

AGAINST THE IVORY TOWER

The Movie Frozen as a Feminist Fairytale

Ms. Jintu Alias

Asst. Professor, English Department, Yeldo Mar Baselios College Kothamangalam, Ernakulam, Kerala, India.

Abstract: According to Ani Kojoyan, “fairy tales have been stories created by women, for women and about women”. But once they became a literary genre, the stories were misrepresented with an intention to perpetuate patriarchal ideologies and to sustain gender hierarchy. The female protagonists of the Disney Movies assert this notion through their portrayal of the “perfect princesses” who enforce and comply with the underlying chauvinism. The Disney princesses including Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty or Aurora possess little agency. However, the 2013 animated film *Frozen*, successfully redefined its ingrained perceptions of a meek, docile and deferential princess. The movie effectually promotes and bolsters feminist ideals of equality and agency. Unlike the former cadaverous heroines, Elsa, the protagonist of the movie, frees herself from the ideological confinements and dauntlessly accepts her immense powers which have been stigmatized by her society as negative. The purpose of this study illustrates the change in Disney princess franchise and tries to prove that *Frozen* promotes a narrative of feminist ideals of equality, empowerment and female agency. The study investigates the feminist ideals portrayed in *Frozen*, from the perspective of visual and cultural representation, situating my analysis within the context of feminist studies.

Index Terms - *fairy tales, patriarchal ideologies, princesses, agency, feminist, Frozen.*

1. Fairy tales and adaptations

Fairy tales, the stories of magic and transformation, are one of the oldest and popular forms of literature. Betleheim indicts that “fairy tales have unequaled value, because they offer new dimensions to the child’s imagination”. Fairy tales is said to have created by women as a type of parlor game by the middle of eighteenth century. During the Victorian age these tales were re written as established stories by Gimm Brothers. But once they became a literary genre, these stories were misrepresented with an intention to perpetuate patriarchal ideologies and to sustain gender hierarchy. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar rightly observes that “the vexed and vexing polarities of angel and monster, sweet dumb Snow White and fierce mad Queen, are the major images literary tradition offers women”. (Gilbert, Gubar, 5) The fairy tales failed to feature a girl who took her destiny in her hands and enacted her agency. This tendency continues to reflect in most of the movie adaptations of fairy tales as well.

The Walt Disney Pictures, an American film production company, is noted for its animated versions of the famous fairy tales. The popular animated feature films include *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Tangled* (2010), *Frozen* (2013), *Moana* (2016) etc. The twentieth century Disney movies blindly promote the acculturation of different gender ideologies. Also, its female protagonists are dictated by the dominant patriarchal systems of power. As the women try to enact agency, they ultimately fail due to the misogynistic system that squashes any hope of them becoming powerful.

2. Frozen – A Feminist Movie

Judith Fetterley comments that Feminist Criticism has been characterized by a resistance to codification and a refusal to have its parameters prematurely set. The resistance towards this codification makes *Frozen* (2013) different from the past movies which undermined the role and contribution of women. The movie is adapted from the fairy tale *The Snow Queen* written by Hans Christian Andersen. Jennifer Lee adapted the story for screen and directed the film with Chris Buck, making her the first woman to direct a Walt Disney Animated movie. The movie is noted for its progressive themes and it ridicules the obsolete, male oriented themes of the twentieth century movies.

Elsa, the protagonist differentiates herself from the stereotypical Disney princesses who bluntly comply with the patriarchal ideologies. Elsa is portrayed as a vivacious young girl who possesses magical prowess but is taught to conceal and control them. The patriarchal society, including her father, scares her and calls her powers as sinister and pernicious. Thus she locks herself in a room out of sheer terror and also out of her love towards her family.

Confinement is a recurring motif in all the animated movies. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf wisely observes that while it is “unpleasant to be locked out... it is worse perhaps, to be locked in” (Woolf, 5). It can be considered as a patriarchal tool of oppression. But, Elsa transforms her confinement to a tool of expression. Her powers “get stronger” (9:39-40) in the closed room and this power constitutes her identity. She valiantly fights against the prejudices and escapes from her confined state without the aid of a male companion. She sets her way to freedom and “slam[s] the door” (32:19-21) against all the hypocrisies. Her escape from the incarceration represents her freedom from the ideological ties of family and society.

Anna also confronts confinement inside the bolted doors of the palace. She says, “it gets a little lonely, all these empty rooms. Just watching the hours tick by...all my life has been a series of doors in my face” (9:26-32). She loathes this confinement and considers true love as the key to save her. For Anna “love is an open door” (24:17-19) towards self-definition and independence Anna finds a release from the imprisonments herself, through love. She valiantly goes in search of Elsa out of her love towards her sister and the kingdom of Arendelle. She valiantly shields Elsa and faces Hans' sword bravely. It is this “act of true love” (1:27:47-51) that thaws her frozen heart and Anna saves herself despite of her true love's kiss. It is the love for whom she travelled mountains for.

Elsa's power symbolizes the inherent power of a woman which goes unnoticed and which is considered by the society as evil. Through the ice worker's song, the movie extols this power by comparing it to ice. “Ice has a magic can't be controlled. Stronger than one, stronger than ten, stronger than a hundred men” (02:35-42). Also, the song reflects the notion that the frozen heart symbolizes the fear of woman which asserts and promotes her subservient status as a second sex and a recluse. This is indicted when Grand Pabbie says: “your power [has a] beauty in it, but also great danger... fear will be your enemy” (7:31-48). Thus, the song instructs the necessity to be valiant and to shatter the shackles of sexism.

The movie shows how a woman's life is hemmed and regulated by the patriarchal ideologies and asserts the need to break the hegemonies. The Duke of Weselton calls her a “monster” (28:25-26) and says “The queen has cursed this land! She must be stopped” (29:42-46) to which Anna answers “my sister's not a monster” (30:00-02). Elsa breaks the binaries of a good girl and affirms her liberty by singing that “the perfect girl is gone” (32:48-54).

Thus, it can be said that *Frozen* presents new conceptions of heroines. The two central characters Elsa and Anna are vigorous, active and have a zest for life. This portrayal indents to mock the idea of a ‘perfect princess’. Elsa, being the protagonist commits certain errors which negatively affects her dear ones. Anna also is imperfect and is described by the trolls that she “is a bit of a fixer upper, her brain's a bit betwixt” (1:06:03-06). Anna chooses Sven as her partner and this mocks the idea of an ideal prince. Sven is delineated as an ordinary orphan. These ideas asserts that ‘perfect’ hero or ‘perfect princess’ are roles that fits well within the traditional roles of a misogynistic society. By portraying imperfect characters, *Frozen* alters the matrices of fantasy.

3. Conclusion

Disney has a long tradition of films which reinforced the patriarchal social constructs. The twentieth century Disney movies featured passive heroines who were deemed to live their life in servitude. However, the twenty first century Disney movies reflected certain progress in the delineation of its female protagonists. The movie *Frozen* released in 2013 marked a revolutionary progress in the matrices of fantasy. *Frozen* is considered as the antithesis of the fairy tales of the twentieth century. It is a movie of surpassing interest and it successfully depicts a story of decided power. The woman characters of this movie are emblematic of every woman who doesn't want to conform to the patriarchal ideologies of the society. The movie breaks connections with the conservative milieu and proves that women's life can be a story, not of defeat or submission, but of accomplishment and victory.

Acknowledgement: Wikipedia, Youtube, Shodhganga.

REFERENCES

1. Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Vintage, 1989. Print.
2. *Frozen*. Directed by Lee, Jennifer and Chris Buck. Performance by Idina Menzel, Walt Disney Pictures, 2013.
3. Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. "The Mad Woman in the Attic." *The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. New York: Scholastic, 1998. Print
4. Kojoyan, Ani. *Women, Folklore fairytales and Society*. New York: Chelsea House Publisher, 2001. Print.
5. Woolf, Virginia. "A Room of One's Own". Boston: Louisiana State University Press, 1998. Print.

