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**BEYOND THE DEVASTATION: AN EXPLORATION OF DYSTOPIAN
CIVILIZATION IN HAJIME ISAYAMA'S ATTACK ON TITAN**

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Abstract:

'If someone is willing to take my freedom, I won't hesitate to take theirs', quoted from the popular anime series Attack on Titan (2013-23) by Hajime Isayama. The anime accurately describes a dystopian civilization amidst racism, xenophobia and political disputes. The paper aims to uncover facets of underlying themes present in anime series namely fascism, racist ideology and inevitable war. The anime exhibits violence, brutality and atrocities faced by people. The paper also focuses on the journey of the main character from being a protagonist to antagonist; someone who becomes politically and socially aware of the oppressions carried out by the 'others'. The research sheds light on the social, cultural and historical dimensions portrayed in the series. The paper examines the characteristics of a dystopian society by exploiting and oppressing people. It also provides an overview and analysis of injustice, totalitarianism and militarisation as portrayed in manga and anime. The research is qualitative in nature employing iconography and narrative techniques to interpret the anti-utopian anime. The paper aims to offer insights into dystopian narratives through historical and social context. The research paper deploys knowledge to gain better understanding of the critically acclaimed anime series and the genius storytelling of Isayama.

Keywords: *Dystopia, Racism, Anime, Oppression, Fascism, etc.*

Introduction:

Hajime Isayama is a renowned manga artist and writer. He is popularly known as the AOT (*Attack on Titan*) author. He created one of the most watched and controversial anime till date. The anime became immensely popular to an extent that it ended up dividing the whole internet upon its finale, to reconsider whether the actions of the protagonist were right or wrong, a moral dilemma that the mainstream viewers have not recovered from yet. It's no exaggeration to say that AOT has



earned its rightful place in the history of anime especially when the big three anime of all time (*Naruto*, *Bleach* and *One Piece*) are usually the fan favorites.

Attack on Titan first serialised on television in the year 2013 and concluded in 2023. It is adapted from the manga *Shingeki no Kyojin* written by the same author. The story revolves around three main characters namely *Eren Yeager* (Protagonist), *Mikasa Ackerman* and *Armin Arlert*. Initially the viewers may think the plot is merely about Titans vs Humans, the titans are giant humanoid creatures who live beyond the walls and frequently devour human beings, whereas humans reside within walls namely (Maria, Rose & Sina) to protect themselves from Titans for their own survival and learn to fight them by joining Survey Corps (Scout Regiment). The protagonist *Eren Yeager* joins Survey Corps after a Titan eats his mother alive and the plot appears to be motivated by Eren's actions to take revenge upon Titans. However, it gets more complicated when he learns the entire truth that there's a world out there which had been kept unknown to the residents of *Eldia*, also the involvement of government officials in keeping the secret for decades and considered Eldians as second-class citizens against *Marleyans*. AOT reflects on the theory of in group vs out group i.e. *us vs them*.

It is quite evident in the series that discrimination persists among the people of Eldia and Marley. The walls around the city indicate social order and class. We can also observe that Marleyans treated Eldians with indifference and on a large scale, a calculated decision was taken to wipe out the history of Eldians and its inhabitants. The age-old rivalry between Eldians & Marleyans raises ethical questions among viewers as to whether war is the only option to achieve peace. The research paper also sheds light on unjustified treatment towards Eldians who were subjected to torture, persecution etc.

Parallels of AOT and Nazi Ideology:

In both Nazi Germany and *Attack on Titan* fascism was the core ideology with the "intent" of self-preservation. In AOT, the Marleyan's detested Eldian's in the name of racial superiority yet convinced them to fight for Marleyan's against the people 'Behind the Walls' who were Eldians. This is a classic act of propaganda and brainwashing, the Xenophobic Marleyans successfully convinced the Eldians to be xenophobic of their own people. The Marleyans used genetic manipulation to convert Eldians into Titans with intent to weaponize them, dehumanising them as a mere tool for their own selfish purposes. 'Racial hygiene' is followed with pride by the Marleyans, using this as an excuse they segregated the city into two halves - pure vs impure, good vs evil, forcing Eldians to reside in ghettos and wear armbands like a leash which symbolizes a forced surrender of free will, drawing parallels with the Nazi regime. The anime series serves as a social commentary on the criminality executed by Marleyans towards the innocent citizens of Eldia. The anime *Attack on Titan* serves as a reminder that human beings will actively seek violence even when it can be prevented. The protagonist Eren Yeager continues to execute revenge and ends up killing many innocent lives through genocide. The author Hajime Isayama improved gradually not only in his drawings in manga but created an unparalleled story with multiple twists and turns.

Portrayal of Ethnic Cleansing:

"The hardest choices require the strongest wills" as said by *Thanos* of Marvel Universe, aligns with Eren Yeager's approach in the anime. Both the fictional characters share questionable morality and are driven to achieve a better world. Thanos and Eren Jaeger are willing to make

Literary Cognizance
ISSN- 2395-7522 (Online) Imp. Fact.6.21 (IIJF)
An International Refereed / Peer Reviewed
e-Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism
Vol.- V, Issue- 4, March 2025



sacrifices for the greater good of humanity; one seeks balance in the universe whereas the latter wishes to reclaim humanity. The practice of ethnic cleansing is carried out by Marleyans as depicted in the anime; it sheds light on how people are willing to eradicate an entire community for power and dominance. Eradication of Eldians, their culture, identity and their existence led them to being segregated and confined to areas with their movements being restricted. Eldians were being manipulated and controlled by Marleyans by being brutally tortured and brainwashed, it draws parallel with the history of Holocaust where Jews were subjected to harsh treatment and faced discrimination. Marleyans and their authority remind us of Nazi Germany and their rigid policies of segregation and racial purity.

Review of literature:

In the research paper titled '*Revisiting the Fascist Subtext of Attack on Titan: Some Notes on a Modern Reactionary Anime*' (2021) by Tim Brinkhof the author highlights the rise of fascism and connects it to sociological concern leading towards autocratic forms of governance. He also explains about dehumanisation and drawing historical parallels with Nazi ideology in the anime.

In another research paper titled '*The Good 'US' vs the Evil 'THEM' as Fluid Constructs in the "Attack on Titan" Manga*' by Dr. Ameni Hlioui (2021), the author explores the fluidity of good and evil in the people of Eldia and Marley as they each justify their actions as an attempt to survive. The paper also focuses on Eren Yeager's transformation from the victim to an oppressor. Ultimately, concluding that the line between good and evil is blurred in the interest of self-preservation.

The paper '*Dehumanization in Attack on Titan*' by Setefanus Suprajitno (2022) examines how the series dehumanises the titans and in the later half, humans. The paper discusses how propaganda dehumanizes the enemy i.e., Eldians hence justifying violent acts of atrocities committed against them by the Marleyans.

In the paper titled '*Investigating Dystopian Denominator and their Manifestation in Veronica Roth's Divergent trilogy and Hajime Isayama's Attack on Titan (Manga)*' by Dhikra Mmouni (2022) the paper explores its portrayal of dystopia through its setting, characters, and overarching themes. It highlights how the walled society in Attack on Titan serves as a symbol of both protection and oppression, the people of Elida live in fear of the outside world as a result of xenophobia. Eren's evolution from good to evil reflects a core concept of Derrida's deconstruction theory.

Objectives of the study:

The research aims to analyse the impact of anime and manga on viewers. The paper reflects on the main themes of the anime series, interpreting it through various critical lenses.

The objective of the research works are as follows

- To examine the ingroup vs outgroup theory
- To analyse the dystopian characters presented in the anime
- To interpret serious issues of society such as race, social class and eugenics

Research Methodology:



The research is qualitative in nature, making use of primary data i.e. (anime, manga & OVA). The research is carried out further by investigating social class order, race, geographical and historical implications portrayed in the anime.

Analysis:

The research paper explored social issues such as prejudice, discrimination and racism. It also touched on themes of survival, social hierarchy. The anime is analysed by using narrative analysis techniques and studying several recurrent themes in anime.

Findings:

The present paper discusses the dystopian society of Eldia faced by unchanging discrimination, identity crisis and social exclusion of the characters in the anime. The anime series epitomizes xenophobic nature of Marleyans towards Eldians and their ethnic cleansing to prevail over the order of Marleyans over Eldians. The paper also allows us to comprehend the ideals and perspective of Marleyans and their helplessness against the backdrop of war.

Conclusion:

The feverishly popular anime *Attack on Titan* highlights various themes and unresolved issues from the past, it also focuses on social standing of individuals in the society. The research paper aimed to uncover the aspects of eugenics, ethnic cleansing and xenophobia drawing parallel with Nazi regime and Mussolini's fascist ideology. AOT managed to address complex themes in a span of a decade, wherein author Isayama portrayed human conflicts, moral dilemmas and gore violence. The paper highlights the reflection of several ideologies portrayed in anime which were prevalent in the 20th century and influenced the present scenario.

The research paper also focuses on exploring the underlying evil of the human psyche, showcasing how readily human beings succumb to destructive impulses when given the right reasons for inflicting pain and violence.

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To Cite the Article: Meshram, Neha and S. Shreenidhi. "Immortality and Exploitation in A Man of the People." *Literary Cognizance*, V-4 (March, 2025): 249-253. Web.

