE EXISTENCE OF THIS
VEHICLE ("THE OBJECT") UNTIL YOU ARE .5 MILES FROM THE
SECURITY PERIMETER OF JOHN F.KENNEDY INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT. BY READING THIS SIGN YOU HAVE DENIED EXISTENCE OF
THE OBJECT AND IMPLIED CONSENT.

—AMERICAN RESTORATION AUTHORITY,

SECURITY DIRECTIVE IX-2.11

"TOGETHER WE'LL SURPRISE THE WORLD! [555] (Shteyngart 27)

The writings show how the government regulates each and every action of the common people. There are also army checkpoints to find out any miscreants, but they are manipulated by the powerful people. For example, Lenny gets passed by an army checkpoint without any trouble because his company has provided the army with the news of his arrival beforehand.

Tracking people is an easy way to keep them under surveillance. The authority uses *apparat* to track people. That is why, through the identity of Nettie Fine, they find out which ferry Noah is on and that particular ferry gets destroyed. However, this tracking is not only done by the authority, but also by common people. Through the use of *apparat* and social media, anyone can keep track of anyone. When Lenny first meets Eunice, he looks up her on social media and even when they lived together, they used to track each other to know where the other is. Foucault has rightly said, "Our society is one not of spectacles, but of surveillance" (562). He comments that the society itself has created some institutions where constant vigilance is required in order to discipline. He compares family, school, hospitals, and police as the new versions of Panopticon where the children, the students, the patients or the inmates are under constant supervision. In Lenny's society, this surveillance is easier because of the *apparat*.

In almost all of the dystopian novels, as a result of the dictatorship of the authority, a rebel group always rise up to better the condition, but somehow they get defeated and the situation remains the same. Booker asserts, "dystopian fictions society generally wins this battle" (57). The protagonist might change a little a bit after he gets disillusioned about the luxuries provided by the government. In this novel, the group led by renegade David protest against the government's atrocities; they occupy Tompkin Park and set tents there, giving every possible amenities to the other discharged employees and their families. However, their endeavor fails. Because the army mercilessly slaughters everyone there as a warning against other rebels. Although the rebels are incapable of achieving any success against the government at the end of the novel, they play a significant role in changing Eunice and Lenny's blind faith in the system. In the end, though Eunice goes back to her past lifestyle, Lenny realizes the decadence of America and finally moves out of the country to start a new life.

From the above discussion, it can be argued that *Super Sad True Love Story* is a cautionary tale for contemporary people. The way contemporary people rely on their smartphones and try to show their intimate and little details of their life on Facebook or Instagram does not surprise the readers of the novel to find a similarity between the novel and the present day. Over-attachment to technological devices can never be good, and that has been depicted in the novel. The novel portrays how the dependency on social media and technology makes it easier for the dictators to manipulate and control people by keeping a constant surveillance on them. The data system based on this technology has created discrimination and distance among people. All these are existent in current society. At the present time, people are dependent on their apps and instruments and are rapidly losing their individuality. The surveillance of the authority is also apparent in this age as technology has made it easier. Even though *Super Sad True Love Story* is written in the twenty-first century, when technology rules people's lives, the concern Shteyngart has about the current situation is apparent in every page of this novel. In an interview with Chris Vognar for Dallas News, Shteyngart jokes about his personal experience of getting judged by a cable man because of his book collection. He also shows his concerns about the decreasing number of book readers. In this interview Shteyngart says,

Books no longer matter the way they used to," says Shteyngart, who also teaches writing at Columbia University. "They're no longer a central part of our culture... When I go around the country on these tours I'm amazed at how many people show up, which is great. But we are a minority (n.p.)

So, it is apparent from the above discussion that *Super Sad True Love Story* is a cautionary tale for modern people to be wary of their conducts and dependency on their technology. Shteyngart

has shown his concern about the overuse of technology of twentieth-century in this novel through various incidents and characters. Relying on Raven Barton's assertion that dystopian novels "are shadow projections of current society, hyper-exemplifying problems and potential fears that already exist," (6) I have tried to show that Shteyngart's description of the future condition in this novel is nothing but a reflection of the situation of contemporary America which is aimed in cautioning the young generation of the ominous consequences of excessive dependency on technology.

Chapter Two

Noughts and Crosses and “Sultana’s Dream”: Cautionary Tale against Racial and Gender Discrimination

Noughts and Crosses is a contemporary novel that deals with reverse racism in Britain. It is a pitiful truth that racism is still a persistent social problem in the twenty-first century. The author, Malorie Blackman, herself has experienced the brunt of racism and has written this novel as a reaction. The world the characters of this novel live in enjoy the same technology the readers of the novel do and this similarity makes the readers relate to the social problem more intently. Blackman has made the story more forceful by using true incidents of racial prejudice. She has written this novel as a premonition for the whites to be conscious of their acts otherwise, the suppressed will retaliate. On the other hand, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain has written the short story “Sultana’s Dream” as a foreshadowing of what might happen if men keep on ignoring women’s basic rights. During her time, women were devoid of human rights in the name of religion. By depicting a utopia for women in this story, Hossain has warned men of the true power of women. In this chapter, through extensive discussion of *Noughts and Crosses* and “Sultana’s Dream,” I will illustrate how both this literary pieces prophesize the horrifying consequences of racial and gender discrimination and show how the reversal of power can take place and the dominant could become the dominated if these discriminations still persist in the society.

Noughts and Crosses is a 2011 novel where the author Blackman tells the story of a racially segregated Britain where the history of the suppression of the blacks has changed because the whites are no longer the dominating group; rather they are now the dominated group

and the blacks have become the dominating one. The story is set in an unspecified time, where the power role has reversed because now the blacks (the Crosses as Blackman designated them), have become the suppressor of the former suppressor, the whites (or the noughts). The story centers around a Cross girl Persephone (Sephy) Hadley and naught Callum McGregor. The noughts live a miserable condition. There is a strong inequality between the ruler and the ruled. This inequality is based on skin color and cultural differences between the two races. The Crosses suppress the noughts in every way possible so that they cannot rebel against the Crosses.

Callum's mother gets fired from her job because she did not back up Sephy's mother Jasmine's lie to Sephy's father, Kamal. Life becomes harder for the McGregors, as Jasmine makes sure that Meggie does not get any other job. The story then jumps three years ahead when Callum has been accepted in an all-Cross school, which is a rare incident as noughts were not permitted to get admission in Cross schools in the past. The government was trying to remove discrimination between the Crosses and the noughts, and permitting black students to study in an all-Cross school was an agenda of the de facto government. However, the hatred of the Crosses against the noughts made it difficult for the Noughts kids to acquire knowledge. Callum's own experiences in the school and the treatment of the Crosses expose the discontentment that is existent between the two races. The bullying of the Cross teachers and students compels Callum and the other nought students to drop out from school one by one.

The situation gets worse when Callum's sister, Lynnett commits suicide. She was suffering from mental imbalance and used to think of herself as a Cross. The reason behind her delusion becomes apparent when her father tells them how she was tortured by some Noughts because of her relationship with a Cross. The hatred in Callum's mind gets fueled by her suicide.

He also comes to know about the involvement of his father, Ryan and his brother, Jude with a naught rebel group, Liberation Militia (Blackman 36). Ryan surrenders to the police to protect Jude from being taken into police custody for his alleged involvement in a shopping mall bombing and dies while attempting to escape from the prison. Callum himself joins the renegades and in a short time becomes one of the strongest and skilled revolutionaries. To force Kamal in releasing some of the revolutionaries, Jude plans to kidnap Sephy and they successfully kidnap her. Seeing Sephy after so many years, the spark between her and Callum reignites and they consummate their love.

However, a member of the Liberation Militia betrays them, Sephy gets rescued by her father and the group of rebels hide to save themselves from being captured. After a few months, it is revealed that Sephy is pregnant. Hearing this, Callum goes to meet her, but gets captured and is sentenced to death for his anti-government activities. Kamal and Jasmine try to force Sephy to abort the child but she does not agree. Kamal offers Sephy the release of Callum in exchange of the abortion, but she refuses. Similarly, he offers Callum his life if he publicly announces that he has raped Sephy. None of them accepts Kamal's offer and Callum is hanged. In an epilogue, it is revealed that Sephy has given birth to a girl.

Like *Noughts and Crosses*, in the short story "Sultana's Dream", with the reversal of gender roles, the oppressed becomes the oppressors. In the then Indian subcontinent, women used to be manipulated by men in the name of religion. The story was published in *The Indian Ladies Magazine* in 1905 and is about women's absolute freedom. "Sultana's Dream" is a journey in the dream of a young woman named Sultana, who goes to an idealistic Indian society run by women where men are minorities and the women have all the power. The story begins

with Sultana, the protagonist, dozing off while thinking about the condition of the women in India. Suddenly, a lady comes in front of her, whom Sultana takes as her friend, Sister Sara. Sister Sara proposes to take a walk in the garden and thinking that it is night time and there is no risk of being seen by the male servants, Sultana agrees. However, she is astonished when Sister Sara tells her that the passers-by are calling her “mannish” (Hossain n.p.), meaning she is timid and shy. Sultana feels very self-conscious because she might encounter men because according to the existent Purdah system, she is not supposed to be seen by any men. Sister Sara assures her the impossibility of this happening by saying that this is “Ladyland” (Hossain n.p.) where men are the ones who have to follow strict Purdah and avoid unknown women, which she jokingly calls “mardana,” (Hossain n.p.), the opposite of zenana. Zenana was a custom maintained by the women of British India where they were confined within the four walls of the house in order to avoid the risk of being seen by men. Gradually, Sister Sara reveals how Ladyland is different from the patriarchal society of Sultana.

In Ladyland, the ruler is a queen, who treats everyone equally. This land is free of vices, corruption, diseases, and immorality. The women perform all the outdoor duties, whereas the men manage the household. The queen of this land has ensured female education and the abolition of childhood marriage thirty years’ ago when she was crowned. Before she was crowned, the condition of the women of this land was similar to the women of Sultana’s India. The female scientists of two different universities have made scientific revolutions and have been able to extract water from the clouds and store solar power, whereas the men were perfecting their military skill. When Sultana asked how they confined the men within the four walls, Sister Sara replied that they brought the change by the power of the female mind. Ten years ago, a neighboring country announced war against their land for harboring some political

refugees. The queen defeated the enemy with the help of the principal one of the universities. Since then, the men were kept in separation from the women and all kinds of crimes vanished from the land. Now, this is a peaceful, crime-free and scientifically advanced country ruled by women. Sultana went to visit the two universities and the Queen only to be astonished by the advancement of the women. She could see the difference between her own country and Ladyland and was planning to tell her friends how the women of Ladyland have reversed the gender roles. However, when she was on the sky in a hovercar, she slipped and found herself in her own bedroom, waking up from a dream.

One of the distinctive features of dystopian novels is the familiarity the readers get with the problems delineated in the novel with their own. Even though Malorie Blackman does not specifically confirm the time the novel is set, supposedly the time period when the story takes place is the same as the readers' own time; so it could be called a parallel universe to the readers, which Booker calls defamiliarization. Booker characterizes dystopian novels, "Dystopian fiction, then, with its defamiliarizing strategy of revealing evils in society through shocks of recognition in a different context has much in common with a number of modern literary movements" (176). In Blackman's parallel universe where racism is actually a grave social issue like ours, history has been reversed as the blacks somehow have overpowered the whites. After being in the power position, they have started to dominate and discriminate the whites. Like the blacks in Tony Morrison's novel *Paradise*, the Crosses have forgotten that they themselves were once victims of discrimination and segregation. Racial prejudice is one of the abhorrent social problems since the dawn of human civilization. In Blackman's alternate history, the once oppressed blacks have now overpowered their former suppressors. However, as a consequence of power reversal, the

blacks manipulate the whites. The reversal of power and its consequences are very aptly discussed by Grzegorzcyk and Bradford, who assert that:

In the world Blackman depicts, the predominant Western belief and historical thought of power relations between the coloniser and the colonised are reversed by changing the “practices and histories which have privileged Europeans over their non-white **others**” and by establishing that the dark-skinned Crosses are the dominant and powerful rulers. (qtd. in Kobza 63)

Hossain has also depicted her contemporary society in her short story. Hossain was one of the pioneers of female rights in the then India. During her time, Muslim women had to follow the strict rules of the Purdah system. Purdah system refers to the dress code and separation of women from non-related men. This system is a distorted version of modesty among women in Islam. According to Islam, an adult woman has to cover her body and be modest in front of strangers, but some men have misinterpreted this and taken it to an extreme level. In Hossain’s other writings, she has discussed how extreme purdah system has taken many girls’ lives. She has compared purdah system to slavery which confines not only the body but also the mind. She says that because men have been repressing women’s mind for so long, women have become inert. That is why Hossain has written relentlessly against the Purdah system and the lack of freedom of women of the beginning of the twentieth century. She wrote the short story “Sultana’s Dream” as a reaction against the then patriarchal society. This story was a time ahead story of that century because, in reality, women were not even allowed to go out alone let alone having ultimate power. Hossain, through Sultana’s dream, has pointed out the mistakes men make in the treatment of women and has written this story as a warning against all the patriarchal societies which tend to suppress women and their rights. She cautions the men dominated society

not to make the mistakes the men of Sultana's society committed, otherwise women would fight for their rights and will definitely.

Discrimination based on ethnicity, religion and skin color is an ancient and loathsome part of human civilization. Skin color was one of the major factors for which people were mistreated and oppressed immensely in the past. Unfortunately, this situation still exists all over the world. In almost all the countries of the world, minorities face racial discrimination. Even in developed countries, racism is a fatal social problem. The novel *Noughts and Crosses* aptly shows the consequences of racism and shadism in Britain. Blackman's note at the beginning of the novel itself indicates how the black people were not given credit for their achievements in various sectors when she was a child. She writes,

The African-American scientists, inventors and pioneers mentioned in chapter 30 are all real people and their achievements are very real. When I was at school, we didn't learn about any of them – except Robert Peary, the white European-American explorer. I wish we had done. But then, if we had, maybe I wouldn't have written this book (n.p.)

Blackman has used her own life experience to show the discrimination between the Noughts and the Crosses. She has experienced herself how the whites have always excluded the blacks for ages from the records of human civilization. Blackman's note verifies how systematic discrimination has driven the black people to rebel in order to change their subjugated existence and consequently creating an alternative history of white suppression by reversing the power role. The oppression of the Noughts is apparent in every aspect of their lives – education, social, religion, and profession.

The suppression of the minority Noughts by the Crosses is one of the main themes in *Noughts and Crosses*. The beginning of the novel shows how the Crosses oppress the Noughts. Meggie was not aware of Jasmine's lie, so she was not able to back her up in front of Kamal, but still, Jasmine fires her. Even though Jasmine was the one who was wrong in this situation, she still dismisses Meggie as a form of punishment because she holds all the power. The condition in which the white people live in now is apparent in Meggie's thought after she gets fired, "being around Crosses was like walking on eggshells" (Blackman 22). Meggie's thought clearly shows that the Noughts have to be extra careful around the Crosses so as not to offend them and to lead a safe life. Exploiting their power, the Crosses now oppress the Noughts. As Petra Kobza says in her thesis,

The novel changes the usual pattern of the oppressed and racially discriminated black minority and transforms these minorities into the dominant and powerful class to show (white) readers the negative consequences and psychological sufferings that racial discrimination and racial division cause by turning these readers into the marginalised and suppressed inferior group. (64)

The history of black repression shows how the blacks were segregated by the whites. During the nineteenth century America, blacks were segregated legally by Jim Crow Laws. The blacks were not allowed to mix with whites and they used to live a miserable life. They were devoid of human rights. Slavery was a legalized form of labor for the blacks. Slave trade was a profitable business in America during that era. In South Africa from 1948 to 1990, there was a system called apartheid, which made a clear distinction between the whites and the non-whites in terms of basic human rights and politics. There was a vast difference in the distribution of properties

and the whites used to enjoy all the amenities and the blacks had to slave away to earn the minimum sustenance. The history of the African only proves how white supremacists neglected the blacks.

The history of black repression has been reversed in *Noughts and Crosses*. The sufferings the blacks used to endure in the past has been turned around as the suppressed have now turned into suppressors. When Meggie loses her job, she says she cannot have another job in any other Cross family because Jasmine would not forget this and would not stand “idly by whilst [she] get another job with one of her friends” (Blackman 25). The Crosses do not forget if a naught has ever caused any harm to them. As the Crosses hold all the power in this world, they hold grudges and do not leave any chance to take revenge if the Noughts do any wrong to them. In this novel, Blackman has shown how years of abuse that the blacks have tolerated in the hands of the whites could lead the blacks to do everything in their power to change the condition. Kobza has rightly asserted, “Malorie Blackman questions the adopted preconceptions of the world and tackles issues concerning race, power and truth and turns the existing positions and powers most people take for granted around” (64). However, the whites are not concerned about this possibility because they are not aware of the sufferings of the non-whites. The Noughts are not conscious of the truth that because of their predecessors’ treatment of the non-whites in the past has made the Crosses to treat the Noughts in the same way.

The reversal of power and dominance is also the major theme in “Sultana’s Dream.” Hossain lived in a society where women were repressed in the name of religion. Women were housebound because of the fear of being seen by non-related men. The short story is an illustration of a woman’s heartfelt thoughts about her freedom in an imaginary world. The

society that Sultana belongs to is male-dominated. As a result, women are manipulated by men in every possible way. In Sultana's world, women are not allowed to get out of the house during daytime and even at night if they go out, they have to go out when the male servants are asleep. Sultana's comment, "there was no harm in going out at that time. The men-servants outside were fast asleep just then, and I could have a pleasant walk with Sister Sara" (Hossain n.p.) exemplify the rigidity of the restrictions the women had to abide by. When she was walking on the streets of Ladyland, she was self-conscious of being seen by men. However, Sister Sara ensures her the impossibility of something like this. When Sultana asks why Sister Sara replies that the men of this country stay within the four walls of their houses. Even though thirty years ago, women of this country lived behind veils like the women of Sultana's world, women's empowerment has changed this condition and now men are the one who have to maintain purdah from the women. Thus, the story depicts how the table has turned when the once repressed have come to power.

One of the tendencies of the dystopian novel is to alter history, which Booker remarks to be one of the distinctive traits of this genre. Jens Van Gheluwe describes this trend as: "Knowledge of this past is usually a hazardous subject, as even the mere notion of a time in which things were different could inspire people to hope for a future in which they would be again" (12). In *Noughts and Crosses*, the Crosses hold the power position and to secure their position, they have altered the history so that the Noughts may never know they were once in power. They have changed the human history glorifying only the blacks. There is no mention of the contribution of the whites anywhere. The way white people used to shun blacks from everything, now the blacks are doing the same to them. This is apparent when Sephy and Callum go to school, and Mr. Jason, their teacher taught them how "Nobody could do it right, especially the Noughts" (Blackman 74). He teaches that all the achievements throughout the civilization

have been achieved by the Crosses. They also altered the history book, so when Mr. Jason asks the class what all the scientists and pioneers have in common, it was only Callum who knew the right answer, “They were all Crosses” (Blackman 128), but then he loses his patience when Mr. Jason boasts off about the achievements of the Crosses from the beginning of the civilization. Just as Malorie Blackman found the achievements of the black scientists and explorers excluded from her textbooks, Sephy and Callum’s textbooks were devoid of white people’s achievements as Callum points out “Because all the history books are written by Crosses and [the Crosses] never write about anyone else except [their] own. Noughts have done lots of significant things, but no-one in this class knows” (Blackman 228). But unfortunately, Mr. Jason calls him a liar for saying the truth.

The way the Crosses have changed the history, they have also changed religion according to their choice. They have changed the name of Christmas to “Crossmas” and have changed the Bible too according to their own interpretation as they consider themselves to be the closest to God. They call themselves to be “God’s chosen” (Blackman 81). According to their version of the Bible, the son of God was also dark-skinned like them instead of being a Caucasian. Callum describes his parents’ thought about religion and the Holy Book, “it’d been written and translated by Crosses, so it was bound to be biased in their favour” (Blackman 81). The manipulation of religion by the Crosses is apparent through this comment.

Similarly, the history of patriarchal society has been turned upside down in the world of Sara’s dream. The society in Sara’s dream is a utopian world for women, but a dystopian one for men. While defining utopia, Booker says, “Not only is one man’s utopia another men’s dystopia, but utopian visions of an ideal society often inherently suggest a criticism of the current order of

things as nonideal” (15). The narration given by Sara makes it clear that this society is very much different from that of the writer’s own. In this society, not the men, but the women are the free individuals who do not have to follow the rules of Zenana. Contrary to the traditional patriarchal norms, men not only live in Purdah hiding from women but have also got used to this system which is called “Murdana”. Hossain writes men “are accustomed to the purdah system and have ceased to grumble at their seclusion” (n.p.). The women of this story have changed the age-old rules of Indian patriarchy. Literature is a reflection of author’s own times and a feminist like Hossain always depicted the condition of women of her society. So, while the women of this short story have put the men into purdah and have created a utopia for themselves, this utopia is a dystopia for the men, because they are devoid of their human rights.

The manipulation of power by the Crosses to oppress and marginalize of the Noughts have resulted in distrust between the two races. As the Crosses are the dominant ones, they exhibit their distrust without any qualms, but the Noughts have to hide their resentment to stay out of trouble. In the name of security, the Cross officers interrogate Callum on the train and check his ticket and asks him where he got the money from, because “After all, it was one of those well-known Cross-initiated facts that we Noughts didn’t pay for anything when there was the chance of stealing it instead” (Blackman 108). In return, the Noughts also do not trust their rulers. When Callum eavesdrops to listen to what his family is saying about Sephy calling him a “blanker”, he finds out that his brother Jude thinks that he (Callum) is deluding himself if he (Callum) thinks that a Cross girl (Sephy) cares for him (Callum). Jude says, “There’s not one of those Crosses that can be trusted” (Blackman 73). This distrustful relationship has been going on since the blacks came to power. With the reversal of power, the whites who used to distrust the blacks are now being treating the same way by the Noughts.

Distrust is also apparent between men and women in Ladyland. The women who are now in power, believe that men are good for nothing. This seems odd to Sultana because, in her world, men hold all the power and perform every kind of actions except household chores. Before women came to power, the men of Ladyland were also like this. When the female scientists were working on their projects of conserving water and sunlight, men laughed at them taking their projects as mere female fantasies. Sister Sara tells Sultana, that the working hours in Ladyland is only two hours. When Sultana expressed her surprise hearing this, Sister Sara said that the men in Sultana's country do nothing but smoking and dawdling away their time talking about work but not performing them. The women also do not trust men with needlework, because they believe men do not have the patience to do such delicate work. The distrust between the two genders is apparent in Sister Sara's quote about men, "They should not do anything ... they are fit for nothing" (Hossain n.p.). This distrust is nothing but the result of being distrusted by the men in the past. Being distrusted by men for ages has in turn, made the women distrustful of the men.

Another salient characteristic of the dystopian novel as described by Mira Muurinen is the "Depiction of social divisions" (19). The existent social strata is a device of the Crosses to make the Noughts feel marginalized. Booker defines the creation of a marginalized group as an instrument of dominance: "And in Western society in general, the notion that personal mastery is to be gained through domination not of oneself, but of the Other" (73). Social division is created by the unequal distribution of wealth; discrimination among the two races are apparent on the financial condition and division of labor of each class. This is clear in the vivid description of the houses of Sephy and Callum; their houses represent the condition of the two races. Sephy's house is way too big for four people, and Callum's house is way too small for five people.

Sephy's house is full of luxurious and comfortable furniture whereas Callum's house is furnished with his father's handmaid furniture. The Crosses are the richer groups in the society, they get to lead a luxurious and exuberant life; whereas, the Noughts are in the lowest position of the economic chain. The Crosses get the honorable and respectable jobs, but the Noughts have to do all kinds of manual and demeaning works. When Sephy thinks about it for the first time, she remembers that all the menial jobs of their home were done by Noughts; she says "I couldn't remember the last time I'd seen a nought in our house, except in the kitchen, or cleaning" (Blackman 50). Noughts are not allowed in their houses except to perform trivial jobs. That is why she is surprised to see a Nought man in her house in the middle of the night.

There is also discrimination in the education sector. The segregation that existed in the past where the blacks were not allowed to attend the same school as the whites still exists in this novel, only the discriminated group has changed. Noughts kids are not allowed to study in Cross schools and get separate education too. In fact, they did not even have permission until a few years ago "to be educated up to age of fourteen – in Nought only schools" (Blackman 33) and even there, the sixteen-year-olds were put into twelve or thirteen-year-old children's classes where they have "a quarter of the money or resources that [Sephy's] schools [had]" (Blackman 33). Callum and three other Noughts kids get the opportunity to be admitted into Sephy's Cross school following a policy of the government, but still, many black parents protest against this policy. This incident is similar to the actual incident of the Ole Miss Riot in 1962 when white supremacists protested against the entrance of the first African American student, James Meredith in the University of Mississippi. Callum worked hard to get into the school against his mother's wish, but there, he has to face the disparaging situation and alienation. When Sephy tries to befriend the Noughts students, she gets bullied by her family's richer friends and her

teacher stops her from sitting with the Naughts kids. All these discouraging incidents and the bullying of both Naughts students and teachers increased the number of drop out of the Naughts students. In the school, they were also taught altered and distorted history that led Callum to think the worthlessness of education; he says, “And what was the point anyway? It wasn’t as if I’d get a decent job after it. No Cross would ever employ me for more than the most mundane, menial job, so why bother?” (Blackman 81). Even after receiving a good education, Naughts are not allowed to join in any honorable posts.

Manipulating language by the authority is a dystopian motif, says Booker. The Crosses have a tendency to dehumanize the Naughts. The Crosses think so low of the Naughts that they think that the Naughts are worse than animals. Animals have a better position to them than the Naughts; they often refer to the Naughts in a pejorative manner. The name calling is the consequence of language control. In Anna Perrson Penzer’s view, “This form of pejorative language used to address an ethnic group suggests an existing degrading view of the group as a whole” (13). This thought is in the veins of the Crosses and that is why during the turmoil at school even Sephy bursts out: – “STOP IT! YOU’RE ALL BEHAVING LIKE ANIMALS! ... WORSE THAN ANIMALS – LIKE BLANKERS!” (Blackman 60). Even the names that the two groups give each other have derogatory meaning. Naughts means something blank or zero, which refers to the thoughts the Crosses have of the Naughts. Kobza remarks,

The novel emphasises the opposition of and division between both groups with a simple orthographic and visual means: The word ‘Crosses’ is written with a capital letter, while ‘Naughts’ is lowercased.² This small function and the literary method of separating the linguistic forms for both groups symbolically deepen the

conception of an antagonistic society and the racial divisions depicted in *Naughts & Crosses*. (64)

A nickname for the Naughts given by the Crosses is “Blanker,” which means nothing, Lola explains, “Blank, white faces with not a hint of colour in them. Blank minds which can’t hold a single original thought. Blank, blank, blank. That’s why they serve us and not the other way around” (Blackman 87). The Naughts also gave the Crosses derogatory names like, daggers, which indicated their violent nature.

The women of Rokeya’s society also had to face all kinds of discrimination possible. They were deprived of education and freedom—the ability to walk freely and express their thoughts freely. This short story is nothing but a comment on the then conservative Muslim society. Begum Rokeya herself was a victim of patriarchy but as her husband’s mentality was different from that of contemporary men’s, he helped her to be educated and acquire knowledge. That is why she has written a short story which can be taken as a cautionary tale about the power of women over the men. Md. Mohoshin Reza’s assertion clearly points out how Hossain’s dystopian society can be a reflection of real society,

The male folk of both the real and utopian worlds are greatly similar. Both are hateful to women education and consider that the need of women education is quite unnecessary and objectionable. That the woman can contribute to society being educated is rejected with sheer negligence by the man race of the Lady Land in *Sultana’s Dream*. (204)

The discrimination against women has also led the women of Ladyland to overthrow men and treat them in the way the men had treated them. Just as men had confined the women inside

the four walls of their houses in the past, women have also put them behind the wall. Fayeza Hasnat has rightly pointed out that “Sultana’s Dream” acts as a reaction to this prevalent social Darwinism so aptly coated with religious doctrines in context of women’s position in colonial Bengal” (120). Sister Sara says that men are good for nothing and she opposes the belief that women have to be put inside for their own safety, but it is the men who have to be put inside because “Men, who do or at least are capable of doing no end of mischief, are let loose and the innocent women, shut up in zenana! How can you trust those untrained men out of doors?” (Hossain n.p.).

Like other dystopian societies, Callum’s society is also under the surveillance of government. The people who fall under government surveillance are the Naughts. The government keeps them under strict supervision. The mistrust that exists between the two races has driven the government to believe that the Naughts are behind all kinds of crimes. It is apparent when Callum’s mother was given assurance of the discretion of information in the hospital, but the government took those anyways and came to their house to arrest Jude with the allegations of the bomb attack in the shopping mall. When Callum rushes to the mall to save Sephy, a Cross asks her if Callum is harassing her. The Crosses have an assumption that the Naughts are always trying to hurt them.

The news is also manipulated by the government and the powerful. News media only highlights the crimes of the Naughts. They do not report the crimes committed by a Cross, but they do so in the case of the Naughts as pointed out by it is Kobza:

The media representations are depictions of Naughts being stripped of their humanity and individuality and the continuous racial discriminations and

subjections leave all three men psychologically haunted and tortured not only due to repeatedly occurring racial inequalities, but also due to the split society that alienates and humiliates them as ‘the primitive other’ and inferior race (qtd. in Kobza 66)

That is why when the protesters attack Shania in the school, the cameras never show the jacket of Callum covered by Cross spit. When Sephy is bedridden, she watches a news which highlights the fact that three *naught* robbers robbed a jewelry store, and she thinks “Why was it that when Naughts committed criminal acts, the fact that they were Naughts was always pointed out? The banker was a Cross. The newsreader didn’t even mention it” (Blackman 93).

The story of Lynnet shows the terror the Naughts live in. She was in love with a Cross man, and some Naughts beat her and her boyfriend to death, as a result, she lost her mental balance. She imagines that she is a Cross too, and lives in her own made-up world. She utters, “Look at my skin ... Such a beautiful colour. So dark and rich and wonderful” (Blackman 56).

Kobza calls this quote:

“The most crucial quote that triggers pupils to learn about the issue of skin colour is addressed by one of the female characters, Callum’s sister Lynette.” This fact and thought is later taken up by Callum by saying: “How I wished I could afford the treatment to make my skin permanently darker” (101)

She does not care for anyone or anything in the world, except for the thought that she is a Cross and hence closer to God. Her insanity reflects the amount of torture she had to endure because of her love for a Cross.

The reaction of such a discriminatory society in dystopian novels is the birth of a group of rebels. The group consisted of some unsatisfied white people who are fed up with the

discrimination and injustice they face on a daily basis. The government tries to suppress these rebels at any cost; they keep the Naughts under surveillance to determine who is related with the rebels. Booker talks about surveillance in dystopian novels, “Among other things, this awareness of always being watched helps to suppress individuality” (79-80). The lack of freedom faced by the Naughts have caused them to rebel against the stereotypical society and they have now become violent. When Callum drops out of school, he joins the rebel group and within a short time, becomes a valuable member of a unit ironically named “*Stiletto*” like the very sharp, very deadly dagger” (Blackman 232) – to kill the *daggers* (Crosses) (ibid.). This rebel group bombs the shopping mall; Jude planted the bomb himself, but their father took the blame. All these incidents drove Callum to join the rebels. However, in the name of enforcing law and order, the government only suppress this marginalized group, which Booker describes this way, “This kind of scapegoating frequently occurs in dystopian fiction, whose governments typically enforce their intolerance of difference through persecution of specified marginal groups” (11)

In this novel, Blackman has shown different reactions to injustice. Though some characters were hoping for a better future that they dreamed will come eventually, characters like Callum and Jude resort to violent actions to revolt against injustice. Blackman has not only shown the severe consequences of extreme segregation which is, violent approach for a solution but has also shown how this violence could ignite further violence. Kobza states, “The novel illustrates how the Naughts’ conditions of being oppressed and marginalized victims of a system that constantly indorses racial thinking and racial tensions can breed political unrest and rebellion” (66).

However, the reaction of women against the injustice in Ladyland is different from the Naughts. The women in the society of Ladyland in “Sultana’s Dream” have outrun men in the

field of the real power – the power of the brain. When Sultana asks how they have managed to overpower men, Sister Sara replies that they have done so “by brain” (Hossain n.p.), because women’s brains are quicker than men’s. Even though men have more muscle power, women can defeat them by the power of their brain. Sultana roams around witnessing various achievements women have been able to achieve without men and how women have succeeded in establishing their dominance over men. Reza comments,

This is remarkable that in the fiction, the dialogues of Sultana and Sister Sara reveal the pictures of contemporary Indian society meaning “what is going on”. On the contrary, the world in *Sultana’s Dream* (the Lady Land) stands for “what should be (204)

Hossain’s contemporary women were not allowed to gain institutional education and were deprived of being financially independent. The unfulfilled dream of being in control of themselves has been portrayed in the short story. Reza’s comment on the narration of the story proves that Hossain not only depicted the social position of women in her story but has also suggested what kind of society women should live in.

Hossain not only opposed the stereotypical idea of men regarding women but in fact, has used her writing as a cautionary warning about what could be the result if the patriarchal mentality doesn’t change. Booker asserted his thought on social problems depicted in dystopian novels, “dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable” (19). That is why “Sultana’s Dream” could be taken as a cautionary tale for the then Indian men. However, unfortunately, this warning is still applicable for Bangladesh. Even though

Bangladeshi women have progressed immensely in the fields of education and job, Bangladeshi men still maintain patriarchy in the name of religion and society. Even after a hundred years after the publication of this story, the story is still relevant for Bangladeshi women. That is why it could be said that this story is a cautionary tale against the present twenty-first society patriarchal society. According to Hasnat,

the abrupt ending of the dream and the awakening of the dreamer function as a warning signal to remind the readers that women's empowerment was nothing but a dream for the Muslim woman in colonial Bengal, that the whole utopian structure of a perfect society was also stained by the essentialist patriarchal ideology, that such dream episodes would continuously recur and vanish until the awakened female consciousness reinvented the method and tool of her own discourse (124)

Similarly, *Naughts and Crosses* is also a cautionary tale against racial prejudice. Even after hundreds of years after the abolition of slavery, people still are getting judged and discriminated because of their skin color. Not only black people but the non-white people are now the victim of shadism. The amount of violence against non-white people is increasing alarmingly. People, irrespective of nation and status, are now the victim of this crime against humanity. In the statistical bulletin published in 2017 by the Home Office of Britain, the rate of hate crimes based on race is alarming. The number of race hate crimes increased by 27 per cent (up 13,266 to 62,685 offences; Table 2) between 2015/16 and 2016/17. Race hate crime was the most commonly recorded strand of hate crime in all 44 police forces (Hate Crime, England and Wales, 6). So, it can be presumed that this novel depicts the violence that racism can bring and by

depicting this picture, this novel is warning everyone to be aware of their conducts. Kobza describes the aim of Blackman in writing this novel:

As already said, the novel clearly depicts the harmful consequences of racism and with the help of the novel and the learning unit created, learners understand that racial thinking can be damaging, can cause mental suffering and can, ultimately, lead to self-hate and self-loathing (70)

In conclusion, it can be said that both these literary pieces carry the same message to the dominating group. Both the writers have tried to foretell the consequences of forgetting history and the extreme treatment of the dominated. Though, Blackman has shown how the oppressed tend to resort to violence to secure their rights; Hossain has shown the power of mind and peaceful action. Whatever their approaches are, both the writers have warned the people in power to beware of their conducts, otherwise, the consequence would be very grave.

Chapter Three

Uglies as a Cautionary Tale against Conventional Standard of Beauty

Uglies, published in 2005, is the first book of a trilogy by Scott Westerfeld. The novel is set in a futuristic society where cosmetic surgery is mandatory for everyone once they turn sixteen. It is a tradition that has been going on for hundreds of years. The logic behind this mandatory surgery is to avoid being judged based on people's looks. In the past, people had to suffer discrimination because of their demeanor and this led to feuds among them. In order to prevent discrimination, some unknown government made the permanent physical alteration compulsory. The idea of altering oneself surgically has been integrated into the minds of the people so successfully that no one opposes this idea. This chapter, through a detailed discussion of the novel *Uglies*, is going to show how Westerfeld has highlighted the negative effects of the intention of changing the physical appearance and modifying oneself based on the modern-day standards of beauty.

Uglies deals with the legalization of cosmetic surgeries in an unknown city after a disaster that destroyed everything three hundred years ago. In the world that Tally Youngblood, the protagonist of the novel, lives in, everyone has to go through compulsory cosmetic surgery when they turn sixteen. Every single teenager waits for their sixteenth birthday to become pretty. Tally was no different from the other teens. Her childhood best friend Peris has already turned pretty and she cannot wait to join him in the New Pretty Town, where all the surgically altered pretty people live. However, before she turns sixteen, she meets a girl named Shay while fleeing from New Pretty Town. Shay is a young rebel, who first introduces the idea of not being pretty as something normal into Tally's head. Soon enough, they become close friends and Shay takes

Tally to the ruins of the old city Rusty, which was destroyed by fire for some mysterious reasons a long time ago. Shay talks to Tally about running away to the Smoke where all the rebels who do not want to become pretty hide, but unfortunately, Tally was too preoccupied with the idea of being pretty to take Shay seriously. Then, the day Tally was supposed to undergo surgery, she is taken into the custody of Special Circumstances, a special branch of law enforcement who are known for their cruel appearance. There, Dr. Cable tells Tally that Shay has run away and gives Tally an ultimatum to bring Shay back and inform the Specials the location of Smoke, otherwise they would not let Tally have the surgery. The doctor also gives her a pendant, which is actually a tracker so that Tally can inform the Specials about the location of Smoke. In fear of remaining an ugly for her whole life, Tally goes ahead with Dr. Cable's mission.

On her way to finding Smoke, Tally meets a group of young pretties who call themselves rangers and are in charge of destroying a special kind of flower called white tiger orchids. This flower was planted everywhere by the Rusties for business profit as these flowers were valuable, but eventually, the plants started to grow like weeds destroying the land's fertility. Now the plants have outspread so much that the rangers burn the flowers to stop the land from becoming barren. After an arduous journey, Tally finally reaches Smoke, and there, she meets David, a young renegade, who leads a group of uglies who think being pretty is not everything. After meeting them, Tally hesitates to activate the pendant Dr. Cable has given her to give away the location of Smoke. Instead, she gets accustomed to the lifestyle of the rebels and becomes close to David. David takes her to his parents Az and Maddy, and they tell her that they were surgeons who once worked for the government to turn people pretty. But, they ran away when they came to know that the government alters the brains of the pretties to suppress any kind of opposition. The government manipulates their brain in such a way that they become somewhat dull to even

question the logic behind the government's steps. In this way, the government ensures the permanence of their rule. After the hidden agenda of the government becomes apparent to Tally, she joins the renegades. However, she accidentally activates the tracer and the Specials capture everyone except Tally and David. Both of them rescue the others but at the cost of Az's life and Shay turning to pretty. To test the effectiveness of the cure found by Maddy, Tally goes to the town and surrenders to the authority to turn her into a pretty.

The futuristic society that Tally lives in is built upon the philosophy that everyone is equal, but that equality is based only on external beauty. The ideology behind this is that the past conducts of the Rusties proved to be demeaning because in the past, "people killed one another over stuff like having different skin color" (Westerfeld 44). This quotation clearly exemplifies racism that existed before the mass surgery. Booker talks about dystopian motif, "In particular, I work on the assumption that the modern turn to dystopian fiction is largely attributable to perceived inadequacies in existing social and political systems" (20). Dystopian fictions are reactions against the existent social flaws. Because there was disparity based on physical appearance, the government of *Uglies* created the tradition of mass surgery. The logic behind the justification of mass plastic surgery in *Uglies* may seem to be legit to a contemporary reader who is also continuously brainwashed by the modern standards of beauty. At present, altering one's physical features to become pretty is nothing unusual because people have some predetermined concepts of what makes someone beautiful. That is why, at present, cosmetic surgery is one of the popular medical procedures in the world. As the futuristic societies in the dystopian novels are based on the misdeeds of contemporary people, the changes that the dictators bring forth are the reaction to these misdoings. Those who were naturally beautiful used to humiliate those who were not "pretty" enough for them. The "not pretties" (Westerfeld 124) were also the

victims of discrimination as Shay alleges, “Everyone judged everyone else based on their appearance. People who were taller got better jobs, and people even voted for some politician just because they weren’t quite as ugly as everybody else” (Westerfeld 44). The unnamed government of this futuristic society took the responsibility of removing this discrimination by making everyone go through the mandatory surgery.

The importance on physical beauty led the future government to adopt a policy to make everyone equal because of the disastrous consequences of body shaming. The government, along with the policy makers of other cities, portrayed the picture of an ideal beauty and made it compulsory to modify everyone’s faces when they turn sixteen. They worked hard to find an ideal form of face for everyone so that no one feels discriminated because of their appearance. Every city that agreed to have the surgery formed “The Committee for Morphological Standards” or as Tally calls it, “The Pretty Committee,” (Westerfeld 262) that determines the standard of public beauty. Even though all the cities are independent, they have the same standard of beauty. Tally thinks about the concept of this committee, “The Pretty Committee was a global institution that made sure pretties were all more or less the same. It would ruin the whole point of the operation if the people from one city wound up prettier than everyone else” (Westerfeld 263). In order to establish homogeneity among people so that no one should feel less pretty than the other, all the cities have established a committee to create a specific standard for beautiful physical aspects.

As the story progresses, the hidden agenda of the government to manipulate people through the use of medical science, which is a common aspect of dystopian novels, becomes apparent. Using the example of manipulation of science by Huxley’s government, Booker alleges

that science is used as a means of manipulation by the government in dystopian society “because high technology helps them to manipulate and control their subjects through genetic and psychological conditioning” (50). The whole point of turning pretty is to eradicate discrimination from the society. People belonging to this future are so obsessed with looking beautiful that they do not hesitate to go under the knife. With the development of medical science, different committees have been set up who work to ensure that becoming artificially pretty does not remain as a privilege enjoyed by rich people only but also by people from every social class. Another logic behind this mass surgery is that in the past, Rusties used to engage in wars for reasons like skin color, so the authority decided to stop this feud by making everyone pretty. Az justifies the government’s intension behind the surgery saying, “and now everybody is happy, because everyone looks the same: They’re all pretty. No more Rusties, no more wars” (Westerfeld 267). The decision makers thought that there would be fewer feuds and discrimination if everyone looked same, so there will be no need to compare anyone to other people. Tally also believes that government’ decision to force everyone to undergo the surgery would establish equality among people and tries to justify the decision saying “So what if people look more alike now? It’s the only way to make people equal” (Westerfeld 45).

However, unfortunately, this means of establishing equality in society failed miserably as it was unable to remove discrimination among people; instead, it resulted in creating a new kind of segregation. Commenting on segregation and highlighting the negative aspect of segregation is one of the salient characteristics of dystopian novels. Mira Muurinen has aptly pointed out that “the segregation system is not created at the whim of a single elite, but is a hyberbolic [sic.] exaggeration of current societies” (20). When the novel opens, the readers see that Tally goes to New Pretty Town from Uglyville (Westerfeld 6). This futuristic society is divided into different

towns that are named based on different levels of prettiness. The middle-aged people, along with their under aged children called littlies, live in Crumblyville (Westerfeld 99). When the kids turn twelve, they move to Uglyville, where they are given academic lessons and they wait eagerly to turn sixteen so they can have the most awaited surgery. On their sixteenth birthday, they are taken away by the officials to have the surgery and then they get access to the long-cherished New Pretty Town, where they can do pretty much everything they want to. The older generation lives in the suburbs named Dullsville (Westerfeld 47). This kind of different social strata only indicates that the very process of removing separation among people has created a new kind of barrier. Scott and Dragoo assert, “Scott Westerfeld’s dystrophic future pictures a socially stratified environment centred on beauty as an indicator of societal position” (2). Based on the gradation of their beauty, people live in different parts of the town and they do not interact with each other unless it is an emergency.

Ironically, the very attempt of effacing discrimination end in generating a new form of division and discrimination in the society. The description of the different parts of the town indicates the blatant differences that exist among the town and its inhabitants: “Behind from the spires of New Pretty Town rose from the center of town, and around them was the greenbelt, a swath of forest that separated the middle and the late pretties from the youngsters” (Westerfeld 46). There is a clear separation among the young and old pretties. After the surgery, pretties move to a new city, whereas the middle and old aged pretties have to live in a separate place away from the new pretties. This indicates that even though the purpose of the surgery was to remove discrimination, disparity still exists among the people but in a different form. Discrimination is not a result of a few days, it has been going on for ages, as Shay wisely comments, “You just got programmed into thinking anything else is ugly” (Westerfeld 82).

Since the dawn of human existence, human beings have appreciated beauty – be it the beauty of human beings or simply the beauty of nature, but the aspiration to become beautiful led to the horrible society where Tally lives. Her world is something that is based on the concept of beauty standards. The desire to be beautiful is a part of human life, it is “biology” (Westerfeld 16). No matter how educated or advanced a person is, he/she will always look at the well-formed physiognomy with appreciation. This is a tendency inherent in every human being, as Tally thinks, “A million years of evolution had made it part of the human brain” (Westerfeld 16). That is what has led to another type of discrimination: the way the pretties and uglies look at each other. Pretties are a source of wonder to the uglies. From the very beginning of the novel, it has been shown that the pretties have always generated a sense of reverence and awe among the uglies. There is a certain kind of vulnerability in the pretty features of a pretty that makes the uglies to protect and admire them. Even though the uglies criticize everything the pretties do, secretly all of them (except for some rebels) want to be like them so that they too, can enjoy all the benefits and privileges that pretties enjoy. There is an inherent desire among all of us to be pretty; Tally describes the general impulse of everyone’s aspiration to have beautiful children, “And no matter how you felt about a pretty, there was a part of you that you thought: *If we had kids, they’d be healthy too. I want this pretty person...*” (Westerfeld 17), and this kind of mentality made it a little easier for the government to manipulate the people.

The authority of this novel has created a mass delusion about the logic behind cosmetic surgery. Booker believes that this kind of delusion about anything in dystopian novels is comparable to religious fanaticism. In his view, “the dystopian governments of fiction and the totalitarian governments of modern reality generally depend on precisely the sort of mass-delusion that Freud associates with religion” (11). A negative effect of this excessive obsession

with beauty generates another problem in people - inferior complexity. The pretties make the uglies feel like they are nothing and the uglies fall victim to this. For example, Tally says more than once that she is nothing. She, like many others, feels that she is a nobody because she is an ugly. When she sneaks into New Pretty Town to see Peris, she thinks what the consequences would be if she loses her way – “Of course, Tally *was* nothing in here. Worse, she was ugly” (Westerfeld 7). Tally’s sense of inferiority reveals how one’s identity is limited to being ugly or pretty. This even leads to the non-use of real names of people. Pretties or to-be pretties call the uglies by their certain physical aspects that do not seem pretty to them. For instance, Peris calls Tally ‘Squint’ because of her squinty eyes. That is why at first when Shay calls Tally by her real name instead of her “ugly nickname” (Westerfeld 18), she feels awkward because she is not used hearing her real name. The different views of the pretties and the uglies are clear in the way the former treat the latter. To the pretties, uglies are ‘babies,’ ‘juvenile,’ or ‘immature.’ When Tally could not find the scar in Peris’s hand, he tells her that he has brand new skins now, and she blinks. Peris then says, “You’re such a kid still” (Westerfeld 18). This kind of thinking is apparent in the different conversations Tally has with other pretties.

Another dystopian motif, as pointed out by Booker while discussing Huxley’s *Brave New World*, is the loss of real individual identities, which is the opposite of bourgeois society, is a (*The Dystopian Impulse* 49). The loss of individualism is more apparent among the new pretties who totally forget about their characteristics before they turned pretty. That is why Tally is surprised after seeing Peris, who seems like a new person to her. The new Peris forgets his friendship with her and does not even bother to reciprocate her love for him. Every single ugly says they will come back to Uglyville after the surgery, but in reality, they never do. Their lives are surrounded by parties and fun. They become so engrossed with the idea of enjoying life that

they forget everything. It seems they somewhat have become inhuman. They turn into self-involved and narcissistic people who only think about their well-being. They make fun of the uglies, even tease and bully them, but the uglies themselves are not so much different from them in many ways. The soon-to-be pretties also bully and prank the under aged uglies.

The idea of being an attractive person has been ingrained in these people so deeply that they can only think that being pretty is what makes them a human being. In the pursuit of beauty, they lose their sense of individuality and self-worth. They do not even think of themselves as human beings anymore. Tally thinks she does not belong to the New Pretty Town because she is an ugly. So she hides her face behind a pig mask. When pretties make fun of her ugly mask, she thinks “It was better than what they’d do if they saw her real face” (Westerfeld 13). Her sense of self-worth is limited to her physical features. That is why she answers Shay’s comment on the phases of pretties by saying that it is better to die pretty than to be “dead ugly” (Westerfeld 50); she thinks that being pretty is the most important thing in the world and that is why she feels inferior because she does not fit into the collective idea of prettiness. Hence, for her, death is far better than being ugly, but becoming pretty has its cost. In some way, the pretties seem to become stupid, as in the case of Shay. Shay was an intelligent girl who questioned the intention of the surgery when Tally met her, but after the surgery, she too becomes a self-centered person who does not try to understand anyone else’s problems or does not compromise anything. She even tries to influence Tally to have the surgery as well.

The danger of this mass surgery has been beautifully depicted with the use of the metaphor of the white flowers in this novel. Following Shay’s directions to reach the Smoke, Tally reaches a field full of white flowers. She was not aware of the originality of this flower

before; the Rangers tell her about them for the first time. These beautiful flowers were the result of the greed of the Rusties, who wanted to breed these flowers in a great amount so they can earn a huge amount of money, but it became uncontrollable, and these flowers destroyed every other species of plants and trees, making the land infertile and turning it into a desert. This is called monoculture, where only one type of species lives destroying all the other species. The pretties can be compared to monoculture. Tonk, a ranger Tally meets, very aptly explains, “That’s what monoculture means: Everything the same” (Westerfeld 182). If everyone looked the same, there would be no diversity, creating only a group of identical, homogeneous people. The mass uniformity, resulting from this process, can only be prevented by celebrating diversity. Tally realizes that variety is strength when she goes to the Smoke, where the forest itself keeps the orchids away - “It’s got lots and lots of species,” Shay said. “So it’s strong enough to keep out the weed” (Westerfeld 191).

In dystopian novels, the danger of the distance between nature and human gets highlighted. In this novel, it is emphasized greatly. People of this novel are not only obsessed with the idea of beauty but are also deprived of the touch of nature. That is why they are unaware of simple natural phenomena. For example, Shay calls waterfall “white water,” because she did not have any idea what it is called. They are also deprived of learning about nature in school; they go to field trips to go to some part of the Rusty only to learn about how reckless past people were. To them, living in nature is equivalent to living like animals. It took Tally to reach the Smoke and come into the touch of nature to understand that “nature at least, didn’t need an operation to be beautiful. It just was,” (Westerfeld 230). The rebels are the ones who go to nature to take refuge from the dictatorship of the authority. They find a different kind of solace in the lap of nature. The rebels thus work as mediators to reestablish the bond between human and

nature. Scott and Dragoo comment, “David shows the girls an alternative reality and unites them on the idea that there is beauty in nature and in remaining ugly, i.e., natural” (6).

The distortion of past history by the rulers in order to manipulate the subjects is a common theme in dystopian novels. They do it so that they can exploit the ruled people by telling how good they are compared to the past rulers. In this novel, the idea of natural beauty is completely new to the citizens. They are so accustomed to the idea of artificially altered beauty that they feel strange when they see a natural born pretty. To them, being born pretty is something unusual as their minds are only limited to the artificial enhancement of beauty and that is why deliberately staying ugly seems like an insane idea to them. In addition, the teachers teach altered history in the school. The manipulation of history is apparent in the history of the Rusties. The reason behind the destruction of the Rusties is kept secret; no one knows how the fire that demolished the entire city started. The only connection that they have with the past is when they are taken to the ruins of the Rusties which is “a hulking reminder of back when there’d been way too many people, and everyone was incredibly stupid. And ugly” (Westerfeld 48). But this bit of information is revealed only because the authority wants them to learn what could be the consequences of the past lifestyle. According to Scott and Dragoo, this society is “a highly economically based and materialistically driven era similar to our contemporary world, as a flawed generation that almost brought about the demise of the human race” (3). As a tradition of dystopian novels, Westerfeld in this novel, as pointed out by Booker, has depicted a society that is very much similar to ours to make us understand the severity of the problem of beauty concepts.

With the advancement of science, different and cutting-edge innovations are supposed to make our lives easier. However, in almost every dystopian novel, the authors show how dependency on science and technology can manipulate and destroy our lives. Manipulation of technology is apparent in this novel too. Like any other dystopian novel, the authority exploits technology in their own favor. This exploitation is supposed to help the government to keep the subjects under surveillance. According to Booker “Among other things, this awareness of always being watched helps to suppress individuality” (79-80). Technology and surveillance go hand in hand. Like Foucault’s theory, this surveillance is everywhere – house, roads, hover boards, schools and even in every person. Every person in this society has to wear an interface ring which helps them to be identified. Without it, no one can even operate a lift. Tally’s thought, “Without an interface ring, she was nobody” (Westerfeld 15) exemplifies the dependency on this ring. This ring stores all the information about her and everything else that she needs; the ring is an integral part of her life. If she does not have this ring on her, she might get into an accident because without it, she is invisible to vehicles. The identity and existence of a person are dependent on a single ring, and most importantly, the authority uses it to administer common people. This ring makes it easier for them to track down each individual.

According to Kristin Veel, one of the traits of dystopian novels is surveillance. Surveillance, in particular, she argues, “is a prevalent for dystopian science fiction” (34). In the dystopian novels, the authority uses technology to keep an eye on people. The bridges and hover boards in this novel have sensors to observe who uses the bridge to go where; however, the rule breakers take the help of old technology to go off grid. When Tally offers Shay to show a safe way to go back to Ugly Town, she talks about an old bridge. Hearing this, Shay says, “But it’ll tattle,” (Westerfeld 31) which meant that every bridge reports to the authority of every traveler.

The sensors send all the information about the passers-by to the authority. The same is applicable to hover boards, “Anything that flew had minders all over it” (ibid). Booker identifies a dystopian aspect, “Foucault's emphasis on surveillance and information gathering as modes of power in modern society” (105). The dystopian authority exploits science and technology to spy on their citizens, just like Foucault commented on the use of surveillance in order to establish a power relationship by modern rulers. The latest technology has invented these minders to help the authority to track their subjects. These minders send report of every turn the passengers make to the rulers. These hover boards are so smart that these can read every turn the muscle of the boarders make and are “smart enough to gradually learn how her body moved” (Westerfeld 34). This is an indicator of the twenty-first centuries’ scientists’ efforts to make technology smarter so that machines or chips could replace the human brain in order to lessen human labor. This is possible in the society portrayed in this novel, where with the blink of an eye, uglies can play with the features of the pretty face models and decide which one they want. In this society, with the help of the eyemouse (a latest version of mouse used with computers), one can do all the things on a screen without even moving the slightest finger. Only by using one’s eyes, one can maneuver the mouse to get woks done. Science in this futuristic society is so advanced that one can brush one’s teeth with just one pill; a portable heater is enough to keep an adult warm; a water filter can turn the dirtiest water as well as urine into drinkable water, and dried foods of various flavors and sizes, even the size of a dried yarn can turn into real food within minutes.

However, the most horrid technology of this society is the surgery that each person has to go through to become pretty. The surgery reconstructs every cell and part of the operated person. Any concerned person would shiver hearing the procedure. Bones get shortened or lengthened to fit the perfect height, the bone structure gets reformed, and the skin gets peeled off and replaced

with new and blemish free skin. Before undergoing the surgery, Tally thinks of the medical procedure she will go through in order to become pretty:

Her body was going to be opened up, the bones ground down to the right shape, some of them stretched or padded, her nose cartilage and cheekbones stripped out and replaced with programmable plastic, skin sanded off and reseeded like a soccer field in spring. (Westerfeld 97)

In the pursuit of becoming “perfect,” characters in this novel do not hesitate to change every feature of their face and body. The very description of the surgery is bone chilling. The reconstruction of the surgery is certainly a painful one, but the teachers or the authority deny it saying that they “won’t even know it’s happening. You just have pretty dreams the whole time” (Westerfeld 50). The authority does not want the common people to know of the severity of the operation so that they can have the surgery without feeling scared. They make it seem like it is something very insignificant so that no one can question its extremity. In her song, *Mrs. Potato Head*, Melanie Martinez criticizes the concept of plastic surgery to enhance physical beauty: “Don’t be dramatic, it’s only some plastic/No one will love you if you’re unattractive.” She sings about how people make fool of themselves in an attempt to receive admiration from others by having beauty surgeries. The authority of *Uglies* wants people to believe in the silly ideology that everyone has to be beautiful in order to be liked.

Manipulation of the common mass by the authority is a common feature in dystopian novels. The authority figures manipulate people in order to establish dictatorship by creating a utopian state. In this novel, the rulers manipulate people by making them believe that it is natural to desire a beautiful face and live with other beautiful people. The authority shows their

generosity through the free procedures of mass surgery and creates a satisfied group of citizen. That mass satisfaction portrayed in most dystopian novels is a premonition of autocratic government is pointed out by Booker, who in *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature: Fiction as Social Criticism* says, “if dystopian fiction tells us anything, it is that popular complacency is one of the surest roads to tyranny” (89). Scott and Dragoo articulate, “These operational limitations express one method of control the society has over its people” (3). They have established this idea so well that the surgery has become “a tradition nobody questioned, except the occasional ugly” (Westerfeld 86). This idea has been inculcated in the minds of every single person and that is why they think that “When you’re pretty, people pay more attention” (Westerfeld 93) or that “Being pretty is the best thing ever” (Westerfeld 125). This is just an agenda of the government to achieve their goal of totalitarianism. Even though Shay has been indicating the bleak side of the surgery from the moment she met Tally, Tally never believed her. But after meeting Az and Maddy and hearing the horrible consequences of the surgery, Tally finally believes Shay. As Az and Maddy were in the Pretty Committee, they knew many inside secrets about the surgery which led them to question the validity of the process and convince Tally.

The more Tally talked to Az and Maddy about the surgery, the more she came to know about the real intention of the committee with the transformed uglies. Az informs her about the lesions the new pretties get from the operation which sometimes even kill them. No uglies were born with the lesions found in the brains of the pretties, so Az comments that these lesions “were definitely a result of the operation” (Westerfeld 264). Az and Maddy’s study led them to the finding that the people who had jobs in the firefighting, warden, medical, politics and Special Circumstances sector did not have the lesions, proving that the lesions were the creation of the

government. These lesions change people to the worst. They forget who they were before the surgery, giving importance only to their prettiness and appearance. The scientists who invented the surgery obviously got manipulated by the authority to construct it in such a way that it can be used to manipulate the common people. If a person is interested only on his/her looks rather than anything else, that person would not be a threat to the government in any way, just as David asserts, “Maybe it’s not so complicated. Maybe the reason war and all that other stuff went away is that there are no more controversies, no disagreements, no people demanding change. Just masses of smiling pretties and a few people left to run things” (Westerfeld 267).

As the novel progresses, it becomes apparent that the reason behind the notions of being pretty is just a hidden agenda of the government. The authority only wants a group of beauty obsessed, servile, and self-centered people who will never stand up to its conducts. Booker talks about the resultant mindlessness because of conformity, “Conformity in Huxley’s dystopian society is largely enforced through the proliferation of a passive mindlessness that renders the citizens incapable of the thought or feeling required to question the models provided for them by the ruling World Controllers” (57). This is only possible because of the mentality of the people about their demeanor. If no one cared about how anyone looked, then probably no one would have taken advantage of this mentality. Scott and Dragoo remark, “subversive political images targeted at the young, the potential early-adopters of body modification, highly susceptible to peer influence and with considerable disposable income” (1). The authority of this novel has exploited the preset standard of attractiveness and the desire to become just as much as another person has.

A contemporary reader can relate to the urge of modifying one’s body to become beautiful. In today’s world, especially among the young generation, beauty standard is based on

the standard propagated by the media and the style and fashion magazines. Any concerned citizen of the twenty-first world is a witness of this beauty standard where only those with large eyes, slim figure, perfect skin, hair and teeth with perfect gesture and posture are the ideal beauties preached by the media. This is apparent in the beauty magazines as well as in the various beauty competitions. Scott and Dragoo say that the society in *Uglies* is divided into different classes “built around the contemporary surge in popularity of cosmetic surgery instead of a prenatally-determined class system” (1). The criteria— appearance, measurement, and posture based on which the most beautiful woman is chosen in the beauty contests is quite demeaning.

To achieve the preset standards of beauty, many people now surgically enhance their body parts or remove body fats to have figures like models. According to the statistics released by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), there were 17.5 million surgical and minimally invasive cosmetic procedures performed in the United States in 2017, a 2 percent increase over 2016. The statistics also reveal Americans are turning to new and innovative ways to shape their bodies, as minimally invasive cosmetic procedures have increased nearly 200% since 2000 (n.p.). This statistics shows the alarming increased rate of cosmetic surgery in America. Conscious men and women all over the world are now against this kind of beauty concepts, but some youth blindly follow the media-proposed ideal beauties in order to become pretty. The body shaming and beauty shaming by these ideologies can never have any positive outcome. Tally remembers the “disease” she learned about in the school –

A lot of people, especially young girls, became so ashamed at being fat that they stopped eating. They'd lose weight too quickly, and some would get stuck and would keep losing weight until they wound up like this 'model. Some even died,

they said at school. That was one of the reasons they'd come up with the operation". (Westerfeld 199)

The death of a model or a young girl in an attempt to achieve zero size figure because of starvation is not uncommon in this century. The government of this novel took the advantage and inaugurated the surgery in the name of improving the situation, just as Scott and Dragoo say, "but the operation eradicated the eating disorder epidemic by equalizing beauty for all" (3)

In the end, it can be said that *Uglies* brings out the horrifying truth behind a beauty based society. In today's world, everyone wants to look attractive and they blindly follow the standards set by the beauty magazines and models. What they do not think is that this beauty standard has no depth, these are just a set of rules propagated by some beauty mongering people. If everyone looked the same, the world will lose its diversity and everything will become dull. There should not be any beauty standard, everyone should be taken as a beautiful person. The inner beauty should be given more importance than the outer one, and that is what Tally realizes at the end of the novel. Westerfeld has beautifully portrayed the dangers of focusing only on outer beauty and taking any measures to be attractive, that is why this novel can be taken as a premonition against contemporary beauty standard.

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation has been to prove that among many other functions, one important aim of dystopian novels is to caution the readers of the vices and ills of the society. Through detailed discussion of Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*, Malorie Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses*, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's "Sultana's Dream" and Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*, the focus of the dissertation has been to bring to light the evils of society and how the authors have used the novels as cautionary tales to warn the readers of their conducts so that they can bring change and avoid social catastrophe. I have analyzed these texts by using the theoretical framework of dystopian novels as proposed by Keith Booker and the theory of surveillance by Michelle Foucault. This dissertation aims at contributing to the research field of dystopian novels in terms of premonitory aspect. Moreover, as works on Bangladeshi dystopian texts are not abundant, this dissertation will also open a possibility of further research of Bangladeshi works in this genre.

For future research on this topic, there are many possibilities. One of these could be analyzing other aspects of dystopian novels rather than social, moral and technological ones analyzed in this dissertation. Another one could be to compare the warnings of dystopian novels from different eras and countries. Also, analysis of dystopian works of Asia and the Far East could be another possible research to find out the contribution of these writings in the genre.

The first chapter analyzed the moral, social and technological decline of a futuristic America. This novel deals with the overt reliance of contemporary Americans on technology and consumerism. Shteyngart has shown what the consequence could be if a nation forgets about its literature, arts, and culture. Just as Booker said, over-reliance creates a kind of mindless group of

citizens, Shteyngart has also shown that dependence on only technology and hedonistic pleasure could even bring about the collapse of a once powerful world power like America. Shteyngart forewarns the readers about the decreasing number of readers in a social media dominated future America. He also forebodes that all the social, moral and technological degeneration will only lead to the rise of a totalitarian government which is a concern for conscious Americans at present.

The second chapter discussed two texts written hundred years apart, but dealing with two universal social problems – shadism and gender discrimination. Malorie Blackman has set the novel in a Britain where reverse racism is the main concern. Blackman has shown the arbitrariness of racism which is rampant in contemporary Britain. Through the process of defamilirization, as propagated by Booker, Blackman has enhanced the seriousness of the treatment of whites of the non-whites. She has depicted an altered universe to alert the readers of the consequence of racial segregation and marginalization of the minority group by the dominant and powerful group. Similarly, Hossain has warned the men of her time to be cautious about their treatment of women. She foretells what the result of years' of discrimination might lead to—the uprising of the segregated women, which will lead to the reversal of power role. Both these dystopian texts thus portray the dire consequences of racial and gender prejudice to alert the readers to be careful about the unequal treatment of any group.

The third chapter analyzes the manipulation of medical science by a totalitarian government in order to create a servile nation. The unknown government of this society has excessive control over the citizens which, in fact, is a dystopian trait. The authority controls the citizens by alluring them with the lucrative offer of free mass cosmetic surgery. This government

manipulates human being's inherent desire of wanting to be pretty to establish its authority. This mass fascination of one's beauty is ensured by the alteration of one's brain during the cosmetic surgery. The government does so to perpetuate their rule. The twenty-first century has seen the advancement of medical science to enhance one's beauty. Westerfeld has written this novel to predict the effect of such dependence on cosmetic surgeries. His novel cautions the readers not to fall victim to the preset concepts of beauty; rather to be content with natural beauty.

The analysis of these texts shows that dystopian writings convey premonitions of the contemporary society and lifestyle. The main focus of these novels is to bring to light the faults of modern society through exaggeration. George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty Four*, wrote against the autocratic ruler and the surveillance on common people. Similarly, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* is, a story about how television destroys interest in reading literature" (Johnstone n.p.). Most of the novels of this genre are set in some socio-political and economic revolution or after an apocalyptic period. These novels usually progress in the process of Bildungsroman with a special focus on the threats of the present society. For example, in both the novels *The Divergent* and *The Maze Runner*, the major characters fight for their identity and position in a futuristic society where the authority strongly constrains the process of the formation of identity of the common people. One interesting aspect of contemporary dystopian novels is the bad effects of social media among the youths. For example, the influence of reality shows is depicted in *The Hunger Game* series. So, it can be said that these contemporary dystopian novels are cautionary novels against the faults of contemporary society.

In conclusion, it can be said that dystopian novels draw the picture of a futuristic society where people lead a miserable life because of the arbitrary government. These people do not get

to know about their miserable condition because of their luxurious and technology-based lifestyle. Different dystopian novels focus on different aspects of contemporary society to point out the consequence. For example, *Super Sad True Love Story* depicts the bad effects of over-attachment to technology, which is a matter of concern among the conscious people. Here, the identity of people is determined by a more modern smartphone named *äppärät*. *Noughts and Crosses*, on the other hand, portrays the consequence of racial discrimination. “Sultana’s Dream” cautions the patriarchal society of the subcontinent and *Uglies* brings out the horrible truth of living in a beauty dependent society. All these stories focus on one or more problems of contemporary society and gradually foretell the consequences. So, it can be said that these literary pieces act as premonitions against racial and gender discrimination, excessive dependency on technology, and obsession with stereotypical beauty standard.

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