

# Asian Resonance

## Emerging trends in Vampire Fiction with reference to Meyer's *Twilight Series*

Paper Submission: 10/07/2021, Date of Acceptance: 23/07/2021, Date of Publication: 24/07/2021



**Ganga Nand Singh**  
Assistant Professor,  
University Dept. of English,  
Vinoba Bhave University,  
Hazaribag, Jharkhand, India



**Sagorika Sen**  
Research Scholar,  
University Dept. of English,  
Vinoba Bhave University,  
Hazaribag, Jharkhand, India

### Abstract

With the turn of the century, the world has witnessed an extraordinary interest in the revival of supernatural and gothic elements in young adult fiction. The contemporary literature beholds a wide array of authors coming up with new ideas and innovations in writing. Rapid growth in mass media platforms and opportunities in socialization provide impetus to the new authors to try their hands on unconventional writings. The modern generation readers, especially those of the millennial generation have a varied taste of reading. They do not idealise a *Pamela* or a *Clarissa* in real life. Even they do not find similarities with an Austen heroine. Strained to keep pace with the fast moving modern world, these young readers want reading to be a comforting and entertaining experience. The contemporary authors recognize this very need of the present day readers. Their protagonists are interesting and relatable. Neither are they too virtuous nor too vicious. The present day novels either revolve around the original dilemmas and difficulties which we all face in our everyday life or carry the readers to a virtual fantasy world which provides a medium of wish-fulfilment. Even the supernatural and the mythical have been turned relatable. With changing time, authors have even experimented with inter-mixing various genres. They have erased demarcations between love stories, thriller, horror-stories etc. Readers find such writings engrossing as they can live through all these experiences at the same time. This newly evolved form of literature has found huge readership all around the world. These authors tasted vast commercial success and they further encouraged new authors to be creative and try out something out of the box. Gothic fiction is one such widely explored genre of the modern times. It had originally evolved centuries ago by a bunch of authors as a new branch of literature during the Romantic age of English literature. They consisted of tales of death, horror and supernatural. The first gothic novel, '*The Castle of Otranto*' was written by Horace Walpole in 1764. The major themes of these novels were mystery and terror consisting of grotesque devils, dilapidated castles, rugged terrain and dark and haunted buildings. The gothic fiction gave rise to a similar genre of vampire fiction with blood-thirsty evil night dwellers. They were reanimated corpses as vampires feeding essentially on human blood. They slept in coffins and were burnt by sunlight. Authors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century wrote extensively on vampires. Most important of these are Sheridan Le Fanu's portrayal of the lesbian vampire in *Carmilla* in 1872 and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker in 1897. The latest addition to this vampire mania is Stephenie Meyer's widely popular franchise, *The Twilight Series* which opens new vistas to explore the multi-dimensional Vampire fiction.

**Keywords:** Vampire Fiction, Gothic, Supernatural, Young-Adults, Romance, Horror, Dream Dracula, Popular.

### Introduction

Stephenie Meyer might never have imagined of the overnight popularity and success she achieved with the publication of her debut novel, *Twilight* in 2005. From here, it was no looking back for this American novelist. The humongous popularity of her first novel motivated her to write further and she extended the story to form a series of five amazing vampire romance fiction novels: *Twilight* (2005), *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007), *Breaking Dawn* (2008) and *Midnight Sun* (2020). A fresh graduate in English, Meyer got married at a young age of 21 and entered motherhood

E: ISSN No. 2349-9443

soon after. Though, she was an avid reader of Shakespeare and Jane Austen, she never thought herself capable of being an author. But the unexpected was soon to happen. Meyer conceived the idea of the plotline in 2003 as a dream fragment. She visualised a fragile human girl and a handsome vampire falling in love with each other. Although the vampire loved her eternally still he thirsted for her blood at the same time. Thrilled by the idea, she started giving it a proper structure and soon completed the manuscript of *Twilight*, though had no intent of publishing it. It was only when her sister read the unprinted copy of the book and encouraged her to get it published; Meyer mustered courage to approach the publishers. With quite a few initial rejections, Meyer finally got the nod from Little, Brown and Company. This deal transformed the life of Stephenie Meyer entirely. *Twilight* instantly grabbed the attention of the young adult readers and soon climbed the ladders of success. It received the Publisher's Choice Best Book of the Year award as well as the *New York Times* Editor's Choice award.

#### Objectives of the Study

The chief objective of this article is to delve deeper into the mesmerism of *The Twilight* series. This research paper is an attempt to understand the reasons behind the unique place that the novel series has made for itself in the hearts of millions of teenagers across the world. In order to do so, *the Twilight* series will also be compared to other novels published earlier in similar theme. Also, the new avenues of vampire fiction would be explored illustrating the evolving trends in vampire fiction.

#### Review of Literature

With the publication of the first book of the *Twilight* series, there has been quite a stir in the circle of the critics. The books were ridiculed as well as praised by the literary experts. *The Washington Post* reviewed the novels to be teen-friendly but also mentioned that Meyer's prose seldom rises above the serviceable and the plotting is leaden. Anna Limber of ThoughtsCo. in 2018 highlighted the pros and cons of the books and commented that the books are easy and enjoyable, though they aren't masterpieces of literary achievement whereas Stephen Messham of the Fantasy Book Review appreciated the entire series and wrote that the *Twilight* books are full of romance and padded with action and vampirism. He also called the books to be a kind of *Harry Potter* in fantasy and Shakespearean in romance presentation.

Ames Melissa of Eastern Illinois University, in her article, *Twilight Follows Tradition: Analysing "Biting" Critiques of Vampire Narratives for their Portrayals of Gender & Sexuality*, applauds Meyer's *Twilight* series as a new spotlight on the all-encompassing umbrella genre of Vampire-literature. Karin Tanabe of *The Washington Post*, critically reviewed the latest published novel of the series, *Midnight Sun* on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Although *Midnight Sun* is just the retelling of the first novel of the series *Twilight* from the point of view of the male protagonist Edward, but Tanabe analyses the novel to present a heightened look as it deals with the extreme complexities of love. The book

# Asian Resonance

also retains its suspense which is a feat considering that most readers already know the story.

With the publisher's insistence, Meyer expanded and shaped the story adding new dimensions and characters to make it more appealing for her readers. All the consequent sequels of the *Twilight* series kept setting new records for best-selling books and were too adapted as blockbuster movie series. The fervid fan base of the *Twilight* series soared higher each day and many critics and readers even compared the novels with that of the extremely popular *Harry Potter* book series. *The Entertainment Weekly* even compared Meyer with one of the greatest vampire-fiction writers of all time, Anne Rice. Another literary journal, *The Guardian* acclaimed Meyer as an imaginative and prolific author of the modern times. Despite the appreciation and admiration, the *Twilight* series has also received its share of flak and controversy. The novels are highly criticised for highlighting and glorifying abusive teenage relationships and degrading the key essence of feminism. The female protagonist, Bella is called to be weak and lacked basic personality and judgment. Meyer is also ridiculed and mocked for her amateurish writing skills. However, whatever may be the concerns of the reviewers; the fact which can neither be overlooked nor be negated is the tremendous response of the readers.

#### Textual Study of the *Twilight* Series

It is not very difficult to analyse the appeal that the *Twilight* books have on its target readers, especially young girls. The books very appropriately prod the real feelings, sensitivities and insecurities of the teenage mind. We all must have witnessed that adolescence is a difficult period in one's life. With all the hormones kicking in, it becomes quite a complex task to decipher the physical as well as psychological changes which one goes through. The self-insecurities, doubts, curiosities as well as fantasy make the teenager inquisitive as well as secretive. With puberty, the body as well as mind experiences certain unknown and undiscovered excitements. The *Twilight Saga* has been able to cater all these chaotic emotions of the young minds. The fantasy world it provided acts as a medium of temporary escape and solace from the mundane realities. The books help the teenagers to fulfil their heart's deepest desires. The manner in which Meyer portrayed Bella Swan resulted in millions of young girls all over the world find likeness with her. They could actually see themselves in Bella. She is described to be very ordinary and clumsy with a low self-esteem.

The *Twilight* series grants a completely new interpretation to the concept of vampire fiction. It interweaves the two extremely popular subgenres of contemporary literature; i.e. young adult romance as well as gothic fiction. The young readers are served with a truly engrossing love-story of a simple and innocent teenage girl, Bella Swan. Her parents are separated and she had spent most years of her life living with her mother in Arizona. After her mother decided to get remarried, Bella voluntarily moved to the tiny rain-drenched town of Forks to live with her single father. Her life turns upside down when she

E: ISSN No. 2349-9443

meets a breathtakingly handsome and suave vampire Edward Cullen. Bella develops an unexplained attraction towards him and much to her disbelief finds the vampire too head over the heels in love with her. This leads to the beginning of a unique love story. On one hand Edward internally craves in the smell of Bella's blood but does everything to keep her alive. The story progresses with Bella falling in several life-threatening situations and always making a narrow escape. In addition to vampires, Meyer also introduced the character of a shape shifter or werewolf, Jacob Black to provide the twist of a love-triangle. However none of Meyer's supernatural creatures are horrific. The vampires are not merely lascivious and blood-thirsty revenants. They are shown as beings with feelings and emotions and a pitiful past associated to them. And here is where the *Twilight* series stand aside from other vampire narratives.

It would be complete injustice if we analyse the *Twilight* series as a mere addition to the cult of vampire fiction. The series has much more to offer. It is also a bildungsroman or coming of age novel. With each novel of the series, the readers get to comprehend the character of Bella and witness her progress towards maturity. Bella's personality keeps on evolving on her journey from teenage to motherhood. The novels also explore the intensity of the first ever sensations and experiences which every teenage girl is thrilled about. Bella couldn't resist her physical attraction for Edward as she is so consumed by his desire. Although, she knows that he is a vampire but she cannot resist her bodily cravings for him. In *Twilight*, when Bella and Edward were sitting close in their dark biology class Bella describes her feelings as, "I was suddenly hyper-aware that Edward was sitting less than an inch from me. I was stunned by the unexpected electricity that flowed through me..." One major aspect of all the novels of this series is the passionate yet subtle description of Bella's sexual feelings for Edward. Being a Mormon, Meyer has knowingly avoided explicit descriptions of actual sexual intimacies and advocated abstinence before marriage. She has very skilfully kept away from turning her writings erotic or vulgar by thinly veiled metaphors but provided enough for her young readers to imagine the rest. Elizabeth Spiers of the *New York Times* reviewed the *Twilight* as a novel about a fatal attraction to something or someone dangerously different from you.

The *Twilight series* is all about the stereotypical dream of the teenage girls all over the world. In today's cynical world, most people endure meaningless relationships with no true emotions. Here, novels like these provide optimism and relief. Bella and Edward have an ideal love-story. Everything falls in proper place at last and the story ends on a happy note. Edward is the epitome of perfection. He is handsome, immortal, forever young, extremely rich, loyal and chaste. Moreover, he has inhuman strength and other super powers. He unfathomably falls in love with Bella, who is described just like any ordinary human girl. He makes Bella feel special and makes her life extraordinary. In fact everyone in the entire

# Asian Resonance

novel series strives to keep Bella happy and safe. Isn't it secretly wished by every teenage girl? It is indeed difficult to find perfection in this imperfect world.

Vampires had been part of folklores and vampire myths since centuries. The name 'vampire' originated from the Old Russian Slavic folklores. Stories of vampires circulated in the 11<sup>th</sup> century when people started dying from unknown diseases such as rabies and pellagra. Even people started fearing the dead bodies as they used to swell up due to accumulation of gases in them during the process of decomposition. These dead bodies were thought to be alive and many rituals were being performed to prevent the dead from rising. These rituals included burying them with lots of garlic, or burning or mutilating the dead bodies. The vampire lore became known to other parts of the world during the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the war between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire. During this period, the Austrian soldiers noticed the strange burial techniques of the local people. Soon words and reports travelled fast to other parts of the world about this vampire hysteria. The matter was thoroughly investigated and all such claims were refuted on the basis of scientific theories. The panic among the people subsided but the concept of the undying dead had already developed its roots encouraging authors to explore an entirely new dimension of horror stories. Since then, many works have come up in this field of vampire fiction, but the novels of the *Twilight* series have established a completely different place for themselves in the world of vampire fiction. Readers do not cringe or get horrified by reading them. The *Twilight* vampires are fascinating creatures. On the other hand, the vampires depicted in previous vampire-fiction novels and short stories such as Bram Stoker's epistolary novel, *Dracula* and John Polidori's short story *The Vampyre* were terrifying monsters. Polidori depicted Lord Ruthven as an aristocrat pale blood lusty vampire in a suspense and horror short prose whereas Stoker's fictional Count Dracula had been one of the most iconic vampires of history. The character of the epic Count Dracula was pale, gaunt and clad in black from head to toe without a speck of any other colour. He was also told to have sharp white canine teeth. He had kept himself alive for several hundred years by sucking blood of innocent people. Unlike the vampires portrayed by Stephenie Meyer, Stoker's vampires were real devils with sole intention to trap more humans and converting them into vampire for taking revenge for their own cursed life. Count Dracula lived in Castle Dracula in Transylvania but he wished to move to a more populous location of England in order to increase his supply of human preys. He devised several sly tricks to reach there and once he reached England, he wrecked havoc. Count Dracula was an archetypal vampire of gothic fiction. He had several supernatural powers. He defied gravity, was extremely agile, his reflection could not be seen in any mirror, he could disappear and reappear at his will, manipulate weather, could shape shift and even command certain animals. For next several decades, these were considered the most

E: ISSN No. 2349-9443

appropriate characteristics befitting a vampire. Literature written on vampire-fiction during this period mostly followed the footsteps of Bram Stoker and projected vampires as merciless blood-thirsty creatures.

The public perception of vampire changed when American author Anne Rice published her gothic vampire novel, *Interview with the Vampire* in 1976. It was the first time when any author had tried to portray the past human life of a vampire. The author implied a sympathetic approach towards the vampire who introspects and questions his own existence. This novel dissolved the conventional boundaries between the human and the vampire. The readers too could relate to the pain and the misery of this human like vampire. This vampire is not similar to the menacing and devilish image of Dracula. The novel revolves around the life of a vampire, Louis de Pointe du Lac and his conversation with a reporter with whom he shares the struggles he had to face due to his blood lust. This novel opened a new perspective to the deadly image of vampire. It made the vampire too look like victim of unwanted circumstances. It also brought the vampire close to the readers and they were no longer considered as the antagonists in a story. Readers could feel the moral anguish of the vampire when it had no choice left but to commit a murder reluctantly to keep itself alive. Thus Anne Rice paved a way for the alteration of the vampire narrative and a different kind of vampire formed. This vampire could be a protagonist of the story and the readers even felt pity for it. When Stephenie Meyer took one step forward in this direction and further tampered the conventional vampire narrative to introduce idealistic and drool worthy vampires and people will continue to love them in varied perspective.

#### Conclusion

It has been many years since the release of the first part of the *Twilight* series, but it has still not lost its charm or become out of print. Owing to the huge demand of the readers from all over the world, they have been translated into many languages. The books have such attraction that not only the teenagers but even their parents can't deny enjoying the books. It won't be an exaggeration to say that Stephenie Meyer has found a niche for herself in the literary world. The *Twilight* novels have also resulted in many researches in various universities on teenage psyche and the likes and dislikes of adolescents. There are also certain key features of the novels. It deeply

# Asian Resonance

emphasizes on human commitment and the need to make right decisions. It will be true to say that we are what we decide. The decisions taken by Bella at various points in the novels shaped her life. Today's youth also need to sharpen their decision making skills at tough corners of life and develop ability to choose between right and wrong. Meyer also helps the youth to realise the value of relationships in life and importance of being committed. The modern self-centred young people have a lot to imbibe from the novels and implement them in their own lives. I believe that drawing inspiration from Meyer, interested writers in vampire fiction will create new dimensions and milestones in vampire fiction.

#### References

1. Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight*. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2005. Print.
2. Kirschling, Gregory. "Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Zone." *Entertainment Weekly*. 2007
3. Meyer, Stephenie. *Eclipse*. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2006. Print.
4. Meyer, Stephenie. *New Moon*. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2007. Print.
5. Meyer, Stephenie. *Breaking Dawn*. New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2008. Print.
6. Baxter, Kent. "On 'Coming of Age'." *Coming of Age*. Ed. Kent Baxter. Ipswich: Salem Press, 2013, 1-15.
7. Ames, Melissa. "Twilight Follows Tradition: Analyzing 'Biting' Critiques of Vampire Narratives for Their Portrayals of Gender and Sexuality." *Bitten by Twilight: youth culture, media, and the vampire franchise*. Ed. Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010.
8. Stoker, Bram, and Maurice Hindle. *Dracula*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. Print.
9. Anne Rice. *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*. 2000.
10. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/midnight-sun-gives-twilight-fans-a-new-story-to-sink-their-teeth-into-sort-of.html>
11. Ames, Melissa. "Twilight Follows Tradition: Analysing 'Biting' Critiques of Vampire Narratives for Their Portrayals of Gender and Sexuality." *Bitten By Twilight: Youth Culture, Media & the Vampire Franchise*. New York: Peter Lang, 2010. 37-53. Print.