

Chapter IV

Celebrando el genero: Gender in Feminist Fairy Tales

I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will.

– Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Gender as a hotly contested terrain of femininities, masculinities and other genders underlines the need to overthrow sexist power and understand the cults of gender by contextualising, deconstructing and reconstructing the theme of gender to probe gendered themes, gendered attitudes and gender debates by celebrating the theme of women and gender. The present chapter looks at the post-modern feminist fairy tale texts, *The Moon Ribbon* by Yolen, *Feminist Fables* by Namjoshi, *Kissing the Witch* by Donoghue, *Sweeping Beauties* by the Feminist Fairy Tale collective, *The Bloody Chamber* by Carter and *Her Stories* by Hamilton as manuscripts that are therapeutic to heal gendered victimisation. It emphasises on the need to echo how the gendered expressions in the traditional and subverted texts depict the need to embrace gender and gendered identities across the gender spectrum.

The subversion of gender roles in the select feminist texts highlights the need to comprehend the themes of postfeminism and post genderism. The need to rework gendered messages, gender-neutral images and symbols in the texts redefine a post gender society. All the tales disrupt heteronormativity in the retellings by reflecting on the humanistic attitude to gender in the postmodern tales. The feminine paradigm questions the gendering of the body by mapping the futures of gender in a postmodern age of post humanism. The tales subtly question the positioning of gender in an era that questions even technology as gender neutral. The chapter deconstructs and reconstructs issues of gender and sexuality and endeavours to discuss the decolonisation of female sexuality,

the deconstruction of the male rescuer archetype and the reconstruction of the feminine in the select fairy tales and feminist fairy tales.

The decolonisation of female sexuality in the select texts questions the oppression of women and other genders through the feminist fairy tale *genre* of literature with special reference to the reworked fairy tales as in “The Tale of the Apple” in *Kissing the Witch* by Donoghue as in the lines, “Hard work was no hardship to me; it kept the pictures at bay” (53). The tales in Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* emphasise that the powerful woman does not need a male rescuer. The demythologisation of the male rescuer, in the select tales undermines the male as rescuer. All the texts assert that all problems are solved at the right moment on their own and sometimes even a female rescuer can rescue the victimised male protagonist. Thus, the tales picture female bonding of mothers and daughters, sisters, friends, lesbians or companions including the camaraderie between two women who have no kinship.

Another theme is the decolonisation of female sexuality. It states that women are capable of redeeming themselves and that even self-liberation is possible for women as they break the shackles of patriarchy. Homosexual relationships have also been portrayed as supportive for victimised women and the rescuing function can be performed by a female character. When women are liberated by men, it is not a matter of pride because women liberate men as in Anne Downer’s “Somnus’s Fair Maid” where the male victim Hyppolyte Dunsmore is rescued by Persephone.

The fairy tale writers positioned new perspectives towards upliftment of gender by women through gendered pronouncements of gender issues in feminist fairy tales. The subverted tales like the tale of “The Bloody Chamber” reinforced the positioning of identity by shaping confident, bold heroines and strong men as is seen in the feminist fairy tales like Farida Shapero’s “This Century of Sleep” or “Brier Rose beneath the Sea”

where the woman does not need a rescuer at all. The male rescuer in Carolyn Swift's "The Sleeping Beauty Wakes up to the Facts of Life" laments that he woke up Arora and regrets the same. The cumulative dynamics of women's persistence in redefining herself as a cultural construction is asserted in Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* which challenges gender politics.

"The Tale of a Needle" is about a woman of feminine graces who is taught by an old woman to think about all that has been forbidden. The passive girl is thus liberated by female cooperation and the old woman empowers the princess. I [Sleeping Beauty] reached out and kicked her spinning wheel into the corner. Badness was running through my veins like wine. I hate you [the old spinner.] I shouted. You sit here in your dust, your foulness . . . I'll have you punished. I could have your head chopped from your shoulders . . . I stared at her. My eyes swollen with water. My head felt as if it were about to break open like an egg. (181)

The agitation of the princess after pricking her fingers liberates her from the curse of patriarchy as she understands the message of the old spinner woman who has motivated her to explore the knowledge that has been denied to her. This is the real awakening from her sleep. Yolen's "The Moon Ribbon," like her "The Thirteenth Fey", harps on the theme of emancipation due to female cooperation. Sylva's sorrow during traumatic moments diminishes when she finds a silver ribbon with a label attached to it in a drawer while cleaning an old desk. The card read, "*For Sylva' The Moon Ribbon of Her Mother's Hair.*" The tale continues with Sylva following the ribbon which sets a path and leads to a house. She asks if the woman is her mother and the woman replies that she can assume so if she wishes. She gets back home with a crystal and days later the ribbon guides her to a house where she was welcomed as a sister and is granted a jewel. Thus, the moon ribbon which is the gift and legacy left behind for her by her mother gives

her the strength and courage to move forward. The female cooperation she received empowers her from the cruelty of her step-mother and step sisters. Sylva emerges stronger, stoic and liberated.

The feminist fairy tale genre is a literary endeavour where the woman writer is not only feminist, but a gendered writer who creates a new ethos by questioning not just male hegemony, but hegemonic systems of power. The ideological production of femininity as the “other of patriarchy” to voice alienation is evident in the tale, “The Honey Stick Boy” by Yolen. The childless couple are upset and as the old woman takes three sticks for the cook fire, she wishes they had a child and prays to the spirit of the hive. She feeds the stick with honey. The next day, the couple find the honey stick boy as an ideal son. The father wishes to teach him to fish, but Mellis refuses as he is made of honey and sticks, but when the father is aghast that the boy is disobeying his father, he agrees and is washed away and lost in the river. The man consoles himself that the brave son gave his life to save the father. Unlike mothers who cry themselves to depression, the old woman consoles herself that her husband is safe and though dear, she treasures the memory and handles grief in a pragmatic manner. The quest of the couple and their liberated self as strong identities is portrayed here. Dominant social and aesthetic constructions of identity and gender explore female experience by writing such gynotexts to celebrate the female identity in women’s writings.

Women write through their bodies to reinvent the themes of gender discourse and as Cixous put forward the concept of women writing through their bodies in *écriture féminine*, they challenge patriarchal discourse by multiple narratives which celebrate femininity through feminine writing. Gender Discourse, as a social construct is projected in the select reworked tales. Sex as biological echoes masculine and feminine attributes instituted by gender paradigms and this gives a sense of identity to the individual in

society. In “Sans Soleil” by Yolen, Viga convinces the king that the sun is a nourisher and is not harmful and cannot kill. She opines, “Old wives and young babes believe such tales. They should not frighten you, Sire” (32). Viga boldly believes that gender shapes culture. She marries Sans Soleil and convinces him that the sun is harmless, but when the prince is touched by sunlight, he dies and Viga realises that what one believes is stronger than the truth. She reconciles herself to the loss. The texts chosen for study break cultural impediments to discover the meaning of gender constructs in respective societies. The feminist fairy tales transform disciplinary paradigms by adding gender as an analytic category.

Gender theory introduces the subject of masculinity and femininity in feminist criticism, and elucidates on gender power, gender autonomy, gender individuality and gender relationships. All the texts overthrow gender domination and the gendered messages in the texts resound the voice of gender. The tales of Carter picture how the sexist culture projects the manner in which the imbalances of power between the two sexes in traditional tales are reworked. It also portrays how man becomes the coloniser and woman the colonised. These tales define culture as empowering to a woman and depicts how culture assists a woman in conceptualising her psyche. They aid in redefining women’s goals from a gendered point of cultural feminism. The select tales are an expression of therapy movement, mediation, woman bonding, cults of matriarchy and the study of women in literature and art.

The feminist fairy tales are feminist guides and gendered pointers in the context of male domination in respect of sexual status, gender roles and temperament. Thus, the post-feminist texts taken up for study are therapeutic and challenge gender victimisation. Self-liberation is highlighted because in the patriarchal discourse, women are expected to assimilate male-controlled dialogue and carry it further to the next generations.

Motherhood is depicted as part of patriarchal domination in fairy tales because conjugal bliss means abandonment of female identity. Homosexual relationships are discussed as liberating forces and no longer considered a taboo in heterosexual society.

Namjoshi's "Thorn Rose" is the tale of an ambitious princess who fights for power against her brother but loses just because she is a woman and this makes her feel extremely miserable. "And yes, she had a sister who didn't like men, preferred women. She clambered to the attic of her own accord and when she fell asleep, nobody woke her: no women available" (10). Thus, the Sleeping Beauty depicted in Namjoshi's tale can be awakened only with the kiss of another woman and if there were no women available, she would have to sleep. The tale, thus, dismisses a male rescuer and discards male deliverance unlike in the canonical fairy texts. Like Olga Broumas in her collection in 1977, *Beginning with O* and her poem on Sleeping Beauty, Namjoshi depicts homosexuality as a redeeming and liberating force that is not deviant, but as emblematic of female camaraderie to overthrow patriarchal norms in the revisionist tale.

Gender politics is contextualised in the select texts to address gender issues across the gender spectrum including women's painful realities, sufferings and endurance. For instance, *The Bloody Chamber* expresses the concept of the female as a human being, the interior landscape of female sexuality and feminist perspectives of the feminine as gendered. Gender theory explores ideological inscriptional literary effects of the sex-gender system and depicts the need to understand and embrace all genders. *Kissing the Witch* critiques how gender as an ideology deliberates on gender discourses and how inclusion and diversity of gender must be studied in this context. All the stereotypes affirm that one's gender should not be badged with fixed attributes and behavioural patterns. However, the select tales explicate how understanding gendered expressions of the voices of all genders in the gender galaxy is pivotal. The select texts depict an

understanding of the gender lexes of gender, identity, power and sexuality of all genders in the gamut of gender.

The feminist fairy tales are antithetical in theme, philosophy and content. While the fairy tale genre begins with “Once upon a time” and ends with “happily ever after”, the feminist reworkings pitch the plot of the tale in *media res* or middle of the action and do not conceptualise a perfect world. The tales in *Kissing the Witch* question the concepts of gender and assert that no charming prince can make a woman live in a “happily ever after world.” The subversion of gender roles and gender stereotypes in “The Tale of the Bird” to express freedom and self-reliance is projected by debating on the interior colonisation of the female psyche by the decolonisation of female sexuality. “The thing is to take your life in your own hands” (11). Gender as a performance is depicted with realism, and sexuality is interrogated on these lines. The tales look at gender as performance and the femininity narratives of performativity delve into the themes of the psyche as in the tales, *Kissing the Witch* and the other select texts.

Feminist fairy tales interrogate the theme of women and knowledge on the basis of feminist epistemology which studies how gender influences our understanding of knowledge, justification and the theory of knowledge. It illustrates how this disadvantages women. Feminist epistemology is comprehended as analysing feminine manners of understanding and this can be analysed from the epistemological point of view. Ontology is about being. The tales can be understood based on an understanding of feminist ontology which maintains that men and women are equally important as in international politics. The social systems infused with gendered power associations are seen in all the select texts. “The tale of the Handkerchief” emphasises the theme of gender in these social systems and the need to understand that there are different identities of gender and gendered identities of different sexual orientation. It asserts the strength of the

postmodern women. *Kissing the Witch* echoes, “I’ve grown accustomed to this life. The goose girl went on. I have found the fields are wider than any garden. I was always nervous, when I was a princess, in case I would forget what to do” (79).

Feminist fairy tales vouch for dissolution of gender roles and cultural norms similar to neo-liberalist feminism and gender abolitionism which dismantles basic structures of patriarchy. Similar to *enby*, a gender identity, there also exists individuals who have non-binary gender identities of being neither male nor female or alternately being both. These identities are championed in all the select texts. The different sexual orientations which challenge the binary as the main purpose of the feminist fairy tales portray how gender blindness or the practice of not distinguishing people by gender is reverberated in feminist fairy tales. Thus, abolition of gender bias is vital in literature and life. Gender neutrality or gender transcendence, a part of the transhuman concept of post genderism is subtly portrayed in the texts. For instance, in “The Tale of the Apple,” the lines “Hard work was no hardship to me; it kept the pictures at bay” (53) defines the post gender woman. It erodes the binary division of gender perspectives of gender by emphasising on the equal treatment of men, women and people of the other genders without the discrimination of social roles.

In Feminist Fables, the participation of men and women are showcased in more or less equally varying spheres ranging from unpaid childcare to high level politics. This redefines an egalitarian post gender society and champions a genderless world. The tales in *Feminist Fables* question heteronormativity and states the assumption that heterosexuality as the norm can be questioned. The tale, “The Gods” in *Feminist Fables* echoes, “To be so dammed good” is “not womanly” (37) and interrogates the sexual as political. It challenges that one group need not control another group, based on power or

sexuality. Hence, the need to overthrow harmful gender roles raises the question, “Does gender even matter?”

This chapter, therefore, addresses the issues of pluralistic societies across cultures through an intertextual, cross-cultural analysis of feminist fairy tales by women writers and looks into the self-awareness, self-observation and self-appraisal of the women characters. The select authors characterise the vision that is distinctively beyond gender and echo different versions of the images in the fairy tale texts. “Perseus and Andromeda,” “Friends,” “The Homicidal Streak,” and “Troglodyte” in the *Feminist Fables* are given subversive twists. As mothers, sisters, daughters or as wives, women took up all the responsibility and grew multidimensionally. The text harps on what Simone de Beauvoir said, in her *The Second Sex*, “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” (37).

The themes of feminine consciousness, feminist sensibility and concepts of power and powerlessness are seen in the select texts. In *Kissing the Witch* in “The Tale of the Spinster,” the mother said, “Work will be your mother, she whispered, it will lead you through dark days; it will clear you a level place to rest at last” (120). In the same tale, the lines “I begged her for friendship, for sisterhood, to take all the gold I had but give me back my child” (120) is thought provoking. The social theories, political movements and moral philosophies on gender inequality, gender politics, power relations and sexuality are queried by the authors through plot and characterisation. Reproductive rights, domestic violence, equal pay, sexual harassment, stereotyping, objectification and oppression are concerns that are imperceptibly reworked.

Carter's works depict how feminist activism traversed the boundaries of class, caste, race, culture and religion and created a new set of paradigms like tradition and modernity, self-assertion and self-effacement, social restrictions and economic independence. "The Tale of the Voice" in *Kissing the Witch*, questioned the role of women and the need for women to redefine themselves. The silence of the women at the ball raises the question, "Had they lost their voices too? Even their bodies were silent, always upright, never loosening their lines; they walked like letters on a page" (198).

The feminist tales liberate women from the traditional care-taker image and assert that women are not the object of man's gratification. The tales of Virginia Hamilton question the position of women in the texts and demand amelioration in their social position. In "The Tale of the Kiss," in *Kissing the Witch*, the pertinent statement is "You are not child enough for your mother nor woman enough for your father. You don't work or play or think as they would have you work and play and think" (220).

The feminist fairy tales attempt to deconstruct sexuality by subverting the fairy tales. Kate Millet in her *Sexual Politics* (1969) fights gender oppression through her insightful analysis of gender politics and calls sexuality as a tool through which a man categorises woman as good or bad. She defines sexual politics as the "arrangement whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (88). Namjoshi's "Her Mother's Daughter" in *Feminist Fables* is of a mother who refuses to see the point in her feminist daughter's argument that women had all along been relegated to a secondary position in the man-made world. In fact, she believes "that's how it should be" (96).

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), which she calls gynocriticism. Showalter divides the writings of women into three phases, feminine, based on patriarchal aesthetics and social values, feminist phase of women's

protest against patriarchal attitudes and the exploration of women in terms of work, class and family and the third female phase where writers search for their voice and identity. Like Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, feminist fairy tale writers juxtapose their work against the social, political and cultural realities of the lives of ordinary women of their time, while tracing the similarities of this female literary subculture to other literary subcultures.

The feminist fairy tale writers present the oft repeated themes, patterns and images of women and challenges gender stereotypes. The struggles of women writers to create their own identity by presenting female characters in a male-centric world is explicitly brought out to challenge the dominant culture by questioning the lives and professions of women as writers thereby questioning androgyny. Like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, these tales explore the psychological urges of women and the right of a woman to fight machismo and develop her potential by liberating herself from patriarchal attitudes and stereotyped behavioural patterns.

The feminist fairy tales assert that women are individuals and not just "other" in relation to man. Female bonding and supremacy of women establish that men are also performers of secondary roles. Feminine sensibility in choice and treatment of theme emphasise on physical, mental and intellectual emancipation in the portrayal of characters, values, viewpoints and reflects the vision of the select women writers. Virginia Woolf in this context in "Women and Fiction" in *Granite and Rainbow* 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" (8).

The feminist tales selected for study aptly echo that all gendered identities must break all the different forms of gendered restrictions against male strictures and undergo a

metamorphosis to achieve selfhood by overcoming despondency, rejection and negation of life to assert indomitable courage. It is clear that the Feminist Consciousness Movement initiated by Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller, Rebecca West, Virginia Woolf, John Stuart Mill and postfeminist writers like Rosi Braidotti, Drucilla Cornell, Spivak, Mohanty, Rosalind Gill, Anne Brooks, Angela Mc Robbie, Yvonne Tasker, and Olive Schreiner, had great impact on these writers. Post-feminist ideology, heralded by Wollstonecraft, questioned man-woman relationship, marriage, love, sexuality, gender and unravelling newer insights into man-woman understanding to perpetuate harmony between sexes in the hope of an egalitarian future.

Virginia Hamilton in her tales reflects how transcendence and accommodation effaced fear and how women's discourse focused on aesthetic excellence. For instance in Namjoshi's "Broadcast Alive," the incredible woman is an achiever, but at heart a really womanly woman and all she wants is a normal life" (63). Thus, gender norms are demolished as women fought for gender and carved a niche for themselves voicing the need for parity in society. Women celebrated their feminine presence and attempted to silence androcentric culture in their journey to selfhood through silence and voice. They addressed the awareness of the need for education, constitutional rights and focused on awakening the self. They reverberate Frieden's *The Feminine Mystique*, that "for woman as for man, the need for self-fulfilment, autonomy, self-realisation, independence, individuality, self-actualisation- is as important as the sexual need" (282). In the tale, "Her Mother's Daughter," the mother refuses to see the point in her feminist daughter's argument that women had all along been relegated to a secondary position in the man-made world. In fact, she believes: 'that's how it should be' (96).

Celebrating the discourse on reconstruction of the self was yet another feature of the feminist fairy tale texts. The fierce feminist attitude of the select feminist fairy tale

writers pronounces a renewed consciousness of womanhood. Women's concerns are addressed through symbolic poetic expression and these tales are a fine discourse on the reconstruction of the self as women embark on a quest in search for selfhood. The female literary discourse presents a kaleidoscopic picture of self-assertion and self-resurrection. Uplifting themselves above gendered isms, they articulate a quest for identity. Motherhood is glorified, self-sought spinsterhood is accepted, and women are self-reliant.

The female protagonists are from different lands, cultures and races and they rebel against patriarchal norms of dominance to transcend gender-politics. They break the traditional genre boundaries and narrative discourses as in the select works where the women protagonists break the shackles of gender patterning and gendered identities to reconstruct their lives. As an anti-canonical counter discourse, Namjoshi blends prose with verse and decentres the discourse to dethrone textual authority to invite multiple readings as in *Feminist Fables*. Feminist fairy tale writers discover the strangled voice to articulate woman's silent discourse, to demystify and deconstruct myths and voice forth the inner yearnings, strivings and aspirations of women. They protest against the dehumanising tendencies of society by rejecting the opposition between masculine and feminine and elevate them with their multiple differences.

The powerful bond between women and the sexual and emotional orientation of a woman as profoundly affecting her consciousness and creativity is evident in *Her Stories*. The text addresses resilience and the creativity of the African-American community and redefines a culture where the stories focus on the real and fantastic women, their joys, sorrows and strengths of those who hail from all over the black American diaspora. The tales celebrate the dreams and strength of women and celebrate gender in its own right.

The deconstruction of the voices of the silenced women is yet another agenda of feminist fairy tale scholarship. Feminist fairy tales represent the feminist spirit and

character by unearthing the inner aspirations of women and the female psyche to use their intrinsic strength to overcome catastrophic events. For instance, the characters like Sylva and Mona dream of emancipation as they have their own dignity and freedom. The feminist fairy tale heroines of “The Moon Ribbon” and “Moon Child” depict women progressing from a meek, docile and non-descript woman to a strong individualist and active feminist. Feminism, as a firebrand ideology is evident in the tales of Hamilton. The literature of the select feminist fairy tales mirrors a society where men and women ought not to be trapped in stereotypes but share the world with equal responsibility and widen one’s horizons in their journey to selfhood with a feminist vision.

The theme of reconstructing gender discourse in feminist fairy tales is evident in all the select texts. Gender discourse as a ubiquitous term and system of cultural signs and meanings assigned by various social mechanisms to sexually dimorphic bodies presents cultural signs which constitute gender as having a direct effect on how human beings live their individual lives in gendered realms and how social institutions operate in the ambit of gender. The positive self-image of the “New Woman” who is educated, financially independent and courageous to defy convention and social norms is projected to create a better world for women. In *Feminist Fables*, the human paradigm of identity is dismantled. The feminist fairy tale writers de-naturalise institutionised codes of behaviour.

The feminist fairy tale heroines crush the shackles of tradition and are materially and spiritually trapped into conventional female roles. The quest for self-definition is assigned to the cultural heritage of a woman as is seen in these select tales. The loss of autonomy and powerlessness of a woman make her passive and angelic as is discerned from the fairy tales of Cinderella and Red Riding Hood. The cultural production of femininity which contrasts the violent patriarchal world of male authority which silences

women in the power struggle is upturned in the reworked texts. The sexual undertones of heterosexual love in the old fairy tales forced women to seek refuge as guarded by their lovers, husbands or fathers.

In feminist fairy tales, the feminist fairy tale writers epitomise women's position in the patriarchal social order and do not lose the subjective position. They defy submission to patriarchal authority and revise male genres. In *The Moon Ribbon*, the mother-daughter bond is creative and transformative and other kinds of female associations expand the notion of motherhood beyond mother-daughter relationship. Women's destiny is a passive acceptance of the inevitability of the female role- where sexuality remains phallogentric.

Feminist fairy tale writers from different contexts, cultures and nations rework feminist issues in their themes to question the role of family in controlling women by restricting their sphere of activity. The woman's body becomes the site of patriarchal and colonial oppression. Gender and the role of women in these texts focus on the possibilities of post-colonial feminism and foreground gender from numerous perspectives. The goal of these feminist fairy tales is gender equality and emancipation of women and the third gender. The tales of Hamilton are a source of courage and strength, and the reworking of old identities erodes gender stereotypes and myths.

The deconstruction of gendered themes and gendered messages of these select postmodern fairy tale texts is the deconstruction of identity on the sexual, ethnic, national, socio-political and cultural level. It includes the intersection of the three main discourses namely racism, imperialism and sexism. The texts interrogate marriage, sexuality, desire, body and writing about the subaltern to discourse on marginalities, the role of mothers and intimate link between motherhood and motherland.

The theme of gendered language, gendered nations, family, motherism, mystical affiliation, spirituality, elevation and the subaltern is addressed as also the themes of third world sweat shops, exploitation of women's labour, global sex tourism and the effects of environment, health and education. In *Feminist Fables*, Namjoshi overthrows patriarchal myths of the male centred realms by mythologising tales to subvert conventional gender roles to reject masculine/ feminine binarism in the texts. In *Her stories*, the myth of the friendship of the cousins Cammy and Elodie are threatened when the family reunion includes other cousins and Elodie is tempted to drop Cammy for a new companion.

Deconstructing body, desire and sexual identity by focusing on the theme of sexuality is concentrated from the points of view of the woman's body and her personal relationships. The select feminist fairy tales address the theme of bodily desires, bodily pleasures, sexual attractiveness and beauty myths which were once taboo subjects for women. Sexuality which was coded as morality was reworked. There was reconstruction of the self as women's destiny was determined by her body. This was inverted by reworking women as saviours, enlightened souls, and warriors. These concerns were rewritten to depict women as financially independent women. Women's struggle against male ideology when they were condemned as silenced angels, wives, whores and mother figures are pictured in these tales.

The select feminist fairy tales focus on self-reliance and self-sufficiency of women and question the rights and injustices meted out to women. The theme of domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault and discrimination against women is reversed. bell hooks argued that men's liberation is a necessary part of feminism and men are also harmed by sexism and gender roles. The fairy tales of Perrault, Andersen and the Grimms encompass their work in a variety of disciplines including anthropology, sociology, economics, women's studies, literary criticism, art, history, psychoanalysis and

philosophy. The feminist reworkings retort that writing and philosophy is phallogocentric. For example, feminist fairy tale texts like the tales of Carter examine the literary phenomena of texts and tune it with ‘gynocriticism’ where woman is the producer of textual meaning. Namjoshi’s tales invoke stereotypes to annihilate and depict unjust assumptions of male oriented symbols by feminising them. In “Nymph,” Namjoshi gives three versions of the tale of Daphne. Daphne is turned into a green laurel whether God chases Daphne or Daphne chases God.

The deconstruction of different feminisms in feminist fairy tales discourses on the varied ways in which women characters are resurrected in the upturned tales. The reworked tales champion liberal feminism where individualism and equality of men and women through political and legal reform is achieved. Radical feminism where the male-controlled capitalist hierarchy is the defining feature of women’s oppression is perceived in *The Bloody Chamber*. Conservative feminism, which asserts that women are equal to men and are not just homemakers assert that household chores should gain remuneration and recognition through paid labour as is delicately highlighted in *Feminist Fables*. This champions the reworked heroines in comparison to the traditional Cinderella, Snow White and other female protagonists.

Libertarian feminism conceives people as self-owners as is seen in the characterisation of Mona in *The Moon Ribbon*. Separatist feminism does not support heterosexual relations as in the fables of Namjoshi. The fables promote lesbian feminism that topples male norms of heterosexuality. The concept of eco feminism is reworked in a subtle manner in the tale of “Red Riding Hood”. The same woodcutter who destroys Nature can be seen emancipating the feminine. The connect between women and nature highpoints the need to efface oppression of women and Nature. Marxist feminism in these texts champions discrimination against women in domestic life and employment and this

agitation is voiced in the feminist fairy tale texts like *Kissing the Witch*. Socialist feminism by working to end economic and cultural sources of women's oppression is discerned in all the feminist fairy tale texts and explicitly echoed in *The Bloody Chamber* as in the lines,

And I began to shudder, like a race horse before a race, yet also with a kind of fear, for I felt both a strange, impersonal arousal at the thought of love and at the same time a repugnance I could not stifle for his white, heavy flesh that had too much in common with armfuls of arum lilies that filled my bedroom in great glass jars, those undertakers' lilies with the heavy pollen that powders your fingers as if you had dipped them in turmeric. The lilies I always associate with him; they are white and stain you. (15)

The feminist reworkings question sexist power structures by dubbing women as 'the second sex' and negotiating a space with feminist thought for consideration of race related subjectivities like the feminist leaders, Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Moraga, and Audre Lorde. The tales of the feminist fairy tale writers like Carter are akin to standpoint feminists who address global issues like rape, incest, prostitution and culturally specific issues like female gender mutilation in some parts of Africa. Lipstick feminism of the 1960's and 70's by reclaiming symbols of feminine identity with make-up, suggestive clothing and sexual allure as empowering can be seen in the descriptions in the reworked texts where traditional beauty concepts of traditional fairy tales are upturned.

Virginia Hamilton in *Her Stories* presents true tales like "Millie Evans: Plantation Times" and talks of phenomenal women. Evans remembers, "My birthday always comes in the fodder-pulling time. My mama told me she was pulling fodder until the hour before I was born in 1849. In "Mary Lou Thorton: My Family," "The most important thing to my mother was to bring us to Ohio so we could get an education" (3). The reminiscences

of the African American woman who entertained everyone at home with music, dance, reading, writing, literature and entertainment pictures the genuine affection of women towards their family and the concern with which they took care of elders. Though her mother had fourth grade education and father fifth grade, they taught themselves to read the paper and the Bible. Thorton at her first job made fifteen dollars a week and thought she was rich and gifted her father a blue serge suit. She says that her father liked it so much that he hardly wore it and wanted to be buried in it. “So my brothers and all of us got together and bought him another suit to wear. But he kept that blue serge suit, and he was buried in it” (103).

Glass ceiling practices that limit advancement of women and the issues of colonisation in a “matrix of domination” are patterned in the tales. Feminist fairy tales challenge the parameters of freedom. The feminist fairy tale writers gained much from Germaine Greer, Mary Ellmen, Kate Millet, Shulamith Firestone, Patricia Meyer Spacks, Susan Gubar, Sandra Gilbert, Showalter, Annete Kolodny, Jane Marcus, Michele Barrett, Judith Newton, Cora Kaplan and more. Feminist fairy tales talk of universal female identity. “. . . . Woman has ovaries, a uterus, these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature” (*The Second Sex* xv).

Gender concepts in feminist fairy tales are deconstructed to upturn the plots and characterisation of fairy tales. The concepts of gender euphoria as being aligned to one’s body; biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, gender dysphoria or gender distress arising from conflicts between a person’s gender identity and their aligned gender or sex are addressed in the select feminist fairy tales. Ambiphilia or sexual attraction to men and masculinity, gynephilia or attraction to women and femininity, pansexuality or omnisexuality, the romantic or sexual attraction to people regardless of their gender, the concepts of gender fluidity and cisnormativity are discoursed in a subtle manner in these

reworked texts. The fables of Namjoshi assert the themes of gender fluidity. Mothering memoirs or matrilineal genealogies by rewriting motherhood as didactic writing for children and young adults are also thematised in all the select texts.

The narratology of textual elements, narrative voice and gendered narrative depict how feminist rewritings transform tales into didactic narratives. Didacticism, as the liberating potential is reworked in the feminist fairy tales as altruistic. The socio-cultural factors, social alienation, economic dependence, social malfunctioning, the trauma of women, domestic violence, sexual abuse and sexual violence of the traditional texts are subverted. Namjoshi's tale "Signpost," critiques witches as sign posts instituted by patriarchy to scare young girls into conformity with norms laid down by the male world.

The deconstruction of the discourse of the interior colonisation of women in fairy tales is yet another theme of feminist fairy tales. Fairy tales closely relate with gender studies, because they reinforce 'myth' by reproducing dominant patriarchal gender norms and challenge these myths to interrogate gender appropriate behaviour in men and women by a feminist critique of these tales. As a powerful tool of fantasy and magic, they redefine gender realities to unearth the existing stereotypes as is seen in Carter's tale, "Wolf-Alice." "Could this ragged girl with brindled legs have spoken like we do, she would have called herself a wolf, but she cannot speak, although she howls because she is lonely" (119). Gender-liberal theorists elucidate the fairy tale as a narrative that strongly imparts gendered behaviour patterns to children unlike the moral edification theme of the Grimms. The stereotyping of the physical features, characteristics and roles of male and female characters on the lines of gender in fairy tales is inverted.

As Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet and Betty Frieden opine, the 'female 'self' is a cultural idea promulgated by male authors, male fears and anxieties which are portrayed through female characters. "Her panting tongue hangs out; her lips are thick and fresh.

Her legs are long, lean and muscular . . . She never walks; She trots or gallops. Her pace is not our pace” (119). The ideology of *The Feminine Mystique*, *The Second Sex* and *Sexual Politics* are echoed here. All the tales of subversion in *Feminist Fables*, whether “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Hansel and Gretel,” “The Ugly Duckling,” “Cinderella,” “Perseus and Andromeda” are from the female point of view.

The androcentric culture and masochist expressions in these intertexts offer a subversive twist as in Red Riding Hood accosting the wolf and the hunter, Gretel’s introduction to the witch, the depiction of the ugly duckling as a swan among ducklings. Cinderella’s inability to live happily ever after with her handsome prince and Eve creating paradise wherever she walks are subversive discourses that challenge the dominant discourse of patriarchy. In Angela Carter, in the tale of “The Company of Wolves,” on Christmas day, the girl overpowers the wolf. “See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny’s bed, between the paws of the tender wolf” (23).

The deconstruction of men and women in fairy tales and feminist fairy tales and the inversion of the gendered characterisation of the canonical fairy tales is a hallmark of the feminist fairy tales. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in “The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination” argue, “Snow White in the coffin has become the “eternally beautiful inanimate *objet d’art* patriarchal aesthetics a girl wanted to be” (40). Men have been pictured as adventuring princes, handsome, strong, street-smart, powerful heroes, evil demons and more. Kay F. Stone, opines, “Heroines are not allowed any defects, nor are they required to develop, since they are already perfect” (“Things Walt Disney Never Told Us” 45).

Men in fairy tales are not active affiliates of the domestic space, but they inhabit the outside world of action and economics, and their presence is palpable in the women’s sphere. They assert authority over women. In the tale of “Rumpelstiltskin,” in *Children’s*

and Household Tales, the woman does set foot out of her domestic space for an adventure of sorts, albeit at the whim of two men (Grimm 278-282). All the female protagonists struggle for existence and acceptance within the domestic sphere, overburdened with household responsibilities. Max Luthi in *The European Folktale: Form and Nature* says,

Every man has within him an ideal image, and to be king, to wear a crown, is an image for the ascent onto highest attainable realm The visible kingdom, the fascination, the influential are oft- cited even in democratic societies, because they have a symbolic force. To be a king does not mean just to have power To be a king is an image for complete self-realisation. (139)

Deconstructing spaces as stereotypically defined by well-defining male and female spaces in fairy tales break gender myths and gender stereotypes. Domestic and familial chores for women were designated so that women do not explore the public sphere. This is seen in the tales of Cinderella, Red Riding Hood and Snow White. These traditional fairy tale texts akin to *Onna Daigaku*, the rule book for Japanese women, which belittled women as meek, mindless and submissive and *Manu Samhita*, the Sanskrit text which domesticated women in familial spaces reflects suppression of women in their designated spaces. Spaces are thus gendered in the canonical texts and subversions.

The classical fairy tales are determined by socially sanctioned patriarchy as in the Cinderella versions. The banishment of women to the domestic space to confine them to the household spaces and not public spaces is upturned. Female protagonists like Snow White were subject to domestication and subverted. In the stories in *The Moon Ribbon and Other Tales*, emotional fulfilment and parenthood were stifling for women who were always expected to symbolise love, care and affection. Thus, the space and performance of women and men of the fairy tale genre needed to be reworked.

Women in fairy tales were allocated to the domestic space as the space of performance. Women were so committed to their family that they failed to perceive the trap in which the expectations of patriarchy had ensnared them by subjugation. Fantasy, utopia and dystopia in the works of women envisioned an alternate reality by creating new spaces for women through fantasy narratives in the select texts. Feminist fairy tales, like Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* created a space for urging readers to realise the cognitive transformation to confront patriarchy through feminist and lesbian writings. Feminist visions that defy patriarchal laws which relegate women to secondary roles express the need to overthrow subordination of women through these genres. Thus, new spaces that privilege the woman and the lesbian are created for the erasure of boundaries of gender to redefine and recreate new spaces that subvert patriarchal texts. Celebrating the space of women in feminist fairy tales is affirmative as is viewed in the select texts. The celebration and deconstruction of folklore in feminist fairy tales has contributed immensely to the genre of feminist fairy tale scholarship. The anthropomorphic study of the culture of any country venerates oral traditions and folklore as a socially formative narrative that influences children in their childhood and this is pictured in the select tales.

The upturn of the gendered myths of folk and fairy tales paved a new way to this genre which emphasised on the rethinking of gendered ideologies and myths from the gendered stance. *The Bloody Chamber* comprising of ten stories, "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" are reworkings based on the fairy tales of Perrault, published in 1979 and challenge the representation of women in fairy tales from the feminist and gendered point of view. The tales retain an air of tradition and convention depicted in her voluptuously descriptive prose.

In Namjoshi's "The Badge Wearing Dyke" and "Her Two Maiden Aunts", the theme of a woman's love for another woman is termed as archaic and as old as creation itself. In the tale, two elderly spinster mice live in a relationship unmindful of dogmatic insinuations. A university educated-mouse wearing the badge of gay liberation and lesbian solidarity is proud of her aunt championing woman's love for woman. This is debated and discoursed as ancient gender norms are protested.

The feminist fairy tales are open new spaces which privilege the lesbians as the place of alterity to liberate womanhood from tyrannical images of stereotyping. "The Tale of The Apple" depicts the strong heroine. In "Runner," Namjoshi asks why a beautiful princess like Atlanta who was so healthy desired the golden apples. She had health and needed no fruit; she was a rich princess and needed no gold and the patriarchal tale was just an imagining of the female psyche by the male psyche and was not grounded. Through the feminist reworkings, the myth of male supremacy attempts to traverse patriarchal boundaries. Similarly, in *The Bloody Chamber* and *The Moon Ribbon*, male supremacy is interrogated by giving importance to women characters.

In *The Moon Ribbon*, in the tale of "Somewhen," Tom chooses the road to Somewhen and travels for many days climbing the mountains, in search of a land digging the hills and diving for pearls. He accosts a girl enroute and decides to grow a world in that place. Years later, he shares his travels with his grandchildren. "I roamed the world when I was young; Somewhen-Was that what the old man had meant? In the seeking was the finding?" (14). Years later when a young man tells Tom that he is seeking his fortune and wishes to know as to which way to go, Tom says, "Somewhen is the best I know" (15). The deconstruction of the subversion of dominant discourses of gender and culture are echoed in these texts. Fairy tales and feminist fairy tales across cultures reveal how cultural differences affect gender typecasting and to what extent it remains shockingly

similar across geographical spaces, thus corroborating the arguments of feminist critics and theorists.

The dominant anthropological approach to the question of women's position in the feminist fairy tales ascribes innate characteristics to men and women- militancy to men and self-effacement to women's position. The stereotypes of the self-effacing, humble, quiet, good woman emerge in most tales and social tyranny masquerades as science. James Hillman in his essay, "First Adam, then Eve" has given the succinct explanations of the genesis of this attitude. "The image of female inferiority is not changed because it remains the image in the masculine psyche. Theories of the female body are preponderantly based on observations and fantasies of men . . . we must bear in mind that the evidence in anatomy, as in all fields of science, is gathered mainly by men and is part of their philosophy" (374). In spite of women excelling in all arenas in the sphere of capitalist production, they are still expected to manage the domestic sphere on their own.

Johann Jacob Bachofen in the 19th C pioneered the matriarchy debate in 1861 with his concept of 'mother right' in *Myth, Religion and Mother Right* and argued that "matriarchal people feel the unity of all life, the harmony of the universe" (79). He introduced a philosophy of "regulated naturalism" in which maternal love was the basis of all social ties, but this perpetuated the myth that the woman's only role is to be a good mother. Judith Lorber in *Paradoxes of Gender* called gender imagery, "the cultural representations of gender and embodiment of gender in symbolic language and artistic productions that reproduce and legitimate gender statuses" (30-31). Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow in *Women in Cultures of the World*, voice the need for "not only training in the requisite skills but also in the values and attitudes appropriate to feminine roles" (10). In "The Rose Child," the old woman says, "If it were a real child, I would feed it

with pieces of bread sopped in honey and milk till it was quite grown up. But as it is a rose child, goodness alone knows what I must do, for I do not” (25).

Deconstruction of ‘Woman’s Work’ is yet another leitmotif of feminist fairy tales. Hammond and Jablow opine that the issue whether men ought to do work that is culturally assigned to women is considered a matter of personal volition and depends on culturally determined values. What is never questioned is whether men would be capable of doing those jobs- they may need some time to master the feminine skills, but there is never a doubt that they can if they want to” (64). The theme of women’s identity and relevance was championed by Maria Tartar. She points out that it takes, “no special degree of historical sophistication,” to recognise that the social structures, institutions and economic networks of many fairy tales are based “on medieval or, at least, pre-modern models.” (*The Hard Facts of the Grimm’s Fairy Tales* 48).

The oral tradition did not echo the gendered themes as they presented distorted reality as fairy tales narrated much the real, unreal and distorted conditions in the world of those who imagined, recited and those who heard the tales. The realism, symbolism and didacticism of these tales were imperative and that was why the Grimms preserved, “profound truths about the origins of both German culture and European Civilisation.” (*The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* 12).

The socialisation of men and women in Latin American cultures hinges on the concepts of machismo and marianismo, believed to be mutually exclusive beliefs separating genders. Machismo, a set of traditional cultural ideas about women signifies virility, sexual prowess, physical and ideological control of women. Marianismo is associated with glorification of motherhood, stoic acceptance of one’s lot and skills of self-sacrifice and endurance in a marriage (Lindsey 159). The relevance of gender was highlighted in course of time with the emerging genre redefining the subjugation of

women. Male as an adventurer in public space was distanced from women and women issues. Even religious works were patriarchal and established the docility of women. *The Bible* also ordains, “Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men: She is to keep silent” (*Authorized Version*, I Tim. 2:11-12).

The powerful tool of magic could not fight gender bias. Fairy tales witness not only the presences of mothers, stepmothers, grandmothers, godmothers and mothers-in-law, but also the absence of fathers, grandfathers, stepfathers and thus patriarchy prohibited adult men in parading this genre of children’s tales. Yet the tales were written from the male point of view and gender continued to determine space and performance of the characters. Fathers are mentioned in the beginning of the tales. Sometimes fathers reappear at the end of the tale to project patriarchy as the re-establishment of the order.

There is a fusion of the familial and social realm in fairy tales where fathers’ reign over their families and kingdoms at the same time. The fairy tale fathers are often silent throughout the story. Sometimes they are weak and responsible for the connotations in the fairy tales. At times, they are unsympathetic and thus the tales are written from the male-centric point of view. And the men do laugh with sympathy to young girls and query their disobedience. The tales do not depict bad fathers, bad stepfathers, wayward fathers, wizards, foolish kings or cruel princes. Thus, patriarchy is not presented as forceful or violent. As Kate Millet pointed out in *Sexual Politics*, “so perfect is its system of socialisation, so complete the general assent to its values, so long and so universally has it prevailed in human society that it scarcely seems to require violent implementation” (43). In *Rumpelstiltskin*, the poor miller puts his daughter into trouble to save himself and the daughter is forced to embark on the task of spinning straw into gold. In *Sleeping Beauty*, the father, as an egotistical male, insults woman power and his daughter is the subject of

suffering and not the father. These expressions of “hegemonic masculinity” and “normative heterosexuality” are evident in fairy tales. However, this is reverted in the feminist fairy tales like *Sweeping Beauties*, *The Bloody Chamber* and *Her Stories*.

Men’s aggression against women to dominate them as victimised women who portray deviant behaviours in women, as offenders subject to prejudices, crime and offences are reworked in the feminist tales. Male violence against women in the form of rape, incest, polygamy, abandonment and domestic violence was not seriously questioned. Thus, women posed a threat to the dominance of patriarchy. This cannot be generalised and the need to rethink women’s criminalisation was echoed. The portrayal of sexual abuse in fairy tales has been debated in this light in the feminist fairy tales.

The theme of fatherhood and the patriarchal structural hegemony is voiced by Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment*. He suggests that the ‘evil’ alter-father figure in fairy tales is often personified in ogres, monsters or dragons, which are outside the family unit. By changing ‘bad’ into ‘good’ fathers, the fairy tales eclipse the risk that fatherhood will be interpreted as threatening the stability of the family and thus society (114).

Fairy tales boost the confidence of children in psychological education. Children are transported to a world of charm, fantasy and magic, but what problematises this endeavour is gender specificity. The fairy tales, a poetic expression of the sense of confidence that human beings are secure in this world and more or less at ease with codes is reversed. The tales of the select writers echo gendered victimisation in a fictitious and realistic manner. Maria Tatar in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tale* elucidates that fairy tales “give us exaggerated and distorted (one might even say uncensored) forms of internal conflicts played out in the context of family life.” (93). Women as a sign and symbol were portrayed. According to semiotics, ‘woman’ is a ‘sign’ not an ‘essence.’ The

‘arbitrariness of the sign’ is a fundamental principle in Saussurean linguistics. K.K. Ruthven in *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction* explicates that, ‘woman’ and ‘man’ are not biological essences which precede the social organisation of life, but constructs produced by a society and mediated in the discourses which it circulates about itself (36). Woman as a ‘sign’ is thus a ‘culturally variable construct’ where different societies define her in different ways (37).

The retelling of fables, myths and canonical stories reiterate the need to question traditional patriarchal knowledge of the past which has been inherited by new generations with old meanings. Feminist fairy tales like the tales of Virginia Hamilton’s “Lena and Big one Tiger,” “Marie and Redfish”, “Miz Hattle gets Some Company”, despite being animal tales are fabular. *The Bloody Chamber* endeavours new meanings from a female perspective by interweaving female experience in a feminist light. As Zimmermann says, “Where the old mythology was debilitating, the new is inspiring” (26).

All the feminist fairy tales have individuating women who are representative identities that voice the issues of the entire female community. All the female identities in the texts are identities that culture has imposed on them. The women from the prison house of old tales are liberated from the conditioning and stifling circumstances they were subjected to in their lives as women. In the tale, “The Princess and the Pea”, the twist to the tale of the princess whose sleep gets disturbed because of the green pea under seven soft cushioned beds is intelligently reversed by Namjoshi who echoes, “but it soon became obvious that her skin was such that she was allergic to everything” (5). The writer inverts the tale by stating that the genuine princess catches a cold and dies of the same. Hamilton’s tales, “Catskinella,” “Good Blanche”, “Bad Rose and the Talking Eggs”, “Mary Belle and the Mermaid”, “Mom Bett and the little Ones a Glowing” liberate women as feminist tales.

The deconstruction of the supernatural in the tales of the Grimms made their stories “pure, truthful and just” that they eliminated passages they thought would be ‘harmful to children’s eyes’ notes Zipes (*Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 48). Patriarchy describes women as “white-as-snow”, “red-as-blood” and “black-as-ebony.” Witches are feminine characters who are sinister. Ruth B. Bottigheimer suggested that they were “exceedingly hideous and frightening”. Supernatural elements in the texts are seen in plenty. As John Widdowson says, “Almost a caricature of all unpleasant human characteristics” (202). The abundance of giants, ogres, witches and demons in fairy tales were in plenty as seen in the tales of Hamilton. In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim psychoanalytically interpreted the witch in “Hansel and Gretel” as a personification of greed. Ruth Bottigheimer in *The Transformed Queen* suggests, that “the female’s original access to power through her association with nature became perverted and denied, so that more recent versions of fairy tales relegate power held by females to the old, the ugly, and/or the wicked” as ugliness, bodily deformity, birthmarks, warts, ragged clothes or witchcraft etc. The select authors echoed the association of good and bad in the select tales.

Deconstructing Masculinity in feminist fairy tales and reversing the stereotypes of masculinity in fairy tales as symbols of patriarchal dominance was inverted in the feminist tales. Men’s Studies, renamed by feminists like Mary O’ Brien in *The Politics of Reproduction* as the ‘male stream’ is relevant (126). Critics like Harry Brod argue that men’s studies have a task corollary to that of women’s studies. Masculinity Studies examines issues like the ‘incompatibility of the ‘classic man’ with the challenges of the modern times, the discussion of the ‘new man’ and other such subjects and matters of masculinity. Masculinity Studies emerged during the 1970’s and was the promotion of a new consciousness and a new way of looking at the traditional definitions of man and

manhood. During the 1980's, masculinity studies focused on the experience of marginal and minority men and involved in class, ethnicity, sexual identity and so forth. The main argument put forth by this arena of studies was that not only women, but men too, pay a price for the stereotypical notions of gender held by almost all societies.

In the 'Introduction' to his book, *The Making of Masculinities*, Brod argues that men's public lives "in an important sense represent a retreat and escape from their personal lives, a shrinkage rather than an enlargement of their spheres" (3). The same biases in traditional scholarship which limit women's spaces, often perpetuate misunderstandings about 'masculinity'. As Kimmel explicates in *The Gendered Society*, that this too is "after all, a culture construct that is at the mercy of simplistic formulations of sex roles "and not "a static universal box into which all men must fit" (121).

Male roles are associated with "straightforwardness, manly simplicity, openness and transparent honesty," all somehow combined with a stoical endurance and intellectual energy (Newsome 195). Hegemonic masculinity's overarching norm is the 'anti-feminine' which stigmatises all characteristics and qualities stereotyped as 'womanly', which includes among other things the ability to express emotions of vulnerability (Lindsey 246). Thus, female identity was focussed against the backdrop of masculinities. Michael Herzfeld says, "...there is less focus on 'being a good man' than 'on being good at being a man' - a stance that stresses performative excellence, the ability to foreground manhood by means of deeds that strikingly speak for themselves" (16). Masculinity is projected as an elusive status and not just biological maleness. Jennifer Waelti-Walters says "To be acceptable, a woman has always had to try and fit the tale. She is expected to be beautiful, virginal and long suffering. And the only gift promised to her at the end of all her ordeals is that some prince will come and marry her" (11).

The Feminist fairy tales questions sexism, androcentrism and female subjugation to raise voices for gender equality. Marie Lugones coined the word “decolonial feminism” to express the idea that our society’s concept of gender was forced on people of colour through historical and continued colonialism. *The Bloody Chamber* explores violence in all forms. Audre Lorde challenged racism, classism, sexism and homophobia. Gloria Anzaldua, a queer Chicana poet, feminist theorist and scholar of Chicana cultural theory sees the possibility of a new consciousness to see the emergence of the contextualisation as liberated gendered identities and not as male or female. For instance, Namjoshi, projects the androcentric culture in her texts by unearthing the biased order and making slippages to give a subversive twist to the fables. Red Riding Hood attaches a new connection with the wolf and the forester. While Hansel is petrified, Gretel stays with the witch. Cinderella does not live “happily ever after” but gets separated from her husband. Thus, all the subversions of the fairy tales critique the male dominant discourse.

Feminist perspectives include feminist ethics, feminist bioethics, feminist epistemology, feminist history of philosophy, feminist philosophy of language, feminist philosophy of law and religion, feminist philosophy of psychology and sociology and these tales could be viewed through a gendered lens from these perspectives. Philosophical attention was given to the phenomenon of care and care giving. Understanding gender from the perspectives of feminist philosophy to liberate protagonists of fairy tales and feminist fairy tales through feminist philosophy is essential and facilitate deconstructing gender perspectives. The feminist fairy tales encompass issues relevant to feminist philosophy like feminist perspectives on autonomy, on class, on work, on disability, on globalisation, on objectification, on rape, on abuse, on family, on sex and gender, on the body, on self, on trans issues and more. For instance, in *Sweeping Beauties*, there is the discussion of the power of men.

They had no control over our sisters who slowly, but ever gradually lost all their skills. They allowed the secrets of the earth, sky and sea to lapse in their memory. The store of lore about animals, herbs and plants was eroded from their minds. All the old customs fell by the wayside. They no longer passed on the knowledge from mother to daughter at puberty. The onset of menses, known as the special sign, was no longer a joyous celebration. Instead, it became a hidden secret discussed only by women. (13)

Feminism questions the canon as misogynist because philosophers like Hegel opined that women were not made for activities that demand a universal faculty. Synoptic interpretations like Susan Bordo's *The Flight to Objectivity* argues that even philosophy included the works of Descartes which are gendered male. In the *Feminist Fables*, Namjoshi's retelling of myths, and canonical tales revise distorted plots and project female experience from the feminist perspectives by erasing patriarchal canons of literature and mapping newer gendered tales from a woman's perspective. In Donoghue's, "The Tale of the Needle" in *Kissing the Witch*, the girl remembers how she never worked at home and just walked in the kitchen ten minutes before dinner and her parents never liked to see their girl crossed. "The day I was born, they lifted me into my father's hands, and he roared out so all could hear: This is my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased (169).

The feminist appropriation of canonical philosophers in unearthing the authority of women is evident in *The Fragility of Goodness* by Martha Nussbaum. Cynthia Freeland, the American philosopher of Art, argues that feminist appropriation is politically oppressive. The two claims to feminism presented in feminist fairy tales that the Feminist Normative raises concerns on how women ought to be viewed and treated based on the justice meted out to all sexes as having equal rights and respect as

empowering. Feminist Descriptive claims suggest that feminism is not just intellectual but political too and that women are disadvantaged with respect to equality and rights. These topics are taken up for academic scholarship and rational discourse in the select texts.

Gender based discrimination intersects with socio-economic status, inequality, ethnicity, disability, geographical location and sexual orientation. They redefine gender boundaries and gender roles. The select texts echo how new realisation dawns when the histories of pain, violence and deprivation translate into strong spirits and evolve into powerful identities when gender boundaries are redefined. The tales mourns the plight of the third world subaltern women and talks of the “effaced” itinerary of the subaltern subjects and comments that the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. Gendered violence is also debated as in “The Tale of the Voice” in *Kissing the Witch*, where the protagonist moans, “I stayed through the winter, long enough to fill a jar with my tears. The taste reminded me of the sea. I never thought I would miss the smell of it, but finally come spring, I did. I didn’t know how to send a message; all I knew was the way home. The days of walking were like knives under my feet” (201).

The signature of feminist fairy tale scholarship include studies that incorporate a search for poetics, personal integration, search for values, quest for identity and humdrum monotony that mars the sensual descriptions of women’s erotic vocabulary against women, the beauty of man-woman relationship, contemporary urban life, Indian and foreign milieu, and alienation that recur in the select works. In *Feminist Fables*, Namjoshi, revolts against the definition of ‘woman’ in a patriarchal set up. “A Moral Tale” validates the social antipathy to lesbian love relationship. The feminine beast who loves Beauty is the object of derision. Literature and life uphold heterosexuality where, “men loved women and women loved men, and men rode off and had all sorts of adventures and women stayed at home” (23). The Beast with its outlandish likings exists

and expires deserted and lonely. “Happy Ending” talks of drakes and ducks living according to their individualism in realms of happily ever after.

Hamilton’s supernatural tales including, “Who you!” “Macie and Boo Hag,” “Lona and the Cat Woman,” and “Malindy and the little Devil” echo womanist themes. Her folkways and legends include, “Woman and Man started,” “Luella and the Tame Parrot,” “The Mer-Woman out of the sea” and “Annie Christmas.” Her True Tales including “Millie Evans: Plantation Times”, “Lettice Boyer: From Way Back” and “Mary Lou Thorton: My family” are feminist. The select reworkings reiterate that if literature were to be meaningful, it must move beyond description and representation to inclusion through subtle didacticism.

The centring of marginality by feminist fairy tale writers engenders their works by manifesting pragmatic idealism to diagnose the cultural as regressive and one dimensional. Expressions through the phenomenological equation of self/other which necessarily tests masculine selfhood upon feminine otherness decentres socially dominant discourses of power to work towards celebrating consciousness raising to forge a new individual and collective identity for women. Gender as a multi-level phenomenon shapes identities and behavioural dispositions of the individual to subvert the social order and change the skies where women dominate. In *Feminist Fables* “I See You for What You Are” elucidates the theme of satirically caustic re-writing. The bosom friendship of Viola dressed as a page and the love-lorn Viola is reworked by Namjoshi with lesbian possibilities with the query, would that have been wrong? (91).

The predicament of the silenced self, the lives of different genders in prisons, the vagrant lullabies of the ‘other sex,’ tales of supernatural, the conceptualisation of feminist theory, the questions of the distorted rainbow, the theme of fulfilment and unfulfillment of love, conflicting emotions and the candour of a woman in dealing with her desires and

dreams are the topics of the canonical reworked tales. Trampled by the whimsical nature of men, the feminist fairy tales are lives of the obdurate literary journey of powerful women. Hamilton says, “Power that came not from my own thin body or my own taut mind but was invested in me by a village. Power, I had to learn how to pick up without getting burnt, how to shape it and conceal it and flaunt it and use it, and when to ease it, and when to still my breath and do nothing at all” (213- 14).

The social and political constraints and suppressed voices in feminist fairy tales depict illusion versus disillusion, feminine emotional outrage against the conflicting role of chauvinistic imperialism, culture versus secularism, self-perception versus social attributes, the binary opposition of male versus female, conservatism versus modernism, tradition versus scepticism and the creative versus the metaphysical in the select texts. This proves how paradigmatic proportions of gender and sexual power are expressions of the unceasing labour to work towards a goal. Women solve the problems of humanity by overthrowing patriarchal lineage. The continuum that women’s politics is depicted in life and literature is projected. The psycho-dynamics of women in feminist fairy tales in the feminist context adopts the form of a quintessentially personal, idiosyncratic, infuriation of bewildering the reader in a subtle manner through toppling gender norms.

Postmodernism addresses the psychodynamics of women and how the techniques of postmodernism are subversive of established literary practices that dabble in experiences placed on the cultural, moral and social periphery. In *The Moon Ribbon*, post coloniality is historically constituted by a release of cultural and material forces of change to resurrect ‘otherisation’ of a created space by the dominant elite. Ontology of a postcolonial subjecthood transmutes the colonial subjectivity through its cultural practices. Hence colonised subjectivity creates a new set of power relations to dispel the hegemonistic colonial discourse. The sexed subjecthood of the female in a hegemonic

discourse presents the instability of patriarchal and heterosexual meaning systems of a colonialisised space.

Helen Cixous states that woman must speak from her own position, and this is well defined in the select tales. “Every woman has known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language ground and language for woman speaking—even just opening her mouth in public is something rash, a transgression”(108). She continues, “It is by writing, from and toward women and by taking up the challenges of speech which has been governed by the phallus that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence” (*The Newly Born Woman* 85).

Deciphering women narratives and how they transgress the borders of the text help women to retrieve their lost self and female identity. This theme can be connected with comprehending identity as in the contexts of border studies. The theme of initiating characters with a representative identity raises pertinent issues of the subjugation of the feminine. The Princess, The Ugly One, The Loathly Lady, She Monster, Bird Woman, Green Slave Woman and other female representations are not just characters. They are presented as wayward girls, wicked damsels, princesses, slaves, mothers, nymphs, daughters and witches. Namjoshi liberates readers from comprehending the tyranny of the stereotypical images by deciphering the ironic, didactic engagement of these tales as a path to gender justice.

The epigrams and maxims in *Sweeping Beauties*, the adages in *The Bloody Chamber* and pithy short maxims in *Feminist Fables* are stylistic features of fabular literature which blend wit and wisdom to rework gender concerns and demolish polarities of power politics. The epigrammatic, pithy, aphoristic fables are cryptic of Virginia

Hamilton and exemplify the fantastical discourses through meaning making. Thus, the themes of women's emancipation from the family, society and patriarchy are echoed in the texts. The textual celebration of hegemonic heterogeneity is juxtaposed with the female canon. The psychodynamics of women calls for an "openness to the continuing deferral of cultural identity" (Ashcroft 23).

Women are the repositories of cultural wisdom and cultural heritage. That marriage does not guarantee safety or a clear identity to women and that it makes unreasonable demands on the woman, is discussed. Marriage is oppressive, restrictive and though motherhood binds the woman to the family, it is the site of sexual debates and sufferings of the trauma of social identity and pain. In "The Doll", Namjoshi discusses how a boy breaks the doll which the girls named Bristle Boy. "The boy gets mad. He smashes the doll. The two little girls get very angry. They would like very much to smash the boy. But they say to themselves that the boy is fragile. They pick up the sticks and start over" (30). Thus, the gendered inversions and reworkings subvert the canonical tales.

Nation and gender are interlinked as a social phenomenon. Women are delegated the responsibility of biological and cultural reproduction of the nation in the feminist fairy tales. While the fairy tales question women as a decorative sex and eulogised virginity as noble and glorious, the feminist fairy tale texts, particularly the feminist fairy tale films echo new technologies to challenge traditional humanism, because bodies become technologies to be held in reserve. The use of technology, techno-scientific progress, genetic engineering, bioengineering, body sculpting, cosmetic surgery, conversation of non-human animal bodies, humanistic universalism, animal rights, end of Anthropocene, crackers replacing humanity, bioengineered humanoids and other concepts of post humanism offer a new epistemology that is not anthropocentric or centred in Cartesian

dualism. It undermines traditional boundaries between human, animal and technical expertise and can offer newer readings in the genre.

Technological humanism as an umbrella term that includes posthumanism, transhumanism, liberal humanism, democratic transhumanism, the heterogeneous landscape of anti-humanism, fields of object-oriented ontology, post humanities and meta humanities which postulate newer insights in subverting fairy tales in different contexts. Probably these topics and themes could be incorporated into the feminist fairy tale genre to illustrate the blurring of gender boundaries in the post gendered post human society. The feminist fairy tales could be an insight to develop tales based on critical posthumanism. *Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* by Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway's, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism" could enhance the quality and dimensions of feminist fairy tale scholarship and fairy tale research. Feminist fairy tale scholarship through feminist research methodology presents the self-construction of gender politics and gender relations and articulates women's gendered experiences in patriarchal society. This has resulted in the concept of sisterhood and women's bonding as is seen in the select tales. Women's bonding is non-linear, non-hierarchical and intimate like the mother daughter bonding, that expresses the domestic, aesthetic and psychoanalytic notion of the feminine as nonbinary.

Feminine values combined with patriarchal ideals deal with depicting the problems of domestic labour, marriage, alienation and widowhood as in *Sweeping Beauties* in "The Fairy Godmother," who says that every man wants a woman who will deport herself with dignity. "A woman who is able to entertain his guests, rule his household and bear his children. A man likes 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).

The feminist fairy tales question the continuous evolution of gender issues, gender myths, gender needs and gender development to explain how gendered-isms have resulted in questioning the feminist myths in life, learning and literature. It recognises the humanity of both women and men because neither matriarchy nor patriarchy. Contrary to a new leadership of gender, a new gender of leadership beyond gender restrictions become relevant. In “The Tale of the Hair,” the female protagonist says, “I took her head on my chest and wept over her, salt in her wounded eyes. It was the only way I knew how to clean them. I didn’t know whether they would heal, or whether she would have to learn the world from me now. We lay there, waiting to see what we would see” (99).

The present study leads to the fact that texts are gendered and examines how gender is less determined by nature than it is by culture. Feminist fairy tales evaluate hegemonic gender ideologies in culture and question the paradoxes of feminism through the deployment of iconic images of women. The social inequalities of patriarchal culture where the archetype of the ideal woman as mother, wife and homemaker are a décor in contrast to the desire of a woman for academic emancipation is expressed in the reworked tales. *Kissing the Witch*, echoes, “You’re not child enough for your mother nor woman enough for your father. You don’t work or play or think as they would have you work and play and think” (220). The questions of feminist praxis, social feminism, political power, gendered division of labour, inseparability of sexuality from politics and the centrality of textuality to a “larger culture of politics” interlock and entrap dichotomy of immorality and chastity to circumscribe women’s participation in the socio-political arena. The politics of subservience must be crushed and bastions of power stormed in all the select feminist fairy tale texts. Carter, in *The Bloody Chamber* contrasts the ideal female (birds)

and the actual female (protagonist) and echoes how the protagonist recognised her feminine qualities, and how “when he shakes out those two clear notes from his bird call, I come, like any other trusting thing that perches on the crook of his wrist” (343).

Gender stratification encompasses the entire gamut of women in all societies. The tales reflect that gender inequality is not an episodic, ephemeral, situational phenomenon and that gendering is a socio-cultural reality. In Namjoshi’s inversion of “The Princess and the Pea” the “exceptionally charming sensitivity” was “absolutely amazing” despite the empathetic nature of the princess. The reworking of old texts underlines the celebration of women and gender to celebrate gender autonomy from all bonds of patriarchy. The articulation of women’s experiences, the expression of the maternal instinct of women, voicing gender discrimination and gendered identity by women, depiction of mother-daughter relationships in female bonding and restoring the primacy of matrilineage, gender discrimination, marginalisation and articulating the exploitation of the female by the patriarchal social order are the relevant themes of the select texts.

Thus, bridging the gap between fairy tales and feminist fairy tales, the researcher understands the changing patterns of man-woman relationships in these texts with reference to gender. Women seek dignity, recognition, individuality, empowerment and emancipation through self-strength and equality. Civilisation is a thin veneer and women have a lot to achieve. Have women achieved self-worth and success as fine humanitarians and as good sensitive human beings? The thesis thereby wraps up the strength, metier and resilience of women as highfliers with the query as to whether women have worked towards the development of the inner self by working towards the theme of ‘beyond gender.’ This is in itself a challenge to celebrating women in life and literature.