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Comparative Study of *Cinderella* (1950 & 2015) by Disney in Relation to its Representation of the Society

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Abstract:
For the last few decades, children's movies have increasingly gained acceptance as a mean to provide values and information to the children. Thus, the research is focusing on Children's movies with special focus on Cinderella movies by Disney released on 1952 and 2015. A picture about the functioning of our society and its beliefs are made known to the children through children's movies. Children are exposed to discrimination, violence, death etc. through children's movies in the name of entertainment. The depiction of society to the children will be analysed using theories of Cultural studies and gender studies including theorists like Judith Butler. The contemporary relevance of this area is that, by focusing on aspects of children's movies the research attempts to understand the different perspectives of societal ideologies exposed to the children.

Keywords: Cinderella 2015 and 1952, depiction of society, treatment of female characters, gender studies

For the last few decades, children's movies has increasingly gained acceptance as a mean to provide values and information to the children. Thus, the research focuses on Children's movies with special focus on Cinderella. A picture about the functioning of our society and its beliefs are made known to the children through children's movies. The contemporary relevance of this area is that, by focusing on aspects of children's movies the research attempt to understand the different perspectives of societal ideologies exposed to the children and validates it by using the literature review. The research attempts to look at how the portrayal of society has changed with time in two different movies inspired by same story but produced during different times. Through this, the outlook of the society that is perceived from movies can be analysed.

The Cinderella movies by Disney released on 1950 and 2015 will be analysed in the course of the research. The changes in the society is recorded through the movie of the age and the subject matter it deals with. Disney has released two versions of Cinderella and both depicts the protagonist with noticeable difference in the character and in the structure. Art being a mirror of the society, the differences in the portrayal could be considered as the influence of the society. Thus, the comparative study will attempt to bring out the aspects of society and the changes in the society as depicted in the movies and the probable reason for such a portrayal.

The changes in the depiction of the movies motivated the content of the research. Though all the Cinderella movies have been inspired from the same fairy tale, it has been portrayed in different ways. Even the same movie production company has produced the same plot differently within a time gap of sixty five years. The attitude of the audience and the functioning and beliefs of the society would have caused this. Thus, the research attempts to find out the aspects of the society depicted and not depicted in the movies and the probable reasons for the changes in the depiction in relation to the time the movie is released.

Through the research the researcher attempts to find an answer to the question, what are the changes in the portrayal of the society and characters in the two movies and how it reflects the changes in the society from 1950 to 2015? Thus the research attempts a comparative study of Cinderella released by Disney in 1950 and 2015 and analyses the differences in the depiction of society. The research would attempt to examine the changes in both the movies with respect to the depiction of character, plot and the background of the movie. The change in the portrayal of each character with time and the change in the depiction of the society with time with respect to both the movies will also be examined.

Several studies have been conducted on different aspects of Cinderella, the fairy tale. Thus, this research will use the aspects in the other studies and situate it in the context of the society and figures out the difference in the nature of the portrayal of the society in both the movies. The research will attempt to find out the reason for the difference in the depiction and relate it to the change in the attitude of the society towards the subject matter.

Although the literature covers a wide variety of feminist and cultural theories, this review will focus on the socio-cultural and gender theories in relation to the Cinderella movies produced by Disney. The theories for analysing a movie, feminist reading of the movies, cultural influence on the movie, and the changes in both the movies in relation to the evolution of society will be explored in the literature review. The research, by applying these concepts to both the movies, attempts to find out the changes in the representation of the society in relation to the movie.

The character Cinderella in both the movies, though evolved from the same fairy tale is depicted differently. *Cinderella* (1950) shows the character Cinderella as having an opinion for herself and also revolting a bit against the step mother. She is portrayed as a strong woman though is suppressed under many occasions. In the twentieth century when woman was not as free as she is now, Cinderella is portrayed as being capable of deciding her life to some extent. But in the 2015 version of the same fairy tale Cinderella is shown as a subaltern in all its senses. She is submissive to everyone around her and she does not decide anything on her own and just follows the orders of people around her.

As Fr. Robert Barron has said about the character Cinderella of 2015 *Cinderella* movie, "we have a beautiful, vivacious, and morally upright young lady whose life becomes a nightmare through the intervention of untimely death and wicked oppression" (Word on Fire). This statement clearly explains the character Cinderella of the 2015 *Cinderella* movie. The societal background during both the movies differs greatly due to the rise of feminist movement in the sixties. The comparatively strong characteristic of the Cinderella could be a result of this. The later version developed in the twenty first century portrays the typical idea of a woman and how a typical patriarchal society expects her to be. Thus, the characterisation of Cinderella in both the movies is a reflection of the expectations of the society of a woman.

The way the character Cinderella is portrayed can be analysed using the feminist theories. In Judith Butler's theory of performativity deals with the expected behaviour of a male and female in a society and the theory of social constructivism deals with the societal notions and stereotypes constructed around different groups. In the movie *Cinderella* (1950 and 2015) Cinderella is expected to do the household works and not to complain about her situation which is the stereotype of a woman. The step mother and step sister stereotype is developed mainly due to the influence of the Cinderella tale. This is another stereotype associated with woman. In relation to the male characters of the movie, the Prince is expected to marry a princess to become the king. In 2015 movie it was the sickness of the king which forced the prince to marry whereas in 1950 movie it was the need for a princess for the kingdom which initiated the marriage. To show the liberalisation in the constraints in marriage in the twenty first century the movie portrays how the king happily allowed the prince to marry a girl of his choice who is not necessarily a princess.

Cinderellas of both the movies undergo characteristic transition in the process of the movie. Both the movies portray it the same way that woman is expected to be kind and forgiving. After she becomes the Princess Cinderella forgives her step mother in both the movies even though she has been subjected to a lot of physical and emotional abuse. The idea of woman as forgiving is brought out here. Fr. Robert Barron points out that "the surest sign that this transformation has occurred is that Cinderella, upon escaping from the cruel oppression of her stepmother, turned to the wicked woman, not to curse her, but to offer a word of forgiveness". The idea in the society of woman as an epitome of virtues is projected through this transition of Cinderella in the movie.

Another argument that has been brought out in the movie is that it is the beauty of Cinderella that attracted the Prince and if she was in rags while meeting the Prince he would not have accepted her. The 1950 movie clearly brings out this aspect. But in the 2015 movie she met the Prince in her ordinary look and Prince was attracted to her seeing her inner beauty. Thus the change of the perspective of the society in the concept of beauty not as a physical quality and as a spiritual quality is expressed here. Getting the prince to look at a woman in rags and realise he is the woman he wants to marry seems to function as a stand in for him proving that he can overlook her low status and choose her as a partner. Comparing it to the present society this change is evident that people are more attracted to the inner beauty than the physical appearance and the saying that 'looks can deceive' is taken into heart by the society and is depicted through the movie of 2015.

Another difference in the portrayal of the character is the ignorance and acceptance of Cinderella about her repressive condition. 1950 Cinderella is aware of her condition and acknowledges that she is supressed but the 2015 Cinderella lives in complete ignorance of the fact that her step mother and step sisters are using her, taking advantage of her and is taking her for granted. In *Cinderella* 2015, when Cinderella was moved to the attic she finds it pleasant and finds the mice as good company and not disgusting. This shows her acceptance of fate no matter how bad it is. She is portrayed in a way that she is too good that she is a nincompoop. She blindly believed her step mother and though she had to do all the works in the house she believed her stepmother's words that it is to help her distract herself from the thought of her father's death. But she never raises the question as to why step mother does not need a distraction. And the narrator says that her step mother and step sisters were so happy to give her "a lots and lots of distraction" that she is always loaded with work. And she always respond to them with the reply "as you wish".

Ironically the most oppressed Cinderella is portrayed as sportive that *Cinderella* 2015 shows her as a horse rider and sport lover unlike the 1950 representation. The twenty first century has witnessed many woman sports person and the director is trying to replicate this image of woman through the portrayal of Cinderella on a horse. When she is overcame with heavy emotions she takes her horse for a ride. And it is at one of such moments that she meets with prince charming that the spirit of the young lady attracted the prince. In a society where you are judged by the skills and talents you hold this change in the plot is true for the twenty first century.

The new Cinderella stands apart in terms of portrayal of the heroine. It not only has a different characterisation from the previous Cinderella movies but also from other fairy tale heroines. "It's a bizarrely retrogressive characterisation at a time when fairy-tale heroines are invariably described as "feisty" and "spirited" (Barber 1). The recent fairy tale movies like *Tangled* and *Brave* has explicit woman as strong and powerful. But *Cinderella* (2015) went another step and showed their heroine as weak and totally dependent on others, from mice to Fairy god mother. She could be seen as an effort of patriarchal society to satisfy its needs by portraying Cinderella as having no voice of herself. "The catchphrase which Ella's dying mother passed onto her was, "Have courage and be kind." But the film's actual message is that you should keep smiling and put up with whatever abuse you're handed, because eventually a ditzy fairy and a hunky prince will sort everything out" (Barber 1). It could be interpreted as the conventional view men have of woman in their mind. Cinderella being the most popular fairy tale has been used to portray the value system in the society.

The popularity of Cinderella has affected the societal mind set so much that "Americans will call almost anything a Cinderella story that involves a good thing happening to someone nice" (Holmes 1). The story of Cinderella, in the base level, is a story of something good happening to someone nice. But the reason for the goodness was her choices and her decision to pursue her wishes. Her decisions built her destiny. But in postmodern literature Cinderella cannot be seen as just a story of something nice happening to someone nice but it should also be seen as a reflection of the society. The changes in the characterisation of the characters is a reflection of changes in the values in the society.

The requirement of an external force to provide assistance to Cinderella in her pursuit is in a way showing woman as incapable of achieving something on her own. Though Fairy godmother is a divine force and the fairy tale uses divine intervention for the movement of the story it shows the incapability of woman to be completely independent. Throughout her life Cinderella is shown as being dependent on someone. When she was in her house with step mother she was helped by the mice, birds and the dog. And with the help of fairy god mother when she became the princess she is again dependent on the prince. The famous quotes of Descartes holds true in Cinderella's life that man is born free but everywhere he is in chains.

"Fairy tales have been studied to produce typologies and methodologies in folklore, to examine societal similarities and differences, and to identify changes in values over time" (Kelley 87). Cinderella, as it has gone through series of evolution and different versions of movies, reflects the society in each portrayal. As Disney came up with the two versions with a half a century time gap the change in the attitude of a community towards the same issue could be analysed.

The change in the portrayal of Cinderella from strong to calm, and the depiction of Prince Charming from kind to stubborn could be seen as a reflection of the society. Also the fact that prince charming is not named shows the ignorant attitude of society towards anyone who is not the subject matter. Since it is the story of Cinderella, Prince Charming stays without a name and it could be seen as a lack of identity. Also, the argument that the name Cinderella meaning ugly was given to her by her step mother to insult her also validates the previous statement. People are judged based on the outer appearance and the inner values holds less importance in the society. This is true for both the movies or the recent production could have found a name for the characters which are not appearance based. This could clearly be seen as the judgement of society based on the immediate impression of what they see. The movie thus validates the saying that the first impression is the best impression.

The Prince Charming has also undergone changes in half a century that the new Prince Charming is portrayed as more active and capable than the old one who simply follows his father's orders. The added element of hunting and the actions in the movie can be interpreted as an element added to appeal the action loving society. The society now is more violent than it was when the 1950 *Cinderella* movie was released. Thus, actions has become a necessity to keep the audience engaged and it is a reflection of the change in the society. Also, the depiction of Prince as not simply following orders of the king shows a more respectable characteristic of prince compared to the earlier one. In a society where children become independent at a young age or wish to become independent at a young age, the prince charming serves as a representative of the youngsters of today's society.

The opening lines of the novel *Pride and prejudice* by Jane Austen stands true in the Cinderella story that it is universally acknowledged fact that a young man of great wealth is in search of a wife. The prince Charming though was not particularly searching for a wife was in need of a woman in his life. This is a fact that has not changed in the movie with the change in time and it will stand true for the ages to come as well. The entry of a person in their life changed their life altogether for Prince Charming and Cinderella. The idea of love and courtship has not changed in the later depiction from the earlier Cinderella movie. This conveys the idea that love and courtship is the same even if the attitude of the society changes because it is a matter of emotion and heart.

Cinderella reflects the society and the difference in the characterisation of each character shows the societal changes and how the society expects a character to be. The theme of identity is a main concern in both the movies that Cinderella of the 2015 movie says to prince charming during their first encounter that "what they call me does not matter". This could be seem as an attempt to break away from the societal notion of identity and the expectations of the society. Maybe the character Cinderella is portrayed as a woman who rides horse but an obedient woman, which in itself is a contrast, to break away from the conventional idea developed around the character Cinderella of the fairy tale.

"Like Perrault in his context, Disney's work presupposes a normative standard of American-style "*civilité*"--a standard that values reason and realism over mystery and irrationality, sentiment over calculation, the morally right over the temporally powerful" (Woods 1). Thus Disney's Cinderella movies serves as a reflection of the society which helps in the socio cultural analysis of the society with its changing values and systems. The research has examined the changes in both the movies with respect to the depiction of character, plot and the background of the movie. The change in the portrayal of each character with time and the change in the depiction of the society with time with respect to both the movies are analysed to distinguish the differences in the value system of the society.

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