

Breaking the Stereotype of ‘Damsel in Distress’ : *Frozen*, a Feministic Fairy Tale

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Abstract

Fairy tales have been an inevitable part of everyone's childhood. Through its fantasy and romance, fairy tales have instilled certain stereotypes in the minds of the children. With all these false notions of a probable 'Prince charming' and a 'happily ever after' life, the teenagers tend to approach life with unreal expectations. Most fairy tales have the same structure of plot, with a 'Damsel in Distress', a Witch, a Prince charming to save the Damsel in Distress. *Frozen* is a movie that breaks all these stereotypes, nevertheless has all those magic and fantasy pertaining to a fairy tale. This paper attempts to show how the protagonist of this movie Elsa, evolves into a 'Damsel' who can let herself out of the 'distress'. This paper elaborates on the feministic portrayal of Elsa and Anna. This movie also shows the nature of real love. Anna, who is waiting for the 'true love's kiss' to save her, realises that neither Prince Hans nor Kristoff is her true love. When Elsa saves Anna, it is revealed that it was Elsa who is the true love of Anna. Anna for her whole life thought, it is a man who is capable of being 'A true love' of a woman. But this story breaks all these stereotypes and emerges into a feministic fairy tale.

Keywords: *feminism, deconstruction, stereotypes*

Introduction

Women were always pushed the periphery, whereas the man will occupy the centre. Not only in society, but also in literature and art. In fact, Literature has contributed more to these socially constructed ideologies of women being less important than men. Both in Oriental as well as Occidental mythologies and stories women were always ignored and they were only given secondary roles. Indian mythologies like Ramayana and Mahabharata, though there were many noticeable women characters, they were always identified along with their husband or father. Sita and Draupadi were remembered only for their chastity towards their husband. And the sacrifice they made for the cause of men. A Woman was always identified as a relative being rather than an individual. In the Greek mythology, the Goddesses were not that powerful. They were either praised for their beauty and chastity like Aphrodite and Athena, or they were condemned like Medusa. Thus women were polarised to extremes and they were confined to the image of a Goddess or a Sorceress. Even Eve was created for the sake of Adam and not for her own self. Eve is called "the supernumerary bone of Adam." In West, there were fairy tales which contributed to the social construction of making woman a helpless victim. Thus there mythologies and stories, created many stereotypes of a woman being a Goddess, a sacrificial mother, a submissive wife, a siren and a sorceress.

Fairy tales have been an inevitable part of everyone's childhood memories. Without realising the impact it has on the social construction, people were passing on these tales to their younger generations. These fairy tales are also an important reason for stereotyping woman as a weaker and helpless being. Every child believes and dreams about the life of Fairies. Every fairy tale has a 'Damsel in Distress' who is in need of a 'Prince charming' and the true love's kiss to save her from the distress. The Damsel has absolute beauty but not the power to save herself. On the other hand the stereotype of a jealous Witch trying to trouble the Damsel is also found in all the fairy tales. They may appear subtle, but they are also the reason for the pathetic plight of women. These tales following the same conventions, makes a strong impression in the subconscious mind of the readers, that woman are not capable of saving themselves. This helplessness of women, gives men the feeling of superiority over women. These stereotypes also conditions the mind of a woman to wait for a man to save her, thus

losing her own identity. These repeated portrayal of woman waiting for a ‘happily ever after’ married life with a Prince Charming, makes the woman readers believe that the sole purpose of a woman is to wait for a man. Thus these stereotypes restrict the woman from seeing their own identity and capability.

Frozen – a Feministic Fairy Tale

Frozen is an animated fairy tale – movie, directed by Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee. This movie, released in 2013, is based on the story ‘The Snow Queen’ by Hans Christian Anderson. Though this story has the elements of fantasy like a fairy tale, it doesn’t follow the stereotypical conventions of the ‘fairy tale’. There are various stereotypes that are broken in this movie. The stereotypes that so long made the woman to believe that they are supposed to be submissive, are broken. Thus this movie, throws a feministic light on the female characters in the movie.

Ice is commonly associated with death, lifelessness and transience. Imageries of flowers like lily and rose are mostly used while describing a woman. But here Elsa, because of her power, is associated with ice. When something is ‘frozen’, it is said to be lifeless. But the Director attributes a new meaning to the image of ice. The strength of ice is often unnoticed, because of the negative meanings attached with the image. Through Elsa and her power, the Director is trying to convey the message that the strength of women are also underestimated. Thus the stereotype of associating women with warmth(life), is broken. This doesn’t mean that women are cold and unfriendly. The director brings out a positive character of ice, which was not identified by the stereotypically constructed minds.

Ice has a magic, can’t be controlled
Stronger than one! Stronger than ten!
Stronger than a hundred men!

The lyrics of this song, though on the surface level expresses the strength of ice, it indirectly points out the strength of Elsa. As Elsa is associated with ice throughout the movie, it is clear that, both ice and Elsa share the same amount of strength.

Men are always associated with reason and women with emotion. But here the stereotype is broken. When Kristoff and Anna looks at the beautiful ice palace built by Elsa, Kristoff says “It’s ice. I might cry.” For which Anna replies “Go ahead, I won’t judge.” Men were always taught not to give into emotions and they were not allowed to cry. ‘A man will never cry’ is a baseless stereotype, because it is human nature to emote their feelings. Restricting a man to cry, will never make him a better person rather his bottled up feelings end up in stress.

The character of Witch, is an inevitable part of a Fairy tale. The word ‘witch’ itself is gender orientated. There is no masculine equivalent term for witch. This stereotype of a woman being a Witch is also broken in this movie. The fairy tales show the stepmother and step sisters as cruel and jealous beings. This idea further promote the idea of ‘women against women’. If women themselves are against each other, how will there be any empowerment. So, this movie eliminates the idea of a woman being a Witch. It’s actually Prince Hans, who is revealed to be the jealous and cruel villain of the story. Thus the absence of a Witch, reminds the audience that it is not always woman who are against each other. But there is a more threatening villain, which is nothing but our decisions and choices. Anna made her choice to marry Prince Hans, without knowing his real motives. Thus it is neither a man nor a woman who is against a woman, but it’s the foolish choices and haste decisions, people take in their life.

The Prince Charming who comes to save Anna from her loneliness is Prince Hans. During their encounter and their duet, the audience might feel that they are made for each other. And Prince Hans is really the Prince Charming. But only at the end it is revealed that he is the devil in disguise. May be it can be taken as a warning for all the girls out there, influenced by the fairy tales, dreaming of a Prince Charming.

Elsa flees Arendelle, and goes to live on secluded North Mountains. There she builds a beautiful palace made of ice. Seeing her creative skills, everyone goes awestruck. Elsa herself says “I never knew what I was capable of” She also says that “I am alone. But I am alone and free” She was always taught “Don’t let them know, Don’t let them see. Conceal. Don’t feel” She was made to conceal her power and her creative ability. The plight of the woman is also similar to Elsa. They are also asked to fit into a specific frame, so that they are accepted in the society. When she is alone in her own ice castle, she is wondered by her own powers. At a point of time she says “I don’t care, what people are going to say” She comes out of her fear and she feels that she no longer need to conceal her power and “be the good girl” she is always expected to be. Elsa’s ice palace can be considered as the symbol of literary creation of women writers. Women writers were restricted to write only about domestic issues and they were not allowed to experiment their creativity. But when they finally “let it go”, they realised their own capabilities.

The stereotype of 'Damsel in Distress' is the pivotal force for all the other stereotypes. During the first half an hour of the movie, it may seem that the movie is no different from a normal fairy tale. Because, Elsa is the Damsel in distress, who is doomed to be alone because of her power. The socially constructed mind of the audience, awaits a Prince Charming to save Elsa. But no one comes. It is her sister Anna, who sets out to find her sister and bring back summer in Arandelle. This shows that it's not always a man who is entitled to save a woman. If the inability of a woman to save herself, is what, gives the feeling of superiority to a man, then women must show the world that they can protect and save themselves. Elsa is not shown as a Damsel in distress, rather she is a self asserted and powerful woman.

Anna is also a powerful feministic character. She is also not shown as a helpless woman, who can't save herself. Rather she saves the life of many. She saves Kristoff from the wolves in the mountain. Then she again saves his life, by throwing the anchor at the right time to stop him from falling of the cliff. She strikes back the giant snow man without any fear. Finally, saves her sister, when Hans tries to kill Elsa. She was always there to help everyone. She says "you don't have to live in fear, 'cause for the first time in forever, I'll be right here" And she stands by her saying that they will fight this winter together. Women reaching out a helping hand to the other suffering women, is the need of the hour. Fighting it together gives them both physical and mental strength. It's not the kiss of Prince Hans nor Kristoff that will save Anna, but her sister Elsa's single drop of tear. Anna saved her sister from Hans and that's one act of true love. And Elsa hugging the frozen Anna and crying, is also an act of true love, and that's why Anna is saved. Thus the love between two women saved each other and nothing else.

The movie doesn't end in a marriage, but still it proves to be a very happy ending. Elsa and Anna are once again close as they were in their childhood. And Arandelle has regained it's warm summer. The villain is overthrown. Neither Anna nor Elsa gets married. Even though Kristoff and Anna are seen kissing each other, we cannot see that stereotype of 'happily ever after'. The movie ends in a happy situation, where everyone is happy, but we never knew what lies ahead of them. Thus the stereotype of ending a fairy tale with a 'happily ever after' marriage is also broken in this movie.

Conclusion

Celebrating sisterhood is one of the major themes of feminism. This movie by portraying the love between two sisters, brought out the need for women to stand for each other and to love each other. Only if women are able to appreciate the love from the same sex, can they understand and appreciate the love from their opposite sex. This movie also reminds us that a woman has every capability to protect herself and assert herself. By identifying their abilities, a woman can save herself and other woman from any helpless situation.

Work Cited

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