

**ABSTRACT**

**Dynamics of Conspiracy in Select Novels of Sidney Sheldon**

**Submitted by**

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The theme of conspiracy is widely adopted in the many forms of popular culture which are commonly based on the real beliefs of conspiracy thinkers in society. The novels of American writer Sidney Sheldon have also widely depicted the many forms of popular conspiracy theories that are familiar among the masses. Sheldon's thriller novels greatly depict characters caught between conspiracies of massive proportions and by doing so, they depict the various features and characteristics of conspiracy theorizing. Through the study and analysis of the novels of Sidney Sheldon namely, *The Doomsday Conspiracy* (1991), *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* (2004) and *Windmills of the Gods* (1987) this study explores and highlights the various dynamics that are identified within the domains of conspiracy beliefs. Sheldon's novels are mostly in the romantic thriller genre and he mostly writes in a manner that keeps his reader captivated within the plot of the story. He portrays his heroes and heroines as enduring through deception, conspiracy and disasters of all kinds as they find love, passion and peace in the midst of hectic action and danger. Through his usual method of fast paced narration and frantic developments, Sheldon's novels illustrate the dynamics of the system of conspiracy thinking. By utilizing theories of conspiracy that are familiar in society, Sheldon can thus be seen as providing a viewpoint towards such theories and their manifold features through the plot construction of his novels. The notion of conspiracy is not an unfamiliar concept in the history of human relations. It is not difficult to comprehend that conspiracies of all kinds have been operational in the functioning and evolution of modern society. Illegal operations, criminal activities and undisclosed businesses of many kinds are indeed, very much a part of society. Denying that conspiracies exist would be greatly inaccurate as withholding information and secret planning are common aspects of societal affairs. It also becomes an inevitability that many theories of conspiracy have

emerged in society that hypothesize the deceit and secret planning that is kept functional without the awareness of the greater part of the population. With the advancement in technology and the technological means of media and communication, the concept of conspiracy have been exposed to a platform for expression which have not been made available in previous eras. With the popularity of the media, the aspect of conspiracy and its many theories have been established as a form of modern folklore in contemporary society and thus, such theories are thought to be a form of paranoid approach and are often only referred to as a means of entertainment.

Popular conspiracy theories that are made familiar in society includes such theories like the existence of extra-terrestrial beings from outer space, secret societies within the established governments of the world and supposed plans for world domination and de-population by influential leaders. Charles Pigden has noted, “The conventional wisdom on conspiracy theories is that they ought not to be believed.” (219) The usual understanding of conspiracy theories is that they are but false speculations and misconceptions and are regarded as nothing more than mere beliefs of delusional individuals. In 1964, American historian Richard Hofstadter has offered an explanation of conspiracy theories and why they ought not be taken seriously ; his essay titled “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” chronicles the somewhat complicated history of how conspiracy theories have been formulated. Hofstadter, in his essay, highlights the different cultural, political and religious developments that brought about hysteria, mass panic and uproar within civilized organizations and denoted how such events eventually brought about the many speculated conspiracy theories. What Hofstadter emphasizes in his essay is primarily composed of psychological findings thus, he concludes that the notion of conspiracy

theorizing is the product of psychological disorders. The labelling of conspiracy theories as a “paranoid style” of approach by Hofstadter is very much shared in conventional thinking ; claiming that a person is a ‘conspiracy theorist’ would imply that that person is suffering from delusional tendencies and likewise, calling something a ‘conspiracy theory’ becomes equivalent to calling the theory a ludicrous speculation. Hence, conspiracy narratives are associated in conventional society with derogatory means and definitions.

Conspiracy theories are abundantly found in popular society, some of which are based on factual occurrences and are capable of actually uncovering a conspiracy, while some are based purely on unhealthy obsessions and fantastical imaginations. Therefore, the matter of conspiracy theories and what constitutes such theories is composed of complex characteristics that are difficult to categorize. The forms of conspiracy theories that are popular are not always similar to one another, however, conspiracy theories are known to have in common a rebellious nature that rejects the conventionally accepted systems of functioning in society. As Robert Brotherton has noted :

In conspiracy rhetoric, the mainstream explanation is usually termed the *official* story. This disparaging label is intended to imply that the explanation is merely an account that happens to be proffered by some official source, and so should not be trusted. Indeed, a conspiracy theory need not offer a coherent, fleshed out alternative scenario. It may simply be based around allegation that something is wrong with the official statement. (10)

What Brotherton has stated regarding the mental state of conspiracy theorists is taken from the standpoint of psychological reasoning where paranoia is mostly

associated with conspiracy thinking. Psychological explanations of conspiracy beliefs are mostly shared among the general masses as the conventional wisdom and thus, labels of derogatory nature such as ‘crazy’, ‘delusional’ and ‘paranoid’ are mostly identified with the features of conspiracy. Conspiracy theories are known to crop up in times of fear, panic and uncertainty, and they are understood as desperate attempts of searching for explanations and meaning by anxious and irrational individuals.

Hostility towards powerful institutions is a common aspect of conspiracy theorizing; such theories are known to target the higher-ups of society whom they speculate to be working against the interest of the common man. Theorists of conspiracy are known to be highly suspicious of events and occurrences that affect a lot of people and are bent on the idea that events of massive scales are somehow orchestrated and elaborately planned. It is believed that there are no accidents, coincidences or mistakes as all occurrences are hypothesized to have significant roles to play in the elaborate conspiracy. What is conventional and accepted as the norms and ideals that govern the people are rejected and challenged through the theories that are hypothesized.

Governmental organizations and established institutions within society are viewed with a high level of contempt and suspicion by conspiracy theorists. It is recognized that conspiracy believers do not trust the system by which civilized society is governed. Hence, leaders of world governments and political elites are suspected to be culprits in a conspiracy that maintains a status quo which favours the elites only. Doubtful attitudes towards dominant factors in society thus, remain a common feature in conspiracy thinking regardless of the theory. For example, the conspiracy theory regarding the existence of alien beings may completely be different from the theory that natural disasters such as tsunamis and earthquakes are caused by man-made

machines. However, the similarity between such theories lie in the fact that they do not accept the conventional understanding of events and instead, they sternly believe that such events are attempts to deceive the public and that the actual truth is being withheld by those who possess power in society.

In his book entitled *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault had written, “The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological’ representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by his specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline’.” (194) For Foucault, both the concepts of power and knowledge goes hand in hand, therefore, when only certain people control knowledge, oppression becomes a possibility. Foucault’s works include such aspects of disciplinary power wielded by institutions that are aided by the state. In his works, Foucault speaks of how regulations enforced by institutions have been ingrained into the minds of the masses which makes it a possibility for the occurrence of mass coercion without resistance. This concept of being stripped of one’s individuality and freedom coincides with the theories of conspiracy where the rejection of conventional societal norms is a common feature. Through the influence of powerful institutions, the masses are thought to be fed false ideologies that are perceived as truth and in doing so, a system of order is maintained. Power thus, is exercised not through force and aggression but through the functioning of ideologies that are maintained and produced through institutions.

The role of such ideological influences fuelled by established institutions are speculated by conspiracy theorists to be the main cause for the possibility of deceit, exploitation and oppression. In conspiracy thinking, it is often stressed that discrimination and subjugation of people in society is maintained through the upholding of a system that keeps all individuals within the established systematic

function through ideological manipulation. Louis Althusser has defined ideology as “a system (possessing its logic and proper rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts according to the case) endowed with an existence and a historical role at the heart of a given society.” (qtd in Barry 157) Althusser’s idea that socially constructed organizations enforce the laws that separate people into specific classes is identifiable and recognized within the belief system of conspiracy theorizing. The workings and functions of different forces within society such as the family, the school, the church and the media are thought to have major impacts in the lives of people in the sense that they are means of conditioning the individual and moulding them into subjects that contribute to the sustainment of the dominant system.

The theme of conspiracy has been adapted and incorporated extensively in the fields of art and entertainment. Although categorized under the domain of what is recognized as a lower class of literature, conspiracy themed genre fiction such as the works of Sidney Sheldon are very much celebrated amongst audiences. Sheldon’s novels in their depiction of action, luxury, terror and espionage are reflective of the ways in which conspiracies are perceived by the public. Sheldon, in his novels, portray popular conspiracy theories that are held to be true by many people and in doing so, he depicts the associated features that are to be recognized within conspiracy narratives. This study, through the study of popular conspiracies depicted in the novels of Sidney Sheldon, has attempted to highlight the aspects of conspiracy theories and the role they play in the functioning of popular society. Through the theoretical examination of the system in which conspiracy thinking develops, this study has asserted that the notion of conspiracy theorizing has more to offer than psychological prescriptions and that they are capable of playing positive and ideal roles in the functioning of civilized nations.

Jon W. Anderson writes, “Conspiracy theories, before they adopt particular psychological styles and features are fundamentally sociological, not psychological, phenomena. They arise in exclusion and proceed as information-seeking on the part of the outs about the ins.” (96) Through conspiracies depicted in the novels of Sidney Sheldon, this study explores the different characteristics of conspiracy theorizing that have their roots in the relations established within society. Thus, this study lays emphasis on the power dynamics and the roles of socially constructed forces that are significant aspects of conspiracy theorizing.

### **Chapter 1 : Situating Conspiracy in Popular Culture.**

This chapter establishes the status of conspiracy theorizing in the contemporary society. Many have recognized that conspiracy theories are a relatively new development as they are very much influenced by the advancement in technology and electronic means of communication and media. Although there are numerous speculated conspiracies within society, the conventional understanding still remains that conspiracy theories ought not be taken as serious subjects of speculations and are instead known to be dismissed as traits of psychological disorders.

Conspiracy thinking in popular culture is not a rare concept, it can even be claimed that all significant events that occur on a large scale have conspiracy theories of their own. The tendency of conspiracy thinkers to make irrational connections and unnecessary linkages to many unrelated theories make the notion of conspiracy theorizing a never ending process of speculations and suspicions. Therefore, the status of conspiracy theories in popular culture is maintained to be a derogatory form of thinking. However, conspiracy theorizing forms a wide part of popular culture due to their wide representation in forms of entertainment. The allure, attractiveness and the



intrigue that is associated with the unusual and strange theories of conspiracy narratives have allowed for their varied representations and misrepresentations. Hence, the notion of conspiracies are commonly found to be sources of entertainment and are associated mostly with ridicule and mockery.

Different theories of conspiracy exist within the domains of civilized culture and it is evidently clear that most conspiracy theories lack any form of coherence and reason. Theories that involve elaborate plans of world domination and depopulation will be difficult to execute secretly in real life, especially considering the elaborate nature of such plans. However, it is to be recognized that the contemporary culture that is influenced heavily by dominant factors such as the media is inevitably prone to misinterpretation of information. Hence, the role of ideological forces of society cannot be ignored as such forces play significant roles in the formation of conventional understanding. As Ben H. Bagdikian writes :

Certain kinds of stories, certain public figures, certain social data, certain analysts of social and political events are regularly on the network evening news and the front page, while other stories, spokesperson, and analysts are mentioned obscurely if at all. The main problem in the news today is not what is false, but what is missing. (51)

Taking into consideration the fact that conspiracy theorists are trying to uncover the hidden knowledge that people are entitled to, it can be asserted that the act of conspiracy theorizing is not only confined within the sphere of mental disorders but instead, have their roots in sociological formations.

## Chapter 2 : Society and Suspicion of Authority.

This chapter has attempted to examine the suspicious attitudes and tendencies of conspiracy thinkers towards authority figures in society. Through the analysis of extra-terrestrial conspiracy theories as depicted in Sidney Sheldon's novel *The Doomsday Conspiracy* (1991), this chapter highlights the hostility that is often associated with conspiracy narratives regarding the power relations established in society.

Sheldon, in *The Doomsday Conspiracy*, tells the story of Robert Bellamy, who is an officer of Naval Intelligence. Robert is asked by the government to locate eleven people who witnessed the crash of a weather balloon. Without his knowledge, every witness that Robert locates is assassinated by the authorities as they were in fact, witnesses to the crash of an UFO. Fearing that the information about alien beings will cause mass hysteria, the government has decided to eliminate all those who know of their existence including Robert. As Robert unravels the truth, it is revealed that powerful government officials and elites have met in secret to orchestrate the plan to withhold the truth and eliminate the visitors from outer space. The novel ends with the conspirators being exposed and the alien beings warning the humans of their impending doom if they continue to mistreat their planet.

The theory surrounding supposed visits from alien beings is one of the most popular amongst conspiracy theories. Despite the number of reported sightings, the question of alien existence remains unanswered. The conventional norm regarding UFO sightings, crop circles and other related incidents is that they are false presentations and hoaxes that are but attempts to gain attention. In his novel, Sheldon depicts such aspects that surround the theory of alien existence and highlights how the

conventional wisdom that is established plays an important role in the act of discrediting of the theory. Sheldon's portrayal in his novel thus, provide an understanding of how systems of functioning are recognized in society that keeps people from questioning the official statements and proclamations.

In *The Subject and Power* (1983), Foucault explains the forms of power that may arise in society and the struggles that resistance to such power formations produce. He writes :

This formation of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, impose a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. (331)

As it is the accepted norm that the existence of life in outer space is yet to be proven, the theories about their visits continue to be dismissed. Despite the number of allegations, no proof has yet been uncovered which leads many conspiracy theorists to claim that the masses are allowing the conspiracy to continue as the 'official' statements are rarely questioned or challenged despite being doubtful and suspicious.

### **Chapter 3 : Exploitation and Subjectivity.**

This chapter lays focus on the idea of exploitation, manipulation and oppression in conspiracy narratives that is recognized to be carried out upon the masses. Through the examination of the conspiracy theory of global warming and climate change, as depicted in the novel *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* (2004), this

chapter lays emphasis on the aspect of being made into a subject by the speculated conspirator.

Those who believe that global warming is a conspiracy believe that the science behind the global warming findings and climate change is an elaborate conspiracy that will dramatically and radically increase regulations of people's lives and businesses and raise the cost of living and government taxes. Sheldon depicts such aspects of global warming conspiracy theories in his novel as he presents the character of Tanner Kingsley, the antagonist who creates a machine that enables him to manipulate the weather. Kingsley is the head of an international think tank and he appears to be a humanitarian working for the improvement of the environment. However, as the novel progresses, he is revealed to be a sinister figure who plans to gain wealth through the manipulation of the earth's atmosphere. Kingsley is also depicted to be equipped with advanced pieces of technology that enables him to locate and monitor people easily. The novel, thus, examines the notion of surveillance in society and the idea of manipulation and exploitation committed against the people.

The issue of global warming and climate change has been made into a major area of concern as many campaigns, advertisements and media commercialization have continuously urged people to make changes in lifestyle and make sacrifices for the improvement of the environment. The taxes and expenses that have been implemented by authorities for the purpose are met with much suspicion by conspiracy thinkers as it is believed that the issue of global warming has been exaggerated or a complete hoax. Nevertheless, environmental conservation is recognized to be a noble cause regardless of the higher expense and higher amount of taxes.

The ideology behind the issue of global warming becomes a central area of concern for many conspiracy theorists. In his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, Louis Althusser denotes that State power, which is repressive, is also maintained in such a manner that it becomes more subtle and restrained. The state is able to function more subtly by means of seemingly taking the consent of the citizens into consideration. Peter Barry, on Althusser’s idea of ideology, writes:

...democracy makes us feel that we are choosing the kind of government we have, but in practice the difference between political parties, once in power, are far fewer than the rhetorical gulfs between them...Instead of force crudely applied from a single source, as from a lever, there is assent secured in many different and complex ways, and ideological power is shown to be of ultimately greater significance than material power. (158 – 159)

The willingness of citizens to believe by means of being disciplined through the different factors of the Ideological State Apparatus such as the school, media, family and art becomes of huge significance when looking at the matter of conspiracies from the perspective of the role played by ideology. The idea of free will and democracy is a fabrication according to conspiracy theorists; what is held to be important and urgent are influenced by the ideological forces of society such as the media while in actuality, the policies implemented by the authorities is done so in order to gain more of the population’s wealth. Such features are explored and depicted in the plot of Sheldon’s novel in such a way that audiences are presented a different perspective different than that of the conventional understanding.

#### **Chapter 4 : Secret Organizations and Exercise of Power.**

This chapter focuses on the popular theory of secret groups or societies within civilized communities. The concept of secret organizations controlling all major events is examined through Sidney Sheldon's portrayal in his novel *Windmills of the Gods* (1987). Conspiracy theorizing ultimately is an approach towards the power dynamics that are accepted and established within human relations. Such dynamics of the exercise of power by the higher rungs of society are explored and examined in this chapter.

In *Windmills of the Gods*, Sheldon presents his readers with a secret society known as 'The Patriots of Freedom' which is composed of world leaders whose sole purpose is to maintain a status quo in their respective countries. The target of this secret organization is Mary Ashley who is appointed as ambassador to the Iron Curtain country of Romania by the newly elected President of the United States, Paul Ellison. The President's programme of launching new relations with communists countries is met with uncertainty and objections and thus, a conspiracy develops against the ambassador, Mary Ashley. The secret group of conspirators monitor and follow every move that Mary makes and they plan to assassinate her as publicly and horrifically as possible so that future plans of establishing relations with capitalist or communists countries will be deemed too dangerous. The realm of politics, which is most commonly associated with conspiracies, is thus, dealt with in Sheldon's novel.

The plot of the novel highlights the belief of conspiracy thinkers that the powerful secret groups are directly or indirectly influencing the political outcomes of the world government. As it is believed that the workings of secret organizations are powerful enough to impact all significant outcomes of society, the conformity on the

part of the masses becomes a significant aspect. In “Power\Knowledge”, Foucault writes :

Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain...Power is employed through a net-like organization... The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. (98)

It is thus, recognized that power is exercised not necessarily by a higher object but rather, it needs to be constantly and systematically accepted and performed. On the matter of conformity and compliance, the role of ideology is of utmost importance in Marxist theory. Sara Mills writes, “Ideology, for Marxists, is the imaginary representation of the way things are in society, and this fictive version of the world serves the interest of those who are dominant in society.” (34)

The existence and workings of secret organizations in the modern world has not been proven, including the theory that political events and affairs are directly controlled by them. However, the idea that people are being influenced and coerced into accepting and following certain ideals and standards remains a concept that is challenge worthy. Hence, the need for the establishment of compliance and conformity by authoritarian institutions becomes a prime factor which conspiracy theorists stand to question.

## Chapter 5 : Conclusion.

This final chapter summarizes the various dynamics that are associated and related to the views of conspiracy theories that have been denoted in the study. Conspiracy theorizing is not a simple concept and cannot be grouped into a single category or even several. However, conspiracy theories have a common characteristic that is identifiable which is the rejection of the conventional understanding of the power dynamics in man-made society. Conspiracy narratives, whether they are ambitiously convincing or not, are often known to be against the forms of institutions whose ways have been internalized by the people. Conspiracy theories provide a different perspective on the system of affairs that has long operated the functioning of mankind and in doing so, they perform an act of searching for the humanity and true nature of man which is deemed to be lost in the midst of societal conditioning.

As seen depicted in the novels of Sidney Sheldon, the belief system of conspiracy theories is mostly composed of mistrust and suspicion of the ruling ideologies in society. And as this study denotes, such tendencies have their roots in the sociological structure of human relations where the conventional norm and a distinction is maintained between the rulers and the ruled. Conspiracy theories can be acknowledged as taking notice of the power relations within society and making attempts to produce free-thinkers who, instead of following and obeying, are able to make conclusions independently about what the disciplined society has to offer. Foucault has written in his essay "Governmentality", "The art of government...is essentially concerned with answering the question of how to introduce economy – that is to say, the correct way of managing individuals, goods, and wealth..."(207) In the midst of questionable policies and procedures introduced by governments, conspiracy narratives can be said to be working in the interest of the common man as opposed



to the state whose interest is recognized to be the expanding of economy at the expense of lower classes. Thus, conspiracy theories and conspiracy thinking can be acknowledged as working in the interest of the common man who has been unfortunate under the functioning of the current system of society that promises equality and justice for all individuals.

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SIDNEY SHELDON***

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***Submitted***

***In partial fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of Master  
of Philosophy in English of Mizoram University, Aizawl.***

**DECLARATION**

**Mizoram University**

**December, 2016.**

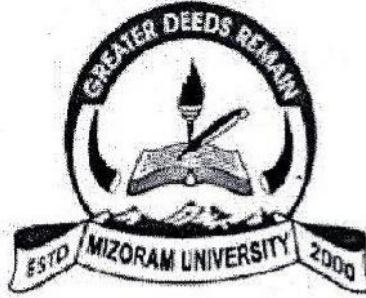
**I, F. Laltlankimi, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for research degree in any other University/ Institute.**

**This is being submitted to Mizoram University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.**

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**MIZORAM UNIVERSITY**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that “Dynamics of Conspiracy in Select Works of Sidney Sheldon” written by F.Laltlankimi has been written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down within the M.Phil. regulations of Mizoram University. The dissertation is the result of her own investigations. Neither the dissertation as a whole nor any part of it was ever submitted by any other University for any research degree.

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## **Chapter 1**

# **Situating Conspiracy in Popular Culture**

This study will focus on the notion of conspiracy in popular cultures and the concept of conspiratorial thinking in society. The concept of ‘conspiracy’ is not an uncommon subject in the nature of human relations. Secret planning have certainly been operational in human history not just in the establishment of nations and political affairs but also in the forms of criminal activity within daily societal relations. The act of conspiring is very much a notion that the human race is not unfamiliar with and it can in fact, be stated that conspiracies have had a significant impact on human relation as it has shaped beliefs, fears, hatred, segregation and much more. Apart from conspiracies with disastrous results causing much despair in human history, they have also led to the popularization of conspiracy theories which have occupied a well-known place in the culture of the modern world. Conspiracy thinking occupies a prevalent place in popular society which is evident from the number of theories that circulate amongst the masses that speak of secret plans of world domination, suppression of information and criminal activities committed by trusted leaders.

The term ‘conspiracy theory’, in modern culture, has become a derogatory term and is used to describe any theory that attempts to illustrate certain events as outcomes of some kind of secret conspiracies. Their portrayal in forms of popular culture along with the increasingly multiplying numbers of bizarre theories that can easily be dismissed have added to the ridicule and mockery that are so often associated with conspiracies. Despite the contempt that is attached to them, such theories still occupy a significantly wide place in modern culture and their position in the civilized society of contemporary world can, to a certain scope, be considered indispensable.

It is not difficult to comprehend that conspiracies have been in existence and operational in the evolution of modern society. Secret groups, undisclosed arrangements and covert missions have been known to have taken place in times of war, political rivalries and affairs of the same nature. To deny that conspiracies very much exists in a given society would become inaccurate as withholding certain information and secret planning are common aspects of societal affairs. Criminal activities that may include theft, murder and other means of illegal operations are thus, means of conspiracies that may occur on a regular basis in modern communities. However, such characteristics of undisclosed activities cannot constitute the makings of what is considered to be a conspiracy theory. Thus, what constitutes and differentiates a conspiracy from a conspiracy theory can be based on the subject matter contained in the conspiracy itself. Conspiracy theories are often associated with the belief that there are sinister forces deliberately working against the interest of the world population and that events and disasters are all somehow interconnected and planned by the powerful forces who seek to rule over the general public. Thus, the unlikely nature of such elaborate conspiracies can be credited to the derogatory status of conspiracy theories among civilized societies.

With the immense advancement in electronic media and technological inventions, conspiracy theories have been given a platform for manifestation which have not been witnessed in previous eras. Contemporary society has identified the term ‘conspiracy theory’ in a somewhat deprecating manner ; the term is usually used to describe any theory that attempts to describe and illustrate events as the outcome of secret planning and hidden conspiracies. Hence, the term is used dismissively and to call something a ‘conspiracy theory’ immediately implies its implausibility and accordingly, calling

someone a ‘conspiracy theorist’ would also imply his being associated with a state of some type of paranoia. However, as conspiracy theories have been in existence even before the invention of the popular media in the form of computer technology, it has to be noted that such theories have had a wide range of following among the masses and have been taken to be topics of hazardous and consequential nature as much emphasis was laid on their plausibility.

The number of conspiracy theories that have surfaced are numerous ; some may seem rational given the amount of research and information that have been gathered while some theories may easily and immediately be dismissed as results of obsession and delusion over aspects that one cannot control. Thus, when something is given the term ‘conspiracy theory’, the conventional perception expected on the part of the general audience would be to not take such a theory as a subject that needs further study or attention. However, it is not always an easy task to control what one believes and thus, it is not difficult to comprehend the continued existence of conspiracy theories in society. Often, people are not always in liberty of what they choose to believe in ; while some may be quick to dismiss, ridicule and mock the very premise of conspiracy theories, others may find them practical and even operational given the amount of ‘evidence’ that may be gathered in favour of the possibility of the conspiracy. Thus, the never-ending cycle of conspiracy theorizing , no matter how illogical and questionable they may seem, is often accompanied with its own share of believers and followers.

Conspiracy theories can exist in any part of the world and they can come in many forms. But mostly, they are likely to target government officials and power

agencies as perpetrators of events that has impact on a large amount of people. Peter Knight has highlighted :

Opinion polls conducted in Germany in 2003 indicated that one in five Germans believes that the U.S government was behind the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, with one-third of Germans under the age of thirty believing in the theory. A 2004 poll found that half of the New York City residents believe that U.S leaders “knew in advance the attacks were planned ...[and] that the U.S government either actively assisted in the September 11 attacks or deliberately allowed them to happen because it wanted to go to war with the Middle East. (165)

The basic assertion of conspiracy theories is based on the belief that there are sinister forces that plan to bring about world domination through manipulation, annihilation and oppression of the masses. Such belief is associated with stern confidence that the forces behind the conspiracy are few in number and are in fact, the wealthiest elites of the world who control the world economic and political transactions and operations. World leaders including political personalities, religious leaders, influential people in entertainment and owners of world organizations become targeted in conspiracy theories as the masterminds or agents of the elaborate scheme . Undisclosed information , secret gatherings, deliberate manipulation of information and cover-ups are what conspiracy theorists aim to uncover and from the amount of research and evidence that they gather, it is understandable that certain conspiracy theories can become frighteningly convincing and compelling.

In 1964, Richard Hofstadter has offered an explanation of conspiracy theories and why they should not be held with high esteem in society. The essay titled “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” chronicled the somewhat complicated history of how conspiracy theories came to be as he duly explored the different cultural, political and religious developments that brought about panic, hysteria and uproar within civilized organizations. Dealing with issues such as immigration, Freemasonry and Mormonism, Hofstadter laid emphasis on the tendency to over-exaggerate and tendency to be suspicious of events that have large amount of impact. Hofstadter claims that the accused conspirators are in reality, a reflection or self-projection of the paranoid themselves. Thus, the essay was based primarily on psychological analysis and it aimed at the explanation and examination as to why conspiracy theories are merely a product of psychological disorders. Much of what Hofstadter highlights in his essay about the paranoia that associates conspiracies is undoubtedly shared by many as the term is used dismissively and with contempt. Mental illness continues to be claimed as the source for believing in conspiracies and efforts that are taken to inform others of the conspiracy tend to be met with ridicule.

As Charles Pigden has stated, “The conventional wisdom on conspiracy theories is that they ought not to be believed.” (219) Thus, calling someone a ‘conspiracy theorist’ would suggest that the person is “irrational, paranoid or perverse.” However, it is important to note that those who claim to be conspiracy theorists not only comprise disturbed individuals and victims of paranoid delusions ; it is to be noticed that many individuals who dedicate themselves to conspiracy theories are sane, educated and knowledgeable people that have compiled numerous amounts of research that are



intelligible to say the least. The same can be said for individuals that believe in conspiracy theories. As such theories are often hugely accompanied with what are claimed to be ‘proofs’ and ‘evidence’. And as supporting data have a tendency to sound logical and even possible, the thinking that sinister forces are plotting against the world population becomes an understandably widespread belief among the people.

One of the most dominating and widely believed conspiracy theories among other theories is the theory about the existence of extra terrestrial beings in outer space and that the world government is covering up and hiding the truth from the people. Theories about aliens and flying objects can be considered an effective example of the impact of conspiracy theories because such theories have existed since before the invention and popularity of electronic media. With the number of reported sightings that are accompanied with video footage of unidentified aircrafts and other means of documentation, the theory that there has indeed been visitors from outer space had never gone out of favour amongst conspiracy theorists. Although government officials have dismissed U.F.O sightings and other claims of their existence, alien conspiracy remains rooted in popular culture and the belief that the world government knows about alien existence and that they are deliberately allowing alien abductions to happen continues to remain a strong theory of conspiracy.

There are numerous accounts of U.F.O sightings around the world; some can easily be debunked with no need for investigation or analysis while some maybe difficult to comprehend even after detailed evaluation. One of the most well-known sighting of an U.F.O is the infamous incident at Roswell, New Mexico in 1947. The incident that has now been turned into a popular culture phenomenon continues to be one of the major

unsolved cases of alien related conspiracies. Speculations about what actually happened surfaced as many claimed that it was a real space craft that has crash landed. And after officials elegantly announced that it was a weather balloon and not an U.F.O, suspicion of the authority arose and there are even conspiracies that claim that the spaceship contained real life alien beings and that they are being kept hidden from the public. (Report of Air Force Research Regarding the 'Roswell Incident' [1994]) Such conspiracies have generated numerous science fiction in books and television which, in many cases contain conspiracies of their own about how they a dramatization or portrayal of the deceit that the world authorities are allegedly committing upon its citizens.

Such is the characteristic of conspiracy theories as one conspiracy is likely to lead to another. Hence, there is never just a single form of a conspiracy theory. For example, the conspiracy surrounding aliens and U.F.O is not confined within the speculation that the government is hiding their existence. There can be further conspiracy upon the matter as there can emerge a group of conspiracy theorists that have their basic belief situated on religious ideals. Such a group of believers may posit that there indeed are alien beings that closely watch and monitor the earth, but such beings are not extra – terrestrials but are , in actuality, demons from another realm that seek to deceive human – beings by promoting the belief that the universe was not the creation of God. Such type of conspiracy usually tend to believe in the theory that world leaders, including religious leaders, are involved and are active members of an occult secret society that worships the devil and are continuously promoting evil through seemingly innocent and harmless means. Those theory can, nevertheless, lead to another which in turn can lead to the next. And in some cases, the conspiracy theorists themselves are

accused of being the part of the conspiracy by other theorists. Thus, the never-ending cycle that is conspiracy theorizing continues to spiral and becomes an aspect of modern society that can never seem to be diminished nor taken up as serious news.

Whatever a conspiracy theory maybe composed of, they can be said to have one thing in common which is the supposed exploitation, oppression and domination of the world citizens through any means possible. Subscribing to conspiracy theories would mean that one has a very negative and cynical view of life as the mistrust of authority and the powerful in society is the very premise around which conspiracy theories are built. However, it is still found that a significant number of individuals continue to believe in conspiracy theories and even the theories that seem to be based on the most illogical and unbelievable factors continue to have their fair share of followers. Polls taken now and then have revealed that there are many people will believe conspiracy theories that may sound to be the most absurd and ridiculous. For example, a poll taken in 2013 by the Public Policy Polling revealed that there were American citizens who believe in the theory that there are ‘lizard people’ who are gaining control of our societies . Another 5% of the voters believed that the fumes left behind the trails of aeroplanes are toxic chemicals that are deliberately planted by the government. (Williams) Thus, it can be claimed that conspiracy theories have a quality about them that is evidently alluring to people.

Conjectures about conspiracies are known to crop up in times of fear and uncertainty such as terrorist attacks, financial crisis and other such events that have major impact on the public. In such times of public unrest, people may look for answers as to why such events have to occur and conspiracy theories, rational or irrational in

their workings, may provide some type of answer for such people who are desperately looking for explanations. Such state of uncertainty and terror maybe one attribute of why conspiracy theories are so ingrained in the consciousness of the public. Thus, it is not so surprising that many conspiracy theories and theorists are linked with psychological studies and such studies often conclude that the belief in conspiracies are traits of paranoia and delusional fantasies. Christopher Thresher -Andrew had written :

We find these theories and those believe them incredibly resilient to counter – argument, driven by an often fanatical belief in their version of the truth , coupled with a heavy political over-tone in that their opinions need to be heard. We see an interesting combination of cognitive biases, personality traits and other psychological mechanisms at play in the formation, propagation and belief in the conspiracies. (6)

Thus, from the perspective of psychological analysis, conspiracy theories and those who believe them see themselves as the few who seek the truth, in whose hands the future of the human race depends. The act of conspiracy theorizing is commonly attributed to mental disability to comprehend the truth and although it can be argued that human beings have a natural tendency to be sceptical and suspicious of things that are done in secrecy, it can be accurate to state that conspiracy theories take suspicions to the extreme. Robert Brotherton has noted:

In conspiracist rhetoric, the mainstream explanation is usually termed the *official* story. This disparaging label is intended to imply that the explanation is merely an account that happens to be proffered by some official source, and so should

not be trusted. Indeed, a conspiracy theory need not offer a coherent, fleshed out alternative scenario. It may simply be based around the allegation that something is wrong with the official story. (10)

Being constantly fuelled by electronic media and other forms of culturally diverse ideals and concepts, conspiracy theories continue to maintain their distrust and suspicion of society and all the advancements that come with it. For example, a new artist in the music industry may attain fame and fortune in a relatively short period of time; a conspiracy may emerge upon the artist's rise to stardom as musicians are often said, by conspiracy theorists, to have done something to gain the fame that they are now enjoying. Such accusations may involve 'selling of one's soul to the devil' as many conspiracy believers are in the opinion that the singers and entertainers have gained their fame through sacrificial rites within an occult system. A further conspiracy upon such matter may include the theory that famous and influential people from the entertainment business are subliminally promoting sinister ideals to the public through music, film, television and lifestyles. Brotherton writes :

Typically only events of obvious national and international significance attract conspiracy theories, such as terrorist attacks, natural disasters, disease pandemics, the deaths of celebrities and plane crashes. These kinds of events are profoundly shocking, have a large impact on public consciousness, and receive extensive media coverage. In fact, the larger the impact, the more likely an event is to garner conspiracy theories. (10 – 11)

With the influence of the media being felt strongly in popular culture, audiences are evidently driven and swayed towards whatever is being exposed the most. Thus, news and reports that have the most impact are often associated with conspiracies as they are believed to be staged events or outcomes of baleful plotting on the part of the elites that are supposedly behind every significant event. It is often understood that conspiracy theories are vastly influenced and fuelled by the electronic media and hence, they are a relatively modern invention even though many conspiracy theories have existed even before the invention of the internet. With the media being a highly significant aspect of civilization, it serves as both a platform for conspiracy theorists to flourish and also a target for theorists as the media is often claimed to play a major role in conspiracies.

However, it is not just headlines that attract conspiracies ; conspiracy theories can crop up anywhere as they usually believe that everything that occurs is somehow intended. Keeping a secret plan hidden can be difficult in real life, especially if such a plan is elaborate in its action and intention. On the contrary, conspiracy theories are highly suspicious of all events and are bent on the idea that occurrences and happenings are somehow, all orchestrated and elaborately planned. It is believed that the conspiracies are carried out on a daily basis so, it is often believed that there are no accidents, coincidences or mistakes and that every small detail each have a role to play in the conspiracy. It is thus, believed by conspiracy theorists that every fact about human civilization that is known by man is only a fabrication that has been forced upon the race. Jon W. Anderson states :

Because it is the extreme that attracts media attention, the new and dramatic, the full range of conspiracy theories is rarely brought into focus. Only the wildest make it over the threshold of media attention; the routine, everyday sorts of speculation on which conspiracy theories draw, which they occasionally inflate and with which they are continuous never make it, or are pushed to the side as "normal." Thus the "abnormal" designation, as "paranoid style," slips past easily, lazily, as a self confirming hypothesis. (96)

Anderson's claim that conspiracy theories are sociological rather than psychological are true to a considerable extent; those who believe in conspiracies tend to have in mind a certain concept of a civilization in which the ruling class exploits the citizens although the number of citizens may outnumber those in power. The existence of societies or organizations that keep their aims and ideals hidden seem to be a dominating figure in the area of conspiracy theorizing. Popular among such 'secret societies' that are believed to be fully operational in world affairs may include the Illuminati, the Freemasons, Bohemian Grove amongst others. According to believers, the intention of such groups are simple; world domination.

Of course, the existence of such mentioned groups cannot actually be considered secret as they have been known to exist. The belief and contention of conspiracy theories lie behind the fact that the procedures and functions of such groups are never truly made known to the public. Unlike governments that are functioning all over the world, 'secret societies' do not take the consent of the population and the outcomes of their meetings are mostly in favour of them and them alone. Such thinking on the part of conspiracy theorists may, on most occasions, be considered irrational and attributed to

paranoia as members of such groups are more often than not respectable and influential individuals in society. Thus, according to conspiracies, world leaders who are wealthy and famous are driven and motivated by the sole purpose and desire for gaining more wealth and power and as powerful elites have unlimited means to influence the masses including the media and all forms of entertainment and technology, coercing the world population without their being aware becomes a central feature.

James Vaughn writes about the Bohemian Club :

During my own full participant study were met: Presidents of the United States of America, Speakers of the U. S. House of Representatives, Secretaries of: Defence, State, Treasury, and Energy, and Directors of the CIA. I also met Directors of some of the largest U.S. Corporations involved in: banking, development, military contracts, insurance, transportation, communications and energy. Several individuals present during this field study were identified as judges, elected state officials, lobbyists, famous entertainers, and academics from some of the most prestigious universities in the United States. (86)

Although the list of members that include Presidents may lead the club to be revered as an exclusively prominent group of individuals who engage in a process of coming up with a shared system of developmental sketches, the elitist and wealthy number of members also lead to suspicion and mistrust upon the group. Many might agree upon the notion that there is indeed a certain barrier that is present between those who have power in society and those who do not. Thus, it is only natural that, among individuals who belong on the non-ruling class, there is a predisposition to have misgivings about



the wielding of power that is exercised by those who rule. As such, the meetings of Presidents, intellectuals, bankers, entertainers and other wealthy individuals are inevitably met with some level of doubt and distrust because the convention among conspiracy theorists is that - what good can come about from a secret gathering of individuals who have more than they can spend while many struggle to make a living in modern society.

Theorists of conspiracies posit that the secret plotting and secrecy that is being carried out is not merely an attempt at criminal activities that can take place anywhere; the alleged conspirators are held by theorists as having not simply a selfish and corrupt agenda. Rather, conspiracy theories view the world in terms of a very pessimistic concept where the general population fall prey to the deceitful and vindictive workings of evil forces. Conspirators are said to have no disregard for people's suffering as they carry out their plans that threatens the well-being of the populace. Such traits are, to a great extent, influenced by religious beliefs as the conspirators are often held as the incarnation of all that is evil and who seek to destroy and annihilate all that is good.

Conspiracy theories are known to be greatly associated with what are claimed to be 'proof' and 'evidences' that can expose the conspiracy; such type of 'evidence' that are found abundantly are rarely accountable. An example of such type of evidence that is commonly found may come from the American entertainment industry; if a musician is spotted doing certain hand gestures while during a performance, and if that artist is known to be relatively successful, conspiracy theories may crop up regarding the odd gestures the artist was making as an indication and confirmation of his being involved in the secret society that requires a person to 'sell his soul' in order to gain fame and fortune. And then the same artist would be linked to another artist that have been doing

the same hand gestures and the conspiracy spreads as musicians are 'revealed' and 'confirmed' to be in the same occult system that intends to enslave and exploit the masses while they establish themselves as royalty. The same can be said for other types of conspiracy theories as they are known to escalate quickly and are prone to linkages with other theories that can make matters very difficult to comprehend and the level of believability, thus, decreases. It is, however, important to acknowledge that conspiracy theories are diverse and may come in many forms and styles, such that conspiracy theories may not develop and generate in the same way or to the same exact extent as other theories of the same nature.

One of the main difficulties in dealing with conspiracy theories can be the fact that they are extremely hostile to any form of counter-argument or correction. Any argument made against the plausibility of the conspiracy are often taken as being part of the very conspiracy that is being carried out. Thus, persuasions aimed at the dismissal of conspiracy theories are often known to fail. Even when counter-arguments are made by means of factual truth and reliable data, it is likely that such agencies are taken to be working in favour of the conspirators or the arguments are simply dismissed by means of stating that the counter-beliefs are just a fabrication and that it has been forced upon the minds of doubters of the conspiracy. As such, it is often futile to argue against conspiracy theories as it is a common factor that there will arise another conspiracy in the light of the conspiracy that had just been debunked.

Despite the faulty features that are associated with conspiracy theories such as unreliable data, unlikely nature of their calibre and involvement of outer-worldly concepts, their popularity and allure seems unable to disappear completely from the face

of civilized existence. And although much of the known conspiracy theories maybe regarded as far-fetched and unbelievably astonishing, it is important to acknowledge that there exists, in the realm of conspiracy theorizing, an intelligible and noteworthy side that is worth a second look. It should not be over looked that there are conspiracy theorists who have engaged themselves in analytical research and careful study before putting forth their theories. As John W. Anderson writes :

Conspiracy theories, before they adopt particular psychological styles and features (from paranoid to super – rational), are fundamentally sociological, not psychological, phenomena. They arise in exclusion and proceed as information-seeking on the part of the outs about the ins. So, minimally they should be informed by conventions of such behaviour and even provide a unique window into it. (96)

Although most conspiracies view the world in a pessimistic perspective, one of their main appeals can be the fact that they are in the interest of the common man. A person who believes that there is a conspiracy within society and acts upon it in order to bring about a end to the deceit cannot to be simply dismissed and regarded as a mentally disturbed person; such a person can be regarded as acting out from the goodness of his heart as he believes that he doing what he knows is best for the people. For example, a theorist of conspiracies regarding a terrorist attack may point his finger towards government officials as being perpetrators of the conspiracy which will, of course, be denied. But the research garnered by the theorists, if done based on analytical factual grounds, may reveal information that has been deliberately kept form the public; information that would not have been approved of if the public was made aware. Even if the information that have surfaced may not lead to the exposition of the conspiracy, it

will undoubtedly lead to the revelation of important data that may concern a large amount of people. Thus, the task of conspiracy theorizing can have significant bearings on cultural and political spheres. If stripped of the title ‘conspiracy theory’, the amount of research and investigation that contributes to the making of a conspiracy theory can prove reliable sources for the study, understanding and critique of human relations and the construction of institutions. Conspiracy theories are much founded on the influence of the media, they have developed a tendency to be irrational in form and are rarely associated with accountable facts. As Charles Pigden explains :

To call something a “conspiracy theory” is to suggest that is intellectually suspect; to call someone a “conspiracy theorist” is to suggest that he is irrational, paranoid or perverse. Often, the suggestion seems to be that conspiracy theories are not just suspect, but utterly unbelievable, too silly to deserve the effort of a serious refutation. Thus the tactic relies on the epistemic principle that in general, conspiracy theories ought not to be believed (that it is irrational to believe them), and indeed that they are mostly so irrational that they ought not be discussed, except perhaps as symptoms of some ideological malaise. (219)

Research done by conspiracy theorists may contain information and data that can prove to be significant in a number of ways but their association with the term itself will inevitably lead them, at some point, to be considered delusional and be seen as a type of outcast in society. A status of being known as a radical activist who dwells on delusional conceptions and false beliefs, are thus, often associated with being a conspiracy theorist.

In their task of exposing the truth that has been hidden from the world population, conspiracy theorists lay much emphasis on the theory that the public are being told only what the official are wanting them to know. Television, books, newspapers and magazines are often held to be playing one of the major roles in the mass coercion and persuasion of the masses. The idea that the forces of modern culture such as television and the media are leading their audiences into a particular direction is not so far-fetched as what is shown to the people are what naturally garners the most attention. Ben H. Bagdikian writes :

Each day, editors necessarily select some stories for emphasis, some for de-emphasis, and some for the waste basket. Certain kinds of stories, certain public figures, certain social data, certain analysts of social and political events are regularly on the network evening news and the front page, while other stories, spokesperson, and analysts are mentioned obscurely if at all. The main problem in the news today is not what is false, but what is missing. (51)

Further he writes :

Our mainstream media have fine figures to prove what the world looks like from the standpoint of policymakers in Washington, from the interplay of lawyer-lobbyists and legislators, from the opinions of conservative think tanks, the board rooms of corporations, and the floors of stock exchanges. But that is a long way from the compelling realities in which most of our citizens live. (55)

It is not difficult to comprehend that there are agencies that may deliberately be altering the informational data that are forwarded to the population. The intentions of

such agencies maybe political , commercial or economic and it may even be for the better functioning of society that they withheld information. But it cannot be denied that it violates a person's liberty as a citizen as it denies the right to information. Partial facts shown in the news and biased reporting may be able to sway viewers to a certain direction that is at par with official policies and as such, the media becomes a crucial instrument for the coercion of the public.

The theory of being 'brainwashed by television' thus, take form in the light of the influence of mainstream media. Conspiracy theorists hold that the general public are led astray from the real events that take place world-wide by means of being shown only those that the conspirators are allowing them to see. It is not that what is being shown in the media is entirely false, but the issue is that what is being shown may only be a fraction of the truth and only partial facts maybe included after alternative procedures have been taken. For instance, news about injustice and discrimination faced by ethnic communities in a capital state of a country maybe not be telecasted, and instead other news concerning positive aspects such as community development undertaken by leaders of the society maybe focused upon in order to maintain and promote a certain image. The reality surrounding bias news reporting that is a major area of concern for conspiracy theories may best be highlighted in the words of Bagdikian as he writes :

There is another reality, in our streets where millions sleep in doorways; where most children can no longer expect to live in families with one income or buy a house or go to a university; where the poor are getting poorer and the rich richer; where ever-more-lavish skyscrapers and luxury hotels casts shadows on deteriorating schools and libraries ; where air and water are increasingly unhealthy;

where thirty-seven million people have no health-insurance coverage; where millions of children in hopeless neighbourhoods with hopeless schools and no hopes for good jobs are killing themselves with drugs – drugs often imported from countries we favour because their governments call themselves anticommunist. (55)

It can be argued that there is a natural tendency in human-beings to have a distrust and suspicious outlook upon things that may not necessarily concern their consent as they may be exclusive to certain elites. If looked towards historical records, governments, organizations and powerful agencies have been known to fail that result in the ruin of countless communities and innocent people. One may look to the 9/11 terrorist attack which contains one of the most believed conspiracies. Many lives were lost in the attack on the Twin Towers which many held, was instigated by a desire and hunger for power of one nation over another. The attack was mourned on an international scale and people immediately looked for answers. The efforts that were taken after the tragedy, the man-hunt that ensued and the amount of hatred and prejudice that was felt amongst the citizens of the United States and also foreign countries led to a nation that was filled with hostility at the expense of many uninvolved individuals, and it can be accurate to state that violence and sadism occurred in direct or indirect relation to the terrorist attack. Terrorism and war can be one the more effective examples to indicate how government policies are not always in the best interest of the people. As such, conspiracy theories that crop up when government policies fail cannot altogether be condemned as they are mostly based on such grounds of injustice committed intentionally or unintentionally upon the common people.

Conspiracy theories of popular culture after the 21<sup>st</sup> century ranges from belief in secret societies that recruit singers and actors to lead the world into devil-worship, to figures of the Biblical Anti - Christ being manifested as influential leaders, to the First Lady of the United States of America secretly being a transgender male. As irrational and ridiculous as some of these theories may sound, it is noteworthy that that they can have significant bearings upon the culture from which they stem. Ray Pratt writes :

*each* of these works offer important insight on widespread fears in American culture of the 1990's that continue into the present moment. Each takes as profoundly significant the widespread belief in secret conspiracies, though each - while finding conspiracy beliefs important - also sees them as a manifestation of other, more complex developments in U.S and world political economy ... (3)

The conspiracy theory that political leaders like Vladimir Putin are in actuality 'lizard people' with the ability to shape-shift into human form may not necessarily provide an in-depth elucidation of Russia and its citizens but theories that sound equally absurd such as the First Lady being born a male can prove to reflect certain aspects of the nation's ideals. For example, same-sex marriage was legalized in 2015 with President Barack Obama playing a major role in its promotion. A conspiracy theory soon surfaced claiming that the First Lady, Michelle Obama, was a transgender male which would mean that the United States not only had its first African-American President but also its first homosexual President. The theory provided explanations for many people who had more than a few questions for the President's endless support to the movement which many saw as profane and sacrilegious. The theory, of course, is not as elaborate or profound as other theories, but it does provide a fairly good example of the cultural



uprising that occurs in the country and how there are conflicts amongst the citizens as there exist many that are not readily willing to accept the changes.

The media has, without a doubt, played one of the most significant roles in the very nature of conspiracy theories. The 21<sup>st</sup> century, in particular, has witnessed a phenomena that has changed the way of living for the entire population. The impact of the mass media has been a revolutionary milestone in the history of the human existence as a whole and it has inevitably shaped the way of thinking and daily lives of the public. The power that is at the disposal of the media is undeniably strong when it comes to conspiracy theories. Their part played in the formulation of conspiracy theories can be recognised as being composed of two factors. Firstly, conspiracy theories hold the belief that the world is governed by sinister leaders who continue to exploit, manipulate and control the world population by means of feeding them false beliefs and ideologies. Such fallacy are spread and enforced through the mass media. Thus, their role becomes one of the utmost importance. Secondly, the role of the mass media can be blamed for the spread of conspiracies in the first place. Taking advantage of the allure and popularity of conspiracy theories, there has been numerous attractions in popular culture that range from movies, television shows and books that deal with concepts of conspiracies. It is undeniable that the world of television have witnessed huge amounts of profit from adaptations of conspiracies such as science – fiction and the supernatural, and as audiences are willing to invest themselves into such portrayal of fantastical appeal, it becomes a norm that conspiracy theories continue to maintain their status of being omnipresent in culture.

Dominic Strinati has observed, “industrialisation and urbanisation gave rise to an atomised and anonymous mass ripe for manipulation, a mass market for the mass media best catered for by mass culture.” (10) The force of mass culture is felt in every aspect of modern civilization that has, to a considerable amount, altered the daily lives and thinking of the masses. Strinati has further written :

This audience is understood to be a mass of passive consumers, susceptible to the manipulative persuasions of the mass-media, acquiescent with the appeals to buy mass-produced commodities such as mass culture, supine before the false pleasures of mass consumption, and open to the commercial exploitation which motivates mass culture. (11)

Audiences in mass culture are understood to be a crowd that may easily be persuaded through commercial marketing and the same can be said for the concept of conspiracies where it is believed that the public is under the control of powerful figures through the mass coercion process that is executed through the armoury of the media. It has been a much accepted belief that conspiracy theories are a relatively modern invention that is conditioned and fuelled by the electronic media as technology has allowed for a vast number of data and information to circulate throughout the world. It is often argued that there is a definite and clear distinction between what is known as ‘popular culture’ and ‘highbrow culture’, ‘popular’ culture being the modernized form of culture that prevails in the present age. John Storey has written, “An obvious starting point in any attempt to define popular culture is to say that popular culture is simply culture that is widely favoured or well liked by many people.” (5) The statement can be further emphasized in the words of Dominic Strinati as he writes :

It is a culture which discourages the effort of thinking and creates its own emotional and sentimental responses. It does not demand that its audience thinks for itself, works out its own responses, and entertains responses which are intellectual and critical. In this sense, it begins to define social reality for the mass public. It therefore tends to simplify the real world and gloss over its problems...Also, just as it denies intellectual challenge, it tends to silence other opposing voices because it is a stultifying and pacifying culture. (13)

Many may identify conspiracy theories as a form of radical anti-government movement, which is one way of defining it, but it can also be defined as a form of resistance to the form of living that popular culture has brought about. Government policies, economic status, trade and commerce of a given community have definite bearings upon the culture of that community. The mentality of conspiracy theories may be that it comprises paranoid concepts and delusional thinking, but at its very basic premise, theories of conspiracy can be understood as means of critiquing a form of culture that has led and is continuously leading the human race to meet its downfall. It is often discussed that television, magazines and other forms of popular culture have stripped people of their individuality as certain norms and status quos are established. Taking the notion of appearance as an example, fashion trends are known to be popularized through means of the media and the public flocks to whatever is labelled to be 'trending'. People are constantly being told what is beautiful and what is not, they are told what they should be and what they should avoid to be, individual thinking and expression becomes a form of a rebellious concept that can lead to a person being known as an outcast in society. The mental conditioning that is very much functional in

popular culture thus, becomes at par and coherent with the theory of being “brainwashed” that have been popularized by conspiracy theories .

The role of ideologies becomes one of utmost importance in the understanding of conspiracy theories ; it is important that, in a conspiracy, the common citizen continues living with the belief that he or she is an independent individual, while in reality such people are being fed false ideologies and beliefs that are internalized in the subconscious mind which makes their existence unproblematic for the elite few who are in control of their existence. Such outlook upon the workings and functioning of human relations have been stressed upon by historians and philosophers through the ages. Challenging those in power and have misgivings about those who have authority is a common aspect of civilization ; class ranking and discrimination of a given culture is one important factor that has given rise to riots and man-made disasters of all kinds. Influential people throughout history have been known to critique, study, theorise and challenge the power relations that governs the very world that we live in and to claim that such theories are in direct relations may be unwise and difficult to justify, but it is significant that the most influential and noteworthy philosophical studies are needed to be explored and considered in order to understand the formations of conspiracy theories.

French philosopher Michel Foucault spent most of his career forensically critiquing the modern bourgeoisie capitalist state, including the police, law courts, doctors and psychiatrists. His goal, in general, was to work out how power works in society and changing it into a Marxist Utopia. Foucault’s works included aspects that refer to disciplinary powers wielded by institutions that are aided by the state. His works speak of how the rules made by such institutions have been ingrained into the minds of the

masses. Such concepts of being institutionalised in the daily lives of people can be identified with the concept of being ‘brainwashed’ by the governmental elites. By being ‘brainwashed’, it is meant that through the power of institutions that make the policies in society, people are made to believe what they are programmed to believe. In other words, individuality and free will are taken away in the face of authority who decides what a person should do or should not do. Much of Foucault’s ideas can thus, be identified with what conspiracy theorists are challenging in a culture where citizens are made subjects. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, he writes, “The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological’ representation of society ; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline’.” (194) as both the concept of power and knowledge, for Foucault, goes hand in hand it becomes significant that when only certain people control knowledge, oppression becomes a possibility. Thus, the need to be aware and vigilant of those that watch becomes a concern all of which can be adopted within the belief system of conspiracy theorizing.

The theory of Marxism can also be brought into light in order to explain the workings of conspiracy theories ; the theory of class struggle is a dominant feature in conspiracies and it is not uncommon that in the field of theoretical study, such characteristics of society are often featured. Peter Barry defines the aim of the theory of Marxism as , “to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the mass of production, distribution and exchange.” (150) The division of society in Marxist theory into the bourgeoisie, also known as the capitalist, and the proletariat which is the working class and wage labour can be identified and merged with the theories of conspiracies where world leaders are supposedly maintaining a status quo which keeps

the wealthy in power and the poor remain poor. The role played by ideology is emphasized in the works of prominent Marxist Louis Althusser who defines it as “a system (possessing its logic and proper rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts according to the case) endowed with an existence and a historical role at the heart of a given society.” (qtd in Barry 157) The discrimination that is witnessed between classes in a given society, the role and importance of ideologies that are exercised along with the disciplinary functions that Foucault has elaborated in his works and also his metaphor of the Panopticon provide for significantly analytical insight into the workings and functioning of conspiracy theories.

Foucault’s theory of the Panopticon allows for a wider exploration of the relationships between systems of social control and people in a disciplinary situation and also the power-knowledge concept. Acceptance of regulations and submissiveness is the end result of surveillance from the Panopticon ; a normalization of sort, stemming from the threat of discipline. Power comes from the knowledge that the observer has accumulated from his observation in a systematic fashion and thus, suitable behaviour is achieved not through total surveillance but by panoptic discipline and in doing so including a population to conform by the internalization of this reality. Foucault writes :

The Panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon ; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide – it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap. (200)

The architectural structure of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon thus, provides a useful perspective on the functioning of society and Foucault describes its major effect as , "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power." (201) This notion of "automatic functioning of power" induced in individuals can again be analysed in terms of conspiracy theories and their belief systems. A foremost concern of conspiracy theorists is seen in the fact that citizens of a given society are stripped of their privacy and personal space. The feeling of being watched and monitored by powerful forces that knows every detail of one's life is a common trait that can be seen in various conspiracy theories.

In conspiracy theories, a popular metaphor used to define the common man and the corporate heads is that the common man is the 'sheep' and those that rule are often termed 'wolves', and thus a metaphor for the common conspiracy that seeks to make people aware of the injustice that is prevalent would consist of how the wolves are few but smart and how the sheep are never made aware that they outnumber the wolves and can easily overthrow them if only they worked together and join forces against the dominant force. Thus, conspiracy theorists maintain that is an objective for the wolves to make sure that the subjects, the sheep, are occupied in material things and other such means of distraction so that their need for a social revolution and change will not be realised. Hence, the different forms of social media becomes an important aspect for conspiracy theories as their utility and functions are seen as contributing to the exploitation and mental degradation of the masses.

As the relation between conspiracy theories and the analytical forms of social critique would further reveal, it may be justified to state that conspiracy thinking in

popular culture is a means of resisting social construction in one's culture and a search for identity that has been lost in the process of being conditioned and influenced by the prevailing ideologies of society. The conspiracy thinking community as a whole, whether they be connected as a group or stand individually, are indeed not taken seriously by the general masses of contemporary societies. Due to their description as something radical and irrational, most individuals do not care to look any further into the matter of conspiracy theories other than what is being shown to them.

Themes that concentrate on conspiracy theories in movies, television shows, books and all sorts of entertainment in popular culture gives a clear view of the force of conspiracy thinking in contemporary society and how they are perceived by the common folk. Writers of the popular genre in novels, movies and television series alike have indeed seen immense popularity and success in their careers as the stories that they compose, which are in the nature of conspiracies and the impact that they may have on the public, can be identified with the dominant societal aspects of civilization that has to do with world government and their policies in maintaining law and order that may not always be in the best interest of the citizens.

With the popularity of genre based fiction, novels with themes that involve conspiracies have been produced in a great number of detective stories, science fiction and other genres of the same nature. Although the very concept of conspiracies have been much utilized in forms of literature in earlier times, the mass produced forms of conspiracy fictions that are witnessing popularity in modern society can become greatly significant as they are known to portray the belief system of conspiracies and their ways of thinking that are prevailing in contemporary society. An important characteristic of



popular literature is the form of non-stop action and suspense that keeps readers engaged and interested in the plot of the story. Gaining profit from mass consumption is an important characteristic of popular fiction and it is one of the main reasons why they are not taken seriously as literature. Popular fiction writers are known to benefit from their utilization of the current affairs that may be dominant at a particular point of time. And as David Grover and Scott McCracken write :

Interest in the audience of popular fiction has been part of a critical shift in the last half century that has sought to take ordinary readers seriously rather than condemning their bad taste. But the reader is as much a sociological and a historical problem as a literary one and studies of readers have often emerged from outside literary studies. (7)

As the audience is an integral part of the success of a novel, it is only natural that an author of the popular genre writes in accordance with the interest of his readers. The intrigue and interest of the people have been seen manifested in many works of popular culture and literature and they are celebrated to a great extent amongst their many followers and admirers. Although genre fiction are not considered to be literature by many, their appeal and popularity amongst the public is noteworthy in the study and analysis of a given culture.

As mentioned, the role of the mass media in the realm of conspiracy theories can be seen from two different perspective which are, firstly, that the media is a weapon for conspirators and secondly, that the mass media is responsible for the creation of conspiracies in the first place. Claiming that conspiracy thinking is encouraged by the

influence of the media is accurate and applicable to a considerable degree; movies about alien existence, possible time travel, apocalyptic disasters and the like are continuously produced, books and novels are continuously written that deal with mystery, suspense and deceit which are all aspects that can be based on real life experiences and events. Some forms of popular fiction in the thriller genre are known extensively to encourage the form of conspiracy thinking as they are often taken to be true by many readers. For instance, the suspense novel *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) by popular writer Dan Brown came under much controversy for its depiction of aspects of Christianity and of the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, the book was not only criticized and disapproved but was actually banned from some communities for its misinterpretation as there were fears that the novel might lead to Christians questioning their faith and beliefs. The impact of Dan Brown's novels is felt similarly strong in his 2000 mystery thriller *Angels and Demons*. The novel dealt with the aspects of secret societies and their impact upon the world government and how cover-ups are maintained on an international scale. The book saw great success and it has such an impact upon popular culture that there were and undoubtedly, still are those who hold that the books of Dan Brown confirm the existence of conspiracies and that Brown's works are a depiction of how they have existed throughout the development of civilization. The same can be said about the film industry where conspiracy theories are not uncommon. Various movies are said to be representations of conspiracies and some films and televisions are said by conspiracy thinkers to predict the future that will involve certain events that will leave a major impact on the people. Such events may include disasters like terrorist attacks, man-made tragedies, death of important people or the destruction of nations.

The works of American writer Sidney Sheldon is also not a stranger to the themes of conspiracies. In Sheldon's novels ranging from *Bloodline* (2004), to *If Tomorrow Comes* (1985) to *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* (2004), the theme of conspiracy remains a chief characteristic. Sidney Sheldon is regarded by many as one of the most successful thriller writers of his time. Also beloved and appreciated as a producer, Sheldon has had a large amount of impact upon genre based fiction and also popular culture as a whole. In his autobiography titled *The Other Side of Me* (2005), Sheldon writes in detail about how he and family had struggled to make a living for themselves during times of economic crisis. He writes, "America was going through a devastating crisis. The stock market had crashed five years before and thousands of banks had failed...We were in the grip of a disastrous depression. Former millionaires were committing suicides, and executives were selling apples in the street." (2) He also writes about how, just at seventeen he had attempted to commit suicide by means of taking sleeping pills and his father's alcohol only to be caught by his father who convinced him to give his life another chance. Before his status which he became known for, Sheldon held several jobs as a young boy due to the economic depression which greatly affected his family and his education. He held several jobs at the same time including jobs at factories, selling shoes, being a cloak-room attendant and a radio announcer. Added to the clinical depression that he was suffering from as a teenager, Sheldon was also known to have a bi-polar disorder but it was successfully treated with medication during the 1930's.

It is also important to note that Sheldon enlisted in the army before moving to New York city. Although his time in the army was short and uneventful, his brief

experience of the army life may have indirectly influenced his career as a story teller. Sheldon entered the entertainment industry as he started writing, directing musicals and movies. After winning awards and gaining much recognition for his works in television, Sheldon started writing novels. In 1969, his first novel *The Naked Face* was published for which he was nominated the Edgar Allan Poe Award . Then, his next novel *The Other Side of Midnight* was published which made it to the number one spot in *The New York Times'* best-seller list. His other novels that follow also made it to the same list and several of them were adapted into films and television series.

Sheldon's novels are mostly in the romantic thriller genre and he mostly writes in a manner that keeps readers engaged within the plot. His novels depict heroes and heroines who go through deception, conspiracy and disasters of all kinds, find love, passion and closure and eventually everything comes into order again. His most well-known titles, besides the afore-mentioned, include *A Stranger in The Mirror* (1976), *If Tomorrow Comes* (1985), *Memories of Midnight* (1991), *The Sands of Time* (1992) and *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* (2004) among others.

Sidney Sheldon undoubtedly has seen immense success from his fictional works but nonetheless, they are known less for their literary merit than for their reader appeal. This is so because of the accepted norm that distinguishes 'high-brow' literature and 'low-brow' literature. Sheldon has been known to produce works that have the same and typical form of thriller suspense and action that can also be seen in other works of popular fiction. The easily accessible nature of his works, their being mass- consumed and mass-produced , their being read for the sole purpose of pleasure and the fact that they are easily understandable and relatable are the factors that had led to Sidney

Sheldon being a writer and personality that comes under the realm of popular culture and literature.

Although the plots in Sheldon's novels cannot be expected to be included or mentioned in the American literary canon, it is undeniable that their recognition has been felt in popular culture and literature and one can identify that they will not be diminished any time soon. Given that Sheldon comes from the realm of what is identified as 'popular' literature, his works are indeed identified with typical popular literature style and diction. In a Sidney Sheldon novel, one may expect to find beautiful women with lovely and unpredictable personalities, handsome heroes with abilities and qualifications that are not easily accessible to others, evil and sadistic villains, unimaginable wealth, fame and fortune, lustful interactions, extravagant trips around the world, murder, rape, conspiracies of personal and world-wide measures and vengeance. Although literary critics may be quick to dismiss the works of Sidney Sheldon with claims that his works lack philosophical aspects that are expected to be found in serious literature, it cannot be denied his works are celebrated by many as his style of writing has an allure that keeps readers engaged and transfixed within the story.

Sheldon, whether he produced his novels for commercial and financial success alone, have seen immense popularity from his conspiracy themed books and this success can be greatly attributed to how he depicts the agenda of conspiracies. Sheldon's novels like *The Doomsday Conspiracy* (1991) and *Windmills of the Gods* (1987) contain aspects related to the immense power wielded by world leader upon the people who are never made aware of the decisions that are being taken that concerns their future and well being. Sheldon is not a known conspiracy theorist, but he is a product of economic

downfall, war and clinical depression, thus his novels may be seen from a perspective that is for the common man and not the high-brow audience.

Just as much as conspiracy theories are in favour of the common man, the novels of Sidney Sheldon can be considered to be for the common man as well. Although Sheldon can be accused of taking advantage of the fears and anxiety of people, it can be said that the type of conspiracies that Sheldon depicts in his novels can reveal much about the system of conspiracy thinking that many people hold to be true. Popular fiction like the works of Sheldon are known for their fast paced action that are unrealistic and somewhat predictable. But they are also known to be portrayals of what people believe and what they wish to read about. Genre based writers like Sheldon are giving to readers what they wish to read which are composed of what are being held important and with high esteem. Thus, even though the conspiracies that Sheldon writes about in his novels may not be held as depiction of truth by the writer himself, they are indeed a reflection of the characteristics that are dominant in the society.

Conspiracy fiction have evolved into a genre of its own in popular culture and their style and forms of plot construction include aspects of unravelling secrets that have to do with history, politics and organizational institutions. The common theme in such works is that the characters unravel the conspiracy, encountering difficulty as they work to uncover lies, deception and manipulation as the truth and the lies become entangled amidst a series of events. Although conspiracy fiction is also often known as paranoid fiction, its depiction of society can become a sources of analytical study in connection with the styles of conspiracy thinking that exists among the public. Sheldon's depiction of government deception, cover-ups and elite exercise of power can indeed prove

effective in the understanding of the fears and suspicion that are associated with the belief of conspiracies in contemporary societies.

The theory of class struggle, the injustice brought upon by class distinction and the discipline and coercion that is internalized by the people by means of ideology that are elaborated in the works of Marxism and the works of Foucault can thus, be analysed in term of conspiracy thinking that are prevalent in popular literature. Relationships that have been built and the power structures that operate within have been a dominant topic of discourse since the establishment of any form of human relation. Aspects of conspiracy theories can also be seen at par with theoretical studies as they can also be seen as a critique and analytical study of human relations in a given society like the theories of class struggle and role of ideologies. Historical, political, economic and scientific developments that have surfaced have a lot to do with the structure and functioning of mankind and to study its place in the universe and as such, all realms of research and study can be included inside the domain of conspiracy thinking.

The formation of societies and organizations have undoubtedly seen changes and modifications that involve the influence of human consciousness. As such, certain constructions that have nothing to do with human nature may have been created that is believed to be followed and adhered to in order to survive in civilization. Thus, forms of understanding the social construction mechanism, whether blatantly suggestive or theoretically analysed, are indeed an important part of contemporary culture which can prove to have room for improvement in various fields. Therefore, it may be accurate to state that conspiracy theories, in their challenge and opposition of the status quo, aim for equality, justice, peace and the upliftment of mankind and their own individuality.

The perspective of conspiracy theories in such a way can provide a more rational and relevant description of modern society that can be seen in accordance with the theoretical aspects of philosophers whose studies remain relevant in all areas of civilization. Conspiracy thinking, due to psychological explanations and reasoning, is known to be associated with mental illness, but conspiracy theorists who are well known to be brilliant in their areas of expertise have been known to appear with accurate data in support of their theories. As such, among groups of the more intelligible conspiracy theorists, an important slogan that is a means of encouragement is that citizens should be vigilant and not paranoid; by this it means that conspiracy thinkers encourage people to research the theories that they have come up with before blindly believing in them. Hence, conspiracy theorizing can be identified to be a form of knowledge-seeking activity that seeks to make right the wrongs that has been committed.

The dissertation shall seek to examine three novels of Sidney Sheldon namely, *The Doomsday Conspiracy* (1991), *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* (2004) and *Windmills of the Gods* (1987), as they remain one of the most mass produced and mass consumed forms of popular culture. As conspiracy theories have attained a relatively new form of expression and representation in popular culture, the study will attempt to trace different dynamics of the novels in the light of popular and dominant influence.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Society and Suspicion of Authority**

This chapter, through the analysis and examination of Sidney Sheldon's novel *The Doomsday Conspiracy* (1991), will explore and analyze the impact of one of the most popular and undoubtedly, one of the most believed conspiracy theories which is the theory of the existence of alien beings. The theory that there are extra terrestrial intelligence that constantly monitors earth has been a popular belief even before the existence of the popular mass media and with the invention of the electronic communication and media, the belief has increased to such a point where it has become difficult to distinguish between what is believable and what is simply paranoid conception

The theme of alien conspiracy is widely utilized in literature. Sidney Sheldon published his novel *The Doomsday Conspiracy* in 1991 which remains one of his most well-known and celebrated. The novel was written in a time when sightings of Unidentified Flying Objects were becoming a common and frequent occurrence throughout the world. Stories of the government covering up remains of UFOs crash landing on earth circulated among the masses and it became quite a norm in society. In *The Doomsday Conspiracy*, Sidney Sheldon portrays the contemporary American culture where there is, constantly, a belief that the general public has no knowledge of what is being done above and beyond what is made known to the people.

The conspiracy surrounding the theory of alien existence is primarily based on the premise that there are indeed, alien intelligence that more or less have come in contact with the earth but the world government have suppressed the information of the supposed contact that has been made and accordingly, the public is being deceived regarding the negotiations and policies that has thus been established. Alien conspiracy is

a rather wide subject as the analysis of the possibility of alien life can lead to fields outside the realms of scientific facts to the realms of history, archaeology and even religion. There exists cases of alien abductions and U.F.O sightings all over the world but such cases tend to remain a mystery as they are mostly unresolved. Conspiracy theorists are known to speculate that the governments from different countries of the world are conspiring to contain information about alien intelligence and that evidence of their existence has been hidden as to avoid the complications that may come with the public knowing about their existence. The conspiracy thinking does not simply end at the existence of alien beings ; believers of alien conspiracy tend to believe that the world governments have made arrangements so that abductions and probing on random citizens will be able to take place. Consequently, believing in the existence of extra-terrestrials becomes equivalent with the belief that the government is lying to its people and therefore, the figures of authority become subjects of suspicion and mistrust.

Theories about alien beings have been portrayed in various forms of entertainment and other forms of popular culture. Such depictions usually portray the possibility of the existence of alien forces from other planets and are usually based on accounts of the different theories surrounding UFO sightings, encounters and cases of alien abductions. Television dramas such as “The X- Files” (1993-2002) , which depicts the story of federal agents investigating the unsolved cases of paranormal nature, are very much beloved not only by Americans but also by audiences world-wide. Such dramas follow conspiracy theory storylines about extra-terrestrials and top secret government operations which are mainly based on hypothesis made in real life. Movies such as the “Men In Black” franchise, which are widely popular are also based on supposed encounters with secret

agents who dress in black and whose sole mission is to contain information about alien existence and to prevent the public from the knowledge of their operations. Peter M. Rojcewicz states that the origin of the Men In Black was established in the year 1952 in a period where there was a “rise of interest not only in flying saucers and their occupants but also in monsters and the fantastic in general.” (149) He further elaborates :

MIB have been reported to have arrived unannounced, sometimes alone or in two's, traditionally in three's, at the homes or places of employment of selected UFO witnesses and investigators or their research assistants, usually *before* the witness or researcher has reported the UFO experience of any kind. People have reported that MIB know more about them than the average stranger could possibly know, and thus MIB can possess an omniscient air. (150)

Such a theme of mysterious forces, that work secretly to contain the information regarding UFOs and the extra-terrestrial are thus translated and incorporated extensively in different forms of entertainment in movies and television.

As the name of Sidney Sheldon's novel *The Doomsday Conspiracy* (1991) indicates, conspiracy in the modern world is a dominating theme in the novel. The plot of the novel centres on an incident in Switzerland where it is reported that a weather balloon has crashed, which contained government equipment. The main protagonist is a man named Robert Bellamy who is a Commander in ONI office of Naval Intelligence. He is a war veteran who served in Vietnam alongside his friend Edward Whittaker. After Edward dies in the war, for which Robert was unintentionally responsible, he is

taken under the guidance of Edward's father Admiral Whittaker who eased his guilt and treated him like his own son.

Robert is badly injured during the war and those close to him believe that he will eventually die from his injuries, But Robert is miraculously nursed back to health by Susan who tends to him day and night. Robert and Susan fall in love and soon they get married. They live a blissful life until it is interrupted by Admiral Whittaker who recruits Robert for the National Security Agency. His work keeps Robert away from his wife most of time and Susan get increasingly tired of doing nothing but wait for a husband who could be anywhere in the world. She goes back to her job as a nurse and meets a new friend, a patient named Monte Banks.

Robert's work creates more and more distance between him and Susan and finally, the marriage ends. Susan marries the rich and powerful Monte Banks just as Robert had feared and he is left alone and open to be manipulated when Operation Doomsday begins. Robert is called by the NSA and assigned to locate eleven people who were on the Swiss bus who seemed to have witness the weather balloon incident. Since there is no information about the passengers on board, the assignment seems almost impossible. Robert is sceptical about his mission as he is not certain what the government wants with random people who only happened to see a weather balloon falling from the sky. But he is assured that the witnesses need only to be warned to not talk about the incident as it involved top secret instruments.

Although the assignment that has been placed upon him seemed an extremely difficult one, Robert soon encounters his first witness named Hans Beckerman, who was

the driver of the tour bus. Robert soon finds that it was not a weather balloon that has crash landed. Beckerman tells Robert that it was a spaceship that had crashed and that all the passengers saw it as well. However, when they drove to the site of the incident, the remains were gone. Robert gathers all the information he could from the driver and finds out that there had been ten witnesses. Before leaving, the driver gave Robert a small metallic fragment of the 'spaceship' and Robert moves not knowing what to believe.

Robert reports back to General Hillard, his superior in charge of his mission. General Hillard tells Robert that the driver was right and that it was actually an alien spaceship that had crashed. He told Robert that there had been "communications" with beings from another world and that it is their intention to take over earth. He, then, proceeds to tell him that the purpose of his mission to locate the witnesses and contain the information so that there would not be a public panic. Robert is sceptical about the intentions of government but General Hillard reminds him of his duties and tells him to locate and report to him whenever he finds another witness. Robert has no choice but to continue.

As Robert gathers information about the witnesses and their whereabouts, secret meetings are being held amongst world leaders. The meetings are presided over by a man named 'Janus', the same man that General Hillard reports to regarding Robert's actions and progress. As his investigation goes further, Robert learns from the witnesses that there were alien beings inside the spaceship and that there was an empty space inside the spaceship where a third alien might have been sitting or operating the ship. And as soon as a witness is found, Robert reports back to General Hillard without knowing that

each located witness is murdered by order of Janus and made to look like accidents. When Robert found his final witness, he learnt from him that there had been another woman among the passengers whom he had not located. As he is almost certain that he had located every individual on the tour bus, Robert decides not to inform General Hillard about the eleventh witness until he is certain himself. Thus, he informs Hillard that he has found the last witness, a man named Bushfekete.

Robert, searching for the eleventh witness, decides to go back to where he had started which was the residence of the bus driver. When he arrives, he finds out that Hans Beckerman had died due to a car accident. As Robert has been taught in his training that there were no coincidences and that if coincidences appeared, he was probably in a state of danger. Getting suspicious and feeling uneasy, Robert contacts all of the witnesses that he had located and he finds that all of them had been killed. Then, Robert realizes that his skills has been used to murder innocent people and also that he has become a target himself.

Robert runs from one country to another in a desperate attempt to save his life. He uses several passports and he soon realizes that if he continues on his own, there is a higher chance of him getting caught. So, he decides to hire a prostitute named Pier in Rome and he pays for her fortune. Robert asks her to go to Venice with him and she agrees although having doubts about the strange man who bought expensive jewellery for a prostitute. The police seem to be aware of every move that Robert makes so, Pier offers him a safe place to hide in her home town of Naples where they will stay at her mother's house. But after arriving and spending the night, the detectives found their location. Pier helps Robert escape although she had previously intended to turn him to

the police in the hope of getting a reward. She decided he was a good man who deserves to be free then, she helps him escape.

Robert escapes by means of an air balloon and he has no choice but to seek help from his ex-wife and her husband. Susan and Monte Banks boarded Robert on their ship called the 'Halcyon' where Robert is served a full meal and gets a good night sleep. Robert manages to escape once again when his location is infiltrated. Desperate, Robert goes to his old friend for help who is also in the same line of work as Robert, a Chinese man named 'Li Po'. Robert finds that Li is part of the conspiracy and he is the Chinese connection. He shoots Robert on the shoulder and the two engage in a deadly brawl. The injured Robert manages to over-power Li and he contacts the American Doctor stationed there in Paris. As suspected, the doctor reported immediately about the conversation he had just had with the fugitive but Robert outsmarts him. The doctor is made to tend to Robert's wound as a gun is pointed at him, and after he had finished he is tied to a chair. As he has lost a great amount of blood, Robert faints to the ground.

While unconscious, a woman's voice speaks to Robert through the crystal, the fragment from the spaceship. And upon waking up, he suddenly knows where to go and what to do. He contacts his mentor Admiral Whittaker and asks him to have General Hillard and Janus meet him in Switzerland.

Robert goes to Switzerland, to the crash site of the spaceship where the eleventh witness, the missing third alien had told him to go. He sees her waiting for him, taking the shape of a beautiful young woman. A helicopter soon arrives and Susan and Monte



Banks step out first. Followed by General Hillard and other officials. Susan screams, telling Robert to run for his life. Robert demands to see Janus and turns to the helicopter and sees his mentor, Admiral Whittaker .

Admiral Whittaker admits to Robert that he had been behind Operation Doomsday and that Robert's failed marriage was due to his constant interference by means of assigning Robert to impossible investigations. He turned to the alien and assured her that they were ready for war and that the planet belongs to humans who can do what they wish upon it. Then, the alien shows them a vision of what the earth will become if humans continue to live the way they do. She warns that the earth will become a desolate place if human beings do not change their ways. She tells them, "We have come to prevent you from destroying your planet. We are all part of one universe."

(430)

The Admiral is not convinced and is determined to overpower the extra-terrestrials. He orders Colonel Johnson to kill Robert but the Colonel instead tells the Admiral that he has been arrested. Admiral Whittaker is informed that all the members of his secret organization have been rounded up and that the organization will no longer be in existence. The mother ship of the aliens appears in the sky above them. The woman takes Admiral Whittaker, General Hillard and Monte Banks with her into the spaceship saying that they have much to learn. She urges Robert to let people aware of the dangers that come with exploitation of the planet and assures him that they will come back. The novel ends with Robert finding a new passion and purpose with the love of his life, Susan, by his side.

The novel can be said to be in the style and form of a typical genre based novel as it includes romance, action and suspense all displayed in fast-paced narration. Sheldon's portrayal of the popular concept of UFO conspiracies gives a vivid and accurate understanding of the belief system that is built around conspiracy theories that human beings are not alone in the universe. Those that hold the belief in the theories of alien existence are known to have a distrustful mind of officials and government policies and *The Doomsday Conspiracy* depicts such aspects that are associated with conspiracy thinking. In the novel, trusted government officials become the antagonists as they are the culprits to the conspiracy, influential and wealthy business men play significant roles for the execution of the plan to deceive the world and innocent civilians are at the mercy of those in power if they happen to know more than they are allowed to know.

Topics regarding conspiracy theories, especially ones that involve alien beings, typically look towards the West and the United States in particular. Washington D.C and Area 51 in Nevada are among the many places where conspiracy thinkers believe that the government is hiding evidence of supernatural beings that have visited earth. Dwight C. Smith Jr writes, "Americans have always been sensitive to threats from rival national interest...a recurring apprehension that someone "out there" is an organized, secret alien group that is poised to infiltrate our society and to undermine our fundamental democratic beliefs." (76) Smith's statement regarding the sensitivity of the American nation maybe elaborated by means of the fact that the American government is perceived as a world super power, and is thus continuously apprehensive when it comes to outside forces that may pose a threat to their forces. Smith further elaborates :

There is a broad, though shallow thread of willingness to believe in the alien conspiracy in public opinion. At the fringes are anxious persons of varying political persuasions, whose apprehensions approach paranoia as they detect their favourite conspiracies behind every public event. But even in the middle “sensible” ground, it remains painfully obvious that Americans are susceptible to the lures of conspiracy advocates when their accusations touch the right cultural anxieties. (76)

Smith traces the history of threats that America as a nation has faced. These include - the Bavarian Illuminati in the 1700’s which was seen as a threat to the church, the Red Scare in the 1900’s and organized criminal conspiracies that led to the creation of the ‘Mafia’. Smith attributes such historical occurrences as to why they spread and so, conspiracy theories have become popularized in ones culture. Indeed, cultural uprisings tend to have impacts on the common people that can lead to unnecessary panic and disturbances. Organized criminal activities even on a local scale can become highly dangerous and the situation can become even more chaotic due to needless interference and alarm on the part of the civilians. Although many conspiracy theories may transpire from almost all aspects of a given culture, official figures are rarely known to come forward in an effort to discredit the conspiracy theory. Theories that may arise regarding sinister plots to con the world are usually not taken up by government officials as serious subjects of investigation because the conventional understanding is that such suppositions are inconsequential. There is also the possibility that government actions to prove the theory wrong can lead to even more paranoia on the part of the conspiracy thinkers; as believers of conspiracies are aggressively resistant to counter argument or

correction, it becomes difficult to react against the claims made as the government's interest to discredit that one theory can be seen as confirmation of the theory because the government would not have taken interest at all if the theory were false.

However, it is to be noted that alien or UFO conspiracy is founded upon institutional research and intelligible examinations. As Michael D. Swords has written:

Since the 1960s, a growing group of scientists has directed a significant amount of thought and writing to the question of ETI (Extra-terrestrial Intelligence). They have debated the odds of the existence of such beings, the possibility of their travelling between the stars, and the means of contact between them and ourselves. (67)

Attempting to understand and explain the many forms of alien encounters ranging from U.F.O sightings to claims of abduction and probing have existed for decades. Researchers would have to consider factors such as the motivation behind the people who made the claims, and if those claims are accountable, the possibility of the involvement of military forces would have to be considered as well as the involvement of the government in general among other factors. As such researching upon the field of Ufology is known to be a rather complex study and it is understood that there can never be an expert upon the matter. Michael D. Swords has written :

Despite the intelligence and prestige of many of the leaders of this optimistic view, the vision had an air of complexity yet lack of concreteness which made it easy to disregard as unfocused speculation. Many conservative scientists felt that the field of study was not a field at all. (67)

Such a statement can be seen as being relatable to how conventional norms view the theories regarding alien or UFO theories ; other than serving as source material for science-fiction and other means of entertainment of the same nature, theories surrounding the existence of extra-terrestrials continue to be perceived as traits of delusional thinking that stem from mistaken information. Stuart Appelle writes, “Many critics of the ET hypothesis argue that in the absence of tangible proof, parsimony requires that the ET hypothesis be dismissed.” (56) Alien and UFO encounters and experiences are usually explainable by means of psychological examinations and analysis as Appelle writes after duly examining certain factors such as personalities of the individual, sleep anomalies, anxiety that may be suffered and other aspects:

UFO sightings are not caused by spacecraft, so abduction experiences are not caused by aliens. It would be difficult to take the ET explanation for abduction experiences seriously without also taking the ET explanation for UFOs seriously. Therefore, dismissal of the latter has been used as a basis for dismissal of the former.

This approach maintains that the UFO evidence fails to support anything other than prosaic explanations. It is based on the observation that most sightings are at least potentially explainable as mundane phenomena ( hoaxes, misperceptions of natural events, misidentification of conventional objects, secret military devices, etc.). However, this only demonstrates that no *single* explanation provides a satisfying account of the sighting literature, not that prosaic explanations can explain all sightings. (56 – 57)

It is thus, established that claims made about UFO sightings and encounters are not always accountable and reliable as they have been known to lack coherent proof or evidence and much of reports and claims of being abducted are often known to be dismissed after psychological evaluation. Nevertheless, belief in UFOs and intelligent life-forms from another world remains to occupy a widely significant place among the public. The level of investment that believers of the theory are willing to make can be taken as a proof of how deep the possibility of alien existence is ingrained in the minds of people as they are believed to hold answers that can explain the very meaning of being alive and being human. For example, the Church of Scientology founded in 1954 by author L. Ron Hubbard believes that the origin of the human race has its beginning from extra-terrestrial intelligence. The church has been classified as a cult by some but the religious beliefs and practices of the church have continued to attract devoted and dedicated followers including powerful and wealthy people of society and also influential and famous personalities. The subject of alien existence is also taken up as serious field of philosophical domain by other groups as well. John A. Saliba has written about how there are groups who have founded religions whose beliefs and doctrines are based on the existence and functional nature of extra-terrestrials within the solar system. He writes:

...aliens are surrounded with a sense of mystery. They are regarded as transcendent and supernatural entities who have reached a level of perfection and power far beyond that of human beings. Moreover, they are believed to communicate with specific individuals in order to bring salvation to a human race threatened by nuclear and environmental disaster. (105)

Sabila elaborates the different characteristics that contribute to the making of religious group that is dedicated to the extra-terrestrial such as the belief that “God (in the Judeo-Christian sense) often does not have a central role, is not present at all, or his existence is sometimes denied.” (106) Also he writes that there is a strong belief that there has been contact and encounters between humans and alien beings and that there are select individuals who are “channels, messengers or prophets, chosen to relay messages to the human race, to have met personally with alien beings, and even to have been transported to other planets.” (106) It is also stressed, within such religions, that human beings need to prepare for the eventual arrival of the aliens. Such preparations are mainly spiritual in nature and can also be physical in form as shrines and embassies for alien beings maybe built.

It is to be recognized that even if people are not associated with UFO religious institutions, the belief in their existence is a common cultural factor that has occupied a prominent place among civilized societies. As the field, as a study poses questions ranging from scientific, religious, political, psychological to historical, it is inevitable that there are many who hold the belief that we are not alone in the universe. As Charles A. Zeigler has denoted :

tens of millions of adults in the United States believe that some UFOs are manifestations of an un-earthly intelligence. In other words, that belief is not confined to an aberrant few but, rather, its burgeoning in the last half of the twentieth century is a major cultural event that warrants further studies by social scientists, including those with special interest in religion.” (qtd . in Saliba 116)

Like other conspiracy theories, the theories revolving around the possibility of alien existence cannot be confined to one aspect only and although the particular field of extra-terrestrial existence has been studied, analyzed and examined from various streams of study, it remains a subject that is yet to be solved. In a world where scientific and technological advances are dominating the very existence of the earth's inhabitants, it is proven that the various 'evidences' that 'prove' the existence of alien life forms are inefficient without further detailed exposition. Even though there has been established organizations researching and studying extra-terrestrial origins and their possible existence, the phenomenon of the U.F.O remains a modern folklore. Believers of the existence of alien beings often look towards authority figures of society as they hold that those figures are responsible for withholding the truth about the origins of supernatural events that have occurred. The suppression of information is undoubtedly a common aspect in forms of organizations where there are select individuals who are in charge of policy making. And decisions made within such law making procedures cannot always be agreed upon by all parties alike, thus making it an inevitability that when there occurs an event or incident that cannot be understood or explained, those in power will be questioned directly or indirectly by those that are affected by the event. Thus, in UFO conspiracies, the exercise of power by figures of authority remains a central and important aspect.

Sidney Sheldon, in *The Doomsday Conspiracy*, presents a scenario where the conspiracy theory regarding the world government takes place. Sheldon utilizes organizations such as the National Security Agency of the United States in such a way that the plot of the novel becomes relatable to the widely believed theory that world



organizations funded by the government are suppressing vital information that concerns the world population as a whole. Despite the numerous accounts of UFO sightings and encounter, solid proof is never provided that can answer the question of whether human beings are the only intelligent life force in the universe. Sheldon's portrayal of authority figures in his novel, thus, provides a significant insight to the shared belief among conspiracy thinkers that the government and its wielding of power over the common man has led to deceit that impacts everyone on an international scale.

As Sheldon has depicted in the plot of his novel, conspiracy thinkers believe that the authority, in other words the government, is not only suppressing information from the public but also containing those that are aware and silencing them. As Robert Bellamy locates each individual who has witnessed the crash of the alien aircraft, they are being terminated and assassinated without hesitation. Such is the cynical and pessimistic thinking of believers of conspiracies as almost every powerful authority figure is believed to have a sinister agenda that care not for the suffering of innocent people. The state and its institutional organizations in a given society is deemed the main cause and origin of conspiracy theories as there are only a certain number of individuals that are in the position of power and the other larger half of the society are compelled to become the lower rungs who only get access to a portion of the truth. The larger half of the society, who are also the lower class, are not only kept from knowing the entirety of the developments that may escalate, but they are also made to live in a certain way; certain ideals, norms and truths are beings fed to them in such a way that they are made to accept policies and official statements and mass coercion are able to take place.

Michel Foucault, in his work of analyzing established power relations recognized that associations and interactions within a societal setting is imperative in order to understand the role and functioning of the state and its institutions. In his book *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (1977), Foucault traces the significance of the influence of a disciplinary system within a society, one that moulds the individual in a certain way and turns him into what he called a 'docile body'. He writes :

By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has 'got rid of the peasant' and given him 'the air of a soldier'. (135)

The State, according to Foucault, not only possesses power but is able to make a system of organization that regulates the actions, functions and mindset of the individuals within the societal concept. The portrayal of certain characters by Sidney Sheldon in *The Doomsday Conspiracy* reflects the kind of characteristic that is the result of institutional discipline that Foucault may label 'docile bodies'. The protagonist, Robert Bellamy, is depicted as a man that has been trained into being an expert at espionage and intelligence, thus, the military nurturing that he had been fed is seen in every aspect of his life including his behaviour towards his ex-wife Susan and her new husband. Other characters such as Admiral Whittaker and General Hillard are depicted in light of disciplined characterization. However, the aspect of 'docile bodies' cannot be confined and identified only to those that are under the military training institutions. It is the

issue of institutional discipline that functions in a society that Michel Foucault has stressed upon, and likewise, such concept of mass coercion and compulsion is a factor that conspiracy theories stress upon mostly.

For Foucault, the notion of power is not achieved from force nor violence but through the organization of a system that manipulates and directs the thought and principles of those that compose the masses. Foucault recognized that power is not only violent and repressive, instead he concentrated his works on the notion that power, in a societal setting is exercised in a form that allows social discipline and conformity among people. The state and its institutions such as the hospital, school and church, among others, are important means of inducing the forms of conformity and consistency that allows the exercise of power without the use of force.

Conspiracy theorists, like many thinkers, are extremely sceptical and critical of the system that is known to be the norms and ideals within a society. Not believing in 'the system' is a most significant aspect of conspiracy thinking and as conspiracy theories can be found almost everywhere, believers of such theories have a tendency to be doubtful of any system of organization, thus, the image of being a normal individual is often stripped from the conspiracy thinker. According to conspiracy thinking, people in societies that are governed under the regime of capitalism are like a flock of sheep that follow the rest without individual inhibition to do anything else. Paying taxes, voting systems, genetically modified food, enrolment of one's identification into government data, prescribed medications, school and college systems and even social media accounts are all viewed with contempt and suspicion. The society with its norms and ideals that have been constructed are thus, believed to dis-individualize the people which leads to a mass

of citizens that lack individual thinking and questioning regarding the system that monitors and navigates their lives.

Sara Mills has written on the notion of Power in the works of Foucault :

Foucault tends to see power less as something which is possessed but rather as a strategy, something which someone does or performs in a particular context. Power needs to be seen as something which has to be constantly performed rather than being achieved. Indeed, he argues that power is a set of relations which are dispersed throughout society rather than being located within particular institutions such as the State or the government... (35)

Foucault describes in historical detail the role and significance of disciplinary regimes that are operational within human relations in his book *Discipline and Punish*. A Sara Mills writes , he “examines the way that discipline as a form of self-regulation encouraged by institutions permeates modern societies.” (43) In further elaboration, it is written :

...he analyses the way that regimes exercise power within a society through the use of a range of different mechanisms and techniques. He analyses a range of different institutions such as the hospital, the clinic, the prison and the university and sees a number of disciplinary practices which they seem to have in common. Discipline consists of a concern with control which is internalised by each individual: it consists of a concern with time-keeping, self-control over one's posture and bodily functions, concentration, sublimation of immediate desires and emotions - all of these elements are the effects of disciplinary pressure and at the

same time they are all actions which produce the individual as subjected to a set of procedures which come from outside of themselves but whose aim is the disciplining of the self by the self. (43)

Idealistic procedures are, thus, internalized by the people through means of relations that are functioning throughout the establishment of the society. This very notion of the disciplinary regimes that Foucault has highlighted is not uncommon in the belief system of conspiracy thinking where it is held that people are being dis-individualized and 'brain-washed' through institutions and organizations that are held with high esteem in the societal organization. Alien or UFO conspiracy in contemporary context has been established as one of the most widely believed conspiracies as compared to other theories. However, the conventional norm that obligates the common person to not believe in an event that bears the name of a conspiracy theory is so sternly established that further investigation is often not pursued.

For example, in the year 1997 what is now known as "Lights over Phoenix", it was reported that people, who number in thousands, were witnesses to Unidentified Flying Objects that hovered over Phoenix, Arizona and Sonora, Mexico. The witness reports allegedly stated that the crafts seemed to have lights attached and they were formed in the shape of a 'V'. The events was witnessed by many but still, there is no official statements for the 'lights' that were seen by the many individuals who claimed to have seen the flying objects. The images and video footage that were produced were dismissed as not providing enough proof and may have also mentioned that the crafts that were seen were actually planes. The U.S Air Force also explained that the lights that were seen were, in actuality, flares dropped by a military air craft as part of a

training exercise. The footage that were provided and also the very nature of the sightings, where people claimed to see the crafts from afar, are able to be provided with explanations by sceptics and non-believers. Although the event was supposedly witnessed by thousands, the fact that rational and probable explanations are able to dismiss them make the occurrence something that is not intelligible or coherent. (Birnes Casteel)

Sidney Sheldon gives significant accounts of how people in society are often obligated to disbelieve the slightest aspects of supernatural origin. Sheldon, in his portrayal of William Mann depicts the typical norm that is often accompanied with the system of intellectual obligation that does not allow individuals to think outside of the system. The character of William Mann is a Canadian banker who is described as finding solace and relaxation in the corporate world only. It is described that he found no enjoyment in the tour of the Alps and immediately thought the UFO crash was staged. "He was sure it had been staged by the Swiss government to impress tourists. He had been to Disney World and he had seen similar things that looked real, but were faked." (225) William Mann serves as an example of the type of person that has invested fully into the doctrines implemented by the corporate oriented society ; he finds no pleasure in out-door activities and all his time and energy is invested into his work of being a banker. When witnessing the crash of the UFO, he is the confident sceptic. He had told Olga Romanchanko, the lady seated next to him on the tour bus, that the UFO "was merely a spectacle arranged by the Swiss government for tourists, that were no such things as flying saucers." (242)

The characterization of William Mann, thus, serves as the portrayal of how relations established within a capitalist, corporate society can often lead to the

consciousness and thinking of the individual being programmed and made to think in a certain way. Although the character of Mann appears only for a short portion of the novel, Sheldon's characterization makes it apparent that he is the type of person who has little imagination and is invested and dedicated to only the purpose of his wealth. Thus, it may accurately be stated that his existence is greatly dis-individualized. Other characters can also be analyzed from such perspective of being subject to disbelief and inactivity in reaction to the UFO crash.

The witnesses of the tour bus are depicted to have different personalities and attitude towards the crash of the air craft. Some of them immediately believe the event was real like the priest Father Patrini who was terrified as he was certain that he has seen the devil. Others like Professor Schmidt and Olga Romanchanko and others are shown to believe that the crash was real but upon initially seeing the site, they fail to pursue the subject any further. Instead of thinking of ways that will make the public aware of the what has happened, the witnesses decide to keep the information to themselves and leave the matter into the hands of the government. Their lack of inactivity suggests that as they as citizens they are utterly in no possession of power to act upon the matter and that it is out of their jurisdiction to do so. The reaction of the witnesses suggest that they, like other citizens have become subjects and their thinking has been conditioned in such a way that their trust upon the authority has remained a priority in every situation.

In *The Subject and Power* (1983), Foucault explains the forms of power that may arise in society and the struggles that resistance to such power formations produce. He

elaborates the different kinds of struggles that question the various forms of power that hinder individuality. He explains:

This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word “subject”: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by the conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to.

(331)

The associated notion of conspiracy thinking that one must not readily believe in the “official” statements and policies made by dominant figures can be given theoretical confirmation through Foucault’s examination of the different forms of power that shape the life and activities of societies. The stress laid on the theory that people have been ‘brainwashed’ is very much dominant in the realm of conspiracy theorizing. Conspiracy theorists lay much emphasis on how the people are allowing the conspiracy to happen as many government policies are accepted even though there might be uncertainty regarding such policies.

Regarding the theories that surround aliens and UFOs, a conventional norm is known to be established that obligates people to believe that events like UFO sightings, crop circles and other related alien incidents are all but hoaxes in order to attract media attention. As such, people who experience such events are often known to look for



answers and explanations first that prove that they are man-made. There is difficulty in establishing an official declaration about whether or not the possible existence of other worldly intelligent beings is worthy of investment and considerable as a threat to human life. Recognizing and establishing the study and research of UFOs also come with complications. As Lewis M. Branscomb and D. Herbison-Evans have observed :

The public does not understand the lessons learned by centuries of hard experience that the mental discriminator for distinguishing evidence from mystery and truth from falsehood must be set at a level above the random noise of our experience. Unable to judge on scientific level the reports they read about UFO's, laymen (and alas, some scientists) make their judgments on the basis of reactions of commentators on the scientific scene to claims of participants in controversy. (1297)

The statement made makes evident that there has been much confusion and paranoia regarding the matter of UFO's and debates that lead to no specific conclusions circle themselves among the common folks. Since it is mere speculation that the masses have been left with and no official recognition of the phenomenon as truth, it is only understandable that suspicion and mistrust upon the authority is the single most important factor that the issue entails. Thus, the plausibility of the existence of intelligent beings other than the human race has been made into modern myths.

In *The Doomsday Conspiracy*, the conspiracy is carried out by an elite group of individuals ranging from government officials to powerful and wealthy elites in society. Secret meetings are held between these people and assassinations are undertaken which

violates the established laws. The novel depicts the conception of wealthy elites by common people through the characters like Monte Banks who, along with his rivals, are called “ruthless predators.” Through their characterization and the depiction of other characters that play the part of conspirators like General Hillard, the novel presents the assumptions that conspiracy theorists hold about the masterminds behind the elaborate conspiracy that withholds the truth about the entire universe. Thus, they are shown to suppress the information about the existence of the alien beings and are ruthlessly willing to go to such extreme measures in order to maintain the system where they remain at the top of the social order.

Foucault has stated :

Obviously the establishing of power relations does not exclude the use of violence any more than it does the obtaining of consent; no doubt, the exercise of power can never do without one or the other, often both at the same time. But even though consent and violence are instruments or results, they do not constitute the principle or basic nature of power. The exercise of power can produce as much acceptance as maybe wished for : it can pile up the dead and shelter itself behind whatever threats it can imagine. (340 – 341)

Here, Foucault talks of how the nature of power, although not entirely oppressive, is in position to utilize violence to maintain the structure of the power relations. In conspiracy thinking, violence upheld against the masses is a means of maintaining order and balance which is believed to be achieved through means of being disciplined and submissive which are again, disguised as means of liberation and free will. Such an act

of placing individuals into their place in the societal structure is done so in the name of justice and fairness which in turn, establishes the norm and convention that is internalized by all.

Further, Foucault writes upon the notion of power :

It operates on the field of possibilities in which the behaviour of active subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. (341)

Thus, certain forms of action, thinking and building of relations are established within a societal formation in such a way that such type of recognized associations are accepted and not questioned. As Foucault has also stated, “Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are ‘free’.” In the sense of conspiracy thinking, free countries are in actuality more oppressed than they realize; free citizens, as claimed by conspiracy theorists, are enslaved by the society and its ideologies, conformities, conventions and norms. Citizens are kept from true freedom in the sense that they are disciplined to follow certain constructed norms and are taught subliminally what they desire and need through forms of manipulation by means of the mass media. The choices and decisions made by people living in the society are not their own but are influenced or motivated by a higher power that orchestrate the very existence of society.

Hence, the “free” citizen is a concept that is only planted in the consciousness but is not a reality.

In *The Doomsday Conspiracy*, when the protagonist Robert Bellamy realizes that as he is in the middle of an international conspiracy, he has no choice but to run in order to save his life. Although he has attained the knowledge that there are indeed alien intelligence that has come in contact with human civilization, he is aware that any attempt at revealing this secret will ultimately fail. His face is shown in the media as a criminal and he is shown as someone highly dangerous which is all that is needed to convince the common man that he is a criminal. Robert, in his attempt at survival, is at the mercy of his own strength and intelligence as it has become impossible for him to find help since he has now become out casted. Even if Robert is to come forward to the public and announces that he is innocent, that there are alien beings visiting earth and that the government is at fault, he will undoubtedly seem more dangerous and more unstable as the public will indisputably follow and believe the words of the superior and the seemingly more normal. The role of ideology, thus, become a factor that is utmost importance when establishing and maintaining the ‘normal’ atmosphere.

Louis Althusser, in his 1970 essay ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus’ has spoken of the role of ideology. Althusser explains in his essay that ideology expresses class position and is determined by class struggle. Ideology is seen as representing the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. Dominic Strinati elaborates Althusser’s illustration of the notion of ideology :

...for Althusser, ideology functions to secure the reproduction of capitalist relations of production by instilling the necessary skills into the minds and behaviour of the population. This is a function of the state which is performed, in the modern era, by its educational agencies, primarily by the school. But what is ideology? We do not have much sense of what ideology actually is apart from the ruling ideas (the know-how wrapped up in ruling class ideas) which ensure the continuity of capitalism. (135)

Althusser's conception of ideology can be described as a desire to recognize independent effects and relations which are free of the chains of economic and societal determinism. The notion and accepted norm that are established through the different forms of society are thus questioned and challenged as promoting certain forms of ideals. Such outlook upon societal organizations are equally questioned and scrutinized in the field of conspiracy thinking in such a way that the teachings that are received in schools and institutions are responsible for 'brainwashing' children in a certain way in order that they grow up to become programmed individuals who contribute to the exploitation and manipulation of people without their ever knowing that it was induced upon them.

Althusser states, "I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which presents themselves to the immediate observer to the form of distinct and specialized institutions." (143) Strinati states in regards to Althusser's theory of ideology, "Education is reduced to a mechanism for the enforced indoctrination of technical skills and respectful attitudes, the imposition of the dominant ideology, and for distributing people into the realm of production." (140) Further he comments on the educational system :

The functionalism and economic determinism in Althusser's theory of ideology mean that it cannot visualize education as a 'relatively autonomous' institution with its own 'specific activity'. Furthermore, the function of education as ideology seems capable of ensuring the indefinite perpetuation of capitalism.

(141)

The ideas produced upon the role of ideologies in society are identifiable within the domain of conspiracy holders as it is believed that the structure of society is devised in such a way that development and progress occurs among the rich and development among the poor remains stagnant.

*The Doomsday Conspiracy* by Sidney Sheldon, presents a scenario in which the established system of relations is threatened in society. The action and suspense that make up the plot of the novel occurs outside the knowledge of the common man; the masses continue to live their normal lives and are not troubled by aspects that are outside of their jurisdiction. In actuality, the very fate of their existence is being decided behind closed doors without their consent. Such is the shared fear that is found in conspiracy theories where innocent lives are at the mercy of the elite few whom they trust for their well-being and future.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Exploitation and Subjectivity**

Sidney Sheldon, in his 2004 novel, *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* utilizes the conspiracy theory about man-made climatic changes and how they are perceived by the public. The theory that ‘normal’ and ‘average’ citizens are being monitored and spied on is also depicted alongside the theme of climate manipulation. The plot of the novel, like other Sheldon novels, is action filled and it takes readers into the world of the wealthy and famous, exploring the power relations, the deceit and conspiracy that is speculated to be true by many conspiracy theorists. In the beliefs of most conspiracy theories, it is always a dominant factor that the majority of the entire world population are being oppressed and made subjects by the dominant forces. This chapter will focus on the concept of subjectivity in conspiracy thinking and the process by which such concept is able to operate and be executed in civilized society through the conspiracy of climate change and global warming.

Conspiracy thinkers who hold the theory that global warming is a conspiracy believe the hypothesis that the phenomenon of climate change is one of political interest; they allege that the science behind global warming has been invented or distorted in order to promote and implement certain ideals and ideological principles in order to manipulate the public. Climate change is believed to be a man-made hoax that is funded by the government organizations in order to further promote policies that benefit the elites while the majority are being influenced to believe in such policies and it remains to have a wide following among conspiracy thinkers.

Those who believe that global warming is a conspiracy believe that the science behind the global warming findings and climate change is an elaborate conspiracy that will dramatically and radically increase regulations of people’s lives and businesses and



raise the cost of living and government taxes. Tactics and policies implemented for preserving and maintaining the environment and natural resources will inevitably lead to certain sacrifices and changes that will have to be made in the everyday lives of people. Such means of preserving the environment initiated by government policies are seen by conspiracy theorists as being a mere tool that has been orchestrated in order to maintain supremacy and oppression by the few who hold power in society. Thus, with the conspiracy theory regarding global warming and climate change, the mistrust and suspicion upon the government and authority figures continue as it is believed that the main agenda behind such a phenomenon is deceit, oppression and domination and all efforts that attempt to control the activities and daily routines of people are met with suspicion.

The plot of Sidney Sheldon's *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* (2004) starts with the death of four people who are from different parts of the world. Their deaths are all violent and mysterious. The four people who are dead share a similarity with one another which is that they all worked for a well-renowned international think tank known as Kingsley International Group, KIG. The head of KIG is a man named Tanner Kingsley who uses the company to create a machine for himself, a device known as Prima which can control weather. With it, Tanner plans to control the world's climate and gain all the riches that world leaders are prepared to offer. The company and the ideas for the machine were created by the ingenious thinking of Tanner's elder brother. Due to an accident, Andrew becomes mentally handicapped and Tanner takes over the think tank which Andrew had created in order to help people and as a means of fighting the crisis of global warming. Being obsessed with gaining wealth and power,

Tanner turns the philanthropic ideals of KIG and plans to hold the world hostage once the Prima Project is perfected.

Tanner has the most brilliant scientists in the world working under him and he is very careful not to let them know his intentions regarding the Prima Project. But unfortunately for him, four of his scientists manage to unravel the fact that Tanner Kingsley does not intend to give the weather control machine to the government once it is finished. In an effort to stop the sinister plan of Tanner Kingsley, the four scientists agree to meet in Washington, D.C. There, they plan to meet Senator Van Luven, a member of the Senate Select Committee on the environment and reveal to her the existence of the Prima machine and expose Tanner Kingsley. The four scientists are mysteriously killed one by one before they could ever meet the Senator. The conspiracy continues as the families and loved ones of the deceased scientists become the next targets.

Sonja Verbrugge, whose husband worked for KIG is killed in Berlin, Germany. Her husband was one of the men who scheduled to meet in Washington. Another woman named Lois Reynolds is attacked in Denver, Colorado just a few miles from where her brother Gary's plane crashed mysteriously. The other two scientists killed are Richard Stevens and Mark Harris. Their wives, Diane Stevens and Kelly Harris become the next targets for assassination. Tanner plans to eliminate the two women giving them no time to recover from the initial shock of the deaths of their husbands. The unsuspecting women are expected by Tanner to make easy targets and he hires assassins to dispose of them immediately.

Diane Stevens and Kelly Harris are the two main characters around which the plot is constructed. Diane is an accomplished painter and Kelly is a famous supermodel who has an independent attitude. Tanner Kingsley's hired assassins Greg Holliday, Greg Carballo and the blood-thirsty Harry Flint constantly pursue the women but somehow, Diane and Kelly continue to escape from their hands. Tanner first appears as a friend to the two women, offering them his help and assuring them that their husbands' deaths are being investigated by the company. He gives each woman his business card and tells them to not hesitate to seek his help. Using the tracing device that is planted in his business cards, Tanner is able to trace the locations of the two women. After the women find out that they are being traced, they dispose of the cards with the tracking device. But it does not stop the deviously brilliant mind of Tanner Kingsley as he has other means of technology and power to locate the whereabouts of the two women.

Upon meeting, Diane and Kelly did not like the company of each other since they had little in common except for the fact that their late husbands both worked for KIG. It is Diane's idea to stay together as she believes that the death of Richard and Mark were somehow planned and that they were murdered. They soon realize that they have a better chance of survival if they stay together and that they were a good team with different charms and wits that they each possess. Putting their minds together and their beloved husbands' deaths as motivation, the women are quickly able to pick up Tanner's trail.

The women soon learn about the other related deaths of those that work for Tanner Kingsley and they decide to visit the places where the murders took place to find answers. They escape the country and travel to Berlin, Germany where Sonja

Verbrugge was killed and to Paris where Kelly's husband Mark was murdered. Although being heavily pursued by the assassins hired by Tanner, they continue to somehow outsmart them and escape. The women do not find any new or meaningful information in Europe and so they return to the United States and visit the scene of the crime where Gary Reynolds met his death.

Gary Reynolds was reported to have been killed in a plane crash but by now Diane and Kelly know that it was not an accident. They find out that Gary's sister Lois Reynolds is still alive after surviving a horrible explosion. They visit Lois in the hospital and from her they become aware of the existence of Prima. Lois also tells them that she has had her own suspicions about the death of her brother. A doctor comes in and tells Diane and Kelly that visitors are not allowed. And after the women leave, the "doctor" murders Lois.

The women believe that their ordeal is almost over as they have figured out the secret that Tanner Kingsley is hiding. They contact Senator van Luven and set a meeting with her. Diane and Kelly think that the Senator will put an end to Tanner's plot to control the world's weather but unfortunately for them, they are walking into the same trap that had been set so effectively for their spouses. Senator Van Luven turns out to be a co-conspirator and also Tanner's lover. In fact, she is the reason that Tanner became obsessed with having immense wealth and power as Van Luven would only marry a powerful man. As Tanner is so desperately in love with her, he did everything in his power to achieve his status and even going to the extent of causing his brother's accident which led him incapable of being head of KIG. Although Andrew

survived his brother's attempt to murder him, Tanner's plan of using KIG for his own selfish needs are carried out and the love of his life returns to him.

Diane and Kelly are left in the hands of Harry Flint who intends to violate them and then kill them. Kelly takes advantage of Flint's intentions and pretends to be infatuated with him. Then, she stabs him to death. They escape and immediately go to the press and expose the Prima project. The two women send fake invitations to the media inviting them to the unveiling of KIG's new weather controlling machine named Prima. Tanner has no choice but to destroy his prized weather machine and then he plans to make use of another Prima machine that he has invented in the French Polynesian Islands.

Together with Senator van Luven, Tanner Kingsley escapes in a private jet leaving his brother Andrew behind with the machine that is programmed to self-destruct. The plan to hold the world hostage through manipulating the weather is still priority for Tanner and his lover. However, Tanner underestimates his handicap able brother as Andrew realizes what has become of his beloved brother. Andrew, even with his mental disability figures out that his brother and his intentions are evil. In his final act, Andrew puts his brain to function and controls the weather sending a storm. In doing so, the private plane in which Tanner and the Senator were in is hit by a lightning and the plane crashes.

Meanwhile, Diane and Kelly are safely hiding at a friend's house. They see on the news that Tanner Kingsley and Senator van Luven have been killed in a plane crash. With Tanner dead, his plan to hold the world hostage finally collapses. Diane and

Kelly realize that they have survived their terrible ordeal together, and with the knowledge that their beloved husbands will be proud of them, they set about reclaiming the pieces of their lives.

Like his other action filled thrillers, Sidney Sheldon in *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* takes his readers on a tour to the lives of the rich and famous. And like most of his other novels, a conspiracy carried out by those in power is the central theme to the story. The theory that there are forces that monitors the activities and whereabouts of citizens is depicted in the novel and it is a main aspect that can be identified in each chapter. Like other writers that dwell on the concept of conspiracies, Sheldon makes use of the neutral fear that is present among human beings of the unknown. Although not believing in conspiracy theories is the established convention among the general public, the content and features of conspiracy theories can become frightening aspects for those that choose to believe in them.

The theory that climate change is a man-made hoax remains a popular conspiracy theory. The theory invokes claims that the world government has joined forces and has orchestrated a scam that will frighten citizens enough so that they will be able to collect more taxes from them. Thus, the theory claims that there is no such thing as carbon-dioxide accumulation in the earth's atmosphere which is acknowledged as the main cause of air pollution and it is claimed that the earth is actually getting colder as opposed to the hypothesis that the earth's atmosphere is getting warmer due to pollution. The global warming conspiracy asserts that the most powerful individuals have gathered and are conspiring to bring about a ruling system that is sinister in nature; it is believed that not only is the earth's atmosphere not polluted by harmful gas emission, it

is also claimed that the world government have, at their disposal, ways and means that allow for them to manipulate the climate which have long term political goals that will benefit certain people.

On the issue of global warming, Barry Holden has written :

The core issue involved here concerns the extent to which people are prepared to make short-term sacrifices for the sake of long-term gains. The essential point is that climate change ‘forces us to confront how much we are willing to sacrifice today for benefits which will be enjoyed later in our lives or in the live of succeeding generations’. (58)

Continuously, people are being encouraged to adopt new ways of conserving energy in the hopes of averting the effects of global warming and environmental degradation. Such ways may include a change in daily activities like driving, cooking, disposing of garbage and other similar domestic activities. The taxes that have been implemented by the authority figures is thus, met with much contempt and uncertainty. The idea of using taxes and fees paid for by the public is seen by doubters as a means of gaining profit from the people as it is believed that climate change and environmental degradation are seen as mere exaggeration or made-up theories in order to convince the people that there is danger to our planet. Similar to other conspiracy theories, environmental issues are seen by conspiracy thinkers as means to exploit people of their rights as citizens and strip them of their freedom without their consent. For those who hold the theory to be true, natural resources are not limited and climate change is a farce that has political goals and the idea of freedom and liberty is equally met with

derision as it is also seen as a lie that has been orchestrated for political means accordingly.

Anthony A. Leiserowitz has observed that “global climate change did not become a significant public concern in the United States until the summer of 1988- at that time the hottest year since the middle of the nineteenth century.” (1435) Further, he highlights:

In May 1989, a Gallup survey of American public asked : “How much do you personally worry about the Green-house effect or global warming?” Gallup found that 35% worried “a great deal”, 28% worried “a fair amount”, 18% worried “only a little”, and 12% worried “not at all”. Thus, 63% of Americans were fairly to greatly worried global warming in 1989. (1435)

The issue of global warming and climate change has been made into a major area of concern for many as campaigns, advertisements and media commercialization have continuously urged people to make changes in lifestyles and make sacrifices that will enable a better future for generations to come. Encouraging the masses to adopt certain policies and changes in the effort to decrease environmental degradation is very much witnessed as a result of the mass media’s continued exposure upon the subject. Spokespersons and ambassadors from politicians to movie actors are constantly placed in front of the public in order to promote more efficient ways of ‘saving the environment’.

Brian L. Keely has noted that the study of conspiracy theories “can shed light on the nature of theoretical explanation.” (110) He elaborates :

Conspiracy theories, as a general category, are not necessarily wrong...small groups of powerful individuals do occasionally seek to affect the course of



history, and with some nontrivial degree of success. Moreover, the available, competing explanations-both official and otherwise- occasionally represent duelling conspiracy theories... (111)

It cannot be denied that acts of conspiracy can be operational in possibly any situation or occasion. And just like other prevalent conspiracy theories, the issue of climate change and environmental degradation is associated with much conspiratorial thinking. Within the realm of environmental conspiracy theorizing, the organization known as High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program (HAARP) has been under much speculation as many believe that the organization is a means of changing the weather and controlling the climate in any part of the world. HAARP was known to be a research program that was allegedly funded by the US Navy, US Air Force and the University of Alaska. The purpose of the organization is was to investigate the potential for enhancement of ionospheric enhancement technology for communication and surveillance but the program has been the subject of numerous conspiracy theories. It has been speculated that HAARP has a hidden agenda and that its functions and capabilities can lead to disastrous outcome on a global scale. The program has been accused by conspiracy theorists of causing floods, hurricanes, droughts, earthquakes and thunderstorms in several parts of the world. Fred Burks, regarding the program and its intentions, writes :

The HAARP website acknowledges that experiments are conducted which use electromagnetic frequencies to fire pulsed, directed energy beams in order to “temporarily excite a limited area of the ionosphere.” Some scientists state that purposefully disturbing this sensitive layer could have major and even disastrous consequences. Concerned HAARP researchers like Dr. Michel Chossudovsky of the

University of Ottawa and Alaska's Dr. Nick Begich (son of a US Congressman) present evidence suggesting that these disturbances can even cause tsunamis and earthquakes. (par. 2)

Further, he states :

Some researchers have raised questions about the possible involvement of HAARP in major disasters like the earthquake in Haiti, Indonesian tsunami, and hurricane Katrina. Could these have been HAARP experiments gone awry? Might they even have been caused by rogue elements which gained control of this devastating technology. Of course disasters like this happen regularly on a natural basis, yet if you begin to research, there is some high strangeness around some of these disasters. The evidence is inconclusive, yet with the known and unknown major destructive capabilities of this weapon, serious questions remain. (par. 12)

Thus, speculations regarding weather control have been identified greatly with the HAARP program, and although the program is reported to have been shut down in 2014, questions about their findings, inventions and continued operation have been brought up continuously in conspiracy theories.

Sidney Sheldon, in his novel *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* (2004), presents such a scenario where the powerful and wealthy section of society are in actual possession of knowledge and power which enables them to control and manipulate natural forces along with the activities of people. The speculations and assertions about environmental deceit that makes up many conspiracy theories can be evidently seen as reflected in Sheldon's thriller *Are You Afraid of the Dark?*. The novel can be said to capture the popular notion among conspiracy thinkers that powerful, wealthy and intellectual elites are in all

probability, sinister individuals who aim to gain profit in every way possible from unsuspecting citizens. Sidney Sheldon portrayed the antagonist, Tanner Kingsley, in such a way that he embodies the figure of a conspirator who manipulates the workings of mother nature, gives himself the right to call it is his own and acts like a god himself. The persona of Tanner Kingsley is not known to be derived from any particular figure, however, the manner in which he is portrayed by Sheldon becomes at par with the image that conspiracy thinkers may hold to be the characteristic of a public figure who has a dark hidden side to his intentions and objectives. Tanner Kingsley and Senator van Luven are indeed effective depictions of supposed conspirators among world leaders who, with all their charms and means of persuasion are able to deceive and exploit people on a large scale.

Sheldon has depicted his antagonists in such a way that they embody the expected persona of conspirators that people of contemporary culture have in mind. In his novel, Sheldon makes it a point to portray the antagonist Tanner Kingsley as the ultimate power hungry capitalist ruler who will stop at nothing to achieve his goal. With unlimited power that is composed of brilliance, money and technology, Tanner Kingsley is made to embody the characteristic of the conspirator that is able to persuade and convince many on a large scale. Tanner Kingsley, with unrestricted resources at his disposal, is able to carry out whatever sinister plan that he has in mind to gain power over others. The depiction of Kingsley's resources and equipments also become important aspects that furthers his effectiveness as conspirator and a sinister figure. His private office is described accordingly as :

The huge office was crammed with arcane electronic equipment, and the soundproofed walls were lined with wafer-thin television sets displaying live scenes from cities around the world. Some of the views were of busy conference rooms, offices and laboratories, while others showed hotel suites where meetings were taking place. Each set had its own audio system and, even though the volume was barely audible, it was eerie to hear snippets of sentences spoken simultaneously in a dozen different languages. (Sheldon 122 -123)

Added to the characteristic of Tanner Kingsley is his charismatic charm and his being a convincing liar which are often associated with real life characteristics of people who are believed to be conspirators like political elites and famous entrepreneurs. Tanner Kingsley's ability to convince those around him that he genuinely cares about the environment and its preservation is reflective of the authority figures that are constantly under the scrutiny of conspiracy theorists. On the surface, Tanner Kingsley is an influential CEO of a respectable think tank, who looks after his handicapped brother and who works sincerely for the improvement of the environment. The fact that he has a sinister side to his personality that does not refuse to destroy and murder those that gets in his way including his own brother makes him a force of great threat and also an accurate depiction of a conspiring world leader. Tanner Kingsley's ability to conceal his true intentions are reflective of the theories of conspiracies where humanitarian acts in real life by political figures and famous people alike are known to be convincing and inspirational while their sinister goals are kept well hidden behind their reassuring promises. The issue of environmental degradation has gained much recognition in a given culture very much due to its exposure by means of the mass media. Every item for sale,

every household product , clothing and vehicles are instantly made more attractive and alluring when they are labelled as being “eco-friendly”. Such tactics of persuasion are looked at with contempt and doubt by conspiracy thinkers as a mere means of coercion and enforcement of ideals that have political goals.

The issue of global warming is a topic that is very kept alive in popular culture; governments worldwide had reacted to the possible threat of environmental degradation, national policies have been adopted to reduce the emissions of harmful gases into the atmosphere and the mass media has played an important role in influencing the public to take the matter as a serious problem that is continuously causing harm for the welfare of human beings. It is evidently clear that the topic of environmental preservation occupies a definite place in society as in the fields of politics, journalism, television and even entertainment, the subject is continuously dealt with. Famous people including politicians, sportsperson, musicians and actors are constantly preaching and trying to convince the public to make changes and adopt new ways that will prevent us from destroying our own planet. Products from garbage bags to clothing are all influenced by environmental awareness as products sold are often associated to the claim that they were manufactured from recycled items or they are eco-friendly.

Many have claimed that the media’s depiction of the issue of global warming and climate change is highly inaccurate and are only a means of creating a good story. It can be claimed to a considerable degree that one of the major causes for the rise of conspiracy theories is the tendency of the media to over exaggerate information with the aim to achieve interest and engaging sensationalism among their audience.

Brian Shackley and Brian Wynne have noted :

A number of policy, industrial, media and environmentalist have indeed subjected the science of climate change to critical scrutiny. Much of the specialist media coverage of the global warming issue has concentrated on “revealing” that the “official” reports, such as those of the IPCC, understate uncertainty and conceal the diversity of opinion among scientists.

The way in which advisory scientists portray uncertainty is also restrained by their relations with other scientists who expect the scientific uncertainties, as understood in a given research specialty, to be adequately and faithfully represented by those who purport to speak in its name. Failure to meet this expectation raises doubts either about the competence or about the integrity of the advisory scientists, who could then be accused by their peers of being out of touch with the latest scientific thinking or of being dishonest. Therefore, the advisory scientists’ “problem” is not only scientific uncertainty itself but also the difficulty of negotiating uncertainty simultaneously with their scientific peer groups and with policy actors. (278 – 279)

Global warming and climate change conspiracy theorists have made it a point to stress that conspirators behind the ‘hoax’ that is global warming have made it a prime objective to frighten the population enough in order for certain political goals will be achieved. Politicians and numerous influential people who speak on behalf of organizations dedicated to the preservation of the environment have time and again stated that the sacrifices made today will benefit the generation of the future; the efforts promoted in the hopes of mitigating the crisis have been met with much contempt as many have noted that the ‘future generation’ that is so often mentioned is only including

a certain class of people from society and that the poor of the current generation who need aid from policy makers are being ignored. Conspiracy thinkers, therefore, concentrate their suspicions upon the authority figures as they claim them to be hypocritical and are promoting ideals and morals that keep people from realizing the truth about climate change.

The ideology behind the issue of global warming and climate change becomes the central area of concern for conspiracy theorists. In his 1970 essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, Louis Althusser’s stressed analysis on the aspect of ideology provides an important and relevant perspective on the matter of global warming conspiracy theories. Althusser has denoted that the State power, which is repressive, is also maintained in such a matter that it becomes more subtle and less restrained. The state is able to function more subtly by means of seemingly taking the consent of the citizens into consideration. Althusser terms such means of functioning as ‘ideological structures’ or ‘state ideological apparatuses’ and they include political parties, educational institutions, church, the media and the arts. The ideological structures represent and promote certain ideas, norms and attitudes which are in favour and are in accordance with the aims and goals of the state and they are thus, a means of maintaining control and dominance by the state.

Althusser states:

...it is essential to say that for their part the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*, but they also function secondarily by repression, if only ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic. (There is no such thing as a purely

Ideological Apparatus.) The schools and churches are suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, etc., to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks. The same is true of the Family.... The same is true of the cultural IS Apparatus (censorship among other things), etc. (145)

Conspiracy thinking has enforced the idea that people are merely at the mercy of the authority figures in society so much so that all that is held as being important and valuable are ingrained in the conscience of the people by the many means of coercion and control that the state have at its disposal. Such thinking of being confined and restricted to only certain degrees in such a manner that ideology turns citizens into subjects is seen identical to the analytical discourse provided by Althusser. “ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects” (175), Althusser has stated. He further states, “individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects.*”(176) The very assertion that freedom is not truly attained in a capitalist society, that Althusser and other Marxist theorists have identified, is thus recognizable in the theories of conspiracies that seek for the justice that is seemingly denied to the common man.

The importance and urgency of environmental preservation is continued to be displayed as a priority in all spheres of popular culture. With the continuation of encouraging people to lessen their impact on the environment, it is not surprising that many people in society will be inclined to use and purchase goods and products that are deemed not harmful to the earth’s atmosphere. The difficulty in changing lifestyles and everyday activities in order to lessen pollution comes from the reason that ecologically harmless products that are, in all probability not contributing to pollution, are known to



cost considerably more than products that are not eco-friendly. This is not to state that people are indifferent towards the preservation of nature and the environment, however, it can become easily and genuinely confusing when products made from recycled materials cost so much higher than regular, conventional products.

Peter Barry, on Althusser's theory of ideology has written, "democracy makes us feel that we are choosing the kind of government we have, but in practice the difference between political parties, once in power, are far fewer than the rhetorical gulfs between them. (158) He further writes, "Instead of force crudely applied from a single source, as from a lever, there is assent secured in many different and complex ways, and ideological power is shown to be of ultimately greater significance than material power." (159) The willingness of citizens to believe by means of being disciplined through the different factors of the Ideological State Apparatus such as the school, media, family and art becomes of huge significance when looking at the matter of conspiracies from the perspectives of the theory of the role of ideology put forth by Althusser.

The depiction of climate change conspiracy by Sidney Sheldon can be of extensive significance as Sheldon has provided an effective depiction of a shared speculation among not just believers of conspiracy theories but also from normal citizens alike that the world government have successfully managed to lead the entire population into believing certain ideas that were formulated and orchestrated by a few. It portrays the thinking that world leaders are in possession of unlimited power and resources, so much so that they are able to play god and manipulate nature in order for them to gain more wealth. The two female protagonists Diane Stevens and Kelly Harris are shown to

be at the utter mercy of the conspirator with the sinister plan; Tanner Kingsley is able to be aware and vigilant to every move that the women make because of the resources that he possesses and because of the connections that he has established all around the world. Tanner Kingsley and his lover Senator Van Luven become the embodiments of what a conspirator would be like and they also can be perceived as exemplary conduits for the forces in a capitalist society that rules the lower rungs of civilization by means of subliminal motivation, influence and false ideologies. Characters in the novel are constantly hunted by Tanner Kingsley who has no intention of averting from his goals to achieve more wealth and power; in doing so, Kingsley symbolizes the system of civilized society where a status quo is maintained in which there exists a separation between classes and where ordinary people are made into subjects.

In his 1982 essay “The Subject and Power” , Michel Foucault emphasizes his theory of power by denoting that the role of exercising power is a mode of actions building upon actions; he highlights that the functioning and working of power is about interplay and interchange rather than being about two opposite forces that clash. Thus, exercising of power is the control of the actions of others by taking action. Foucault writes:

Power is exercised only over free subjects , and only insofar as they are “free”. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behaviour are available. Where the determining factors are exhaustive, there is no relationship of power: slavery is not a power relationship when a man

is in chains, only when he has some possible mobility, even a chance of escape.  
(342)

Without the possibility of rebellion by the subject against the established authority, the functioning of power will be the same as physical domination which, according to Foucault, is not a relation of power. Freedom becomes an essential factor in the exercise of power thus, becoming a condition as well as a precondition. As Foucault writes, “power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not a supplementary structure over and above “society” whose radical effacement one can perhaps dream of.” (343)

It is often stressed in the realm of conspiracy thinking that there is no such factor as freedom when it comes to civilized society; all that are offered, choices that people make in their daily lives are all imposed upon them by means of motivation, persuasion and influence. Thinking themselves to be free individuals, conspirators become able to lead entire populations astray while simultaneously making it a point to convince the people that they are free individuals with the ability to make choices and decisions for themselves. Conspiracy thinkers are known to dwell on the fact that it is hugely contradictory that in a free country, citizens are in need of permission for almost every social activity such as driving vehicles, building houses, getting married and receiving medication among other things. Of course, such aspects of governmental policies can be justified and explained as a means of maintaining law and order in a such a way that civilization does not lose its morality and humanity. Thus, in order for a society to function, certain things are restricted and regulated. Such regulations, terms and conditions are what are being met with contempt by conspiracy thinkers as they are

thought to be tools that keep citizens from realizing the truth about their sinister plans and how they have continued to suppress the truth.

As the conventional understanding of conspiracy theories is that they are expanded out of proportion and that they are exaggerated forms of given information and speculations, the portrayal of the antagonists by Sheldon in his novel *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* provides such exaggerated personalities that are suspected of having control over the major events of the world. With statements such as, “We could buy a country, and proclaim ourselves the rulers. Then they couldn’t touch us” (389) Tanner Kingsley and Senator Pauline Mary van Luven become the ultimate evil forces representing the authority figures whose only goal is power over the well being of others. Tanner Kingsley, before a Select Committee on the Environment states:

As all of us aware, the greenhouse effect is caused by the burning of fossil fuels and other related factors completely under our control, and yet these emissions have reached their highest point in half a million years. They’re polluting the air that our children and grandchildren breathe. The pollution can be stopped. And why isn’t it? Because it would cost big business money...As far as we know, this earth is the only place that’s habitable for us, yet we’re poisoning the land and the oceans and the air we breathe as fast as we can. (Sheldon 95)

Kingsley later remarks to Senator van Luven, “This isn’t about business Senator van Luven. This is about humanity. We’re seeing the beginning of a disastrous global destabilization. I’m trying to get the Senate to allocate funds to correct it.” (96) Statements such as these made by the main antagonist provides an understanding of how officials are perceived by believers of conspiracy theories; the protagonist are able to

make those around them believe that they are sincerely working for the improvement of the earth. Tanner Kingsley, on the outside, is a passionately active humanitarian who continues to pursue the government urging them to take the matter of climate change into serious consideration while in reality, all expenses that is to be utilized for the purpose of improving the environment only adds to his wealth.

Added to the theory that the wealthy and powerful are conspiring to exploit and annihilate the world population, Sheldon in his novel also highlights an important aspect of conspiracy thinking which is that of surveillance. In the novel, Tanner Kingsley is easily able to locate the whereabouts of the two women who were his targets; he is shown as being able to listen in on any telephone call and is able to trace where they are going by means of tracking devices that he has planted on them. Conspiracy thinking is often labelled as being a ‘paranoid’ style of thinking; the belief that the activities, whether big or small in scale, are being monitored and watched constantly is one of the more dominant aspects of conspiracy theories. Many are sceptical about governmental procedures that require complete information about citizens at their disposal. As such identifications of all kinds, usage of electronic devices such as computers, cable televisions and mobile phones and using credit cards among other things are all suspected to be ways for the government to spy on its citizens. Thus, even if one lives in a free country, they are specifically kept within a domain in which they are conditioned to only do certain things and only think in a certain way.

The subject matter of surveillance and inspection is again, not uncommon in the realm of theoretical studies. Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), have accounted for the historical analysis of the formation and different aspects of

communities where he highlights the forms of discipline that is required within an establish communion. In highlighting the measure taken during a plague in the seventeenth century, Foucault writes:

...surveillance is based on a system of permanent registration : reports from the syndics to the intendants, from the intendants to the magistrates or mayor. At the beginning of the 'lock up', the role of each of the inhabitants present in the town is laid down, one by one; this document bears 'the name, age, sex of everyone, notwithstanding his condition': a copy is sent to the intendant of the quarter, another to the office of the town hall, another to enable the syndic to make his daily roll call. Everything that may be observed during the course of the visits- deaths, illnesses, complaints, irregularities- is noted down and transmitted to the intendants and magistrates. (198)

Foucault gives detailed accounts of the procedures that were involved during such times of crisis on large scales. Foucault makes it a point to depict the plight of the common man who is obliged to follow and obey the law and order that comes from the higher rungs of the community. Further he writes about the procedures undertaken because of the plague:

It lays down for each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death, his well-being, by means of an omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way to the ultimate determination of the individual, of what characterizes him, of what belongs to him, of what happens to him. (197)

Foucault, thus, analyses and denotes how authority and their policies have led to their determining the very individuality of the citizens by means of imposing policies which acts as formative tools for the very existence of the people. It is noteworthy that in the sphere of conspiracy theorizing, the importance of free thinking and not mere following is highly stressed and given importance. Therefore, the functioning of contemporary civilization as a whole is frequently accused to be at the mercy of a worldwide conspiracy where one cannot execute simple tasks without some type of registration first. The forms of disciplinary procedures of the late seventeenth century that Foucault has written about can thus be seen as almost identical to the existing era of technological marvels where many means of prohibitions, regulations and disciplinary policies are maintained which are of course, different from those that were established in history but are nonetheless having the same aims, functions and procedures. Although the official policies can be seen as being designed for the well-being of all citizens, they can also be equally seen as convenient ways for the authorities to keep the subjects in order in such a way that control becomes easier for them.

It is not uncommon for certain people living in society to refuse official registrations and listing themselves into governmental policies due to uncertainty regarding their intentions. The fear that their private and personal lives are not secure and no longer private often become the reasons as to why many have been known to hesitate being associated with official strategies. Michel Foucault, in explaining his theory of the Panopticon has stated, "Visibility is a trap." In explaining the functions of the architectural figure of the Panopticon, he writes that it helps "to avoid those compact,

swarming, howling masses that were to be found in places of confinement.” (200) Then, Foucault elaborates the effects of the structure as :

...to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. To achieve this, it is at once too much and too little that the prisoner should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little, for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed; too much, because he has no need in fact being so. In view of this, Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. (201)

If the corporate world of contemporary culture is taken into consideration, it is evident that rules, regulations and established principles are what guides the people. It is often claimed that the world with its incredible technological advancements have made it impossible for people to remain isolated from the rest of the population. Thus, being part of the system of civilization where identification is mandatory is equivalent to being exposed to the dangers of being exploited in modern day power relations. Foucault's statement about visibility being a trap is therefore, identifiable within the domain of conspiracies as surveillance and monitoring of the citizens as it is believed that the well-



being and individuality of the people will best be realized and discovered without imposed ideologies, laws and restrictions.

Climate change and the issue of environmental protection can become one such force that turns society into a confined system of power relation where people are induced into a state of consciousness where the ideals enforced are so consistent and convincing that constant observation is not even necessary. Global warming, being a relatively new phenomenon, is portrayed to be an issue that needs immediate and constant attention. Continued participation on the part of people that are held with high esteem have brought about changes that make the subject of global warming an area of concern in modern society. Many have claimed to become environmentally conscious in the light of the impending crisis that pollution is bringing about and even for those that cannot be said to be actively participating, the preservation of the environment is almost always revered and well-regarded. Hence, consciousness and vigilance toward global warming can be termed to be a success in contemporary culture as the labelling of things and people alike as ‘eco-friendly’ immediately ensures their improvement and allure.

Again, what is important in the formation of the society that allows itself to be confined by a few in a certain way is the ideology that has been implanted into the system. Calling global warming a hoax can by no means be an intellectual statement. However, questioning and researching the information provided can indeed become of great value and significance on the part of the tax payers and the customers who also happen to be those that are being accused of polluting and desolating the earth.

Kundan Kumar, in his analysis of the role of ideology in politics, has remarked:

Ideology is a more specific term than ideas. It has in practice been employed with different emphasis. It is a pattern of ideas thrown up automatically by specific social circumstances... It is a set of ideas formulated into precise political programme. It is a fervently held but impractical formula for a political utopia.

(42)

Ideologies that are designed specifically to organize and guide a working political system cannot be termed as unfair or biased towards its people for any organizational system to function properly, a fairly set of specialized dogma philosophical outlook is required. However, when such guiding principles fail to meet the needs and are suspected to be working in favour of only a few, researching and questioning the workings of the society as a whole may come to the realization and discovery of values and ways of thinking that can benefit not only the individual but also the system.

Critiquing society and its constructed norms and beliefs is not uncommon in human history as many a great philosophers, scholars and thinkers have been known to structure their ideas in opposition to the established norms of their time. The concept of conspiracy theorizing can also be viewed in such a manner that conspiracy thinkers become critical individuals who, by research and analysis, find faults in the established norms and are attempting to educate the public on the matter. However, as long as the derogatory term, that is 'conspiracy theory' and 'theorist' is associated with the form of critical thinking that is not conventional, it becomes a paranoid form of perspective that is pessimistic, irrational and simply wrong.

It is evident that the issue of global warming is a force that is felt strongly and also effective in everyday lives, political policies and business enterprises. As established,

it is also crucial to realize that the depiction of the science of global warming and climate change by popular media cannot always be accountable nor reliable as the media have been known to be prone to over exaggeration and taking information out of proportion. Although it is greatly necessary that the environment remains one of society's priorities, it is also equally necessary to look into the matter with a critical set of thinking as opposed to following the status quo and believing whatever is being fed from the higher rungs of societal organization.

It can be claimed that the misinformation, exaggeration of the news and uncertainty about the science have brought about the formation of global warming conspiracy. With organizations such as HAARP and the continued policies that is imposed upon the public by means of taxes and higher prices of commodities, it becomes difficult to not suspect that the officials are taking advantage of the fear, concern and vulnerability of its citizens.

Sidney Sheldon, in his novel, presents such a situation where the worst fear and speculations of conspiracy thinkers is made into a reality. *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* becomes an effective depiction of such a scenario where the authorities are in utter and complete control of society as we know it and where the lives of the common people mean little or nothing at all. The fear and suspicion of the things that are not known is a dominant feature when analyzing the characteristics of conspiracy theories. Such fears, which are never specific and are based solely on speculation, are depicted effectually by Sheldon as the different forms of conspiracies that he included such as weapons of mass destruction, corrupt politicians and assassination of witnesses become factors that can be identifiable to the belief of conspiracies in society. True to the nature of

conspiracy theories, their portrayal by Sheldon can be identified as exaggeration. However, such exaggeration provides a form of reading that gives an insight into the realm of conspiracy thinking where speculation and scepticism are often the guiding principles.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Secret Organizations and Exercise of Power**

Conspiracies and conspiracy theories that surface and are well known in popular culture are manifold. However, the notion that the entire world is being controlled by a secret group that is immensely powerful and discreet and has immoral values and tendencies seems one of the most shared speculations among public audiences regarding conspiracies. Sidney Sheldon, in his seventh best-selling novel titled *Windmills of the Gods* (1987) presents his readers, with his signature style of intrigue, a thriller about international political affairs that are most relevant among the belief system of conspiracy thinking. The novel, alongside the depiction of fast paced action that Sheldon's audiences are accustomed to, depicts the very ingrained aspect of conspiracy theorizing where it is believed that the political systems of the world are being influenced and prompted by outer forces. As such, through the analysis and study of Sheldon's *Windmills of the Gods*, this chapter will explore the characteristics of conspiracy theories that are relevant to the notion of secret societies or groups that are believed to have major impact amongst the political scenario.

The main protagonist of the novel is a woman named Mary Ashley. Mary is well educated, well-mannered and self-disciplined. She teaches Political Science at a University and is moderately successful. She is married to a doctor named Edward Ashley and they live in Kansas with their two children Beth and Tim. Mary has had dreams about travelling and seeing the world but married life has not permitted her to fulfil this fantasy. Although she is happily married and enjoys her job very much, her longing for an opportunity to travel and explore resides within her.

Mary lives a fairly ordinary life until she receives a telephone call from the President of the United States. The newly elected President Paul Ellison asks Mary to

become the new Ambassador to Romania. The President explains that he has read an article that Mary has written and also her book upon the subject matter of foreign relations and thus, he feels that Mary would be eligible and efficient for the post.

President Ellison has launched a new people – to – people programme with the Iron Curtain countries which have stirred a wide range of controversy. The Communists think that President Ellison is opening doors so that Allies can enter and take over their country while the West feels that the Communists will be able to move freely and be able to spy on the country and will eventually turn the nation into a communist dump. It is in the hopes that this campaign will become successful that the President has decided to recruit a new ambassador. Mary is excited and honoured that the President had personally picked her for the job but since she will not be able to leave with her entire family due to her husband's work, she turns down the offer. Her husband Edward admits to her he was jealous that she was chosen and not him and apologized to his wife because of his envy. As they are about to resume their regular lives, Edward is killed in a terrible car accident when he is called in the middle of the night to attend to a medical emergency.

With Edward gone, Mary is offered the job again by President Ellison. At first, she has no intention of accepting. But after being in contact with Stanton Rogers, the President's right hand man and a close personal friend, Mary accepts the offer. As she has had no prior experience, she is rigorously trained and prepared for her move to Romania. Her preparation for her new post helps her with the grief that she feels over the death of her husband as she has to put every ounce of her energy and thought into her training. Her and her children's pictures are plastered all over the pages of

newspapers and magazines and the amount of publicity that the her new post has gathered was overwhelming for her entire family.

During her preparation, she is introduced to Mike Slade who has been appointed to be her deputy chief. Mike Slade has an arrogant attitude because of which Mary immediately dislikes him and even requests for his removal. But Staton Rogers assures her that Mike Slade is the best at his job and Mary unwillingly accepts that she has to endure his presence. Upon arriving in Romania, Mary is faced with continuous political issues and is made to arrive at numerous meetings and she attends party after party. She realizes that she would have to be much stronger mentally and physically in order to not fail the expectations of her country. She is also aware that many people are underestimating her abilities as ambassador as she is inexperienced and also a woman. Among such doubters is Mike Slade who even tells her to go home and go back to her once normal life. But all such disbeliefs upon her capabilities only serves as motivation for Mary and she is able to hold her office with dignity.

Meanwhile, secret meetings are being held all over the world by a group known as Patriots of Freedom. The meetings are held in secret locations and it is conducted by a man known only as the Controller. Such secret meetings seem to be deciding the fate of many people who are potential threat to the position of Mary Ashley becoming an effective ambassador. People who have tried to understand and investigate how Mary has come to be chosen and the truth behind the convenient death of her husband are all murdered. The secret committee hires a professional assassin from Buenos Aires known as Angel who can only be reached through his mistress who is described as “fat”, “ugly” and a complete “moron”. And as such, no one knows the identity of Angel.



Angel is also hired to kill a man named Marin Groza who is exiled from the country for his plans to overthrow the dictator Ionescu. Groza is a revolutionary who seeks to free his people from the grasps of the unjust government. Angel pursues Groza and goes to his home. He enters pass security with ease and spies on Groza until he gathers useful information to make his task easier. Soon he finds out that Groza inflicts himself by means of a whip every Friday in order to atone his guilt over the murder of his wife and child who were tortured to death in front of his eyes. Angel poisons a whip and sends it to Groza's address and it is placed in his closet. Groza unknowingly uses the poisoned whip and the revolutionary fighter dies from the poison from the whip.

Mary and her children are slowly adjusting to the politically unstable country and Mary proves to be an effective ambassador as she wins the favour of President Ionescu and establishes a business plan between Romania and the U.S. She is able to negotiate efficiently with President Ionescu and continuously pleases Stanton and President Ellison. Mary meets a French doctor named Louis Desforages who rescued her from attackers while Mary was walking towards home. Mary and the doctor soon get closer and they begin to be involved in a relationship.

Mary's position as ambassador becomes hostile when she learns that she is unwanted by an unknown force. After she finds her office vandalized, she becomes even more frightened. Later, Mary falls ill and Dr. Louis tends to her as the nearest hospital was in Frankfurt. He tells Mary that someone has been poisoning her with arsenic on a daily basis and Mary realizes that Mike Slade had been providing coffee for her every

morning. Her suspicion is confirmed when she finds out that Mike is the only one who purchases arsenic from the embassy's pharmacy.

Dr. Louise meets Mike Slade in private in order to confront him about the poisoning. Mike, realizing that Louise has known of his intentions, pulls out a gun and kills the doctor. Mary is frightened for the safety of her and her children and she tries to contact Stanton Rogers but he is out of station and cannot be in contact, so she leaves him a message. Mary is scheduled to attend the ground breaking ceremony of a new American library. However, she is informed that Louise is dead and then she receives a note signed by Angel telling her that it is her last day alive. Mary comes up with a plan and she attends the ceremony and sends Mike away on another assignment. During the ceremony, a car explodes nearby and the supposed culprit who is thought to be Angel is shot dead. However, in reality, the occasion is only a part of Angel's plan and the man that has been shot is only a decoy. After Stanton Rogers is finally informed by Mary about Mike Slade, he orders Colonel McKinney, who is also stationed at the embassy to arrest him but Mike had disappeared. Rogers thinks that it was in the best interest of Mary to be around as many people as possible. Thus, preparations are under way for the celebration of the fourth of July at the residence of the ambassador.

Angel enters the residence of Mary as a decorator that will supply the red, white and blue balloons for the party. The balloons are each filled with different gases that are intended to cause a huge explosion and killing everyone present in the process.

As Mary was getting ready for the party Mike Slade walks into her office along with Colonel McKinney. They explained to her that they were on her side and that their

predicament has its roots in the people – to – people programme launched by the President. They explained that there is a fraction of U.S government who believe that the President's relation plans will bring about destruction by Communists' hands and on the other side, which is the iron curtain countries, there are people who believe that the new policy will allow capitalist spies to enter their countries. They inform her about the secret society known as the Patriots of Freedom and that the group's intention was to kill Mary and her children as publicly as possible so that any attempt for another relation program will be abandoned. Mike tells her that he had been poisoning her so that she will have to leave the country and that Dr. Louise was part of the conspiracy and he had to kill him as he found out that Mike had not gone according to plan.

In hopes of catching Angel, Mary proceeds with the party and they search every inch of the house as they firmly believe that explosives have been planted. They soon find out that the explosives were inside the balloons and that Angel's true identity is the mistress, the fat, alcoholic woman who was regarded to be an idiot. The roof of the house is opened and the balloons are released just in time. As Mike Slade had been a member of the Patriots of Freedom as a spy, all other members from around the world are arrested except for the Controller and Angel. Mary receives a call from Stanton Rogers in Washington and tells him that Angel was the mistress. And when Rogers was able to describe the appearance of Angel, it becomes clear to Mary that he was the Controller. Rogers had been the culprit of the conspiracy due to the jealousy he feels over Paul Ellison, his close friend, for being elected President over himself. He never forgave Ellison since his whole career has been built for Presidency. Rogers disappears and his head was found two days later in a garbage can. Angel had killed him after

Rogers insulted her for failing the mission to kill the Ambassador. After the President begs Mary to stay on her post as Ambassador, Mary requests that Mike Slade remains by her side as deputy chief. Although Mike Slade is already needed on another mission, the President yields to the persuasion of Mary and both she and Mike remain in Romania.

In *Windmills of the Gods*, Sheldon takes his popular theme of conspiracy fiction to a level where conspiracy thinkers are most suspicious of, which is the realm of secret societies within national and international affairs. In popular culture, the word ‘conspiracy’ has become identified and synonymous with speculations about secret societies that have direct or indirect influence over the workings of international political affairs and transactions. It is a common suspicion among the majority of the public that the political systems of countries of the world are designed in such a way that it works only in the favour of only a portion of the people. Such theories are associated with the speculated existence of secret societies and groups that formulate and control every outcome of every political affair that occurs in any part of the world. Secret societies that are suspected to have direct influence upon the yielding of power by world leaders remains a popular speculation among conspiracy thinkers. Such secret groups that are suspected to be operational include the Bavarian Illuminati, the Freemasons and Bohemian Grove among others. Sidney Sheldon, in his novel, has utilized the popular notion of the speculated existence of secret organizations within modern society that are powerful enough to control and alter the relations that take place regardless of the public’s awareness and approval. The novel highlights how a secret organization functions without the awareness and consent of the majority of people that are affected

by their decisions. The “Patriots of Freedom”, the secret organization that Sheldon has created for the novel, thus highlight how conspiracy thinkers have hypothesized the possible influence and outcome of secret societies being operational behind the policy making procedures of the world government.

In *Windmills of the Gods*, Sheldon takes his signature style of conspiracy themed fiction into the dimension of politics which is, indeed, a topic that receives much attention among conspiracy believers. In a typical conspiratorial way of hypothesizing, almost every outcome of governmental origin is designed and manufactured in order to have a negative impact upon the public while at the same time profiting only the policy makers themselves. The novel portrays the very notion of relations established between countries. The program launched by the President of the United States is intended to create better relation by means of peaceful cooperation as President Ellison states in his speech:

Sending our Ambassador to Romania is the beginning of a worldwide people-to-people movement. Let us never forget that all mankind shares a common origin, common problems, and a common ultimate fate. Let us remember that the problems we share are greater than the problems that divide us, and that what divides us is of our own making. (15)

Of course, the President’s intentions to establish peaceful relations are very diplomatic and admirable as it will bring forth better cooperation between different countries. However, the desire and struggle to maintain an order within an established civilization leads to the tampering of international political affairs and plans are thus,

orchestrated in order to sabotage the humanitarian policies of the government and in turn maintaining the existing systems in the respective countries that are involved. The novel takes the character of Mary Ashley, a normal American citizen who is hand-picked to become a national figure. The main protagonist is pulled into the political scene of the United States without any prior experience. Mary, in her lack of familiarity and her apprehension makes her a relatable character as the conspiracy that unfolds which is working against her is seen from her perspective. Much of the suspense and thrill in the novel is witnessed through the relatable characteristic of Mary Ashley's personality making the theme of conspiracy within federal grounds all the more effective. Being exposed to the world of governmental procedures, the novel, through the main protagonist, is thus able to explore the various speculations that have surfaced and are continuing to surface about the government, its officials and their intentions.

Similar to the typical form of popular thriller novels, Sheldon makes use of the sinister portrayal of the antagonist who, at first, appears to be a character of good and noble intentions. Other misleading characters in terms of their true intentions are also presented throughout the novel which all add to the suspense and thrill of a conspiracy novel. John Scaggs has noted on the theme of anti-conspiracy thrillers, "the protagonist is pitched against a powerful conspiracy without recourse to the forces of law and order..." (117) The same characteristic of conspiracy themed novels is seen in the novels of Sidney Sheldon as in *Windmills of the Gods*. Although the novel can be identified as being based on a formulaic system of genre fiction and are considered to be under the domain of low-brow literature, it is no less an effective representation of the extent to which believers of conspiracy theories take their speculations. Thus, the novel can be

said to act as an escape, an exploration into the imagination of conspiracy believers who have little or no outlet for their scepticism about governmental organizations that are running the world.

The style of the depiction of action, dialogue, characterization and theme in the novel may not be considered to be distinctive and unique for its genre based formation. However, the portrayal of the certain elements of the federal systems alongside the characterization of its main protagonist and antagonists provides for a look into some of the hypothesis that has developed about secret societies and plans made by officials without the knowledge of the majority of the population. The aspect of conspiracy theorizing is almost always associated with the notion of some form of a secret group that functions behind the workings of powerful organizations. Most notable among such speculated groups such as the Illuminati are thought by conspiracy thinkers to be so powerful to such a level where they hypothesize that there are no coincidences nor accidents and that every event, every outcome of every large scale occurrence has been pre-determined and that the majority of the world's population are only 'puppets' under their complete control.

The premise behind the theories of secret societies are not based on pure fiction and fantasy alone; the organizations or groups such as the Illuminati and similar others were indeed in existence and were very much operational within civilized nations. The fact that they were seen as threatening the already existing norms and belief systems led to their being scorned as evil and sinister in nature. The group known as the Illuminati remains one of the most recognized and suspected organizations that are thought to be

operational in secret and as such, their intentions and plans are thought to be greatly harmful for a majority of the world.

Dwight C. Smith Jr has noted that the issue of the Bavarian Illuminati came to be raised in the American society in the year 1798 “by the Reverend Jedidah Morse of Charlestown, Massachusetts, who, with many of his fellow New England Clergy, found rapidly shifting social and political conditions threatening to an established sense of order.” (77) He further writes :

Political cleavages that had emerged on a national scale following adoption of the constitution stimulated their apprehension...

Conservative churchmen were particularly vulnerable to rumours that atheistic forces were arrayed against them. A growing demand for religious tolerance was inexplicable simply as a popular cause; there had to be a driving force behind it, using the issue of religious freedom as a smokescreen for an attack on religion itself. The absence of an identifiable force was simply proof that it was secret; and the necessity of exposing it required a search for its true identity. (77)

Smith further explains the origin of the Bavarian Illuminati and stated that the original goal of the order was “to advance the cause of truth and reason.” He explains :

Their opponents, said the order’s founder Adam Weishaupt, were the Jesuits who controlled education through the enforcement of dogmatic instruction that suppressed all liberal ideas. Weishaupt’s argument was not antireligious; he wanted to rescue Christianity from “the advocates of supernaturalism and the enemies of



reason,” and that led him and the order to frequent early utterances hostile to current Christian dogma. When read apart from Weishaupt’s basic intent, and in association with other records of the order, those statements were interpreted as evidence that the order was “devoted to the overthrow of religion and the State, a band of poisoners and forgers, an association of men of disgusting morals and depraved tastes.” (78)

The order of the Illuminati, in the contemporary context, has now been purely identified with the concept of conspiracy thinking and acknowledged as having to be associated with anti-religious purposes and devil-worshipping. The very form of popular culture, especially that of the Western customs, is highly suspected by conspiracy theorists to be part of an elaborately orchestrated plan by the Illuminati to take complete control of the world. The majority of what contributes to the making of popular culture such as technological advancements, art, music and fashion, are speculated by conspiracy thinkers to be part of a scheme that has been carefully coordinated by conspirators in order to make possible the coercion of people on a massive scale without having to use force. Thus, the conjecture that the organization of groups such as the Illuminati are anti-religious are kept very much alive in the forms conspiracy theorizing as they are identified by a majority of conspiracy believers that it involves the occult and that they have a mission to bring forth destruction upon the population on a colossal scale.

The Bohemian Club has also been much scrutinized by the believers of conspiracy theories as having to be involved in the plan to bring forth a “new world order”. James Vaughn has described the organization as “a private men’s club” whose members are “socially prominent members of the highest stratum of society who

typically represent the heads of the economic, entertainment, military and political institutional orders of regional, national and in some cases, global levels.” (86) The meeting held within the Grove can be simply dismissed as an exclusive organization that seeks the best interest for world business. However, there are numerous rumours of alcoholism, drug use, prostitution and homosexual activities within the two weeks that the members spend in the woods annually. The various ritualistic ceremonies, especially that known as ‘The Cremation of Care’ where all Bohemians are known to gather in front of a giant owl statue is greatly thought to be under the influence of devil-worshipping and that the Grove is a meeting where they decide who will be elected into which position. Thus, the two weeks spent is also speculated as being a part of an initiation program into power. This can be considered to be partially true to some extent as James Vaughn has also written:

In the backstage region of the Grove, Bohemians can explore artistic, political, economic and military ideas beyond public scrutiny. The implications of the personal relationships developed and maintained in the grove is that they radiate throughout the institutional orders of society where the relationships can be used in the Bohemian’s professional roles in society. In some instances, it is asserted herein, the Grove’s events may be used by powerful individuals to evaluate possible public policies, or for potential candidates for public office to see how their peers receive them. (85)

Vaughn writes that activities within the club include the celebration of arts and companionship. However, there also takes place lectures and intellectual discussion regarding “public policies, political ideology, and corporate philosophy as well.” (86) He states :

The Bohemian Grove offers a unique social institution for its members in which they can be free of the daily cares of life. They can “remove their masks” in the dramaturgical sense of things”. They leave their front region roles at the gate and share in the pleasures of a midsummer night’s dream with men of great social prominence, free of social ramifications. This type of joint action, in which each player makes supportive indications to the other actors in the group, gives rise to the shared meanings of being free from Dull Care...they also enact typical male bonding behaviour of drinking and telling stories and jokes, in groups around the campfire, leading to the development of common or at least similar mindsets. Bohemians later leave the Grove and re-enter the world of Dull Care with strong and tight emotional relationships. (120)

The tight security maintained around the Grove, the little amount of media coverage that has been obtained and the exclusivity of the membership which only includes the wealthy and powerful have been met with protests from many who reject the idea that only a small fraction of the population are qualified to make policies and ideals for themselves and for the rest of the much larger population. Protesters are often known to gather outside of the woods in objection to the Bohemian Club where many have speculated that plans for the Manhattan Project which led to the first nuclear

weapons during the World War II was made. Similarly, there have been other theories linked with the Grove about discussions for de-population on a global scale.

The shared fear and anxiety amongst believers of conspiracy theories regarding the existence of powerful groups that secretly run the civilized world has been made into a significant part of contemporary or popular culture. Almost everything that catches the attention of the public is suspected of having some form of a conspiracy behind them. The music and entertainment industry, especially that of the Western cultures is heavily associated with speculations about secret occult groups and subliminal brainwashing of the masses. As symbolism and representation are believed to play a major role in the detection of members of secret societies, believers of conspiracy theories are known to jump to conclusion and make claims without supporting data or proof and make unconvincing and unnecessary connections. However, conspiracy theories continue to be accepted by many people even if the data that supports such theories maybe lacking any sort of reliable information.

It is stressed often by sceptics that conspiracy thinking is fuelled by delusional thinking which lack any sort of supporting documentation other than one's imagination and a leap of faith. Hence, the notion of conspiracy theorizing is quick to be dismissed as a mere product of unsupported speculations. J. Eric Oliver and Thomas J. Wood, on how conspiracy theories are perceived in America have noted :

Most scholarly models prioritize elite discourse and ideological predispositions as *the* driving engines of public opinion, yet most conspiracy theories directly contradict mainstream explanations for public events and are usually suspicious of

political elites. This presents something of a puzzle: if public opinion is so determined by elite discourse, then how can a set of beliefs that openly question the sincerity of political elites and the dominant narratives for political events be embraced by the mass public? Widespread belief in conspiracy theories would suggest that a set of unrecognized factors shapes the way most Americans understand politics. (953)

The Western cultural influence, especially that of America, has been felt strongly in other parts of the world and similarly, the same can be said for the notion of conspiracy theorizing. Oliver and Wood had further pointed out that believing in conspiracy theories tend to be greatly influenced by information bias, which means that theorists tend to lean toward specific type of information that affects themselves and ignore the rest. And in psychological studies, conspiracy thinking is linked with the aspects of belief in the supernatural, paranormal and religious convictions. And it has been highlighted that those that invest themselves in the different aspects of conspiracy theories are simply attracted to the melodramatic and peculiar; as conspiracy narratives offer unconventional perspectives upon events such as national disasters, popular society and political affairs, it is noted by many that people are naturally drawn towards the uncommon, rare and sometimes bizarre side of the story. For example, a person with an extensively high level of superstitious beliefs about the supernatural may be prone to the belief that powerful and wealthy individuals in society have all 'sold their souls' to the devil and in return they have gained fame and fortune which comes from the devil. Similarly, those that may have had experiences financially with corporate business may formulate theories about how corrupt and conniving the whole federal system is.

Conspiratorial ways of thinking provide answers and explanations to a certain degree of events or occurrences that may seem unfair and unnatural to people hence, their wide range of appeal and attractiveness. Although the conventional norm compels people of society to not invest into the belief of conspiracy theories, it is the certain aspects of society that have lead to the formulations of conspiracy narratives. As such, it is worth noting that the factors that lead to the creations of the concept of dominant conspiracy theories such as secret societies need not be dismissed so easily but instead should be thoroughly analyzed. Conspiracies that involve the plotting against society by a group of powerful, intelligent elites is undoubtedly one of the most common and widely believed theories. Such theories posit that the system under which society functions have been largely exploitative and manipulative of the common people. Such secret societies are conceived to be so powerful and influential in society that theorists often link significant events and accidents of the world, whether modern or historical, to the workings and planning of such secret groups.

Deaths of important people in society, tragic events caused by terrorism and related hate crimes, important events that make history ranging from sporting events to musical awards can all be interpreted in terms of conspiracy thinking that usually believe that there are no coincidences and that all important events are only a stepping stone for what is to come. The suspected conspirators that are accused of being part of the secret organization are thought to be powerful, wealthy and influential in various fields thus, making them the more capable to scheme and manipulate people on a very large scale. The ‘conspirators’ that are suspected of having villainous and sinister plans against common people are usually political leaders of national government organizations who

are commonly influential and persons of significance in the functioning of societies. Those who are accused by theorists to be part of world-wide conspiracies thus, include Presidents of countries, prominent activists and even religious leaders like the Pope himself. Secret societies are thought to be so powerful and prevailing that it is believed by theories that they can , and have, altered historical information, tampered with scientific discoveries and covered up murders. Taking the whole concept of conspiracy into perspective, it basically be understood that the way of life, the norms and accepted systems as they are known in civilization is a façade, a hoax, that has been fabricated in such a manner that the common man remains controlled and exploited.

Such features of the basic dynamics of the existence of secret societies and their supposed operational activities can be seen as reflected in Sidney Sheldon's novel *Windmills of the Gods* . Sheldon, creating the secret organization known as the "Patriots of Freedom" explores and highlights the different aspects associated with the notion of secrecy and deceit in the realm of politics. The Patriots of Freedom, in the novel, are forces that combine from both the America and the Iron Curtain country of Romania who reject the programme that has been launched which will be able to bring about a change in the functioning of both the countries. The struggle to maintain a system of power relations within the respective countries become the driving force behind the novel's narrative.

It is understood that, in the plot of the novel, the group of conspirators wish to maintain the way of functioning in their respective countries. The country of Romania is an Iron Curtain country where the form of government that runs a country like the United States is not applied to any aspect of their lives. The desire to maintain a

particular way of functioning, which is often known to be the major objectives of secret organizations, is highlighted thoroughly in the novel. The novel also highlights the common speculation about hidden activities that are aimed at achieving certain objectives; when Mary Ashley refused to take the job of Ambassador, she initially turns down the offer as it conflicts with her husband's interest and his job as a doctor. However, Edward is soon murdered in what is made to look like a car accident and thus finally, Mary becomes Ambassador as there is no longer a husband to argue otherwise. The death of Edward, Mary's husband, at the onset of the plot of the novel becomes emblematic of what is to come and a fine example of how conspiracy theorists view the workings of secret organizations. Conspiracy theorists have time and again stressed the possibility that conspirators will stop at nothing to achieve their goal which means that killing and murder of innocent bystanders becomes a common occurrence.

Similarly, the novel also highlights how government policies, even those that are aimed at better developments and having humanitarian objectives are met with suspicion and uncertainty. President Ellison, in the novel, launches a new programme that is very optimistic and humanitarian in nature and, if successful will undoubtedly lead to much better relations between the concerned countries. However, his policy is rejected and unwelcomed by many including those that are important policy makers themselves. Thus, a conspiracy is carried out aiming at the disposal of the newly appointed ambassador. The people-to-people programme is launched by the President of the United States who has been newly elected. It is reasonable that there be doubts about the new President's outlook upon national relations, however, President Ellison's role in the novel that causes the conspiracy to form in the first place is significant as it provides an insight to the



narrative of conspiracy thinking that is always highly sceptical of political leaders and their policies.

Sheldon depicts the members of the Patriots of Freedom to be amongst the most wealthy and powerful individuals in their respective societies. In the conventional understanding of conspiracy theories, theorists are always highly distrustful of government leaders who have a great amount of influence upon political relations. As such, Presidents and other government officials are always viewed as being sinister beings that seek to cause harm and oppression. In the light of such an outlook upon political figures, the concept of conspiracy theories can be viewed as a form of political narrative that seeks to bring an end to the faults and uneven beneficial aspects of political systems. Secret societies, whether they be based on real organizations or they be made up, are hypothesized by theorists to be extremely exploitative of the people. The members of the secret organizations are made up of only the wealthiest, most influential individuals that come from different parts of the world. Thus, members of such a group are thought to be extremely spiteful and obsessed with wealth and power. Their main objective, as believed by conspiracy theorists, is the continuous exploitation of the masses by the conspirators, the higher rungs of society who see themselves as superior in every way. Although the notion of conspiracy theorizing is mostly associated with taking news and information out of context and blowing them out of proportion, it is not difficult to understand that they highlight the faults and obvious distinction between groups of people that live under the same law and governing system.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, in *The Marxist Manifesto* (1948) have noted that society has always been maintained through a class struggle between two groups of people. Marx and Engels write:

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes...

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. (14)

Marxist beliefs thus, see the society as an endless struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed where the higher class are the only class that prospers and profits off the work done by the lower class. In the *Manifesto*, it is further written:

All the preceding classes that got the upper hand sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. (20)

Conspiracy narrative have always posit that the ruling class have somehow engineered various crisis in society in order for them to maintain their own status and

power. In light of modern catastrophe ranging from economic crisis, war and diseases, many have discredited the functions and yielding of power by the bourgeoisie and in turn have turned to conspiracy theorizing in order to look for answers and provide remedies. Hence, before conspiracy thinking is identified with the extreme and delusional, it can be identified as a form of political narrative and critical approach to the systematic functioning of society.

Marxism, unlike conspiracy theories, hold that the exploitation and oppression of the people are carried out in the open through labour process and through the production and selling of commodities. Conspiracy theories, on the other hand, generally view that the oppression of the masses take place by means of hidden initiatives led by a group of sinister and evil individuals. It can be argued the two theories indeed differ in their outlook on the way oppression takes place in society. However, the critique of the system that does not cease to govern the daily lives of people is a common ground that is shared with much passion.

Conspiracy theorists hypothesize that a group of world leaders have a common objective which is to bring about a world where there can never be equality among individuals and people accept the system of the society even if it is evident that the elites are the only ones that profit. The notion of ideological influence is hence, an important aspect of conspiracy thinking that seeks to break the chains of the system which have been internalized and accepted as the norm. Ideals, morals and standards that have been taught to people from the moment that they became a part of society are thought to be fabricated and engineered by the elites in order that the status quo maybe

maintained and the separation and distinction between the classes will continue to be established.

In Marxist theory, ideology indicates the entire apparatus of ideas and design that are known to reflect and justify the society and its existence. Louis Althusser, in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1970) has noted that the capitalist society requires means of re-producing the means of labour-power that produces the goods. For example, schools teach and impart the rules and regulations to the students who will internalize such information that will someday turn them into reliable sources of labour power as they have been taught the importance of obedience and subjugation. This notion of individuals being kept in check from a sensible age is identified to a great extent in conspiracy thinking as it is felt by theorists that the system feeds people what to think, how to feel and what to believe from a very young age which turns people to products and not into individuals in their own right.

The conditioning of people, the common masses, into a certain way of living remains a prominent topic in conspiracy narrative as it is held by theorists that people are constantly being told what to believe, what is truth and what is lie, what is good and what is bad, which leaves the people in an utter place of being dis-individualized and monotonous. Television, books, the media and electronic media have all been attributed to the reasons as to why the controlling and coercion of people on a massive scale have been made so easy and effective. A fine example would be the depiction of the acts of terrorism and the related races by the media of the western world; many conspiracy theorists have contested that terrorist acts such as the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers were in actuality an inside job orchestrated by the government of the United

States. With the influence of the media, many have indeed associated the middle-eastern regions in general and the religion of Muslim with acts of terrorism, violence and mayhem.

In his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, Althusser has stated regarding what he calls the “ideological state apparatuses”:

Each of them contributes towards this single result in the way to proper it. The political apparatus by subjecting individuals to the political State Ideology, the ‘indirect (parliamentary) or ‘direct’ (plebiscitary or fascist) ‘democratic’ ideology. The communications apparatus by cramming every ‘citizen’ with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc, by means of the press, the radio and television. The same goes for the cultural apparatus (the role of sport in Chauvinism is of the first importance), etc. The religious apparatus by calling in sermons and the other great ceremonies of Birth, Marriage and Death, the man is only ashes, unless he loves his neighbour to the extent of turning the other cheek to whoever strikes first. (154)

Althusser states in his essay that the different agencies of the ideological apparatus such as the educational system, the family and the church continue to contribute to the mode of production that ensures a continuation of the capitalist exploitation of the lower and working class.

The societal construction of a capitalist environment is deemed by conspiracy theorists as an evil system that continues to reign supreme through the ‘brainwashing’ of the masses. The influence and stress laid upon the importance of ideology is thus felt

strongly as in the theories of Marxism. Conspiracy theorists are often known to be biased in terms of confirmation of a 'conspiracy' which means that they do not approach the system as a whole, rather they attack the fragments and agents of the system such as the media, the politician or the policy to which they hold a particular interest or grudge. However, conspiracy theories can be easily linked together, in the sense that if a person believes in one theory, he is likely to believe in another conspiracy theory. Thus, it becomes plausible, at least to the conspiracy thinker, that all the deceit and the manipulation is projected from the same source which is the higher rungs of the societal organization. Thus, despite the diversity and range of conspiracy theorizing, it ultimately is about the critique and rejection of the capitalist exploitation of the masses, in other words known as 'the system'.

As Sara Mills has written:

Marxist theory generally uses the term ideology to describe the means whereby oppressed people accept views of the world which are not accurate and which are not in their interests. Ideology, for Marxists, is the imaginary representation of the way things are in a society, and this fictive version of the world serves the interest of those who are dominant in society. (34)

Such an outlook of the theory of Marxism upon the notion of ideology is to a great extent shared by conspiracy thinkers. And as the agents of the ideology are known to promote similar ideals and practices that are accepted as the norms of society, it becomes easy to assume that the systematic pattern that promotes such norms were carefully orchestrated by the elites aiming at the maintenance and upholding of their

status as the upper class. Thus, hypothesizing that world leaders and elites meet in secret to orchestrate plans for world domination becomes an easy and common explanation to crisis of different nature.

While framing constitutions and government policies, it is very much possible that the ruling class believes in the authenticity and effectiveness of the ideas proposed. Similarly, it is understandable that if and when important and influential leaders get together, they will be a part of a form of social group or club where they can share similar interests and socialize away from public scrutiny. Here, the difficulty with conspiracy theories lies in the fact that all wealthy, successful and influential persons are thought to have achieved their status through dishonest and corrupt means and as such, those individuals are thought to have menacing goals. Nevertheless, the value of conspiracy thinking lies in the fact that it rejects the notion of acceptance of the system that has been conditioned into the daily lives of society.

Michel Foucault, on his analysis of power has also focused on the effects of various organizations and institutions upon groups of people in society and how people play out their roles in accordance with the effects of those institutions. Foucault, rather than focusing on the process of oppression instead focuses his analysis on the role of the relations that are established within the society that permeate the functions and allows for the systematic implementation of the subjects as active participants of the established relations.

Foucault has maintained in his works that the notion of power rather than being concentrated in a singular place is something that is performed and is like a strategic

function. It is not necessarily the state or the institution that holds the power but power comes from how it is exercised under the influence of the state. In “Power/Knowledge”, Foucault writes:

Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power...

The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. (98)

Foucault’s works has been subject to much debate and deliberation as he can be said to be unclear about the concept of resistance to the established power relations. However, his view upon the exercise of power is expressed thoroughly throughout his works as Sara Mills has noted, “Power needs to be seen as something which has to be constantly performed rather than being achieved.” (36) Thus, in order for power to be successfully implemented, it does not have to be exercised by a higher power but rather, it needs to be constantly and systematically accepted and performed by individuals. Mills further states :

Rather than simply locating power in a centralized impersonal institution, such as the army or the police, as earlier Marxist theorists had done, he is interested in



local forms of power and the way that they are negotiated with by individuals or other agencies...he sees power as also at the same time productive, something which brings about forms of behaviour events rather than simply curtailing freedom and constraining individuals. (36)

The acceptance and continuation of the systematic functioning of societal organizations is also strongly felt in conspiracy thinking where theorists are continuously urging people to 'wake up' from the norms and ideals which have been imbued into people consciousness as human nature. Foucault, in his works, have identified that the power structure is executed only through the compliance of the people; the state alone does not possess all the power but it is the construction of forms of relations that put the people in positions and places that allows for a situation where the power relations are maintained by the people themselves.

Conspiracy theorists have noted time and again that those common masses outnumber the higher-ups, but it is almost impossible to 'wake up' from the power structure since the masses have accepted and believed in the customary notion of what is already established. The conspiracy that is prevalent, thus becomes the fact that the class distinction and separation has been so internalized and accepted that the chain of power relations and its entailments will not likely be realized or abolish.

Sidney Sheldon's novel *Windmills of the Gods*, certainly becomes an effective depiction of the significance of the compliance that need be established in the structure of power in society. Mary Ashley, the newly appointed Ambassador for the United States is targeted by a national conspiracy to be killed as publicly as possible in order

that the public is exposed to the dangers of tampering with established relations. The sinister mission carried out by the antagonists of the novel can be identified as the depiction of the ideological influence that is so crucial for swaying the minds of the public.

The secret organization in the novel similarly becomes emblematic of the way a society under the guise of democracy functions. The Patriots of Freedom, also including other speculated secret societies in actuality, when analyzed and researched can thus, be effectively interpreted and characterized as the institutional governing of the masses that promises the freedom of choice and the freedom of will. It may not be revealed whether or not secret societies are operational, but in all certainty, it is not difficult to comprehend that if research and in-depth analysis is undertaken before the acceptance of the system that a capitalist society offers to its citizens, it will most likely be revealed that there are alternatives and unconventional means of survival which enables people to think and decide for themselves.

## **Chapter 5**

## **Conclusion**

This study has attempted to analyze and explore the different dynamics of conspiracy theories. Through the novels of Sidney Sheldon, the characteristics of conspiracy thinking and their associated relations of societal formations have been established. As has been denoted, the concept of conspiracy theorizing and conspiracy thinking in general can be manifold as it encompasses realms such as politics, culture, religion and history. It has also attempted to establish the notion that conspiracy theories are not just associated with the psychologically disturbed and delusional; conspiracy beliefs, in actuality, are rooted in the culture of modern civilized society that have been founded upon the systematic and ideological functions of human relations.

As denoted, the aspect of conspiracy theorizing cannot be grouped into a single category or even several. The features that are associated with conspiracy beliefs are diverse, manifold and difficult to grasp all in an instance. The platform that has been established in the form of electronic media have allowed for the concept of conspiratorial thinking to be expanded to realms that were otherwise not recognized with conspiracies before. As it is recognized that people living within the domains of civilized society are provided access to records and information through electronic means of communication and technology, it is not difficult to comprehend that most conspiracy theories have been results of mere speculations by people with suspicions and doubts that can be explained away with rational thinking. The causes for the surfacing of conspiracy theories of any nature can thus, firstly be attributed to uncertainty, fear and superstitions of people towards a particular subject. With information about current events and historical occurrences being made easily accessible to the public, the formation of speculations that concern supposed pre-meditated acts of certain evil doers have become a norm in popular

culture. The concept of a conspiracy theory is usually identified as a mere aspect of popular culture that needs no further speculation as its contents are pre-determined by conventional wisdom to be false speculations and composed of absurdity. Apart from conspiracy theories that may contain actual relevant cultural and political issues, the type of theories that have been developed after the immense advancement and usage of electronic means of information and media indeed, can be characterized as lacking coherent arguments or even lucid reasoning. Even in the absence of actual proof, all counter arguments made against such conspiracy theories can end with accusations of being part of the conspiracy itself and charged as being a brainwashed follower of the system, which is the conspiracy at hand.

As society changes at a rapid range, the means of technology and mass communication is made effortlessly available and is no long subject to centralized control, making issues such as cultural occurrences, political uprisings, corruption and criminal activities more difficult to conceal. This contributes to the breakdown of trust in the power of institutional organizations. Indeed, technology has contributed much to the concept of conspiracy thinking and the notion of conspiracy itself has been acknowledged in popular culture as the pure invention of the means of electronic media. The impression regarding popular culture that- what is so easily accessible lacks depth and meaning can be identified with conspiracy theories as well.

Raiford Guins and Omarya Cruz have noted, “the study of popular culture has taken place under the rubrics of sociology, music, communications, media studies, cinema studies, history, economics, and so on.” (2) It can be agreed to a considerable extent that, such lines according to which the notions of popular culture are identified can be

applied to the understanding of conspiracy theories and their formation in society. Similar to the concept of ‘popular culture’, conspiracy theories are composed of issues that have been developed within the domains of cultural and societal formations ; they certainly are composed of subject matter that have their relations to issues of political, economical and historical nature and no doubt, they have reasonable bearings upon the affairs that are established within human history. However, as denoted earlier, the number of conspiracy theories have increased in the light of the media which has led to the derogatory nature of conspiracy narratives. Although the act of conspiracy thinking may have been known to be effective and even helpful during national times such as war and political uprisings, the fact that conspiracy thinking in popular culture is known to target almost every aspect of a culture’s way of functioning by means of accusations that cannot begin to be coherently explained have led the whole concept of conspiracy theorizing to be based off of people’s paranoia, their search for the abnormal and bizarre or their bitterness towards society and its ways.

Conspiracy beliefs, as they are recognized in contemporary societies, are to a great extent the product of popular culture thus, it is not difficult to comprehend that the aspects that comprise the notion of the ‘popular’ is shared by the concept of conspiracy theories. Guins and Cruz have denoted:

A commonly held view on popular culture is that it is simultaneously incredibly easy to talk about and incredibly difficult to talk about. Reasons for this apparently paradoxical view are that the popular is astonishingly pervasive and that intellectual polemics have targeted popular culture as an over-whelming influence on historical perceptions of, and social relations to, culture. (3)

Much like the description of popular culture, conspiracy theories are composed of aspects that are considered to be lower in nature as opposed to those that are regarded as high-brow culture. Conspiracy theories, having their roots in popular culture, are known to appeal to the general public; providing answers and critiques on the many aspects of modern society and their ways of functioning. Although containing characteristics that may serve as effective assessment of the faults of institutional organizations, conspiratorial thinking that have become popularly recognizable are mostly composed of the bizarre, the unusual and unnatural hence, their status as a paranoid form of approach towards concerning subject matter.

It is not difficult to recognize that the features embodied in the concept of conspiracy speculations are arranged and formulated in such a way that they may appeal to audiences; as conspiracy theories that are popularly recognized are those that are in the nature of being unusual or strange. As such, features of conspiracies that are portrayed through the means of entertainment and media can be said to be commercially intended and profit oriented. Movies, television shows, magazines and books can be said to have immensely profited from the allure of conspiracy thinking which serves as proof of the allure of conspiracy stories in the public eye.

Motion pictures, television shows, magazines and books with themes of conspiracy and its many features are abundantly found in popular culture as it is recognized that the allure and attractive nature of such topics is deeply felt even amongst those that claim that all conspiracy theories are false and plain preposterous. Utilizing the basic fundamentals of conspiracy theories which have their roots in actual societal ways of functioning, conspiracy fiction has been indeed fuelled and kept alive within the domains

of contemporary culture. Aiming at commercial success, conspiracy themed products are found in all forms of entertainment and taking into consideration that such forms of fiction are taken to be truth by some conspiracy believers is also contributing to the reasons as to why conspiracy thinking has been recognized disparagingly.

However, as highlighted by means of the study of select novels by Sidney Sheldon in previous chapters, the many theories of conspiracies tend to have their origins in actual occurrences and developments. It can thus, be stated that events such as U.F.O sightings, unanswered occurrences of disasters and unfair means of political systems are provided with opportunities for seeking the truth in the form of conspiracy thinking. As Jon W. Anderson has stated, conspiracy theories “arise in exclusion and proceed as information-seeking on the part of the outs about the ins. So, minimally, they should be informed by conventions of such behaviour and even provide a unique window into it.” (96)

As a form of approach towards certain affairs, it can thus be acknowledged that the immediate dismissal of conspiracy theories is not always intelligible for the reason that they serve as the field through which accepted norms and principles are questioned. While being placed as a product of popular culture, conspiracy thinking can be thought of as a critical approach that best challenges the notion of the ‘popular’. Within the domain of conspiracy thinking, the popular, meaning the accepted conventions and general ideas are always being approached in a manner that is sceptical and therefore, unorthodox. It has been established by this study that the act of conspiracy theorizing is a method that dwells not only on the bizarre and unusual; conspiracy theories and fictions are a form of political critique that questions the system of operation that ranges



from the most serious and conservative to the most seemingly ridiculous. Therefore, although fuelled and kept alive by the many aspects of what is popular and advanced, conspiracy theories also act as a resistance towards such ideals that are considered important in society.

Guins and Cruz have stated about the features of popular culture :

Mass-produced commodities have been regarded as inauthentic, formulaic, simplistic, and banal. Because they are designed to appeal to global commercial markets rather than reflect the specificity of unique cultural expression, many have and continue to argue that such objects neither challenge aesthetically, morally or spiritually, nor promote active engagement and critical contemplation. (5)

With never-ending discoveries in the fields of science and technology, it can be stated that modern civilization is not the same as it once was, decades ago; of course, it is only natural that humans make advancements and improvements in various fields of expertise, however, such advancements and progress, to a great length, cannot always be in the best interest of the human race. War, terrorism, pollution , corruption and much more man-made disasters and tragedies are witnessed in almost all parts of the globe. Mankind is known to have been through much throughout history in terms of war and hatred between one another. However, when acts of terror and hate crimes happen, the fact that such happenings are accepted to be a normal occurrence and a part of being human is a relatively new development in the civilized world as opposed to earlier times when such news of similar nature were actually information that shocked the general public.

As denoted in the earlier chapters of this study, conspiracy theorizing, whether they be ambitiously convincing or not, are almost always attacking the forms of establishments that have been internalized by the people. The main targets of conspiracy theories are known to be the corporate world such as bankers and political elites who are known to have been the centre of speculations by theorists even before the advancements made in electronic media. With gradual change in lifestyles and societal priorities, the concept of conspiracy theories has also been subject to change where the contend subjects, which are also known to be most dominant, have to do with the daily routines, the influence of cultural aspects and the how those factors are speculated to be all connected to a much a larger scheme.

Conspiracy theories can be viewed as an opposition to the notion of popular culture in a such a manner that they never readily accept what is offered on a massive scale, be it political views, cultural aspects, entertainment or even fashion. In other words, conspiracy thinking in contemporary society can basically be understood as a form of unorthodox approach towards societal organization. Conspiracy narratives view the ideals and principles that are held as imperative in the functioning of society with a critical form of thinking instead of blindly believing and accepting such factors. Of course, it is not always in the best of interest to be sceptical and hateful of whatever surfaces in the midst of popular society. In fact, the tendency of some conspiracy theorists to be passionately hateful and aggressive towards societal affairs can be contributively of their derogatory status . Apart from the paranoid, conspiracy theories of the contemporary world can be recognized to be playing a role in the struggle for a better world free of destruction, oppression, hate and inequality.

It can be agreed upon that some theories that are popular such as those that hypothesize the imminent take-over of the human race by lizard people are redundant. At the same time, it is noteworthy that conspiracy theories also question as to why so many people are without homes while there are people in high places who have more than enough to spend ; they question why governments have enough money to fund the making of weaponry for wars while they are unable to provide clean water to under-developed countries of the world. Conspiracy theories provide a standpoint against a system of affairs that has long operated the functioning of mankind in association with each other and in doing so, they perform an act of searching for the humanity and true nature of man which has been hidden and covered under the conspiracy of oppression.

When theorists of conspiracy talk about not being able to trust ‘the system’, it is basically understood as the capitalist government. In the concept of conspiracy thinking, the government is seen as being oppressive, exploitative and manipulative which can be recognized as being true to a certain amount when viewing the systems of capitalists societies of the western world. George Soros has written about capitalism, “As long as capitalism remains triumphant, the pursuit of money overrides all other social considerations.” (102) He further writes about the system of government under capitalism:

It rules our lives in the way that any regime rules people’s lives. The capitalist system can be compared to an empire that is more global in its coverage than any previous empire. It rules an entire civilization and, as in other empires, those who are outside its walls are considered barbarians...It is almost invisible because it does not have any formal structure. Most of its subjects do not even know that

they are subjected to it or, more correct, they recognize that they are subjected to impersonal and sometimes disruptive forces but they do not understand what those forces are. (103-104)

Soros also comments about the capitalist system while highlighting the inequality that is associated, “Far from seeking equilibrium, it is hell-bent on expansion. It cannot rest as long as there are any markets or resources that remain unincorporated.” (104) Such insight upon the characteristics of a capitalist system undoubtedly shares many of the features that are identified with the notions of conspiracy theories and their supposed speculators. The hunger and desire for profit and gain, the unjust that is allowed to escape punishment and the willingness of the people to become subjects are thus, seen as being very much a part of conspiracy theorizing and also the system of capitalism. Although many countries have thrived under the organizational system of capitalism, it cannot be doubted that there is a flaw which can be witnessed even in the daily lives of citizens. The acceptance of the flawed features of the system that is able to be overlooked by the authorities and also by the people can become what the perception of conspiracy theories have strived to change and demolish.

Conspiracy thinkers find it highly problematic that individuals are conditioned by the society that they live in from the moment of their birth. The institutions that are established within the society teaches its people about what is right and wrong from a delicate age ; the family, the school and the church have indeed internalized the conventional norms and ideals that has been introduced and believing that it the only truth that a person needs to know in order to become a human being. Without their being aware, people living under the ideals of a governing body, by accepting and not

questioning their position, have turned themselves into subjects. Louis Althusser, in his “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” have wrote extensively about the roles that are played in order for people to become subjects under the ruling power. He writes :

...the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression. (132-133)

In his essay, while discussing how societies reproduce the relations of production, Althusser highlights how such a reproduction is able to take place through the means of institutions that impart the willingness of the people to accept the norms of the society. According to Althusser, the exploitation of the lower class by the higher class is possible to continue due to what his theory and concept of the Ideological State Apparatuses. For Althusser, the exploitation of the lower classes of society is not only executed through the repressive powers of the state ; rather, he instead lay emphasis on the role of the notion of ideology and discusses the fact that the functioning of the body of the state is more complex than previous explanations by other Marxist thinkers.

Althusser emphasises upon the idea that the school, the family and the religious institutions all function in the process of naturalizing the subjugation of the lower classes, the acceptance of certain rules and regulations and their willingness to comply to the rules. Conspiracy narratives seek alternatives from the norms that are established within the domains of society; what is being handed to the people in the form of

traditions, culture, information and truth become the main subject matter which are met with contempt as they are seen as a form of oppression that keeps people from the truth. What is portrayed by the media is always met with suspicion as it is believed that the media is entirely under the control of the government which means that what is shown is only partial truth and the whole story is being kept from the knowledge of the audience. The media, alongside the institutions of the society are blamed by theorists for imparting principles that influences people to think, behave and live in a certain way. Conspiracy theorizing can thus, be recognized to be sociologically nurtured to a significant degree and not psychological as conventional wisdom will have people believe.

It is indeed very true that society and its norm alter the lives of the people in ways more than one. Taking the idea of beauty into example ; no human being is ever known to have been born hating the way that his body is shaped and how he looks. Society reinforces the idea of beauty into the consciousness of the individual from a delicate age through the means of the immediate family, the peer groups, the school and of course, the media. Here, the conspiracy becomes the fact that people living in societies are taught that there is a certain type of appearance that is to be considered beautiful. Therefore, people aspire to make themselves look like the ‘beauty’ that is shown to them in magazines, television and movies. Such a situation can be interpreted in terms of conspiracy thinking by taking into consideration and analyzing the fact that cosmetic companies, entertainment and lifestyle outlets such as television shows and magazines are profiting and gaining wealth from the insecurities of the people. Therefore, the media dictates what is beautiful and fashionable; it tells the people what to purchase,

what to devote themselves to and it points them towards what they should hold as important for their daily lives.

Althusser, in his essay, discusses his idea that the society is the outcome of the complicated relations between practices that are operational, and he denoted that it is through such actions and practices that the individual is constituted. This notion of coercion in which individuals have been made subjects is also identified in the works of Michel Foucault where the resistance that is acknowledged in the concept of conspiracy theories is also recognizable. The idea of the Panopticon system that Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) highlights how individuals living in society are made to accept regulations and not question the system that rules over them. He writes about the system of the Panopticon :

It is a polyvalent in its applications; it serves to reform prisoners, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work. It is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power, which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons. Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used. (205)

In the Panoptic system, the individual becomes a self-governing body who follows and governs himself by the regulations that has been implemented by the system. The

Panopticon is able to function automatically because even if there is no one who is actually asserting the function of observation, the rules that govern the system has been internalized by the people. Therefore, the system maintains and guarantees the functioning of power and upholds a certain way of operational behaviour.

Theorists of conspiracy have noted that in order for conspiracies to be operational, the subjects need to be in a state of mind where they believe that the system that they follow is the only way of living. Therefore, the notion of democracy and people thinking that they are free individuals is thought to be only a sham. People in society, as stressed by conspiracy theorists, although they outnumber those in power are made to believe that they are in no position to challenge the established order as they believe them to be the ultimate order of things. Thus, the society as a whole is impelled to regulate itself when the order of things are disrupted and in turn, maintaining the status quo. Conspiracy theories, therefore, take notice of the power relations within the society and promote the alternative of producing free-thinkers who, instead of following and obeying, are able to make decisions on their own about what the disciplined society has to offer. Foucault, in his works, speaks extensively about the power relations that are established and followed by the whole of society. In 'Governmentality', he writes :

The art of government...is essentially concerned with answering the question of how to introduce economy - that is to say, the correct way of managing individuals, goods, and wealth within the family (which good father is expected to do in relation to his wife, children, and servants) and of making the family fortunes prosper – how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father toward his family into the management of the state. (207)



In terms of conspiracy thinking, what Foucault discusses regarding the art of government and how it has to do with the management of economy starting from the family environment becomes a means of conditioning by the higher-ups through the everyday ordeals of what is known to be normal ways of living; by imparting what is accepted and what is not accepted as normal, people in society are thus, lead into a path that turns them into devoted contributors to the system that governs them. The government is recognized by the people to be an institution that cannot be challenged and look upon it as a source for the ultimate truth and hence, the state and its institutions are never questioned.

Conspiracy theorists, in their act of speculating and researching, can be said to be challenging the unchallengeable, the sturdiness of the government in the public's consciousness. Sara Mills has written, "What he (Foucault) argues is that theorists often assume a solidity and permanence to the state and institutions which leads them to focus less on the potential for change, the fragility of the maintenance of power." (48) Mills also writes:

Foucault does not simply want to dispense with the notion of the State in all of his work or to argue that the State is not important; rather, in analyzing the relations of power, it is necessary to extend that analysis beyond the limits of the State... Thus, relations between parents and children, lovers, employers and employees- in short, all relations between people- are power relations. (49)

Viewing the society and its structural organization in such a way that inquires upon its intentions and long-term goals is very much what conspiracy theorizing

embodies. And as established, it does not differ nor stray from the views of intellectual scholars who have questioned the notion of power and socially constructed hierarchical positions. If researched properly, one can be justified in stating that it is the search for truth, equality, peace and freedom that has veiled and disguised under the belittling title ‘conspiracy theory’.

As the themes of cultural dynamics such as entertainment, art and literature would suggest, the allure of conspiracies is felt strongly amongst the public. As such, it is not surprising that products of the dominant culture reflect the aspects of conspiracy narratives. The popular genre have seen much success with themes that are based on the concept of conspiracy theories. Conspiracy themed products, although they be purely fictitious, serve as fine examples for highlighting the allure and attraction of conspiracy theories in popular society and they can be seen as effective examples of how conspiracies in society are thought to be operated. Genre-based fiction and conspiracy theories, both products of popular culture to a significant degree, thus prove to be greatly efficient in the study and understanding of contemporary popular society.

The novels of Sidney Sheldon have seen great success in terms of profit and following among the people and much of that success is undoubtedly an outcome of the themes and subject matter that Sheldon has chosen for his books. In his novels where the plot involves a conspiracy, the main characters challenge the established order; they are depicted as not accepting what is given to them by the higher-ups, resisting and fighting back against the system that rules thus, providing the attractive quality of his novels. Judging from the popularity of Sheldon’s novels as well as other novels that can

be categorized in the same sphere as that of Sheldon, it is evident that conspiracy and its many features occupy a wide amount of space in the day to day routines of society.

Sidney Sheldon's novels with their conspiracy themed plots that are made to thrill may not be practical in actual situations of real life. However, as established through this study, the scenarios that has been presented in his conspiracy fiction reflect the aspects of conspiracy that many hold to be true in real life situations. The depiction of the features of conspiracy such as the aspects from which they are derived, their misconception and their status in the eye of the public becomes evident through the plots of the novels. Conspiracy theories of all kinds have undoubtedly a part of civilized human establishments, some may even claim them to be effective strategy builders in times of war and conflict within nations. With the advancement in technology, conventional understanding has prevented people from taking the theories of conspiracy seriously. The notion of conspiracy has been lowered to a degree where it is made out to be a place for the psychologically disturbed to dwell. However, as denoted through the analysis provided in the earlier chapters of this study, conspiracy theories that are popular in the modern age of technology and electronic media are highly composed of sociological movements that are in the pursuit of truth about human relations as opposed to the paranoid delusions of disturbed individuals.

Conspiracy narratives seek to do away with exploitation, oppression and discrimination. Theories that are popular in the contemporary culture have often noted that they wish to 'wake people up' from their 'brainwashed' state where they conform to every norm that is placed in front of them. Conspiracy thinkers, whether they be practical or utterly delusional, are in fact, very much working for the best interest of the

people. In contemporary society where technology and material luxuries occupy such an important place, conspiracy thinkers and their many theories can be seen as seeking to revive what it means to be a human and the essence of being alive. Thus, conspiracy theories force people to question the system of functioning that they have followed their whole lives because they have been taught that the system works even though the faults are visible.

This study has established that Sidney Sheldon's novels capture the attention of readers as well as provide an understanding into the different dynamics of the notion of conspiracies. His novels can be perceived to be allegorical in the sense that they depict how the construction of human relations in society comprises of aspects such as deceit, discrimination between people and facts hidden from the knowledge of the common people. They highlight, through the notion of conspiracy, the 'evil' that is constantly lurking in civilized society that dictates that there is a definite distinction between races and classes of people. Therefore, conspiracy fiction, as well as conspiracy theories, bring to light the shared speculations and doubts about societal aspects and forces people to confront such doubts and offers a platform where such uncertainties are questioned. What has been accepted as 'natural' and 'normal' are thus, re-analysed through the concept of conspiracy thinking in an attempt to bring about change that will benefit people from all spheres of society. Socially constructed norms have led people to think, act and behave in certain ways ; people are not born hating their bodies or people of other races, society tells us what is value worth and what is not, it tells us the roles of males and females in society. Thus, the study concludes that such ideals and conventions can bring about frustration, discrimination and unequal treatment of people on various

levels and that conspiracy theories force people to question those ideals that have been provided and taught to them as truth.

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## APPENDICES

**NAME OF CANDIDATE** : **F. Laltlankimi**  
**DEGREE** : **M.Phil**  
**DEPARTMENT** : **English**  
**TITLE OF DISSERTATION** : **Dynamics of Conspiracy in  
Select Novels of Sidney  
Sheldon**  
**DATE OF PAYMENT OF ADMISSION** : **3.8.2015**  
**(Commencement of First Semester)**  
**COMMENCEMENT OF SECOND**  
**SEMESTER/ DISSERTATION** : **1.1.2016**

### APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL –

1. BOS : 11. 4. 2016  
2. SCHOOL BOARD : 19. 4. 2016  
3. REGISTRATION NO. & DATE : MZU/M.Phil./301 of 19.04.2016  
4. DUE DATE OF SUBMISSION : 9.12.2016  
5. EXTENTION IF ANY : N.A

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**DEPARMENT OF ENGLISH**

**Name :** F. Laltlankimi

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**Educational Qualification:**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Board/University</b>	<b>Year of Passing</b>	<b>Division/Grade</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
X	MBSE	2008	I	61.8%
XII	MBSE	2010	I	62.4%
B.A	Mizoram University	2013	II	66.85%
M.A	Mizoram University	2015	I	69.75%
M.Phil.	Mizoram University	Course work completed in 2015	I 'A' Grade awarded. 10 pt. scale grading system, 'A' corresponds to 6-6.99 pts.	Corresponds to 63% in terms of percentage conversion.

**M. Phil Regn. No and Date :** MZU/M.Phil./301 of 19.04.2016

**Other relevant information :**

- i) Currently working on M.Phil dissertation entitled “Dynamics of Conspiracy in Select Novels of Sidney Sheldon under the supervision of Prof. Margaret L. Pachuau, Department of English, Mizoram University.
- ii) Attended and participated in an international seminar entitled, “Indigeneity: Expression and Experience,” organised by the Department of English, Mizoram University under UGC-DRS-SAP I, on 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2016.
- iii) Attended and participated in a national seminar entitled, “Emergent Identities: Its Literary Representations”, organised by the Department of English, Mizoram University under UGC-DRS-SAP I, on 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2016.
- iv) Attended and participated on a national seminar entitled, “Child Lore and Identity”, organised by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi and the Department of English, Mizoram University, on 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2016.
- v) Visited the following out-of-state libraries for the purpose of research:
  - a. National Library (Alipore, Kolkata)
  - b. University of Calcutta Library (College Street, Kolkata)
  - c. Library of British Council (Camac Street, Kolkata)
  - d. American Library (Jawaharlal Nehru Road, Kolkata)
  - e. Jadavpur University Central Library (Raja S.C Mallick Road, Kolkata)
- vi) Awarded the UGC-MZU Fellowship for the tenure of eighteen months from the date of admission on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2015.