

Tribhuvan University

Representation of Female Character as the Second Sex in Niki Caro's *Mulan*

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Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

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Letter of Recommendation

Karuna Thapa Magar has completed her thesis "Representation of Female Character as the Second Sex in Niki Caro's *Mulan*" under my supervision. She has completed her research on August 2021. I hereby recommend this thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Pradip Raj Giri

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Representation of Female Character as the Second Sex in Niki Caro's *Mulan*" submitted to Central Department of English, TU, Kirtipur by Karuna Thapa Magar has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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Abstract

way in Niki Caro's animated movie, *Mulan*. In the movie, director Caro has depicted the female protagonist Mulan in men's disguise. Mulan has played masculine role. She follows men's dress, goes to the battlefield, and does not obey the patriarchal systems. Although the movie seems to be feministic from surface level, the characters in the movie are not free from patriarchy. This research claims that in the name of equality, freedom, feminism, the director, Niki Caro has not let female characters celebrate her differences. The movie *Mulan* This research paper explores the reason for representing women in a stereotypical way. It has presented female characters in a way that women must follow men's character to become stronger and create equality in the society. To support this claim, this paper uses theoretical insights of Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Anne Birrel, Blain Brown and so on.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Misrepresentation, Patriarchy, Feminism, Empowerment

Mulan is one of the best fantasy adventure drama films produced by Walt Disney Pictures that is directed by Niki Caro. Hua Mulan is the central character who is active and adventurous. She is raised in a patriarchal male-dominated society in China where she is expected to get married to a good husband. She is arranged to meet with a matchmaker to show her fitness as a future wife. Confused Mulan tries to pour tea in front of the matchmaker but a spider frightens the former's younger sister Xiu, which causes a mishap and damages the teapot causing the matchmaker to call her a disgrace to her parents.

Rouran warriors to the north attack an imperial outpost under the leadership of Bori Khan. The northern invaders are also supported by the witch Xian Lang. She is also a magician who is used to pose as surviving combatants and report the attack to

the Emperor of China. He also issues a conscription decree ordering every house to contribute one male to fifth against Bori Khan's army.

The imperial forces come to Mulan's house to enlist recruits. Although Zhou is already old and has contributed a lot in the army for a long time, he is still forced to pledge his service because he does not have a son. Mulan realizes that her father Zhou will definitely be killed if he goes to the battle. That is why, Mulan decides to go to war in her father's place. She flees with her father's armor, sword, and horse to join the battle. She goes to the training camp run by Commander Tung who is also an old comrade of Zhou. She takes the training class without revealing her true identity and finally becomes a brave soldier.

Tung is forced to finish training soon by the Khan's forces and send his battalion to the war. Mulan follows the army forces on her own and she is also accompanied by Zian Lang. She teases her for pretending to be a man. She also tries to murder Mulan. However, she defends her by the leather with which Mulan's chest was bound to hide her identity. She removes her male disguise after returning to the battle as the Rourans start invading her fellow forces with a trebuchet. She uses her archery skills and discarded helmets to maneuver the trebuchet into firing on a snowy mountain, causing an avalanche which buries the Rourans.

Then she comes back to the camp and rescues a soldier Honghui. She is expelled from the troops when she no longer can hide her true gender identity. She starts her journey home. On the way to her home, Xian Lang also confronts her and reveals that Lang was also shunned by her people and fights for Bori Khan Only because he treats her as an equal and that no one else does. Similarly, she exposes that the invasion on the outpost has been a diversion, as Khan's true plan is to arrest and execute the Emperor for killing his father. Then Mulan returns to her battalion to warn

them of the impending capture. The troops she befriended stand up for her, and Tung also believes her and gives her permission to lead the unit to the Emperor's palace.

In the movie, Lang's magic is used to be in the image of the Imperial Chancellor and persuades the Emperor to accept Khan's challenge to single combat while removing the city guards from their posts. Rourans kill the guards and prepare to burn the Emperor alive. Rourans are distracted by Mulan's troops when she goes to save the Emperor. Zian Lang who is sympathetic to Mulan transforms herself into an eagle and sacrifices her life by intercepting the arrow when Khan tries to snipe her with an arrow. Then Mulan murders Khan and returns to her village.

Ultimately Mulan comes home to be reunited with her parents. Under the leadership of Commander Tung, an emissary from the emperor comes to present Mulan with a new sword while making a personal request that she join the Imperial army as an officer.

The movie *Mulan* seems to be empowering women at first glance through the main character, Hua Mulan. The female characters in the movie Mulan and Xianniang are shown as heroic characters. This movie seems to be advocating for gender consciousness at first glance. However, if we go in the depth of the story, the strong patriarchal system can still be noticed in the character of Mulan. Albeit, the directors seem to be highlighting the issue of breaking gender roles, the movie is not free from male-dominated ideas. The script writer is still favoring and supporting traditional gender roles through Mulan's character indirectly. In the name of equality and breaking traditional gender roles, the movie turns Mulan into a male. It shows that in order to be a strong warrior, you have to be male. It shows that the movie supports traditional and stereotypical gender roles. While watching the movie, questions arise in my mind: Why does the movie *Mulan* depict female characters stereotypically?

And how does the film represent female characters in the movie?

The movie *Mulan* depicts female characters stereotypically in order to show the patriarchal male dominated society of China in the 20th century. Film involves stereotypical elements in the movie with the aim of projecting the prevalence of male's dominance over female. Females are represented as a weak and powerless character in *Mulan*. Despite her remarkable contribution to war and social work, she is still looked down upon by society and male counterparts.

Regarding the movie, different critics have reviewed the movie from different perspectives. One of the popular critics and writers Janet Maslin in *The New York Times* argues that *Mulan* is a movie about women empowerment. The film has violated the traditional gender roles. Female characters in the movie are shown as brave, courageous, and muscular in the movie. The movie has helped to deconstruct the idea of gender stereotypes. The barrier proposed by male dominated-society has been dismantled in the movie. Maslin observes:

Disney takes a sledgehammer to the subject of gender stereotyping in "Mulan" a film that not only breaks the cross-dressing barrier but also ratchets up the violence level for children's animation. "Sign me up for the Next war!" exclaims the heroine's grandmother, in a show of what does not precisely qualify as a progress for women. And for all its supposed daring in presenting a bold female warrior, "Mulan" takes no steps forward when it comes to Disney's animation renaissance. This is the most inert and formulaic of recent Disney animated films, right down to the clowning sidekicks and would be- be "under the Sea " production number. (6)

Maslin opines that the movie seems to be violating the gender stereotypes through the character of Mulan. She is shown as the protagonist. She has been projected as a fighter, warrior, and combatant. Women in Chinese culture are not supposed to step

out of their home without male's permission. However, in the movie, *Mulan* is the one who fights against the northern invader staying in the war's front line.

Imini Antikad Chibber in one of the popular newspapers *The Hindu* argues that *Mulan* is a completely different women's story. In most of the epic scenes of the film, men are taken and shown in a lead role. However, in the movie *Mulan* it is a woman who is presented as a brave and courageous woman. She plays one of the greatest roles in saving their land from Northern invaders. Women are also shown as supernatural human beings who turn herself into a hawk. Chibber writes:

Unlike other live action versions of Disney classics such as *Jungle Book* and *Aladdin*, which were frame-by-frame copies of the animated original, *Mulan* tells a markedly different tale. *Mulan* is an adventurous young girl. Though her parents wish her to be good marriage material and thus bring honor to the family, she is more interested in running, jumping from rooftops and other 'unladylike pursuits. (7)

Mulan's bravery and responsibility and her heroic action are shown as man characteristic. Through her character, the movie has proved that women also have manly qualities. *Mulan* is shown as masculine figure in the film. She does not give up so easily and is strong. Chibber argues that the movie is successful in breaking the stereotypical ideology of male-dominated community.

Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian* argues that the movie has shown and revealed the female masculinity or masculine character reflected in the role of FaMulan as depicted in Disney Movie *Mulan*. Bradshaw writes that masculinity, female masculinity, and the concept of gender role have been presented in a different way. Socially constructed gender roles have been broken in the movie through the female character in the movie *Mulan*. Bradshaw writes:

Mulan emphasizes the parallels between Mulan and Xianniang. They are polar opposites, but both are women who have infiltrated a man's world; both must use shapeshifting subterfuge to assert themselves, both in battle against the enemy and also to fit in with their comrades. Finally, there are to be encounters and significant dialogue scenes between Mulan and Xianniang, who have more in common than either of them supposed, even in the drama's biblical temptation in-the –desert scene, when Xianniang attempts to seduce Mulan to the ways of evil in the vast wilderness of her exile. (9)

Bradshaw states that female characters in the movie are presented as a warrior and more courageous than men. They are seen in epic battle scenes to fight against the enemy to save their land. The idea of presenting women in the film has challenged the traditional notion of gender roles. If given chances, even families can perform men's jobs. They are equally strong mentally, emotionally and physically. This kind of idea can be captured through the role of a female character in the movie *Mulan*.

One of the popular critics, Ann Hornaday from the United States in *The Washington Post* writes that *Mulan* is a story of women empowerment. The heroic character of the female has been shown through the role of Mulan. Hornaday Hornaday states:

Mulan is a far more sober affair than its predecessor, filled with shadow warriors, dark magic and elaborately ritualized mysticism. Like the recent Netflix hit *The Old Guard* this is a movie dedicated to the proposition that women can and should be just as bellicose as men: Although just a few drops of visible bold are shed, "Mulan" is very much a war picture, with the near-constant skirmishes, ambushes and showdowns, while meticulously choreographed, beginning to feel longer and more repetitive as the body count piles up. (13)

Regarding the movie *Mulan* Hornaday states that patriarchal masculinity is problematic. This traditional gender role needs to be challenged anyway. Women should not fit themselves in the rigid constructs of manhood or woman hood. The movie shows women's struggle to accept their prescribed gender, their sexual and gender confusion when they are trying to fit in with all of the other boys in their squad, are traditional hallmarks of the identity struggle that numerous queer and transgender face. Hornaday argues that *Mulan* is also about the search for women's identity in male dominated society.

Thus, various critics have focused on various aspects of the movie *Mulan* but no one has attempted to observe this movie from the perspective of gender stereotypes. So, this research paper explores the causes and way of representing female characters stereotypically. This thesis is purely library-based on primary and secondary resources as well as material available in the library, internet, websites and journals. It employs theoretical insights from various radical feminists like Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* makes discussion on the treatment of women throughout the history and the depiction of women in literature through ages. Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* shows how women's literature has evolved, starting from the Victorian period to modern writing. Anne Birrel in her journal, *Women in Literature* argues about the portrayal of women in film and writing. Similarly, the research paper discusses the craftsmanship of cinematography, lighting, color and visual storytelling taking reference from popular writer and filmmaker Blain Brown's *Cinematography: Theory and Practice: Image Making for Cinematographers and Directors*.

The movie shows that girls can do anything, but the messages the movie carries tells a different story. Sekhukhune in Mtuze argues that stereotypes include

psychological and social division in which people have already confirmed. It refers to a process where a person makes interaction with the conviction that they have to do and think in an acceptable manner. Sekhukhune describes:

Most of these stereotypes which are, for the moment, exemplified by idiomatic and proverbial expressions, have relegated the social status of women to that of a nonentity. The gender role stereotypes of men have acquired aggressive qualities and command absolute power and authority, while those of women demonstrate a lack of assertiveness and certainty. (5)

Above statement signifies that gender stereotypes are different behavioral patterns of men and women. Females are indicated as powerless and submissive whereas men are projected as the storehouse of social power. Women are conventionally linked to qualities like nurturing, dependence and a preoccupation with their physical appearance. The idea of preconceptions is the major reason through which men start dominating females. females are projected negatively. They are shown as objects. Females are stereotypically represented in male writing. Most of the female characters in novels and literature are stereotyped. They are bound to accept and internalize the socially constructed gender roles and social values. Supportive and weak characters are given to females by male authors in their art and literature. They are represented as the hungry female for love but not for her prosperity. Their social, economic, and status in the society are negatively depicted. Binary oppositions and stereotypes are practiced not only in society but also in the movie industry and in the great works of art and literature. In the patriarchal belief system they are often stereotyped in several forms.

In the movie *Mulan* a female character, Xian Lang is shown as “witch”. She has the power to turn herself into a bird. She is not appreciated as a combatant in the

army. Lang says “they will never accept me” (12; 26-8). Her character shows that patriarchal society does not want females to be brave, courageous, and strong enough. Similarly Mulan’s father Fa Zhou says, “Father must protect the family and defend his house from shame. The mother is the protector of all tradition” (29:23-38). It shows that women are often portrayed as the protector of conventional norms and values.

20th century’s one of the prominent French feminists, existentialist philosophers and social theorists, Simone de Beauvoir in her text *The Second Sex* explains the ways in which female are represented and understood in myths and literary texts. Beauvoir notes that women are always objectified and depicted in negative character. She argues that even so-called male authors, philosophers and writers are so much committed to mythologizing women. Their works are overshadowed by men. For her, women’s role in fiction and non-fiction is not appreciated, valued, and praised. She opines that depiction of women in literature and myths affect women in their daily business. Beauvoir notes that patriarchal notions of understanding female characters have created many difficulties and hardships. She further states that male are treated as the subject or “the absolute” (75) whereas women are treated as “the other” (76). Women are always defined by men not as she actually is in herself but as one who is relative. She is not taken as a free and autonomous being. In art and literature also they are presented as binary opposition. Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* states:

This means that woman is necessary as long as she remains an Idea into which man projects his own transcendence; but she is detrimental as objective reality, existing for herself and limited to herself... Because she is faux infinite, Ideal without truth, she is revealed as finitude and mediocrity and thus as falsehood. (203)

Beauvoir opines that humanity is male, and it is male who defines female not

as she actually is in herself, but as one who is relative to him. She is not taken as an autonomous being. She argues that man is the subject or the absolute truth whereas females are another or an object. She discusses the ways in which male authors project female in the work of art and mythology and its impact on women. She notes that women are able to assist men in achieving his supremacy. Beauvoir explains that women live for themselves in objective reality. Beauvoir describes that men never treat women as equal to them. They are objectified and sexualized. She analyzes that negative depictions of women in the entertainment industry have serious implications. It can cause the dissemination of stereotypes, low self-esteem and health issues. Beauvoir states: "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth (74)". She claims that patriarchal dominated society never presents women in the great work of art as they are rather they are portrayed from men's perception and viewpoint distorting the reality. As per Beauvoir, male dominated communities all the time mistreat women and regard them as inferior to male. Females are oppressed and suppressed not only in real life but also in reel as well. Men have been using women as a private property for a long time. For Beauvoir, the practice of stereotypical representation of women has been persecuting female characters in patriarchy for a long time. The society perceives women as characters lacking deficient.

The movie *Mulan* depicts females as the binary opposite of masculinity. Men in the film are portrayed as powerful, strong, and intelligent whereas females are projected as insignificant, vulnerable and weak. The director, Niki Caro reinforces the idea that females are unimportant and useless. This can be seen in an argument between Chi-fu and Shang where Shang tells, "She's a hero!" then Chi-Fu answers with, "she's a woman! She'll never be worth anything!" (53:7-14). Although, *Mulan*

has been shown as a feminist and bravest woman, however it is important to note that she become successful because she was disguised as a man. It signifies that success is primarily a man's traits.

“A girl can bring her family
Great honor in one way.
By striking a good match
And this could be the day
Men want girls with good taste, calm, and obedience.
Who work fast-paced.
With good breeding and a tiny waist,
You’ll bring honor to us all”. (00:06:11–00:07:49)

Even in the song, gender roles are reinforced, “You’ll bring honor to us all,” (00:06:11–00:07:49). In this song scene, Mulan is getting ready to see the matchmaker to turn herself into a bride. The scene supports the idea that the only way through which women can bring honor to their parents is by being a bride. It underlines the issue that a female's priority must be on finding a boy, getting wedded, and taking care of the house. The film discourages a young girl from pursuing a career and finding her true potential, instead it makes women find love and be a wives. The song signifies how traditional male-centered society stereotypically defines how a woman can bring honor to their parents.

Albeit, *Mulan* looks feminist movie from surface level, we can see it as an anti feminist film if we analyze it from closer view. The female character in the movie depicts a sexist picture of what society values in women. In the following song, women are expected to be beautiful, a good cook and they are expected to have man’s masculinity.

I want her paler than the moon with eyes that shine like stars. My girl will marvel at my strength, adore my battle scars. I couldn't care less what she'll wear or what she looks like. It all depends on what she cooks like beef, pork, chicken. Mmm. My girl will think have no faults. That I'm a major find". (28:3-59)

It shows that society always expects women to be unintelligent, brainless and passive. She is always expected to be less intelligent. She has to be a pretty looking girl and a good cook. Their job must be limited inside the house. That includes: taking care of children, washing dishes and bearing children. In male dominated society a good woman is a woman who can act "quiet and demure, graceful, polite, delicate, refined, poised, and punctual" (00:03:08 – 00:03:21).

In the name of making feminist movie, the director, Niko Caro has disguised female character, Mulan as male. Although the movie seems feminist movie from the surface level, it is still dominated by male-dominated ideology. In the name of attempting to display females as strong and bold characters, the movie has made women accept patriarchal male dominated traits. Caro refuses to let female characters celebrate her difference. Mulan is not a free character. She is not allowed to celebrate her feminine qualities. The movie shows that girls can do anything, but the messages the movie carries tells a different story.

Sekhukhune in Mtuze argues that stereotypes include psychological and social division in which people have already confirmed. It refers to a process where a person makes interaction with the conviction that they have to do and think in an acceptable manner. Sekhukhune describes:

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In the movie *Mulan* a female character, Xian Lang is shown as a supernatural woman “witch”. She has the power to turn herself into a bird. She is projected as a bold and brave character in the movie. Nevertheless, the director in the movie does not celebrate her own feminine qualities. Still, She is not appreciated as a combatant in the army. Lang says “they will never accept me” (12:26-8). Her character shows that patriarchal society does not want females to be brave, courageous, and strong enough. It shows that following male dominated perspective alone does not create equality in society. Through her character it can be noted that wearing male dress and

playing the role of male only do not help in creating gender equality in the society. Similarly Mulan's father Fa Zhou says, "Father must protect the family and defend his house from shame. The mother is the protector of all tradition" (29:23-38). It shows that women are often portrayed as the protector of conventional norms and values. It proves that Niki Caro's perspective of making feminist society turns out to be wrong.

One of the prominent French feminists, existentialist philosophers and social theorists, Simone de Beauvoir in her text *The Second Sex* explains the ways in which female are represented and understood in myths and literary texts. Beauvoir notes that women are always objectified and depicted in negative character. She argues that even so-called male authors, philosophers and writers are so much committed to mythologizing women. Their works are overshadowed by men. For her, women's role in fiction and non-fiction is not appreciated, valued, and praised. She opines that depiction of women in literature and myths affect women in their daily business. Beauvoir notes that patriarchal notions of understanding female characters have created many difficulties and hardships. She further states that male are treated as the subject or "the absolute" (75) whereas women are treated as "the other" (76). Women are always defined by men not as she actually is in herself but as one who is relative. She is not taken as a free and autonomous being. In art and literature also they are presented as binary opposition. Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* states:

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Beauvoir opines that humanity is male, and it is male who defines female not as she actually is in herself, but as one who is relative to him. She is not taken as an

autonomous being. She argues that man is the subject or the absolute truth whereas females are other or an object. She discusses the ways in which male authors project female in the work of art and mythology and its impact on women. She notes that women are able to assist men in achieving their supremacy. Beauvoir explains that women live for themselves in objective reality. Beauvoir describes that men never treat women as equal to them. They are objectified and sexualized. She analyzes that negative depictions of women in the entertainment industry have serious implications. It can cause the dissemination of stereotypes, low self-esteem and health issues. Beauvoir states: "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth. (74)". She claims that patriarchal dominated society never presents women in the great work of art as they are rather they are portrayed from men's perception and viewpoint distorting the reality. As per Beauvoir, male dominated communities all the time mistreat women and regard them as inferior to male. Females are oppressed and suppressed not only in real life but also in reel as well. Men have been using women as a private property for a long time. For Beauvoir, the practice of stereotypical representation of women has been persecuting female characters in patriarchy for a long time. The society perceives women as characters lacking deficient.

The movie *Mulan* represents a female in a bold and leading role. She is as courageous as men combatants. She is portrayed as powerful, strong, and intelligent whereas females are projected as insignificant, vulnerable and weak in surface level. But if we look at the movie from a close view, Niki Caro still reinforces the idea that women should be like male if they like to be accepted in society which turns out to be wrong. Director indirectly conveys the message that females become unimportant and useless if they fail to male culture. This can be seen in an argument between Chi-fu

and Shang where Shang tells, “She’s a hero!” then Chi-Fu answers with, “she’s a woman! She’ll never be worth anything!” (53:7-14). Although, *Mulan* has been shown as a feminist and bravest woman, however it is important to note that she become successful because she was disguised as a man. It signifies that success is primarily a man's traits.

Niki Caro in *Mulan*, in the name of making gender equality disguises the female protagonist as a man in a battlefield. Caro does not let Mulan to celebrate her own feminine qualities. Caro has given a message that in order to maintain equality in the society, females should follow men's lifestyle. They have to have male like qualities in order to be accepted in society. The movie has further triggered gender inequality. Even war has been gendered here in the movie. And this is how female combatants in the film and media are stereotyped in misleading ways. Mulan cannot participate in the war until she changes her appearance into a man. In (38:3-59) seconds scene she cut hair to be in war. It is because if someone knows her identity, she is more likely to be killed. It shows that in patriarchal society it’s like a curse for women to participate in brave work like war. She cannot fight being a woman instead she is under obligation to wear men’s dress and make her hair short to participate in the war. She is bound to disguise herself as a man. Her characters and actions reflect the fact that in patriarchal male dominated society they are not accepted to go to war culturally and socially. It shows that war is something associated only with men. “Did they send me daughters, when I asked for sons? You’re the saddest bunch I ever met but you can bet before we’re through Mister, I’ll make a man out of you” (32:36-43). The song demonstrates how masculinity and war are inherently bound together. Women are sent to battle only when men can’t fight anymore. Mulan goes to war when her father can not fight. It clears the position of women in the patriarchal society

and the mindset of male in patriarchal society. Mulan goes to war when her father can not fight.

Although her character is heroic, brave, courageous and has good goals she is not shown as a hero. She cannot serve her country as a woman. Mulan is successful because she disguises herself as a man. It proves that women are successful only with the support of men. Not only is her appearance changed but also her name when she goes to the battlefield. Mulan's name is changed into Ping when she goes to fight. She gets afraid of Shang for fear of being ignored because she lies about her true identity. Everyone starts doubting her bravery and fighting skills after her identity is revealed. This proves that disguising women as male, making man-like appearance and wearing men's dress alone are not sufficient to bring gender equality in the society.

Regarding the depiction of women in literature, an English feminist, author and critic, Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own* observes: "women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (60). This is the reality of the world's cinema where females play second fiddle to heroes. Their success is not celebrated. Director gives them such a role where there is a man behind her prosperous and victorious lives. Although women are given lead roles in the cinema, ultimately a man is presented in such a way that their characters are overshadowed. If women's character in the great work of art is bold, they are presented in the guise of a man. Their gestures are shown in manly nature just to indicate that women are always inferior to men. In order to be bold enough, women are projected in men's disguise. Almost all male-directed movies, females are used to serve male characters. Women are depicted on the screen as a dependent character. She argues that female writings are not regarded as a good writing in male dominated society. Woolf writes:

The values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so. Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are 'important'; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes, 'trivial'. And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battlefield is more important than a scene in a shop – everywhere and more subtly the different of value persists. (72)

Woolf argues that women's argument, views, and opinions are taken as worthless, common general and sentimental from men's point of view. Even though females have entered into the world of writing fiction, their writing is always trivialized, generalized and ignored in patriarchal dominated communities. Their works are not appreciated and taken as genius writing. Patriarchy always refuses to acknowledge and admit the achievement of women authors. Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* writes: "No one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility" (35). It shows that men never admit the strength of women's power.

One of the most influential English authors and critics, Jane Austen in her text *Persuasion* shows her disinterest in male written art and literature. The reason is because representation of women in literature was without doubt biased. Their role and contribution to poetry, stories, drama, songs and oral folklore have been taken for granted for ages. Austen Observes:

I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon a woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men. Perhaps I shall. Yes, yes, if you

please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs to a much higher degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything. (38)

Male writers treat and portray women as physically weaker, angelic figures, and household commodities. They have been portraying women in literature in an ambivalent way for a long time. For patriarchy, good women are those who accept societal values, norms, and assumptions. They are rewarded happily if they follow patriarchy. Male authors do not present women as they are. They are presented through male's perspective in art and literature. Austen opines that the inequality and differences between men and women can be noticed in almost all male writing. Female experiences and emotions are not portrayed without any bias. She highlights on the issue of stereotypes of feminism which view feminist theorist and critics as being concerned in destroying male artists. She argues that male academic's theories are patriarchal in nature. They are biased and male oriented. For her male writers never can address the real issue of females in their writing. Extreme stereotypes attempt to turn women from angel to demon. Such practice restricts women's creativity and autonomy.

The director, Niki Caro in her movie *Mulan* imposes traditional gender roles in an attempt to empower and motivate women in the society. The movie *Mulan* reinforces the idea that honor is a particularly masculine trait. If women want to be honored in society, they have to follow patriarchal norms and values. Good girls are those who follow male culture. This is exactly the same, Niki Caro is doing throughout the whole movie. The song lyrics "I'll make a man out of you", and "let's get down to business, to defeat the Huns. Did they send me daughters, when I asked for song?" represents the stereotypes that only male are supposed to be fighting

respectfully and honorably. They are expected to contribute to the nation's achievement. Similarly "make a man" symbolizes that the major aim of Captain Shang is to train people into "men" who represent power, strength, and intelligence. They are the only gender who are worthy of fighting. Similarly, the song lyrics "Be a man" indicates that males have that power which females are never going to have. The manner and behavior of women are not accepted in the army. Mulan is a character who transforms herself into a man and tries to be "worthy" of fighting in the battlefield. Similarly in a scene, male friends of Mulan dress up as women and start to flirt with the Huns in order to save the emperor. In the movie, Caro leaves a message that females must follow male's ideology in order to be accepted in society. In other words, females are supposed to follow the rules and order of male, if they want to be honored in society. Wearing pants, cutting hair in men's style, and speaking in a loud voice is the only way to create gender equality in society. Niki Caro encourages women to be grateful just the way they are.

They are often falsely stereotyped and represented in art and literature. In the movie Mulan is offered a powerful job in the Emperor's kingdom because she saved his life. However, Niki Caro lets Mulan refuse to accept the offer and returns home to be an obedient and good daughter. She does not let her hold the male's position in the emperor's kingdom for fear of violating the gender roles. Although she wins many battles on her own by showing her bravery, she fails to violate and break gender roles set by patriarchal male dominated society. Mulan does not break through the glass ceiling and discourage gender roles. It highlights the idea that females can play men's roles sometimes. But later she has to return to the household. She fights wonderfully and skillfully and defeats the enemies. Mulan should have been taken and considered as a hero. Meanwhile, her grandmother tells, "Great, she brought home a sword. If

you ask me she should have brought home a man” (110:15-23). She plays an important role in saving China but what her family expects her to do is to bring honor to parents by turning herself into a beautiful bride. It shows that patriarchal male dominated society never accepts women who violate gender roles. The most important thing for women in male dominated communities is bringing honor to their families. Their heroic works and character in the society is not valued and appreciated until she follows traditional gender roles. Such stereotypical roles given to women symbolizes that their job is staying at home and maintaining stereotypically feminine roles. Violating gender roles is equivalent to inviting disrespect to family.

Despite the fact that there are many feminist qualities embedded to Mulan, the movie is still not free from stereotypical representation of women in art and literature. Traditional gender roles still can be noticed in her character even though she seems to be violating and breaking gender roles. It still underlines stereotypical male traits. It shows how women should be and what kind role they should play. Director portrays the female character as an inferior being. They are successful only when they find a husband no matter if they have masculine qualities, successes and heroism. They will always be treated as inferior to males in patriarchal male dominated society.

One notable American feminists and gender theorist, Judith Butler in her *Gender Trouble* argues that in patriarchal society male use female bodies as an object. Men are projected as creators whereas females are treated as creations. They are supposed to be submissive, inferior and secondary beings in male dominated society. Butler states: "Science and naturalness are discursive constructs. The body is not a mute facticity, or mature, but like gender it is produced by discourses such as the ones Butler has been analyzing" (65). Butler opines that gender also is constructed, created, and made by male dominated society. For men, male are the product of facticity

whereas women are the product of factiousness. She observes:

The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a 'one' who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today. (37)

For her, gender performativity is not about being born male or female. It does not determine our behavior. Instead we learn to behave in certain ways to fit into the community. It is the idea of performance and an act. Butler opines that gender is a form of parody. It is essential to emphasize on the issue of difference between the body of gender and performer. In male dominated society, females are unknowingly oppressed in different forms such as physically, mentally, socially, economically, culturally and educationally. Patriarchal dominated society presents females as inferior and male as superior. It is male who plays the role of decision maker. Homemaking, child caring, food shopping, and washing dishes are taken as women's duty. Making money and policy are regarded as a men's job.

In the movie *Mulan* director, Niki Caro does not allow females to accept her own natural feminine qualities like post-feminists do. Instead, Caro forcefully made the female protagonist dressed as a man in the name of feminism. She indirectly says that in order to be acknowledged in the society, women have to have male qualities. She steals her father's sword and asks her parents for their support in her journey. She is taught to behave in maleway and perform the norms of conventional housewives to prepare for her marriage. She quotes "When will my reflection show who I am inside" show her feminist attitude. She is trained at the training camp to be a man. She is appreciated only when she accepts patriarchal norms. She did not get that honor when

she was a woman. She was supposed to be appreciated only when she could bring honor to her parents by accepting societal norms and values. She is praised and appreciated as a man but not as a woman. For being a good daughter and bringing happiness in her family she is under compulsion to follow patriarchy. It shows that women in patriarchy are appreciated by the society only when they act like a man. She has great responsibility that is “to not uproot my family tree. Keep my father standing tall” (43:5-19). The only way to bring honor to the family is by following patriarchy in male-centered society. They are not allowed to follow their own dream. Mulan is a feminist character who desires to make her family happy of her achievement. Meanwhile she fails to do the show because she is expected to be an obedient girl towards arranged marriage. However, at the last she proves herself that she is one of the bravest soldiers. She can perform any role given by the society. One of the main important issues is that no matter how much effort the directors is putting effort in representing a character which violates traditional gender roles, the movie Mulan still seems to reinforce the gender stereotypes that appreciate the value of male over female.

Regarding the idea of sex and gender, Jennifer Stalemate in her *Reflection on Historical Process* notes that there is radical difference between body and socially constructed gender. Regarding the gender Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* states “women are born feminine, second, weaker and not made, and he responsibility that she puts on herself an women for accepting the roles given to them are all very existentialist ideas” (37). She argues that women are forced to accept the binary oppositions and the roles given to them in patriarchal society. Stalemate writes:

The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise

restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free floating artifice. This radical Splitting of the gendered subject poses yet another set of problems. (74)

Stalemate makes different definitions of gender. She suggests that gender is not cultural interpretation of sex. It must not be taken only as the cultural inscription of meaning on a preconceived notion of sex. For her, gender is cultural and sex is not natural. It is also the discursive or cultural means by which nature is produced and established as pre-discursive.

Niki Caro in the movie *Mulan* does not let women celebrate their own natural feminine qualities like post feminists. In the name of creating gender equality, Caro has forced female character Mulan to follow gender stereotypes. The director does not let her be just the way they are. Movie does not allow the female character to enjoy her own gender qualities. She refuses to let girls celebrate their sex and gender differences. Putting on male dress, breaking patriarchal gender roles in a violent way, fighting to male battlefield, and being as courageous as male won't help to create equality in the society. Although, movie's intention of bringing equality seems praiseworthy, their way of bringing change and equality is wrong. Instead of creating equality between male and females, this idea conflicts between two sexes in the society.

Cinematography is the craft and art of making motion images and pictures by capturing a story visually. This is a science and art of writing with movement and sound. It is the skill of creating images we watch on screen. Camera movement, camera placement, shot composition, lighting, camera focus and shot size all under the essential elements of cinematography. Its careful tricks help to make the movie shine. One of the popular American cinematographer and the author of

Cinematography: Theory and Practice: Image Making for Cinematographers and Directors Blain Brown observe:

The term cinematography is from the Greek roots meaning “writing with motion.” At the heart of it, filmmaking is shooting- but cinematography is more than the mere act of photography. It is the process of taking ideas, words, actions, emotional subtext, tone and all other forms of non-verbal communication and rendering them in visual terms. The tools of cinematic technique are used by both the director and DP, either working or in doing their individual jobs. It is far more than just “photographing” what is in front of the camera-the tools, the techniques and the variations are wide ranging in scope; this is the heart of the symbiosis of the DP and the director. (11)

Brown opines that cinematography is important in communicating the script visually with the mind of viewers. It is about telling a visual story at its best. A good cinematographer works closely with the director to help the director realize their creative vision, through composition, camera movement, lighting and framing. One of the significant elements of cinematography is camera placements which plays a crucial role in affecting the reaction of the audience to the shot. It aids to convey character behavior and have emotional impact as well. For instance, if a character has to be seen as rude, the camera must be placed close to the character's mouth. Camera movement is another element of cinematography which helps to heighten the suspense and emotion in the movie. Similarly shot size and composition, sound and visual effects plays a crucial role in making the movie great.

The movie *Mulan* directed by Mendy Walker has one of the best cinematography. Cinematographer Walker has created epic visuals. She boasts a stunning visual palate of beautiful vistas and expertly lensed action sequences even on the small screen at

home. The visual language of the movie *Mulan* combines the breathtaking long shots, a detailed realization of complex choreographed action sequences, and intimate interiors. She is successful in capturing all these elements effectively. She captures the extensive action sequences needed for the film. The traditional cultural scenes and battle sequences have been shown as if it is real. It is the beauty of the film. Many fight scenes are filmed in colorless locations. The selection of the bleak landscapes barren contrasts with the warm colors used in Mulan's home village. Walker in the first fight scene between two armies uses a complicated mixture of cameras attached to helicopters and mountain to mountain miles away to capture the scale of the event. Similarly, Walker brilliantly catches Mulan's reflection in its blade in a scene where she holds her father's sword. In a scene, Mulan is with her father's armor on. She rides off to her destination on horse in the rain with the dark scene. This scene is entirely filled with sounds, dramatic music, effect track, and ambience. It intensifies her darkness and courageous action at the same time. This shows her mixed feelings. The scene also helps the audience to understand about her dangerous and serious decision.

Cinematographer has tried her best to bring the film to life. Mulan's real stunts help to bring one of the film's most beautiful shots. Camera has been beautifully designed to be able to move to capture the fluid action in certain shots. In a scene, where Bori Khan jumps off the horses, the director has designed the camera in such a way where the whole world moves with him. Similarly, Walker has filmed the large battle sequence against Bori Khan's army artistically. Walker seems to be very much determined to be organized. The battle scene with the horses is praiseworthy. In a scene where Mulan causes an avalanche has been shown as real. Most of the scenes have been tried to be displayed in a realistic way. One of the characters named Jet Li

who plays the role of Emperor in the movie seems wonderful in terms of its setting, lighting and sound. The scene shot in the throne is one of the different spaces from the rest of the movie. Director of the photography has done lots of testing with different colors of red. The movie has different textures of different tones, fabric, and what they looked like next to other tones. The sword presentation director has not moved the camera too much to make the audience be with them.

One of the notable cinematographers and the author of the *Sight Sound Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics* Herbert Zettl argues that lighting plays the greatest role in manipulating and articulating our perception of the environment. It helps in establishing an aesthetic context for our experiences. The artistic use of light in the movie makes the audience see the certain event in a specific way. Lighting also helps in conveying the message to viewers. It delivers emotion and feelings of a certain character in cinema. Regarding the purpose of lighting Zettl observes:

Lighting helps us, or makes us see and feel in a specific way. Through lighting we can articulate our outer space/time environment and our inner environment—our emotions. Lighting reveals what objects look like, where they are located, and what surface textures they have. It also influences how we feel about a person or an event. Very much like music, lighting seems able to bypass our usual cognitive perceptual screens—our rational faculty with its critical judgment—and affect us directly and immediately. (20)

Zettl opines that lighting is essential in articulating our inner and outer environments. Lighting has both outer and inner orientation functions. Both functions depend to a great extent on the proper control of shadows. It can be used to articulate characters' inner environment. That is our emotions and feelings.

Walker in the movie *Mulan* has done a great job in capturing the feelings of

Mulan. Low key lighting in the movie matches Mulan's mood. That shows her inner environment. When Mulan is shown in the movie, the image of the scene and coloring is beautiful and light. It indicates that a hero is someone who needs to be appreciated and praised for his heroism and good doing. Similarly, whenever the focus is on the antagonist, the Huns, the environment and atmosphere has very ominous sound in the background and dark light. They make the audience feel scary and frightening. It shows that villains are evil in terms of their traits and work. When Mulan is introduced, she is very light-hearted. The protagonist's appearance makes the audience thrilling, happy and hopeful. It is very appealing to an eye whenever the protagonist Mulan is drawn to have light features. Likewise, Huns are drawn with gray shades in their skin. They have distinguished jet black eyeliner in order to show that villains are evil and threatening by characters and looks. The movement of the picture in the movie is smoothly effortless and creatively transitioned. One of the scenes in the movie where Mulan's transition from an obedient and sweet young girl to woman who gets ready to risk her life for bringing honor to her family. This scene begins when she is sitting outside in the rain. The technique of projecting Mulan's mood and feelings is praise worthy.

The warrior in the movie relives the epic adventures of the fearless Mulan with a motion-activated sword which plays an array of "sword sounds". In the blades of the sword, it has the symbol of "loyal, brave and true". The sword shown in the movie seems authentic and realistic. In the movie, *Mulan* the motion activated sword has realistic sounds. The engraved symbols on the blade translate to "loyal," "brave," and "true" represents the loyalty of the combatant. Three best settings found in the movie in terms of cinematography are activate with motion, activate with button on hilt and off. The button on front of the hilt has helped in activating sounds.



Figure:- 1 Dark scene represents Mulan's misfortune. (03:05)

The camerawork in the movie *Mulan* is brilliant as seen in the introduction of the film as the movie goes from ink on a paper to zooming out of the Great Wall of China to display the length, strength and the wall symbolizes. The movement in a movie is smoothly effortless, all done by hand and creatively transitioned. It indicated that it takes hard work to draw out each singular shot and connecting them together.



Figure:- 2 Projecting Mulan's emotions. (34:47)

This in the scene shows the transition of a young sweet and obedient young girl to a mentally matured woman who gets ready to risk her life for her country and family. This scene begins when Mulan is sitting outside in the rain. This is the director's one of the best and creative ways of projecting emotion, mood, and feelings of Mulan. In this scene she seems to be realizing that she has to do anything to save her father and her country.



Figure:- 3 Mulan gets prepared to go the battlefield. (41:35)

The director in the film changes Mulan's clothing, hairstyle, and gesture while getting ready to join the battlefield. The scene also highlights the issue that in order to combat against the enemies, a woman has to cut her hair, speak in a bold voice and wear men's clothing. It also indicates that women are not supposed to fight in their own appearance. This is the reason Mulan begins her appearance transformation and cuts her hair short to put into a small man bun. This is taken as a proper hair style to be recruited in the Chinese troops.



Figure:- 4 Mulan's masculine characte. (37:15)

This scene is entirely filled with sounds, dramatic music, effect track, and ambience. It intensifies her darkness and courageous action at the same time. She rides off to her destination on horse in the rain with the dark scene. This shows her mixed feelings. The scene also helps the audience to understand about her dangerous and serious

decision. The angling of the camera, background music and the content helps to make the film iconic. Dramatic music is played in the scene in order to highlight the issue of her bravery and determination. The scene also makes the audience feel worried and scared for Mulan.



Figure:- 5 Bori Khan an antagonist in the war. (67:56)

Director's use of camera techniques in the entry of antagonist Bori Khan is unique in terms of showing his facial expression and dark coloring. Through the use of close angle camera technique, the director has tried to show the audience the furious expression and appearance of the antagonist. The use of close up technique helps to accentuate an actor's facial expression. Lighting has been shown disturbing and scary in order to show that the enemy is always scary.



Figure:- 6 Mulan training lika a man. (57:55)

Director has constructed different costume prototypes while developing Mulan's signature red robe look and battle wear. She is dressed in the red robe which is a generic design in order to show Chinese culture and history. She appears in such an outfit in order to identify themselves from the tribes.



Figure:- 7 Mulan fights like ma brave men. (70:54)

In the sequence of sword presentations, the director has carefully dropped off the depth of field in order to focus on where the director wants the audience to look, particularly for Mulan and her family. The camera has not been moved much. The reason is the director wants the viewers to be with them. Camera is moved only in the last shot of Mulan when the audience can see her taking in the phoenix and world.



Figure:- 8 Warriors in the Battle field. (80:17)

The outstanding cinematographer Mendy seems to be breaking down Mulan's epic battle scenes, the perfect camera and lens combination for the film and the gender

roles in cinematography. She has been able to utilize the costume, especially lenses to create the look they were after. Cinematographer Mendy Walker is successful in making the most of an epic scale of large format; locations, visual effects largely kept in camera and photography are the exciting part of the film.

The analysis of the film shows the flaw of representation of the female character in the movie, *Mulan*. In the name of equality and women empowerment, the director has presented a female character, Mulan in the guise of male. It indicates that you have to be in a men's outfit, speak in a loud voice, and cut your hair. It suggests the fact that women cannot join the battlefield in their own appearance. In order to be accepted as a powerful woman, she has to be like a man. Director has not let female character to celebrate their differences in the name of feminism. The director in the film has not let the protagonist, Mulan to celebrate her own sex and gender. In the name of equality and women empowerment, she has shown female character in men's guise. Thus, this paper explores that the idea of making women's appearance look like men's does not make sure that they get the idea of equality and empowerment. Instead of celebrating the natural differences between men and women, the director has stereotypically depicted the female character.

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