

**AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE REPORT POSTED ON THE WEBSITE
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An executive summary of the final report of work done on the Minor Research project of Dr Melisa Maryann Goveas, entitled “The New Age Disney Princesses: Attempting Gender Sensitisation” sanctioned by UGC,vide sanction letter No. 2102-MRP/15-16/KAMA002/UGC-SWRO, dated 31/3/16

Walt Disney Animation Studios is one of the oldest and most respected studios in the Film industry. Renowned for its unique animation style, Walt Disney Studios has produced such timeless classics such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*,*Sleeping Beauty*,*The Little Mermaid*, so on. The Disney Princesses like Snow White, Ariel (the mermaid), Aurora (the sleeping beauty) and Cinderella have captured the imagination of children and adults alike. Nevertheless Walt Disney Animation Studios have always drawn flak from feminists who claim that their princesses’ characters are stereotypical. They are forever the ‘perfect women’ who ‘are damsels in distress’and who ‘need a Prince Charming’ to bail them out. Attempts were then made to answer these criticisms and in comparison to the earlier characters, there was a sea change in the portrayal of these princesses. No longer was she a damsel in distress, but was one who could stand on her own feet and take care of herself. Nevertheless the role a prince as her lover and companion continued, but now they were partners and there was together they attempted to do away with the evils that were plaguing them.

Disney then furthered the character of the princess with an unexpected twist through the portrayal of Merida in *Brave* in 2012. Though the movie received mixed reviews, the character of Merida as the independent princess who speaks her own mind, refuses to marry and prefers not to have a ‘Prince Charming’ aroused interest in the public and critics alike. Merida has now become the one Disney princess who does not have a love interest, but instead continues to be the ‘tomboy’ princess who loves to hunt,

ride and climb mountains. Then in 2013, the box office hit and academy award winner, *Frozen* with the sister princesses duo of Elsa and Anna who stand up for each other in spite of all adversities gained accolades. The specialty of this movie laid in three major twists to the usual Disney princess plot. Firstly, Elsa, the cursed princess does not 'lose' her curse to freeze things; rather she retains this, not as a curse, but an ability which she learns to control. Secondly, the Prince character, Prince Hans proves to be a villain who attempts to murder the sisters so as to take over their throne and thirdly it is the sisters who save one another rather than Kristoff, the character who to some extent plays the love interest of Princess Anna. The 'New Age' Disney Princesses had arrived.

The project then tried to highlight the peculiar characteristics of these princesses which made them the New Age Princesses by examining in detail the characters of Merida, Elsa and Anna. The project elaborated how Merida's recklessness led to her mother being cursed, but it also highlighted how Merida stands up to the problem and in the end apologizes to her mother, breaking the curse. Merida's strength of character and bravery are highlighted. The project also examined how Elsa and Anna too highlight these qualities in them. We can see how Elsa overcomes the fear of her powers through love and how Anna sacrifices her life to save her sister's life. The movie focuses on the love between the sister and how finally it they who save each other. The project also employs Julia Kristeva's theory of Abjection to show how these princesses are abject by nature and how they create chaos and confusion around them. The theory of abjection states that when confronted with that which questions our boundaries and comfort zones, our selves start to disintegrate. Kristeva highlights women and death as examples of the abject and the project uses her ideas to develop how the 'unconventional' behaviour of the princesses would definitely cause the breaking down of the boundaries of patriarchy.

The project also conducted a sample survey and discussion by visiting various schools in and around the city and speaking to students from VII, VIII & IX standards. The researcher first held a discussion on the Disney princesses and tried to make the students understand how the New Age Princesses could be seen as role models and why they could be seen so. This was followed by handing over a questionnaire to the students and based on the data that was collected, the research has drawn the conclusion that the New Age Disney Princesses can be employed as an effective tool in teaching gender sensitization to young girls and it could help to develop within themselves the qualities of independence, courage and the ability to face and deal with life's problems.

The project also drew the conclusion that while the Disney Princesses could be a marketing goldmine for the Disney franchise, there is no denying that the New Age Disney Princesses are an excellent role model for young girls. The fact that they are extremely popular with both children and young ones and have stood the test of time is indeed heartening and it is extremely possible that they could be of a big help in instilling the quality of gender sensitization in young children. A quality as gender sensitization needs to be taught at a young age if it has to be properly inculcated; but the complex theory might prove to be beyond the grasp of a young child. The New Age Disney Princesses could thus be employed and thus proving to be an effective tool for gender sensitization.