

# Sidney Sheldon's Novel 'The Sky is Falling': A Tour Across Countries and Cultures



**Sonu Devi**  
Assistant Professor.  
Deptt. of English,  
BPSM University,  
Sonipat

## Abstract

'Sidney Sheldon' is among the top writers read and appreciated with fervor in the modern world. She has written more than twenty novels and several other works of literature, many of which have been on the list of world best sellers. Of course in many of her novels the central character is a woman. In the novel "The Sky is Falling" the heroine 'Dana Evans' is a very adventurous and intelligent TV anchor and journalist who is at the same time very composed and well balanced. She is well travelled and doesn't fear travelling alone in foreign lands and people unknown. The novel is an unending saga of travels both by air and land in the US and abroad. Besides cuisines, hotels, recipes, transportation there is a deep delving in the manners, cultures, history of countries beside a peep in their political situations and geographical locations. However the novel is not without a tinge of bias against some countries. Still the book is a wonderful reading; an interesting, grasping and exciting journey across the countries. The plot is, though, a murder mystery which includes a lot of thrill, adventure and risk however the travel details are amazingly beautiful and add to our understanding of life and world.

**Keywords:** Itinerary, Travelogue, Telescreens, Improbable, Cuisines, Cold-War

## Introduction

The cultural and historical knowledge of a country, nation or people can be known not only through its history records, monuments and stamps or old coins but the valuable information can also be collected from the travelogues, business deal records and legal documents. Travelogues are not only records of just a person's journey and his travails but also of the languages, culture and way of living in a particular area or country. However literature in its proper sense i.e. story telling depicts travels that its characters have to undertake. 'Gulliver's Travels' are world famous in which Dr. Gulliver goes in foreign lands like 'Lilliput' among exotic people and has wonderful experiences. Though the stories are not meant as such and no such place exists on the globe, nevertheless, they give us joy and refresh our minds. 'Alice in Wonderland' is another classic example of dreaming about fancy world and then escaping in it. But 'Sidney Sheldon's novel 'The Sky is Falling' is not just an escape into the improbable world but a realistic journey across Europe, Russia and some parts of America, though not undertaken for the purpose of travelling but for untying the knots of a tragedy, however, it gives us deep insight in the cultures and manners followed in different nations.

The novel 'Sky is Falling' is a detective story exploring the mystery of a series of murders committed by someone behind the curtains and made to look natural deaths as a result of calamities or tragic accidents. The central character in the novel is 'Dana Evans' a TV anchor who goes from one country to another in order to unravel the entangled yarn. In her attempt she travels between nations looking for proofs and collecting evidences. She comes across the people and workers of these countries as co-travelers, drivers and local journalists and we get a veneer of the manners and the way of living followed in those nations. However the novelist's biases against 'Russia' and its people are also exposed because the animosity that prevailed long between the USA and the former USSR has been cashed upon.

Miss Dana Evans is a well known and popular TV anchor and reporter who enjoys the status of a celebrity and rubs Shoulders with the people in the top layer i.e. USA. She works for the WTN [Washington Tribune Network] one of the most suitable places for the close interaction with high society and travelling abroad in search of news or a story.

'Gary Winthrop', the last heir, of one of the richest, most influential and the most generous families of the US murdered by two small time burglars while attempting to steal some valuable paintings. However 'Dana Evans' suspects something more in the event as none of the stolen paintings have turned up for sale.

Actually 'Gary' is the fifth person from the legendary 'Winthrop' family to die within a year. 'Taylor Winthrop' the head of the family and his wife 'Madeline' had been burnt to death in a fire in 'Aspen' in Colorado. 'Paul' their son died in a road accident in France; 'Julie' their daughter died in Alaska while skiing in the mountains. Dana goes to all these places in search of clues. Besides 'Taylor Winthrop' was ambassador to 'Russia' and had relations in many countries like 'Germany', 'Italy' and 'Belgium'. Thus the story is spread world over between different continents.

Dana goes to 'France' to investigate into the reasons for the death of 'Paul Winthrop'. The romantic nature of French people is world famous. 'Paris' is the World fashion centre and famous for its 'love' around the world. We can get the romantic French flavor in the flight itself as she is approached by a fellow passenger whose tries to come closer are subdued by her answer that she was not alone rather her husband and three children were waiting for her. Similar situation occurs when Dana goes to the police commandant looking for the proofs regarding the death of 'Paul Winthrop'. The police commandant himself makes such allusions about enjoying life.

"Such an unfortunate family. Life is tres fragile". He looked at Dana and smiled. "One must take one's pleasures when he can". He added subtly, "Or when she can. Are you alone here, mademoiselle?"<sup>1</sup> p155

Dana herself is mesmerized by the beauty and romantic air of Paris, the French capital, on her second visit to France. She is so much carried away by the scenic beauty of the city:

"It was impossible not to feel the magic of Paris, even as they flew over the city, preparing to land. It was the city of light; it was the city of lovers. It was no place to come by oneself. The city made her ache for Jeff."<sup>2</sup> P209

She is addressed 'mademoiselle' a standard French term for any young woman and 'bonjour' a common greeting for anybody you may happen to meet; 'Oui' is spoken as an exclamatory expression. Not only this but many dialogues are exchanged in French and Dana has her limitations in this language so she requests police men to speak English, nonetheless, the police people respond to her queries in French. Another well known beautiful aspect of France is its villages. They are world famous for their serene beauty. The novelist has thrown light on this aspect because it was near one of the French villages that 'Paul Winthrop' lost his life. The concerned village has thus been depicted in the novel:

"Roquebrune-Cap-Martin is a medieval village with an ancient castle, church, historic caves, and luxurious villas that dot the landscape". P-153

Dana's further enquiry into the business deals and activities of 'Taylor Winthrop' take her to Italy's capital Rome where lives one 'Mancino Falcon'

whom Her Roman journalist friend 'Dominick Romano' depicts as a very dangerous man and advises 'Dana' to keep off him. But as usual she proceeds further with her task and meets Mancino. Here, however our interest is not in what happens next and the plot but in the general way of life and culture followed in a nation as depicted in the novel. Conversation is dispersed with Italian expressions and general courtesies. In the hotels like 'Ciceroni' and restaurants like 'Toula on via Della Lupa' she is greeted by saying: 'buon gioro'. 'Bene' is a very common Italian expression to show ones ascent on any issue or topic. The chapters are replete with the expressions like 'grazia' and 'prego' for common courtesies. And dishes ordered in hotels are also naturally Italian and too long to order even for a person with a working knowledge of Italian. Dana lets Dominick order food "Prima pasta fagiol Dopo abbacchio": page '98'. Here respectful term for any woman is 'signorina'. To make the situation look natural 'Sheldon' has used the terms like 'preg is accomodi'in stead of its English equivalent 'please sit down' very familiar and understood world over p: 200

Again 'Mancino' is full of venom for 'Taylor Winthrop' because the later had destroyed his only daughter 'Piya's life by making her pregnant and then taking her to a butcher who tore out her womb instead of taking her to a doctor as he might lose his reputation. As a result she lost all her potential to be a mother and lives in a convent leading the life of a nun. Here too 'Falcon Mancino' shows the common Italian trait of 'family' tradition when he speaks of the harm that 'Taylor Winthrop' had done to the 'Mancini' family by destroying all its future generations even before they were born. Same trait we see in 'Mario Pujo's novel 'Godfather' and the movie on the same title where we find a lot of vendetta in the name of family like 'Corleone family' and 'Brasini' family'.

In search of another connection and witness 'Dana' boards the 'German' flight 'Lufthansa' to 'Dusseldorf' airport. We find the narration of the city:

"It is beautiful, beautiful. Dusseldorf is divided by the Rhine River, you know, in two parts. The older part is on the right bank—and the modern part is on the left bank. Five bridges connect the two sides."

Besides the depiction of local cultures, manners, cities and conversation in native languages the novel has hotels and dishes in galore. In short the novel has all the ingredients to suit a professional traveler except the preparation of an itinerary. Though Dana certainly makes a rough preparation of every tour she undertakes and more often than not finds a taxi waiting for her on every airport. In 'Germany' too she finds a taxi:

"There was a line of taxis out in front of the 'Dusseldorf International Airport. Dana took one to the 'Breidenbacher Hof' in the centre of town. It was an old elegant hotel with an ornate lobby." P186

The 'Schiffchen' hotel she finds elegant while about the food she says that the meal was delicious. When it was over she exclaimed that she was going to hate herself in the morning but it was worth, every bite.p187

The chapters seventeen is replete with German expressions and phrases in the German language. The respectful common address for a

woman is 'Fraulein'. When she goes to meet Mr. 'Zander Dieter' in his office the receptionists asks her:

"Fraulein, when did you make the appointment?" p 190 on Dana herself starts speaking a bit of German as she says 'Danke' for thanks on the same page. On meeting Mr. Zander she addresses him as 'Herr Zander'. 'Herr' is the 'German' equivalent of 'Mr.' Local features of a place is another area of interest for a tourist, i.e. what special has taken place and what the place is famous for. Germany is famous for its bears so a reference has been made to this special feature and we are also provided with a valuable piece of information also

"When Steffan dropped Dana at the hotel, he said, "Did you know the teddy bear was invented here by a woman named 'Margarete Steffi? The cuddly little animal became popular all over the world" P-189'90

"We have real bears also in Germany, Dana, and they are dangerous. When you meet Dieter Zander, be careful. He looks like a teddy bear, but he's not. He is a real bear" P-190

The novel really seems to be a record of journeys and travels as the novelist goes on from one place to another. In the chapter eighteen Dana takes us to another beautiful country Belgium and we are given more general information that the headquarters of NATO, THE North Atlantic Treaty Organization is at 'Building Leopard 111 and the Belgian flag has three vertical bands of black, yellow and the red. In 'Brussels' the 'Belgian' capital 'Dana' visits the world famous statue 'Manneken Pis Fountain' a bronze statue of boy urinating placed in the scallop shell.- p202. The best shopping place, as a fellow passenger tells her, is 'Galeries St. Hubert'.

Sports tourism is also a form of tourism and the novel "The Sky is Falling' is not without a tinge of it. To know more of the circumstances leading to the death of 'Julie Winthrop' the protagonist of the novel visits the icy country of 'Alaska' A favorite haunt of those who love skiing. The capital city of 'Juneau' is wrapped in a charm and wonder of its own.

"Juneau was a surprise to Dana. At first it appeared to be a large city, but the narrow winding streets gave Alaska's capital city the small town atmosphere of a village nestled in the middle of an ice age wilderness. Dana checked into the popular inn at water front, a former brothel located in the centre of town" p-163

She reaches in some time 'for some great skiing'. Through 'Dana's narration we learn a great deal about 'Alaska' and the sport of skiing. There are lines of shops selling skiing paraphernalia. The terminology related to the icy sport is quiet mind boggling. There is huge variety of skis available for sale. We also see how the sellers promote their goods to lure the customers into buying them. Then there is the list of different formats of skiing that may be of wonderful interest to someone with an interest in sport tourism. In the cold weather Dana feels like having brought some propylene clothes.

Towards the ending of the novel the centre of action shifts to Russia and more particularly to its capital 'Moscow'. The Russian flight to Moscow is full of fur coats, hats and scarves. Dana thinks to herself, "Why would any sane person visit Russia in the

winter?" Here the list of 'places to be visited' grows longer. The drive into Moscow was like a scene out of 'Dr. Zivago. The whole city was clad in mantle of ice. It is in this chapter that we come across many anti-Russia comments. The tourists in the hotels are kept an eye on. One is reminded of the novel '1984' by 'George Orwell' where the remotest countryside also has been fitted with telescreens and the big brother is always watching you. 'Tim Drew' her journalist friend tells her about 'Kremlin' and 'Red Square'.

'The Kutafya Tower' —"This is where Russian power has been for centuries. Ivan 'the Terrible' and Stalin had their headquarters here, and Lenin and Khrushchev".p—217

America and Russia have been at daggers drawn for quite a long time during the days of cold war. The acrid taste still lingers in the mouth and novel has more than usual anti —Russia comments. These comments not only show Russia in a bad light but also expose deep seated prejudices in the mind of the novelist and add a touch of propaganda in an otherwise beautiful record of travels across the world. The following dialogue is a commentary Russia's constitution:

"The law here says that no member of Duma-- that's the lower parliament--can be prosecuted for any crime. The result is that the 'Duma' is filled with the men who are wanted for all kind of felonies —gangsters, who served time in prison, and criminals who are in the process of committing crimes. None of them can be touched" —P.222

Roads and streets have been depicted as unsafe and her friends suggest her not walk the streets without a revolver. This malingering of Russia continues. Other precautions that she is suggested to have are as follows below:

"Do not drink the tape water even the 'Russians' do not drink it. Oh and when you eat out she always specify 'chisti stol'-- that means clean table or you will find your table loaded with appetizers that you don't want. If you are going shopping the 'Arbat' is the best place. The shops there have everything. And be careful of the taxis here. Take the older shabbier ones. The con artists mostly drive new ones". P.223

Next few pages are devoted to general traits of Russia and its people. The food in Russia is described as terrible. The Russian culture is incredible. They have the Bolshoi Theatre, the great Hermitage, the Pushkin Theatre, the Russian ballet, the Moscow circus. Russia produces more books than any other country of the world and average Russian, we are informed, reads three times more books than the average American. Russia is twice as big as the US is It has thirteen time zones and borders on fourteen countries.

On the basis of above analysis we can say that 'The Sky is Falling' is a beautiful book full of travelling experiences in various countries depicting different cultures. Through the chief protagonist 'Dana' the novelist has shown her own vast travelling and understanding of different peoples. Not only the real places and real people there is also a mention of an imaginary place in the novel. There is a secret Russian city in the depths of a mountain. Krasnoyarsk-26 is an underground city where top

ISSN No. : 2394-0344

Russian scientists live and produce plutonium used in making the weapons of mass destruction. They are totally disconnected with the outside world and live anonymously. The novel is a wonderful record of peoples, manners, cultures, cuisines and geographical conditions of different countries; and one finds oneself wiser and richer in experience and knowledge of the world after reading the book.

**References**

1. All quotations from the novel have been taken from the "Harper Collins Publishers" EDITION OF THE BOOK

REMARKING : VOL-1 \* ISSUE-10\*March-2015

2. 'Gulliver's Travells' by 'Jonathan Swift'
3. 'Alice in Wonderland' BY Lewis Carol'
4. 'Godgather 'by Mario Pujó
5. 'Dr. Zivago' by Pasternak
6. '1984' by George Orwell'
7. <http://www.sidneysheldon.com>
8. "1001 Science Questions Answered" 'Reader's Digest'
9. 'RD Trivedi' A Compendious History of English Literature'