

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Every genre has subversive elements. Feminist debates reveal the mutability of different genres from gendered perspectives. Such deliberations theorise the appropriation of genres and the phallogocentric themes in the genre to focus on the study of women and gender. Power dynamics, as the edifice of gender relations construct reality through the politics of omission, alienation and segregation. This redefinition of power structures in the fictional narratives and the presentation of short stories as realistic discursive products of power can be subverted to reconceptualise gender. These narratives are self-deconstructing as they are enmeshed in practices of power and resistance. They form part of the cultural dynamics and foreground patterns of masculinities and femininities which are subject to change.

The theme of how patriarchal structures operate differently within male authored texts and female authored texts in the literary canon exposes the need for gender justice to critique patriarchal attitudes and resist the hegemonic patterns of culture. This emergence of the corpus of women's voices with greater verve resulted in the re-definition of this genre of Women's Writing. It enabled women to carve a niche by articulating experiences related to identity, sexuality, marriage, love, family, domesticity and life. It analyses varied correlated areas of interest from the female standpoint as an alternative to comprehend the subject of 'woman' from the male stance. This enthused women to break the traditional literary conformist forms of writing to discover a new language to reconnoitre womanhood.

The Feminist Fairy Tale as a genre was neither discoursed as a subject of debate with reference to celebrating women and the theme of beyond gender nor addressed as a contribution towards addressing similar gender concerns in the study of the select

feminist fairy tale texts across cultures. The present study interrogates the subjugation of the victimised female protagonists in the fairy tale texts and depicts how the female protagonists are resurrected and empowered in the reworkings. The select tales substantiate that the inequalities between men and women are not natural or preordained, but socially constructed by cultural structures. The need to redefine how the genre shapes the dynamics of non-sexist literature that transforms the canonical traditional fairy tales into the Feminist Fairy Tale as a genre underlines the need for the study.

The prerequisite to project an evolving new framework to perceive a distinct perspective on the subtle patriarchal politics at play in the masculinist texts and the inversions of the lived reality of women's experiences are probed. The need to interrogate sexual polarisation and gender imprisonment of women to dismiss gender dominance through feminist and gender consciousness to blur gender boundaries defines the need for the study. The need to emancipate children's literature from patriarchal hegemony by using the genre as an effective pedagogy at home, in story telling camps, academic workshops, in the classroom and curriculum through interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to empower children, young adults, the differently-abled, marginalised and less privileged is yet another requirement for the study. Thus, the themes of 'gender' and 'beyond gender' could be disseminated to society to introduce measures and policies to empower all genders in the gender spectrum in order to envision a utopia of gender harmony and gender justice to reintegrate humanity.

Women writers like Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Michele Barrett, Toni Morrison, Adrienne Rich, Jonathan Culler, Juliet Mitchell, Elaine Showalter, Judith Butler, Margaret Atwood and a host of others articulated that gender is socially constructed. They asserted that gender is grounded on societal ideals that constrict women to narrow minded patriarchal partialities. If these women writers were the path breakers,

many followed suit in shaping the ever changing body of the genre of Women's Writing by challenging the male authored perspectives about the feminine identity. Many an expression of many a female critic, strengthened the critical body of Women's Writing which in turn nourished the Feminist Fairy Tale as a genre. A brief review of literature and enumeration of the theoretical tradition that precluded the formation of Feminist Fairy Tale genre follows.

The critic Judith Fetterly necessitates female readers to resist male authored texts so that they could read those texts from the male point of view as resisting readers (xi). Carolyn Heilbrun, in *Towards a Recognition of Androgyny*, suggested an alternative in which men and women could freely choose their modes of behaviour and believed that sexual polarisation threatens the existence of humanity (189). Showalter affirmed the "androgynous position" articulated by Mary Ellmann in *Thinking about Women* (287). Rita Felski in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* etched a unique "female consciousness" and inscribed an inimitable female idiom in the interpretation of women's texts as an exclusive literary tradition (19). Nina Auerbach unearthed a powerful female community of "emblems of female self-sufficiency" which heralds the power of women in society (5). French Feminist Criticism focused on women's style as a writing effect of rupture and subversion in avant-garde literature, available to both men and women. This was analogous to female sexual morphology and focused on a concentrated feminine discourse.

French feminist Helene Cixous coined *Écriture féminine* or "women's writing" in her "The Laugh of the Medusa" that propounded, "Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (875). Sandra Harding's feminist inquiries in the sex/gender system were revolutionary in "feminist epistemology" (113). Feminists like Simone de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone opined that socially weighed specificities of the female body like

menstruation, pregnancy, maternity or lactation must be surpassed to achieve equality in the public sphere. The emerging notion of the female body as the site of material existence where patriarchal mechanisms control women's sexuality, challenged the male right to appropriation of women's bodies. Underscoring this, social constructivists like Chodorow and Gilligan opine that it is not biology per se, but connotations attached to biology that subjugate women. They highlight that new meanings ought to be given to female corporeal existence sanitised from patriarchal codes. Similarly, theorists of sexual differences like Irigaray, Cixous and Wittig underline the need to reject the mind/body duality. They deny precultural, prosocial or prelinguistic conceptions of the body and present it as a social and discursive category.

The psychodynamics of female creativity in the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women, the stimulus behind Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, Patricia Meyer Spacks' *The Female Imagination* and Gilbert and Gubar's *The Mad Woman in the Attic* anticipate the new genre of Feminist Fairy Tale Writing. The emerging gynocriticism, according to Showalter as expressed in "A Criticism of Our Own" "focussed on the multiplying signifying systems of female literary traditions and intertextualities" (363). Irigaray's *This Sex which is Not One* denoted that woman is indefinitely other in herself and reinvented the theme of womanhood in varied ways. Like Irigaray, feminist fairy tales reconsider the question of female sexuality in a variety of contexts to articulate a feminist discourse, thereby rescuing the feminine from patriarchal constraints through writing for women in order to inscribe the body of female desire. Gynocriticism defined the female literary text and female critical text as the total of its "acts of revision, appropriation and subversion with its differences of genre, structure, voice and plot" (Abel 2).

The next phase in feminist critical theory was the concentration of the work of a group of Franco-American feminist critics which Alice Jardine explained as “gynesis”. Gynesis to her was, “The putting into discourse of ‘Woman’ as that process diagnosed in France as intrinsic to the condition of modernity, indeed, the valorisation of the feminine, woman, and her obligatory, that is historical connotations as somehow intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing and speaking” (15). In the gynocritical paradigm, the author, character and the reader explore the feminine self and undermine notions of female subjectivity by celebrating the death of the author. Gynesis raised several problems like the problem of agency and thus gynocritics emphasised women’s writing. Thus, gynesis championed the significance of the feminine.

Feminist criticism, in course of time, expanded and moved towards gender theory. This was driven by the realisation that gender identity extends to not just man or woman, but includes identities like agender, gender fluid, gender nonconforming and other identities in the gamut of gender. The theme of sexuality in literature as inclusive of orientations like gay, heterosexual, bisexual, asexual and pansexual was highlighted as a pontification that celebrates gender. Showalter moved towards gender theory by discussing the representation and the effect of gender in literary criticism by incorporating the male and female as is seen in her text *Speaking of Gender*. Along these lines can be read Catharine Mac Kinnon’s theory of gender as a theory of sexuality where women are subordinated as objects of male desire atypical of sexual submissiveness that institutionalised male authority and perpetuated gender subordination.

Sexual dominance deliberates that all genders are created through the eroticisation of gender supremacy and gender subjugation. This echoes Judith Butler’s normativity argument that critiques sex/gender distinction and refutes biological determinism, the view that biology is destiny. The Butlerian construction of gender as performance and

reference to sex as socially constructed postulated new dimensions to traditional tales by blurring the distinction between female and femininity. Showalter points out how, “within feminist scholarship, the term ‘gender’ is used to mean the social, cultural and psychological construct imposed upon biological sexual difference” (*A Criticism of One’s Own* 67). A different, but equally concrete perspective was shared by Gale Rubin who defined the sex/gender system as “a set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied” (106).

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* argues that gender is performative as a person’s gender identity is produced through repetitive performance or role-play. Gender is becoming and is not an ontological state of being. Butler in “Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire” in *Gender Trouble*, states that “gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. The unity of the subject is thus potentially contested by the distinction that permits gender as a multiple interpretation of sex” (280). Teresa de Lauretis who views constructions of gender as a “technology of gender” asserts that gender is a social relation. Teresa de Lauretis in her essay, “Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts,” depicts that gender constructs a relation between one entity and other entities and sees a subjectivity constituted in gender, not in sexual difference alone, but as a subject who traverses “across languages and cultural representation: a subject engendered in the experiencing of race and class, as well as sexual relations: a subject, therefore not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contracted” (714). Monique Wittig observed that language is the site of a covert struggle for gender meanings: “the universal has been, and, is continually at every moment appropriated by men” (66).

Gender as a category, in the light of varied feminist theories looks at varied canons – the feminisation of genres, the experiences of the male and the female, the dominant and the marginalised, the concerns of race, class, culture and sexuality within the ambit of gender experiences. The genre of gender studies which thereafter replaced women's studies designated social relations and inscribed social power relations with all its normative gendered codes as deconstructed gender myths. As Elaine Showalter reaffirms, “the introduction of gender into the field of literary studies marks a new feminist phase in feminist criticism, an investigation of the ways that all reading and writing by men as well as women, is marked by gender” (*Speaking of Gender* 2). Cora Kaplan states, “ a feminist literary criticism that privileges gender in isolation from other forms of social determination offers us a similarly partial reading of the role played by sexual difference in literary discourse, a reading bled dry of its most troubling and contradictory meanings” (148).

Gender analyses in texts, focus both on writing by men and women. Susan Bordo, popular for her contribution in the field of “body studies,” speaks of the materiality of the body as she untangles myths, ideologies and pathologies of the female body. Feminist philosopher Jean Grimshaw opines that gender never exhibits in its pure form, but in the context of lives that are shaped by a multiplicity of gender influences. The political stance of feminism on gender and gender justice is a subject of analysis in cultural practices. The representation of women in predetermined gender roles as weak, innocent, docile, sentimental, sensitive, irrational or seductive and their being treated like a sex-object or as procreation machines are challenged in the genre of feminist fairy tale texts which are the revisionist reworkings of the traditional fairy tale texts.

Such redefining of literary theory to make it receptive to gendered and cultural differences between male and female readers are the schema of feminist criticism due to

theoretical influences on social and political defiance. Thus, gender, sexuality and power relations reify the encodings of this context in the socio-cultural milieu. As Annette Kolodny in “Dancing through the Minefield” says, “What is important about a fiction is not whether it ends in a death or marriage, but what the symbolic demands of that particular conventional ending imply about the values and beliefs of the world that engendered it” (147). In the same essay, she concludes that reading is a socialised and learned activity in academics. What readers or feminists engage with “are not texts but paradigms which perpetuate the norm” (153). Literature, being vulnerable to plural readings of texts through changing theoretical frameworks, is ever redefined as a discursive practice. As Hawkes in *Structuralism and Semiotics* opines, Literature is a “mediating, moulding force in society,” structuring our sense of the world as every time a code is invoked, it is also reinforced and reinscribed (56). Donna Haraway in her “Cyborg Manifesto” speaks of a hybrid of machine and organism that transcends traditional boundaries to echo gender as a contest that challenges the naturalisation of sex difference in multiple arenas of struggle.

Fairy Tales were a fertile critical ground of feminist and gender concerns. Bruno Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* illustrates that fairy tale scholarship is an integral part of childhood as they are inherent with enrichment and entertainment. Jack Zipes underlines the socialising function of these tales and their subversive potential by working on socio-historicist, marxist, historical and cultural studies. However these texts were critiqued as gendered and biased in the presentation of gendered stereotypes and archetypes. Hence the present study draws a comparison between the traditional tales in fairy tale literature and their reworkings as postmodern feminist fairy tales to present a feminist and gendered critique. The tradition of fairy tale and feminist fairy tale scholarship further elaborated in the light of

discussions on the select texts depicts the need to rework the canonical texts into feminist versions.

The fantasy characters involved in magic are gendered as fairies, elves, goblins, gnomes, mermaids, damsels, witches, dwarves, demons, princes, princesses, ogres, giants, dragons, godmothers, fairy mothers, stepmothers, magical helpers, talking horses and they colour the legendary romance and folkloric fables. These characters of *The Facetious Nights of Straparola* by Giovanni Francesco Straparola or the *Neapolitan Tales* of Giambattista Basile are queried as legendary. The tales of *The Panchatantra* to the *Pentamerone*, Pu Songling's collection of *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio in China* and *Yei Theodora Ozaki's Japanese Fairy Tales* through the tales of Perrault, Grimm and Andersen to Tolkien's *The Hobbit* or Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* have been reworked across cultures. Thus, these reworkings hold the potential for social protest and cultural reforms. They redefine the reconstruction of the glorified stereotypical victims of the fairy tales and reorient the theme of female solidarity or female bonding for the empowerment of gender.

The magnificence and opulence of fairy tale texts were inverted in the feminist fairy tales. Like the authors of Greek fairy tales, Italian fairy tales, Finnish fairy tales, Chinese, African, Arab and Indian fairy tales, the feminist fairy tale writers portrayed men and women according to their differing customs, ethnicities, cultures and mores. The characterisation of men and women is as realistic as in the French *Contes des fees*, the Italian *PIacevoli Notti*, the *Pentamerone* of Giambattista Basile, the Folk-lore Records in England and *the Indian Fairy Tales* by Maive Stokes. Marginalisation, space, agency and feminism enhanced the new discourse of pedagogy and aesthetics in fairy tales and influenced thought and theory.

The Feminist Fairy Tale genre that emerged as the antithesis of the Fairy Tale genre interrogated the “happily ever after” from varied feminist standpoints. The theme of subversion of gender stereotypes and the determinism of space and performance in the tales were also questioned. Incest in fairy tales was showcased in a newer light. The supernatural world of the fairy tale fairies, witches, heroes and heroines as part of the make-believe world was subverted. Newer insights into the stereotypes of femininity, masculinity and queer in the canonical tales were altered in the upturned feminist tales. The relevance and influence of fairy tales all over the world were reworked from the point of gender with newer thematic and structural dimensions.

“The genuine writer of fairy tales is a seer of the future. With time, history must become a fairy tale – it will become once again what it was at its inception,” etched Novalis in his *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia* (506). Fairy tales which evolved as socio-cultural tales for children with folkloric motifs, fairy tale patterns and mythical archetypes became part of what Jung called “collective unconscious,” their residues still residing in the register of experiences. Luthi opines that the enchanted tales were part of antiquity as “a poetic vision of man and his relationship to the world, a vision that for centuries inspired the fairy tale listeners with strength and confidence because they sensed the fundamental truth of this vision” (19).

As Jack Zipes opines in his introduction to *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition*, the oral tales, “reflected the customs, beliefs and rituals of the ‘tribe,’ and were stories told for adults as well as children” (xii). These tales left an indelible mark in the minds of children who loved these wondrous fictitious accounts which foresaw self-transformation and a better world. Zipes in his anthology of feminist fairy tales in *Don't Bet on the Prince* is of the opinion that “. . . stories and fairy tales do influence the manner in which children conceive the world and their places in it even

before they begin to read (xii). Thus the literary corpus of oral tales gained a cultural heritage and each country gave the oral tales a written literary form. As Jack Zipes in his *Breaking the Magic Spell* recounts,

As a written, innovative, privately designed text which depended on the technological development of printing and the publishing industry, the fairy tale in the eighteenth century excluded the common people and addressed the concerns of the upper classes. It was enlarged, ornamented and filled with figures and themes which appealed to the furthered and aesthetic tastes of an elite class. (13)

The oral tales were universally widespread as they were beyond geographical boundaries and human experiences. They were sugar-coated realities of a “happily ever after” world of untruths that were camouflaged in the fantastic genre of a crafted utopia. The psychoanalytical and therapeutic tales seize the naivety of young minds by distorting authenticity to transport children to fairy lands of prodigies, marvels, incantations, hoodoos and voodooos, hexes and magical charm by conquering dragons and witches to imbue visionary power and patriarchal regime. Marxist thinker Gramsci emphasized on the hegemony in these tales by “coding it as ‘cultural, moral and ideological’ leadership over allied and subordinate groups” (423). Christina Bacchilega in *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* says, “...the stories we produce find us in the past, and enable us to live through the present uncertainties by projecting us into the future” (24).

The socialisation, canonisation and institutionalisation of the fairy tale corpus not only suppressed and silenced the female voice of the heroines, but subdued women writers as is apparent in the words of the critic Elizabeth W. Harries who opines in *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* “Many, indeed most of the early writers of the fairy tales in the 1690’s in France were women and produced

more than two-thirds of the roughly seventy tales written and published during the 1690's.

The contours of female conquest to male dominance of the fairy tales were curtailed to fit patriarchal paradigms of hierarchical framework which highlighted beauty and passivity as virtuous and evil and narrated witchcraft and imagined devilish stepmother-hood as antagonistic. The bifurcation into the binaries of archangel/sorceress, gorgeous/monstrous, untainted/terrific reaffirms the male-controlled status quo. Andrea Dworkin in her work, *Women Hating*, comments.

There are two definitions of woman [in fairy tales]. There is a good woman. She is a victim. There is the bad woman. She must be destroyed. The good woman must be possessed. The bad woman must be killed, or punished. Both must be nullified . . . [the ending of these tales] tells us that happiness for a woman is to be passive, victimised, destroyed, or asleep . . . It tells us that the happy ending is when we are ended, when we live without our lives, or not at all. (48-49)

The tenet of fairy-tale scholarship inherits itself as a multidisciplinary genre revitalised by feminist scholars by taking the marginalised to the centre with a reconstruction of the tales through theoretical approaches and adaptation of fairy tales. Hasse in *Fairy Tales and Feminism*, echoes how, across cultures and philosophies, feminists like Jane Yolen, Anne Sexton, Tanith Lee, Olga Broumas, Emma Donoghue, Marina Warner, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, Joanna Russ, Megha Collins, Terri Windling, Babara G Walker, Rosemary Lake, Suniti Namjoshi and many others pictured “a multi-coloured spectrum of female characters” (qtd. in Hasse 7).

Femininity was retraced through a critique of male history by denaturalising the fabrication of the performance that woman is forced to act and deliver in order to accentuate the construct of ‘eternal feminine’. These raconteurs contextualised the genre

with attempts to end male hegemony and enforce gender mores and gendered codes to redefine gender and sexuality. They decode ingrained biases that are imposed on by a dominant heterosexual culture. Thus, the male and female are deconstructed as ‘gendered’ and ‘sexual’ identities to flout the boundaries of gender. Yolen, Namjoshi, the fairy tale feminist collective and other writers of the feminist fairy tale genre lure on the canonical heritage by creating variants of the traditional corpus to showcase active, bold, headstrong heroines to echo a multiplicity of voices with a nuanced writing back to heal the apprehensions of gender and sexuality by disentangling the social and sexual experiences of the female.

All the select tales deconstruct the patriarchal aesthetics of the tales to demystify the patriarchal “myth of phallic superiority” to redefine inversion of gender roles in the socialisation process in order to re-evaluate gender arrangements and power politics. The select writers showcase feminist concerns on the appropriation and reappropriation of the tales as in Alison Lurie’s “Fairy Tale Liberation” and its sequel “Witches and Fairies.” Marcia R Lieberman’s comment on the void between cultural changes and beguiling fairy tale ideals as unrealistic was championed. In “Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale,” she asserted that the medium was to “acculturate women to their traditional social roles” (714). Feminist concerns in fairy tales were addressed as in Karen E. Rowe in “Feminism and Fairy Tales.” She opined that these tales “encourage women to internalise only aspirations deemed appropriate to our ‘real’ sexual functions within a patriarchy” (211). This seismic shift in the narrators of these tales is expatiated by Jeannine Blackwell and cited by Hasse in “The wise women were happy to help them [by telling them their tales], but when the brothers wrote down the tales, they omitted some of the magic words, and they jumbled up parts of the plots . . .

they left the wise women out of the stories they told, or changed them to be wicked, bossy and ugly” (162).

The feminist fairy tale writers recapitulate this genre to sparkle and transcribe a cultural debate on gender and sexual politics by overpowering the male dictated thought process infused in fairy tale texts. Zipes in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* cites Marie Louise Von. Franz. “For years the classical literary tales were mainly articulations and representations of a male viewpoint” (qtd. in Zipes xii). This male centric thought, says Rowe, is contrasted with the resurrection of female protagonists of the fairy tale to use the genre as a heuristic device to recreate the psyche of the women as “an awesome imaginative power over the female psyche” to covert misogynistic tales as discussed in *Don't Bet on the Prince* (qtd. in Zipes xi).

The contradiction of power/vulnerability, maternal power/ female powerlessness in the patriarchal social order is questioned in the select texts. The patriarchal social order, responds to the threat which maternal power represents by imposing strict control of women's activities and restricting her access to the public sphere.” (Palmer 100). A bustling contempt for sexual role playing is seen in the feminist reworkings where all the authors articulate a preference for a separatist feminist utopia. The select feminist fairy tales detest damsels in distress and gallants who are saviours and consider various possibilities along a culturally constructed spectrum between masculinity at one end and femininity at the other.

Each and every writer of the feminist fairy tale genre creatively contributed to this alternative aesthetic terrain of feminist rewriting of the feminine in literature. Jane Yolen, Angela Carter, Suniti Namjoshi, the writers of the Feminist Fairy Tale Collective, Virginia Hamilton and Emma Donoghue, as fairy tale revisionists, thought-provoking iconoclasts and provocateurs approached women's concerns and women's suppression

from myriads of angles by resurrecting the female protagonists of fairy tales as an inspiration to earnestly rethink the theme of women and gender. The feminist authors don many caps with verve and panache and explore high seriousness, ribald sarcasm, subversion, deconstruction, iconography and the demythologising of mythology.

The tales are magically surreal and echo nihilism, vacuity, erotic violence and gothic realism. Every tale has elements of the sensual and the bloody and echoes narcissism, solipsism, animalism and victimisation. All the tales amalgamate myths, fables, pantomime and fairy lore with fabulism, surrealism and symbolism. *The Moon Ribbon, Feminist Fables, The Bloody Chamber, Kissing the Witch, Sweeping Beauties, and Her Stories* are inter-textual and use the gothic and picturesque to appropriate and subvert the texts.

The fiction of sexuality is decoded and deciphered through unhinging female sexuality from the traditional tales to interrogate asymmetrical power relationships of gender. All the select retellings dispose of the archetypal images of manhood and womanhood and rework the magical mirror reflected in the canonical texts. They break the strictures of hegemonic hierarchy to liberate children's literature from the clutches of non-serious literature and resurrect the canonical texts from the mystique of gender and sexuality. As Zipes in *Breaking the Magic Spell* says, “. . . the fairy tale records the breakdown of an old-world structure of chaos, confusion and the striving to attain a new world. The fairy tale is multi-dimensional, hypotactical, and open-ended” (41).

The rewriting and re-working of the traditional tales by the select authors and many others of the genre, reflect the theme of subverting the stereotypes of gender. Such creations were a result of the debates of the late 60's and 70's which underlined the need to deconstruct traditional tales from the point of varied theories to assert that these inversions were radical ground breaking paths which, with innovative revolutionary

potential countered the phallogocentric system. Female protagonists who internalise or emulate stereotyped socio-cultural paradigms of male and female behaviour with prejudiced cultural behaviour are reconstructed in the select texts. Karen E Rowe in her article, “Feminism and Fairy Tales” echoes the need to revisit the fairy tale genre from the feminist standpoint which is quoted here extensively for better understanding:

To examine selected popular folktales from the perspective of modern feminism is to re-visualise those paradigms which shape our romantic expectations and to illuminate psychic ambiguities which often confound contemporary women.

Portrayals of adolescents waiting and dreaming, patterns of double enchantment, and romanticisation’s of marriage contribute to the potency of fairy tales . . . Thus, subconsciously women may transfer from fairy tales to real life cultural norms which exalt passivity, dependency and self-sacrifice as a female’s cardinal virtues.

In short, fairy tales perpetuate the patriarchal status quo by making female subordination seem a romantically desirable, indeed an inescapable fate. (209)

The texts that subvert the original traditional tales of Perrault, Grimm and Andersen were just read as part of children’s entertainment from time immemorial. The initiations into reading fantastical bedtimes stories narrated to children and savoured by children and adults across the globe were popular for the plot, characterisation and wonder. However, they failed to evoke gender issues to connect with the times in which they were written. The feminist fairy tale writers initially surprised the readers when the genre was critiqued and researched from varied standpoints. Andrea Dworkin in *Women Hating* comments,

The point is that we have not formed that ancient world – it has formed us. We ingested it as a whole, had its values and consciousness imprinted on our minds as cultural absolutes long before we were in fact men and women. We have taken the

fairy tales of childhood with us into maturity, chewed but still lying in the stomach as real identity. Between Snow White and her heroic prince, our two great fictions, we never did have much of a chance. At some point the Great Divide took place: they (the boys) dreamed of mounting the Great Stead and buying Snow White from the dwarfs: we (the girls) aspired to become that object of every necrophiliac's lust- the innocent, victimised Sleeping Beauty, beautiful lump of ultimate sleeping good. Despite ourselves, sometimes knowing, unwilling, unable to do otherwise, we act out the roles we were taught. (32-33)

Thus the quintessential fairy tale heroine who suffers ordeals is objectified and victimised in all the fairy tales, including the tales of Perrault, Grimm and Andersen which were dubbed by these women writers as restrictive and claustrophobic. The rewritten tales are inversions of tales of children's literature and are appreciated by radical feminists who champion the need to liberate children's literature from the gendered telling of folk and fairy tales. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in "The Queen's Looking Glass," in *The Madwoman in the Attic* express the imprisonment of women in patriarchal prisons literally and metaphorically and they opine, "Either they are inclined to immobilise themselves with suffocating tight-laces in the glass coffins of patriarchy, or they are tempted to destroy themselves by doing fiery and suicidal tarantellas out of the looking glass" (208).

The new tales critiqued the traditional endings of fairy tales as damaging to the young girls who were pained by the concepts of physical beauty as a passport to marriage and the emphasis of a prince charming as a redeemer. They violated the objectivity with which intelligent women pined for self-worth, a career, financial independence, gender parity and emancipation, instead of confining themselves to "a happily ever after" life of domesticity, dominance and subjugation. The socio-cultural imperatives of the tales on

the female imagination, is addressed by Lieberman in “‘Some Day My Prince Will Come’: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale.” “Millions of women must surely have formed their psycho sexual self-concepts, and their ideas of what they could or could not accomplish, what sort of behaviour would be rewarded, and of the nature of the reward itself, in part from their favourite fairy tales” (187). Marina Warner in *From the Beast to the Blonde* states, “storytelling makes women thrive” (xi). Karen Rowe in “To Spin a Yarn: The Female Voice in Folklore and Fairy Tale,” spins the yarn as a tale. She opines that “in the history of folktale and fairy tale, women as storytellers have woven or spun their yarns, speaking at one level to a total culture, but at another to a sisterhood of readers who will understand the hidden language, the secret revelations of the tale” (57). The texts also echo acculturation. Gilbert and Gubar contend, “Fairy tales often state and enforce culture’s sentences with greater accuracy than more sophisticated literary texts” (qtd. in Zipes 201). Marcia Lieberman in her article, “Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy tale” states that people “learn behavioural and associational patterns, value systems and how to predict the consequences of specific acts or circumstances” (187).

The polarity in the female psyche induced writers to understand its generic reality by depicting the cognitive dissonance overtaking a naïve and gregarious girl who displays a train of polar, emotional reactions as diverse as supplication, succumbing through reprobation and compliance. The parochial treatment meted to women resulted in women’s *‘joie de vivre’* to pursue her expectations with the quest for identity and to project a fervent feminist voice to proclaim her feminine sensibilities. Thus, feminist fairy tales as an all-encompassing genre offers a kaleidoscopic representation of the need to combat gender norms and negotiate the rights of women to end harassment, entrapment,

confinement and hegemony. From the point of the female milieu, the oppressed heroine is a virtuous maiden entrapped by social and cultural perimeters.

The tales reflect that liberation from patriarchal hegemony need not always be made possible by a male redeemer and women can perform the rescuing function as well. Many a time, women do not need rescuers or external forces to liberate them and could manage with self-liberation. To question male as the norm and woman as the aberration queries ubiquitous patriarchal figures obliterating women's freedom to picture the polarised dichotomy of angel and monster through antagonistic images. The critic Colette Dowling in *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence*, calls this "The Cinderella Complex" and asserts that,

Personal, psychological dependency- the deep wish to be taken care of by others is the chief force holding women down today. I call this 'The Cinderella Complex' - a network of largely repressed attitudes and fears that keeps women in a kind of half-light retreating from the full use of their minds and creativity. Like Cinderella, women today are still waiting for something external to 'transform their lives.' (21)

The internalisation and instrumentalisation of fairy tales is intense as it deals with the cultural evolution of storytelling and the socialisation of archetypal patterns. The role played by children's literature in the self-realisation process is unique. The intertextuality of myths and magic, folk and fairy lore and the fabrication of fantasy and fiction are at once imaginative as well as educative. These texts deal with society, childhood and literature and project gendered images that were creative and imaginative. Dorothy Dinnerstein in *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* discourses that it is senseless to pronounce prevailing male-female arrangements as 'natural'.

They are of course a part of nature, but if they should contribute to the extinction of our species, that fact would be part of nature too. Our impulse to change these arrangements is as natural as they are, and more compatible with our survival on earth. To change them . . . we need to understand not only the societal mechanisms by which they are supported, but also the central psychological ‘adjustment’ of which they are an expression. What makes it essential for us to understand is a massive communal self-deception, designed to allay the immediate discomfort and in the long run- a run whose end we are now approaching-suicidal.

(9)

Thus, the indoctrination of the fairy tale genre as a repertoire of hegemonic thought was intended to project the male self through the eroticisation of domination over women. This was done by the ideological portrayal of the feminine as a glamorous endeavour to create a falsified version of gender and sexual fixities in the fairy tale collections.

Matrilineal heritage is an important theme of feminist fairy tales. Matriarchal and matrilineal link uplifts women who fight the female norms of life. The ‘missing mother’ trope in fairy tales and Disney movies foregrounds these concerns. Karen Rowe depicted the matrilineal heritage of the canon in “To Spin a Yarn: The Female Voice in Folklore and Fairy Tale.” She states,

To have the antiquarian Grimm Brothers regarded as the fathers of modern folklore is perhaps to forget the matrilineal lineage, the “mothers” who are in the French veilles and English nurseries, in court salons and the German spinnstube, in Paris and on the Yorkshire moors, passed on their wisdom. The Grimm brothers like Tereus, Ovid, King Shahryar, Basile, Perrault, and others reshaped what they could not precisely comprehend, because only for women does the thread, which

spins out the lore of the life itself, create a tapestry to be fully read and understood. Strand by strand weaving like the craft practiced on Philomela's loom or in the spinning of Mother Goose, is the true art of fairy tale- and it is, I would submit semiotically a female art. (68)

The concepts related to this realm of Women's Writing and the 'Woman's body' is echoed in *Of Woman Born*, wherein Adrienne Rich expatiates,

Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource rather than a destiny. In order to live a fully human life, we require not only control of our bodies . . . we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, the corporeal ground of our intelligence. (62)

The theme of motherhood and sisterhood, the decolonisation of female sexuality, the deconstruction of male rescuer archetype, the reconstruction of the strong female archetype and the interior colonisation of female sexuality are thus explored in the select texts, *The Moon Ribbon*, *Feminist Fables*, *The Bloody Chamber*, *Kissing the Witch*, *Sweeping Beauties*, and *Her Stories*. Rachel Blau Du Pless's 'Washing Blood,' studies the subject of motherhood as "a biological power speaking through us" (10).

The universal experience of subjugation by all women of all cultures all over the globe is however overthrown in the reworked texts. Carol Gilligan stressed the role of gender and relationships in moral reasoning. Her theory of feminine morality, ethics of care and sense of self in contrast to men's "ethics of justice" reiterates that women's concerns in protecting others through self-sacrifice instead of honouring her needs at one point leads to a shift from goodness to truth where she ought to balance and prioritise herself and this is when an equitable inclusive environment of gender justice is created.

Similarly, the subverted texts are a call for affirmative action of women to strike a balance of their responsibilities along with self-care.

The invisibility of women due to male dominance of an authoritative figure, trivialisation of their experiences, psychological combats, subjugation of women of colour and discrimination due to differential attitudes are queried. Judith Mitchell, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Gayle Rubin, and Nancy Chodorow explored the feminist potential by a denial of the misogyny of Freud's psychoanalysis to depict how phallic culture domesticates women. Similarly, feminist reworkings were attempted as a rationalisation of women's subordination. The concoction of a woman's world within the masculine world makes the woman novelist recognise the significance of bisexuality. This leads the researcher to Mitchell's question, "What are we in the process of becoming?" and this is exactly what the feminist fairy tale writers query in their subverted texts.

Thus, fairy tales, feminist fairy tales, fairy tale films and feminist fairy tale films echo the theme of engendering gender as pivotal in this genre and attempts to assure the emancipation of women and all genders in life and literature. The earnest efforts of Yolen, as is evident in *The Moon Ribbon*, Carter, in *The Bloody Chamber*, Namjoshi in *Feminist Fables*, the efforts of the collective in *Sweeping Beauties*, Emma Donoghue in *Kissing the Witch*, Virginia Hamilton in *Her Stories*, and other feminist fairy tales across the globe redefine the context of gender and sexuality in subverted texts. The depiction of subjugation and domination in the conquest of women and the marginalised genders emphasises the need to focus on the contextualising of gender, identity, power and sexuality as essential debates in the study of the reworking of feminist fairy tales which upturns the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman. It questions the ethical theory of deontology which affirms that ethical actions follow universal moral rites which judge the morality of choices.

The select feminist reworkings depicts how these texts are subverted to celebrate gender by emancipating human beings from being victimised by gender norms, gender stereotypes and gender roles. They question the concept of subject and subjectivity in feminism by questioning the social construction of gender which symbolises womanhood or motherhood as being just female. The tales question the hypothesis that motherhood is the central role for women to perform their calling and that a woman is not complete unless she bears and nurtures children. Gender, according to these texts ought to be an ideology that naturalises the woman's role by reinforcing the difference in social performances of the roles of men and women as preordained, unalterable and natural. The feminist fairy tales identify the difficulties of women and challenge the injustice meted out to women in life and literature. They identify women's problems and suggest appropriate solutions by probing into the subtleties of the politics of gender, sex and racial politics by unearthing feminist and lesbian experiences, patriarchy, masculinities and heterosexism which are wrapped up in these tales.

The select feminist fairy tales articulate the female angst and search for identity in their female protagonists. They encounter the traditional portrayal of victimised female heroines whose familiarities of oppression due to restraint, subjugation, sexual politics and gender discrimination in a patriarchal set up were confronted and braved. The feminist fairy tales juxtapose fairy tales and feminist fairy tales to unleash and unmask feminist and gender concerns. They question the enslavement of women by subverting the male dominated discourse to socially construct newer meanings by reverting gender roles to empower women through magical enchantment of the vehicle of the postmodern fairy tale. Thus the rediscovery of women by gender portrayal of heroines through subversion attempts to overthrow gender bias in fairy tales to resurrect the heroines of the traditional texts.

The feminist texts discover neutral zones where gender tyranny does not operate and subverts conventional gender roles to reject the masculine/feminine binary. The exploration of maternal ancestry in the life of a woman, the restoration of the primacy to matrilineage, the articulation of the woman's quest for a female tradition, the theme of sisterhood, lesbian proclivities and the revolts to break the silence of cognitive conditioning is presented. The canonical texts of Greek, Indian, European and American fairy tale literature are reworked to explore gay liberation and feminist emancipation. The theme of the politics of representation and the musings of women in patriarchal worlds are reworked to study negative female associated symbols by endowing them with positive values.

The gender archetypes are overthrown by the gendered treatment of heroes and heroines in the reworked versions through the psychological interpretation of gender stereotypes to groom children with proper gender socialisation through fairy tales. The texts are encoded or decoded with gendered messages and social norms and the role reversal of heroes and heroines in the reworked texts are creatively reimagined. Thus, the socio-cultural development of heroines through the study of fairy tales and feminist fairy tales analyses the psychological and sociological effects of gender roles from a non-sexist point of view of gender to assert women's rights and human rights.

This thesis draws upon these aspects of gender, sexuality and power as depicted in the traditional and reworked texts to project the reversal of gender roles, the theme of gender stereotypes, the subversion of gendered identities, the performance of gender, the decolonisation of female sexuality, the interrogation of the role of the male rescuer archetype and the deconstruction of the characters in the traditional texts with the reconstruction of the heroes and heroines in the subverted texts. The fantasy and myth of silencing women through the indoctrination of sex roles, expressions of feminist

consciousness, experiences of motherhood and sisterhood and the theme of gender polemics is addressed. The attainment of selfhood as means of emancipation to challenge domestication to unravel the feminine mystique and understand sexual textual politics is emphasised.

Feminist fairy tales are thus the agents of social change as they question gender issues and voice gender justice. The select feminist fairy tales project an exuberance of the feminine expression, reinvention of allegory, sexual frankness, and thematic innovations through varied techniques of expression of women's visions and aspirations in the literary horizon. They project a rich tradition of storytelling with interrogation of gender archetypes through the reversal of gender stereotypes, gender myths, gender roles and gender norms. This study addresses the need for celebrating women in this genre of inverted tales and suggests that it is a prerequisite to blur the boundaries of gender and emphasise on the need to think beyond gender because humanity exists in an era that is post gender and post human.

Fairy Tales have been critiqued as a part and parcel of popular imagination. Passed on from one generation to another in oral and written form, they have innocuously ingested their covert politics and ideology. This politics, especially the politics of gender, being fed from childhood just like mother's milk, has seeped into humanity, to in turn shape the socio-cultural gendered norms of society. To bring in any change to such established norms, a constructive criticism of the root cause must be made, and this has paved the way for the emergence of the Feminist Fairy Tale as a genre that subverts the archaic fairy tales.

The genre successfully questions the gender tropes put in place by traditional fairy tales by holding a mirror to gender through the reconstruction of the female protagonist and the deconstruction of the male protagonist. It envisages the toppling of existing

gender dynamics by addressing the power relations between the sexes. Feminist fairy tales have not been popular as a genre though many works exist under its ambit.

Therefore this study is an enquiry into understanding the suppression of women in fairy tales and the celebration of women and all genders in feminist fairy tales. The theme of 'beyond gender' is also addressed to emphasise the significance of a gender just world.

Existing research on this genre has primarily focused on dissecting the sexual and cultural politics by dismantling traditional stereotypes, unravelling the psychodynamics of female creativity and comprehending sexist and misogynist thinking through the archetypes of strong women to subvert patriarchal imperialism. No research work on the writings of the select feminist fairy tale writers across cultures has been taken up for study. Similarly, no research has focussed on how the select works alchemise women's subjugation to celebration through theoretical readings to epitomise the new woman and blur the boundaries of gender as presented in the select texts. Thus, criticism on the feminist fairy tale genre based on the contextualisation of 'beyond gender' has not been taken up for study until recently. This is because the select feminist fairy tales were not exclusively identified as an inverted genre in comparative studies.

The texts deal with varied aspects of feminist reworkings and focus on individual texts, plots and characters. They are yet to bring in a comparative analysis of feminist writers across cultures. The need to present the 'new woman' in fairy tale and feminist fairy tale scholarship to focus on self-realisation and self-actualisation for women and to rethink altruism, redefine the need to blur gender boundaries. This is addressed, by re-envisioning the ambit of gender and exploring the realms beyond gender in order to efface the myth of gender binaries. The present research addresses this research gap.

The thesis aims to showcase how the present study of the genre of feminist fairy tales identified a unique experience of gender as genre to invert gender constructs. This is

made possible by converting the indefiniteness of unbelievable make-believe worlds in the presentation of a new genre that is unique and novel, in its own way. The feminist fairy tale genre interrogates the socio-cultural status imposed on women by subverting the plot and characterisation in the traditional fairy tale texts. In effect, the female protagonists are resurrected and the male rescuer archetypes are downplayed, thereby inverting the traditional fairy tale genre. The study aims at celebrating women as gender through the kaleidoscope of the feminist fairy tale genre.

Feminist fairy tales serve as a tool to bridge the line of demarcation of gender binaries to upturn reality by negotiating the feminist genre as a genre with a literary purpose. The literary expressions of this genre purports the subtleties of reversing the genre by focusing on the select texts, authors, plots and characters to address the research gap in fairy tale and feminist fairy tale scholarship. Thus the thesis builds a deep empathy towards the traditional female protagonists of the fairy tale genre and capsises gender stereotypes to promenade the liberated new woman as a 'woman of substance'.

The study deliberates as to how the genre shapes the dynamics that transform the canonical traditional fairy tales into feminist fairy tales by reworking the genre. The evolving new framework, presents a distinct perspective to perceive the subtle patriarchal politics at play in the masculinist texts. The inversions of the lived reality of women's experiences are presented as not just regurgitations of patriarchal dominance contesting for egalitarianism of women, but as avant-garde zeitgeists who envision a utopia beyond gender. The said framework would embrace into its ambit, not merely sexual polarisation and gender imprisonment of women, but dismiss gender dominance to unearth the theme of dominions beyond gender and comprehend the much needed consciousness to address the need to blur the boundaries of gender.

Feminist Fairy Tale genre was neither identified as a separate genre nor discoursed as a subject of debate in fairy tale scholarship in World literature. Feminist Fairy Tale, as a genre, in course of time interrogated the subjugation of women characters in the fairy tale texts to substantiate that the inequalities of gender between men and women are not natural, but societal. The select tales assert that these inequalities are not preordained, but socially constructed by cultural structures. The texts are retellings of the classical fairy tales and attempt to redefine feminist rewritings as non-sexist literature.

Jane Yolen, acclaimed as the Hans Andersen of America in 2009, was the winner of World Fantasy Award for Life Time Achievement awarded to individuals for their overall career in arenas related to fantasy. She is an American author, poet, journalist, non-fiction writer, novelist and short story writer who contributed immensely to the genre of fantasy fiction, science fiction and children's literature to address the theme of women's issues, feminist consciousness and the theme of subversion of gender. Winner of the World Fantasy Special Award in 1987, Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children's Literature in 1998, Nebula Award for Best Novelette in 1999 and more, her prominent works include *The Devils Arithmetic*, *Owl Moon*, *Tales of Wonder*, *Briar Rose*, *The Emperor and The Kite*. *The Moon Ribbon and Other Tales* is the text selected for the present study.

Angela Carter, British feminist fairy tale author, popular for her feminist works, picaresque writing, use of magical realism in the genre of fantasy fiction, Young Adult fiction, and Children's Literature, is popular as an editor and translator who addressed gender concerns and emphasised on the subversion of gender roles in her reworkings. She won the popular James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction) in 1984, Kurt Maschler Award in 1979, The Cheltenham Prize in 1969, and Somerset Maugham Award in 1968 and was renowned for her contributions to the realm of the carnivalesque in gothic

fiction. Her renowned works include *The Magic Toyshop*, *Nights at the Circus*, *Wise Children*, *The Sadeian Woman*, *Heroes and Villains*, *The Passion of New Eve* and *Shadow Dance* which were extraordinarily brilliant contributions to World Literature. *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* is the collection of tales selected for the present study.

Suniti Namjoshi, literary icon and diasporic author of Indian origin, fabulist, non-fiction and fiction writer, poet and short story writer has contributed immensely to the genre of fantasy, fabular fiction, and Children's Literature. Influenced by Virginia Woolf, she champions the concerns of all marginalised genders through feminist and queer writing. She subverts gender roles, reworks traditional tales, mythologies, folklore, and legends to create new patterns of meaning. Member of the Literary Panel of the Arts Council of England from 1993 to 1996, she holds a prestigious position in the realm of Indian and world writers and is an elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Her popular works *Suki*, *The Conversations of Cow*, *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth*, *The Fabulous Feminist*, *Because of India*, *Sycorax* and *Aditi* tales are well accepted. The text chosen for the present study is *Feminist Fables*.

Virginia Hamilton, the celebrated Afro-American children's writer and black female author, famous for her works exploring the African- American experience, is a spirited celebration of the strength, resilience and dreams of the Afro-American woman. She celebrates "the precious gift of life and love from generation to generation" in her writings. Winner of The Newbery Medal, The National Book Award, The Coretta Scott King Award, The Hans Christian Andersen Medal, and The Edgar Allan Poe Award, her works include biographies, folktales, and contemporary novels. *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales*, *M.C. Higgins, the Great*, and *The Planet of Junior Brown* are her popular works. The legendary women of the folk and fairy tales are phenomenal and are a stimulus that offers optimism and encouragement for future generation. *Her Stories*,

comprising of nineteen amazing tales are the incredible imaginings of African American women. Thus this work is chosen for this study.

Emma Donoghue, the Irish-Canadian author, playwright, literary historian, novelist, short story writer, teacher, non-fiction writer, and screenwriter contributed immensely to the genre of fantasy fiction, Young Adult fiction and Children's Literature. As a feminist fairy tale author, she addressed the themes of gender and sexuality, issues of patriarchy and male dominance through subversion of gender roles and unequal power structures by portraying bold heroines in her works. She won the James Tiptree Award (1994), Irish Times Irish Literature Prize for Fiction (1997), Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Fiction (2008), Stonewall Book Award (2004), Orange Prize for Fiction (2010) and Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2011. Her popular works include *Room*, *Stir Fry*, *Haven*, *Life Mask*, *Passions between Women* and *Touchy Subjects*. The work selected for the present study is *Kissing the Witch*.

The Irish Feminist fairy tale Collective, a band of feminist fairy tale authors called Fairy Tales for Feminists, reworked tales from a feminist and gendered stance. The collective includes Elaine Crowley, Margaretta D'Arcy, Rita Kelly, Maeve Kelly, Anne Hartigan and other well-known writers who subtly detail the theme of resurrection of female protagonists to invert the fairy tale characters through subversion. The popular works of the collective include *Rapunzel's Revenge*, *Ms Muffet and Others* and *Mad and Bad Fairies*. The text selected for the present study is *Sweeping Beauties*.

### **Objectives**

To achieve this aim, the study focuses on how this genre uses the template of gender as a category of analysis in feminist fairy tales and depicts how gender is contextualised to subvert gender and genre by reimagining and reassigning gender roles.

- The study seeks to disassemble gendered norms through the interrogation of gender concepts, inversion of gender roles, and decolonisation of female sexuality by deposing patriarchal dominance.
- It inverts the projection of female sexuality in the canonical construction of the genre and expresses how culture naturalises as normative certain hegemonic practices through powerful discourses.
- It celebrates women in feminist fairy tales and addresses the dynamics of power and gender dominance by redefining the construct called ‘woman’ by reworking the ‘feminine mystique,’ re-understanding the ‘New Woman’ and re-reflecting on the concept of ‘matricentric feminism.’
- It questions the marginalisation meted out to different genders across the gender spectrum and addresses the need to welcome the theme of ‘beyond gender’.

### **Thesis Statement**

The study focuses on how the genre of Feminist Fairy Tale uses the template of gender as a prism of analysis to showcase the inversion of gender constructs by interrogating and subverting the socio-cultural frameworks imposed on women to blur the boundaries of gender.

### **Methodology**

Six works of the Feminist Fairy Tale genre are chosen for close analysis and close reading in the study. Re-reading of the texts through comprehending narratology in the light of feminist theories is also applied. The select texts are *The Moon Ribbon and Other Tales* by Jane Yolen, *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter, *Kissing the Witch* by Emma Donoghue, *Her Stories* by Virginia Hamilton, *Feminist Fables* by Suniti Namjoshi and *Sweeping Beauties* by the Irish fairy tale collective, Fairy Tales for Feminists. The guidelines of the *MLA Handbook*, ninth edition are followed.

The thesis titled “‘Fiesta Feminina’: Blurring the Boundaries of Gender in Select Feminist Fairy Tales” is divided into six chapters, the first chapter is the introduction and the sixth chapter is the conclusion.

The first chapter is the introductory chapter which envisages the genre of women’s writing, feminist perspectives, feminist theories and feminist theorists in the light of celebrating the theme of gender. The chapter explores the cannon of women’s writing, the feminist relevance of the genre of fairy tales and children’s literature. The thesis looks at how this women’s genre enables us to look at newer insights regarding the multiplicities of different fairy tales from complex and varied perspectives without disturbing the Utopian world of wonder. Overt themes like the interpretation of gender roles, sexual role reversals, different dimensions of sexual crossover, articulation of feminine identity, synthesising the feminine realm of life and the contestations of androgyny in the varied tales are probed from the female stance to expose the struggles of women. In fairy tales, the heroines are reticent and sophisticated in their verbal articulation and the inner vibrations of their psychospiritual strains, their moral dilemmas, betrayals and paradoxes. Yet, they articulate the experiences of female sexuality and rebel against male structured norms or sexual politics to transcend their sensitivities, and conflicts through their bodies to celebrate the representation of female consciousness.

The second chapter inspects the themes of gender and sexuality. The thesis projects how the concerns of assigning gender roles to men and women in the traditional tales are deconstructed by analysing the socio-cultural set up. Society and culture are re-read to depict the changes in the socio-genetic development of culture. Liberation for women is championed through solidarity, sisterhood and lesbianism. The reworking of old gender roles by empowering women through fables enables the writers to present empowered heroines in literature. The chapter celebrates the themes of gender and

sexuality on the basis of gender, power and identity in fairy tales and children's literature. It looks at how this women's genre facilitates newer insights regarding the multiplicities of different fairy tales in diverse cultures from complex and varied perspectives without disturbing the utopian world of wonder. The traditional naive heroines celebrate the triumph of patriarchy through the gendered expressions and gender roles in the texts through the paradigm of magic. The chapter reviews the history of the fairy tale down the ages and looks at the presentation of women in fairy tales. The warfare to end the clampdown of women in fairy tales and the plea to unshackle women by cracking the redeeming potential in the resurrection of women is championed as a social protest. The feminist fairy tale genre, thus, contextualises the inverted themes of gendered identities in the light of gender, identity, power and sexuality.

The third chapter examines the feminist reworking of the tales in the texts and this is explored based on the criterion that subjectivity is a gender issue. Reconstructing heroines through a narrative strategy of their own in a unique manner brings back the strong woman in literature. The chapter looks at how empowerment through gothic tales emancipates women by redefining the latent potential and strength of a woman. The reworking is done from the feminist and gynocentric point of view by redefining the theme of liberation, mothering, mother-daughter relationship, and resentment of sexuality to depict the celebration of women in feminist fairy tales. The ideology of the critics like Derrida, Kristeva, Foucault and many other theorists are comprehended under the wings of literary and cultural theory to resurrect the heroines of the traditional fairy tale texts. The chapter discusses the tales of Yolen, Namjoshi, Hamilton, Donoghue, Carter and the Irish Fairy Tales for Feminist's Collective by exploring the themes of sexuality, homosexuality and gender domination in our culture. The study mentions how the select films of Disney highlight the liberation of women through the female protagonists in the

feminist fairy tale films through subversion. The reworked films present independent, bold, dauntless, stoic heroines in the tales. The reworking of fairy tales into a new genre of feminist fairy tales, based on gender and sexuality is debated and the discourse of the dominated is reversed into the discourse of the liberated by inverting and subverting fairy tales into feminist fairy tales.

Contemporary feminist fairy tale authors redraft the traditional fairy tales which were fantastical canonical texts as bubbles of delusion by accentuating the need to rework power relations, sex roles and oppressive patriarchal structures of thought. Unconscious sexism is overcome by reinvigorating the tradition of the fairy tale using irony, myth, burlesque and satire. The stereotypes are subverted, and sexual stereotyping of gender roles is defied by addressing the reversal of the inherent sexism in fairy tales. The silent female is overthrown by revisioning women characters and their traditional gender roles which mandate subversives. In toying with the sexism motif of the tale, the feminist fairy tale writers attempt to present a non-sexist world where women protagonists are given a newer dimension and are on par with men. Thus, the second chapter contextualises the feminine in the light of gender, identity, power and sexuality.

The third chapter addresses the concerns of gender by discoursing on the main theme of the thesis which is the celebration of women as heroines in the revisionist genre. The authors and the texts divulge how the heroines are reworked in the feminist fairy tales and how the category of gender is represented. The authors are from different cultures, yet they all deal with the theme of women empowerment in the traditional fairy tales and fictional narratives. The writers portray intelligent, bold and confident heroines as more powerful than their male counterparts, unlike in the traditional tales. The chapter highlights the reconstruction of the female protagonist to address feminist thinking in the fairy tale genre to examine women's subjectivity and oppression.

The construction of female subjectivity in the traditional society is highlighted. The idea of woman as the absolute other is probed and the political significance of women's sexuality is echoed. The representation of women and the need for women's writing to delve into the arenas of quest to transcend separation and alienation is underlined. The chapter celebrates women by contrasting the subjugation of women in the traditional tales by reworking the dominant structures that defined women as feminine objects of subordination through the feminist fairy tales. Gendered readings of these texts, their similarities and differences, the exploration and understanding of feminine, feminist, masculine, masculinist are signifiers used to analyse the phenomenon of gender. The title of the thesis being "Fiesta Feminina': Blurring the Boundaries of Gender in Select Feminist Fairy Tales," the chapter attempts to eulogise the innate strength of women in the genre of Women's Writing in the evolution of the feminist texts.

The fourth chapter celebrates the redefinition of not only women, but women and gender in feminist fairy tales. Patriarchy is addressed as a problematic term. Though men and women are allies on the one hand, patriarchy has different expressions in the presentation of sexism in different discourses in the academia. The courage with which the feminist fairy tale writers explore female sexuality to voice the liberation of women is commendable. The chapter analyses the readings of fictional narratives to throw light on gendered readings of the male and female protagonists and the new gender roles assigned to them. They explore masculine and feminine ways of reading and writing. The themes of homosexuality and heterosexuality reverberate in the select texts. The focus is on the presentation of reworked gender roles, gendered differences and sexualities where the gendered binaries are presented in a newer light. The female protagonists of these select works no longer struggle in patriarchal vicinity but overcome the crucial oppositions of binaries.

The fifth chapter envisages a world beyond gender and voices the need to delve into realms beyond gender. The experience of being a man, woman or homosexual depends on psychological, physiological, sociological, historical, geographical and socio-cultural variables. The fact that women are critiqued to the point that they are denied their humanity and serve as appendages in a male world is addressed. The non-androcentric attitude in the select fairy tale texts reveals that a male code of prowess and valour is being valorised in the ritual rather than the free will of a woman. While the consciousness of authors as feminist lesbians or diasporic authors require them to deal with issues of dominance, their sensibility as feminist writers responds to the aesthetic appeal of artifice.

Feminist fairy tales explore feminist ideas and assert that inequality between sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced due to the cultural construction of gender differences. The authors assert that women should claim for more space within the existing social structures and deconstruct the existing statuesque. The authors rework fairy tales, myths and legends to make them a vehicle of a new vision through the exploration of the female condition. All the female protagonists have an identity of their own and resist patriarchy. The theme of gender polemics and the attainment of selfhood as means of emancipation to challenge domestication are addressed by critiquing the feminine mystique to unravel the sexual textual politics.

Chapter six is the concluding chapter and projects how all three writers focus on the different aspects of women's issues by reworking fairy tales and fables to depict the blurring of gender boundaries and the genderscape. The conclusion echoes the muddling of gender roles and distorting the realms of a gender egalitarian society in a postfeminist posthuman world.

Yolen, Carter, Hamilton, Donoghue, the feminist fairy tale writers of the collective and Namjoshi are from different cultures. Yolen is American, Carter is British,

Hamilton is African, Donoghue is Irish and Namjoshi is Indian. All the six works are by women authors from different lands and focus on feminism and gender roles by reworking fairy tales and fables to question the position of women in society. Their works depict how female writers may find new patterns that echo older folk and fairy tale traditions. The works of these writers prove that women have to invent and reinvent themselves continually. The characters they encode present the biological, psychological, sociological, intellectual, cultural, emotional and maternal make-up of women and echo their struggles and success in the socialisation process. The tales reflect on the circumstances thrived by women, the civilising process of their states in very specific ways and have one thing in common. They lay bare the contradictions of the civilizing process and reveal how power works in an arena where the impact of the socialisation of women ought to be recognised.

Feminist ideology, gender consciousness and gendered understanding of sexuality have facilitated women to overcome suppression to combat patriarchy. Women in these texts celebrate their identity and overthrow the hierarchies of caste, class and gender by struggling for recognition of cultural roles and achievements. The “silenced and unheard sex” of the traditional texts was silenced by the traditional male cannon due to the voices of feminists and gynocritics. The predicaments have been voiced by writers of feminist reworkings and are voices and tears of liberation to champion women’s issues. Sexual relationships, patriarchal oppression, male chauvinism, polygamy, gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, post rape care, sexual advances, emotional abuse, harassment, voyeurism, physical torture, violations of bodily integrity, thoracic injuries, chronic pain, gynaecologic ailments, pelvic disorders, unsafe abortions, appropriation and control of women’s productive and reproductive capacities are possible themes that can be echoed in a subtle manner.

The conclusion echoes how women from different cultures across the globe create social history by liberating passive women from the fairy tale tradition through their own strength and identity. The theories of gender and sexuality and the varied feminist and gendered themes in the select texts echo subversion, transgression, gynocriticism and debate on the blurring of gender roles and the theme of 'beyond gender'. The scope for further research is presented by theorising the body as expressed by several writers including Virginia Woolf, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, Helene Cixous, Simone de Beauvoir, Gayle Rubin, Donna Haraway, Sandra Lee, Kristeva, Teresa de Lauretis and other feminists. The theme of abjection, gender trouble and subversion can be discerned in the select works. Thus, the present study mediates the extrinsic and intrinsic elements of gender in fairy tales and feminist fairy tales to interpret the literary genre so as to depict the gender concerns of the select authors along the lines of gender theory.

The cultural and gender difference in fairy tales and feminist fairy tales and the different ways in which the male and female authors present the depiction of patriarchy is deliberated under the theme of subversion of gender stereotypes and gender roles. This impression of gender concerns on male and female authors as dissimilar in society is the agenda of feminist theory and redefines power relations in life and literature. The texts are vulnerable to plural readings depending on whether the readers are male or female and whether the readers apply gender theory while reading the text or whether they savour the texts to enhance the value of the tale.

Consciousness rising in life and literature are closely related with women, gender and sexuality because woman is a subject, a construct, a young girl, a virgin, an adult and a mother; and the eternal feminine is appended as an adage to her. The hearth and the home, which defined woman is destabilised in these texts and the tales echo how women

as gutsy, audacious individuals thrashed out the polemics of feminism at length, over a considerable period. It questions, Are not all the probes exhausted, and the questions resolved? So, it seems but this is certainly not true as is evident over a period of time. Even a cursory look around reveals facets that glare open-endedly, that plague the mind with their incipiency, that create within an unrest, distress that heaves beneath the patina of compulsive glossing overs. Unevenness disrupts smooth transition and the long engrained ingrained wounds weep insidiously. Gendering them with understanding through revisionist reworkings is embalming; pivoting them with renewed dialectics is easing and seething them with critical tincture is placating, and this is what this work as a thesis seeks to do as it dialogises to achieves yet another step forward.

Feminist fairy tales are thus the agents of social change as they question gender issues and voice gender justice to project an exuberance of the feminine expression, reinvention of allegory, sexual frankness, thematic innovations, gynocentric techniques of writing and candid expression of women's visions and aspirations in the literary horizon. This is done by incorporating a rich tradition of storytelling with the portrayal of the reversal of gender roles and gender stereotypes in the reworkings. The postmodern tales addresses the need for celebrating women and all genders in these tales. Thus, the thesis invites the readers to reflect on the theme of gender and 'beyond gender' because humanity is at the crossroads of an era that is post gender and post human.