

**Exploring Feminist Discourses and the Representation of Women in Sidney Sheldon's
Novels: A Critical Analysis of 'Master of the Game', 'If Tomorrow Comes', and 'Rage of
Angels'**

Project Report

Submitted by

Sandra Mariya Sajan (SB21CE030)

Under the guidance of

Ms. Shahanaz M H

In partial fulfilment of requirements for award of the degree

Of Bachelor of Arts

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam



College With Potential for

Excellence Accredited by NAAC with 'A++'

Grade

Affiliated to

Mahatma Gandhi University

Kottayam-686560

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Declaration

I do affirm that the project “ Exploring Feminist Discourses and the Representation of Women in Sidney Sheldon's Novels: A Critical Analysis of 'Master of the Game', 'If Tomorrow Comes', and 'Rage of Angels’” submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature and Communication Studies has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

Ernakulam

Sandra Mariya Sajan

22/03/2024

SB21CE030

B.A. English Literature and Communication Studies

St. Teresa’s College (Autonomous)

Certificate

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Exploring Feminist Discourses and the Representation of Women in Sidney Sheldon's Novels: A Critical Analysis of 'Master of the Game', 'If Tomorrow Comes', and 'Rage of Angels’” by Sandra Mariya Sajan is a record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

Ernakulam

22/03/2024.

Shahanaz M H

Department of Communicative English

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Sandra Mariya Sajan

Abstract

This research paper delves into the intricate portrayal of women characters in the literary works of Sidney Sheldon, viewing them through the critical lenses of feminism and the male gaze. Drawing from the insights of Henry James, who perceives novels as personal interpretations of life shaped by the author's societal perceptions, this work explores how Sheldon's depiction of women reflects broader societal ideologies.

The focus of this study is to examine how women are portrayed in Sidney Sheldon's novels, using the theories of Judith Butler and Laura Mulvey. We focus on feminism and the male gaze to understand the underlying ideas in Sheldon's stories and how they might affect readers today. Our goal is to explore these themes to reveal their impact on contemporary audiences.

The main objective of this paper is to dismantle the facade of false femininity perpetuated in Sheldon's works, revealing how these portrayals may perpetuate harmful stereotypes and influence societal perceptions of gender roles. Through a critical examination of selected texts, we highlight the complexities of gender dynamics and the need for nuanced representations of women in literature. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature shapes and reflects societal attitudes towards gender, paving the way for more inclusive and empowering narratives.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A novel acts as a mirror to the realities and manners of the people and things in an era in which it was written. It is often written using grand and lofty language, and describes what never happened or is likely to happen.. Within its pages, romantic themes are explored through elevated language, delving into scenarios that transcend the boundaries of probability and existing in a realm of imagination. In a story, fictional characters deal with tricky situations that mirror real-life situations in an interesting way so that it holds the interest of the readers who yearn to connect with the fictional world while maintaining the reality. M. H Abrams, in his 1953 work *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, argues that a novel serves as a fictional narrative that reflects the reality of the state of a society (Abrams). You can find similar sentiments in Henry James's 1881 essay "The Art of Fiction" . The essay emphasizes on the role of the novelist and the importance of portraying life in a manner that captures its essence and complexity (James). Henry James used the opportunity to present the idea that a novel 'is a personal and direct impression of life'. In its most literal sense, a novel represents the imagination of the author about what he thinks his readers require and most often about how he views things and how he puts what is happening around him in society into words.

Often at times these things that the author sees around him are vividly portrayed in his works. One such instance is the portrayal of women in a society, namely a patriarchal one. The author's personal views and thoughts are pictured through his words and this plays a very important role in understanding how the author- here a male- views women. These views are evident in how authors write "fictional" stories where the man is the head of the family and makes all major decisions, tangible instances where the son receives more preference and

acknowledgment over the daughter, women being in charge of the household chores while the man goes out to work and many more. It is even visible in the portrayal of emotions where a man is depicted as assertive and vocal while the women are portrayed as reserved and quiet.

However this is slowly changing. As societal dynamics evolve, women have increasingly become the driving force behind movements that have come up, a coating for gender equality. They no longer are willing to be confined to the four walls of patriarchy but are rather actively engaging in the public sphere, voicing their concerns, aspirations and dreams. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler, an American philosopher and gender studies scholar, argued against homogenizing conceptions of "women" which had a normative and exclusionary effect on the social world. (Qtd. in Wikipedia - third wave feminism). Butler explains how it's important to recognize women as individuals and not through the lens of patriarchy which often imposes constraints on their ideas and identity. This shift has been embraced by many authors who have taken up these movements and give it life through their art form- writing.

Another theory that will be discussed in this project is the concept of the Male Gaze. The concept of the gaze was first used by the English art critic John Berger in his work *Ways of Seeing* (1972). This theory presents an analysis of the representation of women- as passive objects to be observed.

In feminist theory the male gaze is the act of depicting women and the world in the visual arts and in literature from a masculine, heterosexual perspective that presents and represents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the heterosexual male viewer. (Source: Wikipedia- male gaze)

Though this is mainly linked with films and item dances, male gaze is very much prevalent in literature. The patriarchal notion of the predator and the prey or the idea of

dominance and submission is very much relevant here given how men feel like they have authority over the female body, free to gaze and fantasize as they wish. Importantly, the Male gaze is not confined to just films or literature, but rather something that women go through every day.

As said earlier, authors portray in their works the society they see around them and the male gaze seeps through into literature through the patriarchy. Given how the patriarchy finds it difficult to digest women in power and authority they decided to derogate and demean women and the male gaze was one such idea used. John Berger's assertion in 'Ways of Seeing' that *Men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at*, encapsulates the male gaze in the most impeccable light. Men throughout history have been inclined to power and perceived women as objects they needed to protect and objectify - both at the same time. This objectification became normalized and male gaze was justified as a means of asserting dominance.

This notion extends to the societal attitudes towards sexual behaviors that can be connected with how men who slept around are often celebrated as 'studs' while women stigmatized and labeled as 'sluts' and other derogatory terms.

Just as vividly as male gaze is prevalent, so is the concept of Femininity. Historically men have favored those who embody traits associated with traditional femininity such as soft women who dressed pretty and spoke softly. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, 'Femininity' is defined as *the fact or quality of having characteristics thought to be typical or suitable for a woman*, often symbolized by characteristics like long hair which is traditionally regarded as a sign of femininity. Certain traits are often connected to this stereotype called 'femininity', such as gentleness, loyalty, empathy, being submissive to the male figures in their lives - father/husband, looking pretty, taking care of the household etc.

Simone de Beauvoir, a French feminist activist, writer and philosopher introduced the concept of 'Eternal Feminine'. She argued that this notion is a patriarchal construct which portrays women as passive and submissive, valued for their role in birthing and nurturing, while being excluded from real human emotions and experiences that were valued and given importance in the male centric world.

The idea of femininity has historically been understood as submitting to the constraints created by men, because they -men- knew what women wanted and what was best for them. The myth of the eternal feminine has shaped the conception of how women are to be perceived and portrayed in books and movies, creating stereotypes and limiting their agency.

When female authors often challenge these myths and ideologies by making a conscious effort to skip them in their works, male authors indulge the readers in such false fantasies rooted in traditional gender roles. This assumption puts women on the pedestal of the "Good" and the "Bad". The "good" women were depicted as angels- beautiful to look at, loving, soft, dressed in colorful attires and were compliant. Conversely "bad" women are portrayed as witches and the evil queens- the ones who went against the rules, ugly, bitches, seductress, hard and aggressive.

From early childhood, children are subtly exposed to these distinctions through books and movies shaping their perceptions about gender roles. Girls were encouraged to be pious and gentle, while boys were taught to disregard such "bad" women

However, even this idealized version of femininity is devalued and belittled. As a girl grows up people begin to scrutinize her physical appearances and point out features of femininity in her body. She is told to dress pretty- not much cleavage and legs are to be shown, neither is she to cover up her body. Her dressing was to show slight indications of her beauty and grace. She is supposed to grow her hair out, sit a certain way, be presentable, and be diligent while talking but should be careful not to 'run' her mouth. All these were

important markers that showcased her femininity and the fact that she was brought up in a cultured family.

In this research I analyzed Sidney Sheldon's novels 'Master of the Game, If Tomorrow Comes and Rage of Angels' using various theories such as liberal theories of feminism advocated by pioneers like Mary Wollstonecraft and Betty Freidan, and theories of femininity involving, 'women as the center of the storyline', the idea of the 'Eternal feminine' and the 'male gaze' and how it is portrayed in books written by male authors'.

Sheldon novels are based on true events and are a total page turner. He gives the readers a view into the fictional world like no other author of his time. Politics, sex, crime, religion, human psychology and love are often combined in such a way that is intriguing and often held at awe by the reader. Sheldon is an American writer known for his best-selling crime thrillers. Most Sheldon books have women as the central character making his works one of the best to understand 'woman' from a man's perspective. Sheldon's books, including titles like 'Rage of Angels,' 'The Other Side of Midnight,' 'Master of the Game,' and 'If Tomorrow Comes,' earned him great fame. They feature clever plots with sensuality and a high degree of suspense—a device that kept fans from being able to put his books down.

Chapter 2

Character Portraits and Plot Threads: An Exploration

Jennifer Parker (*Rage of Angels* - 1980 an action romantic thriller)

This book narrates the story of Jennifer Parker, a young and ambitious lawyer whose life takes unexpected turns as she navigates the areas of love, law and betrayal.

Jennifer goes from a small lawyer who was in love with Adam Warner, a wealthy and charismatic politician to a ruthless attorney who works for the mafia under Michael Moretti, an underboss. She is confronted by the consequences of her decisions, her life and career threatened and her loyalty and love put to test.

With her sharp legal mind and dedication to her work, Jennifer exemplifies the strength and resilience that Sidney Sheldon often portrays in his female characters. Her journey through the legal world is marked by challenges, showcasing her ability to confront adversity with grace and intelligence.

Jennifer's character challenges gender norms, highlighting that women can excel in traditionally male-dominated fields. She is portrayed as an independent decision-maker, relying on her wit and intelligence to navigate a world fraught with intrigue and complexity. As the narrative unfolds, Jennifer's personal and professional life becomes intertwined with a gripping storyline, revealing not only her legal prowess but also her capacity for love and vulnerability. Sheldon crafts Jennifer as a multidimensional character, with her strengths complemented by moments of internal conflict and emotional depth.

In "*Rage of Angels*," Jennifer Parker emerges as a testament to Sidney Sheldon's portrayal of strong, independent women who navigate a world of challenges, showcasing not only their professional acumen but also the complexities of their personal lives.

Kate Blackwell (*Master of the Game*- 1982 thriller novel)

Tells the story of Kate Blackwell who is the heiress of a financial empire that she built from the ground. The story follows the lives of the McGregor family spanning over four generations. The story begins in South Africa where Kate's father Jamie McGregor is digging for diamonds with an ambition to get rich. It later follows Kate's rise into power within the family business, her marriages and her relationships with her children and grandchildren. The book explores themes of love, betrayal, ambition and revenge.

Kate's character is one of sheer will and determination. She was relentless in her pursuit for success and was often cunning and manipulative in her ways. Though she is resilient and strong it comes at a cost she pays for through the tragedies that occur around her and numerous sacrifices that she has to make to keep her family and empire together.

Her headstrong character and attitude gained her respect as she paved her own path in a man's world. The love-hate relationship you build with Kate's character makes the book very intriguing and interesting to read

Tracy Whitney (If Tomorrow Comes - 1985 crime novel)

This book follows the story of Tracy Whitney, a young woman whose life changes overnight as she turned from a beautiful betrothed woman to a criminal framed for a crime she didn't commit. As she navigates the criminal world from inside the jail, she becomes a master thief bent on a path to avenge everyone who wronged her. She later becomes a con artist high on the thrill of outwitting the law enforcements and other dangerous criminals.

Her journey in seeking revenge is a central theme, portraying the consequences of such a relentless pursuit. Despite her shrewdness and cunning strategies, Trace learns that revenge may not provide the satisfaction or fulfillment she anticipated. The narrative reflects on the toll that revenge takes on an individual and questions the ultimate worth of such pursuits.

Trace's character is layered with contradictions – a blend of beauty and brains, vulnerability and resilience. Her experiences in the story offer insights into the complexity of human motivations and the unpredictable nature of the quest for retribution. Overall, Trace Whitney is a multi-dimensional character whose story delves into the intricacies of human nature, the consequences of one's actions, and the intricate interplay between beauty, intelligence, and the pursuit of justice.

A few characteristics and features that all Sheldon women have is that they are smart, independent, determined, generous, consistent and ambitious - a few traits that are frowned upon in women by the society but it is important to understand that it is these qualities that take the plot forward and give the readers one of the best experiences ever. However, despite Sheldon's reputation as a feminist writer, there is a need to critically examine his works to ascertain whether they authentically promote feminist ideals or merely use feminism as a superficial veneer. While his portrayal of empowered female characters is commendable, it is essential to consider whether these narratives truly challenge entrenched gender dynamics and power structures, or if they inadvertently perpetuate them.

Through a thorough analysis of Sheldon's books, readers can explore the nuances of gender representation and identify whether the empowerment of his female characters is accompanied by a genuine interrogation of societal norms and expectations surrounding gender roles. This examination can shed light on the extent to which Sheldon's narratives align with feminist principles and contribute to broader conversations about gender equality and empowerment in literature.

Chapter 3

Feminist Critique

Sidney Sheldon's novels have always had the power to enthrall readers with its complex characters and majestic story lines. But underneath these narratives lie patriarchy, gender dynamics, power struggle, male dominance and societal expectations- All in the guise of strong and independent female characters which often gives us the notion that it reflects a feminist perspective. In this critique we see how Sheldon's works depict patriarchal ideologies under the cover of feminism and femininity using the feminist theory. The texts will be analyzed using three main factors that make up each storyline - the portrayal of female characters, the representation of gender roles and the ways in which male dominance & power dynamics work within the narratives.

The female characters in the Sidney Sheldon books are shown to confront challenges, pursue ambitions, and defy traditional gender norms, contributing to a feminist undertone in Sheldon's storytelling. Rather than being passive victims in the face of adversity, these female characters are portrayed as women who actively overcome obstacles, showcasing empowerment and determination.

However, when we look at the texts closely we understand that Sheldon's narratives are written in such a way that it appears to the readers as if women are the protagonists of their own stories, pursuing careers, love, and personal growth with agency and strength. But in reality these themes often revolve around men. Sheldon has written these narratives so subtly and artfully that readers often do not think about it. The theme of feminism in Sheldon's literary works is often said to be shown in the depth of the female character

portrayals. However if we analyze these works under the light of liberal feminism we understand that these female characters are not portrayed rightfully.

Sheldon's characters are often one dimensional and reinforce traditional stereotypes related to gender and equality. One dimensional characters, also known as flat-characters are those that do not change much from the beginning to the end. In the books 'If Tomorrow Comes' and 'Rage of Angels', both Tracy Whitney and Jennifer Parker begin their journey from love, later on we see them driven on vengeance and crossing various hurdles, but if we look deep enough we can understand that the underlying fact behind all these is them trying to hard to gain back the love they lost.

Liberal feminism, often associated with Mary Wollstonecraft, is a theory that focuses on individual rights, gender equality especially in education and civic life etc. This theory often seeks to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender - neutral treatment. But as we read Sheldon books we understand that this is not exactly the case. In the book Master of the Game, Sheldon's main character Kate Blackwell is portrayed as a successful business woman who is very ambitious. Though she seems empowering on the surface, the ruthless tactics she uses to expand her business and the willingness to exploit others for her profit makes the readers question if Katherine is actually the epitome of female empowerment within the patriarchal society. Kate is pictured as a strong and independent young woman - the author has tried to make the female protagonist look gender neutral-but these attributes are often portrayed in a masculine manner. Her strength and independence are shown to the readers in the form of her endless ambition and aggressiveness- two character traits that are often associated with men. This depicts to the readers the idea that women must embody masculine qualities to be successful in a male dominated world rather than being feminine and different. This very idea shakes the foundation of feminism.

Another main feature that makes Sheldon's books a best seller is the idea that his narratives delve into broader social issues, addressing challenges women encounter in a male-dominated world. But when we look into the character of Margaret Van Der Merwe, -Kate Blackwell's mother- in *Master of the Game*, we understand that she never had a life of her own. The entirety of her life revolved solely around the two men- her father Salomon Van Der Merwe and her husband Jamie McGregor. Though the author does talk about the challenges that a woman faces in a man's world and social issues that go on, he never actually gives it the importance it deserves. The challenges a woman faces are often summed down to the way men view her sexually - in her house or her workplace- and the social issues are made to look like background noise - just enough to create an idea of what's going on .

In the book an instance in the book,"he started towards the doorway that led into the shop "come along Margaret" She followed him meekly and Jamie thought. She's like a frightened kitten". (Sheldon,15). Here Margaret is shown as a frightened little girl whose father controlled her entire life. Later on she gives this control to her husband who treats her like his maid, almost as if she is invincible merely because she believed that he once loved her. Sheldon has written Margaret's character in such a way that it garners the pity of the readers. But when we look deep into her character we understand that her way of thinking never changed. She was brought up under the patriarchy and she took it on into her marriage and in her relationship with her daughter.

When Kate heard where she was going, she exploded anew. "I've heard about that school! It's awful. I'll come back like one of those stuffed English dolls. Is that what you'd like?"

"What I would like is for you to learn some manners," Margaret told her. "I don't need manners. I've got brains."

“That’s not the first thing a man looks for in a woman,” Margaret said dryly, “and you’re becoming a woman.”

“I don’t want to become a woman,” Kate screamed. “Why the bloody hell can’t you just leave me alone?”

“I will not have you using that language.” (Sheldon: 142)

Here we see how Margret tries to change the way Kate is. She tries to bring Kate under the man made restraints of what is right and what is wrong for a woman. Margaret gives more importance to ‘manners’ rather than ‘brains’ because that is what a man looks for in a woman.

She sacrifices her life, feelings and future for a child she bore him, under the false belief that he will love her . Both her father and her so-called husband saw her as a commodity that is useful for them. When her father understands that his daughter is no longer the precious virgin that he thought she was, he calls her a whore and a slut and throws her out of the house.

“I’m carrying your grandchild.”

“You’re carrying the devil’s child!” He moved closer to her, and his hands were knotted into fists. “Every time people see you strutting around like a whore, they’ll think of my shame. When you’re gone, they’ll forget it.”

She looked at him for a long, lost moment, then turned and blindly stumbled out the door.

“The money, whore!” he yelled. “You forgot the money!” (Sheldon :89)

In the same way, Jaime McGregor seduces her and gets her pregnant to get back at her father- as a way of shaming him. “He had used Margaret as an instrument of vengeance, and she had produced his heir.” (Sheldon :110). He never took into consideration how Margret felt about being used and thrown like a discarded tissue. Margaret is portrayed as such a

naive person with no regard for her own self respect when she is shown as waiting for Jamie to come back to her now that she is carrying his child.

The challenges that Margaret has to face from everyone around her, especially the father of her son who tricked her into falling in love with him. Jamie saw Margret in the same light he saw her father- as someone who tricked her into working with his father and robbed him of all he had. Rather than talking to her about it or coming to an understanding he decides to act upon what he thinks is the truth and abandons her.

“As for Margaret, he had no sympathy for her. She was in on it. What had she said the first day they met? My father might be the one to help you. He knows everything. She was a Van der Merwe too, and Jamie would destroy both of them.” (Sheldon : 87)

The shame and ridicule that Margaret has to go through, how the people - men- around her converse about her and how Jamie is well aware of all that she suffers but never decided to take responsibility for his actions all shows that Sheldon's narrative is anything but feminist.

Within an hour, everyone in Klipdrift had heard the news. How Ian Travis was really Jamie McGregor, and how he had gotten Van der Merwe’s daughter pregnant. Margaret van der Merwe had fooled the whole town.

“She doesn’t look like the kind, does she?”

“Still waters run deep, they say.”

“I wonder how many other men in this town have dipped their wick in that well?”

“She’s a shapely girl. I could use a piece of that myself.” “Why don’t you ask her? She’s givin’ it away.”

And the men laughed.

The female characters in the book are defined by their connection with the men. In *Master of the Game*, Kate's mother Margaret van Der Merwe is shown to exist - first under her father Salomon van der Merwe and then as the wife of Jamie McGregor. Maggie's entire story revolves around them. They are the ones who give her character meaning and depth.

Elizabeth Blackwell, Kate's daughter is another female character in the book that is portrayed as a beautiful but naive young woman whose main goal in life is to find herself a suitable husband/ partner.

Throughout the novel, her storyline revolves around her romantic rendezvous and her character development is overshadowed by the pursuit for love and validation from men. This diminishes women's agency and capabilities and reinforces harmful stereotypes such as that a woman's worth is tied to her ability to attract and please men, this again cements the patriarchal ideology that woman depends upon a man for validation and fulfillment.

The depiction of power dynamics in the novel is yet another trait of the many Sheldon books. This however is anything but feminist. Though Kate's position in *Master of the Game*, as the head of the Kruger & Brent corporation shows that she wields power and authority, a majority of the positions are held by men both in her company and in her family, thus showing the dominance of male characters within the narrative. The woman who overcame hurdles to become the head of a big corporation is the perfect guise for male dominance to be in play from behind the curtain.

In both Sheldon's novels "*If Tomorrow Comes*" and "*Rage of Angels*," we see very similar instances. The protagonists Tracy Whitney and Jennifer Parker emerge as formidable women who confront daunting pasts and unjust circumstances, ultimately achieving remarkable success. However, a deeper examination reveals a narrative where the male characters appear to hold significant influence over their trajectories. Despite their apparent

independence and strength, the reality arises that the success and fame attained by these women might be attributed, at least in part, to the actions and decisions of the male characters. While Tracy and Jennifer show remarkable resilience and determination, the influence of significant male figures subtly shapes their paths. Whether providing guidance, financial aid, or direct assistance, these men play crucial roles in helping the heroines achieve success. Initially, Tracy and Jennifer appear as self-made women, triumphing over challenges through determination. Yet, a closer look reveals the significant influence of men in shaping their journeys, often behind the scenes, impacting their opportunities and challenges. This shows how their agency is overlooked by the men's inert need to make these women dependent upon them, as a way of protecting them from the evils of the world. Tracy and Jennifer's agency is frequently limited by the actions and decisions of the men in their lives. Despite their initial portrayal as self-made women, their trajectories are shaped by male figures who hold significant power and influence. This dynamic highlights a broader societal expectation that women should rely on male support and guidance to achieve success, rather than asserting their own autonomy. Furthermore, the narratives may inadvertently reinforce traditional gender roles, perpetuating the notion that women's success is contingent upon male assistance. This can have detrimental effects on readers, particularly women, who may internalize the belief that their own agency is secondary to male authority.

The stories are written so beautifully that we miss these subtle references that make up the reality of the matter. Themes of gender inequality are present throughout the texts and are often overlooked because the readers are very much focused on the 'strong female protagonist'. Instances of sexism, discrimination and misogyny- often in the workplace- are portrayed as inevitable, as something a woman has to go through if she wants to survive in a man's world. These harmful attitudes are normalized and shown as factors used to build the

main character into a strong woman, often forgetting how dangerous and serious these issues are. Readers, especially women, are made to think that these hardships that they suffer are natural and inevitable and develop the idea that the trauma that they go through is what builds them into a strong woman.

While it's true that experiencing hardships and overcoming adversity can contribute to personal growth and resilience, it's important to question whether it is truly necessary for women to endure such extreme challenges in order to be considered "strong." Women should not be required to endure abuse, discrimination, or oppression in order to prove their strength or worth. It's essential to challenge narratives that romanticize and glorify suffering as a prerequisite for strength and instead recognize and celebrate the inherent strength and resilience of women in all aspects of their lives.

Feminism is not about challenging men; it's about confronting the pervasive dominance they exert across various sectors of society. This dominance often manifests in efforts to devalue, criticize, and subjugate women, ultimately relegating them to subordinate positions without granting them agency or autonomy. At its core, feminism seeks to dismantle the power structures that perpetuate gender inequality and limit women's opportunities for self-determination. It aims to challenge the systemic oppression that marginalizes women and denies them equal rights and recognition. This includes combatting societal norms and expectations that prioritize male voices and experiences while relegating women to secondary roles.

Chapter 4

Male gaze

Male gaze is a concept that refers to the way in which visual arts and media portray women from a male perspective, emphasizing women as objects of male desire and pleasure. This objectification of women, reducing them to their physical appearances and sexual attributes has been seen since the beginning of mankind. Male gaze reinforces gender stereotypes and limits women's agency and their right to be free and independent within narratives and representations.

The concept of male gaze was introduced by Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in 1975. In this essay she explored the concept of male gaze in cinema and its effects on the representation of women. She focuses on the idea of 'scopophilia', or the pleasure derived from looking and its relationship to desire and identification. This concept has since then expanded beyond the scope of just movies to encompass literature and other forms of media.

In movies male gaze is often conveyed through cinematography, and framing as well as character portrayals and interactions, whereas in literature, male gaze is often portrayed through narratives, descriptions and character interactions. Though this tendency is often found in works written by male authors, some female writers also perpetuate this portrayal. Sidney Sheldon's works often known for its strong women characters and intriguing plot line has some of the most vivid and explicit descriptions of the female body. The male gaze in these books is evident through the narrator's perspectives, character interactions and descriptions of the female characters. Despite featuring strong female protagonists, these works often portray women through the lens of men, who serve as the narrator for these portrayals.

Often written in a way that makes the readers feel as if the male protagonist is praising and admiring the female characters, it ultimately reinforces the traditional gender dynamics and power imbalance in the society. Through the detailed descriptions of their physical appearances, emphasizing on their attractiveness and sex appeal, women are being degraded and diminishing her agency and in a way her self-respect.

In Sidney Sheldon's novels "Master of the Game," "If Tomorrow Comes," and "Rage of Angels," the concept of the male gaze, as theorized by Laura Mulvey, is prevalent in the portrayal of female characters and their interactions within the narratives. Through the lens of Mulvey's theory, we can analyze how Sheldon's works construct and carry on the male gaze, reinforcing traditional gender roles and objectifying women as passive objects of desire.

In the book 'If Tomorrow Comes -Sidney Sheldon (1985)' despite the protagonist, Tracy Whitney, being an outstanding and strong woman, the male gaze is very much evident in the way the other male characters in the book view and interact with her.

Won't disappoint his fans. If Tomorrow Comes is sexy and alluring, seducing readers through the guise of a beautiful heroine who lives on the cutting edge of danger.... Sheldon has a habit of both charming and shocking his readers. He does both with aplomb in "If Tomorrow Comes."

This is what United Press International said about Sidney Sheldon's book 'If Tomorrow Comes'. The book was mentioned to be 'sexy, alluring and seducing'. Rather than focusing on how brilliant Tracy was in outwitting her opponents or the dedication she puts into achieving her goals, even the blurb given by an international news agency was patriarchal.

Throughout the novel, Tracy is consistently objectified for her physical appearance and allure. Despite Tracy being an intelligent and resourceful woman, men are often attracted

to her primarily because of her beauty and body features. Sheldon often uses these features as a way, at times as the sole means through which she can outwit men and gain what she wants. This reduces one of Sheldon's best female characters into a mere object of desire, neglecting the depth of her character ultimately reinforcing traditional gender roles. Tracy's journey in the male dominated world of corruption and power is largely defined by her interactions with the men in the novel. From her initial interactions with Jeff Stevens to the various men she encounters throughout the book, all the men are attracted to her beauty and sensuality. The initial thought that crosses all their minds while they first set their eyes in her is to focus on their desires.

“She sure has a great body, lieutenant Dunkin’ thought. He wondered what she looked like under that mud pack and without the curler cap” (Sidney -118)

This is the first thought that crosses the mind of a character that is supposed to protect the female protagonist- he thought she had a great body.

Patriarchy often forgets the effects that male gaze has on a woman. It affects their psychology and most importantly their perceptions of themselves and other people change. Male gaze is not just about women being looked at/ ogled by men but also about how this is portrayed through advertisements, movies and books in their description of women. These descriptions often make women feel insecure about themselves.

In the book ‘Master of the Game’ we can see how Margaret becomes highly self conscious about her looks when she becomes aware of the fact that Ivan Travis was observing her. She becomes very mindful of her own looks.

‘She knew she was not pretty. She was interesting looking. She had pretty eyes, high cheekbones and a good figure. -- Yet this was not the characteristics of 'pretty' (Sheldon: 76)

The objectification that a woman faces under the male gaze forces her to question herself. She becomes hyper aware of her own appearance and how others perceive it. This leads them to conform to the societal beauty standards. She starts associating with the patriarchal norms, believing that it is what is right. The pervasive nature of the male gaze leads women to doubt their worth and role in the society. They come to believe that their value lies primarily in their ability to attract men.

‘He must think I am an idiot. She went over and over in her mind everything she had contributed to the conversation, nothing. She had been completely tongue tied’. (Sheldon, Master of the Game,76)

What comes along with male gaze is a slew of judgments from the same men who objectify women. These judgments extend beyond their bodily appearances to their beliefs and actions. Women find themselves subjected to emotional manipulation as their beliefs and choices are questioned by the patriarchy.

Women are not only objectified by also ridiculed for deviating from the societal norms dictated by the patriarchy. Any action or belief deemed unconventional from traditional gender roles are met with disdain and condemnation.

Within an hour, everyone in Klipdrift had heard the news. How Ian Travis was really Jamie McGregor, and how he had gotten Van der Merwe’s Daughter pregnant. Margaret van der Merwe had fooled the whole town.

“She doesn’t look like the kind, does she?”

“Still waters run deep, they say.”

“I wonder how many other men in this town have dipped their wick in that well?”

And the men laughed. (Sheldon, Master of the Game,86)

This shows how male gaze works in society. They shame women while desiring to do the same. In the book 'Rage of Angels' Jennifer's interactions with male colleagues such as Adam Warner and Michael Moretti are often framed in a sexualized context, with descriptions of her physical appearance and attractiveness serving to objectify her character. Male characters frequently comment on Jennifer's appearance and sexuality, reducing her to a passive object of male desire. Moreover, the narrative often depicts Jennifer's relationships and interactions with other female characters from a male perspective, with their appearances and actions scrutinized through the lens of male desire. This perpetuates the notion of women as competitors for male attention, reinforcing patriarchal notions of female rivalry and submission.

Thus through these three books we can see how Sidney Sheldon uses male gaze as a guise to portray a woman's beauty and her appearances. Through the normalization of these trends within his works, Sheldon is reinforcing the exciting power dynamics and patriarchal structures where women are neglected and not given due importance and respect she deserves.

The repeated portrayal of women as objects of desire serves to perpetuate harmful stereotypes and diminish a woman's value and dignity. As readers, it is important to critically engage and challenge these representations and advocate for a respectful depiction of women in literary works and in the media.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Sidney Sheldon's novels offer a captivating glimpse into the evolving landscape of gender representation in literature. While initially presenting strong female protagonists, a closer examination reveals underlying patriarchal ideologies masked as feminism and femininity. Through the lens of feminist theory and the concept of the male gaze, Sheldon's works depict women as objects of desire and reinforce traditional gender roles.

Despite the apparent empowerment of female characters, their narratives often revolve around men, highlighting a pervasive influence of patriarchal norms. Themes of gender inequality and the objectification of women contribute to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and diminish the agency and depth of female characters.

By critically analyzing Sheldon's novels through a feminist lens, we uncover subtle manifestations of patriarchal ideologies within literature. This underscores the importance of advocating for more inclusive and empowering representations of women in literature and media. Rejecting the normalization of the male gaze is essential in challenging traditional narratives and fostering a society where women are valued for their humanity rather than their sexuality.

Sidney Sheldon's novels serve as a reflective mirror, offering insights into the complexities of gender representation and societal norms. At first glance, Sheldon's female characters appear empowered, confronting challenges and pursuing ambitions. However, a deeper analysis reveals that their narratives often revolve around men, subtly reinforcing patriarchal norms. Characters like Tracy Whitney and Jennifer Parker may start their journeys driven by love or personal ambition, but ultimately, their actions are rooted in the pursuit of male validation or reclaiming lost love. This tendency to center female narratives around

male figures highlights a pervasive influence of patriarchal ideologies, limiting the agency and depth of female characters.

Male characters exert significant influence over the trajectories of heroines like Tracy Whitney and Jennifer Parker, shaping their paths behind the scenes. This perpetuation of male dominance further reinforces traditional gender roles and power imbalances within the narratives.

Themes of gender inequality pervade Sheldon's texts, often normalized amidst the focus on the "strong female protagonist."

In conclusion, Sidney Sheldon's novels offer a complex portrayal of gender dynamics and societal expectations. While superficially presenting strong female characters, the underlying themes reveal a subtle reinforcement of patriarchal norms and power structures. By critically examining these narratives through a feminist lens, we can uncover the subtle ways in which patriarchal ideologies manifest in literature and challenge them to foster more inclusive and empowering representations of women. Rejecting the normalization of these narratives is crucial in dismantling traditional ideologies and advocating for a society where women are valued for their humanity rather than their mere physical appearance.

While the individual perspectives of readers might vary views on this topic, each interpreting the stories through their own lens, it remains undeniable that the recurring narratives of gender bias and power dynamics in these literary works cannot be overlooked. While some may choose to skip or dismiss these themes, as conscientious members of the society, it is our duty to discern and act upon what we choose to read.

Books wield powerful influence in shaping our thought patterns and attitudes towards other people and new ideas alike. It reflects in the way we think, make decisions and eventually decide on how we live in a society.

Therefore it is imperative that authors write responsibly and recognize the impact of their words and narratives on the broader society. By approaching their craft with a sense of responsibility and awareness, authors can contribute to fostering a more equitable and balanced society.

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