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Moana: The underlying different aspects

Moana is a movie released by Walt Disney Pictures in 2016. The movie tells the story of a strong-willed Polynesian Princess called Moana. She unites with another character, the demi-god Maui to restore balance to nature to the environment by the use of a mystic relic lost for a thousand years. This movie has managed to capture the imagination of kids around the world and at the same time also succeeded to give adults some time to think about some important issues that are seldom discussed. The movie is set in the surroundings of the island of Hawaii, which has currently been under a long discussion regarding the preservation of the Polynesian culture as well as issues related to environment and global warming. In this paper, we will try to shed some light on the different messages that the movie conveys through the use of its content.

**Cultural Literature Review**

There is a rather different cultural depiction that we are often used to seeing or hearing when it comes to the discussion regarding the Polynesians. There are countless books like the White Man’s Burden that depict the natives of the Americas and Africa as savages and brutes. This movie shows that there is more to the Polynesians that meets the eye. The writers and the starting lineup of the movie are linked to the Polynesian culture in one way or another. True there are several literary works related to the culture of these natives yet this attempt is quite convincing as this managed to introduce the common folk to the culture of Hawaii and its surroundings. This movie also plays its part in introducing the Polynesian youth that is currently under the influence of the norms and values that are quite different than their own. In short, this movie captivates the audience of all age groups while staying true to its cultural underpinnings, introducing a large section of the world to the Polynesian culture in an exciting and friendly manner.

**Environmental Literature Review**

There is no doubt about the urgency and importance of the issue of Global warming that is affecting the world. The general temperature level of the world is rising to unprecedented levels as never before witnessed or seen by the world. That is the main issue that the movie Moana is centered around. The young princess is concerned as she sees her home disintegrate around her while certain norms are imposed around her that she has no understanding about. The princess leaves her home, bears the cruelty of the open sea to restore balance to the environment. There is nothing new about that as we often observe the childish works of Dr. Seuss, who is seldom given credit for conveying such an urgent message in the most childish of manners. The Polynesian culture, as depicted by many works of literature, can be greatly observed to be based around the laws of nature, in which they always tried to buy in harmony with nature. There are the mysterious ways of the "savages" that the colonizers failed to understand, as the latter was fueled with the influence of Capitalism (Scranton). This is often seen as we observe the world around us. We are told repeatedly through mass media that we need things that are of no use to us, except the few that need them. The Polynesian way of life goes against our ways and ideas, yet during these times when the intensity of natural disasters is increasing day-by-day, we often talk about living in the "organic" way without giving much credit to the fact that this was the way all along. This movie proves that moving out of our comfort zone will curtail the crisis. Hence, the message conveyed is clear. Technology will not find a cure for its damages. We must place our trust in nature if we are to somehow survive and eliminate this dire problem.

**Hawaii: A General Overview**

Hawaii is one of the states of the United States of America. Contrary as many people think, it is a collection of islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The “Aloha state” as is its official nickname, is composed of eight islands, centered on the “Big Island” called Hawaii Island. Hawaii is often known as Paradise of the Pacific due to its beautiful beaches, amazing natural scenery, oceanic surroundings and warm tropical climate (Morgan). This is the reason that it is the most popular destination for surfers, marine scientists, and tourists, the latter being from all parts of the world. The island gained a lot of prominence after the famous bombing of Pearl Harbor, after which it has been the central base of operations during the many battles between Imperial Japan and the US. Currently, the state ranks fourth in terms of its contribution to the National GDP, which indicates a high standard of living as compared to many states in the US. It is also of central importance to people traveling by both sea and land, due to its location.

There is a reason why the basic setting of this animated movie is placed in Hawaii. The writer wants to give an impression that all the world is like the Paradise of the Pacific, beautiful and captivating. Seeing the deformation of this paradise sends a quite message that soon the beauty of this world will be no more, and we will be forced to squander for food. Even as Moana gives the orders for the rotation of the fishing grounds and the coconut groves, she comes to the conclusion that this will do nothing unless she tries to go beyond the call of our daily duties (the world beyond is represented by the reef) to save her village. The writer in this particular instance is trying to convey through the combination of Hawaii and Moana that saving the environment is our first and foremost calling, and that we exist because the environment exists. In short, use if Hawaii as placement for this movie is solely to give religion-like underpinnings to the environmental issue, as history has proved several times that the majority only follows when it comes to religious beliefs. This use of religion emphasizes the urgency of the issue as well as the hope of the writer that his message about the environment is taken seriously.

**Different Shades of Moana**

There is a lot more shown in Moana that meets the eye. Such is not uncommon in these times, as the commercial aspect of these movies is often kept in mind. Therefore, these movies are designed to capture the hearts of the kids as well as the minds of the adults. These messages are not particularly hard to spot. Take the example of the character of Moana herself. She can be seen full of life like a child, yet the next second you see her commanding the village, crushing her desire to go beyond the reef and see the world. This also symbolizes the mixed feelings that we experience while facing the unknown. Moana wants to see what’s beyond the reef and yet she does not wish to part ways with her loved ones, as she, like all of us, is unsure how her adventure will turn out to be. So, to understand what the movie wants to communicate, we need to view the entire cast with reference to this female protagonist, which is explained in the subsequent paragraphs via a series of different lenses.

**Polynesian Cultural Symbolism**

Several cultural symbols are present in the movie. The most important of them is that of the Polynesian Mother Nature called Te-Fiti (Caldwell). It symbolizes the ecosystem that the people are ruining, and how soon it would abandon us we do not change our way of life. The journey of Moana through perils to reach her also conveys a message. We need to move out of our comfort zone if we are to save the planet from this paramount disaster. This leads us to another symbol that is the Boat. The Boat represents the fact that the way to avert this crisis is not clear. Moana is not educated in the art of "Way-finding", a convenient name for sailing according to the situation at hand (Nauta). Yet, we see that she is committed to the task, enlisting the help of the Demi-god Maui to fulfill her responsibility to her clan. Her fear of the unknown does not stop her to go on this adventure to save the whole archipelago. This act also emphasizes that she takes this threat of environmental degradation very seriously, unlike the current rulers of all the major powers of the world.

The Boat is only half of this important symbol, as it is meaningless without the discussion of the reef. The reef represents the boundary to the unknown. It is the symbol of curiosity that often grips us as we look into the unknown, which is intriguing and fearful at the same time. This also symbolizes another fact that some boundaries are meant to be broken, especially if they are keeping us from achieving an important breakthrough. Moana broke the rules but it was all worth it because she managed to achieve the greater good. But the boat is only the half of the symbol as it is linked to the symbolic ocean. The ocean plays the part of the medium that tries to balance the destruction of Ta’ka, as it searches the islands for a suitable candidate to find and return the fabled heart of Te-fiti to return things to normal as they were before.

But the most important Polynesian character in this movie is Ta’ka. This colorless character may not feel appealing, it carries a strong message grounded in the Polynesian Mythology. Ta’ka as the harbinger of destruction is actually the world taking its revenge against us, the humans that have caused damage to our environment. This also align with a concept that different movies (Kingsman: The Secret Service) are also trying to convey. The movie gives the narrative that we are burning candles at the both ends as we desperately try to control the nature. The act of Maui stealing the heart of Te-fiti symbolizes precisely this, how we do not let nature take its course, and instead we use our machines to try to bend nature to our will. This perspective of the Polynesian Mythology is later proved true as Ta’ka turns out to be the corrupted and angry form of the deity Te-fiti, which is raining down natural calamities, not unlike the severe hurricanes, earthquakes and the tornados that we are facing due to our own mistakes.

**Moana as a Feminist Role Model**

The theme of woman empowerment can be seen in the film. The first light towards the arrival of this conclusion is the starring of a female protagonist (Madeline Streiff). But this is new, even for Disney, as often the princess is shown in a weak role, waiting for someone to rescue her from some calamity. Moana thinks of resolving all the issues herself, taking the command of the issue at hand herself, without even the consent of her father, who is the chief of the tribe. With the death of her grandmother, who motivated her to sail beyond the reef, Moana decides to take the matter of saving her village into her own hands. It also brings us to another important factor. Unlike all the previous Disney flicks, the prince is also missing in the movie, while the Demi-god Maui is depicted as a sidekick more than an equal partner, as he is somehow depending on Moana for almost everything, from bringing him the boat to the training that Moana provides to him when he loses the control over his powers. But the ultimate show of feminist power is the returning of the Heart of Ti-Fiti, which is itself the representation of the one true heart, as is the Female goddess Ti-Fiti herself. To sum it up, the action of Moana in the movie uplifts all the female viewers by giving a strong message of female equality. Unlike the previous movies, a strong message is conveyed that the females can be in charge of the situation when it comes to act according to the situation making their own decision to save people that they hold dear.

**The Environmental side of Moana**

The most apparent part of the movie is, of course, its environmental underpinnings. There is a vicious debate going on about the current Global Warming crisis that the world is facing these days. Hawaii is also taking the toll of environmental degradation that is resulting in a steady rise in the sea levels that is slowly sinking its islands (Charles Fletcher). But no one is thinking individually to do something about it. This is also depicted in the movie. The people of Moana’s tribe are either too ignorant or too scared of the issue that is about to change their lives. Then replant the groves and rotate the fishing grounds but they refuse to expand or look beyond their borders for the solution to their problems. In the end, it all comes to the courage of the individuals. We cannot simply put the weight of the fight on the government and spend all our lives with the heads in the sand. Even as Moana charges headlong into the fight to defeat Ta'ka, the evil demon, he finds it the hard way that she cannot do it alone. True, she manages to solve the issue that may destroy the whole environment in the end, but she does it with the help of another being called Maui, depicted as semi-natural force himself. In short, the whole movie shows that we can only avert this crisis by enlisting the love of nature, but collectively, not individually.

**Conclusion**

In short, we can say that Moana is a movie for everyone. It manages to touch the hearts of many through its animation but also managed to convey several messages. First, there is the message that female empowerment is the calling of the day. The last scene that portrays Moana as the Chief Way finder shows that women can lead from the front. It is a serious message to a nation that is yet to elect a Woman President. Second, there is the serious message that the value of the nature understood by the natives has been completely ignored over the course of time. We have damaged our environment to a dangerous proportion. Moana recognizes the need to act despite the fact that she is not taken seriously by any of her fellow tribesmen. Last and the most important conclusion drawn from this movie is that the time to act individually is passed. Just as Moana enlists Maui to help her achieve her aims, we need each other to contain this serious threat of Global Warming. The world requires mass mobilization to counter this collective threat to all humanity. United States is one of the highest greenhouse gas emitters of the world and we cannot succeed in containing global warming if we do not work together, both on collective and individual levels. In short, Moana is a movie that carries a strong message for the adults while being amusing for the youth to watch.

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