

Chapter II

Gender and Genre: Contextualising the Canon Anew

A woman's writing is always feminine; it cannot help being feminine; at its best it is most feminine; the only difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine.

– Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing*

Feminist fairy tale writers interrogate the male-controlled tyrannical expressions of patriarchy in the male authored fairy tale texts of Perrault, Andersen, Grimms and other fairy tale writers of the canon. The feminist revisionists question the socio-cultural literary aesthetics to liberate women from entrapment in marriage and from the politics of the family within the trajectories of women intertwined in life and literature. This is done by redeeming Children's Literature and rooting out coercion in the misogynist fairy tales. Mary Daly's seminal work *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* discusses women as "carriers and perpetrators of patriarchal myth" (109). However, the fairy tales reimagined from the feminist perspectives subvert the canonical fairy tales to demystify myths to liberate women and all genders through the motif of female emancipation and empowerment.

The retellings of the disenchanting patriarchal tales call for a female metamorphosis by exploring varied feminist themes. The select feminist fairy tale texts taken up for study rework the plot, characterisation, theme and treatment of gender in the select traditional fairy tale texts of Hans Andersen, Charles Perrault and the Grimms by questioning the representation of gender and sexuality in these texts. It opposes the depiction of masculinities and femininities in the fairy tale texts and thereafter attempts to subvert gender and genre by reimagining and reassigning gender roles. The present chapter attempts to elaborate on how the select feminist fairy tales reimagine gender and

genre through the subversion of gender roles and stereotypes in the select traditional fairy tales to reconceptualise the genre.

The revisioning of fairy tales in the select texts taken up for study challenges the classic tropes of the fairy tale tradition and question the hegemonic gender roles in the male authored texts. The feminist fairy tales symbolically break societal norms with realism and rework the 'rags to riches' canonical tales by re-creating 'old tales in new skins' through the deconstruction of the male-rescuer archetype and the reconstruction of strong women rescuer protagonists. All the fairy tale reworkings taken up for study as feminist fairy tales refute heteronormativity. In place, they argue that although heterosexuality seems coherent, the select tales uniformly empower all gendered identities across the gamut of gender. The acceptance of the differences and pluralities of all gendered identities across the gender spectrum is portrayed in the select works. The sensitisation of gender reaffirmation, gender fluid, gender euphoria, gender dysphoria, gender neutrality and other gendered concepts unleashes a feminist rhetoric of social and political justice for women and all genders.

A re-reading of the fairy tales and the revisionary readings of postmodern fairy tales depict how the feminist fairy tale reworkings challenge society's ideas about the gender spectrum. All the texts explore issues of gender essentialism. They champion the need for women to break restrictions against male dominated patriarchal strictures to achieve selfhood by overcoming despondency, rejection, and negation of life with indomitable courage. This is projected in the depiction of the heroines in *The Moon Ribbon*, *Feminist Fables*, *Kissing the Witch*, *Sweeping Beauties*, *The Bloody Chamber* and *Her Stories*, where women are reworked as strong female protagonists who parade an identity of their own. The contemporising and recasting of fairy tales as tales that empower women in these feminist revisions is a transition from feminist to post-feminist,

from human to post human and from gendered to genderless and beyond gender. Thus the feminist fairy takes attempt to blur the boundaries of gender in literature. The innumerable tales of the revised versions of “Sleeping Beauty,” “Cinderella,” “Red Riding Hood,” “Rapunzel” and other tales by Perrault, Andersen, Grimm and a host of fairy tale authors in the fairy tale tradition address social concerns to create a ‘New Woman.’ The emergence of a new fairy tale aesthetics where older narrative strategies adopted by male writers of the genre are sabotaged to create female utopias are addressed in the feminist fairy tale genre. Thus, the tales redefine feminism and the feminine.

The select tales written by authors who hail from varied cultures across the globe present how gender, identity, power and sexuality in all the select texts are similar in theme, context and content. Angela Carter is British, Emma Donoghue is an Irish Canadian writer, Namjoshi is Indian, Yolen is American and Virginia Hamilton is Afro-American. *Sweeping Beauties*, by the Irish Feminist Fairy tale Collective are authored by Elaine Crowley, Margaretta D’Arcy, Rita Kelly, Maeve Kelly, and Anne Hartigan. All of them hail from varied geographical locations but empower their characters to sojourn from transcending the feminine mystique to achieve selfhood through a female metamorphosis. It is in this framework that feminism, identity, gender, power and sexuality may be contextualised to depict role reversal, upturn of stereotypes, subversion and varied other themes as inevitable to the strengthening of this genre on a global level.

The chapter attempts to contextualise and re-imagine the select traditional fairy tales and invert them through a liberating potential that empowers the female protagonist to recover their lost identity. It also questions heterosexuality as the accepted norm in patriarchy and reverses the significant gender relationships of the traditional tales. They prove that men are not rescuers but rather intruders. They also point out how women are worthy companions and nurturers and not always envious competitors. The tales of

Perrault, Grimm and Andersen shaped gendered identities in gender specific roles where women were rendered as negative female stereotypes confined to domestic spaces.

The nineteenth century, prolific for the eulogisation of domestic bliss in its gathering of folk and fairy tales from across geographical boundaries all over the globe were masculinist texts. The term ‘fairy tale,’ a product of the 17th century French Salon culture, consisted of wondrous tales that were invented as stories by a few elite aristocratic ladies. The magical tales were derived from the motifs of Giambattista Basile, Giovanni Francesco Strapola and Boccaccio who victimised women in their literary works. Strapola, the progenitor of the fairy tale published *Le Piacevoli notti*. Perrault’s *Contes De Temps Passe* in 1697, the tales of the Grimm Brothers, Mary Catherine Jumelle de Berneville’s *Contes de Fee’s*, Samuel Croxall’s *Fables of Aesop* and other tales published for children, created a literature of their own and made a profound impact on the academic, socio-political and economic life of the times.

A study of fairy tales across the globe discloses that each and every culture had its own fairy tales. The western and eastern canon of fairy tales, despite differences in form and content in the creation of imaginary worlds presented gender and genre by creating stereotypes. The French fairy tales, *contes de fe’es* literally translated as “tales of the fairies” were popular in France. In Russia, marvellous tales called *skazka*, (meaning story) were divided into different classifications as *volshebniki shazki* which were magical tales, *shazki O zhivotnykh* or animal tales which were tales of everyday life (Haney 125). An intrinsic utopianism is seen in the Russian fairy tales that never failed to encode social values. Evenni Zamiatin, Aleski Tolstoi, Ivan Efremov, Valentina Zhuravleva, Olga Lariovna and the Strugatsky brothers combined realism with the structure of the tale. German fairy tales, African fairy tales, American Fairy tales, Italian Fairy tales, Chinese fairy tales, Japanese Fairy tales, Scottish fairy tales, Irish fairy tales,

Indian fairy tales and most of the tales across cultures, discreetly voiced patriarchy, dominance and gender oppression as depicted in folk tales, myths and legends.

The fantastical magical tales, popularised as Children's Literature were written by a single author or by a group of authors. There were fairy tales in the Orient, predominantly in India and Egypt in the form of sagas, myths, mythology, folklore and epics. Fairy tale motifs discerned in Spenser's *The Fairie Queene*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and also in the translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* by Antoine Galland as *Les Mille et une nuits* were patriarchal tales. Andrew Lang, a Scottish scholar published thirteen coloured fairy tale books. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by Frank Baum in 1900 and James Barrie's *Peter Pan* in 1904 played a significant role in the evolution of the fairy tale. The rising popularity of fairy tales in homes and schools extended to libraries, musical compositions, ballets, and theatre. Thus fairy tales and fairy-tale illustrations flooded the market.

The nuances of gendered writing varied in different fairy tales across the globe. The patterns of subjugation were common to male authority where repressions and denials of sexuality, enforced by patriarchy led to ignorance of the female psyche and female body. For instance, in the feminist fairy tales of *The Bloody Chamber*, bodies were inscribed as texts to articulate the agony that women suffer due to antediluvian rituals of the society. Feminist fairy tales decentred the patriarchal power structures by reworking the language of hierarchy to resurrect marginalised categories of experience.

The entire trajectory of feminist scholarship including the select feminist fairy tales, portrayed female protagonists as daring, candid, unsentimental, articulate and less inhibited in their portrayal of sexual desires. For instance, in the tales of Yolen, in "The Moon Ribbon," Sylva becomes bold, courageous and confident and thus, the rescuing function is by a female redeemer. She is empowered by her mother and overcomes the

ill-treatment of her stepmother. In “The Honey Stick Boy,” the old woman grapples the grief of the loss of the child with fortitude. In “The Rosechild,” the woman empowers herself to take care of the Rosechild and rises to the occasion realising that it is better to depend on one’s instinct rather than the advice of the people around her. In “Sans Soleil,” in *The Moon Ribbon*, Viga is depicted as a woman of strong will and passion. She admits her realisation by saying “what we believe is stronger than what is true” (30). Mona, the Moon Child is yet another example of courage and sensibility in the text.

The select feminist fairy tales represent the feminist essence of female consciousness by unearthing the innermost aspirations of women and redefining the thoughts of the female psyche. The female protagonists celebrate their feminine presence and endeavour to silence the androcentric culture in their journey to selfhood through mindfulness of the requirement for education and constitutional rights of all genders by the awakening of the self. For instance, *Sweeping Beauties*, voices Frieden’s ‘The feminine mystique,’ wherein Frieden in her seminal work, *The Feminine Mystique*, states that “for woman as for man, the need for self-fulfilment, autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality and self-actualisation is as important as the sexual need” (282).

Feminism redefined the representation of feminist consciousness as this goes hand in hand with a redefinition of feminist ideologies in these toppled tales. The fairy tale protagonists like Red Riding Hood, Gretel, Snow White, Rapunzel, Cinderella, The Mermaid and her sisters, the Sea Witch, Thumbelina, the Snow Queen, the Little Match girl, Sleeping Beauty, the Goose girl, the fairies and many other heroines, who are passive and docile are reworked to demythologise the traditional hero by the feminist writers. The fairy tales of Perrault, Andersen, Grimm and other fairy tale texts across cultures revered women as goddesses, godmothers, mothers, fairies and angels or

characterised them as ogres, witches, stepmothers, puppets or dolls. The heroines were depicted as sisters, lovers, wives, or daughters and tutored women to be docile and grow multidimensionally according to social norms which constructed woman as the ‘other’.

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, states, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society, it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (273). Thus, the select texts which emphasised sex as biological and gender as a construct conquered the themes of feminine consciousness, feminist sensibility, and sexist ideologies. Concepts of power and powerlessness with reference to social theories, political movements and moral philosophies were discoursed through the characterisation and plot in the reworked texts.

The postmodern tales were a vehicle that redefined gender inequality, gender politics, power relations, gender roles and sexuality. The tales examined reproductive rights, domestic violence, equal pay, sexual harassment, stereotyping, objectification and subjugation in a subtle manner. Feminist activism crossed the boundaries of class, caste, race, culture and religion to create a new set of paradigms like tradition and modernity, self-assertion, self-effacement, social restrictions and economic independence in these works. Feminist texts and feminist fairy tale texts redefine womanhood by liberating women from the traditional care-taker image to assert that woman is not the object of man’s gratification, but has an identity of her own. Writers like Cixous deliberated on ‘*écriture féminine*’ and stated that woman must write herself through her body by expressing herself into the text to break the androcentric hegemony. However, the juxtaposition of the expression of their emotional and stereotypical maquillage as in

Kissing the Witch, projects how both sexes can coexist by overcoming the limitations of understanding the differing differences of gender and sexuality.

The select tales mandate amelioration in their social position by a humanistic attitude to gender in order to reinterpret the trauma that women and all genders accost due to female intimidation, gender discrimination and gender identity. For instance, in *Kissing the Witch*, the inverted tales namely, “The Tale of the Shoe,” “The Tale of the Bird,” “The Tale of the Rose,” “The Tale of the Apple,” “The Tale of the Handkerchief,” “The Tale of the Hair,” “The Tale of the Brother,” “The Tale of the Spinster,” “The Tale of the Cottage,” “The Tale of the Skin,” “The Tale of the Needle,” “The Tale of the Voice” and “The Tale of the Kiss” redefine the leitmotif of gender, power, identity and sexuality in the contextualisation of their female protagonists.

The feminist fairy tale writers, akin to the philosophy of Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* juxtapose their works against the social, political and cultural realities of the lives of ordinary women of their time, by tracing the similarities of this female literary subculture to other literary subcultures. Simone de Beauvoir opined that a woman should be understood as ‘woman’ only and not in relation to man. Beauvoir says, “[Woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her...He is the subject, and he is the Absolute- she is the other” (23). In the feminist fairy tale in *Kissing the Witch*, Donoghue says, “Change for your own sake, if you must, not for what you imagine another will ask of you” (19).

Elaine Showalter in *The New Feminist Criticism* (1989) and *Speaking of Gender* (1989) spoke of a “Female framework for the analysis of woman’s literature” (90). This she calls gynocriticism. Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1969) fights gender oppression with sexuality as a tool through which a man categorises woman as “good” or “bad” and defines sexual politics as the “arrangement whereby one group of persons is controlled

by another” (88). Echoing this, Carter presents the oft repeated themes, patterns and images of women by challenging gender stereotypes to create their own identity by presenting characters in a male-centric world. For instance, the tales, “The Bloody Chamber,” “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon,” “The Tiger’s Bride,” “Puss-in- Boots,” “The Erl King,” “The Snow Child,” “The Lady of the House of Love,” “The Werewolf,” “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf Alice” contest the dominant culture and concept of androgyny by demystifying the lives of women. The tales explore the psychological urges of women and fight machismo to liberate the feminine from patriarchal attitudes and stereotyped behavioural patterns. The tales assert that female bonding and cooperation would suffice women to rescue each other in lieu of which men are reduced to roles of mere spectators or performers of secondary roles.

Feminine Sensibility through the perpetuation of female independence in the portrayal of characters and viewpoints of gendered themes in the select texts reflect the vision of the women writers. Virginia Woolf in “Women and Fiction,” in this context says, “It is probable, however that both in life and in art, the values of woman are not the values of man. Thus when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values - to make serious what is, to him important” (81). Thus, the Feminist Consciousness Movement, initiated by Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller, Rebecca West, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, John Stuart Mill, and Olive Schreiner would have left an indelible mark in the creation and construction of these feminist fairy tale writings, their authors, the characterisation and plot. Richardson’s invention of “the psychological sentence of the feminine gender” is relevant in the context of feminist reworkings (93).

The fierce feminist attitude of the select feminist fairy tale writers pronounced a renewed consciousness of womanhood. Gender concerns are addressed though symbolic

poetic expression. *Sweeping Beauties* as a fine discourse on reconstruction of the self in the search for selfhood presented a kaleidoscopic picture of self-assertion and self-resurrection in female literary discourse. For instance, in the feminist reworkings of the text *Sweeping Beauties*, “The Fairy God Mother,” “Revenge of the Sisters Grimm,” “Pygmalion,” “Alice in Thunderland,” “The Twelve Dancing Princess,” “Snow-Fight Defeats Patri Arky,” “A Tale to Remember,” “The Budgeen,” “Ms. Snow White Wins A Case in High Court” and “Grainne’s Version of the Pursuit;” the characters elevate themselves above gendered-isms and articulate a quest for identity. The female protagonists who hail from different lands, cultures and races rebel against patriarchal norms of dominance to transcend gender-politics.

Suniti Namjoshi’s *Feminist Fables* is a depiction of her ideological stance as a feminist. She capsises myths to invert female stereotypes. They break the traditional genre boundaries, narrative discourses and shackles of gender patterning to deconstruct existing structures in order to reconstruct female identities. The passive powerless women in the texts are dubbed beautiful and the powerful women are labelled as evil. As Zipes in *Don’t Bet on the Prince* states, “Being powerful is mainly associated with being unwomanly” (197). Thus the reworked revisionist tales overthrow patriarchal domination to recover women’s identities from the feminist perspective. As Adrienne Rich opined, “Re-vision the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction is for you more than a chapter in critical history: it is an act of survival” (90).

Motherhood is glorified, self-sought spinsterhood is accepted and sisterhood is recognised as a therapeutic camaraderie. In the *Feminist Fables*, “From the Panchatantra,” “Case History,” “Nymph,” “The Princess,” “The Ugly One,” “The Female Swan,” “A Moral Tale,” “The Monkey and the Crocodiles,” “The Giantess,”

“the Snake and the Mongoose,” “The Secret Wisdom,” “The Debt,” “Broadcast Live,” “The Grace of the Goddess,” “The Hare and the Turtle,” “The Fox and the Stork,” “Of Cats and Bells,” “The Oyster Child,” “Further Adventures of the One-Eyed Monkey,” “The Dower,” “Heart,” “The Mouse and the Lion,” “Swayamvara,” “The Doll,” “The Woman who Lived on the Beach,” “The Saurian Chronicles” and other tales question gender issues rather than women’s issues and critique imbalance of power structures. Thus, the strangled voice to articulate woman’s silent discourse is comprehended.

Virginia Hamilton presents the African-American woman, her life, history and consciousness and all her forty one books written in multiple genres contributed to ‘liberation literature.’ *Her Stories*, dedicated to “our mothers and grandmothers, aunts and great aunts” was gracefully articulated against the backdrop of the magical lore and wondrous imaginings of African American women. She remembers how they “combed our hair,” “rocked us to sleep,” “sang to us,” “told us tales of then and now” and how they expressed that they cared, She dedicated *Her Stories*

To all the women who stood before us,
 Telling us about where they came from,
 What they saw, did and imagined
 They let us know they stood for us

The select authors attempt to deconstruct myths to voice the inner woman’s yearnings, strivings and aspirations. They protest against issues of identity, power and sexuality. They empower themselves against the dehumanising tendencies of society by rejecting the opposition between masculine and feminine despite their multiple differences. The theme of ‘feminine’ as intellect, ‘feminist’ as protest, ‘female’ as self-awareness and the discovery of the self as echoed in Showalter’s *A Literature of One’s Own* holds good for feminist fairy tales.

The Moon Ribbon debates on female malady, sexual anarchy and supremacy of sexes. In *The Bloody Chamber*, the women characters break the gender ceiling through positivist experiences and assert the privilege of their gender through sexism to reinvent the empowered female protagonists. Feminism was thus redefined and concepts related to androcentrism, ethics of care and discourse of the hysteric attempted to empower women of all cultures across the globe to reconsider the concept of the representation of the feminine. Sandra Lipsitz Bem in *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality*, asserted that androcentrism is “one of the three lenses of gender through which we perceive the world,” (2). Similarly, feminist fairy tales expatiate on the concepts of gender polarisation and biological essentialism in their discernment of gendered realms.

The deliberation that femininity is a man-made construct, queries as to how the gendered differences in the fairy tales and feminist fairy tales can be negotiated through contextualising gender. The heroines in the traditional texts are reticent as in the characterisation of Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Gretel, Red Riding Hood, Goldilocks, Rapunzel and other fairy tale heroines. The feminist reworkings of fairy tales like the *Feminist Fables* of Namjoshi use the male centred texts as intertexts to depict the patriarchal themes cloaked in the tales written for children as exclusively written for the innocent child reader. Fear, loneliness, death, anger, desire, longing, hegemony and discrimination battled by conventional heroines are interrogated. Women’s inability to achieve social and intellectual stability is subverted through reconceptualising gender roles and inverting the patriarchal narrative. The fables are reflections rooted in self-experience, observation, understanding and idealism. They echo the myriad experiences of disappointments, desolation, socio-economic hardships, grief and suppression. Both the fairy tales and the reworked tales echo diverse gender perspectives as the socio-

cultural political milieu of the times is different because fairy tale and feminist fairy tale scholarship belong to two different ages.

The powerlessness of women due to aggression, domination, atrocities and varied social impediments in a retrogressive male-centric social order is questioned using memory as an archaeological tool. Identity, career, motherhood, marriage, maternity, trauma, molestation, sexual servitude and economic freedom are fantasied by the coherence of fact and fiction in both the genres. The storytelling narrative fantasises to articulate the feminist fairy tale genre as a platform of social critique. It presents the social stigma of infringing the traditional norms of the victimisation of women by chastising their timidity, fragility and self-effacement.

Yolen's *The Moon Ribbon* is the predicament of an orphan girl. The tale of Cinderella is upturned by Yolen who writes, "Yet late at night when the step mother and her own two daughters were asleep, Sylva would weep bitterly into her pillow which was nothing more than an old broom laid in front of the hearth." Later, Sylva emancipates herself when she finds a silver ribbon with a label. "It read 'for Sylva, the Moon Ribbon of her Mother's Hair'" (2).

The fantastic genre of the fairy tale texts connoted a cultural space as a women's space or women's sphere. It assigned a physical space, familial space and domestic space in the patriarchal set up where women were performers. However, the tales failed to encourage the creative and imaginative space or the social and psychological space as depicted in the select texts. This perception can be connected with Ruskin's sphere theory that defines male duties as public and female duties as private or domestic. The fairy tales of Grimm, Perrault and Andersen fail to assert their feminine sensibilities with powerful proclivities, antipathies and caprices to crash gender stereotypes.

The select feminist texts depict how the repression of women clasped in patriarchy right from the cradle to the grave is reawakened only when precociousness, brashness, meekness, flaccidity and flippancy are overthrown by women who are entrenched by a sanctimonious tradition redolent of male chicanery. Hence in the feminist text, namely Virginia Hamilton's *Her Stories*, truculence is essential to intellectually articulate the tenacious resoluteness of women in the light of the cacophony of the votaries, habitudes and customs with unyielding self-assurance. This has resulted in resurrecting negative female symbolisation by presenting the virtuosity of characterisation, reclusive immiscibility and outsmarting eloquence of women with aesthetic coherence.

The distorted representation of femininity in the ideological discourse of fairy tale texts, condition young minds into perceiving handsome, oppressive men as saviour heroes and project gendered and societal prejudices about love and marriage. The feminist tales in *Her Stories* re-evaluate the female suppression of the female motifs in tales wherein women internalised patriarchy. The increase of sexual violence and ramification of archaic notions of gendered behaviour are reworked. The sanitised and appropriated versions reinforce gender stereotypes and perpetuate issues of sexism in the tales of *The Bloody Chamber* as in the tale of "The Werewolf" where the girl cuts the paw of the wolf on the way to her grandmother's house and this turns into a hand with a grandmother's ring and the girl finally inherits her grandmother's inheritance. Similarly, in "The Company of Wolves," an exaggeration of the tale of Red Riding Hood, the girl in revenge seduces the hunter.

The fairy tales like "Cinderella," "Little Red Riding Hood," "Snow White," "Rapunzel," "Beauty and the Beast," "Hansel and Gretel," "Sleeping Beauty," "The Little Mermaid" and more formed an important part of Children's Literature where

children's psyche did not question the 'happily ever after tales' to interrogate notions over men's control of bodily autonomy. In *The Moon Ribbon* when Sylva's father died, her step mother dismissed the last of the servants and called out, "'Girl', 'You will sleep in the kitchen and do the charring.' ... and from that time it was so" (2).

The charm of the traditional fairy tale texts for children and the characterisation of Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel and Cinderella are patriarchal. The plight of the female protagonists in these tales was effectively communicated in the reworkings. For instance, in the feminist fairy tales like *Sweeping Beauties* the lines "I looked at my step mother and she stared at me and our eyes were like mirrors set opposite each other, making a corridor of reflections, infinitely hollow" (15). It was proved that young girls and women ought to break free from megalomaniac princes, kings, and patriarchal prowess with courage. This was considered as thematic of strength and feminine power. Yet the tales ruin the childhood perspective of gender roles. It is here that feminist fairy tales like the texts of Yolen, Namjoshi, Donoghue, Carter, the Irish Feminist fairy tale Collective and Hamilton situate the female stereotypes and address contemporary issues to render voice to the voiceless.

All the select tales view women through the lens of gender and challenge stereotypes to inspire young women to be clever, bold and confident as they contest hegemony. The authors are from different parts of the globe. They delve deep into the psyche of their female protagonists and address their emotions, resistance and resilience with cultural sensitivity. *Kissing the Witch* questions the power of the male heroes to break the stereotypes through self-discovery with an attempt to restructure and reconstruct the self. To quote, "What this good man had sworn to protect me from was not the same as what I feared. I trusted that he would never let anything hurt me but he would never let anything touch me either" (18).

Women's proclivity to take every humiliation lying down with mollified docility and courteous subservience is projected in the select tales. The subversion of these texts point out how the fairy tale female protagonists were denied autonomy and were prey to the decrees of men. For instance, in *Kissing the Witch*, "One of them asked me what was in my skirts to make them so heavy. And I said knives, and he took his hand of my thigh and never touched me again" (23). The rewritten texts project hardliner protests of the marginalisation that the women characters battle and present the unheimlich withdrawal due to intrinsic fear of caustic castigation.

The fairy tales portrayed how women, as appendages to the life of men, chock-a-block literature with activities and goals to become *ignis fatuus* for women, who were continually oscillating between being the rebellious girls and the relinquishing women, but were subpoenaed to victimisation. All the select feminist fairy tales subconsciously analysed gender from feminist and sociological perspectives. Mona in *The Moon Ribbon* infused the positive self-image of female power with the new woman as an independent powerful female entity who defied convention and social norms by crushing the shackles of tradition to create a better world for women.

Breaking the myth of the sacrificing woman was the essential theme of the feminist fairy tales across cultures. The feminist fairy tale writers transform the fairy tales by restructuring the narrative. They break the myth of the sacrificing woman by elevating women in the light of feminist theory. They envision a progressive philosophy for women to depict the emergence of a 'New Woman' feminist, through firebrand feminism. This would serve as a beacon for all genders in trying situations. The portrayal of women in negating the wondrous world of fairy tales as in the characters of Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Hansel, Gretel, Beauty and the Beast extolled herpulchritude. "The Bloody Chamber" has a female protagonist who masquerades silent

suffering to defy that the fairy tale of “Blue Beard” imparted wrong messages to children and youth by expressing women as docile passive creatures who were prizes to be won. Thus, the subverted tales of Carter depict how the decolonisation of female sexuality expressed the need to liberate women from the trauma of social alienation, economic dependence, carnal manipulation, domestication, domestic abuse, erotic violence and sexual abuse.

The reworked tales satirise the emotions and roles assigned to female protagonists in the traditional tales and overthrow these patriarchal ideologies by creating female protagonists who negotiate the limits of their social space through assertiveness and boldness. This redefinition of female power and the reworking of feminism in the fables of Namjoshi create an empowered genre in its own right. This gender role reversal inverts the sexist fairy tale genre to open up a new world of gender parity. The select feminist fairy tales rebel against male structured norms or sexual politics to transcend their sensitivities struggles and conflicts through their bodies to celebrate the representation of female consciousness.

Feminist fairy tale writing was therapeutic in breaking the silence to voice female resilience, creativity, adaptability, and project women as the torchbearers of civilisation. Virginia Hamilton in *Her Stories* explores gender positions to efface women’s struggles through female bonding and sisterhood. They resist the domineering physical protection, economic support, and social approval. The narrative conflict in the texts on the female bodies to break free from the anguish of menstruation, domestic injustice, marriage, motherhood and widowhood are questioned. *Her Stories* presents women as fairies, mermaids, animals and witches. Animals and half-fish creatures are marginalised like the women in the black folktale genre.

The transformation of Catskinella due to the cat skin gown, the character of Anne Christmas, the notorious and tarnished boat operator, and other blazing, humorous, robust, coarse, callous, resilient, compassionate African women slaves who worked hard at home and work in the plantation during that era were exaggerated by Hamilton to present a body of African American folkways. As Simone de Beauvoir says, “It has been said that marriage diminishes man. . . but almost always it annihilates woman” (446). The answers to these issues are raised in the select feminist fairy tales like *The Bloody Chamber* where marriage is so demanding that the female protagonist is forced to kill her husband with the help of her mother. Betty Frieden harangues in *The Feminine Mystique*, “The only way for a woman as for a man is to find her, to know herself as a person, is by the creative work of her own. There is no other way” (332). She also says, “The feeling of creativeness also serves another purpose: it is an outlet for the liberated talents, the better taste, the freer imagination, the greater initiative of the modern woman” (332).

The contextualising of bodies, beauty and the beauty myth were creatively worked out in feminist fairy tales. Bodies, as a material reality were well-defined within a social context to position the body as an existentialist expression of the discursive construction of bodies. Feminist artists and writers of the day expressed a challenge to the way in which women’s bodies were rendered as idealised objects in works produced by men within the tradition of the classic female nude. The focus of their challenge was this western tradition’s denial of women’s experience of their bodies. A woman’s sexual passion is suppressed in fairy tales as in the tales of “Cinderella,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Rapunzel” and more. The feminine structure of the body, beauty, countenance and complexion that is projected in these traditional tales as in the concept of ‘soft as snow,’ ‘red as rose,’ ‘sleeping Beauty’ and other striking descriptions were subverted. The

feminist fairy tale writers write through their bodies and attempt to liberate women from the beauty myths.

This ideology can be connected to the works of Naomi Wolf, particularly, *The Beauty Myth* which depicts how physical perfection of beauty ensnares women by limiting women to the female identity of being an attractive homemaker and wife by fulfilling society's demands of impeccable beauty as against flawless independence, immaculate creativity, unimpeachable professionalism and success without validating women who continuously contest for gender equality and gender justice. The artificial concept of beauty in fairy tales is reworked with expressions like beauty is nullity and all women are beautiful in their own way. The practice of plastic surgery as similar to eugenics performed by the Nazis is the shameless brutality of questioning beauty as objectifying women as objects of the male gaze. In this sense, Woolf's works are enlightening and can be juxtaposed with feminist fairy tales. The characters of Snow White and Rose Red are placed adjacent to each other keeping in mind the beauty narrative and the 'mirror on the wall' depicts how images of beauty are used against women.

The theme of becoming gendered bodies and disciplining gendered bodies is conforming one's body to the expectations of society. The theme of technology of gendered bodies in feminist fairy tales and films have been so widely adapted that a posthuman analysis of becoming gendered bodies is worked out. The tales about the 'period fairy' created for young girls to forget shame and to emphasise the need to embrace the biological phenomenon of menstruation is to welcome little girls to womanhood and to efface their fears with explicit talk about premenstrual imagery. That periods are not 'sugar and spice,' they are 'blood and cramps' are contextualised to critique the transformations young girls go through, as creative encounters with

menstruation. Thus, menstrual narratives that redefine the politics of the female body were subtly crafted as in the inversions of “Red Riding Hood.” The thematic descriptions of the bloody narratives as gendered narratives have been subverted as in *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter.

The contextualisation of beauty was constructed on the basis of physical beauty, gentility, passivity, complexion and elegance in the canonical fairy tales. However, the same beauty is inverted in the feminist reworkings. Here feminine strength, inner beauty of the soul, motherhood, sisterhood, camaraderie and courage are depicted as a “terrible beauty” that empowers and elevates. There is also the contextualisation of rape, domestic violence and victimisation by inverting the feminine mystique to the attainment of selfhood. Thus, the subversion of these texts and the decolonisation of female sexuality are redefined in the select feminist fairy tale texts.

Contextualising gender in the feminist fairy tale genre depicts the presentation of the themes of gender in the gendered tales as a part of gender discourse through the expression of gendered frameworks in the select feminist fairy tales. Gender as a ubiquitous term and system of cultural signs and meanings assigned by various social mechanisms to sexually dimorphic bodies is echoed in *Feminist Fables*. In “From the Panchatantra,” the Brahmin wishes for a male progeny, but is blessed with a girl. When he specified that his prayers were in vain, the Lord promised him the same in the next incarnation, where he was a woman who bore eight sons. ““And what do you want?” He said to the girl. ‘I want human status’” (4). This cultural sign which constitutes gender has a direct influence on how the heroes and heroines live their individual lives in social institutions and operate as visualised in the select works where society emancipates all genders. In *Her Stories*, in “Little Girl and Ruh Baby,” a little girl watches the home for her mother’s sake and Buh Rabby lies to her to be let into the house and tricks her.

However at the close of the tale, she outsmarts him. In “Lena and the Tiger,” an animal shape shifter tale, the tiger tells Lena, “I just married you to let you know a woman can’t be more than a man.” “Miz Hattie Gets Some Company” is of an older woman who wants more comradeship in life.

The stratification of women into gendered roles was designed to keep them in their respective controlled places. Gender and sexuality in *Sweeping Beauties* reinforce newer gender roles, new-fangled gender norms and newer gendered identities. The message of the text is, “Sometimes you must shed your skin to save it” (11). They question gender stereotypes and sexism and vouch for absolute freedom of women from specified gendered roles. “The Moon Ribbon” and “The Moon Child” are tales which probe into concepts of gender identity. They address issues like violence against women, promote equal access of women to justice and ensure balanced participation of both genders in understanding the choices of women. They explore the need for gender mainstreaming to prove that fair-mindedness in gender matters.

The “Rose Child” emphasises that there is no social pressure on girls to be docile and that as brave diverse heroines, they need not be obedient or beautiful or have long hair or have in possession a charming prince or male advisors. They are self-reliant and can live with their own decisions. The tales defy unrealistic gender expectations from girls and young women who are victimised by patriarchal and social hegemony. The adventures of women in the reworked texts are positive and empowering and gender issues like discrimination, submissiveness and inequalities of gender are reworked. Though all the feminist fairy tales vary from culture to culture and are homogeneous, they are universal as is apparent in all the select six works.

Thus, Literature, which was the arena of male writers who created heroic male protagonists and relegated female characters with male taboos were overturned. Charlotte

Perkins Gilman in *The Man-Made World; Or, Our Androcentric Culture*, coined the phrase, “masculinised literature,” where men wrote on themes that fascinated their sex to make sure that women would never leave the claustrophobic confines which men had circumscribed (3). The myth of male supremacy in the fairy tales was refuted and the maladic female was subordinated for them until women started writing alongside the superstructure of male literature by expressing “multiple feminisms” to create a literature of their own. As J.S. Mill notes, “If women lived in a different country from men and had never read any of their writings, they would have a literature of their own” (qtd. in *A Literature of their Own* 3). In “Wolf – Alice,” a feral child realises her identity as a young compassionate woman and gets kind to the duke. In “The Lady of the House of Love,” a vampiress who intends to feed on a young soldier, who accidentally cuts herself when kissed by the lover, finds her dead. *Unbridling the Tongues of Women* by Susan Margarey challenges how women from the firesides can change the paradigms governing the world of gender issues and power politics to celebrate women by carving a niche for themselves as in the reworkings.

Contextualising solidarity and sisterhood through strengthening the bonds between women and women have been solace to subjugated female characters in fiction and real life. *Feminist Fables* depicts how lesbians are stigmatised for being homosexual. Caught between two worlds, the characters in the tales redefine themselves, their conflicts and moral predicaments, their atrocities and injustice to rebel against the injustices meted out to them by giving voice to silenced women and imparting intrinsic strength to overcome catastrophic events.

“The Moon Ribbon” by Yolen depicts women progressing from a meek, docile and non-descript woman to a strong individualist and active feminist who ought not to be trapped in stereotypes, but share the world with equal responsibility and widen one’s

horizons in the journey to selfhood with a feminist vision. Thus, despite resonating the theme of female camaraderie and in spite of the cultural differences in all the six writers taken up for study, the investment of a meaningful identity is expressed as the female protagonists are pictured as protagonists who are presented as human beings with individuality, rather than as female characters. All the writers subvert feminist ideologies to establish a literature where both sexes coexist in an equal power structure and the female heroes emerge from the works of all writers.

Contextualising power, the issues of power and knowledge within the sociological analysis, the confrontation of subjects of power in relation to gender are evident in the select feminist tales. For instance, in “The Fairy God Mother” by Elaine Crowley in *Sweeping Beauties*, the father asserts his power over his daughter commanding her to get married. A man wants a woman who will deport herself with decorum. A woman able to entertain his guests rules his household and bears his children. A man takes his wife to look attractive, to be a credit to him, to be dignified and above all else, he wants her to be obedient- one who never ever queries his decisions (5) Foucault’s work on the question of relations of power and knowledge based on objectification through which humans are made a subject in the discourse of sociology is pertinent here. The daughter questions, “But aren’t I decorous and obedient? Oh, sometimes I forget to brush my hair or pin it up if I have more comfortable things on my mind. And sometimes I wear any old thing if I am comfortable. But I am very good really” (5).

The political technology of the body - the calculations, organizations, knowledge of the body, focus on the technologies of power, their interrelationship with the body, and the individual human beings as their object. Foucault spoke of the effects of the exercise of power and champions that the body is a subject of power individually and

collectively. Sexuality and repression, whether experienced by an individual or collective must be questioned by the oppressed women. Radical feminists idolise the concept of a benign female rule. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage are feminist thinkers who glorify mother's rule. Stanton promotes a liberating theology of self-development as against subservience in her *The Women's Bible* arguing that the matriarchate would be "a golden rule of peace and plenty" (147). Mothers in the fictional world of feminist fairy tale writers are ambivalent. Mary Daly in her fearless sojourn into dismantling deeply entrenched patriarchal constructs, myths of male dominated discourse in *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* opines "The mothers bind the feet and minds of their daughters" (338). Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth* states, "One of the biggest problems with feminism is that many women fear that it has come to embody a rigid code of required attitudes and types of behaviour" (66). Thus, the fairy tale corpus is redefined by power politics, gender politics and sexual politics and this is inverted in the feminist fairy tale texts.

The male authored texts, as a tool of acculturation and socialisation, are encephalic with the rhetoric of power and therefore the revisionary poetics of the canon were a loud voice for the powerless asphyxiated female population who redefined power by subverting the sexist tales with non-sexist and counter-sexist models which were in tune with female experience. Power is reflected in the fairy tale texts through fantasy, irony, erotic violence and sadomasochism as in the tales of Grimm, Andersen and Perrault.

The Bloody Chamber, is a text that discusses power, the subjects of power, the issues of authority, supremacy and knowledge within the sociological analysis as antithetical to their counterparts in fairy tales. Feminist reworkings connect to Foucault's work on the question of relations of power and knowledge based on objectification through which humans are made a subject in the discourse of sociology. In *The Bloody*

Chamber, the bride states “He stripped me, gourmand that he was, as if he were stripping the leaves off an artichoke- but do not imagine much finesse about it; this artichoke was no particular treat for the dinner nor was he yet in any greedy haste” (15).

Power articulates the quintessential feminists and interrogates power politics in the multifocal, multi-vocal, pluralistic hybrid tales of Carter. She inverted the images of power by which canonical tales shaped sexual meanings. The credibility and legitimacy of the patriarchal canon is challenged, and the suppressed and marginalized voices of the traditional narratives are celebrated. The feminist fairy tales question socio-cultural institutions and ideologies that have perpetuated power and patriarchal domination to rework power concepts in their revisions. Power is described in these tales as having subjected women through feminine sensibility by defining sexist oppression through the feminine ideals of the cult of domesticity, culture, tradition, social customs and feminine sensibility. The feminist reworkings, like *Feminist Fables* stretch the rigid boundaries of the ideological constructs that surface the submerged voices from the past to redefine the cult of womanhood.

Catskinella, an enchanting version of the Cinderella tale, has the ‘mirror’ as the folk tale. It reflects the wishes of Catskinella who refuses to be a bride and jumps through the window of her closed room and escapes from her father. “Good Blanche,” “Mary Belle and the Mermaid,” “Bad Rose and the Talking Eggs,” and “Mom Bett and the Little Ones” are black folklores that highlight the predicament of the African American spirit of the phenomenal women through the supernatural, mystical, magical, eerie tales. The “Who You” tale of the alteration of women to birds is a tale of women and is magically supernatural. In “Macie and Boo Hag,” the mother catches Boo Hag who was believed to be the disembodied spirit of a witch.

The contextualisation of patriarchal and matriarchal power in the feminist fairy tales attempt to subvert the fairy tale ideologies of patriarchy and matriarchy. Patriarchal and matriarchal powers are individualistic in their own right as depicted in feminist fairy tales. Matriarchy was to radical feminists, an idolisation of the concept of a benign female rule. In *The Bloody Chamber*, the mother saves the daughter. “On her eighteenth birthday, my mother had disposed of a man-eating tiger that had ravaged the villagers in the hills north of Hanoi . . . without a moment’s hesitation, she raised my father’s gun” and thus “Took aim and put a single, irreproachable bullet through husband’s head” (41).

Adrienne Rich quotes that “Matrophobia” is not fear of one’s mother or of motherhood but of becoming a mother. In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* she echoes, “. . . But where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia, there may also be a deep underlying pull towards her. An adolescent daughter may live at war with her mother yet borrow her clothes, her perfume” (235). The power of the potentiality of matricentric feminism and maternal feminism to be rooted in motherhood asserts their matrilineal potentialities in society and politics by adhering to feminist perspectives on motherhood and reproduction to signify the power of the feminine as in echoed in theories of feminist mothering and motherhood studies. Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth* states, “One of the biggest problems with feminism is that many women fear that it has come to embody a rigid code of required attitudes and types of behaviour (66). The oppressive and empowering dimensions of sisterhood also voiced the feminine power of female supremacy and the creation of feminist motherhood and feminist sisterhood. Similar to Dale Spender’s *Mothers of the Novel*, and Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man*, the select writers question the radical feminising of a utopian matriarchal rule as in *Feminist Fables*, *The Moon Ribbon*, *Kissing the Witch*, *The Bloody Chamber*, *Sweeping Beauties* and *Her Stories*. Feminist fairy tales relate to feminist ontology. Dale

Spender in *Women of Ideas: And What Men Have Done to Them* states that “women and men matter in international politics and those social structures are imbued with gender power relations” (371).

Contextualising ‘Sisterhood’ and ‘female bonding’ is a popular theme of feminist fairy tales. Female bonding has empowered women as is seen in all the feminist fairy tale texts. Martha Shelley notes that “In a male dominated society, lesbianism is a sign of mental health” (qtd. in Donovan 160). In *Feminist Fables*, Namjoshi’s heroines in “The Badge-wearing Dyke and Her two maiden Aunts” depict woman’s love for woman. *Feminist Fables* affirms solidarity. The statement, “I see you what you are” rewrites the friendship between Viola and Olivia (17). As De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* says, “They are not sanctioned by an institution or by the mores, nor are they regulated by conventions, hence they are marked by a special sincerity” (468). On a similar note, Mary Daly opines in *Gyn/Ecology* on the “Sisterhood of women”.

A feminist thinks of her close friends as sisters, but she knows that she has many sisters – women extremely close in their temperaments, vision, and commitment – whom she never met. Sometimes she meets such women, and some conversation unmask the similarities between them. The proximity she feels is not merely geographic/spatial. It is psychic, spiritual in the realm of inner life-time. She senses gynaesthetically that there is a convergence of personal histories, of wave lengths. (371)

The construction of identity and contextualisation of gendered identities is challenging because writers like Yolen who resist strict categorisation are inexact about essentialising identity. The author critiques the tendency to posit gender as the sole detriment of identity as in the character of Mona in “The Moon Child.” As Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* states, “Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity. . . .

Instead it should be seen as an ‘effect’, the mundane product of regularly repeated bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds that create the impression of an ‘abiding gendered self’” (140). The quest for identity as liberation from power structures is voiced in *Feminist Fables*, in “The princess and the Pea” where the author does not establish the authenticity of the identity of the princess. Her turmoil is attributed to ill health as in the lines, “but soon it became obvious that her skin was such that she was allergic to everything” (5).

The mutability of identity is expressed in the feminist revisions with the suggestion that gender identities are merely cultural constructs and are deceptive. For instance, in “The Bloody Chamber,” Carter ends the tale saying, “No paint, no powder, no matter how thick or white, can mask that red mark on my forehead; I am glad he cannot see it- nor for fear of his revulsion, since I know he sees me clearly with his heart- but because it spares my shame” (42). All the six writers portray the ambiguity of identity. As Toril Moi in *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, quotes Kristeva, “...the very dichotomy of man/woman as opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to metaphysics” (qtd. in Moi 12-13).

The feminist writers are akin to the post structuralists because they opine that women as textual products and linguistic constructs define a feminine signification as a feminist position of multiplication rather than unification. The performing identities and utopias of belonging were thus articulated in *Feminist Fables*. Identity is defined as a performative construct and as a sequence of acts by Judith Butler. She opines in *Gender Trouble* that sex and gender are ‘phantasmatic’ cultural constructions and that gender is a sequence of acts that constantly and continuously exists as it is impossible to exist outside the terms of gender. The feminist texts state that gender norms are socially

instituted and like Butler opine that gendered identities need not conform to “compulsory or unnaturalised heterosexuality” (22-3).

The select texts contextualise bodies. Bodies have been contextualised on the basis of physique, stature, gait and complexion. These narratives give expression to becoming gendered bodies. Tales like “Red Riding Hood” harp on the theme of bodies through the symbolism of menstrual narratives. In “The Emperor’s New Clothes” in *Feminist Fables*, a little girl takes off her clothes emulating the emperor. However, her mother says “Don’t be silly, darling. Only little boys grow up to be emperors. As for little girls, they marry emperors and they learn to hold their tongues, particularly on the subject of the Emperor’s clothes” (8). Carter’s tales like the inversion of the tale of Blue Beard belongs to the genre of bloody narratives which are gendered narratives focusing on the body. Feminist fairy tales subvert the male presentation of the female body and encourage a female or feminine representation of a woman’s body. Gillian Rose depicts how gender shapes geographical discourses of place and space and efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable rightful geography in *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993). She states,

Feminist artists and writers of the day were mounting a challenge to the way in which women’s bodies were rendered invisible in art and culture other than as idealised objects in works produced by men within the tradition of the classic female nude. The focus of their challenge was this western tradition’s denial of women’s experience of their bodies. They depicted how the sexual passion of a woman who was suppressed in fairy tales has been boldly voiced in feminist fairy tales (49).

Feminist fairy tales contextualise sexuality. Angela Carter re-inscribes the sexist ideology of the canonical texts with a new model of female sexual experience. By

infusing sexual anxieties and innuendos in her narrative frame works, she vouches for a re-conceptualised sexual identity that is malleable, hybrid and polymorphous as in her feminist fairy tale, “The Bloody Chamber.” The heroine echoes, “I gathered myself together, reached into the cloisonné cupboard beside the bed that concealed the telephone and addressed the mouthpiece. His agent in New York. Urgent” (44). The myth of male sexuality is debunked through the polemic reconceptualisation of heterosexual relations as in “Thorn Rose” by Namjoshi. Heterosexuality is upheld as a virtue in *Feminist Fables* that states “Men loved women and women loved men, and men rode off, and had all sorts of adventures and women stayed at home” (23).

The iconoclastic message of childlessness and absence of motherhood in Bessie Head’s mind-bending work, *A Question of Power* results in the heroine’s nemesis as expressed in *The Moon Ribbon*. Thus, the narratives of these tales liberated the two sexes from binary essentialism and reworked the power of the sexes by stating that all sexes must coexist by emancipating themselves from frozen stereotypes to exist as mutable and flexible identities. Kate Millet, in *Sexual Politics* says that sexuality is a tool through which a man characterises woman as good or bad and defines sexual politics as the “arrangement whereby one group of persons is controlled by the other” (87).

Feminist fairy tales subvert the male presentation of the female body and encourage a female or feminist representation of a woman’s body. In these tales, suppression of female sexuality is coded as suppression of creativity. Sexual passion is tantamount to crime if it is inherent in a woman’s psyche, but natural if it is to man. To quote Jaques Derrida,

. . . beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition feminine/masculine, beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality which comes to the same thing . . . I would like to believe in the multiplicity of

sexually marked voices. I would like to believe in the masses, this indeterminable number of blended voices, this mobile of non-identified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of 'individual' whether to be classified as 'man' or 'woman' according to the criteria of usage. (76)

The use of rape as a political device in "Red Riding Hood" is eulogised in the traditional tale. The female character that is forced to survive in the claustrophobic confines of patriarchy is ill at ease in the androcentric society. The subject of sexuality and repression in the canonical tales were subverted to craft newer meanings to sexual symbolism, sadomasochism, acrimonious feminism, and feminist debates which were known as feminist sex wars. The reworkings reflect the theme of power and sexuality in literary discourse. The contexts of sexuality in these traditional texts were inverted as contexts of gender and theories of sexuality as in the exploration of the myth of gender. While, Anne Fausto Sterling's *Myths of Gender* support a biologically essentialist view of gender, Cordelia Fine in her iconic book *Delusions of Gender* dispute all scientific evidence for innate biological differences between men and women. Thus, the theme of sexuality by 'anti-gender ideology movements' and global networks as diabolic and a threat to families, cultures and civilisations depicts gender which is a phantasm for transexclusionary feminists and authoritarian regimes can be softly inverted on a gentler note in the reworkings by redefining women's issues from newer perspectives.

Subversion of the androcentric canon is explicit in feminist fairy tales and the authors of this genre subvert misogynist themes and satirise culture. The feminist fairy tale texts probe into the traumatic effects caused by suppression of creativity. The texts courageously displace anxieties and fears of destruction by operating in tandem with deceptive narratives of "critical race theory" and xenophobic panics about migration that women accost due to gender subjugation. The female characters in the select texts cannot

survive in the claustrophobic confines of patriarchy and though they are ill at ease in the androcentric society, they work towards self-actualisation.

The fairy tale writers and their texts subvert misogynist themes and satirise the canonical tales. Like Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, the feminist fairy tale writers are pragmatic in the construction of gender identity of their characters and depict the relation between gender and sex, where gender is a performance. Feminist authors depict gender as allied with social construction and sex with biological innate characteristics. The gender-sex division was important for feminists because of their identity as a woman, and their need to challenge the distinctions between sex and gender. They accepted the fact that certain bodily differences exist between women and men, and that gender construction has little or nothing to do with our bodily sexes.

The unitary idea of gendered “woman” in the feminist fairy tale texts explicated that there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender. Gender is a repeated stylisation of the body, produced within a rigid frame of a set of repeated acts. Gender identity is just performance, which is constituted by the everyday expressions of speech, utterance, gestures, dress codes and representations. Feminist fairy tales, like Butler’s performativity concept vouches that all expressions of gender are repetitions of habitual acts and behaviours which create compelling illusions of gender through language construction. The persuasive illusion of gender is a result of a body of power structures of a heterosexist society which create heterosexual matrix. This is well discerned in the feminist fairy tales where sex and gender are categorised.

The feminist discourse of the reworked tales described the universal category of woman as a subject of oppression and emancipation. All the authors focused on the unitary, exclusionary, and the hegemonic notion attributed to women at the expense of alternative gender expression. Yolen, Namjoshi, Carter, Donoghue, Hamilton and the

feminist collective believe that these hegemonic ideas are exclusionary as they question marginalisation of women in a confirmative and oppressive manner. Like Butler, they echo that these concepts prescribe a socially recognised coherent form of gender expression which excludes incoherent gender expressions. *Sweeping Beauties* implemented the subversive approach in reading the text in a sceptical manner. In “Lonna and Cat Woman” in *Her Stories*, Hamilton discusses the valour of how “Cat Woman grabbed her and shook her like a wet rag. Lonna fainted. Cat Woman thought she’d broken her neck” (58). Thus the reworking of the vampire tale projects a strong heroine who contests patriarchal ideology.

Deconstruction of feminist fairy tale texts does not mean decomposing or dismantling the structure of the text. It is reconstruction of the text so as not to depict opposition or inequality. The varied readings of potential texts are richer than the individual reader and vary depending on the imagination and fancy of the reader. Thus, the role of the reader is indispensable in the reading of feminist fairy tales as the reader’s construct of experience and meaning of the text is pertinent, rather than the reader being an artifact as expatiated by the new critics.

Difference Feminism contextualises these texts and aims at equality to state that biological sexual differences and gender characteristics as vestiges of patriarchy do exist between men and women, despite unequal treatment. Women ought not to be oppressed by patriarchy, capitalism or racism. However, they ought to be revalued for qualities such as care, empathy and subjectivity that are traditionally devalued as ‘feminine.’ Carol Gilligan’s, *In a Different Voice* opines that those differences do exist and though women and men talk and think differently, equal statuesque must be maintained. The feminist fairy tales highlight this theme in the plot and characterisation of the texts and difference feminism is apparent in the expression of the feminist fairy tale writers. In

“Malindy and little Devil”, the devil comes’ back for Malindy’s soul after years. She promised to give it to him and tears off the sole of her shoe and gives it to him. Hamilton ends the tale commenting that Malindy danced along through life as did her children. “They all lived happily ever after. See, because the devil can get your soul, but one time. After that he has to quit. That’s all” (88). Hamilton echoes her longing for an untethered position in a world where she champions freedom and equality for women.

Transgression and transformation are key themes that facilitated the moralisation of fairy tales and feminist fairy tales. The performance of transgressive bodies in grotesque environments focuses on the justification of the normative to discipline gendered, sexed, radicalised and disabled bodies. The concept of ‘carnavalesque’ of Mikhail Bakhtin, where in carnival celebrated the inversions that emanate from the inversions in social hierarchy, suspension of sexual restraints and possibility of playing new and distant roles is perceived in feminist reworkings. The story of a woman who overturns the restrictions of patriarchy is also carnivalesque.

The Bloody Chamber by Carter depicts how the abject is a complex psychological, philosophical and linguistic concept. Like Kristeva, in Carter, the abject is the sense of identity. Abjection is being separated and cast off by norms and rules on the scale of society and morality. The abject is the condition of being servile, wretched, contemptible, or humiliating. Carter’s use of abjection in *The Bloody Chamber* transforms the fairy tale genre beyond its conventions into the realm of pornographic gothic fantasy.

The gendered dimensions of transgression and magical transformations blur bodily boundaries by examining the body politics of fairy tales as in “The Moon Ribbon” which inverts the Cinderella tale. Bakhtin’s theory of carnivalesque underscores its subversion of accepted notions. “This literary mode parallels the flouting of authority and

inversion of social hierarchies that are licensed to manifest themselves in the carnival season by introducing a mingling of voices from diverse social levels that are free to mock and subvert authority” (qtd. in Abrams 63).

Postmodernism, as a cultural critique is a cultural phenomenon that opposes essentialism, de-canonises master codes and reflects profound changes in society and can be contextualised in this literary realm. This postmodernist theme in feminist reworkings is the refusal to accept all certainties and fixities. This includes subversion of newer received hegemonies, new spaces for pluralism and the questioning of the impulses of marginality and differences asserted by feminists. The feminist fairy tale texts problematise all discourses and celebrate heterogeneity, multiplicity and particularity. The feminist assertion of women’s rights, denial of patriarchal domination and capsizing of oppression challenges gender discrimination as in the select tales.

Postfeminism, pigeonholed by a celebration of female empowerment and sexuality, critiques victimhood and highlights the individual woman’s inner freedom to resolve women’s issues to re-define the interdependence between man and woman. This is well presented in the feminist reworkings which reflect a changing landscape of gender and power. Postfeminism vouches for equality of the sexes, disparages ‘victim mentality,’ glorifies the traditional roles as mother and home maker and talks of ‘girl power.’ It voices a ‘brave new world’ of women of cyberspace flouted by cyberfems who have a space in the digital social media to break free from sexist labels, androgyny, defining the differences and subjectivity of men and women. Pluralism and multiculturalism reflected in the feminist fairy tales champion a coalition of plural cross-cultural identities belonging to different clusters of sex, gender, class, colour, religion, and ethnicity.

Postfeminism as a multi-faceted concept is a new way of conversing about masculinity, femininity and sexuality by displaying the polarity of differences and recreating the multiplicity of differences. Postfeminism is evident in the feminist fairy tales as the texts champion cyberfems who believed that they were in cyber space to embrace 'androgyny,' 'pluralism' and 'multiculturalism' depicting coalition of plural cross-cultural identities belonging to different clusters of sex, gender, race, class, colour, religion and ethnicity. The postfeminist writers focused on the themes of sexuality, sexual difference, gender conflict and identity politics and challenged 'women can have it all' and vouched that balancing career, family and personal life is an unrealistic goal for many women. With recent changes in perceptions and outlook of women, like the postfeminists, these writers voice their anguish and frustration over man-woman relationship, over fiascos in marriage, love and sexuality and over suppression of female identity in a patriarchal set up.

The core of feminine expression emerged from bedrooms, kitchens and attics to defy colonisation and suppression by asserting coercion, sexism and racism to combat silencing of women's genuine speech. In *The Bloody Chamber*, the theme of a newer understanding of womanhood and advocacy of a gender free egalitarian social structure to appreciate plurality and mutual differences is focused. Marriage, love, sexuality, gender and the unravelling of newer insights into man-woman understanding was championed in the feminist tales to perpetuate harmony between sexes in the hope of a gender just, gender harmonious egalitarian future. Transcendence and accommodation wiped away fear in women's discourse and focused on aesthetic excellence. Like Julian Barnes, these writers believe in the ethical and transformative power of art which needs improvisation to heal and sustain itself.

The feminist fairy tales, like the postfeminists celebrate women. The portrayal of female conditions of victory and defeat in the presence or absence of masculine power is redefined. Postfeminist is the celebration of the feminine presence. The tales in the post-feminist sense, projects woman's discourse as ambiguously hegemonic. Post feminism means attaining self-sufficiency, greater aesthetic perfection and excellence. Thus, feminist fairy tales examine woman's discourse with reference to the theme of role reversal, social quest, rejection of male domination, projection of intellectualised women and deliberation of post-feminist perspectives. There exists an unconscious collective bonding celebrating mutual respect and accepting the similarity and differences of themes between white, black and coloured women writers.

The possibility of a new self is envisioned. All the feminist fairy tales emphasise that self-discovery and self-identity leading to self-actualisation are archetypes in post-feminist literature. Feminist fairy tales address the institution of motherhood as an experience, identity, institution and ideology and reconstruct the myth of mother as essential nurturer. The tales decolonise existing master codes and conventions, work towards decanonisation and resistance by countering patriarchal forces of domination with multiple stances to create a visible and independent identity. Like Andrea O Reilly, they focus on the critical analysis of motherhood as a social and cultural construct. The feminist reworkings delve into subtexts of theories about gender relations. They project how single women enjoy freedom, identity and autonomy until marriage fixes them as a commodity.

The female protagonists of the subverted tales belong to the post-feminist phase as they rise above gender-based isms. Postfeminists portray women as proclaiming their womanhood and motherhood by glorifying motherliness without subjugation and humiliation. Culture and identity are contextualised in the post-feminist texts. Virginia

Woolf says, “In literature, women have been treated as full of character and importance, in reality; she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room” (*A Room of One’s Own*, 43). Plaiting generations like plaiting her hair is a metaphor of feminist critique to actualise selfhood and depicts how the alienation of children, the responsibilities of motherhood and the essence of female bonding are contextualised. Alienation and castration complex are depicted in the protagonists who embark on the search for the self. Namjoshi rewrites the Cinderella tale and debunks the ‘happily ever after ending.’ To quote,

The Prince married Cinderella. (It pays to have such very small feet.) But soon they started squabbling. “You married me for my money’ was the prince’s charge. ‘You married me for my looks,’ was C’s reply. “But your looks will fade, whereas my money will last. Not a fair bargain.’ ‘No’, said Cinderella and simply walked out. AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED? (112)

The contextualisation of post genderism addresses the thematic content of the tales. They depict how subjectivities of masculine and feminine transcend socially and politically blended gendered issues with the help of technological innovations. Gendered occupational stratification with women bearing the brunt of suffering due to their sexuality, biological make up, lack of mobility and growth is evident in the tales like “Nymph” by Namjoshi. The author states that whether God chases Daphne or Daphne chases God, Daphne becomes a green laurel. Entertainment is being made up by the availability of technology. Donna Haraway, the post-gender theorist believed in emancipation of gender through technological transgression. Post genderism enforces that technology will efface the biological, sociological and psychological role of gender future where bodies will no longer be circumscribed by gendered traits. Disney versions of games and inclusion of feminist music in feminist fairy tale films are part of the

technological innovations. Thus, the attempt is to liberate all genders from stereotypical messages in life and literature.

Contextualising gender and nation in feminist fairy tales is evident because all the writers selected for study are from different cultures across the globe and almost every tale subtly depicts the need for emancipating women and marginalised genders to enhance the status of gender equality for the development of their nation. The select tales reflect that nationalism is socially and culturally constructed because gender configurations are related to the nation and because they impact the development of nations. Theorising gender and nation depicts as to how gender affects national progress and how they are affected by gender, gender equality and economic prosperity.

The critique of the works of these writers explains the construction of national identities and the representation of gender and its intersection with the body, race and sexuality to question the role of gender relations. Women's rights as human rights and the context of women and the biological reproduction of the nations has been debated in the popular work *Gender and Nation* which argues how gender dynamics and constructions of nationhood include specific notions of manhood and womanhood. She contextualises gender relations in connection with reproduction, national culture, national conflicts, women's development and human rights. This defines how the politics of inclusion and empowerment is essential to address the questions of gender and gendered borders as a contribution to feminist fairy tales and Children's literature.

Matricentric feminism contextualises motherhood, maternal feminism, motherism and mothering, as the business of feminism by positioning a woman's requirements and apprehensions as a mother. The feminist reworkings in *The Moon Ribbon*, *The Bloody Chamber*, *Her Stories*, *Sweeping Beauties*, *Kissing the Witch* and the fables of Namjoshi, address the socio-economic, political, cultural and psychological issues confronted by

woman as mother. This aids a woman to redefine her identity with matrifocal narrative to articulate “the voice of mother.” In *The Moon Ribbon*, the maternal type of writings publicise maternal experiences. Matrifocal perspectives of matricentric feminism define activism on motherhood as a site through creating social change. The diversity of maternal experiences across race, class, culture, ethnicity and sexuality is explored to establish motherhood studies as an autonomous legitimate scholarly discipline in academic feminism. In this light, a number of feminist fairy tales including the role of the mother who kills the Marquis in “The Bloody Chamber” discuss the essence of matricentric feminism, mothering, feminist mothering and motherhood through the characters and the feminist texts.

The posthuman can be contextualised in the context of feminist fairy tales to address the existence of a state of being beyond human. It discourses questions of ethics, justice, societal systems and intellectual aspirations of interdisciplinarity. While transhuman is biotechnological enhancement of human beings and focuses on the modification of the human species via emerging sciences like genetic engineering, digital engineering or bioengineering, the posthuman is roughly synonymous with the cyborg. *The Lunar Chronicles* by Marissa Meyer is a futuristic, cyberpunk feminist retelling of strong female protagonists that deals with biological warfare, genetic modifications, cyborg, authoritarian autocratic regimes and a bio engineered pandemic to address the concerns of the day.

The vision to foster feminist solidarities to end gender-based violence and victim blame by conglomeration of ideas and methodologies for collective feminist action envisages feminist futures. Feminist futures envisage a better future where power is shared equally and there is no discrimination, but gender just futures for people of all races, cultures, genders, and backgrounds. The theme of the feminist fairy tales elevates

gendered realities by reimagining women, culture, and development to create a better world order.

Feminist fairy tale films and texts ought to be contextualised on the basis of hindered technologies which stifle creativity and critical thinking which limit imaginative descriptions. Teresa de Lauretis discourses on the technology of gender, as a combination of different social technologies and talks of gender as sexual difference, which was beyond Foucault's theory of sexuality as the "technology of sex". De Lauretis, thus moves forward to reconceptualise an integral aspect of feminist thought, feminist writing, and feminist cultural critiques/practices.

Feminist fairy tales envision themes of 'beyond gender'. Moving beyond gender is to think of gender as the product and the process of a number of social technologies, techno-social or bio-medical apparatus. In the contexts of these theories, women and all genders of the gender spectrum in fairy tale texts ought to be liberated and enlightened by translating "technologies of gender" as pivotal technologies that enable feminist fairy tales to move to a new genre of writing tales from the gendered point of view.

Contextualising the deconstruction and reconstruction of gender and contextualising the feminist critique of *femme fatale* is evident in feminist fairy tales. *Femme fatale* is a French term that translates to "fatal female" or "lethal woman" whose tropes are deceitful and challenge gender norms. It embodies beauty, mystery, seduction and danger. It entraps a man through seduction and foolery or hurts the hero, and this is later conflicted about in her behaviours. For instance, she uses her sexuality to get what she wants, keeps things to herself, and never reveals the whole truth. These characteristics, presented in the fairy tales witches and stepmothers are subverted in the feminist fairy tale heroines. Domesticity and seductively guile characteristics are overlooked and robust women with strong characterisation are pictured in the feminist

fairy tales. The deconstruction of gender in fairy tales has occasioned the reconstruction of gender in the feminist fairy tales.

Feminist Popular Fiction by Merja Makinen examines how feminist writers subvert traditional genres. All the feminist writers locate their dystopia as in Grainne's "Version of the Pursuit" by Rita Kelly (qtd. in Makinen 82). Male participation in feminist issues on male rape and spousal battery help to achieve societal commitment to gender equality. The profeminists support feminism without being a member. Female bonding is embedded in the tales with genial humour and gentle irony. The intersection of power and sexuality and the subversive potential and ideation to interrogate hegemonic sexual codes to address transgression is a quest that eschews closures. As Cixous encapsulates the concept of *écriture féminine*, in her seminal essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*, a feminine text is "always endless without ending, there is no closure, it does not stop" (qtd. in Clayton 44). Children's psyche ought to question the meaning of "happily ever after tales" and thereby the varied notions over men's control of bodily autonomy to understand sexism and stereotypical imagery of beauty. Feminist fairy tale heroines break free from megalomaniac princes and kings as also from all forms of patriarchal prowess.

The binocular vision of an umbilical relationship between mother and child questions domestication of women and channelises the traditional roles of women protagonists in these texts. The decolonisation of feminine sexuality and female power by exploring sexism in fairy tales and their revisions ought to be studied so that patriarchal ideologies can be overthrown to reinforce new gender roles to establish the genre in its own right. The emphasis on gender norms and erasure of outdated gender roles opens a new world of brave diverse heroines who break stereotypes through self-discovery to emancipate themselves and celebrate gender. For instance, the fable from

The Panchatantra in Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* is a call for emancipation from being gendered identities. The texts retain the charm of the traditional tales despite the theme of emancipation of male dominance and gendered ideologies. The voice of the voiceless is made audible and the power of male heroes and female heroines are celebrated with cultural sensitivity.

These feminist reinterpretations empower the heroines to restructure, reconstruct and streamline the self. The tales focus on "the new woman" to create female utopias towards the emergence of new fairy tale aesthetics. This is made possible by negotiation of the limits of their social space through assertiveness and boldness. The select feminist tales are reworked to end patriarchal domination. They analyse socio-cultural issues and examine disparities to understand the fairy tale tradition. The female stereotypes in the select feminist texts are situated based on the narratology of textual elements, narrative voice and gendered narrative.

The liberating potential transforms the tales into didactic narratives in the feminist rewritings. Akin to the women in Greek myths, some of the tales are homodiegetic told by the narrator who takes part in the story or heterodiegetic narrative that are characterised by the absence of a narrator. Despite cultural differences, all the six writers invest meaningful identity in these reworkings because their female protagonists are individualistic human beings rather than docile, victimised female characters. All the select writers subvert feminist ideologies to establish a literature where both sexes coexist in an equal power structure. Thus, the portrait of female heroes who attain selfhood as means of redemption emerges from the works of all the writers.

The perception of gender debates and gendered themes position new perspectives towards upliftment of women through the gendered pronouncements in the fairy tale genre of literature. The subverted feminist tales selected for study reinforce the subaltern

tales of women by sabotaging female identity towards sculpting strong women and courageous heroines in the select feminist fairy tale texts. The cumulative dynamics of a woman's persistence in defining herself as a cultural construction to challenge power politics portrays the feminist fairy tale writer as not just a woman writer, but an elevated gendered writer who creates a new ethos by questioning not just male hegemony but new systems of power.

The ideological production of femininity as the "other" of patriarchy to voice alienation echoes a postmodern deconstruction of subjectivity and alienation. This results in the quest of a woman for her liberated self. Thus, the latter challenges the dominant social and aesthetic constructions of identity and gender to explore female experience by authoring gyno-texts to celebrate the distinctly unique identity of all women in Women's Writing. The blend of the traditional tale with the contemporary reworkings is churned into empowered tales that resonate the metier of hope, optimism, heroism, strength, dignity, independence, poise, self-assurance and self-worth.