Asian Social Studies and
Applied Research (ASSAR)
Published by ASAR Council

Volume 2 Issue 4
November, 2021
ISSN (E): 2709-9229

Decentralization of Gender Role in the Wake of Postmodernism in Wonder Woman

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Abstract

This study underscores that how postmodern literature has introduced a new epoch to deconstruct the socially constructed nature of gender roles enacted strictly and imposed forcefully. In this regard, the study attempts to deconstruct the traditional notion of heroism by centralizing the female character through postmodern version of reality. Presently, everything is observed anew through the lens of postmodernism. Even, the movie makers search for the disarranged titles, scripts and characters' role to fit in postmodern arena. For example, Diana, the protagonist of the movie, 'The Wonder Woman' (2017) is now known through the title of the story. Moreover, postmodern theory as a theoretical framework has been applied to the movie which has been narrowed down to Jean Francoise Leotard's deconstruction of Meta-narratives into mini narratives (1979) which rejects the existing ideology of traditional heroism. Through qualitative mode of inquiry, the script has been analysed using Visual Semiotic Analysis. The study depicts female protagonist in a way which does not bound her within the customary arena. Therefore, the findings of the paper show that nothing can remain in the centre for ever. Even women who have always been marginalized can take the central positions.

Key words: *Postmodernism, Deconstruction, Meta Narratives, Mini Narratives, Visual Semiotic Analysis.*

Introduction

Since the creation of Adam, man has enjoyed the authorized hero ship, be it in society, art or literature. On the contrary, woman has ever been victimized in every field of life due to center/margin dichotomy. Male domination and female oppression has become the norm since the totality of existence. Woman is always been socialized to believe that her role is confined only to house work and bed services. Her feminine destiny is imposed on her by the man- made society. If she denies her true self, only then she can achieve happiness and gain acceptance in this patriarchal society. And, this idea is passed down from generation to generation. Johnson (2007), a feminist literary scholar, revealed that even detrimental representation of a woman works to criticize the prevailing ideology. She upheld that by blurring the

boundaries between stereotypes subverts the audience expectations. She further added that a text can question ideologies by representing them while readers can ask question why such ideologies exist.

Doubting the eternal and unified truths about the world, Crews (1999) defined postmodernism as efforts of individuals in the man-made society. He favored postmodernist literature and said that it emphasis on plurality and entirely disproves the authoritative approach. On the same token, Yaqoob and Saira (2012) were of the view that postmodernism allows the postmodern writers to question the old authoritative ideologies and subvert the hierarchies to reorganize the meaning. In the same line, Lopez and Garry (2001) agreed that in postmodern world there exist only versions of truth not truth itself.

According to Leotard (1984), postmodernism treats Metanarratives with suspicion. Because, these are considered as authoritative approaches and their purpose are to restraint the differences only. On the other hand, postmodernism disarranges the idea of center/margin dichotomy. He further added that in modern societies stability and social order are maintained through the means of grand narratives. And, these Meta narratives are the stories culturally fabricated about practices and beliefs of any society. Likewise, Brewer (2002) was of the view that postmodernism rejects Meta narratives and favors mini narratives because these Meta narratives make no claim to the universal truth and reason. And, Leotard (1984) emphasized the same point that Meta narratives are the theoretical worldviews that are used to legitimize and manipulate religious, political or scientific projects. In the same line, Barry (2008) argued that postmodernism challenges traditions and conventions. By rejecting Metanarratives, postmodernism regulates everything, important or unimportant in its arena. Continuing the same view, Sharma and Pretty (2011) proposed that postmodernism is a part of the socio-cultural development. Therefore, postmodernist literature depicts contemporary life in a particular way.

A wide range of developments in the field of literature, art, architecture and film is encompassed in postmodernism. And, people's views are based on what is presented to them through media. Therefore, postmodern ideologies are expressed on a more regular basis within the entertainment industry. Entertainment is one of the most influential medium for representing and reflecting cultural beliefs. It is the very flexibility of movies that has provided a natural medium for expressing the postmodern conditions as Brewer (2002) claimed. Similarly, Balraj (2011) stated that media plays significant role in postmodern society, and it spreads information about day to day issues to the audience. He continued to say that mass-communication has the potentials to distort the viewers' understanding and perceptions about reality and postmodernism is all about representing versions of reality.

Background of the Study

The Wonder Woman got released in 2017 and written by screenplay writer Allan Heinberg. Using postmodernist approach, he changed the typical notion of heroism carved in audiences' mind. The narrative revolves around Diana (Amazonian princes) brought up on a protected island. She is trained to be an unbeatable warrior. She is active and strong character who makes choices about her own life. She is independent and confident and has sincere emotions to help others.

Diana encounters an American pilot who informs her about the war raging in the outer world. Volunteering to participate in the war to save the world, she leaves her home. Fighting alongside men, she finally saves the world from huge destruction. Also, she discovers her full power and true destiny. Culture, conventions and traditions of any society build the reality and twisting such reality is not a child's play but, the screenplay writer of the movie by adopting a postmodernist approach tried to disarrange stubborn reality implanted in viewers' mind.

In this context, the paper displays that in the postmodern world nothing can remain in the center for ever and even women who have always been marginalized can take the central position. Therefore, the current study aims to find out the postmodern essence which equate Diana's role as a female protagonist with traditional notions of heroism. The study which is solely restricted to the depiction of female protagonist in the movie, 'The Wonder Woman' (2017), attempts to present a postmodern version of reality to the audience, hence affecting their perception of heroism. Supported by Visual Semiotic Analysis, postmodern framework has been employed which has been narrowed down to Jean Francoise Leotard's (1979) deconstruction of Meta Narratives into mini narratives by disarranging the boundaries.

Statement of the Problem

Talking about the feminine history, no one can deny the fact that it is man-made. Woman has ever been made to believe that she is of inferior wit and therefore she is confined to the particular roles only. She has found her dignity only in accepting housework tasks and bed services. Therefore, she has internalized this stereotyped dictum that she is born this way.

Most importantly, inequality is institutionalized in our male-dominated society. This is the reason that feminists are still raising their voices against the manipulation of women. On the other hand, postmodern era combats against all those hurdles that limit freedoms and opportunities for the marginal, therefore emphasizes the necessity of disarranging the boundaries. Hence, the current paper aims to center round the objective to find out the postmodern essence which equate Diana's role as a female protagonist with traditional notion of heroism in the movie, Wonder Woman.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the paper is that the customary idea of heroism has been replaced by postmodern thought aiming to change the viewers' mind-set regarding their perception of heroism. Postmodern perspective in Wonder Woman not only reflects social equality but also women's emancipation from traditional concept of heroism.

Although, postmodernism has blurred the role of genders by introducing the new era yet, male-dominant society is still reluctant to accept them as the heroes of the book but the continuum of such literary additions would broaden their vision regarding female hero and The Wonder Woman which has emerged in a booming culture of twenty first century, makes a good fictional addition for such studies bearing in mind its postmodern themes.

Apart from the perception of a female hero, this analysis also benefits feminism which deals to eradicate all kinds of subjugation like racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, and classist repression and more importantly gender-based domination, and this analysis echoes those ideals which offer a central position to woman in the movie.

Research Question

- How did the postmodern essence equate Diana's role with traditional notion of heroism in the movie, 'The Wonder Woman'?

Research Objective

- To find out the postmodern essence which equate Diana's role with traditional notion of heroism in the movie, 'The Wonder Woman'.

Research Methodology

For this paper, qualitative approach has been adopted. The theory of postmodernism as a framework has been applied to the Hollywood movie, 'The Wonder Woman' (2017), in which the concept of deconstruction of Meta narratives into mini narratives proposed by Jean Francoise Leotard (1979) has been employed. Further, the scrutiny of the movie is assisted by Visual Semiotic Analysis which is a technique in which signs, dialogues and symbols are scrutinized to take out the hidden meanings. In addition, the unit of scrutiny is the whole movie.

Critical Discussion

The movie, 'The Wonder Woman' (2017) is the mainstream role model of postmodern era which replaces the dominant ideology of grand narratives into mini narratives. Accepting the postmodern authority, this movie disarranges the traditional notion of heroism where the title of the superhero is ordained only for man; only he can fight epic battles; only he can have a mission to save the humanity. Even the title of the movie itself announces the subversion of the conventional notion of heroism and hence welcomes the postmodern era.

'I used to want to save the world. This beautiful place. But, I knew so little then. It is a land of magic and wonder. Worth cherishing in every way. But the closer you get.....the more you see the great darkness shimmering within'.

The film opens with the above mentioned dialogues of Diana, the one who has superhero like qualities and has some great mission in the life to create a utopian world where mercy, peace and love prevail. These are also the true reflection of the courage, innocence, and goodness embodied in the virtuous heart of any hero who eventually realizes that beautiful flower is always surrounded by the harmful thorns and it needs courage, strength and vigor to save the flower from the harm of the thorn just like Diana with true heroic spirit does in the movie. The words like 'the darkness shimmering within' give way to the new idea of heroism just like the darkness giving way to the dawn.

On the onset, it is not revealed who will be that hero, male or female. As the film proceeds, we see women named the Amazonians with tall, strong and athletic bodies ruling over a beautiful, lush green and heaven like island with no existence of man. Surprisingly, the very term Amazonian has been derived from the Amazon feminism which is a branch of feminism that accentuates feminine physical power as a means to equate them with masculine power and claim gender equality. The heroic spirit of women in the film is depicted through their powerful physiques and unconquerable feats. Moreover, these Amazonians support the idea that the strength and power can be associated with both male and female. That's why they seem busy all the time in their manoeuvers and military trainings to prepare themselves to participate in one massive battle in order to save the world. All these female characters treat femininity as the source of their strength not as a weakness. That is what makes the film remarkable with postmodern essence which blurs the distinction between fixed conventional boundaries.

We see Diana, the protagonist of the movie, growing up in the middle of the Amazonians to build superhero like qualities which were prohibited for any woman in the past where femininity was

considered a sign of weakness and dependency. Her hero like traits is also shown in her kindness for others and her willingness to help others without any fear. Also, her femininity is the source where her strength comes from. Her ability and her desire to love and to fight for a greater cause that is to bring peace in the world are not for glory but for humanity to grow up peacefully. Obviously, her mother's (the Amazon Queen) advice carry the same sense that, 'fighting does not make you a hero. Just th68e shield then, no sharp edges'. Metaphorically, the 'shield' connotes peace and protection which Diana in the capacity of female hero is destined to bring in the world and the 'sharp edges" suggests sword and war which she is destined to end. She comes up to her mother's advice that it's not fighting only that makes you a hero but to restore peace to the earth is the greatest feat a real hero must cherish in her/his heart. Moreover, viewers witness the fact that the peace of the world has been restored by the female protagonist, Diana and she rightly deserves the title of the movie that is the wonder woman. Breaking the shackles of traditional notion of heroism, postmodernism blurs the boundaries between center/margin dichotomies, hence giving the opportunity to the marginalized souls to subvert the tag of eternal feminine soul.

Postmodernism, no doubt, rejects the fixed social identities and in the movie the postmodern essence is evident when her mother reveals the secret about the weapon (sword) named god killer to Diana. She then curiously asks that 'who would wield it'? And, her mother replies that 'only the fiercest among us even could' and Diana using her strength proves to be the fiercest amongst all other men. Also, the same sword implies the upcoming war. More interestingly, the shape of the sword resembles the sign of Amazon feminism which further reflects that female hero would get victory over the enemy and get the title of the ' god killer'. It is also observed that Diana's mother's prophecy about Diana that 'you are stronger than you believe', 'you have greater powers than you know' comes true hence highlighting the postmodern spirit of decentralizing the fixed authorities. Also, it upside downs their claim to be the forerunner of the man-made world.

Brought up on the sheltered island, Diana desires to be a well-trained warrior like a true epic hero. Like a traditional woman, she is not interested in cloths, love affairs or romance. For her, dancing is just 'swaying' and calls all such things futile activities. To be a true female hero, she horns her skills in archery, sword fighting, and hand-to-hand combat under proud General Antiope and bestows honor upon all Amazonian warriors of the island and protects mankind from the evil intentions of the god of war, Ares.

For ages, the Amazonians lived with peace and kept themselves busy in military trainings to fight with and 7++++SAz \=-0 6ZAefeat enemy of humanity, the god of war, Aries. However, they never dared to leave the island in search of him but simply waited. When American spy Steve Trevor's plane crashes near the island, it is only then Diana comes to know about the war and decides to leave with him. The warrior Diana who has been in training all her life, desires to avail this long awaited opportunity like any epic hero and subsides the traditional notion of female as weak, timid and dependent entity. Putting her life at risk, she saves the humanity and thus negates the concept that female is made both for household and bed services.

'I am going, mother. I cannot stand by while innocent lives are lost. If no one else will defend the world from Ares, then I must. I have to go'. These words reflect her heroic spirit, her bold determination, her untiring strength, her unflinching confidence, her persistent empathy and her unwavering commitment to herself to save the world. Having all these potentials, she is no less than any traditional male hero. Furthermore, she has a great cause for which she renders sacrifices. Such heroic mannerisms really parallel her with the notion of traditional heroism where only the male hero has the right to render sacrifices for the happiness of others. Even her mother realizes her heroic spirit which is evident from her

words that, 'I know I cannot stop you'. Moreover, she never forgets about her own duty and responsibility which is clear from declaration, 'it is our sacred duty to defend the world'. Owing to her bold determination, even Steve himself appreciates her heroic spirit. Considering her a woman and unaware of her god-like power, Steve initially tries to frighten her from the war by calling it a great big mess and that they need more men because alone they can do nothing. To this, she hurries to reply, 'I'm the man who can'! In addition, these words symbolize her super power abilities necessary for any hero to be a savior and the metaphor 'man' connotes that she is independent and she has spirit which equates her to manly power. Therefore, she insists Steve to take her to Ares so that she could face the danger of the war alone. Here, again the manly spirit can clearly be seen to run through her personality.

When Etta Candy introduces herself to Diana as a Steve Trevor's secretary and explains to her that secretary means to follow the rubrics of the boss. To this, Diana replies that this is slavery. Here, the metaphor 'slavery 'depicts the hidden ideology of the conservative society where woman has given the secondary position and is treated like subaltern, while Diana's independent life equates her to the central position. Also, these words redirect that postmodernism has shattered all the manacles of slavery. Therefore, the film is the revolt against all such conventional ideologies and reflects the true essence of postmodernism which opens the door of freedom for everyone.

Likewise, when Steve obeys the command of the generals to struggle for the cease fire then Diana- embedded with heroic qualities- reminds them that generals should not behave timidly; they should fight alongside their soldiers and should get ready to render sacrifices on the battlefield! Similarly, when Steve forbids Diana not to cross the boundary line and that even the battalion itself barely gains an inch, Diana without taking any notice of Steve's horrifying words thrusts herself into the arena of war just like a savior making the impossible possible. The way she drops the machine gun and takes out the tower, her way of crashing into things, deflecting bullets and the way she kills the Ludendorff; all these heroic qualities struck the viewers with wonder. Despite all supporting male characters, Diana accomplishes all the tasks solo and comes up to the expectation of role modelling of heroic gesture and subverts the viewers' perception of traditional heroism.

Her confront with the god of war, Ares (Patrick) is the massive battle where she fights alone without any apprehension and hesitation. When Ares gives offer to her that he would return the world to the Amazonians if she becomes his partner, she rejects his offer because greed has no place in hero's life and she proves that she is the god of truth not the god of war. Furthermore, he tells her that humanity is weak, selfish and do not deserve her protection, she then replies with a heroic gesture that 'it's not about what they deserve, it's about what you believe. And, I believe in love. Then I will destroy you. I used to want to save the world'.

Penetrated in the postmodern essence, the movie ends with the ineffaceable words of Diana leaving behind the long lasting effects of wonder woman on viewers' perception as a female hero. 'But then I glimpsed the darkness that lives within their mind...and learned that inside every one of them.....there will always be both. A choice each must make for themselves. Something no hero will ever defeat. And now I know.....that only love can truly save the world. So I stay.....This is my mission now'. These words echo another prime heroic characteristic that is the mission of her life to save the world which stands Diana out amongst others as a female hero. The fact cannot be overlooked that the movie surfaces the postmodern essence which equates Diana's role with traditional notion of heroism. Hence, by defeating the dominant ideologies about femininity, she successfully earns the title of the superhero. Also, she proves that feminine destiny is man-made not nature-made.

Conclusion

The paper highlights that in the arena of postmodernism, the marginalized characters can be centralized while performing heroic acts and in turn subverts the viewers' traditional thinking regarding female as a protagonist. The application of postmodern theory and using visual semiotic analysis, variety of traditional heroic traits have been explored in the character of the female protagonist, Diana, in the movie, 'The Wonder Woman' which does not bound her to the narrow heroic models of the past. In addition, Diana treats her femininity as her strength and De Beauvoir was right when she said that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman'. She continued to say that it is not the fault of nature which has made women inferior in society rather it is the different upbringing of man and woman in the same society. Fundamentally, if she was taught from her birth to behave in a male manner, she would be a man. She further added that woman is not created rather constructed by the society (2012). And, Diana is trained in the male manner from her childhood that's why she calls herself a 'man'.

Just as there is no rule stating that the protagonist must be a man, similarly, there is no rule saying that female characters cannot bear heroic traits in literature. Feminism favors female empowerment. Therefore, an empowered female may fit anywhere in this man made world, if she is willing to do so. Like, in Diana's case, it is not the haughty masculinity but her confidence, will and self-worth which made her a wonder woman.

No doubt, the literary tradition has naturally focused on men, but postmodernism has endowed us with authority to analyze anew the dominant ideologies and to upside down the whole scenario. In this connection, the movie Wonder Woman has very apparent clues of postmodernism which opens it to an altogether different interpretation and provides a new dimension to the viewers' thought process. Truly speaking, this movie unveils another side of the picture that always existed but we remained blind to it, because it talks about flexibility and retreats from every particularity. It provides opportunity to all those who wants to represent the past from a different perspective, who question the dominant ideologies by deconstructing Meta narratives into mini narratives. If a feminist can raise her voice for equality and a post-colonialist can question the discourses written by the colonists then obviously postmodernists by disarranging the boundaries can represent woman with chivalric traits contrary to the traditional notion of heroism.

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