Chapter 5

Summing Up

One who fears the water can never dive deep and procure the pearls. Any pioneering work requires a certain degree of courage and determination. Bestsellers are yet to be considered worthwhile literature. Conventional, canonical literature is yet to welcome this waif with open arms. This foi-Taulaic literature has not yet been assessed, analysed or accepted. But as the first chapter of this thesis set out to establish, this homeless refugee is sura to be welcomed some day as warmly as standard literature. It is but a matter of time. This form of popular fiction will then be the cynosure of all eyes. Critical attention will be showered on it and it will bask in the warmth of appreciation and blossom further. The teething period is always confusing and slow. Initial acceptance may be delayed, but not denied forever. After all, popular literature has come to stay. The gulf between compulsory and optional literature is closing rapidly. Critics like Fiedler and Cawelti have championed this new fledgling. The ugly duckling will soon turn out to be a swan.
Bestsellers suit all types of tastes. They are the products of our times. They speak to us in our own language. We relive our experiences through the characters in bestsellers. In them are shown men and women facing our challenges and overcoming our problems. They inspire us in our moments of dark depression. The "novel" itself is "new" in literature and cannot boast of a heritage like its ancient siblings, poetry and drama. Popular literature bears evidence to the culture of a particular period in a particular country. It is therefore evidence literature. It gives us a better understanding of men and manners.

The bestseller need not be equated to canonical literature. It is an entity by itself, capable of standing on its own feet, not daunted by the threat of comparison or analysis. The yardstick of analysis may be slightly different. But bestsellers have certain inner strength and this makes them survive the onslaught of negative criticism. By their very continuum, bestsellers teach us the lesson of survival.

The literature of the age is characterised by its highlighting of man's capacity to survive amidst several odds. Survival and individual achievement are especially the keys to American fiction now. The concept of woman is changing in literature. Women are no longer typecast in
readymads. roles. They have become aggressive, ambitious and they represent intelligence rather than emotion. Women are emerging from suppression not only in society but in literature also.

Sheldon has broken the myth of male supremacy in all his novels. His female protagonists are strong and powerful: they are female heroes who achieve unimaginable success in male-dominated fields. This pattern has been taken up for detailed study.

The second chapter has provided a detailed thematic analysis of the eleven novels chosen for study. The heroines in these novels, all survive and succeed. They are broken but not destroyed, defeated but for a while. All the heroines emerge stronger, more complete after their trials. They lose something important in life, but in the process, gain a new perception of who they really are. Adynamic and passive, protected or powerless up to a point, they suddenly become recharged by a crisis or challenge. They emerge from the chrysalis that was keeping them cocooned. The chrysalis is a result of years of male domination, psychological inhibitions or some form of injustice. They coma out of the state of inertia. The period of incubation is over; the long and forced hybernation is over; the
insignificant worm becomes an iron butterfly—strong yet feminine.

The heroines reveal extraordinary will in surviving. They do carry unseen scars within. But every fibre in their being now concentrates on survival and excellence. Thoughts of revenge or super achievement burn in their brain. They are no longer lost and floundering. They have their feet firmly planted on terra firma. They ail nurture big dreams. They who had been crippled in spirit, now walk straight and proud. They have crossed the Rubicon. They have had their epiphany. They have received the chthonic spark. They now blaze a trail: pursuing a dream, a vision, they play to win and never lose their will to survive and excel. When challenges scream at them, they no longer blanch in fear. They crouch in a preparation position, tensing for the charge. The wild spirit of the jungle beast burns fiercely within them: they are now tigresses.

Sheldon's heroines have been turned a prey by certain forces: male chauvinism, the Mafia, parental neglect, betrayal or some injustice. In the case of some heroines, the struggle is more internal than against external forces. Some have to battle it alone as no one understands their almost savage seal. Blows dealt by fate, an obsessive ambition, an uncontrollable urge to excel—these
could also be the challenge or crisis faced by the heroines. The end effect is not one of tragedy. The women become predators and either go hunting down enemies or hunting after great success and power. All the heroines hanker after power rather than material success.

This chapter highlights the power and potential of women. The prey is shown transformed into a predator. None of the women lose their femininity in the bargain. But, interestingly, the few who allow emotions to dominate meet with failure or death. The danger of emotional entanglements as weakening the women has been pointed out. For women ruled by their head, the world is at their feet. As described by Tennyson in The Princess, Sheldon's woman falls on wrongdoers "like a thunderbolt"; she is a woman who drives her 'foes with slaughter from her walls'. As Lilia tells Walter in this poem, "There are thousands now / Such women, but convention beats them down: / It is but bringing up; no more than that:" (127-29). They are warriors battling injustice. Sheldon's heroines move towards wholeness.

The third chapter has traced the re-emergence of the great goddess in literature. The White Goddess and the feminine divine, buried under layers of male interpretations, are unearthed. The ancient female deities,
powerful and chthonic, are rescued from the curse of oblivion with the help of critics like Meredith Powers and others. The preeminence of the early goddess is established. The attributes, the irrational element and the power of the great goddess have been etched. It has been shown that the matrilineal cult has been suppressed by patriarchal interpretations. The goddess is feared and adored and is a force to reckon with. She is chthonic, like Mother Earth—a symbol of creativity, continuity and contrariness. Endurance is her key characteristic. She cannot be destroyed. All seasons of life are part of her design. This female power is present within all women. In a moment of crisis, isolated and let down by the system, the women turn inward and come into contact with their chthonic self. This recharges and revives them and they acquire an almost new identity. They surprise even themselves by their will to survive.

The chthonic self within women is highlighted and women in Sheldon's novels are shown drawing strength during their chthonic retreat. Their journey towards wholeness is compared to Campbell's monomyth quest pattern. The stages of the quest pattern vary from heroine to heroine. In the case of some, the departure phase is clear; in some the initiation or struggle is obvious; in some others the final
transformation is very vivid. The heroines move from humility to pride, from passiveness to activity and, from being ordinary women to heroines. The Sheldonion women, like their chthonic counterparts, are feral and primeval, beyond all man-made codes. They stun, shock, surprise, confuse and confound us by their variety, vitality and vitriolic nature. They all endure rather than endear themselves to others. The archetypal elements in Sheldon's heroines are established with necessary illustrations. The transformation in the heroines is also portrayed.

The chthonic element in other literary heroines is also discussed. Parallels are drawn between Hester Prynne and other such archetypal heroines in literature and the Sheldonian heroines. The archetypal elements found in Sheldon's heroines make them credible and convincing. Several modern myths are pointed out in the novels of Sheldon as myths in the making. The Leviathan myth, the myths of seasons and other myths are also traced in Sheldon's novels.

In the fourth chapter an attempt has been made to analyse Sheldon's craftsmanship critically. Critics like Fiedler are of the opinion that popular fiction need not fulfil the expectation of elegant structure, precise thoughts and other such accepted literary features. All the
same, it must be admitted that Sheldon's narrative technique is that of a master storyteller. He has the ability to hold his readers' attention. His command over the English language, his descriptive skill, his felicitous language, his deft use of humour, irony and pathos and his vivid pen-pictures are all considered. Authenticity is his hallmark and realism and contemporaneity are intricately woven into his novels. Masses of information are also provided by him.

Sheldon's beliefs, views, worldview, philosophy and observations add further interest to his novels. His views on old age and death are poignant. His social awareness, observations on religious practices and his consciousness of gender bias make his novels socially relevant.

Powerful characterization is the backbone of Sheldon's novels. His novels are filled with memorable characters. This has been made possible because of his psychological insight and deep understanding of human nature. He traces the achievements of his heroines to their childhood and parents. He depicts both negative and positive parental influences as being the motivating force behind the transformation of the heroines. Psychological perversions are also shown in his novels.
The heroines move back and forth in time and this creates a criss-cross pattern in Sheldon's novels. This pattern is further enhanced by the withdrawal of the heroines into make-believe realms, a pleasant past or insubstantial fantasy. Sheldon also uses the technique of convergence and divergence. Similar and dissimilar treatment of a particular situation in different novels lends an element of variety to his novels.

In this chapter, the appropriateness and the significance of the titles and the epigraphs are also briefly commented upon. They help to prove that Sheldon is no hack-writer churning out mechanical narratives, but a writer with a purpose, who takes his craft seriously. The chapter concludes by analysing some of the interesting features of formulaic literature. Bestsellers are formulas that have evolved to cope with the enormous challenges that confront society now. Writers of bestsellers have become the spokespersons of this age and they effectively and imaginatively speak the common wisdom needed to carry us through these challenges. The message of some of these writers of bestsellers will survive.

Sheldon's novels are formulaic. They are conventional as well as inventive. The tradition of formula literature is combined with the individual talent of Sheldon.
Stereotype characters are individualized. Suspense is maintained within a restricted framework of predictability. Poetic justice is established at the end.

Sheldon's heroines are feminine stereotypes who could be labelled good-bad girls. But unlike such characters in regular social melodrama, these heroines do not end up as meek, chaste, loving wives. Melodrama, today, lays emphasis on social change, a new, less submissive heroine and the regeneration of traditional values. It also explores various forms of crime and scandal. The sterile orthodoxy of religion, the loss of innocence in the pursuit of wealth and power and the hollowness of worldly success are depicted. Yet, out of this chaotic vision, emerges a truer spirituality: tolerance, compassion and justice become the new gods of the new generation.

Like other bestseller writers, Sheldon clearly writes in the tradition of social melodrama. His novels axe a critical analysis of contemporary society. His melodramatic plot is filled with suspense and the characters are rewarded appropriately after their trials and tribulations. God seems to have been banished from Sheldon's world. But his novels are parables of regeneration affirming our faith in a moral order. It is because of this positive philosophy inherent in Sheldon's
nove1s that his novels hold a high place on the bestseller

In the novels of Sheldon, fundamental assumptions are not in disarray. There is no note of exhaustion or bitter

cynicism. His novels are maps or landscapes of varied human

experiences. Nihilism is absent in the novels. The

Sheldonian heroines persist and prevail, persevere and

preserve our faith in a moral order. Their voices are

neither whispers nor whimpers: neither muted nor muffled.

Their message of hope and courage comas out clearly. Facing

challenges, they are not baffled or bewildered for long.

They come out of confusion using their intelligence and

inspire other women in similar predicaments.

This being a pioneering study, several constraints had
to be faced. Scarcity of secondary source material was a

serious impediment. Criticism, condescension, literary

snobbery and several other hurdles had to be overcome after
the spirit of the Sheldonian heroines.

Future scholars will do well to assess the value of
popular literature in general and formulaic literature in

particular. Several aspects of formulaic literature lie
ready, begging for a researcher's attention. It is a rich
field which will yield rich results if delved into, as the

virgin soil is fertile and unexplored. Exploration will
prove to be fascinating, and intellectual curiosity will be amply rewarded.

Much work could be done on Sidney Sheldon's novels: the psychological aspects and the social relevance of the novels which make them evidence literature and so on. Change is a constant challenge in literature. Works must be analysed critically, regardless of their lineage. All types of literature, high, low, folk, mass, commercial, formulaic and popular deserve scholarly study.

Art but reflects life, which itself is ephemeral. All forms of literature die after a time unless kept alive with the respirator of literary criticism. Immortal works lie next to commercial works by unknown writers under layers of dust in secondhand bookshops. The great and the trivial lie side by side. Great literature is buried in the pyramid of dusty, forgotten books. The great writer and the popular one are equally dead to the casual browser. Literary critics may have banished popular writers to be buried in dusty coffins of oblivion. But it is up to daring critics to come to the rescue of popular literature, which the high priests of canonical literature attempt to exorcise from the body and soul of literature.

It was in 1620 that the Mayflower brought the Pilgrim Fathers from England to America. From then on, this great
nation has been giving shelter and refuge to the persecuted and those with a pioneering spirit. During the Renaissance in the fifteenth century, a diffusion of fugitive scholars sought refuge in Italy. In the same way, in recent times, an influx of scholars, writers, composers and artists have fled their native countries and sought sanctuary in the United States. America is not a homogeneous society. Every American bestseller helps one to understand America a little better. Being the largest democracy in the world, allowing equal opportunities to everyone, and known for her impartiality and rationality, she embraces several races with open arms and lets them make America their home.

It will be most fitting if this great nation similarly democratises literature and closes the gap between high and low literature; it will be most appropriate if bestsellers are taken up for serious study in America, to begin with; for, this step-child of literature is more sinned against than sinning. Popular fiction awaits, looking up to America to show the way to the rest of the world by allowing bestsellers to cross the border and enter the portals of literature. After all, literature is a mansion with several rooms, and surely, there will be room enough for popular fiction therein.