
**WHO IS THE FEMME FATAL FOR?
Investigating the notion of ‘Femme Fatale’ through a Psycho-Social
Lens**

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Abstract:

The present paper examines the notion of 'femme fatale' in popular media and various art forms from different cultures through a psycho-social lens. The paper aims to highlight various examples from historical narratives, popular films, and literature that depict strong women negatively and their impact on the psyche of women in society. By trying to investigate the history of the archetypal figure of 'femme fatale' through a Foucauldian lens of understanding the 'position of power,' the paper was able to establish that the notion of strong and attractive women being seen either as empowering or intimidating highly depended upon who was narrating/creating the story. Language is vital in determining whether the character of 'strong women' will be seen as fatalistic in society or empowering. The aspects of feminism, gaze, historical-cultural contexts, and subversion of tropes were analyzed in the present paper.

Keywords: Cinema, Gaze, Femme Fatale, Mythology, Feminism

Introduction:

If there could be just one innocent text ever written down that showed men and women as equal, it must have been Plato's *Symposium*, where men and women were described as merging and split later by Zeus as a punishment. Only this story placed the heteronormatively distributed sexes on the same level. After that, when the story of the "*Laughter of the Thracian servant*" is explored, appearing in another of Plato's works, we clearly see the distinction between a man and a woman coming. The maid is enslaved; she is unaware of the philosophical truth; she is a seductress, the lost one, gullible, and so on. The philosopher (a man, of course) is the one who knows the truth. This narrative becomes a basis for the present paper to open up about the idea of power in society and the hierarchies that it opens up. Man will be the holder of wisdom and worldly truths, while women will be the ones living in the material world and its low significance. Adriana Cavarero, in her book *Despite Plato* (1995), reads the same story through a feminist lens, arguing that by focusing on the

gender of the servant, a power dynamic erupts out of a story. Suddenly, a man has become capable of intellectual prowess and wisdom, while a woman has been removed from philosophy.

Simply stating that *philosophy* or knowledge is something a man can only understand and participate in excludes women from the narrative. While most philosophical statements begin with the words "A man...", this is supposed to demarcate 'man' as a universal term for all humans. But modern feminist critique goes on to say that this is an act of power that attempts to keep womanhood and women's experiences out of the knowledge systems.

This paper does not imply that since time immemorial, all fables, archetypes, and narratives have placed women at a lower position in society. However, it is essential to see how a woman's voice, spirit, and view (both natural and mythical) has lived through time and history. A surface-level analysis of legends reveals that ancient myths often characterized women as mothers, dancers, goddesses, and nurturers (Vadrevu, 2018). Specific feminine characteristics of caregiving, nurturing, affection, gullibility, and reproductivity became significant with the biological being of 'woman' as well.

The Jungian archetype of 'The Mother' becomes relevant when we see Hestia, the Greek Goddess of Hearth, and all Indian goddesses associated with the suffix 'Maa.' Sudhir Kakkar, an Indian psychoanalyst, studied the position of 'mother' in a Hindu context in his book, *The Inner World* (1978), and found how women are always seen as men in their lives. A woman is a father's responsibility, followed by her husband and, eventually, her son (which she must be blessed enough to give birth to). The sexuality of a woman is not something to be openly discussed, and motherhood is an ever-pervasive theme in her life.

In Greece, oracles were often maiden girls blessed by Apollo, the God of prophecies. In India, maiden girls were often part of rituals and religious ceremonies (for instance, a *Devdasi* used to be a girl who used to sing and perform in temples and dedicate her entire life to spirituality). In a way, music and dance became associated with a feminine spirit.

More than that, women were also seen as strong, political warriors and complex grey characters in myths and legends. The Iliad by Homer and the Indian legends (Ramayana and Mahabharata) hold verdicts of strong female characters who influenced the stories to a great extent (Hossain, 2015; Gautum, 2018). Again, various interpretations of these myths and legends open up the possibility of how power is shown in the works. A narrative built in a male-dominated society that wants to teach the virtues of chastity and honor will talk about Draupadi's laughter as her fault that led to the domino effect ending in war. Stories of *apsaras* and *vishkanyas* (poison-giving women) will exist in evil light to tell what all a woman must never do. Stories

are not innocent, as a Foucauldian analysis would say. They permeate people's lives, cultures, and youth socialization and affect their thinking.

Of course, women were also seen as seductresses and diversions in stories, using their beauty to enchant men and astray them from their path. The present paper will explore this further. Be it Greek Sirens, Apsaras, Vishkanyas, or Lord Vishnu himself appearing as the celestial being Mohini, women's beauty was a dangerous weapon that has often found its power and place in legends.

Oral history and written texts held many stories about men and women, their diverse roles, and their associations in the popular myth and collective psyche. However, when cinema emerged, it changed the entire way these dichotomies were perceived. Women were not supposed to be only *imagined* now. They were visually present on screens. A sense of *gaze* developed through the way a camera observed a woman. Gaze existed before that as well, but the camera and cinematic lens made it more obvious. Smelik (2016) beautifully captures the idea that a voyeuristic tendency (of a man to observe a woman intimately) and narcissistic beliefs (to take control of the woman's life) come together in the films through the camera lens for the pleasure of the male audience. Women were represented on the screen, but through a patriarchal lens, something that can fit the male idea of a 'woman.' For a woman, her own representation was missing from the screen for a long time. All she could internalize was either the 'damsel-in-distress' woman from the screen or being bold enough to be the seductive woman, which eventually led to societal ostracization.

Earlier movies began innocently with repetition of mythical stories centered around goddesses and celestial women and slowly moved from highlighting the damsels-in-distress tropes to women who could seduce with dance and sparkly revealing clothes (*the entry of item number in films*) (Kaur, 2011). Hollywood, in the late 1930s, was experimenting with noir films and detective plotlines where, in the shadows, a gorgeous female character would often make an appearance to deceive the detective or do a crime in plain sight, thus giving birth to the popular '*femme fatale*' figure that would be repeated consciously and unconsciously many times in films (elHallaq, 2015; Stuart, 2017; Bishop, 2019).

Only when the feminist movement came to strength and began observing art and film through a critical feminist lens, they began to problematise the trope, the archetype and very notion of *femme fatale*. This paper aims to do something similar, but rather than highlighting problems in it, we wish to explore it psychologically, deconstruct it and if needed, redefine it.

A Foucauldian lens (Khan & MacEachen, 2021) gives the opportunity to look at the power structures in the development of the notion of 'femme fatale' and see it from a post-structuralist point of view, which argues that there is no ultimate truth out there, only systems of discourses underlying any subject. Michael Foucault, from

whom the above-mentioned perspective emerges, wrote in his work, *The History of Sexuality* (1976), how sexuality was repressed in society in a way that it was talked about excessively - but only in a certain manner. This was done to promote only a specific mindset among people while marginalizing all other viewpoints about pleasure and sexuality. The ever-increasing sexualization of women done by media, art, and literature also hints towards a similar practice of showcasing women in a very specific light alone while keeping all other possibilities of life at bay. *Femme fatale*, which looks like it is a resistance to male power, would appear rather complementary to male power only through a Foucauldian lens. Foucault constantly argued that power and resistance always go hand-in-hand and lend support to one another. The creation of the genre of 'femme fatale' was to show that women who attempt to resist the male world have a certain outcome pre-decided for them, and nothing else can happen beyond that. The woman who did not receive the love of the prince will eventually become the witch with the sole purpose of ruining the lives of others (reference: *The Sleeping Beauty*).

Who is a 'Femme Fatale' after all?

The *femme fatale* (French for "deadly woman") is one of the oldest female archetypes that exists in literature and mythology of various origins. A *femme fatale* is an enchanting woman who lures men into compromising positions by using the seductive web of her sexuality and manipulating wit to fulfill her ambitions (Simkin, 2014). This literary archetype is quite difficult to describe as she's a malleable character with her traits changing with regard to time and different cultures, but what remains timeless is the *femme fatale*'s conformity to accepted beauty norms and willingness to deceive. Her physical form is almost illusive, taking shape depending on the fantasies of the authors writing them (Praz, 1951; Farrimond, 2017).

The traits of the *femme fatale* change accordingly to conform to what would be desirable for the wanton temptress of that era (Julibert, 2022). For example, the fatal woman of the Gothic era had long black hair with wild sexual allure and the Victorian *femme* had her blue eyes, golden locks and child-like innocence, while the Indian *femme fatale* used her dancing skills, her ornamentation and make-up, big eyes and curvy body to seduce men (elHallaq, 2015).

In order to trace the cultural history of the archetype of the *femme fatale* through a feminist and psycho-social point of view, the question must be raised - why are these women fatal, and to whom? Are these female characters really overtly sexual, or is it the narrative that makes them so? And if a man were to engage in the same behavior, would it be considered similarly scandalous and evil?

The trope was mostly constructed (like the majority of the art canon) by heterosexual male authors in a world where the stigma around female sexuality was omnipresent, given the puritanical interpretations of the religious texts along with societal beliefs and the ideal woman was someone who was submissive, fragile and believed in guarding her 'honor' (having sexual connotations directly associated with

virginity and sexual purity). It wasn't difficult to brand a woman as lethal to the patriarchal power structure who dared to walk outside the puritanical beliefs regarding feminine ideals at the time. From a young age, women were burdened with how to be the 'angel of the house' (Braun, 2007) or be branded as the 'virtuous girl next door.' Society often feels the need to cling to categories, labels, and names, and the patriarchal system becomes intolerably confusing without them, hence the long-standing obsession with compartmentalizing women in boxes of their perceived notion of the virtuous feminine or scorned temptress (Fraile, 1996).

A femme fatale is depicted as an antagonist who discourages women from taking on more independent roles and continuing to do their womanly duties. In both real life and fiction, femme fatales are often punished in one way or another through death, abandonment by their lover, or banishment from the social circle for being a threat to male dominance (Grossman, 2020). She serves as a warning of how dangerous it could be to challenge traditional boundaries. This narrative supports the initial argument that power not only gives birth to resistance but also shows what the fate of that resistance is. Any attempt to downgrade a certain order of genders and dominance can have fatalistic ends.

The culturally pervasive narrative of an evil woman bringing downfall to the hapless man can be traced back to the biblical myth of how Eve tempted Adam to sin by disobeying the orders of God, resulting in their banishment from Eden, which is also the starting point of Christian mythology. The myth of the great fall has been used by the church authorities as well as the religious scholars (again male) according to their phallogocentric interpretations to serve the cultural narrative of associating the feminine with evil and to assert the superiority of men (Coleman, 2021; Chakraborty 2017).

The same prejudices and mythical images concerning female seduction were evident in works of different artists as it was common for artists to recreate mythical and biblical tales, i.e., Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *'Lady Lilith'* is depicted as a self-absorbed, vain woman. Her untied hair and bare shoulders hint at her sexual voracity. (Pound, 2023). To an extent, it also establishes the hierarchy of the subject's (male) perverse observation of the dangerous object (the female temptress), which exists inside the boundary of the artwork, which is akin to being trapped in the domestic sphere.

Throughout history, the iconic figure of the femme fatale has been openly devised by men to demonize the powerful, sexually assertive woman who wouldn't submit to the gender norms laid down by a patriarchal society. Especially post the Second World War, the anxiety of men increased regarding women's newfound social and financial freedom (Grossman, 2020; Summerfield, 1997). After the war, when the men came back and saw women out of their homes and holding positions and jobs, their age-old insecurity of being at the top of the economic food chain began to

rise again, and they took the help of popular culture, media, and literature to show that a confident woman, working jobs and managing her own life well, has some evil deeply rooted within her. What this evil is was not clear, so it was left to the open interpretation of the writers developing these tropes.

Post World War, the women who were begged by the governments to take on jobs were persuaded to go back and assume their previous roles in what historian Aileen Kraditor coined in 1968 as the 'cult of domesticity'. During the Great Depression, section 213 of 'The Economy Act of 1932' stated that if both of the spouses were working and a personnel reduction was needed, then one of them would lose their job. It wasn't a question of who would go back. Frances Perkins, New York state's Commissioner of Labor, labeled married working women as "a menace to society, a selfish, shortsighted creature, who ought to be ashamed of herself" for greedily hoarding on jobs which supposedly belonged to men - the actual breadwinners of the family. The idea of career women being misguided and prone to succumbing to committing immoral deeds began saturating popular culture (Hunt,2020).

Re-visiting Femme Fatales in Myths and Legends

The image of the deadly, scandalous woman who weaponizes her alluring sexuality in her quest for power is dominant in the mythology of almost every ancient culture despite the differences in their portrayal. 'She' appeared as a siren, a nymph, a demigod, or an ordinary woman victimized by her circumstances. These powerful women are remembered for their refusal to simply be the object in a man's narrative and for carving their own way to fulfill their ambition while simultaneously causing the death of many men, whether intentionally or not.

As described above, Eve is the first female beauty who, because of being gullible and falling into the trap of the Devil, consumes the fruit of knowledge and even makes Adam take the fall. After that emerges Pandora, who opens up the infamous box, leading to so many vices and ills falling upon humanity; while these were simpler narratives of how women's gullibility or disastrous curiosity can lead to destruction, the male creators of 'femme fatale' developed their ideas brilliantly as time progressed.

Homer's Iliad describes the Spartan beauty, *Helen*, as '*the face that launched a thousand ships*'. She's crowned as the embodiment of feminine beauty, which makes men helpless. In various historical narratives, her seductive beauty is often blamed for the demise of thousands of men in the battle of Troy, even though the war was inevitable because the hospitality code of ancient Greece was broken. Nobody knows the absolute truth about her. She's a woman scorned, the adulteress, the victim, the object of desire, a mere pawn in God's play. She was the quintessential femme fatale long before the world was introduced to the myth of Adam and Eve (Dent, 2023). Of course, when one explores Greek myths and legends, one cannot forget the chaos *Aphrodite* or *Venus* (goddess of love and beauty) created on Mount Olympus when

she first emerged from the ocean. Gods were both struck by her beauty and terrified of her beauty's strength. They ended up marrying Aphrodite (not by her will) to Hephaestus (the only not-good-looking God among the Greek Gods).

When we talk of femme fatales and wronged women, we cannot avoid talking of the Egyptian queen. Cleopatra was the powerful empress who briefly held the fate of Rome in her hands by romantically enslaving two of their most powerful rulers with her charm. Her only crime was daring to enjoy the same privileges as any male ruler in history did. Many artists and writers, following the Roman's propaganda, have vilified her by portraying her as a promiscuous and devious woman of unrestrained passion. She has been labeled "the whore queen" (properties), "a woman of insatiable sexuality and insatiable avarice," and "the whore of the eastern kings" (Powers, 2020). She's a victim of exoticization and racism. Not only that, she has been recreated time and again to fit the European beauty standards with a hint of exotic sexual allure by artists and many Hollywood directors. Even in the paintings of her mythical sensational suicide, she is an object of male fantasy, posing semi-nude, reclining on a bed. She's not only someone men fear but also fantasize about. All her political acumen, influence as a cunning diplomat, intellect, and reputation for being a linguist had become part of a backstory. Her accomplishments and power had been reduced to the sum total of her sexual life, which didn't abide by Rome's regressive notions of how a woman should act. Furthermore, it was easier to blame a foreign temptress than to take accountability for Rome's conflicts.

When we move to Indian narratives, we still find appreciation and romanticization of the female body and beauty, but again, with a hint of destruction and catastrophe associated with it.

'Draupadi is its shining jewel, casting the shadow of her towering personality over the epic poem and the all-destroying war described' (Das, 2014). Remembered as the most celebrated and controversial character in *The Mahabharata* (the magnum opus of Hindu mythology), Draupadi is known for rejecting the binary power structures and asserting herself as a 'subject' by questioning the authority and intellect of men in the infamous Sabha regarding her unjust treatment at the hands of Kauravas in the name of 'dharma' while refusing to acknowledge the loss of her 'honor' and by extension their manhood. Contrary to the figure of 'Sita' - the epitome of an ideal wife, Draupadi doesn't maintain silence over her sufferings. She subverts the norms of gender oppression by refusing the commodification of a woman's body and observing polyandry, which is against patriarchal norms (Mukherjee, 2016; Elizabeth, 2017). However, that's now how many authors remember Draupadi. They remember her as the woman who laughed when a king fell in a puddle of water, the woman who prayed for a man with five wonderful qualities and, because of her desire, ended up marrying five men, and as the woman who often appears as the root cause of the epic war. Clearly, one can see which perspective is supported by which sex.

Satyawati is another one of the unconventional female characters in The Mahabharata who dared to dream of something that was supposedly beyond the reach of a woman at that time. She's not only a femme fatale but also a victim of gender discrimination and objectification as her father chooses to keep her brother but rejects her, and later, she becomes the object of male desire. Like a true femme fatale, she is a woman of a dark past who uses her sexuality as a tool to fulfill her ambition of ruling a kingdom (Dawar, 2021). Her blind lust for power causes King Shantanu's death and further complicates the lives of their descendants, as the narrative goes.

Again, Lord Vishnu's turning into *Mohini* during the *Amrit-Manthan* is an interesting point in Hindu mythology. Hindu mythology, subtly famous for its gender-fluid transformations, Lord Vishnu's transformation into an attractive celestial nymph gives a reflection of how beauty can be seductive and deceiving and lead men astray from the drink of immortality.

Femme Fatale in Art, Print and Cinema

The creation of myths can still be seen with innocence, whose creation was to moralize people and society and preserve future generations through already established codes of conduct and patriarchal norms, regardless of how oppressive they might be. However, the development of art - music, dance, poems, ballads, novels, films, and shows - created a new structure altogether in society as to how individuals will be seen and, most importantly, *observed*.

John Berger, in his famous work *Ways of Seeing* (1972), explores the idea that men *act* and women *appear*. For a man, the focus is on his actions, on the pretenses that he fabricates in order to exercise power over others. That's how art will also show a man - a man winning a battle, conquering a city, riding a horse, or just holding a sword passed down to him from his ancestors. Hollywood films like *James Bond*, *Mission Impossible*, *Fast and Furious*, and Bollywood works like *Dhoom*, *Race*, and other action films will portray, or say, 'fabricate' an idea of a man who fights, does stunts, wins over the bad guys or be the bad guy sometimes as well. But all of this is established through their actions. Not by their mere existence.

However, women *appear* (Berger, 1972). If observed carefully, women in the above mentioned films are *shown* as breathtakingly beautiful, alluring and most of the time, deceptive. Their role is to *appear* in the film, to deceive a character from their path by batting their eyes or showing skin. Somehow, the existence of women in these films remains almost 'click-bait' like in nature, and the addition of a sexual scene with them just fulfills the voyeuristic fantasies of the audience enjoying these films.

But this paper is not just criticizing how women are portrayed in these hyper-masculine films. Its intention is not that obvious. It also wishes to examine the subtle ways in which the same 'appearing' women's ideology appears in other art forms. Berger (1972) continues to point out that everything about a woman - their clothing,

hair, nails, eyes, body, everything - becomes a part of them, which helps establish the virtues and traits of that woman. A man sitting idly in a portrait will not lead us to form an impression of his personality. But a portrait of a woman created by a man will show us just what we need to know to form a character sketch of her. Either one can consider Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, which depicts the beauty of a goddess associated with an idea of shame, or Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass*, showing a naked woman sitting with two fully clothed men.

Stories by Shakespeare or Tagore that often highlighted strong women characters of their respective times often bring the question that Woolf also asks in her essay, *Shakespeare's Sister*, if these women ever truly existed or were just again a part of male fantasy.

Femme Fatale may or may not have existed in all art forms, but women crafted through male fantasy and male gaze was a universal notion. The story of Zulekha and Yusuf in Sanskrit poet Srivara's work, *Kathakautukam*, establishes the notion that a woman's extraordinary beauty can lead to her own downfall if she doesn't control her desires. Though there are several interpretations of the epic poem, one reading of it suggests the above interpretation only. The same goes for the famous figure, *Anarkali*, the one who was glorified after the 1960 Bollywood film, *Mughal-e-Azam*. A famous dancer in Akbar's court makes the mistake of falling in love with the prince and future king of the Mughal empire. The result was her suffering and her death. These tropes showed that a beautiful woman's desire can be extremely fatal for her own life.

While these male-centric representations are abundant in cinema, paintings, and literature, the psycho-social element of this paper also explored art through a female lens - how they perceived femme fatale and used it to their advantage. When Ismat Chughtai began writing stories, the notion of a strong and independent woman that could lead to the downfall of herself and society was changed. Now, the strong woman *will* lead to downfall but only of those who did wrong to her. The strength and independence were to be embraced by the women and those around her, not ridiculed and intimidated. Chitra Banerjee's *Palace of Illusion* (2008), *Mistress of Spices* (1997), and *The Forest of Enchantment* (2019) reimagine women from mythical stories and give them the power to take charge of their lives and not be submissive to the male order and norms. Femininity does remain fatal, but not to the existence of women but to the oppressive norms and structures of society. Here, the relationship between power and resistance changes. The Femme fatale, as a trope, does not strengthen the power structures more but rather gives allowance for different possibilities of life to exist. Banerjee's Draupadi in *Palace of Illusion* has authority and a will to love who she loves. The roles of the legend do not bind her that she has been given for ages; for the first time, she *chooses*. One does not have to be a psychoanalyst to say what impact this can have on women who read her work - they feel freedom for the first time by seeing a character who can choose. Their freedom

is not in the male viewpoint of freedom that a woman can enchant men and use her beauty as a vicious tool, but as a woman who can lead her life the way she imagines and wants.

Dirse (2013) and Deck (2019) argue in their research works that the characterization of female figures in cinema evolved significantly when women began to take hold of the camera and change the *gaze* altogether. Within Indian cinema, one can see that when significant roles began to be given to actresses, they started evolving how the female character would be visualized and imagined on screen. Regardless, Tabu got another 'femme fatale' role in a film (e.g., *Andhadun*, 2018), she made sure to make it layered and complex and even let the audience root for her character to some extent. When female producers and directors like Anushka Sharma, Zoya Akhtar, and others began creating films like *Lust Stories* (2018), *Dil Dhadakne Do* (2015), *Bulbul* (2020), and *Qala* (2022), a new kind of representation emerged in cinema - one where women are not seen as two-dimensional figures, rather complex human beings with flaws and conflicts of their own, with such characters, the simplistic trope of femme fatale could not survive easily.

Lastly, Indian films like *Raazi* (2018) and *Kahaani* (2012) emerged, leading to giving more screen time to women, with centered roles that kept the audience hooked, even though their so-called voyeuristic pleasures may not be fulfilled in the stores. Thus, it led to behavioral changes in people.

Modern woman and Natural Femme Fatale

Post-feminism, there's a lot of room for the archetype to evolve through retellings and reinterpretations of texts from a female-centric approach, which reestablishes what it is actually like to be a woman. In modern times, the narrative of feminine evil is being subverted by female directors and writers.

A spy during the Cold War, Charlize Theron introduces a new femme fatale era in *Atomic Blonde* (2017), directed by David Leitch. She does not conceal her threats under feminine wiles. She carries a gun, beats up men, and is not interested in sex. Her lover is a woman. The action thriller not only portrays a lethal female assassin in violent action but also transgresses the heteronormative sexual discourse.

With her crimson lipstick, white gloves, wavy blonde hair, and fitted dress, the protagonist of *The Dressmaker* (2015), Myrtle Tilly Dunnage, is dressed like a film noir femme fatale. "I am back, you bastards!" she declares after taking a slow drag from her cigarette, which is more of a warning than a greeting. She has returned to the neighborhood where she was once exiled as a child on accusations of murdering a boy, and she is looking to make amends while unveiling the truth of a tragic event from her distant past (Wloszczyna, 2016). Unlike the typical version of an evil seductress who destroys every man she encounters, She's not just a 21st-century femme fatale but also a woman who is truly in love.

Similarly, many contemporary crime thrillers explore why the femme fatale commits a crime, how she, too, was once a victim, and how sometimes her sexuality is forced upon her. In a world where women face sexual abuse and gender discrimination on a daily basis, the thrill of watching a cold-hearted woman going unhinged and detaching and destroying those who wronged her is almost a fresh take on the strengthening of the femme fatale trope.

Narratives like these help remold the trope and portray strong female characters without the 'fetishistic male gaze' (Laura Mulvey's terminology). The modern femme fatale is unapologetically in charge of her sexuality as well as at ease with her femininity, which is crucial in an era where to compete in a professional world, a woman is supposed to abandon her feminine nature in order to be taken seriously.

The impact of this change in art forms is directed in real life as well, where women are attempting to break the glass ceilings and barriers by not conforming to their sexualized identities and narrow mindsets. They are attempting to take charge of their sexuality, beauty, aesthetics, and career. If such women are still seen as fatal to anyone, it must only be the patriarchal rigidity and structures.

Conclusion:

Understanding stereotyping and dispelling stereotypes is crucial for writers who want to create complex characters (Seger, 1990). The celebrated archetypal figure of 'femme fatale,' which has long dominated literature, noir cinema, art, etc., is draped in sexism as well as female liberation. It's up to the creator/narrator whether to perpetuate a stereotype or break it. The entire paper used a Foucauldian idea of 'power being in the hands of those who write history' and 'history favors those who write it' to discuss how the trope of 'femme fatale' evolved, shaped itself, and became what it is today because of the men who were developing it.

The femme fatale trope is at the center of the debate over whether a woman (with power) should be perceived as a paragon of feminist role models or a problematic interpretation of women's empowerment. Its detractors who criticize it as misogynist claim that the archetype reduces the woman's identity to her body and sexuality and reinforces the notion that a woman's success depends on seduction, entrapment, and deceptive tactics rather than her merits. It also stresses that her value depends on her physical appearance. This degrading representation with slut-shaming at its very core also turns a woman's body into a site of vulnerabilities.

On the contrary, the modern interpretation of the trope gives power in the hands of a woman, not to ruin the lives of so-called 'innocent people' around her, but to avenge the wrongs done to her in her life and move towards her betterment and success.

So, even today, as women in India and all over the world still struggle to establish their 'being' and 'existence' as Beauvoir might have stressed, the notion of

'femme fatale' also struggles to both exist in newer forms in shadowed versions or to be treated as a fascinatingly sexist trope of a bygone era.

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