



## Elaine Showalter's Feminine Phase and Gender Stereotypes as Evidenced in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*

**Miss. S. R. Samlin Golda**, Ph.D. Research Scholar, (Reg. No:21112144012007),  
PG & Research Department of English, Nazareth Margoschis College, Pillaiyanmanai, Nazareth-628617.  
(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.)

**Dr. J. Mary Stella**, Research Guide & Supervisor, PG & Research Department of English  
Nazareth Margoschis College, Pillaiyanmanai, Nazareth-628617.  
(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.)

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### Abstract

*For centuries, people have been hearing fairy tales from their childhood. Almost every fairy-tale contains a physically 'strong' man and a 'weak' woman who always needs the help of a man and this is embedded into the minds of people about its fascination for harmful masculinity and helpless feminine gender. Years have been changing yet the manifestation of such toxicity has not been changed. One such example is Meyer's novel *Twilight* which portrays a weak human 'woman' and a strong 'manly' predator who is a Vampire. Stephenie Meyer is an American novelist who gains fame all over the world after her debut novel *Twilight*. This novel makes a strong impact and manipulates the readers' minds that the handsome look and super-hero behaviour will be the thing one needs and not a talented mind and capability. The paper attempts to throw light on the glorifying portrayal of Elaine Showalter's First phase in feminism that is "femininity" and the gender stereotypes through the writing of Meyer's "*Twilight*".*

**Keywords:** Elaine Showalter, Stephenie Meyer, Femininity, Patriarchy, Gender Stereotypes.

Fantasy literature and fairy tales are the genres people hear about and wish to live in it but cannot. In this 21st century, many revolutions are being come to change people's mentality and the entire world. Developed countries like the United States of America and the United Kingdom are being revolutionized to change other people's lives. Yet, some people still bound themselves into Victorian society and gender stereotypes. Meyer is one such novelist who does not realize she is promoting a patriarchal mindset among readers. In *Twilight*, Meyer frames such toxicity and justifies it as love and romance.

Elaine Showalter termed the history of women's writing into three phases, that is, the Feminine phase (1840-1880), the Feminist phase (1880-1920) and the Female phase (1920-). As mentioned by Showalter in her *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*, the 'feminine' novel was acting as a vehicle to portray feebleness, ignorance, prudery, refinement, propriety, and sentimentality as female qualities. In this novel, Meyer's writing resembles the Feminine phase writers like the Brontes, George Eliot



and Jane Austen. In an interview, Stephenie Meyer told that her inspiration for the novel *Twilight* is from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. By reading that novel, she inherits the weak qualities and derives the characters Bella and the name Edward. And it also resembles a fairy tale of the French writer Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's *Beauty and the Beast*. Here also, the main character name is Bella and she fell in love with a Beast. *United Nations Human Rights* defined Gender Stereotype as a generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by, women and men. In this novel *Twilight*, Meyer depicts the female protagonist Isabella Swan with such stereotypical feminine qualities.

Isabella Swan is a 17-year-old girl who recently shifted to Forks, Washington from Phoenix, Arizona. Her mother has got married to another man. For the sake of this newly married couple, she sacrifices her happiness being at Phoenix, a sunny place to a rainy place, Forks where her biological father Charlie lives. Being a naive girl, she instantly gets attracted by the most handsome guy called Edward Cullen who is a Vampire just for his appearance. Edward is a 117-year-old vampire but looks ever seventeen. Edward was described as godlike, angelic and a male model. Here Bella frequently admires his beauty and often feel inferior by comparing herself to him or others though she was the one to whom three guys asked out.

Feeling of insecurity and low self-image is filled in the character Bella. With no self-confidence and low self-esteem, Bella is indulged in depression and suicidal thoughts. In her words:

Maybe, if I looked like a girl from Phoenix should, I could work this to my advantage. But physically, I'd never fit in anywhere. I should be tan, sporty, blond – a volleyball player, or a cheerleader. (*Twilight* 9)

She even hates herself and feels not enough for him. Moreover, she tries to make meaning out of her life after her dependency on Edward. She searches for the meaning of life in him and not in herself. Throughout the novel, one can see Edward has been controlling her and is not ready for her opinion. He forgets that she is also a human being and she also has her thoughts. He is described as a dominant man who selfishly uses a human teenage girl. She was treated more like a doll rather than a human in the hands of Edward. Bella, being an emotional character, is depicted as a cry-baby who often cries when she gets angry. It is evidenced by her words, I usually cried when I was angry, a humiliating tendency. (*Twilight* 22) Bella hates taking decisions in her life and often her life decisions were taken by others.

Meyer constructed Bella as not only mentally weak but also physically weak. Bella often faints down by the smell of blood. Even in her Biology classroom, she is about to faint down and Edward took her to the nurse. At James' attack also she has been passed out and lost her consciousness. To make her a morally good character, Meyer termed her that she never had a boyfriend nor anyone close. She has been described as a modest and clumsy woman who even could not walk with a balance and drive steadily.



Resembling the same gender stereotype that men are the ones interestedly involves in sports activities, not women, Bella does not like involving in sports activities and Gym class. It is like a puzzle that is mysterious to her. When Charlie was watching a basketball in TV, Bella thinks, There was a basketball game that he (Charlie) was excited about, though of course, I had no idea what was special about it (*Twilight* 112). And she depicts herself as a soft woman in the following line-

I had always been slender, but soft somehow, obviously not an athlete; I didn't have the necessary hand-eye coordination to play sports without humiliating myself – and harming both myself and anyone else who stood too close. (*Twilight* 9)

Bella, after meeting Edward, begins to avoid her friends and family. And her entire world revolves only around Edward. She becomes a dumb personality who loses all her rational thoughts after meeting Edward. She foolishly flirts with much a younger boy named Jacob Black only to get the details about the Cullens and eventually finds their real secret. Even after she came to know about Edward's reality as a dangerous vampire and the warnings given by Jacob and Billy, Bella never seems to bother about it. Her pathetic situation reveals through her own words, I sat like a bird locked in the eyes of a snake. (*Twilight* 232) She is very much blindly in love which is her justification for her irrational thoughts. Edward describes the temptation of his first encounter with her as,

To me, it was like you were some kind of demon, summoned straight from my hell to ruin me. The fragrance coming off your skin . . . I thought it would make me deranged that first day. In that one hour, I thought of a hundred different ways to lure you from the room with me, to get you alone. And I fought them each back, thinking of my family, what I could do to them. I had to run out, to get away before I could speak the words that would make you follow... (*Twilight* 236)

Bella plays the role of damsel in distress. Bella says, I was a novelty here, where novelties were few and far between. Possibly my crippling clumsiness was seen as endearing rather than pathetic, casting me a damsel in distress. (*Twilight* 46) She is always knocked off with some problem and Edward comes as a saviour. She loses her path and frequently ends up in the wrong direction. At first, Tyler rides his car and is about to crash down Bella accidentally. But Edward came and rescued her. Then, when she headed up to a bookstore, she lost her way and gets into trouble where some four men call her 'sugar' and followed her to abuse her. At that time, Bella walks speedily and due to fear she even thought to jump in front of a car to escape from them. However, she was rescued by Edward who comes out of nowhere at the end. Edward mocks her by saying, Only you could get into trouble in a town this small. You would have devastated their crime rate statistics for a decade, you know. (*Twilight* 150)

I was wrong about you on one other thing, as well. You're not a magnet for accidents – that's not a broad enough classification. You are a magnet for trouble. If there is anything dangerous within a ten-mile radius, it will invariably find you. (*Twilight* 151)



While the Cullens went to play Baseball along with Bella, three vampires joined them. Among them, a new vampire James could not resist the scent of Bella and wanted to kill her. To save her, the Cullens brought Bella into a hotel room where she is free from all dangers. But this trick also fails when she was foolishly brought out by James' wickedness and again Edward saved her. The entire novel is about her helplessness and Edward protecting from all her dangers.

When Bella moves on to Forks, she tells her father that she will cook for him while at her stay. Here, Meyer insists on the typical gender role of a woman to cook for a family. Even though Charlie lives alone and cooks for himself for the last 17 years, Bella believes a man could not be able to feed himself rather he should expect a woman to feed him. When she plans to go out for two days with her friends, she is afraid that how Charlie would manage everything without her. So, she wrote the instructions which will help him to cook and eat.

The female protagonist Bella does under any circumstances think about her plans and goals for the future. She simply craved an attractive wealthy, youthful man for whom she can serve domestic needs. Without any ambition, she obeys and adores the beautiful Edward, and she wants to be with him and gets married to him. This is a malicious trait which tempts the readers to lead an aimless life. Bella's wish to be a vampire seems to be her choice outwardly, but in a deeper tone, it digs out her inferiority complex and reveals her insecurity which is a gender stereotype of a woman.

Taking the romance and love out of the selected novel, everything seems bizarre. A 17-year-old teenage girl whose boyfriend is 100 years older than her is odd. Even before their love confession, every day Edward watches her sleep intruding her bedroom without even consenting her like a stalker. Meyer turned this abnormal behaviour into a normal one and projects it like romantic behaviour.

Nevertheless, this paper traces out how the poisonous traits are being disguised into an ideal courtship and the way it blinds the younger readers about the negativity and how fairy tale resonates even after the changing decades. Thus, Meyer did not adapt her writing with a new idea, indeed, the recurrence of the same patriarchal idea and femininity was brought by her to 21st-century fiction.

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