

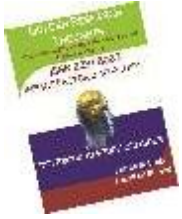
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## FEMINISM IN POPULAR LITERATURE: A STUDY OF SYDNEY SHELDON'S 'IF TOMORROW COMES'



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### ABSTRACT :

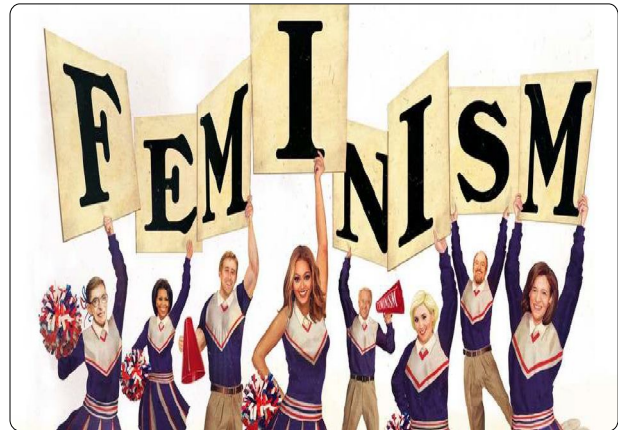
Popular literature as the name suggests is the literature which is read by the masses. Classics are read by only those who are interested in literature, while popular literature is read by people who want to read for entertainment.

**KEY WORDS:** Popular Literature , attitude and behavior , Sydney Sheldon .

### INTRODUCTION :

Popular literature is responsible for the attitude and behavior of its readers. Sidney Sheldon is a writer of popular literature and his books are sold like hot cakes. They are even translated into many languages and enjoyed by the people all over the world. Popular writers change the minds of the people. They can take the onus of prevailing attitudes of the people. Sydney Sheldon is considered as a feminist writer because the female protagonists of his novels; *The Other Side of Midnight*, *If Tomorrow Comes*, *The Rage of Angels* and *Windmill* all are beautiful, intelligent and unscrupulous when it comes to getting their backs at the people who have wronged them. Unlike some popular writers, Sydney Sheldon does not indulge in 'Literary Transvestism' to give feminist title to his protagonists.

Tracy Whitney the main character of the novel is portrayed as the epitome of feminism by Sheldon. She is the heroine 'who fights for existence in a society that denies her justice and a normal life.'...1 Tracy Whitney is bestowed with super human powers. Tracy's transformation from innocent and vulnerable young woman struggling to gain an identity in a male dominated society into an



unconquerable hood is truly fantastic. Tracy is portrayed with characteristics of man than that of woman and she is struggling to acquire an identity of her own in this patriarchal society. She is more of a rebellion fighting oppression that does not have freedom of thought and action. Though she fights against oppression, she is motivated by men who encourage her and direct her to rebel against the system. Sheldon's characterization is such that, Tracy does not have a say in anything that happens in her life. Tracy is what the author has made her and what the author wants her to look like and act like. We can consider this as Sheldon's Transvestism.

From time immemorial women have always been considered as weak and treated as subordinates. Vern Bullough has said 'The very word woman...emphasized (a) passive anonymous position. It derives from the Anglo-Saxon wifman, literally "wife-man", and the implication seems to be that there is no such thing as woman separate from wifehood. As individuals, with few exceptions, women did not count. They were mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, proper and forgotten.'...2. In order to differentiate between male and female, the male chauvinist society attributed all the qualities that they did not for themselves to women. They termed the qualities that are typical to women as 'feminine'. Feminine characters are those characters which depict a woman as weak, submissive and irresolute. Women are known to be inclined to suggestion from others, that is they lack a mind of their own and are not capable of making decisions.'It meant being non-aggressive and non-competitive, and dependent, in need of companionship and affection. In short, women were meant to be inadequate, self-doubting and essentially incapable of a strong, independent and autonomous existence. Feminists maintain that the sex-role stereotype of woman was a prescription for failure, for victimization.'...3 once women realized their limitations of being a woman or femininity, as an individual psychological state and as a wider social phenomenon. Girls all over the world were brought up, with awareness that they were girls and they had to stick to certain conventional behavior, though the conventions deferred from culture to culture. In this feminist era, this conscious upbringing has changed. Women all over are rebelling against tradition and conventions. They are aware that they are subjugated by men and this has to change. Women started demanding equal rights for themselves. 'The real female combined in her the so-called feminine qualities of nurturance, compassion, tenderness, sensitivity, affirmativeness, Cooperativeness with the so-called masculine qualities of aggressiveness, initiative and competitiveness.'...4

Tracy Whitney of *If Tomorrow Comes* is a stereo type feminine character with all the feminine fancies. She is a normal loving daughter, sister, fiancée and ultimately a wife. Like all other girls she was yearning to impress the parents of her fiancé Charles Stanhope and his parents into accepting her. She was the typical woman, calm, dependent, weak and irresolute. In her eagerness to impress her future mother in law she changed four times. She wanted to look the best for Charles so that his parents would be pleased by her. She did not realize that she was judged by her looks and the way she dressed. This naiveté of her caused her fifteen years of her life when she was convicted for crimes that she did not commit.

Tracy was once informed over the phone that her mother was no more. She later learns that her mother was driven to bankruptcy which later forced her to commit suicide and Joe Romano was responsible for all that. Joe Romano was the chief henchman of the underworld don of New Orleans, Anthony Orsatti. Tracy is enraged and decides to avenge her mother's death. She in her naiveté confronts Joe Romano, who refuses to admit his guilt and instead tries to molest her. She in her defense shoots at him and calls for an ambulance. Tracy then flees from the scene of crime. Romano escapes serious injuries and accuses Tracy of armed robbery of a Renoir Painting. She gets arrested and her attorney Perry Pope and Judge Lawrence trick her to admitting a crime that she has not committed.

She convicted for fifteen years and is imprisoned in Southern Louisiana Penitentiary for Women.

Tracy in the prison for the next fifteen years realizes that she has been tricked into admitting a crime she is not guilty of. She is even betrayed by Charles. The treachery works up in her mind for the next fifteen years. She now understands that she was cheated and destroyed like the way her mother was forced to kill herself. All men in her life were responsible for her destruction. Men used the law and even broke the law to their convenience. Some of the authors created an imaginary place 'Herland', a place ruled by women, where the worshipper and worshipped are women. Sydney Sheldon's 'Herland' the prison for women is the antithesis of this feminist ideal.

Southern Louisiana Penitentiary, Sheldon's so called 'Herland' is a dystopia. The prison is a home for all abnormal activities. The inmates involve in all sorts of illegal activities. Women are forced to practice lesbianism. They were forced to maintain a relationship with the Bull dyke. 'The new prisoner quickly noticed that the other inmates left her along, and as her dependence on the bull dyke grew so did the intimacies until finally, she was willing to do anything to hold on to her only friend. Those who refused to give in were raped. Ninety percent of the women who entered the prison were forced into homosexual activity willingly or unwillingly within the first thirty days.'(79)

The inmates rape the other women not just for pleasure but for power. If the newcomers wish to escape then they should be the wife of the bull-dyke.(79-80)

Tracy learns to survive in such an environment. She now realizes that if is quiet then one can never survive, so she manages to train herself to fight back the system. She now discards her femininity and resort to masculine aggressiveness. This change of personality in her is to avenge her plight. Now there is a turn in her personality. Gone is the feeble and fragile Tracy who couldn't take decisions, but now she is ready for revenge. From an innocent, naïve victim she has transformed herself to a woman of crime. She is weak when it comes to avoid male company. Tracy uses this weakness to her advantage. She uses her sex appeal and her body to manipulate situations and manipulate men and destroy them. She is obsessed with revenge.

'For so long now, her every working thought had been to avenge what had been done to her mother and herself. And now that it was almost finished, there was only an emptiness inside her.(145)

Tracy managed to avenge herself but this revenge has left her empty. She has achieved what she wanted to achieve but at the cost of losing her true identity. Now she is longing for her old life again. She wanted to be the same old innocent feminine, girl non aggressive and noncompetitive. Her ego is satisfied by the revenge but the emptiness, loneliness and void created by her metamorphosed self seems boring now. She wants her old life again. She even begs her old employer to employ her again but all her attempts were futile. She has no place in the society.

She meets Conrad Morgan who supports her, and leads her to underworld. She lets her roots grow down and settles down here. She proves to be very proficient in the field of crime, and with her unusual intelligence she reins the Underworld. She is an invincible super human and a daring criminal. With Morgan's help she learns and is an expert of every field of crime. Crime, deceit and stealing become her obsessions. She is hunted down by the CIA, The Interpol, the Scotland Yard and Global Police are all looking for her and she manages to escape from all of them. She is now an expert in disguising and hoodwinking the authorities. It is like a game to her.

The irony of the situation is that, she was convicted for stealing a valuable painting when she was not guilty of the crime. Now she actually steals a painting and Lucullan Diamond with great ingenuity. She wins her game and yet she is unhappy about it, the feminine qualities try to rise in her and she again wants to be her true self when she meets Jeff Stevens. For the second time she is lured into the world of crime. Tracy might be a strong and Supreme Being but she fails in the test of life.

Sheldon used her intelligence to destroy people and not to make people.

'He fails to understand that at the heart of feminism is an egalitarian impulse, seeking to free woman from oppression by removing all the obstacles to their political, economic, and sexual self-determination. To erect a doctrine of female superiority to men only by virtue of their spirit is a step backward.'...5

Tracy is Morally poor. Though she is the be all and end all of the underworld, her intelligence and courage is used destructively by the author. Tracy is a bundle of energy and endless spirit and all this is a waste because it is something that is meaningless. Sheldon either has not understood the meaning of feminism or is totally insensitive to women's problems. Feminism does not mean rebelling or being aggressive and destroy nature. In the name of feminism certain moral values are destroyed. Instead of going on a war foot and destroying enemies, Tracy could have fought all oppressive forces and managed to win in righteous way. Sheldon inverts certain dominant values in the name of feminism. French feminist Antoinette Fouque; 'Inversion does not facilitate the passage to another kind of structure. Reformism suits everyone! Bourgeois order, capitalism, phallocentrism are ready to integrate as many feminists as will be necessary. Since these women are becoming men, in the end it will only mean a few more men.'...6

Tracy has rebelled against the system and avenged the wrong done to her. But as an individual she lost the happiness. She lost her individuality. She is what the Morgans and the Stevens of the society wanted her to be. Her life is made a mockery by the author. Feminism is where a women fights for equal rights and oppression by the males of the society. It is not achieving something in destruction but bonding relationships in a constructive way. Sheldon has failed to convey the message of feminism to the readers. 'Sheldon's chauvinism is explicit as tails off his narrative in *If Tomorrow Comes* by stating with emphasis, that is, in italics, that after all her rebellion, Tracy is excited about the fact that "Life will be thrilling enough just being Mrs. Jeff Stevens."'.7

## CONCLUSION

Feminism is where a women fights for equal rights and oppression by the males of the society. It is not achieving something in destruction but bonding relationships in a constructive way. Sheldon has failed to convey the message of feminism to the readers. Even in his parting words Sheldon shows that Tracy wants to be a wife again. Life has come in fill circle.

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