TOWARDS A FEMINIST UTOPIA: A CASE STUDY OF SUNITI NAMJOSHI'S FEMINIST FABLES & THE MOTHERS OF MAYA DIIP

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This may be placed before the examiners for the evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation entitled "**Towards A Feminist Utopia: A Case Study of Suniti Namjoshi's Feminist Fables and The Mothers of Maya Diip**" submitted by me, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any degree or diploma of any University.

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Dedicated

to my parents...

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1

INTRODUCTION

Well, let's tell the truth.
The cat charmed me.
The tree disarmed me
And though the real people
hadn't yet harmed me,
I thought that they would
given the chance.

(Namjoshi, 1991)

Introducing Suniti Namjoshi as a writer of the Indian Diaspora presently settled in England would only serve as a cursory sketch of the creator of a vast range of poetry, fables, and fiction. In fact, the large number of her works marked by her alternate forms, open-mindedness and unorthodox standpoint make her, a writer opposed to all forms of classification and categorization. Namjoshi's abandonment of authoritative positions and her declaration of her lesbian reality facilitate her personal and creative growth. Rejection of prestigious positions led her to investigate the nature of all modes of dominance – of class, race, gender and nationality and transgress them thereafter. This transgression becomes her key concern and with stylistic wit and inventiveness, Namjoshi offers the readers a non-conformist and deviant world through her works.

Born in Bombay, India, in 1941, Suniti Namjoshi joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1964, but soon left it. She went on to pursue a Master's degree in Public Administration at University of Missourie, Columbia. She completed her thesis on Ezra Pound at McGill University after having migrated to Montreal in 1969. Spending some

time as a teacher at Scarborough College, University of Toronto, Namjoshi came under the influence of Christine Donald, her lesbian-feminist friend who helped her fashion her feminist ideas and ideals. She left Toronto in 1987 to permanently settle down with her lesbian partner, Gillian Hanscombe in Devon, England.

A poet, fabulist, myth-maker, fiction writer, feminist and a lesbian in the same breath, Suniti Namjoshi began her literary career with a book of poetry Poems published by the Writers Workshop, Calcutta in 1967. After this, she published numerous poems, fables, articles and reviews in India, Canada, United States and Britain. Poems was followed by Cyclone in Pakistan and More Poems in 1971, also published in India. Namjoshi then wrote The Jackass and the Lady in Canada between 1972 and 1976 which was published in India. Her first work published outside India was a collection of poems about death and childhood grief, The Authentic Lie in 1982. Feminist Fables (1981) and The Conversations of Cow (1985) were published in London. By this time, Namjoshi had recognized her ideological and political position as a lesbian and a feminist and had made it apparent in her works. Feminist Fables is a prose work containing fables with animals and figures from Western and Indian fables and folklore, teaching human beings lessons regarding their behaviour and actions. The Conversations of Cow concerns freewheeling identities of a lesbian cow named Bhadravati transforming into a woman, a white man and a Hindu goddess.

Retelling traditional tales to propose her feminist agenda becomes the prime motif of Feminist Fables which picks up several voices – of Cinderella, Rapunzel and the Red Riding Hood and of From the Bedside Book of Nightmares with voices of Caliban, Prospero, Miranda, Antigone and Penelope to comment on the victimization of women in

heterosexual patriarchal supremacy. In 1986, Namjoshi published a collection of poetry Flesh and Paper to give voice to her lesbian reality. The Blue Donkey Fables followed in 1980 containing fables full of animals – the blue donkey, the one-eyed monkey, the magpie and others to satirize human frailties and weaknesses.

Because of India: Selected Poems and Fables and The Mothers of Maya Diip were published in London in 1989. The former is divided into ten sections, including poems and prose fables and the author's comments and views on them. The Mothers of Maya Diip, finally introduces us, to her vision of a feminist utopia, a dream of a matriarchal world where goodwill, peace and sisterhood will prevail. Apart from these, Namjoshi has written Aditi and the One-Eyed Monkey (1986) and Saint Suniti and the Dragon (1994). Building Babel (1996) and Goja: An Autobiographical Myth (2000) are her latest contributions to the literary scene.

Suniti Namjoshi's use of fantasy, myth-making and fabulation have enabled her to postulate the lesbian-feminist perspective developed over the years of her stay in United States, Canada and Great Britain. The influence of her contemporary Canadian feminists engaged in their efforts of changing the status quo by reworking traditional tales was deep enough to instigate her to make her contribution to the same. So, Namjoshi picked her heroines from the Indian and Western literature and moulded them as strong characters revolting against patriarchal subjugation.

The objective of our research is to examine Namjoshi's works, precisely fables, and to confirm that:

- Suniti Namjoshi picks up myths from Indian and Western folklore, following her Canadian feminist contemporaries, mixes different genres, to direct our attention towards her views on women's exploitation in a male-governed society.
- Her dislocation as an Indian migrating to the United States of America, to Canada, and then to Britain serves as a basis of her writing, despite her refusal to portray the immigrant experience in her works.
- Her vision of a feminist utopia is precisely lesbian-oriented.

Therefore, we have divided this dissertation into four large chapters to explicate lesbian-feminist theory and Suniti Namjoshi's feminist viewpoint. The first and the foremost chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to the analysis of the issues and debates proposed by English Canadian lesbian and feminist theorists and writers. The chapter begins with defining 'Feminism' as a state of protest against the women on social, economic and ideological grounds. Further, we have expounded the feminist literary theory beginning with the first voice raised for the cause of women in Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women in 1792 to the evolution of various forms of feminisms – Liberal Feminism, French Feminism, Radical Feminism, Cultural Feminism, Socialist Feminism, Lesbian Feminism and so on. The main emphasis of this chapter is the sketching of the Feminist movement in Canada. The central section traces the history of the women's movement in the 'first wave' with the development of 'Institutionalized Feminism' and 'Grass-roots Feminism'. We have also shown the rise of feminist groups that took concrete shape in the 'second wave' as Socialist, Liberal, Cultural, and Radical Feminisms. An important section of the chapter is dedicated to the evolution and growth

of Lesbian Feminism, of lesbian groups such as LOOT and National Lesbian Forum.

The second chapter of the dissertation elucidates the presence of patriarchal norms and attitudes in traditional fairy tales and fables. Here, we break the notion that fairy and folk tales are innocent stories passed on to children and show their adverse impact of creating a patriarchal hegemonic world within them. We point out that Feminists in Canada strive to break the stereotypical projections of women and expose the 'sexist criticism' in literature. To illustrate this, we analyze the reworking of myths, fables, and fairy tales by Canadian Feminist writers such as Virginia Lee Hines, Elizabeth Greene and Pauline Rankin.

The third unit of the dissertation focusses on the Indian and Western influence as reflected in Suniti Namjoshi's works. In the tradition of the Canadian feminist writers, Suniti Namjoshi picks up conventional 'pickled' and 'preserved' heroines and inverts their portrayals to authenticate her lesbian-feminist identity. We also assess carefully that Suniti's Indian roots permeate her writing despite her refusal to depict the dilemma of being an Indian in alien surroundings. In the last chapter, we study in detail the two significant texts, Feminist Fables and The Mothers of Maya Diip by Suniti Namjoshi to critically view her depiction of the oppression of women in heterosexual patriarchy and her proposed solution of a lesbian feminist utopia. Finally, we conclude the dissertation with proving that Suniti Namjoshi's lesbianism is manifested in her fables and prose fiction through the projection of a separatist ideology.

2

CANADIAN LESBIAN-FEMINIST THEORY

There are many strong voices; there are many kinds of strong voices. Surely there should be room for all. Does it make sense to silence women in the name of woman? We can't afford this silencing, or this fear.

(Margaret Atwood, 1990)

A) Feminism – An Introduction

Any study of Feminist literary theory should begin with defining or stating what 'Feminism' is. Various definitions have been proposed, yet no concrete definition has precisely emerged. It has been used as an umbrella term to describe those women and men who feel the need to fight against the oppression of women on social, economic, and ideological grounds, as Jeremy Hawthorn puts it, in A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory. Elaine Showalter in A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing suggests a different usage of the inter-related terms 'Feminine', 'Feminist', and 'Female'. To quote her words:

> First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages, *Feminine, Feminist,* and *Female.*[1]

For Toril Moi, 'Femaleness' is a biological fact, 'Femininity', a set of culturally defined attributes, and 'Feminism', a political position.[2]

What is Feminism then? It is a phase of protest; protest against the ill- treatment meted out to women because of the fact that they are women, the men's 'Other', in Simone de Beauvoir's words. Feminist writers and critics, then, are women as well as men, striving for that utopian state where both the sexes will be treated equally, where women will be in a position to assert and affirm their self rather than being defined as the Other. Once again, whether this 'Promised Land' is the aim of feminism forms yet another issue that has been debated time and again. Some feminist writers uphold the view that no such land is possible. In fact, the goal of feminist struggle is not equality only. Rather it stresses that equality should be accompanied with the realization that men and women are different. Neither is subservient to the other. The realization of this fact, in society, religion, law, and culture is the ultimate aim of feminism. Men need to comprehend that women have not been born to serve them; Eve was not carved out for Adam's company alone. Women are individuals; they are different human beings. They must have a much better status in society than they really have. It is the acceptance of these facts that feminism and feminist activists struggle for.

Feminist criticism, then, throws light on the fact that women have not only been denied a status in society, but have also been deprived of it in literature and history as well. Feminist criticism tries to do a feminist reading, a reading by the feminists that looks at the various images of women depicted in literature, whether it is the angel or the monster, Sati-Savitri or Kali. It projects the psyche of the women as reader. It studies women as writers, and looks at their history, themes, styles etc., exclusively termed as 'Gynocritics' by Elaine Showalter.

Feminist criticism exposes the sexist criticism or "phallic criticism" in literature as termed by Mary Ellman. It shows how the books or literature by male critics and writers as an examination of their body parts. She says, "books by women are treated as though they themselves were women, and criticism embarks, at its happiest upon an intellectual measuring of busts and hips."[3] Feminist criticism rejects and exposes such sexist bias in literature as well. As a discipline, it does not exist in isolation. It draws upon various schools of thought such as Marxism, Psycho-analysis, Structuralism, Existentialism, Deconstruction and so on, which can be seen in the readings of the major feminist writers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Kate Millett and many more.

The first voice in modern times raised in favour of women's rights was in 1792 with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women, where she argues for women's education and their protection by law. She demands that women should be treated as human beings:

> Dismissing then, those petty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence, and despising that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners, supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel. I wish to show that elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex, and that secondary views should be brought to this simple touchstone.[4]

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was assumed that the place of women was at home, as wives and mothers. With the industrial revolution, women

became all the more confined to homes as only men went outside to earn. The male liberal theorists of the eighteenth century advocated that women should restrict themselves to familial cares only. Mary Wollstonecraft and other feminist theorists argued that women were citizens, human beings who should enjoy the same basic rights as men. Wollstonecraft contended that women should cultivate their powers of critical thinking that will, in turn, enable them to develop their souls. **Liberal feminists** following her urged that the laws made by men are deliberate attempts at crushing women's individuality. In 1869, John Stuart Mill again raised the issue of women's rights in The Subjection of Women. Mill, not only fought for education of women but also for individual liberty and freedom. Mill used the utilitarian philosophy of the 'greatest good for the greatest number' to justify that if women are liberated, half the human race is liberated and happiness to women will bring the highest happiness to mankind.

Feminism, as a movement, however, began in the 1960s with the granting of the franchise to women. The publication of Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique in 1963 took the American society by storm. Friedan defined feminism as:

> My definition of feminism is simply that women are people in the fullest sense of the word, who must be free to move in society with all the privileges and opportunities and responsibilities that are their human...right.[5]

Women participated in the civil rights movement and formed their own liberation groups to extend their protest against subservience to men. By 1970, women's organizations such as NOW (National Organization for Women) were set up for fighting their own battle- for self-fulfillment and identity in a male-governed society.

The pioneering works: Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own (1927), Mary Ellman's Thinking About Women (1968), and Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1969) sowed the first seeds of feminist writing and criticism. The major aim of the feminist critic was to fight for a social and political change, for a better status and equal rights for women in the society.

Woolf in her A Room of One's Own hoped for a separate space for women, where they can use their creative potential. She pointed out that feminism is a fight against male tyranny in the patriarchal set-up that disparages women. Women have been looked down upon by men in order to prove their heroic stature. They have served as looking glasses in which men see themselves twice their natural size. Women need to enhance their creative and critical powers if they want to change the value system.

On the one hand, Mary Ellman exposed the sexist or "phallic criticism" in literature, and on the other hand, Kate Millett revealed the 'sexual politics' in society. Millett proved that patriarchy has always been a mode of domination and a display of 'sexual politics'. Her definition of 'sexual politics' is "the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex."[6] Thus, patriarchy has denied women basic human rights and laid a certain code of conduct that makes them subservient and subordinate to men.

In the early 1970s, a majority of courses offered at colleges were centered on presenting the 'images of women' in literature. A collection of essays by various feminists entitled Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives exposed female stereotypes in male writing. In 1971 Elaine Showalter argued that the focus of feminist criticism should be exclusively on women's writing. In the late 1970s, three major works appeared on the literary scene that caused a lot of furore: Ellen Moers' The Literary Women, Elaine Showalter's A Literature of Their Own, and Sandra

Gilbert and Susan Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic. Moers' book reflected that women's writing is not a sub-group in the history of literature. According to her, women have been largely excluded from the canon and in order to understand the history of literature, one must know the history of women's writing as well.

Showalter, on the other hand, contended that women have never had a concrete 'movement' in literature as they have made renewed attempts in finding a position in society with every generation. She recorded the three stages, the 'feminine', the 'feminist', and the 'female' in the historical development of women's writing. For her, the feminine period began with the appearance of women writers using male pseudonyms in 1840s till the death of George Eliot in 1880. The feminist phase was from 1880 to 1920, a state of protest for rights, and the female stage from 1920 onwards, with a new turn in the 1960s, a phase of self-discovery.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar indicated that women have not enjoyed the freedom to create their own images in literature, as they have had to conform to the patriarchal norms. Women's images as the angel and the monster, the sweet heroine and the madwoman, are all products of male fantasy as creativity is considered predominantly a man's domain. These two feminists wished that their book will enable them to retrieve the lost 'female unity, and create a better world for women.

Whereas Elaine Showalter, Mary Ellman, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and others contributed to the feminist movement in the United States, the theories proposed by Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and others brought revolution in France. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir published her The Second Sex and revealed how women have been objectified by men, constructed as their 'Other' and denied their subjectivity. Patriarchal ideology has reduced them to 'inauthentic' objects, which needs to be changed. She writes:

> In my definition, feminists are women- or even men, too – who are fighting to change women's condition, in association with the class struggle, but independent of it as well, without making the changes they strive for totally dependent on changing the society as a whole.[7]

The **French Feminism** was born with the student revolt of May 1968 in Paris. Following the example of their American sisters, women in France formed women-only groups such as 'Psychanalyse et Politique'. Freudian psychoanalysis became their basis of the feminist struggle in exploring the unconscious of women with the publication of Juliet Mitchell's Psychoanalysis and Feminism in 1974. Between 1975 and 1977 Helene Cixous published a lot of theoretical works translated into English as The Laugh of the Medusa, Castration and decapitation and so on. For Cixous, feminists are women who strive for social legitimization. Cixous analyzed that in mainly all the binary oppositions, Activity/Passivity, Father/Mother, Head/Emotions, Intelligible/Sensitive, the underlying opposition is of Man/Woman and woman has been attributed with passivity and powerlessness. In her utopian vision, women will get rid of this logocentric ideology that silences women and will become creative in a non-oppressive and non-sexist society. She also opposed the term *ecriture feminine* or 'feminine writing' as terms like 'feminine' or 'masculine' are rooted in the sexual difference between women and men. For her, the writing was more significant than the sex of the author.

In the 1970s, another feminist theorist shot to fame in France by linking psychoanalysis and feminism. Luce Irigaray, a psychoanalyst by profession, produced a number of theoretical writings which included The Language of Dementia, This Sex Which is not One, and Speculum of the Other Woman. Following Freudian

psychoanalysis, she pointed out that what women are considered to be lacking is the sex organ, the penis, which is the symbol of power. So, she is posited as man's 'other', an 'other' who is absent, negative, or at best, a lesser man. Her subjectivity is repressed in the patriarchal discourse and like Woolf's looking glass, she becomes a mirror for his own masculinity. Irigaray held that women are not equal, but different to men. They must fight, not for equality, but for a separate space in society. She spoke of a specific woman's language, which she called *'le parler femme'* or 'womanspeak'. If women want to change the existing order, they need to unite and form women-only groups to voice their inner feelings and desires outside patriarchy.

While Irigaray sought a language for women, Kristeva exposed the sexism in language. In Man Made Language, Dale Spender asserts that:

> The English language has been literally man made and...it is still primarily under male control....This monopoly over language is one of the means by which males have ensured their own primacy, and consequently have ensured the invisibility or 'other' nature of females, and this primacy is perpetuated while women continue to use, unchanged the language which we have inherited.[8]

For Irigaray, femininity is that which is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order. Therefore, women are perceived as 'feminine' or subverted and marginalized by the social order and even language becomes a tool of this subversion.

The end of the twentieth century marked the emergence of various feminisms. During 1970, a group of **radical feminists** emerged such as Shulamith Firestone, Eva Figes, Juliet Mitchell, and Ann Oakley, who believed that sex is the prime basis of

discrimination. Shulamith Firestone, Anne Koedt, Diane Crothers and Cellestine Ware issued a manifesto entitled "The Politics of the Ego" in 1969 articulating the view "that women's oppression is rooted primarily in psychological, not economic, factors."[9] Barbara Burris and other radical feminists, in their essay "The Fourth World Manifesto" contended that women all over the world form a caste which is "colonized" by male "imperialism". Women have been suppressed and their liberation is only possible if they organize as women. Burris added "we identify with all women all races, classes and countries all over the world. The female culture is the Fourth World."[10]

It was Kate Millett's Sexual Politics and Shulamith Firestone's The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution that fully articulated the radical feminist theory. Millett pointed out that family is the origin of patriarchal subjugation. Family lays down prescribed attitudes of role, temperament, and status of women when they are young and such values are embedded forever. Man has the symbol of power biologically and therefore rules over the woman. So the basic biological difference of 'sex' becomes the social phenomena of 'gender' difference. Institutions like marriage and love should be discarded by women as they promote dependence on men and persecution of women and prevent women from developing their personality.

Radical feminism is, therefore, a journey or a process of "women becoming". It is a voyage from this world to another world where women will be able to free themselves from the demons of patriarchy. This power of "women becoming" is termed as 'gynergy' or women's energy by Mary Daly. So the radical feminists ask women not to submit to men. They have their own lives to live and should even consider childbirth as voluntary.

Radical feminism gave birth to various forms of feminisms, the earliest being Cultural Feminism. As early as at the end of the nineteenth century a group of women went beyond women's rights to a broader cultural transformation. These women were labeled as cultural feminists who fought for the preservation of female virtues, similar to Virginia Woolf's Outsider's Society in Three Guineas. **Cultural feminism** initiated with Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century. Fuller believed that women must seek self-reliance and freedom from all kinds of bondage in a patriarchal society. She promoted the idea of female bonding and self-discovery:

> Women must leave off asking [men] and being influenced by them, but retire within themselves, and explore the groundwork of life till they find their peculiar secret. Then, when they come forth again, renovated and baptized, they will know how to turn all dross to gold.[11]

Cultural feminists today argue that women are not only denied opportunities and responsibilities in the work-place, but also that their ideas are perceived as 'stupid' or "childish'. Another cultural feminist, Stanton pointed out that the feminine and masculine elements were united in one person previously and to re-unite them, one needs to pray to a "Heavenly Mother' in addition to the 'Heavenly Father'. These feminists do not consider the source of this difference between men and women as biological, but cultural. If both women and men seek a humane worldview where these destructive masculine ideologies are negated, the world will surely become a better place to live in. Just as women preserve these feminine virtues or women's culture at home, they can revolutionize the public sphere with these values as well.

In the 1980s, the coloured women formed their own group called the **Black feminists**, who condemned the radical feminists to be racists. Black feminists railed against the women's movement that primarily fought for the interests of the white women. They believed that their experiences were different from those of the white women and these differences could not be ignored. Black feminists formed their own groups such as the Combahee River Collective and were concerned with the establishment of a feminism that would include race, ethnicity and class differences along with sex as the basis of their analysis of oppression of women.

Black feminists revealed how black women have been victims of exploitation and objectification more than the white women have. Noted black feminist Beale showed that they have been physically raped and compelled to serve as the white woman's servant and maid when her own children were starving. Bell Hooks exposed the myth of matriarchy in black women that single women head a majority of black families. This led white women to assume black women as servile nurses in their homes. The black woman has served as the 'other' in a white patriarchal society who needs to be gazed at, and even empowered, as she is inferior both in sex as well as in race. Writings such as Gloria Joseph's "Ain't I A Woman?", Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua's edited This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour contributed to the black feminist movement.

Another important aspect of black feminism was the concern for retaining their racial and ethnic roots. Alice Walker's article, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" was the first step in preserving the culture and history of their mothers. The Black feminists had to choose between a white patriarchal world and a brown matriarchal world and this choice in favour of the latter was at the heart of their struggle.

Like the women of colour, lesbians felt that they are double victims of oppression- of being women as well as homosexuals. Contemporary **lesbian feminism** first emerged with the theories laid down by the "Radicalesbians", a New York group in their article "The Woman Identified Woman". They defined 'lesbian' as the:

> rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman, who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society...cares to allow her.[12]

In 1969 and 1970, Martha Shelley urged that the lesbian should be viewed as a model of the independent women. Women, therefore, need to develop their identity with reference to themselves and not to men. They have to be "womanidentified", love women and support women in an environment devoid of men. Every lesbian is a feminist, for she protests against all forms of male bondage and takes responsibility for her own actions.

Lesbian feminists also focussed on retrieving their own history, showing relationships between women prevalent in literature. Caroll Smith-Rosenberg and Lillian Faderman have traced such friendships between nineteenth century American women and Renaissance women respectively. The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, in "The Case Against Heterosexuality" proposed the utopian model for lesbians based on separatism as a final solution to the problems of women in a male-governed society. They contended that women have to overthrow the male system and withdraw from it for good.

Whereas the cultural feminists adapted a totally pacifist approach in the conversion of society, and the radical feminists fumed with anger, the liberal feminists felt that women should take equal participation in all walks of life, even war, as men. The

contemporary **liberal feminists** toil for freedom of enjoyment of women's rights and opportunities. They uphold the view that it is the biological determinism of women as socially inferior, that they are suited to certain kinds of work and not fit for others or their 'feminine' traits, which are the reasons for this discrimination. Women are given low wages in service and are considered solely responsible for childcare and household work, due to which they are denied opportunities in other spheres of life. They are viewed as sex objects and are restrained in their dress and behaviour. They are prohibited from wandering in public spaces for fear of sexual assault. Patriarchy limits their intellectual faculties as they are said to be safer at home and are denied permission to get exposed to public life. Feminists of this group aim at freeing women from this tyrannical dependent status in a patriarchal society. They fight for the inclusion of women as decision-makers – at home, in the work place and in all political matters. Justice and equal rights regardless of gender and liberation of women from all kinds of sexual and economic dependence is the goal of liberal feminism.

Apart from the radical and liberal feminists a group of feminists emerged who called themselves the **Socialist feminists** who upheld that women's subordination is rooted in a class-divided society. If women want to acquire a better standing in society, they need to fight against patriarchy and capitalism. Capitalism is rooted in the philosophy of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the ruler and the ruled. Man in a capitalist society represents the former and woman represents the latter. Socialist feminists following Simone de Beauvoir wished for a social change where women will enjoy a defined and definite status in the public sphere. Women in their vision of a socialist society will contribute as wage earners to the household and also demand division of labour at home. Women's work at home has never been considered valuable and

worthy of wages. So, women have been given the inferior position. Money is the source of power in a capitalist economy and since man earns money, he becomes powerful and makes a display of it in front of the woman. Socialist feminists like Eli Zaretsky, Ann Foreman, Zillah Eisentein and others emphasized that since capitalism perceives women as guardians of human values and men as workers, their first task is to abolish capitalism.

Women have been producers and contributors to society, which, in turn, becomes their source of victimization along with their role as child-bearer. So, contemporary socialist feminists urge that women must demand their rights and privileges as mothers and carriers of cultural values. They strive for a women's culture rooted in women's experience and practice that will enable women to build a society free from all forms of patriarchal and class-based oppression. To conclude this section in the words of the socialist feminists Ann Ferguson and Nancy Folbre's words:

> the establishment of a self-defined revolutionary *feminist women's culture* which can be ideologically and materially support women "outside patriarchy." Counter-hegemonic cultural and material support networks can provide woman-identified substitutes for patriarchal...production.[14]

B) Feminist Movement In Canada

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman", said Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex. The becoming of a woman, the process whereby a female discovers her self, her womanhood, her search for her identity and its assertion, has been discussed and reasoned out by feminists, time and again. Feminists argue that women have not enjoyed the same status, equal rights, and the same privileges as men since

time immemorial. From her childhood, a girl is taught to be submissive and docile. When she grows up, she is made to leave her mother and live with her husband. She is made to live economically and emotionally dependent on the other gender, Man. Earlier, her father dictates her life and later her husband. Religion makes him, her guardian and law, makes him the owner of the property. In this process, her identity is completely lost. Neither the state nor religion takes her aspirations, desires, and comforts into account while laying down the law. Thus, the goal of feminism is equal rights to both the sexes. Feminists help in making women realize that their only function in society is not to reproduce children, but also to manifest their desires, do some intellectual and creative work, and so on. They have an equal right to remain women, as men have to remain men.

Such are the issues raised, discussed, and analyzed by the feminist writers and activists in Canada. Women and feminist writers in Canada have witnessed a marked transformation in the attitude of men regarding their position in society and literature. Previously, women were tutored to behave properly, to be good wives, and to act like 'women' with the attributes of being humble, docile, meek, even weak and stupid. They were not permitted to debate on issues like Abortion, Lesbianism, Incest and so on. They were told not to fly or run. With the advent of the feminist movements in the 1960s and the 1970s the scenario changed. Feminist writing encouraged women to become active, to become women, and to become intellectually and emotionally aware of their rights and duties. Women in Canada began going to universities in order to read and write. They began to understand how women have been suppressed, oppressed, and repressed in society. They realized how writing by women has been condemned as weak, subjective, confessional and narcissistic. They saw how women writers in the other parts of the world were denied the pleasures of a happy family

life. They had to make their choices, set their priorities: to write or lead a life of a housewife. Efforts made by the feminists in Canada made things change. Women began questioning the roles of the two sexes in society. They began asserting themselves and no longer felt reluctant in discussing things openly. They began exposing social taboos and started writing boldly about their experiences. Margaret Atwood remarks in an article entitled " If you can't say something Nice, Don't say Anything At All" that:

> Women of my generation were told only to hobble with our high heels and our panty girdles on. We were told endlessly: *thou shalt not.* We don't need to hear it again, and especially not for women. Feminism has done many good things for many women writers, but surely the most important has been the permission to say the unsaid, to encourage women to claim their full humanity, which means acknowledging the shadows as well as the lights.[15]

Thus, Feminism in Canada marks a struggle for such strong voices that can enable women to get rid of their fears and apprehensions and protest against the silencing of women in the name of women. It becomes a movement enabling women to express their feelings openly. The feminists state that patriarchy has played a very crucial role in making women afraid of men and denying them their identity and status. Women grow up emotionally, financially, and sexually dependent on men. Feminism advocates the overthrow of such fears and helps women to make forward steps in the path of their emancipation. Since time immemorial, men have dictated what women should do, think, feel, want, and need. Women must try and make amends, as Anne Cameron, a noted Canadian women writer puts it:

> I know... that patriarchy condones and encourages the physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse of children to ensure that we all grow up frightened and afraid to trust others. I am convinced we cannot 'repair' or 'fix' the present system, and must openly advocate the overthrow of the bullshit. To me, that is feminism.[16]

What does, then, a feminist text do to a reader? How does a feminist reader react to such a text? Such questions also form a crucial aspect of feminist criticism in Canada. When a reader enters a piece of writing that is feminist, she tries to understand the writer's life, the experiences of the main protagonist, and tries to identify her biological identity with the other women. She attempts at unraveling the hidden meaning in the text and learns to look at the text with a new critical direction. "Acknowledging this rich silence informing the female text is to validate our experience as women", says Barbara Godard. Feminist criticism points out that women's fictions thus raise theoretical issues and challenges the traditional notions about women and their creative potential. Once again, in Barbara Godard's words:

> women's (re)writing interrupts conventional meanings of 'fiction' and 'theory' which assign different truth values to discourses. Established meanings become suspect: the theory as fiction, fictionalysis, advances narrative truths, partial, provisional, making no claims to universality. This incites the reader to rethink her/his presence within 'social reality' and disturbs those constructions that work at keeping us all in our 'proper' places.[17]

For a better understanding of the contributions of feminists in Canada, one needs to look at the feminist struggle in detail. In this section I shall give a detailed analysis of how women in Canada joined hands for freedom against oppression in society.

'First Wave' of Feminism

The women's movement has been one of the most significant and successful social movements in Canada. Although it is difficult to generalize the women's movement in Canada owing to its geographical and regional diversity, one can sketch out how it has taken shape and provided a drastic change in the status of women in Canada. At the core, the movement is about understanding the causes of women's oppression and uniting to make changes in the status quo. Despite this common interest, the women's movement in Canada has taken different routes and set different priorities in achieving its ends. Women all over the country have formed groups- large or small aiming at legislative and social changes. The feminist movement in Canada has taken various currents- liberal feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism and so on for providing women with economic independence, reproductive rights and a better position in society. In order to understand how the feminist movement in Canada gained impetus, we can divide the history of the movement in roughly two phases: the 'first wave' and the 'second' wave' feminism.

The contemporary women's movement in Canada originated on two different lines. On the one hand, there were women who were professionals from trained and traditional institutions who sought better opportunities for women. On the other hand, there were women from homes and universities who were mainly into raising the consciousness of other women and organizing small groups in order to educate other women of their rights. The former current, earlier known as **institutionalized**

feminism was gradually transformed into 'liberal feminism' while the latter is often referred to as **grass- roots feminism.**

The 'first wave' of feminism in Canada was seen in the earliest women's movement in which women organized together to fight for issues such as regarding suffrage, education, pregnancy and abortion rights, economic independence and so on. The first step towards a progressive woman's movement was seen in the first Canadian suffrage organization founded by Dr. Emily Howard Stowe in Toronto in 1876. Social reformers all over Canada joined hands and successfully obtained the provincial franchise by 1922. Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia got the franchise in 1916; Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island got it in 1917, 1918, 1919, and 1922 respectively. The Quebec women, however, did not get the right to vote till 1940 despite the fact that the federal franchise had been given to all women by 1918.

The granting of the suffrage marks the culmination of the 'first wave' of feminism in Canada. Yet, it was not only the right to vote that mattered to the feminists of this phase. Women remained active between 1920 and 1960 which was a transition phase from women's movement to the modern feminist movement. One of the major concerns of the feminists of this time was understanding the changing role of women as 'mothers' – a movement that is now referred to as **maternal feminism**. In the words of the maternal feminism's foremost Canadian advocate, Nellie McClung:

> The woman movement... is a spiritual revival of the best instincts of womanhood – the instinct to serve and save the race... women are naturally the guardians of the race, and every normal woman desires children...It is women's place to lift high the standard of morality.[18]

Apart from suffrage and equal rights, women need to and should consider it a moral obligation to rear children in the best manner possible in order to reform the society. And to bring in this reform, women need better facilities, reproductive rights and nurturing. The maternal feminists argued that women's role, thus becomes morally superior to men, as they are not only the guardians of the family but also of public morality at large. This great work of 'mothering' as a strong commitment on the part of women in Canada was put forward by Lady Aberdeen of the National Council of Women of Canada. This sense of moral superiority of women in society sowed the seeds of radical feminism in the 'second wave' of feminism in Canada.

The second major argument of the 'first wave' feminists was that women should enjoy equal rights as men. The focus of this group of feminists known as the **equal-rights feminists** was that human rights are universal irrespective of gender. The first expression of this struggle was seen in the efforts of the Dr. Emily Howard Stowe's Toronto Women's Literary Club in 1876 which took the name of Toronto Women's Suffrage Association in 1883. Although the prime concern of this equal-rights feminists group was the granting of suffrage, it also fought for providing improved educational opportunities to women. For this, it aided the opening of the Ontario Medical College for Women in 1883 and forcing the University of Toronto to give admission to female students in 1886. Stowe argued that woman should be "as free to choose her vocation as her brother, man, tethered by no conventionalities, enslaved by no chains either of her own or man's forging."[19]

Another noted equal-rights feminist Flora Macdonald Denison of the 'first wave' of feminism took active part in the Toronto suffrage movement and fought for birth control and divorce rights. She led the Canadian Suffrage Association from 1911 to 1914 and worked with many social reformers in the struggle for equal human rights.

She argued that "men and women should be born equally free and independent members of the human race."[20] Equal-rights feminism and the contemporary liberal feminism, thus shared the view that women should be granted equality in society – in the law, religion, family, educational system and so on.

Yet another group of feminists and activists that emerged in this phase were women who contended that women would never get equal rights, better facilities and opportunities and an improved status in society till capitalism existed. In 1910, Women's Labor League of Winnipeg was established for bringing economic reforms for women – equal wages for equal work, participation in trade-union movements, and better educational and domestic facilities. The abolition of capitalism became the main motive of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) who believed that women's freedom could only be attained if the society not only became sex-conscious but also class-conscious. In 1911 Helena Rose Gutteridge organized the B.C. Women's Suffrage League, after having migrated from London to British Columbia "to deal with all matters connected with the interests of women, particularly those that affect women out in the labour market."[21] Socialist activists such as Helena Rose Gutteridge and Edith Wrigley worked for the better working conditions and pay for women. Helena Rose actively participated in the working of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council. She joined the Federated Labour Party, the Socialist Party of Canada, and then, the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation in 1933.

The contributions of the middle-class or the working class women in this endeavour for suffrage and labour conditions are enormous. The year 1895 saw the publication of the first Winnipeg Labour Newspaper The Voice and the setting up of the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council. Equal suffrage was also endorsed by Woman's Labour League in 1910 along with the various efforts of individual activists, trade-

unionists and other middle-class suffrage organizations such as Equal Suffrage Club and the Political Equality League. **Socialist feminists** today are progressing on similar lines by enforcing improved working conditions for women.

The period also witnessed the growth of Black women activists who laid down the issues and concerns to be taken up by **Black feminists** in the 'second wave' later. Black women and other women of colour also participated in the suffrage movement, although their contributions are not widely acclaimed. Organizations such as The Victoria Reform Benevolent Society and the Women's Home Missionary Society of Amherstburg in Ontario and the Colored Women's Club of Montreal were formed in order to raise funds and assist the black and other women of colour in Canada.

Thus, we see that women who organized and clubbed together followed different philosophies and had varied interests, yet their aim was to unite women to bring reform. At the heart of the women's movement, there was an urge to break free and fight against social ostracism. The 'first wave' feminists struggled for it all and brought in successful changes. However it was just the beginning of a more well defined protest against oppression that emerged in the 1960s in Canada, which is referred to as the 'second wave' feminism.

'Second Wave' of Feminism

Women remained active thereafter throughout the years 1920-1960 after the 'first wave' but it was the 1960s that marked the commencement of the 'second wave' of feminism. The contemporary women's movement owes its success to the liberation of women in the early 1960s. The Second World War saw the rise of women entering the work force, which made the figure of women in working class to rise from 13% in 1900 to 39% in the 1980s. Married women also began earning and doubling the

household income and also witnessed the expansion of educational opportunities for them. More and more female students went to universities and a number of new universities were also founded including Simon Fraser and Trent. Women went to colleges and universities but faced unemployment in the job market. This led to the rise of activists who aimed at conscious-raising and improved labour conditions. They also took active part in the peace movement and the civil-rights movement in Canada. In 1960 the Voice of Women (VOW) was founded to unite women for the cause of humanity. VOW gradually took up health and safety issues for women as well and in 1964 it worked for birth control legalization too. The emerging Left parties in Europe and North America influenced the formation of New Left activists groups such as Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA) on many Canadian University campuses.

Family life and traditional notions of sex and marriage began to be challenged. Women no longer feared pregnancy with the availability of the birth control pill in 1966. With the publication of Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique followed by the appointment of Doris Anderson as editor of Chateline magazine in 1959 and the wide circulation of Friedan's book and articles on it, women's movement gained momentum. Divorce laws, reproductive rights and birth control became the issues of women's articles and women's liberation movement. The establishment of the groups such as YWCA, WCTU, the Canadian Federation of University Women, The National Council of Women, the Business and Professional Women's Clubs and Women's institutions marked changes in the ideological and economic position of women in Canada.

The period between 1967-1971 indicates the further growth of the women's liberation movement in Canada. Feminists talked about, delivered speeches and discussed issues concerning women. Women formed study circles and read Betty Friedan, Simone de

Beauvoir and Juliet Mitchell. In Montreal, women's emancipation meetings were conducted weekly focussing mainly on abortion rights. Women's caucuses were formed at Simon Fraser University – named Students for a Democratic Union (SDU) which soon became the off-campus Working Women's Association and Vancouver Women's Caucus. In 1968 Toronto Women's Liberation Movement (TWLM) was established along with Vancouver Working Women's Association. A unique aspect of this phase of feminism was CR or consciousness raising campaigns. Eight to ten women gathered together and debated and raised the consciousness of other women regarding sex and sexuality, man-woman relationships, abortion laws and friendships and associations among women. Patricia Carey argues in Canadian Woman Studies that "the survival and consistent progress [of feminism] can be attributed, I think, to one of its most frequently trivialized symbols and political vehicles: the conscious-raising session."[22] Women began pouring their experiences in feminist magazines and newspapers including The Pedestal and The Velvet Fist. In 1966 Juliet Mitchell wrote "Women: The Longest Revolution" and in 1967 Judy Bernstein, Peggy Morton, Linda Seese, and Myrna Wood, all activists in SUPA, published an article entitled, " Sisters, Brothers, Lovers Listen" voicing their anger and pain.

One of the major issues of this period was the right to abortion. In 1968 the McGill Student Society published The Birth Control Handbook and in 1970 the Vancouver Women's Caucus along with the assistance of Saskatoon Women's Liberation (SWL) group asked women across the entire Canada to join hands in their struggle for birth control rights. The SFU Co-Op Family at Simon Fraser University fought for another important issue- day-care. Day-Care conferences began to be held and became the prior concern for the National Action Committee. Specific issues such as abortion laws and day-care marked the initial stages of the growth of women's organizations

and the feminist movement on the whole. The first national conference on women's movement was held in Saskatoon in 1970 on how to focus on specific and general issues. Feminists from various groups separated into different camps in order to promote the efficiency of the work regarding single and multiple issues. For instance, the lesbians and radical feminists left the TWLM to form the New Feminists in 1969 and the socialists of Vancouver Women's Caucus were expelled from the league to form the Vancouver Women's Alliance.

While grass-roots feminists were out on the streets fighting for their rights, the institutionalized feminists formed more organizations to express their concern for equal human rights. Women formed the Committee for Equality of Women (CEW) which dissolved into the National Ad-hoc Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) followed by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW). By 1971 NAC had forty-two member groups including YWCA, Women's Liberation Movement, National Council for Women, New Feminists, Canadian Federation of University Women, Federated Women's Institute of Canada, Federation of Women Teachers Association of Ontario and so on. By the end of this period, feminists had modified the abortion laws, had formed the RCSW and the first gay liberation group in Canada. The University of Toronto Homophile Association and other organizations and committees, had introduced the first Women's Studies course at University of Toronto and published eye-opening articles in feminist newspapers and magazines.

1970s and after

Pamphlets, articles, reviews, and research marked this phase of feminism. Early publications included Women Unite! , Century for Struggle, Sisterhood is Powerful were read and discussed. Theories were being formed regarding the root causes of

women's subjugation. Collective discussions, meetings and women's studies programs were conducted. More and more women groups were set up for the further expansion of women's culture and upliftment. One British Columbia activist reported that there were women's groups popping up like popcorn all over the provinces. Women's centers were organized in colleges and universities in the mid-1970s. Women's organizations such as the Canadian Women's Educational Press, The National Association for Women, the Canadian Alliance for the Repeal of the Abortion Law (CARAL) along with the B.C. Federation of Women (BCFW) and the Ontario Day-Care Organizing Committee were set up aiming at providing " a wide range of information for women... a referral service to women who are new to the community or who are frightened to approach more specific community services alone; and a space where women could meet to share their concerns."[23]

As the number of organizations grew, more and more issues and needs were discussed and debated. Along with the grass-roots feminists, lesbians, immigrant women, and women of colour also came to the fore to demand their rights. Lesbian feminists had been working within radical feminists but had not come in the limelight. Before dwelling further into the history of **lesbian feminism**, one must define who lesbians are. Lorna Weir in a speech addressed to an audience of lesbians (feminists and non-feminists) on behalf of the Lesbians against the Right (LAR) defines lesbians as:

> ...women whose primary emotional and sexual commitment is to other women. By the way we live, lesbians claim economic and emotional independence from men. We take the power to explore and discover women's sexuality on women's terms. Lesbians act on women's rights to be with other women, to enjoy the company of women and to organize with women.[24]

The lesbians believe that they have a right to live their life in their own way. By supporting lesbians, the women's movement helped women in gaining their right to work and care with other women. They uphold the view that the patriarchal order has repressed their sexuality and denied them their identity, which they must regain. They must strive to trace their roots back to Sappho and create their own history and world. The lesbian feminists had been active since the 1960s but it was in the early 1970s that lesbianism became an integral part of the women's movement. Lesbians had participated in the women's movement early as they were also concerned with issues such as daycare, wages for labour, and protest against the violence and ill treatment. The first public statement of lesbians was made at the Indo-Chinese Women's Liberation Conference in Toronto in 1971 during the time when lesbianism had become a polemical issue in the American women's movement. In 1972 five lesbians produced and sold the feminist newspaper, The Other Woman voicing the interests of lesbians. The same year a woman's centre for lesbians, The Woman's Place was also set up holding Friday night Lesbian Drop-Ins for the struggle to maintain a separate identity. In the subsequent year the first lesbian conference was held in Toronto followed by more anglophone lesbian conferences in Montreal in 1974 and 1975. Lesbian groups such as The Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT) were formed holding concerts, dances, opening coffeehouses and so on discussing amendments regarding child sexuality, lesbian rights in the society etc. Today, lesbians have formed National Lesbian Forum along with other organizations such as a Woman against Free Trade Committee, Women in Toronto and so on. Lesbian writers such as Candis J. Graham, Dionne Brand, Sarah Louise, Christina Mills, and Carol Camper have proved that they have expressed their feelings, suppressed desires and

aspirations openly and have succeeded, to a large extent, in asserting their space in society. To put it in Mary Meigs' words, lesbian-feminist writing, "is a study of oppression that are part of my own experience: suffocation by upper-class principles and squeamishness, the blindness of privilege, the abuse of power by friends, the oppression of enforced heterosexuality."[25]

Another group of women who began to form associations was immigrant women and the women of colour who addressed their issues and struggled to meet their needs and demands. In 1973 a group of Spanish speaking women formed the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples (CSSP) in Toronto. In 1974 two significant immigrant women's organizations – Women Working with Immigrant Women (WWIW) and Women's Community Employment Centre (WCEC) were also formed in Toronto concerning labour issues and other job needs. Yet, these are not considered as an integral part of the women's struggle completely. It was only in the 1980s that their positive endeavour was brought to the notice of the people. Immigrant women, black women, and other women of colour had been confronting racism despite Canada's policy of promoting multi-culturalism. They believed that the feminist movement had been a movement dominated by the white women and for the cause of the white women only. In order to express their long-suppressed agony the women of colour of various backgrounds formed the Visible Minority Women's Coalition in 1983. Women of colour, black, and immigrant and native women participated in the events of IWD in 1986. Their contribution to the feminist movement was mainly to incorporate an anti-racist position in the feminist struggle.

The history of the women's movement so far denotes that the emphasis in the 1960s was on the similarities in women – that women constitute one big family who have been the victims of repression and oppression in a male-governed society. With the

emergence of a large number of women's groups in the 1970s, the focus shifted on the differences. Women are different owing to their caste, race and nationality and have specific problems to tackle with. The feminists in the movement, therefore, broke into small factions thereafter and gave rise to various feminisms – Radical feminism, Liberal feminism, Cultural feminism, Socialist feminism and so on.

In the early1970s many institutionalized feminists established provincial women councils including Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the National Action Committee (NAC) and the National Association of Women and the Law. Women were being prepared to speak for themselves in primarily four areas of interest: equal pay, child-care, abortion, and family property. With the celebration of International Women's Year (IWY) in 1975 in the United Nations, institutionalized feminism received a major boost and women became active in the working of institutions such as the church, trade unions, universities and the medical profession.

While the institutionalized feminism aimed at improving the status of women in various institutions and the public sphere, the grass-roots feminism witnessed a political split in 1972 when it broke into chiefly two channels – **radical feminism** and **socialist feminism**, each with its own agenda and theoretical perspective. At the NAC-organized meeting in 1972, the term 'radical' was used for the first time for all the women who objected to the liberal-democratic system. Radical feminism grew out of the grass-roots feminism in the 1970s and upheld the view that of all the forms of oppression, women's oppression is the most fundamental, the most severe, and the most difficult to abolish from the society. They believe that the cause of this oppression is patriarchy, which is defined by a renowned radical feminist Zillah Eisenstein as a "sexual system of power in which the male possesses superior power and economic privilege."[26] The radical feminists suggested that in order to get rid of

this oppression patriarchy must be eliminated, and this could only be done if women isolate themselves from " men and from institutions, relationships, roles, and activities that are male-defined, male-operated, benefit males and maintain male privilege."[27] Women could also eradicate this oppression by creating a woman-identified world, a world of women friendships and lesbian separation. One of the earliest known radical feminists in the history of Canada, Bonnie Kreps explains the functions of radical feminists in her article in Women Unite! In 1972 as feminists who choose:

> to concentrate exclusively on the oppression of women as *women* and not as workers, students etc. [Radical feminism] therefore concentrates its analysis on institutions like love, marriage, sex, masculinity, and femininity. It would be opposed specifically and centrally to sexism rather than capitalism...and would not be particularly concerned with 'equal rights' [or] 'equal pay for equal work'.[28]

Radical feminists therefore aimed at liberating women from the so-called 'male values' and posing an alternative culture of women with 'female values'. The idea that women possess these 'female values' or feminine virtues gradually gave way to a more decided moral movement among women – the cultural feminism. Radical feminist organizations such as Women against Rape in British Columbia and Women against Violence against Women (WAVAW) (Toronto) were formed. WAVAW maintained that sex oppression is a universal phenomenon and the eradication of this form of oppression was the most essential – the other divisions of class, race, and nationality were mere products of masculine ideology. Out of the radical feminists grew the lesbian feminists who held lesbian conferences on the national level and published articles and newspapers propagating their theories and programs.

Feminists who were socialists confronted the challenge of consolidating women on issues of class and gender. **Socialist feminism** had its roots in the socio-political changes of the middle and the late nineteenth century in Western Europe and North America. Whereas the liberal feminists fought for equality of women with men, the socialist feminists considered the changing of the basic structural patterns of the society their immediate goal. These feminists felt that it is the societal structure that makes categories of gender, class, and race as obstructions to women's emancipation. They stressed on making the women realize that they are an integral part of the society who should rebel against poverty, unequal wages, and even unpaid work. They brought to the fore that a capitalist economy is the root cause of women's suffering as such an economy propels exploitation of the other and the women become the main sufferer as they are financially dependent on their fathers and husbands. The first socialist feminist organization in Canada, the Saskatoon Women's Liberation (SWL) was formed in the 1960s. The group existed till 1981 as one of the longest-lived socialist feminist groups in Canada. The socialist feminist grouped together to understand the concerns of lesbians, immigrant women and the women of colour. The need to form allies was strong that led Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail to come together in the early 1980s in the International Women's Day Committee of Toronto (IWDC). There were other groups functioning such as SWL and Bread and Roses, a Vancouver based socialist feminist group but their efforts were not effective to a great extent. Some trade unionists also organized the Organized Working Women (OWW) for the benefit of all union as well as non-union women. Another organization, Saskatchewan Working Women (SWW) was founded to take up the issues of day-care, familial and working benefits. The grass-

roots feminism thus expanded its horizon from mere equal-rights to the grouping of women for all their class and race- based gender problems.

The third group of feminists that consolidated their political power were the **liberal feminists** whose contacts with the media and the government led to the inclusion of a guarantee of equality of women in the Constitution in the year 1981. The liberal feminists assumed that the ill treatment meted out to women is due to the fact that they have been denied equal rights and have been trained to show their reluctance in demanding them. They advocate social and legal reforms in order to seek equal opportunities and rights for women such as educational opportunities, financial independence, and achievement of citizens' rights. In 1970 the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was set up aiming at protection for mothers, employment for married women, and special care for the disadvantaged groups of women. In 1984, Abella Report introduced the access to wage labour for women who were married and were of disadvantaged groups.

The rise of the women's movement, the emergence of various feminisms, the fight for equality in all spheres – women in Canada have seen it all. Innumerable organizations, groups and centers have been founded to raise the consciousness as well as the status of women in society. Women have toiled hard to seek a better world of well and justly defined sex roles. Feminists and lesbian-feminists in Canada are therefore approaching the 'Promised Land' through their efforts. They are trying to make forward steps towards a just social order. Concluding this discussion in the words of Anne Cameron, " whether it is day-care, reproductive rights, equal pay for work of equal value, pornography or racism, we first have to allow all hell to bust out, then put things back together again."[29]

N O T E S

1. Quoted in Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London and New York: Routledge, 1985) 56.

2. See Toril Moi, "Feminist, Female, Feminine," The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism. (Hampshire and London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1989) 117-132.

3. Quoted in Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, 33.

4. Quoted in Neena Arora, Nayantara Sehgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in Comparison (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991) 18.

5. Quoted in Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code, Lindsay Dorney, ed., Changing Patterns: Women in Canada (Toronto: The Canadian Publishers, 1993) 37.

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9. Quoted in Josephine Donavan, Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism (New York: Continuum, 1992) 143.

10. Quoted in Josephine Donavan, 144.

11. Quoted in Josephine Donavan, 34.

12. Quoted in Josephine Donavan, 161.

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25. Quoted in Nancy Mandell, ed., Feminist Issues: Race, Class and Sexuality Ontario: Prentice Hall Canada Inc., 1995) 14.

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3

CANADIAN FEMINIST FABULIST VOICES

Child of the pure unclouded brow
And dreaming eyes of wonder!
Though time be fleet, and I and thou
Are half a life asunder,
Thy loving smile will surely hail
The love-gift of a fairy tale.

(Lewis Carroll, 1871)

A) Import of Fairy Tales, Folklore and Myths

Welcome to fairyland! What wonders it promises! Look above at the blue sky and the birds flying, look below at the clear flowing streams, look here at the green meadows, look there at the brick houses, look around at this blissful land. This is the land of fairies and beasts, this is the land of humans and animals, this is the land where the animate and inanimate live together. This is the land where a child is taken when it is grown up enough to perceive and comprehend the world in which he lives. Enter the world of fairy tales and one feels that one is being offered an escape from the world of reality into a fantasy land where everything and everyone is happy and ecstatic. Take a closer look and you will notice that the fairyland is fraught with the same human problems. The more powerful animal is tormenting the less powerful animal, the wicked witch has captured the poor little children, and the beast has kidnapped the young princess on a remote island and so on. A child is introduced to these tales, so that it can enrich his life, and at the same time experience an alternative world of the human and the non-human so that it can grasp what goes on around him in his familiar world.

The Canadian feminist Gretchen Sankey in her work on the effect of fairy tales on children tells us that prior to the seventeenth century childhood was not considered a

significant phase in the life of an individual. The concept of 'child' was not established till the growth of psychology with which it was realized as the most crucial phase in the growth of an adult human being. As a result, fairy tales, folktales, and myths became the texts available for fulfilling its pedagogical needs. Bruno Bettelheim explores the meaning of fairy tales as:

> ...fairy tales teach little about the specific conditions life in modern mass society; these tales were created long before it came into being. But more can be learned from them about the inner problems of human beings, and of the right solutions to their predicaments in any society, than from any other type of story within a child's comprehension.[1]

Uneducated child only lives in it's present and has very vague and incomplete notions of his future. It attempts to grasp the meaning of life but its conscious experiences are too limited to make it fully understand what life is all about. When it reads or listens to these folk and fairy tales, a deeper meaning of life is conveyed to it, as these tales transmit significant messages to its unconscious mind. The German poet Schiller tells us that "Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life."[2] In the world of the folk and fairy tales it looks at the different human problems and learns to tackle them, which help in its mental development. For instance, when it reads about the ugly duckling, at first it feels sad that the ugly duckling is disliked by everyone and is considered repulsive. As it reads the story, it gets the message that not everyone is beautiful and attractive. It experiences anger at the ill treatment meted out to the poor duckling, but at the end, when itreads about the duckling's joy, it is also gladdened. The child has learnt an important message: physical beauty is not the appropriate criteria of judging a person.

The child may not understand the meaning fully at this stage, but such messages are carried and stored in his unconscious at whichever level his mind his functioning at that time.

Fairy tales are located in a different time and space, rather are not bound by time or space. The child knows that the events took place 'once upon a time', and carries it to the oldest of times, to distant lands, yet he interprets those events as taking place in his familiar surroundings. Folk and Fairy tales take him through a voyage inside its mind, and the encounters that it reads or listens to in the story become its own. At times, it becomes the brave hero rescuing the meek princess, and at other times, it becomes the voracious wolf terrorizing the red riding hood. The characters in the tales, human beings or animals, give vent to its inner feelings, boost its ego, and assist it in maturing. By rearranging and fantasizing the events of the stories, by imagining and day-dreaming, the child discovers new meaning in life and by giving an outlet to its repressed emotions, satisfies its ego and superego requirements, and gives new dimension to life. Bruno Bettelheim, in understanding the import and significance of fairy tales, myths, and folk tales writes:

> When all the child's wishful thinking gets embodied in a good fairy; all his destructive wishes in an evil witch; all his fears in a voracious wolf; all the demands of his conscience in a wise man encountered on an adventure; all his jealous anger in some animal that picks out the eyes of his archrivals- then the child can finally begin to sort out his contradictory tendencies. Once this starts, the child will be less and less engulfed by unmanageable chaos. [3]

The child reading these tales comprehends that just as the characters, ordinary boys and girls, or animals, witness severe hardships and difficulties, it will also have to face such problems in its own life. Just as the characters learn to combat those difficulties, it will also have to show wit and courage to face the austerities in its life.

The other genres of literature available to the child are fables and myths. These forms work somewhat differently from the fairy tales. Dr. Samuel Johnson defines a fable, as " a narrative in which beings irrational, and sometimes inanimate, are, for the purpose of moral instruction, feigned to act and speak with human interests and passions."[4] A fable normally consists of animals-monkeys, wolfs, bears, crocodiles, and so on, engulfed in human emotions and struggles. The monkey and the crocodile become friends, the mouse saves the lion, and the three little pigs strive for existence. The child feels that the animal speaks, feels, and understands with it, and through its experience, gains knowledge for itself. Through the events in the life of the animals, the child learns to acknowledge the various aspects of his individuality. The fable is marked by the fabulous; the characters, normally animals, speak and act, undergo trials and tribulations, guide heroes through forests, and assist in rescuing captives, and so on. The mermaids fall in love with humans, the frog turns into a prince, and the pussycat is as clever can it be, and the fox is known far and wide for its cunning nature. The fables are direct and do not carry any hidden meaning. They state a moral truth, they "demand and threaten – they are moralistic – or they just entertain." [5]

Myths, on the other hand, are grandiose, the characters are not ordinary boys and girls or a non-descript 'prince' or 'queen', but larger than life characters such as Theseus, Beowulf, Hercules, or even Adam and Eve. When a child confronts stories laden with myths – biblical or otherwise, it knows that this is not its story. The child understands

that such grand events involving the supernatural intervention – gods and goddesses aiding brave heroes can not take place around it in reality, but they are significant nonetheless, as they satisfy the child's superego demands. By witnessing the might of the heroes slaying dragons and monsters, the child realizes the potential inside him and yearns to emulate those heroes.

The real purpose of the folk and fairy tales are then to provide a plethora of adventures, encounters, vicissitudes for children to enable them to mature. These tales function as sources of enhancement and enjoyment. The multiple ends of these tales is put forth by Bettelheim:

> Fairy tales, unlike any other form of literature, direct the child to discover his identity and calling, and they also suggest what experiences are needed to develop his character further. Fairy tales intimate that a rewarding, good life is within one's reach despite adversity – but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity. These stories promise that if a child dares to engage in this fearsome and taxing search, benevolent powers will come to his aid, and he will succeed. The stories also warn that those who are too timorous and narrow-minded to risk themselves must settle down to a humdrum existence – if an even worse fate does not befall them.[6]

B) Cultural Values Embedded in Tales

Fairy and folk tales are aimed as the stepping stones for laying the foundation for the personality of the individual. They are the carriers of cultural and social values that are conveyed to the children through the various symbols embedded in the tales. Fairy tales, folk tales, and myths have been recounted, refined, and reinterpreted several

times in order to dis-cover their concealed meanings. But are these stories simply an exportation into the realm of fantasy so as to reflect the reality? Through the centuries, fairy tales and fables have been read as a part of children's literature but have formed an important impact on the psychology of adults as well. Western traditional fairy tales have been one of the methods through which these cultural values, social codes and mannerisms have been transferred to people through generations. But what are these social and cultural norms? Are they not the family system into which we are born and brought up; the patriarchal set-up in which we grow up; the society in which we are taught that the father is the head of the family, the bread-earner who lays down the rules and the code of conduct in the family; the mother and the children are dependent financially as well as emotionally on the father. The woman of the house is subordinate; she is labelled as the 'inferior sex'. She is born to be humble and submissive towards her husband. Her place is in the house, she is supposed to perform the household chores with dexterity and skill. In the house, she confined to the kitchen, for she is the Annapurna. She is supposed to cook delicious food, take care of the children, embellish herself and wait for her husband's return from office in the evenings, and so on. In short, she has to exist for him, and has no existence of her own. When she is young, she is gifted with a special kind of training from the day she is conscious of her sex. The fact that she is a girl and has to leave her parents is instilled in her right away. She has to follow certain decorum and has to learn to behave like a 'girl' in society. She has to learn to obey and respect her elders and simultaneously learn not to question what she is prohibited to do. After this tutoring, she grows up, marries the suitor her parents choose for her, and practices what she has been taught all these years.

C) Rewriting Tales – The Feminist Movement

The cruelties and ill treatment meted out to the female sex has been the subject of women's literature, time and again. Women have brought to the fore the marginalization and subjugation of their sex in their writing. Some choose to depict the state of women and leave things unsaid, while others utilize their writing as a tool to express their long-suppressed anger and protest against this oppression. Women writers in the twentieth century, have also taken up the task of "phallic criticism", as Mary Ellman puts it, to expose this sexist criticism and bias in literature. They have decided to write, to write stories in which women seek their identity and individuality. Shirin Kudchedkar writes in "Feminist Voices From India and Canada", that "Western feminist writers (and Western has hitherto meant White Canadian, American or European writers) are concerned with a woman's self to discover herself and find self-fulfillment. Their stories deal with the woman's or girl's encounter with the world, her efforts to define herself, to find viable ways of living."[7]

Feminism, as a movement in Canada, aims at exposing the politics of the stereotypical projections of women in literature. Apart from novels, plays, poetry, and other genres of literature, in which, women have been a subject of male domination, fairy tales, myths, and folklore have also served as a medium through which these socio-cultural values are passed on to children, in order that, these are permeated and rooted in their subconscious as well as conscious self. Since fairy tales and fables serve as crucial material in enhancing the children's knowledge, and since childhood is the most significant stage in an individual's process of development, the values inculcated at this stage, are carried on for a longtime. And, if wrong messages are forwarded, its repercussions would be highly harmful. A child reads/listens to these stories with a promise of refinement, but these tales "cheat the child of what he ought to gain from

the experience of literature: access to deeper meaning, and which is meaningful to him at his stage of development." [8]

What are the aims of Feminist Criticism? What do Women's Studies contribute to, if not, to analyze, how these stories have depicted women as the meek subject and how the dominant power structures in this male-governed society are passed on to children. Since time immemorial, women have not enjoyed independence – mental as well as economic. They have been the objects of male gaze and authority. They have been shown as meek, servile, humble, docile, and feminine. Traditional tales have shown these set standards, directly or vicariously, by which cultures have been operating. Wendy Putman, noted Canadian Feminist writer in the Introduction to Room of One's Own: A Space for Women's Writing states:

> ... I am still fascinated by the messages filtered to our collective subconscious through traditional tales. These stories have a tremendous impact on the way we, as women, are trained to perceive the world. The way we learn to speak – by listening, mimicking, and setting down communication patterns in our minds, so do we absorb the constructions prescribing gender assigned roles and proscribing social scripts at a highly impressionable stage of our development. The structures of traditional tales are reinforced all around us, from the paradigms of religion to the hierarchies of business to popular culture.[9]

Women, in conventional tales, are marked for their beauty, youth, and innocence. They are the passive maidens who have no will of their own and are incapable of thinking rationally for themselves. They are shown as inferior to men, yet they have accepted patriarchy and its mode of empowerment. In her efforts at defining the role

of women in these tales and the subsequent effects on the readers, Kaarina Kailo tells us that women are shown as the meek sisters, who serve as hand-maidens to men – from dwarves to princes, or young princesses waiting earnestly for their prince, their saviour and lord, to come and rescue them from the clutches of the diabolical beast. The male heroes or princes derive pleasure in gazing at their female object of desire and conquering them, thereby satisfying their ego. In her words:

> Even when women seemingly occupy centerstage as the main characters of Western fairytales, these stories simply reproduce Christian, mainstream, patriarchal fantasies about proper female behavior. The typical polarized models of femininity that girls end up internalizing as the good/bad gender-specific modes of behavior are equally empowering for them. Folktale "heroines"... remain locked in their need for protection, rescue and romanticized heterosexual dependency. [10]

Feminist writers in Canada, have therefore, taken up the task of retelling these myths and tales to assert their vision of a land of promised equality. Kaarina Kailo points out that rewriting fairy tales and myths help women writers "to interact with ...internalized images of femininity and to play-act with characters in...[their] inner theater", and that it is their duty "to go through the stages of deconstruction (taking our traditions and cultures apart so as to see what makes them tick) and the stage of reconstruction, re-visioning, re-appropriation". [11]

The Myth of Eve – The First Woman on Earth

In order to understand the efforts of these feminist writers, one can begin with the prime myth – the myth of creation. The Fall of Man or the original sin has been attributed to Eve. According to Genesis, the biblical story of creation, Lilith, the

prototype of woman, was created before Eve, as man's equal. When she was denied her sexual authority, she fled away in search of her freedom. Hence, Lilith is mythified culturally as a sexual she-beast, who is untamed and whose sexuality is unveiled for all to glare at. God then created Eve, as subordinate to man, who tasted the forbidden fruit when tempted by Satan. The biblical story renders Eve as a seductive temptress, associating her as one with the serpent, as her eating the fruit of knowledge and becoming aware of her sexuality, brought anarchy into mankind's blissful state. Thus, culture mythifies man as the innocent victim and the woman as the temptress. Woman's sexuality has evil origins as it is linked with Satan, the fallen angel, and the initiator of evil in God's world. Hence, her sexuality must be repressed and not given a chance to unleash it, or else she would become bestial and uncontrollable like Lilith. She must, therefore be locked and fettered inside the house so that she does not bring chaos in the world again. In order to maintain that he has been victimized, man contends that whenever a woman expresses her sexual desires, she is showing masculine traits, as sexuality is his sole domain of expressing his domination over her. Her sexual assertion will only lead to destruction of mankind. So, she has to be tamed to be submissive, subdued, and compliant for the betterment of the entire human race.

Eve has been over-mythologized as evil whose sexual urges lead to the ruin of humanity. Hence, all her daughters, who have asserted their sexuality, have been exhibited as dangerous. In the words of Tamara Steinborn:

> A close analysis of our culture shows how the true daughters of Eve, all womankind, have been myth-laden to a negative extreme ...Woman, as virago, has become dangerous, overpowering, and sexually threatening to man in his world of reason and order.[12]

Milton has describes the classical image of Eve:

> Eve: "But to Adam in what sort
> Shall I appear?...
> But keep the odds of Knowledge in my power
> In Female Sex, the more to draw his love,
> And render me more equal, and perhaps
> A thing not undesirable...
>
> (John Milton, Paradise Lost)

Here, it becomes clear that the evil in Eve, or woman is closely associated with her sexuality. In order to de-mythify the archetypal image of Eve, Virginia Lee Hines presents two different interpretations of the 'Eve' story in her poem "An Old Story". In the first section of the poem, she describes how Eve, "Motherless", became mother to all the women on Earth, and initiated women to sin, to express their sexual urges freely. Eve's original behavior in the garden became the "thorny grove" for all women. She imbued women with their feminine body parts, " certain breasts, womb, soft skin", along with a craving to break free of the clutches of repressed sexuality, reminding us of Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience. She writes:

> ...Oh, I feel now
> how she felt confined to Eden, naked,
> so innocent longing for sin.
> Let me set down my cup of cocoa,
> grab my coat, my purse,
> run from ordered house,
> take chances in unknown territory.[13]

In the second part of the poem, Eve stands for the modern woman, who is caught in the web of penury, "cooking oatmeal mornings on an undependable gas burner" with no one to count on in an urban materialistic world, struggling for survival and

identity. Instead of showing Eve lurking in the dark shadows of lust and eroticism, it is Adam, with his "brash craziness" and "uncertain temperament" that encroaches upon her world. Adam yearns to fulfil his carnal appetite and ego by conquering her in the sexual act:

> ...intrudes
> into my wanderings, calling my name.
> He lusts for me, the reluctant
> twin. We roll into each other
> bruising our skins, our egos,
> then fly apart.

Eve's body or the woman's body surrenders to male passion and the original garden behavior turns her into a garden, where Adam wanders into and plucks her whenever he wills:

> her body yielding to passion, birth –
> woman becomes a garden.

Virginia Lee Hines, thus, breaks the traditional notion of Eve as the original enchantress, with her true daughters, as evil, or the 'mad women in the attic', to borrow Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's phraseology. The retelling of the myth articulates what has been silenced for years – the plight of woman as objects of male gaze and erotic desire.

Re-Viewing Cinderella's Tale

One of the conventional fairy tale plots consists of the young prince meeting a poor girl, getting enticed by her charms and marrying her to consummate their love. So, the poor girl gets to marry a rich handsome prince and lives happily ever after with him. The young girl has to be the paragon of beauty, innocence, docility, and femininity.

The prince has to be the brave gallant riding on horses, fighting dragons and monsters, the epitome of masculinity. The girl in the story has to preserve her beauty and chastity till the prince comes to claim it in due time. She has to make the right choice – to exist for the prince, take care of their children, and so on. What else could she ask for?

Such is the case with the heroine of our story, Cinderella. Waiting for years for some miracle to take place, with the help of the fairy godmother, Cinderella meets the prince at the ball who gets bewitched by her appearance and falls in love with her. Cinderella gets to marry the young prince and, as required, the fairy tale ends on a happy note.

What happened after the prince married Cinderella? Elizabeth Greene gives us a sequel to the fairy tale, but with a different tone, and a not so happy ending. Greene's fairy tale, "Cinderella's Daughters", if we take the liberty of calling it so, does not begin 'Once upon a time'. It begins fifteen or twenty years after the marriage of Cinderella with the prince. The original fairy tale heroine has not altered a bit. She is the same Cinderella, who was "sweet and good in the face of wicked stepmother and stepsisters"[14], likes romances and picture books, and "only cared about running the house and taking care of people and gardens and helping the poor." However, her daughters, Annabelinda and Zoe, who were lovely and intellectual when they were born, do not turn into the conventional fairy tale heroines. The first disappointment comes when we are told that they are not beautiful. Annabelinda has sallow thin shoulders and Zoe is overweight with bad skin. When they play house, they make up stories of "bloodcurdling adventures and escapes", and instead of the boys, it is the girl dolls who slay the dragons and rescue others. Defying the cultural norms, the daughters are rude and moody and "unprincesslike", and prefer to stay gloomy and

morose rather than looking cheerful and bright in public. To the mother's astonishment, Annabelinda reads historical novels at the age of ten, and Zoe reads poetry, which her mother fails to understand. Secretly, the sisters discuss their bodies, their desires and embarrassments. Annabelinda has only girlfriends and Zoe goes out only with boys. The former writes refined film and play reviews and the latter writes luxuriant poems and spiteful journals. Cinderella's agony is described as:

> Cinderella began to get headaches and bad bouts of bronchitis... Her daughters should be growing into beauty, but every day took them further from feminine perfection. What prince would look at them? How would they make their way in the world? How would they find their happy endings?

The twist in this story, as in the original Cinderella story, comes with the entry of the fairy godmother. The prince, Cinderella's husband, calls the fairy godmother to come and stay with them and restore the chaotic order of things. Cinderella's agony comes to an end when the fairy godmother tells the sisters, "you are each the heroines of your own lives, and you will find your own transformations. Your mother will understand that."

The reader might expect that the godmother is successful in transforming the two sisters, they also meet their princes, get married and live happily ever after. But the author has a different story to tell. For Annabelinda, "heterosexual romantic love remained a close book", and "she did meet a woman she loved." She begins to teach and write, and in time, becomes a renowned feminist. Because of having an archetype for a mother, she tries "not to write too harshly of women who made conventional choices." Greene depicts Zoe's fate as:

> Zoe herself, torn between example of mother and sister, went to graduate school, got a job, fell in love, got pregnant, miscarried, married and had children in that order. She couldn't help being grateful for her husband's affections, and the power shifted in their relationship so that she was always trying to please him and he was always asking for more.

Zoe finally ends her marriage and recuperates the wounds of an unhappy wedded life. She takes care of her children, falls in love again, but does not marry again. She begins to write meaningful poetry and becomes a successful writer too. Cinderella accepts her daughters' choices gradually and adores her successive generations.

Elizabeth Greene's reshaping of the Cinderella story brings to light that women have been victims of male objectification for long, and the feminists of today want to change the status quo. In Greene' fairy tale, men do not have any significant role to play. The prince in the story has no masculine prowess to display; the daughters do not meet any prince in their lives. The female protagonists are the adverse of the conventional heroines, they are not sweet, pretty, and submissive. The fairy godmother does make an entry into the story but does not help them get their princes. The sister that makes her conventional choice ends up with a broken marriage and bruised heart. Only when the two sisters decide to live and grow independently, search their identity, does the author finally provides them a happy ending. Greene closes the narrative with the words:

> There are other stories of Cinderella's daughters. Probably you know some yourself. But these are the two I choose to tell.

Fairy Tale Heroines – 'Pickled' and 'Preserved'

In order to present how women have been 'pickled' for the male gaze, Kaarina Kailo, re-interprets the fairy tale of "The Snow White". Like Cinderella, the Snow White also incorporates the myth of the beautiful princess craving for the "waited-for prince". She is white as snow, who has to starve herself in a coffin, to stay "eternally young, skinny, beautiful, desirable, rescue-worthy."[15] She is the ideal woman, perfect in beauty and worth, 'pickled' and 'preserved' for the male gaze of the prince who will kiss her and make her immortal. Kailo's student, Caroline Desbiens-Magalios expresses the Snow White syndrome as:

> Snow White is the ideal woman once preserved under the glass coffin: passive, virginal, sublimely beautiful and deliciously sensual, like the forbidden fruit. She becomes the apple herself which the prince will pick and taste without fear of punishment, for the standard is different: arousal of the erotic power constitutes a woman's fall but a man's elevation.[16]

Similarly, "Red Riding Hood" is also associated with the socializing the females with a sexual passivity and dependence on men. The Little Red Riding Hood has to deliver some delicacies to her grandmother who lives in a cottage far away from her place. Her mother forbids her not to go through the woods fearing the wolf might eat her up and only take the long route. The red riding hood promises to obey her mother but is tempted to take the short cut through the woods. The wolf however notices her and eats both the red riding hood and the grandmother ultimately.

In "Re-viewing the Life and Times of Little Red Riding Hood", Gretchen Sankey explains that the story is not just a simple fairy tale, but an attempt at socializing the values of sexual passivity and self-abnegation in women. The wolf in the story is the "predatorial man, inclined to seduce if given the slightest chance".[17] The mother prohibits the riding hood from going into the woods because she is afraid that the daughter might get entrapped by the wolf or the rapist who would ravish her. The red riding hood's decision to explore the forbidden territories is equated with her violent sexual emotions, also associated with her red cap, the colour red being associated with danger as well as passion. Since the little girl gives in to her innocuous desires, she has to pay the price and has to bear the burden of the guilt of the sexual abuse as she herself chose to take the dangerous route. Thus, the story warns little girls from defying the said norms. Jack Zipes disputes that the writers of fairy tales "were men who were interested in preserving patriarchal norms, and therefore, Little Red Riding Hood's image must be seen as a male creation and projection", and that the widespread and friendly reception of the fairy tale owes to the "general acceptance of the cultural notions of sexuality, sex roles and domination embedded in it."[18]

The Mermaid Tale

Another of the 'pickled' heroines in fairy tales is "The Little Mermaid". She is the loveliest and prettiest of all her sisters. The story tells us that "all the Mer-princesses were extremely beautiful, but the little mermaid, who was the youngest, had the prettiest hair...and the bluest eyes."[19] The little mermaid is forbidden to leave the coral palace and swim freely in the blue sea as per the Mer-king's law. However, when she turns fifteen, she is permitted to go above the sea, where she saves a handsome prince from drowning in the storm and falls in love with him. In order to

win his love, she requests the sea-witch to get rid of her tail and have a pair of legs in its place. The witch agrees to do so in exchange of the mermaid's melodious voice. The mermaid turns dumb and speechless, and goes to the prince's palace, but is not fortunate enough to get reciprocation for her love and finally retreats.

What is the message of this story? The little mermaid, at first, is not allowed to violate her father's law, and is forbidden to question it too. Being a stereotypical fairy tale heroine, her only aim in life is to win the love of the prince so that he marries her. Kaarina Kailo writes:

> True to this fixated frozen image, girls are conditioned with the dominant fairy tales in the Western hemisphere to pickle themselves, to repress their orality, to hold their tongues and to internalize the sexual dogmas uncritically. The Little Mermaid is the archirepresentative of the woman who is willing to give up speech, self-expression, language in order to "get" her prince.[20]

Such models of self-effacement and self-denial are abundantly prevalent in Western fairy tales to propagate the Christian concepts of self-sacrifice and humility in women. The only fulfillment a woman can seek is in finding her companion, who will aid her in reaching her womanhood, give birth to his children, and live happily ever after.

Pauline Rankin reworks the Mermaid tale in her Story entitled "A Mermaid Tail". The author opens her narrative with the declaration, "THIS IS NO WIDE-EYED cartoon story", emphatically stating that the reader must not expect it to be the conventional fairy tale. The Little Mermaid in this story is a powerful and determined swimmer who swims through murkier waters, strange places and colder seas to look for her companion. There is no Mer-king and there is no forbidden law, establishing the

negation of patriarchy and its edicts straightaway. Outside the realm of the patriarchal set-up, the mermaid is free to swim above to the seas and explore the unknown territories. The mermaid finally reaches a land house where, instead of meeting her prince, meets a woman.

> There she saw the most beautiful woman walking along the shore, on sturdy and powerful legs. The mermaid hauled herself out of the water, where she lay half fainting with exertion and delight. The land-woman hurried to her side...She almost fainted with delight, as well.[21]

The mermaid and the land-woman begin to visit each other frequently, one day on land and the other day in sea. The two gradually fall in love with each other, and make love to each other. Unlike in the original mermaid story, this mermaid does not have to forfeit her tail or voice for gaining the love of her companion. The author writes:

> The land-woman spoke in human tones. The mermaid sounded her dolphin voice. They did not miss the words.

In a male-governed world, the mermaid loses her identity fully. Earlier it is the father who lays down the rules, and later, it is the prince whose love forces her to forego her selfhood. Once she is outside this domination, she can choose her partner, who need not be a man anymore. Neither of the two women needs to sacrifice their personality. The mermaid feels that she does not want to give up her powerful swimming tail and the land-woman wishes not to lose her strong legs. The author gives us the solution:

> They decided to continue as they were: sometimes in land, sometimes in water.

In this manner, the two stayed together, yet giving each other enough space for themselves, which is denied in a patriarchal society. In the rewriting of the tale, Pauline Rankin, therefore, brings to light the repression of women and gives us an alternative matriarchal society in which women need not deprive their emotional and sexual desires. There is complete absence of male characters in the story, which highlights the feminist writer's claim that women's happiness does not necessarily lay with their relationship with men and lesbian relationships are equally promising. Noted lesbian feminist critics, Alice, Gordon, Debbie, and Mary in their essay "Separatism", state:

> [L]esbians, by loving women and not men, pose a direct threat to the very basis of male supremacy. From this analysis, we conclude that lesbians have the ability and commitment to women that will be necessary to overthrow male supremacy and its attendant forms of oppression...[22]

Rapunzel – Don't Let Down Your Hair

The male sovereignty and valiance is also witnessed in one of the famous and widely acclaimed fairy tale, "Rapunzel". "Rapunzel" is the tale of a couple who steal a handful of rampion from a witch's garden and have to pay the price by giving their lovely daughter, Rapunzel, to the witch. Rapunzel is kept in a castle and is forbidden to step outside. Every time the witch has o climb the tower to reach Rapunzel's room, she utters, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your golden hair", and uses her long thick hair as a ladder. One day, the prince riding by hears her melodious voice and gets enchanted by it. He finds out the witch's secret and cries, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your golden hair" and uses it as a staircase to reach the top. The young girl feels

that the prince would love her more and plans to escape with him. The narrative that follows is the witch's finding out their plan of elopement, planting Rapunzel in a remote desert, the prince turning blind, and finally meeting his beloved, getting his eyesight back, and their staying happy ever after. At the outset, the fairy tale is a conventional story of a prince rescuing the young girl entrapped by the wicked witch. However, one cannot ignore the gendered values embedded in it. The story once again typifies women to be meek and cowardly waiting for their princes to come and rescue them. 'Pickled' and 'Preserved' for the prince to come, Rapunzel sings in her solitude, and is dumb to the extent of not ever planning to escape herself. The story reports that she had never seen a man in her life, yet she feels that she would be happier with the prince and not the witch. Such stories and such heroines are consciously constructed for the sustentation of the patriarchal order, where only a man can provide physical as well as emotional security to a woman. The female heroine carries the cultural ideals of beauty and dependence and the male hero carries the ideals of bravery and independence. Kaarina Kailo, once again, points out in this respect that, "girls are encouraged to put the lid on their self-development, while life is an open field, an open season for the self-expanding boys."[23], so true in the case of Rapunzel.

A twist of perception comes in the Rapunzel story with Melissa Branicky's poem entitled, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair..." The poem offers an alternative to the young girl, who gets lured by the prince in hope of fulfillment of emotional and sexual desires. Like Rapunzel, every woman gives in to her desires and lets down her hair. Like the prince, every man uses her beauty as a staircase to reach the top. He entices her by praising her looks but his real motive is to satisfy his physical needs only. The poet writes:

> Like Rapunzel,
> every time a man calls out to you,

you throw him down
your long thick hair,
Slowly each of them has climbed,
groping his way up your back,
tangling your beauty into a ladder.[24]

Slowly, the man empowers the woman completely in the pretence of making love to her. The woman's body begins to ache but she is compliant as she feels that he is fulfilling her needs:

All the while
your neck strains,
the flesh itching
with the ache
you constantly mistake for desire.

The poet asks Rapunzel, and every other woman to understand that the man in her life is not a prince but an ordinary mortal who hurts her physically and mentally by displaying his superiority over her in the sexual act and otherwise. Every time Rapunzel is wounded she takes the aid of the poet to recuperate:

So you come to me,
And I kiss your bruises,
But I can never make you realize,
He has yet to be a prince.

The poet offers Rapunzel an alternative – to cut her hair permanently so that no prince can injure her by climbing over her. The poet, thus, advises women to break the bonds of patriarchy that have been the cause of their suffering for long and seek other modes of happiness:

Let me wield my shears
and free you from these burdens.
I can no longer bear to watch you
supporting this kind of weight

D) Canadian Feminist Fable Writing

Apart from the rewriting of fairy and folk tales, contemporary feminist writers in Canada have also focussed on short fables and stories to strengthen their vision of a utopian land where women will enjoy the same rights and privileges as men. To illustrate this, one can look at "Plucking" by Lorna Schwenk and "Tree and Bear" by Frances Rooney. The former fable exemplifies the woman's agony of being used and discarded emotionally and sexually by the man. "Plucking" is the story of two birds of opposite sexes and the various stages of their relationship. The story opens with the she-bird's entering the life of the he-bird who is amazed and delighted by her. On meeting her, the he-bird seeks her permission to pluck one of her feathers. Their courtship begins and the female bird blooms with his love. The wooing ceases but the he-bird continues to pluck more of her feathers, without asking her. The she-bird's beauty begins to fade as more and more of her feathers are plucked and splotches of white skin begin to appear:

> The plucking continued, however, late at night when she
> was defenseless and tired, or at a weak moment when
> she needed him the most.[25]

However, she is relieved that some of her feathers are left till one day when her partner deserts her for good and she looks at herself in the mirror and finds out that not a single feather is left on her body.

> ...she was completely bare. Not a feather left. Nothing. She was a bald, pale, naked, embarrassed bird. Didn't even *look* like a bird any more.

The she-bird searches her house for her feathers and finds some in his ashtray, some in the dust, some caked and dried, and some in the basement with worn socks and broken shoes. The bird is hurt at finding out how her feathers had been used by her companion. The story ends with the bird's realization that she has been exploited by him and her wait for her feathers to grow back on her body. And the author tells us that each time it took a long time to heal her wounds, indicating that it was an on-going process:

> He called her later that day to say he didn't need her any more, so she went off to recuperate and wait for her feathers to grow back, but it took a long time. It always did.

What is the moral of the fable? A bird is generally associated with freedom and flight, but the writer is shown as helpless and clinging to the opposite sex for support in order to bring out the irony. Earlier she appeals to him and her beauty is fresh for him to devour. As her beauty fades, he gets bored with her and eventually leaves her. Plucking, therefore, serves as a metaphor for the sexual exploitation of the female sex and the losing of the feathers is symbolic of the losing of her individuality and identity and her growing dependence on her male partner. The writer does not state the moral but suggests it to the reader. She implicitly hints that women unknowingly submit to men as the system as engraved these values in them. The writer, through the story, is indirectly protesting against this exploitation and would like women to desist from this heterosexual dependency.

If Lorna Schwenk vicariously presents the protest against the oppression of women, Frances Rooney tells a fabulous tale where the feminist writer's claim is clearly evident. "Tree and Bear" is situated in a verdant forest where the plants, birds and animals reside gladly. A curse befalls on the forest due to which there is complete destruction. All the living creatures perish and when light returns after a period of complete darkness, no life is left in the forest except a half-grown sapling. The soil in which the little tree stood is poisonous, and so the poor tree waits for her death. When the tree opens her eyes, she sees that a small bear is clinging to her trunk. The bear tells her that everything has been devastated and that they should leave the place at once. The tree feels that to leave the forest is impossible and tells the bear:

> I can't. I can't move. This is where I started to grow, and if I cannot grow here, I must die here. That is the law for trees... I am dead already. I just don't know it yet because there are still leaves on my branches, and my bark has not turned to charcoal. My life is over, Bear. That is hard, but it is true.[26]

The Bear tries hard to persuade the Tree to come along, but to no avail. The Tree believes that if she tries to uproot herself she would be hurt and bruised, for no tree had ever dared to take such a step. Trees were supposed to grow and die at their fixed places. The Tree says, "no tree has ever walked in the whole back time of earth. Never, never, never, it can't be done." The spirit of Hope reads the Tree's mind and makes her appearance and tries to impart some of her self to the Tree. She convinces Tree that although it is very difficult to uproot oneself from one's place and the path might be very hard to cross, but struggling to live is more promising than waiting to die. Hope assures Tree:

> Your heart will not break, dear Tree. It has broken already. Now it is healing. The pain you feel is the pain of life, of being alive, of becoming and growing strong, and seeing what you must do, and being afraid, and not holding back in fear. Your heart will not break again, Tree, not the way it has. It will never again feel the pain it has felt. That I promise you, Tree.

The Tree finally agrees to accompany the Bear and with great effort and pain pulls her roots out of the earth. Her branch breaks and her back is torn, yet with Hope in her heart advance with the Bear. The Bear kisses her roots and throughout the night aids her in learning to walk. Both of them become strong and happy on their journey " towards other animals for Bear to run with, toward other Trees for Tree to intertwine her branches with, and toward rich and nourishing soil to feed Tree's bruised roots and trunk and branches and leaves."

The tree in the fable stands for the woman who has lost everything in some mishap and does not have the courage to stand in the face of adversity. The fact that women have been tutored since childhood to depend on their fathers and husbands makes them so weak that they begin to believe that moving out of their defined space is next to impossible, the law for trees, as the story tells us. Women have a choice: either they can remain in their defined roles and suffer and die or to strive to live a better life, even at the cost of defying the patriarchal norms. The Bear becomes the spokesperson of the writer, who gives the reader, the moral of the fable:

> Tree, I know it's impossible. I know it's never been done. I know you can't.... You can either stay here or do what's ordinary and tree-like and possible, or you can do the extraordinary and the impossible and leave here. You

> can stay and die, or you can go and live. There are no other choices.

Thus, one sees how fairy tales, folklore, myths and fables have been political carriers of social and cultural values. They are not simply material forming bedtime stories for children but planting of gendered values in them. By re-writing and re-forming these stories, Canadian feminist writers and theorists have made a sincere effort in making women conscious of their unconscious submission to men and making them rise out of this slumber. They have broken the traditional notions of women passed on to generations and created new models for women to emulate. Through the reworking on these tales, the writers have assisted women finally to seek their long-suppressed individuality even if it can be achieved only by breaking the shackles of patriarchal domination. To conclude, one is tempted to quote Kaarina Kailo's words:

> By rewriting the very stories that controlled us in so many ways, we can finally have our cake and eat it too. We can kiss ourselves awake from the hundreds of years of fruitless waiting, the miracles that don't happen, the rescuers that more often than not leave women in the lurch. Stories have the power to reawaken our senses, in all the senses of the word. Stories are ...our gynocentric wonderlands. They promise hope and healing if we take the time to reconsider the values we transmit through them to children, if we take the time to UN-think. [27]

NOTES

1. Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976) 5.

2. Quoted in Bruno Bettelheim, 5.

3. Bruno Bettelheim, 66.

4. Quoted in Bruno Bettelheim, 42-43.

5. Bruno Bettelheim, 27.

6. Bruno Bettelheim, 24.

7. Shirin Kudchedkar, "Feminist Voices From India And Canada," Feminist Spaces: Cultural Readings From India and Canada, ed. Malashri Lal (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Limited, 1997) 2.

8. Bruno Bettelheim, 4.

9. Wendy Putman, "Introduction," Room of One's Own: A Space for Women's Writing 17:1 (March 1994) 1.

10. Kaarina Kailo, "Refusing to Hold Our Tongues: Women's Folklore, Women's Orality as Self –Recovery," Room of One's Own: A Space for Women's Writing 17:1 (March 1994) 87.

11. Kaarina Kailo, 91.

12. Tamara Steinborn, "Eve Revisited," Room of One's Own: A Space for Women's Writing 17:1 (March 1994) 35.

13. See Virginia Lee Hines, "An Old Story," Room of One's Own: A Space for Women's Writing 17:1 (March 1994) 33-34.

14. See Elizabeth Greene, "Cinderella's Daughters," Room of One's Own: A Space for Women's Writing 17:1 (March 1994) 60-65.

15. Kaarina Kailo, 89.

16. Kaarina Kailo, 89.

17. Gretchen Sankey, "Re-viewing the Life and Times of Little Red Riding Hood," Room of One's Own: A Space for Women's Writing 17:1 (March 1994) 53.

18. Quoted in Gretchen Sankey, 54.

19. The Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson, "The Little Mermaid," The Best Fairy Tales (London: Octopus Books Limited, 1984) 191.

20. Kaarina Kailo, 88.

21. See Pauline Rankin, "A Mermaid Tail," Room of One's Own: A Space for Women's Writing 17:2 (March 1994) 42-43.

22. Quoted in Sonya Andermahr, "The Politics of Separatism and Lesbian Utopian Fiction," New Lesbian Criticism: Literary and Cultural Readings, ed. Sally Munt (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) 134.

23. Kaarina Kailo, 89.

24. See Melissa Branicky, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair...," Room of One's Own: A Space for Women's Writing 17:1 (March 1994) 50-51.

25. See Lorna Schwenk, "Plucking," Room of One's Own: A Space for Women's Writing 17:2 (March 1994) 31-32.

26. See Frances Rooney, "Tree and Bear," Room of One's Own: A Space for Women's Writing 17:2 (March 1994) 33-37.

27. Kaarina Kailo, 92.

4

SUNITI NAMJOSHI'S THEORY OF LESBIAN-FEMINISM

she writes to make a name for herself
then loses it in the writing
forges an image that throws her out of herself
to fill the hiatus between extremes of loving
dons a mask of a woman
to prove that's what she is
what does a woman want?
the question asks too little

(Lola Lemire Tostevin, 1997)

A) Introducing Suniti Namjoshi

The question asks too little and yet too much for a woman writer set on a task to explore the very dilemma of being a woman. It becomes the central concern in the works – criticism, fiction, poetry, and theory of almost every woman writer or feminist. Introducing Suniti Namjoshi in the light of the above statement would be fair enough as her works are devoted to the exploration of the female condition. Namjoshi's works mark a voyage into the female psyche and unearth its various facets. Her profile as a poet, a fabulist, and a fiction writer has made her popular, but not so popular owing to her 'Asian' and 'lesbian' identity. Her recognition as a writer of the Indian Diaspora settled in Britain is deliberately reduced as she outrageously claims to be a lesbian and advocates a vision of a lesbian utopia in her works. This is evident from the fact that her name is omitted or slightly mentioned in most of the accounts of Indian writing in English or anthologies of critical essays like Indian Women Novelists (1991), The World Within: A Study of Novels in English of Indian Women 1950-1980 (1996), Recent Indian Fiction

(1994) or Glimpses of Indo-English Fiction (1985) as pointed out by A. Dasgupta.[1] This is ironical as her first volume of poems was published by the Writers' Workshop, Calcutta.

Suniti Namjoshi has published numerous poems, fables, articles, and reviews in India, Canada, United States, and Britain. Beginning with her first book of poetry Poems published in 1967 in India to her latest work Building Babel, Namjoshi has fused diverse genres – of poetry, fiction, fable, and myth to sketch out her theory of lesbian feminism. She does not share a literary ancestry or milieu with writers like R.K.Narayan, Amitav Ghosh or Mulk Raj Anand or a distinct style with other Indian women writers in English such as Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal or Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. Her style – scandalous and shocking might even baffle the Indian reader who has accustomed himself to reading the unconventional poetry of Kamala Das. Her writing is unique in its own way – set apart from the nostalgic, past-retrieving experiences of her contemporary diasporic associates such as Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherjee and M.G. Vasaanji. A sharp wit and ironical sensibility mark her style, which is truly Indian, although she refuses to describe her life in India in detail in her works.

Ironically true, but it is her Indian and lesbian identity that is at the core of all her works. Her fusion of the various genres is symbolical of the fusion of her Indianness with her so-called Western identity of being a lesbian. In the subsequent analysis, we shall, however, expose how 'lesbianism' has its roots in the Indian culture centuries ago. Thus, the two important factors that are significant to understand her writing are her Indianness and her lesbianism. It is these categories that she constructs and deconstructs adapting a self-reflexive mode to find out the relation of the individual with the world, the self versus the

other. For this purpose she uses witches, monsters, princes, birds and beasts in her fables and myths positioning every one of the as the "other" and yet identifying with them as one. "All right, I was a beast, a creature. But what sort of beast was I?" [2]

B) Mingling Various Genres – Breaking Conventions

The first reactions to Suniti Namjoshi's works would be that they are unconventional, immoral and outrageous. A closer analysis reveals that whereas fairy and folk tales are supposed to be carriers of cultural norms, Namjoshi's tales subvert and invert the laid social order. Namjoshi's prime concerns in the retelling of the fairy tales and fables is to reject all forms of authority and stereotypical notions of women depicted in them and to offer alternate visions of order and perception. Namjoshi, along with her contemporary feminists believe that the modes of perception proffered to the reader are governed by the patriarchal dominance, which need to be questioned and re-examined. For this, Namjoshi invokes the familiar world of fairy and folk tales, gives them a feminist angle and re-presents them to convey new meanings ad suggest a different social order.

The emphasis in Namjoshi's works has been on breaking the conventions – both in theme and narrative strategies. Her identity as a lesbian-feminist actuates her to contravene the boundaries imposed on women and her identity as a creative writer of the twentieth century presses her to invert novel strategies of presenting the same. Therefore, Namjoshi fuses the genres of fable, myth, fairy tale and folk tale to unmask the oppression of women.

Namjoshi's impulse to look into the traditional tales from a different viewpoint reflects her life philosophy. From the very beginning, Namjoshi took decisions differently in

order to be something in her own right. Born in a highly influential Chitpavan Brahmin family of Pune, Namjoshi had a position of authority right away. Her strong determination to prove herself led her to become an Indian Administrative Service Officer, the most highly regarded government position in India even today. Soon, she felt 'bored' with the power that it brought and took study leave to get a Master's degree in Public Administration at the University of Missouri, Columbia. The government job made her learn how to stay out of trouble, which troubled the author so much, that she resigned in 1969 and moved to Montreal, Canada to do a Ph.D. at McGill. Her subsequent thesis on Ezra Pound and lectures at Scarborough College, Toronto University refined her creative sensibility to a great extent. A lesbian from India, a fact that she admits in Goja: An Autobiographical Myth, Namjoshi began participating in Feminist and Gay Liberation movements and developed her political and ideological positions reflected in her later works:

> *You have to be sensible you know. In India these things cause a scandal. A little discretion would have made a world of difference...* Do you think it required no courage to come out and say explicitly as so many people did: "Yes, I'm lesbian, or yes, I'm homosexual," and so gradually remove the disgrace from these words? [3]

In 1988, she resigned from her teaching position to settle down finally with her lesbian friend and partner, Gillian Hanscombe, in Devon, England.

From the beginning, Namjoshi refused to abide by the conventional norms and expresses this rejection in her works too. In order to present alternate modes of perception, she defies the conventional modes of writing and mixes and mingles various genres together.

Namjoshi's characters range from the familiar fairy tale heroines like Cinderella, the Red Riding Hood and Rapunzel to the classical ones including Miranda, Antigone and a female Caliban. Her responses to the Western culture "is her evolving awareness that this patriarchal world prizes white males and regards women, along with the rest of the creation as 'other'". [4] When she admits to be a beast, she is thinking of the Hindu influence operating on her psyche:

> To me a beast wasn't "bestial" in the Western sense. To me a bird or a beast was a creature like anyone else. Hinduism is, after all, pantheistic; and the popular notion of reincarnation attributes a soul to everyone. This may sound odd to Western ears, but for me, it was as familiar as it was unconscious. It was in the very air I had breathed while growing up. [5]

Subverting the classical myth of Caliban, Miranda and Prospero from Shakespeare's The Tempest in poetry in The Bedside Book of Nightmares, Namjoshi lays bare the power politics in the patriarchal family structure. In an interview with Chelva Kanaganayakam, she admits that when she read The Tempest, she felt sorry for Caliban because this creature was the king of the island. She considers Ferdinand, in comparison with him, a wimp and Prospero, a rude father. "Snapshots from Caliban" creates a female Caliban who writes a journal and records her love, grief and suspicions in the form of a diary. Prospero, the father of both Caliban and Miranda is a manipulative egoist, who fails to understand that he has created them:

> I made them? Maiden and monster
> and then disdained them?
> Was there something in me

that fed and sustained them?
Are they mine or their own?
I dare not claim them. (102)

Miranda, the unruly daughter is, at first, jealous of Caliban but the two gradually become "sisters", a nightmare for the patriarchal sage who fails to understand their reunion. In Because of India, she writes that the poems were written to "explain the bloodier aspects of gay liberation" for which she creates a Caliban with a strong ego, "who just wanted what she wanted". (83)

In "From Baby F with Much Love", she creates a female Frankenstein, Baby F, the family structure from the female perspective. The Baby F strives and struggles to define the space of women in the family and evinces how women are tutored to be passive and submissive. Baby F's ego is inflated, and then, subsided when she reconciles with her mother, but is prevented from becoming another meek, anonymous woman. In "The Reformed Antigone", the female protagonist is wise enough to save her own life and decides not to bury her brother and in "Archetypes" Penelope expresses her anger and rage in her weaving. By revising the classical myths and by intermingling prose and poetry, Namjoshi uncovers the sexist implications in these classical tales.

The weaving of fabulation and poetry is also manifested in The Blue Donkey Fables which combines tigers, monkeys, rabbits, pigs, cats, magpies and other animals with a clever feminist blue donkey who tells tales and recites poetry to comment on human frailties and follies. The fables bring numerous animals together who unite to talk about issues ranging from the nature of art and poetry to the relation between appearance and

reality. As to why the fable is chosen over other forms of conventional genres, Namjoshi offers an "Explanation" in the form of a short poem:

> Why do you write about plants and animals?
> Why not people?
> Because
> no daffodil shrieks to be plucked,
> no lily rages, 'Admire my bower.'
> And if dogs go about and shit
> Their shit, at least it mixes
> With the stones and mud...
> Someone explains,
> A tree is not a person. A boy is not a cat.'
> 'Yes,' I reply, striving for patience,
> 'that is the problem. Precisely that.' [6]

The predicament of immigrant women poets in a white male dominant society is illustrated in a sequence in which the blue donkey sets out to recite some of her verse to a lady in love with poetry. The lady's scathing comment of refusal to listen to the donkey expresses the marginalization of non-white poets:

> 'I think poetry is so beautiful. I feel I could live on poetry and fresh air for ever.' The Blue Donkey edged closer. 'Well, as it happens,' she ventured diffidently, 'I am a poet. Perhaps you would like me to recite some of my verse?' 'Oh. Oh no,' the Lady replied hastily, then she recovered herself. 'The fact is,' she explained, 'that though I have studied many languages and my French and German are both excellent, I have never mastered Blue Donkese. And though I have no doubt whatsoever that your poems are excellent, I fear they would fall on

> untutored ears.' 'But please, I speak English.' The Blue Donkey could hear herself sounding plaintive. 'Oh,' murmured the Lady. 'But surely as a Blue Donkey, integrity requires that you paint the world as it appears to you. And consider: what have a lady and a donkey in common?' [7]

Suniti's confrontation of a feminine experience in an alien environment is satirically portrayed in the blueness of the donkey which positions it as different by virtue of species and colour, combined with her claim of being a poet. The Blue Donkey's insistence on remaining a blue donkey against a red bridge, till she is recognized and accepted by the community, is a protest in her own right. The stark blueness of the donkey projects the problematic of colour, race and sex in a white man's world. Chelva Kanaganayakam finds Namjoshi, "unable to participate in the conflict between centre and margin, between colonizer and colonized. In fact, one of her principal strategies is to avoid the creation of a character within a recognizable ethos, for to do so would be to recapitulate to the paradigms of patriarchy". [8] Therefore, Namjoshi combines fables in prose that are often poetic, with other poetic forms, particularly the sonnet, to castigate all – Poets, feminists, literary critics, readers and patriarchs, as shown by Diane McGifford. Her choice is articulated in her own words:

> Of course, the fable is much closer to verse. It's much closer to poetry than the realist novel, and that is why I am pleased that I write these fables in what looks like prose or what is prose. [9]

Fantasy, fable and science fiction are also used in The Mothers of Maya Diip, where Jyanvi, an Indian lesbian poet enters an all-woman world and exposes the sexual

preferences in a patriarchy. Maya Diip is a matriarchal world working on the principles of love, unity and universal motherhood. With outsiders like Jyanvi the poet and Valerie, an American expatriate, Namjoshi points out the hypocrisy of the heterosexual patriarchy that reduces women to mere objects and envisions an alternative matriarchal utopia, a separatist community of women as a preferable solution to the problem of women's exploitation. Therefore, subversion and inversion of the traditional narratives becomes central to Namjoshi's works to deal with issues of gender and feminism, and Uma Parameswaran readily supports Namjoshi's efforts:

> But we cannot do without myths and metaphors. Indeed they are the basic tools with which a writer uses language as a creative process in a community which distances itself from that writer. Subversion is a powerful way of getting things across. Suniti Namjoshi does it marvelously in her retelling of the myths...[10]

C) Fusion of Indian and Western Philosophy

Despite Suniti's denial of investigating the immigrant dilemma and the fact that references to India remain minimal in her works, it is her dislocation as an Indian that serves the basis of her writing to explore the problem of belonging or, in actual, non-belonging. The homeland that remains rooted in the mind or the suitcases of a writer of the Diaspora, as Vijay Mishra puts it, also figures implicitly in Suniti Namjoshi's works. Born and brought up in Maharashtra, Suniti admits that she depicts the landscape of Maharashtra in her works. Although she has not been educated in Marathi, the Marathi

perceptiveness is grounded in her psyche, which is consciously or unconsciously reflected in her works.

The fabulist mode of writing by choosing birds, animals, witches, gods and goddesses has definite parallels in the Indian culture as well. Apart from the inversion of classical Greek and Roman archetypes of Philomel and Perseus, Namjoshi's fables are inhabited by monkeys, crocodiles, swans, foxes, fishes, lions and mice that are encountered in Indian traditional fables and folk tales. Indian fabulist literature involves an element of fun, which is reflected in her fables when she makes a feminist point with humour and understatement. Her fables are infused with the harshness, the irony, the clarity and the sensibility of Maharashtrans, which she acknowledges:

> If you get anything that is Indian in my writing, that is a Marathi sensibility; it is there in the sensibility, not in the content. Marathis are known for their sarcasm and for their irony. You cannot offer a compliment in Marathi without sounding as if you were being ironic or teasing. [11]

Although Suniti's feminist ideas were shaped in the West, one can trace their roots in the Indian philosophy. In Same-Sex Love in India: Readings From Literature and History, Ruth Vanita argues that the Indian literature and Hindu mythology proffers abundance of instances of homosexuality and transgression of sex and gender. Ruth debates that Buddhism and Hinduism provide some examples of the undoing of gender. In Buddhism, lots of women become bodhisattas and finally attain Buddhahood. Buddhism asserts that no human is born with intrinsic 'masculine' or 'feminine' characteristics and 'sunyata' or 'emptiness' is the only reality:

> The goddess explains: Just as you are not really a woman but appear to be female in form, all women also appear to be female in form but are not really women. Therefore, the Buddha said all are not really men or women...All things neither exist nor do not exist. The Buddha said there is neither existence nor nonexistence. [12]

Vanita also shows that apart from 'male' and 'female', the concept of 'third sex' was also coined in Indian culture and admitted into Sanskrit grammar in the sixth century B.C. The attainment of the third sex was the most intense desire that could be experienced by both 'male' and 'female' sex. Further, friendship is given a remarkable place in Indian culture and heritage and apart from the categorization of women in relation to men as the virgin, the widow and the courtesan, there are women in love with friends with whom they played in their childhood or are similar to themselves.

Friendship is also the primary theme of the Indian text Panchatantra literally meaning five *tantras* or narratives, strategies or theories, a compendium of stories that travelled to Europe in the sixth and eighth centuries. Panchatantra depicts animals as protagonists that perform human actions and behaviour. The stories present "odd" friendships between members of different species that deconstruct the notion of gender and sex. In Vanita's words:

> At least one of these implications could relate to gender and sexuality. If the categories "man" and "woman" are socially constructed as both opposite and complementary to one another, playing out the action between beasts rather than humans could have the effect of defamiliarizing and undoing the categories. (41)

The most famous narrative is about the friendship between the monkey and the crocodile that sets an example of love between the same sex. The "odd" friendship becomes the key concern of the crocodile's wife who considers the monkey as her enemy and decides to destroy him. The wife is unable to understand their relationship and fails to comprehend that the crocodile, which feeds on flesh, can be friends with a he-monkey. She accuses her husband of having clandestine relations with the monkey presuming it to be a female. The quotation from the Panchatantra denotes the ardent love between the two male friends:

> If she is really not your beloved then why won't you kill her when I am asking you to do so? Again, if the creature is truly a male ape, as you say, what kind of affection is this that you fell for it? (45)

Suniti Namjoshi's exploration of the motif of friendship and same-sex love surely reflects her Indian influence, as she agrees to have read the Panchatantra in her interview with Chelva Kanaganayakam. The notion of lesbian intimacy and a woman's love for a fellow woman is not only based on her understanding of Western feminist theory, but also approach her reading of homosexuality depicted in Indian traditional fables. Whereas in the Panchatantra, the crocodile's wife questions his queer affection for the he-monkey, Namjoshi's version of the traditional fable, 'The Monkey and the Crocodiles' finds nothing strange in the association:

> A monkey used to live in a large jambu tree which grew along the banks of the river Yamuna. The fruit of this tree was unusually delicious and a bit like plums. At the foot of the tree lived two crocodiles. The monkey and the crocodiles were very good friends. The monkey

> would feed the crocodiles plums and the crocodiles in return would make conversation. They also protected her- though she did not know it- by keeping a watchful eye on her. [13]

In tracing evidences of same-sex love in Indian texts, Ruth Vanita shows that homosexuality and the notion of fluidity of sex have been the prime themes of the Puranas. The love story of the two Hindu gods, Shiva the destroyer and Vishnu the preserver, is a fine illustration of this, where Shiva gets attracted to Vishnu and adapts the Mohini form, the form of a beautiful woman in order to entice him. Their sexual play and Mohini's pregnancy results in the birth of Hariharaputra – literally meaning the son of Vishnu and Shiva, signifying the union of the two opposing forces of destruction and preservation. The story also recounts, that later, Vishnu transforms into a woman, the Mohini form, to obtain the ambrosia, the juice of immortality. Mohini is absorbed back into Vishnu and does not endure a separate existence thereafter. Further, Vanita elucidates that the Hindu gods changed their sex in order to demolish demonic powers. She exemplifies this with the transformation of Krishna into a woman to destroy a monster. Other references point to the Mahabharata where Radha and her woman friends (sakhi) play and bathe together and Krishna trying to invade in their independent feminine space. So, the transgression of the boundaries of sex and gender in Suniti Namjoshi's works can be traced back to the Hindu mythology. Her detachment from and active participation in the Indian culture is presented in her poem, "In That Particular Temple" where she celebrates lesbian love by invoking the legend of the dance of Shiva:

> When we make love
> you and I

are both sacred and secular.
The goddess' limbs
begin to move.
Balanced underfoot
the world spins. [14]

The Hindu view of gender and sex as flexible and fluid and the concept of arbitrary identity are best manifested in The Conversations of Cow. Namjoshi's personal profile as a lesbian herself, in love with a fellow woman, and residing with her, explains her need to legitimize lesbianism in her works. She is the first Indian woman to have declared that she is a lesbian who views heterosexuality as a repressive social structure that leads to the subservience of women. As a lesbian, she therefore wishes to define a lesbian's relation to the world. Namjoshi had been long questioning this in her works:

> It's obvious that for some time now I had been asking the question, what was my place in a world that often seemed absurd to me? All right, I was a lesbian, a lesbian feminist. But what was a lesbian? What was her relation to other people? [15]

It is this dilemma of positioning a lesbian vis-à-vis the world that becomes the subject matter of most of her works including The Conversations of Cow. Every culture uses certain specific animals in defining the relation of self vis-a-vis the world. Uma Parameswaran asseverates that "in her The Conversations of Cow, she [Namjoshi] superbly carries off three banners any one of which is enough to weigh down the average person: the banners that celebrate being a woman, a non-white woman, a lesbian, and she does it armed with the two indispensables of a writer's toolbox – rage and humour." [16]

For the Indian culture, the cow is perhaps the best-known symbol today to denote the quest for self-identity. In "Embracing the Past By Retelling the Stories", Ruth Vanita once again points out that the cow functions effectively as a symbol for crossing boundaries of gender, nationality and sexuality as:

> Nonhuman animals, being less containable than humans in categories of gender and nationality, often function, both in Eastern and Western mythologies and literary traditions, to undo these categories and to reveal the surprising commonality of apparently distinct traditions and groupings. Furthermore, the apparently uncrossable gulf between human and nonhuman may function as a metaphor for the equally uncrossable, although socially created, sexual gulf between members of the same gender. [17]

Ruth shows that the cow represents the woman-as-goddess-and-slave syndrome as well as the image of Mother India as an undernourished, overmilked, mindless producer of numberless children. On the one hand, the cow enjoys a sacrosanct status and is an object of worship, addressed as 'Gau Mata" and Hindus are forbidden to eat the revered animal and on the other hand, the cow is exploited by equating it to the female body.

Vanita further adds that the cow has been attributed with several connotations in the English and Hindi language. For instance, "stupid cow" is an insult in English, indicating the female body as good for nothing except for procreation. When a woman is addressed as "cowlike" in Hindi the emphasis is on her innocence and patience. Therefore, Indians perceive the cow and the woman as interchanging their roles as objects of victimization.

Cow, subsequently, becomes a symbol of the notion of the identity being flexible and fluid in Hinduism.

The Conversations of Cow addresses the possibility of transformation of identity with the two main protagonists: the lesbian cow, Bhadravati and the author, Suniti. Bhadravati, the lesbian Brahmini diasporic cow, nicknamed Baddy by Western cows, who find it difficult to pronounce her name, is reminiscent of the author's own location in a foreign land:

> 'I ought to tell you,' Cow informs me, 'that this is a Self-Sustaining Community of Lesbian Cows.' I scrutinize Cow. So, Cow and I have something in common. [18]

Cow lives with her lesbian friends Bouddica, Cowslip, Lou-Ann, Ariadne, Sybilla and others. Bhadravati combines Eastern with Western literary traditions in her image of a Hindu goddess as well as a lesbian diasporic animal. In her transgression of sex, the cow recalls the Hindu mythological cow 'Surabhi', who produces an endless stream of milk and "Kamadhenu" or the wish-fulfilling divine cow. 'Dhenu' means 'cow' and 'Kama' means both 'wish' and 'work' and also 'erotic desire' and 'sex' as in Kamasutra. When all the wishes are fulfilled and no desire is left, one reaches the stage of "Moksha" or liberation. Namjoshi's Kamadhenu helps to liberate her from her prejudices and categories, as demonstrated by Vanita.

During the course of the narrative, Bhadravati changes into an Indian woman, who later becomes Suniti's lover. The lesbian cow-turned-woman then metamorphoses into a well-meaning white man named Bud, crossing the bounds of nationality, race, gender and

sexuality, who Suniti wishes to marry. The world, as explained by Cow, is divided into Class A humans and Class B humans:

> ...Class A people don't wear lipstick, Class B people do. Class A people spread themselves out. Class B people apologize for so much s occupying space. Class A people stand like blocks. Class B people look unbalanced. Class A people never smile. Class B people smile placatingly twice in a minute and seldom require any provocation. (24)

Cows contends that she can easily pass as a man as both cows and men spread themselves out, stand like blocks without apologizing for occupying space, and never smile without provocation. Suniti, on the other hand, does not understand what she would like to change into and tries to be a Class B heterosexual companion to Bud or Baddy, Bhadravati's white male persona. Cow's reference to her sister Charlotte, a six-foot-two blonde woman, despite being a Hindu and her threatening Suniti of turning into carnivorous terrifies Suniti. The Cow is not troubled by her frequent transformations and tells Suniti:

> 'It's all right,' she says, 'identity is fluid. Haven't you heard of transmigration? And you call yourself a good Brahmin?' (32)

Cow expresses her wish of being an ordinary animal and Suniti asserts her desire of being extraordinary, "a mysterious stranger". (66) Suniti decides to remain cheerful in her status of a devoted wife of Bud but her life becomes miserable as an ordinary woman. However, she feels exhausted with this cheerfulness soon in coping with an

unsatisfactory man and prefers solitude. Her sense of alienation and self-absorption is manifested in her waking up the next morning with her double, Suniti 2 or "S2". Both Suniti and her chaotic split self "S2" are wearied with the multiple identities of Cow and see the world reduced to nothing. Finally they accept Cow in all her selves as Western and Indian, as human and nonhuman, as man and woman, as heterosexual and lesbian:

> 'O Cow of a thousand faces and a thousand names, O Julia, Peter, Madeleine and Kate, O Margaret, Charlotte, Amy and S1, O Bouddica, Sybilla, Cowslip and S2, O Ariadne, Lou-Ann and Madame X, O Cow who manifests herself in a thousand shapes and a thousand wishes...' (121-122)

The novel concludes with Suniti's double merging back into her and her accepting Cow in all her forms. Suniti decides to write the conversations in the form of a book and "Cow as world becomes Cow as book. This is the last and also, in a sense, the first metamorphosis, the Word that is the end and the beginning of every conversation and conjuration." [19]

Suniti Namjoshi's confirmation of her lesbian experience is articulated further in Goja: An Autobiographical Myth, a heroic step in confessing the truth of being a lesbian who crosses the national boundaries to find a place for herself. Namjoshi recounts her childhood and adolescence in India with her aaya, Goja and grandmother, The Ranisaheb. Amidst the Maharashtran landscape, Suniti relates her love relation with these two women, to whom she justifies her choice of remaining a homosexual amid the heterosexual patriarchal society. The writer narrates her lesbian experiences with three women, 'Paramour' a wood nymph, Christine and Gill. Paramour becomes the poet's

inspiration with whom she falls in love in the "enchanted forest". Namjoshi is enticed by the woods, the leaves, the ambience and expresses her passionate love for her:

> I'm at home in this forest...Paramour, of course, lives in the forest. She is the forest. Under enchantment anything is possible. Identity is lost, and with it fear. I'm a fawn in this forest. I put my head in her lap. The leaves and sunlight brush her nakedness – as I would, as I do. She feels my head against her thigh. She feels my tongue brush her hair. I embrace each tree trunk, each leafy branch to its very tip. For a while the forest and I float on darkness. [20]

Namjoshi's alliance with Christine helped her define her political and ideological status as a lesbian, non-white woman who should write for the rights of lesbians in a world dominated and dictated by the white man. Poetry, fables, and prose fiction followed hoping for the recognition of lesbian needs and desires. The collaboration with Gillian Hanscombe subsequently declared Namjoshi's lesbian identity by moving to England with her and composing pure lesbian literature in Flesh and Paper.

Thus, Suniti Namjoshi delves deep into the question of female subjugation in a male-governed world by reworking traditional myths and fables. Her pursuit of inquiry into the female condition and its portrayal with playful irony, wit and humour is a product of her Indian influence mingled with her feminist ideas shaped in the West with the reading of Adrienne Rich and other radical feminists. Her immigrant status may not have provoked her much to describe the racial, cultural and social inequalities faced in an alien environment, yet it is the very fact of being an Indian that has promoted her to write for the cause of women. Her declaration of being a lesbian and her will to overthrow the

patriarchal dominance has formed the very basis of her works and given shape to her fantastical conception of a lesbian separatist commune fully articulated in The Mothers of Maya Diip. It is, therefore, this realization of alternatives outside patriarchy that urge her finally to:

> have a political need to sustain and celebrate the woman-woman bond as between subject and another subject, rather than conceding anything to the subject/object model typical of heterosexual patriarchy – spelt out for us by Simone de Beauvoir, so long ago." [21]

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5

ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST FABLES AND THE MOTHERS OF MAYA DIIP

Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women.

(Virginia Woolf, 1929)

A) Analysis of Feminist Fables

In this chapter, it is proposed to apply Suniti Namjoshi's theory of lesbian-feminism as elucidated in the previous chapter to analyze Feminist Fables and The Mothers of Maya Diip which deal with women's oppression and posit separatism as a positive solution to patriarchal subjugation of women. Feminist Fables was first published in 1981 at a time when Canadian feminism had already arrived at a mature stage in its development. It was the dawn of the lesbian feminism with organizations such as LOOT and National Lesbian Forum fighting for the desires, aspirations, and rights of lesbians in society. Namjoshi had been visiting **Sappho** and the **Gateways** and meeting lesbians and gay men. Her lesbian friend Christine Donald had influenced her the most with her feminist ideas. It was one of the remarks that Namjoshi made that jerked her to write something for the cause. It went like this:

> Here in the West, all that seems to matter for social status is gender and money. But in India several factors operate: caste, class and family background. An Indian woman who has all these factors operating for her certainly isn't oppressed. And it seems to me that such women are far less awkward and far more assured than many of the women I've seen here.[1]

Soon, she realized that her remark was utterly stupid and that she had been ignoring and disregarding women for whom these factors operated. It was this realization that produced Feminist Fables during her sabbatical leave in 1979.

Namjoshi's Feminist Fables is a result of the Canadian feminist and lesbian-feminist ideals interwoven with her Indian heritage. It is the mingling of her Indianness with her lesbian perspective that forms the structure of her fables. If fables are designed to solve human problems and dilemmas, Namjoshi's use of fables is idiosyncratic. Etymologically, a fable is derived from the Latin word fabula which means a made-up story, which suggests that a fable has nothing to do with truth. Yet, traditional fables are seen as potential carriers of "truths", of patterns of behaviour of a particular culture. If fables and myths are used for serving pedagogical needs, Namjoshi "uses this essentially moralizing and instructive genre in a satiric way", and "sets herself against the "truths" of a given order".[2] Unlike traditional fables, where generalizations are applied to individuals, Namjoshi's fables address idiosyncratic individuals engaged in particular idiosyncrasies. Therefore, her fables reveal a truth ratified by her conscious lesbian feminist identity and her insights into the nature of "truths" structured in traditional tales.

A fable is linked to the proverb that claims to be a universal repository of truths. Hence, it becomes essential that fables depict types, not individuals. But, Namjoshi's fables break the very notion of cultural stereotypes of the masculine and the feminine. Her three-fold marginalization of being a lesbian woman writer of the Indian Diaspora is clearly reflected in her fables where she develops the "Asian perspective," the "alien perspective," and the "lesbian perspective"[3]. Her fables, therefore, are set apart from the traditional ones and express the hidden "truths" of the latter by exposing the patriarchal hegemony embedded in them. In Because of India she reports that for her,

the fables "were a way of exploring feminist ideas and their implications for the patterns I had inherited through the mainstream literary tradition."[4].

The two essential elements of any fable are the presence of non-human characters enacting human behaviour, desires and experiences, and the stating of the moral of the story. Thus, we have non-humans teaching humans lessons in life. As far as this is concerned, Namjoshi's fables also contain birds and beasts tutoring human beings. Yet, her fables have a distinctive quality as the characters do not play their conventional roles and do not preach the morals and ethics laid down by society. Namjoshi's characters range from animals such as ducks, swans, lizards, monkeys, crocodiles, mares, snakes, mongooses, bears, ostriches, foxes and owls to mythical characters such as Red Riding Hood, Little Miss Muffet, Jack of the Beanstalk, Goldilocks and the Ugly Duckling to invented ones like the handsome young dyke, the New Woman and the Incredible Woman. In an interview with Chelva Kanaganayakam, she says:

> I am always asked why I write fables and why I write about animals. I try to supply answers, but the honest truth is I don't know. We don't separate animals from human beings. As for animals talking, why not? [5]

Unlike traditional fables, most of her characters are females advocating revolt against the system. Her fables have a feminist rendition and rewriting and reworking them enables her to trace and reveal what is unsaid and undermined in the patriarchal hegemony rooted in the traditional fables.

Feminist Fables offers a new vision into the condition of women in society in a male-dominated world. Through inventing a new mythology, they question the oppression of women in patriarchy and suggest alternatives. With playful irony, they investigate

the status and fate of women in a heterosexual society. Savita Goel in her article on Feminist Fables, comments:

> In these hilarious, witty and elegantly written fables, she [Namjoshi] has invented a mythology that is simultaneously thought-provoking and entertaining and deals with the aspects of women's lives that have been erased, ignored, demeaned and mystified. [6]

What are the issues raised in the fables? How does Suniti Namjoshi bring to the fore the ill treatment faced by women? If one looks at the fables closely, one may find them as an explication of the three phases denominated by Elaine Showalter – the 'Feminine', the 'Feminist' and the 'Female'. The fables explore the 'feminine' aspects in women, where they succumb to the wishes of men and comply with the dominant modes of behaviour dictated to them; the 'feminist' phase where they protest against the values and demand autonomy and power; the 'female' phase where they call women to search for their identity. The fables point out that the inequality between sexes is not a biological but a cultural construct. Gender differences are constructed consciously for empowerment of women and Namjoshi's fables deconstruct these differences and identities as well.

Reworking of old myths and tales has become a dominant subject in the Canadian feminist tradition. Upending traditional tales and conventional masculine and feminine roles to accentuate the feminist ideas has been witnessed in the writing of contemporary Canadian feminist writers and Namjoshi seems to follow their tradition. From the rewriting of old tales such as 'The Ugly Duckling' and 'Hansel and Gretel' to inventing of new fables like 'The Doll' and 'Owl' the ontology remains the same – the unmasking of the subjugation of women and their liberation from heterosexual patriarchy.

Patriarchy has relegated women to a sub-ordinate status in family and society. They have been ordered to be passive, docile and submissive. Their position has been confined to the household as obedient servants of men. They must cook good food, keep the house clean and polished and learn the art of keeping men happy as efficient wives and daughters. The first fable 'From The Panchatantara' is a story of a Brahmin who prays to Lord Vishnu for a son but gets a daughter instead. Still, he imparts all his knowledge to her to make her a brahmin. After much meditation Lord Vishnu reappears and the brahmin again asks for a son. In his next birth, the brahmin becomes a woman and bears eight sons. Namjoshi ends the tale on a satiric note that sums up the entire collection. This time the girl asks for a human status and the god sneaks away with saying, "Ah, that is much harder" [7]. With skillful irony, the author reveals that women have been denied human status and human rights.

In 'The Little Prince' the conventional order of men ruling and women obeying is reinstated. The fable is about an ambitious queen who unfortunately desires that her daughter should ascend the throne. So, she deliberately brings up the little prince as demure and shy and the princess as adept in all skills – hunting, tennis, mathematics and law. Somehow she convinces the king that the more capable should rule and the tests for various skills are set. The prince fails in one and all yet the idea of being ruled by a woman infuriates the king. Order is restored as the prince ascends the throne and the "wicked queen" and her "unlucky daughter" are banished forever.

Often Namjoshi's fables are pithy and concise and end on a crisp note that implies what she wants to say. In exposing the status of a wife in a male-governed society, 'The Tale Of Two Brothers' is a perfect citation. I would like to quote the small fable fully to illustrate my view:

> There was once a man who thought he could do anything,
> even be a woman. So he acquired a baby, changed its

> diapers and fed the damn thing three times a night. He did all the housework, was deferential to men, and got worn out. But he had a brother, Jack Cleverfellow, who hired a wife, and got it all done. (36)

The fable clearly states that women are reduced to servants in the house. Their space is restricted to the home where performing the household chores, taking care of the children and being obeisant to men becomes their only duty. In 'The Secret Wisdom' the servility implicit in a woman's role becomes manifest where a young woman in search of wisdom visits the Country of Smilers. In an interview with its leader, she interrogates the secret of their wisdom. The leader explains to her that the countrymen utilize their energy economically by listening to and looking at unpleasant things with the left ear and eye respectively. He further adds that the natives are trained at this art. When the woman servant serves the refreshments and the young woman inquires if she could learn how to make them, he replies that she requires no training for it, as being a woman she is suited to it:

> 'My dear,' said the leader, 'don't worry about it. You have a natural talent for our native discipline. You need no training.' She was extremely pleased and smiled brilliantly. (41)

Traditional fables contain animals wearing the human garb and enacting their conduct. Namjoshi's fables also contain numerous animals and beasts stating feminist ideas and morals. In a scoffing tale 'No Frog In Her Right Mind' the fabulist pictures the immurement of women in a patriarchal set-up. The fable is about a prince who catches a female frog while playing and takes it home. At home, he puts her in a jar and all night long the frog struggles to escape. Her efforts succeed and she flees at

dawn. The prince gets up in the morning and, not finding the frog in her place, goes outside carrying the jar. The title of the fable suggests that the frog's attempt to defy the norms and move out of her defined space are futile as the prince would trap her again. Women have grappled hard to move out of their homes in search of freedom, yet men have fettered them by displaying their manhood over them.

What is the fate of women who remain restricted in the space allotted to them? Namjoshi hints that if women remain subservient without complaining and submit to the wishes of men, their existence is bound to fade into oblivion and their identity extinct. She allegorizes this in her fable 'The Derbyshire Fish'. The Derbyshire fish represent those women who have never tried at moving outside their homes and surrender to the patriarchal norms willingly. In the tale, the writer narrates that the fish found in Derbyshire in the English Midlands are blind as they swim in the dark. They are also transparent as they do not see and prefer not to be seen. It is only when a child notices some dead fish in one of the caverns that their existence is acknowledged. The fish, according to the story, are dying because they do not want to breathe in fresh air and sunlight:

> But the fish keep dying. The conclusion is escapable: nature knows best, these benighted creatures do not wish to live. It will all work out. They are nearly extinct. (85)

The height of this subordination is brought out in 'Her Mother's Daughter' in which there is a couple who has a feminist daughter. As the daughter grows up, she decides to avenge the wrongs done on her mother. The mother is shocked as subservience is rooted in her psyche and the idea of going against the said norms is almost irrational for her. The daughter tries hard to explain to her mother that patriarchy has made them dependent on the father and that they should fight for their liberation. The

horrified mother makes it clear to the daughter that, "in a good patriarchy the women are dependent, but they're not allowed to know it", and "that's how it should be."(96)

Namjoshi's fables allege that daughters are trained from childhood itself to be passive, patient, and complaisant and to "hold their tongues". The first instance of this is shown in the fable 'The Lesson' where a young girl after being inspired by the naked emperor in the noted fairy tale of 'The Emperor's Clothes' undresses herself and believes that she is an emperor. Her mother, at once, chides her and gives her the right lesson which is given to all the daughters in a patriarchal society:

> 'Don't be silly, darling. Only little boys grow up to be Emperors. As for little girls, they marry Emperors; and they learn to hold their tongues, particularly on the subject of the Emperor's clothes.' (8)

The silencing of women is also divulged in 'Nymph' which is the reworking of the myth of the Greek god Apollo chasing Daphne and the latter being transformed into a laurel. The fabulist gives us three cases where the nymph turns into a laurel. In the first case, the fabulist picks up the traditional myth and questions whether the fate of women who are unwilling is that that they are silenced forever? In the second, she twists the tale by saying that the nymph is willing and chases the god instead. The god soon gets bored and the nymph is again turned into a laurel, as she needs to be muzzled. In the third case, Daphne succumbs and keeps quiet afterwards. She is changed into a green laurel, and "it obviously means, that trees keep quiet." (4)

In an interesting fable, the author narrates and comments upon the fact that even today the birth of a girl child is not a cause of jubilation. 'The Local History' is the story of a young girl who is also a goddess of a small fishing village. In one particular year,

there is shortage of fish and a stupid young man persuade the villagers that they should kill the goddess and use her as bait to have fish all the time. The fishers try to amputate and drown her but the goddess does not die. They are disappointed and gradually their lives change. They forget fishing and the goddess but remember one thing. They celebrate the birth of a son with joy and the birth of a daughter with distress.

Patriarchy makes women extremely vulnerable to objectification and commodification, as they are acquiescent and not willing to protest. Namjoshi unveils this aspect of patriarchal autonomy as well in her fables. In one of the fables, 'The Milk-White Mare' set in the times of the Caliph, Prince Haroun-al-Raschid, "defender of the mighty and the protector of the loyal" (27), a woman transformed into a mare by magic is being treated brutally by her husband and father. Earlier, the woman had been discarded by her husband believing her to be a slut, but now as a mare she was handsome and useful, and was desired by both the men. As long as she is productive, a woman is wanted and is otherwise dumped. Since she was no longer useful for the husband, he threw her out. But as a mare she is profitable and demanded. The Prince does justice: he gives each of them fifty gold pieces and the mare is kept in the stables of the Prince, thus, utilizing her the utmost. The idea is also explicated in 'Legend' that highlights how women have been the objects of male gaze and treated as commodities. Namjoshi advances this argument in the story by depicting how a she-monster found by a group of scientists is operated, dissected and cut up, its bones scraped, and kept in the National Museum, lest she causes any damage if unleashed on the world. With undercutting irony, the fabulist closes the tale by saying that the legend goes like this:

> 'The Dreaded She-Monster. The fumes of this creature are noxious to men.' Inscribed underneath are the names of the scientists who gave their lives to find this out. (33)

However, in 'The Dower' the fabulist tells us that women can revolt against this commodification and enjoy their rights. The fable provides three alternative endings to the main plot. A king desires to have a son but has three daughters in succession. When the first one is born, the queen convinces him that wherever she will walk flowers will sprout. The second is gifted, as where she will walk pearls will be found. But when the third is born the queen dies and the child is not considered to be a real princess as her gait produced nothing. One day the princess' foot is cut and a ruby is formed out of her blood. Three possible destinies are possible according to the writer: the princess is not supposed to walk with shoes and the king becomes richer and richer; the king marries the unfortunate princess to a poor swineherd before the miracle happens. Once her foot is cut, and the miracle takes place and the couple sells the jewel and gets the princess a new pair of shoes; the first princess becomes a florist, the second sets a pearl business and the third produces a ruby when it suits her.

The heterosexual patriarchal hegemony whereby women are born to provide sexual gratification to men is yet another theme of Feminist Fables. Namjoshi skillfully plays upon language to show how women unknowingly relinquish and consider it their duty to satisfy men physically as well as emotionally. 'Sheherazade' is one of the feminist fables where the author plays upon this idea. Men engage themselves in gazing at women and women engage themselves in making themselves apt objects of gaze. Men need to be pleased physically and if women fail to do so they have to pay a price.

The fable is narrated as juxtaposing horses with humans, the male sex of both the species, overpowering the female physically.

> Watch how the stallion mounts the mare. Watch how the mare submits to the stallion. So the Caliph at night will mount the princess. The princes will give much pleasure to him. This is the law. It pleases Allah. (45)

Once the Caliph is bored with the princess, she will die. The stallion has one thousand mares and the Caliph has one thousand women for their pleasure. In this manner, women have been victims serving men in satisfying all their needs. In another myth of the 'Green Slave Women' this idea is confirmed as the Green Slave Women, irresistible to all men is tamed and forced to surrender to the Space Captain by his use of his physical prowess over her. "His sexual swordplay, his inexhaustible energy, his amazing acrobatics" (67) result in the final submission of the women.

Women losing their identity and being completely reduced to nothing but attendants to their husbands and fathers, is indeed the worst effect of patriarchy. Before marriage, they must preserve their chastity and after marriage must use their skills to appease the men. Their virginity or purity is the jewel that they must safeguard to be worn and enjoyed by their husbands after marriage. 'Jewel' shows how a young toad is worried about losing the jewel on her forehead after marriage and the parents consoling her that when married, she will be the sole property of her husband who will be the sole owner of her jewel and then, "'it really won't matter whether or not you are precious.'" (55) The taboo of chastity is so dominant in patriarchy that once women lose it they are no longer fit for living in the society, despite the fact that it is the very men responsible for her plight. Namjoshi in a brief fable about two knights and a damsel points this out in 'Complaint'. A damsel in distress is raped by one of

the knights who abduct her. The other knight, the lover combats with him and wins. Ironically, it is not the girl's complaint about her state but the knight's complaint that he can not marry her as she has lost her virginity. Maidenhood and purity is also the central theme of 'Blood' where the feminist writer explicitly talks about the concept of bleeding associated with the first act of sexual intercourse. In the fable, the Snow Maiden is white and pure and her "breasts white and virginal" (35). The prince marries her believing her to be a virgin. But when he makes love to her, the Maiden does not bleed. The prince is so provoked that he abandons the maiden.

Feminist Fables also reveal the classical stereotypes of women in traditional fairy tales and fables. The epithets associated with women are 'stupid', 'weak', 'fragile', 'insipid', 'demure' and ''imperfect' and 'inferior' to men. In contrast, men are 'rational', 'brave', 'strong', 'bold', 'flawless' and, undoubtedly, 'superior' of the human species. Wisdom, knowledge and strength are manly qualities alone. In 'The Gods' an old couple is gifted with a girl child who is precocious and surpassed everyone in running, music and studies. She is blessed by the gods with great abilities, yet the men of the village are critical of her as " To be so damned good, is not womanly." (37) This is corroborated in 'Whore, Bitch, Slut, Sow' in which a strong-minded woman pleads to the Judge that the labels she bore should be changed. The judge tries hard by calling her a thief or a beggar or even a bastard but the scholars argue that she is neither of these:

> 'The truth is, Your Honour,' the scholar replied, 'that her wickedness consists in the fact that she is a woman.'
> 'Ah,' said the Learned Judge, 'That is the answer. Go away, Woman, that is your name and your new label.'(26)

Similarly, in 'Myth' the fabulist shows that women have been considered responsible for the damage caused to human civilization since creation. The story is about the constant wars between the demons and gods, the former having a winning edge, as they are granted the milk of a goddess that had recuperative powers. The gods understand this and implore the goddess to give them her milk too. Motherly and beneficent by nature suited to a woman, the goddess yields and the wars thus rage forever. "Whose fault is it? It's Her fault, She gave in." (101)

Having revealed the classical archetypes of the masculine and the feminine in society, Namjoshi shows a stage of protest against this ill treatment. Through her fables, she arouses women to rise out of their slumber and get ready to rebel against patriarchal hegemony. The 'Bird Woman' projects this freedom in women where the parents of a she-bird's whose wings begin to grow at a rapid speed refuse to cut them in order to teach her to fly. This action is symbolic of the freedom being given to the bird to fly wherever she wishes. In 'Liberation' she transforms herself into a colourless bird to experience freedom. Savita Goel explains the notion of liberty in her fables as:

> Liberty for her means the deconstruction of social structures, so that they do not retain the shape which men have given them and she is fully aware that the world belongs not only to men but also to women. [8]

The reworking of 'Perseus And Andromeda' is also designed at rewriting of the feminine and masculine roles. The traditional fable shows how each time the prince combats with the dragon to save the princess in distress. In Namjoshi's fable the princess has a mind of her own and when tied to the stake, lures the dragon in changing their roles. The dragon becomes the prince, the princess becomes the dragon, and the prince is tied to the stake. The prince is left alone and the dragon and

the princess leave. Namjoshi implies that women acquiring an independent status can rid themselves of the constructs of gender laid down by the society.

'Rescued' is the refashioning of Rapunzel's thoughts when she is trapped in the witch's castle. Rapunzel in Namjoshi's fable dreams of the prince coming to rescue her. Displeased with the dream she dreams of liberation in the truest sense:

> She dreams of a castle with a very wide moat and four strong walls and a room of her own where she's perfectly safe. (87)

Transgressing gender boundaries and freedom from cultural constructs is also evident in the reworking of the traditional tale of 'Jack of the Beanstalk'. 'Jack Three's Luck' has Jack and his two brothers who climb to the top of the beanstalk and confront a giantess. The giantess agrees to marry them if they are willing to obey her and do the household work. Jack, along with one of his brothers, disagrees but the third brother agrees. The giantess marries him immediately and loves him and is kind to him and the writer concludes, " it's entirely possible that they lived happily ever after." (98)

'Svayamvara' promotes the freedom for women to choose their life partner. The fable is about a princess who is adept at whistling and sets up a whistling contest for all her suitors. She beats each one of them and asks if they consider themselves beaten. All suitors but one consider it unmanly to acknowledge their defeat. The princess marries the one who does and the Svayamvara is over. 'The Doll' deals with the overpowering of the female over the male sex. Two little girls make a male doll and call it 'Brittle Boy'. A boy comes along, gets angry, and breaks it. The girls are also infuriated and "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." (103)

Freedom from oppression and suppression, from cultural taboos and norms, from patriarchy is the feminist agenda of Namjoshi's fables. The feminist representations of the fairy tales of 'Cinderella' and 'Hansel and Gretel' contribute to the feminist protest of the fabulist. 'And Then What Happened?' tells us that after marrying the Prince, Cinderella realizes that the marriage has not been a fair bargain. The Prince accuses her of having married her for his money and the latter blames him of having done so for her looks. Their marriage is not a just decision and Cinderella walks out. The conventional fairy tale heroine flouts all conventions and bravely decides to end an unhappy marriage. The other tale, 'In The Forest', violates gender constructs again, as this time, Gretel is the stronger of the two and confronts the witch whereas Hansel hides behind a tree. Gretel lives with the witch and Hansel goes back to his stepmother, for "when he grows up to be a man, he will fight them all." (93)

Feminist Fables also show women undergoing a phase of self-discovery. Realizing that they have been victims of oppression in more than one way, women have come a long way in their struggle for emancipation. They have comprehended that their ultimate source of solace and freedom lies outside patriarchy. A lesbian herself, Namjoshi feels that lesbians must be recognized in society and allotted the freedom to exist independently. In her fables, therefore, she promotes the idea of women living with women outside the fetters of patriarchy. She is aware of the indignity attributed to lesbians and she brings this out too in her fables.

The utopian vision of a woman-identified world is most explicitly apparent in 'The Moon Shone On'. The fable describes the love of two women unable to find words to express their love for each other:

> 'I love you,' she said in despair to her friend. 'And I you,' said her friend...soon they were entwined in one another's arms. And then? And then the moon shone on, the grass

was green, flowers sprouted, it was probably spring, they were lovers after all. (49)

Namjoshi celebrates lesbian identity and consciousness in 'The Badge – Wearing Dyke And Her Two Maiden Aunts'. Two spinster mice live together and are visited by a niece. The niece wears a number of badges such as: 'Gay Liberation is Our Liberation' and "Lesbians Ignite'. The two mice comfortably tell their niece that they have been living together for the past twenty-five years. They argue that "on the whole, one is so much more comfortable with one's own sex" (11), and the niece takes off her badges and gives to them.

Lesbian feminists see women free from the emotional dependence on men and the fabulist demonstrates this in her fable, 'For Adrienne Rich – If She Would Like It'. The tale is about Sheherazade once again who after a thousand and one nights is given the offer of becoming the Caliph's queen as a reward. After a thousand and one nights of dying again and again, the female protagonist chooses to free herself from the bondage of heterosexuality and chooses to live with her sister Dinarzade as a reward. Namjoshi's critique of heterosexuality is also manifested in 'The Wicked Witch' where a young dyke visits a witch to solve her dilemma. The dyke falls in love with a woman who refuses to accept her, as what she feels for her is not the Real Thing. The Real Thing is the love between opposite sexes that is considered normal and real in patriarchy. The witch advises the dyke to convince her that what she feels for her is also real or get a large group of people to convince her that her love is the Real Thing. The woman tells the witch that she cannot do so and the witch asks her to find what she really feels by starting right then in the witch's home.

Despite this hopeful vision of a separate space for women outside the margins of patriarchy, Namjoshi is conscious of the criticism and abuse lesbians have to face.

The fate of lesbians in a heterosexual reality is sad and depressing, which is brought out by Namjoshi in her fables. ' A Moral Tale' states the moral that homosexuality is disapproved in society and thus the fate of homosexuals is surely an unhappy one. In the fable, the Beast is in love with Beauty. Turning the conventional story upside down, the author tells us that the Beast is a woman in love with another woman. Unlike the conventional Beast, this one is very gentle and is not fierce. The girl denies and the Beast becomes desolate:

> She became more and more solitary and turned to books. But the books made it clear that men loved women, and women loved men, and men rode off and had all sorts of adventures and women stayed at home. (23)

'The Example' sets an example of the treatment meted out to lesbians in the society. Two sparrows hire a wren as a tutor for their children but soon discover that the wren is a lesbian. The wren reasons that she her sexuality has nothing to do with her teaching but the parents are worried that she might corrupt the children morally. They call her 'dreadful' and 'horrid' to which she protests:

> 'I am not dreadful and I am not horrid,' said the wren indignantly. 'That makes it worse. You set an example,' said the parents sternly. 'So do you,' said the wren. (56)

Lesbians not only do not enjoy the basic rights in society but are also denied human status as well. 'Troglodyte' deals with a woman cave dweller that falls in love with another cave-woman. She is unable to understand her emotions. "It may not have been love, perhaps it was love, or perhaps friendship." (68) She draws a large number

of sketches of the other woman and expressed her love. In time, both of them died and faded into oblivion:

> By now, it is firmly established that this woman never was, that she never painted, and never lived. (68)

Thus, Feminist Fables exposes the exploitation of women on social, sexual and psychological grounds. The fables reveal the unknowing submission of women in patriarchal dominance and revitalize women to break the bonds that deny them the freedom they deserve. Namjoshi as a lesbian feminist celebrates the love of women for women within the disabling heterosexuality that makes women as suppressed beings. Diane McGifford asserts that "though her fables teach and have animals as teachers, her lessons usurp the status quo to endorse feminine thought...and coax the reader to the inevitable conclusion that women have been silenced and men have not".[9]

B) Analysis of The Mothers of Maya Diip

'But what would you do if you were the Red Queen?'
'I would make everybody behave themselves,' Alice said firmly.
'How?'
'Well,' began Alice -

(Suniti Namjoshi, 1991)

If Feminist Fables promotes same-sex love, The Mothers of Maya Diip hopes for a lesbian-feminist utopia and establishes Namjoshi's lesbian identity right away. The Mothers of Maya Diip is a prose fiction that mixes myth, fable, the novel, science fiction, and fantasy and is remindful of Gulliver's Travels as it is satirical. It combines elements of fable, utopian and science fiction, poetry and myth to present an all-women world. The idea behind creating such a world where women are privileged over men, where good will and sisterhood prevail in the absence of men, is a need to realize social structures free of heterosexual patriarchal oppression and Namjoshi presents such a world as Mayanagar. The utopian state posits women as positive and men as negative, as the 'other' in relation to women, which is the dominant sex. Since, men are perceived as secondary and subordinate, women can ascribe whatever meaning they choose and construct their own notions of feminine and masculine. So masculinity symbolizes beauty and meekness, and the boys are addressed as 'pretty boys' out of kindness in the same manner, as women are reduced to pretty objects worthy of the male gaze in a patriarchy.

The Mothers of Maya Diip, the lesbian utopian fiction begins with a vision of a matriarchy that "bloomed ashamedly" [10] in one of the princely states of India that is considered to be a forbidden land for the inhabitants of the patriarchal society. The Ranisaheb or the Queen of Mayanagar invites the Blue Donkey of The Blue Donkey Fables to the Maya Diip along with her friend Jyanvi. The Blue

Donkey has pledged celibacy and Jyanvi is a poet and a lesbian, reminiscent of the author's identity. The pun on the title brings out the paradox – 'Diip' meaning a lamp and 'Dwip' meaning an island. 'Maya' on the other hand signifying 'compassionate' or 'illusory'. Therefore, 'Diip' can be best understood as a sort of refuge for women, enlightening them in their quest of self-identification and 'Maya' as it is a compassionate matriarchal world and yet illusory as fictional and not real.

The Matriarchy is headed by the Queen or the Ranisaheb, the Matriarch of the Mayan Council, the other Members of the Council being the Five Lesser Matriarchs of the Five Great Families. The Council is, however, answerable to the Chief of the Guilds. The Guilds are the various groups who are allotted specific functions – the Guild of Poets, the Guild of Goddess' servants, the Guild of Mathematicians and so on. The hierarchy of mothers is maintained as having three grades of mothers – Grade A, B, and C. The Grade C or the lowest grade mothers, function as the workers that perform all the laborious work concerned with the bringing up of the daughters borne by the Grade A and B mothers. The Grade C mothers toil day and night, pass several tests of proficiency before applying for Grade A status. The Grade B mothers are just biological mothers. The Grade A mothers are those who qualify as perfect mothers and are expected to have daughters right away. Although they are the epitome of motherhood, they do not take care of the daughters directly. They can bear their own daughters, yet, at times, allocate this job to Grade B mothers. The Grade A mothers eventually become Chief of the Guilds, with all the mothers, except the Matriarch, as members of the Guilds. The Guild of Poets is lead by Pramila the Poet; the Guild of Therapists is headed by Shyamila the Civil; the Guild of Goddess' Servants by Shyamila's lover Sarla Devi. The Ranisaheb or the Matriarch is portrayed as:

> She was a Grade A mother three times over (that was the maximum), she herself was the product of a Grade A mother three times over, she had an excellent appetite, she was always clad in green, and she always prevailed, or, at least, she frequently did. (117)

She is regarded as the incarnation of the Supreme Mother and matriarchy is, thus, passed on to successive generations, "in practice the bloodline has been unbroken for seven hundred years." (127) The Matriarch has four biological daughters – Asha, Shyamila, Pramila and Saraswati. Pramila, Shyamila and Saraswati are rightful heirs to the throne and that leads to corruption in Mayanagar subsequently.

Maya Diip maintains an army in the form of the Guild of Therapists, in place of the police steered by Shyamila the Civil, to deal with crimes, not of violence and aggression, but of:

> Maladjusted mothers, unsisterly sisters, rivalries and jealousies of diverse sorts, non-conformity with Mayan customs, and, of course...the problems of lovers." (128)

Although the Matriarch is the Supreme Mother, the inhabitants of Maya Diip worship the Goddess who prophesies the future of the Mayans on the auspicious 'Day of Oracles'. The temple of the goddess is maintained by the Guild of Goddess' Servants under the guidance of Sarla Devi. The Guild of Therapists and the Guild of the Goddess' Servants are the two most powerful guilds in the Mayan society.

At the core of this blissful utopian matriarchal world is the commemoration of motherhood. The Mayans uphold the view that motherhood makes the life of a woman complete and purposeful and unless a woman becomes a mother, she is not granted adulthood. So, young girls are prepared to become good mothers. Gagri, the

Good, the Matriarch's grand daughter undergoes several tests of her skill with babies to qualify as being capable of becoming a good mother before permitting her to go out and play. Hatred for children and neglecting the duty of rearing them is sacrilege on Mayanagar. Shyamila the Civil narrates a story about a girl who wished to spend time with the pretty boys and refused to behave like a womanly woman devoid of maternal feelings. The young girl was abandoned by everyone and begged to become a mother on the streets. The story shows that the matriarchal utopia has no place for women who do not consider motherhood essential for their lives. The mothers of Maya Diip earn their livelihood by taking care of the children in the best manner possible. Power becomes significant for employing the lesser grade mothers as subordinates. The grade A mothers hire the Grade C mothers in the same fashion as men engage and empower women as 'wives' to fulfil the household duties. The more powerful the mother, the more favoured the child and to take care of the more privileged daughter becomes a privilege for the Grade C mother.

Every love-relation on Maya is a relation of co-mothership. Lesbians hoping to wed and live together must opt for raising a common daughter, for they are, " not just two women who can live by [them]selves", but are, " members of a society with a part to perform." (147-48) Performance, in turn, is directly related to the financial gains in the form of multiple bonuses. The finances, therefore, are distributed according to rank, which is given according to birth and merit by the Coffers of the Guilds, the Five Great families and the Matriarch.

This illusory Maya land, like any other state, glorifies motherhood and idolizes children as long as they are female. The concept of father is foreign to the Mayans which is exemplified when Jyanvi reports that in her society she applies for the status of co-mother but was denied on the grounds that a father would be more useful and

the Mayans ask what a father is. To question the sanctity of the state is heresy, and the punishment of heretics is banishment. For this reason, Asha is exiled from Maya Diip who believed that the male children deserved a better status.

Within this **Strirajya**, there are outsiders who expose the hypocrisy of the system. Valerie, an American expatriate's description of the socio-cultural milieu in a heterosexual patriarchy satirically communicates that Maya Diip is nothing but a patriarchy turned upside down where women rule a world populated by women only. Women are located at the centre and men at the periphery who are considered useless creatures having no identity of their own. Male children addressed as 'pretty boys' are milked for their semen and then forsaken under the 'Tree of Death'. Those who manage to survive commit suicide in their teens. Apart from this, men have no role to play in an absolute women-identified set-up of:

> No individual isolated and each woman bound to the others by ties of kinship, accepted loyalties and professional affiliations. (128)

Unlike a patriarchy where women are relegated to a subordinate status, Mayanagar has the Rule of the Mothers, which is "gentle" and "generous". But, like a patriarchy, it suppresses one sex to exalt the other. Even violence and aggression, which is withdrawn completely from the society by the elimination of males, "survives as a well-hidden secret in the forms of atomic weapons stockpiled on the island", as pointed out by A. Dasgupta. Whereas in a patriarchy, both the sexes are raised and nursed together and "the pretty boys grow to a larger size and attempt to rule (137), in Maya Diip the male children are considered mad at their age of puberty, when they begin to fight among themselves, and then the waves, and eventually turn into foam. In a patriarchy women fade into oblivion, in the matriarchy men are waste except for

their semen for reproductive purposes. However, Valerie's satirical portrayal of her homeland where men enslave women and make war on them to have their babies, a land of male masters and female slaves makes Maya Diip a definite better alternative to reside in, and explains why she has no intention of repatriation.

The narrative, therefore, begins with the Blue Donkey and Jyanvi entering Mayanagar and the latter falling in love with Saraswati who is a Grade A mother with a daughter named Sona. Namjoshi mingles poetry and prose as Jyanvi recites poetry in order to express her love for Saraswati, "Arms, legs and limbs/ the curve of your throat/ when the goddess made you". (115) Since a love relationship in Maya Diip is primarily a relation of co-mothership, Saraswati interrogates whether Jyanvi would agree to take the responsibility as a co-mother of her daughter Sona. Jyanvi, however has no inclination of bringing up children and is only interested in getting married to Saraswati. In a poetry recitation function, when the other mothers celebrate motherhood through their poetry, Jyanvi arrives at an opposing point of view. While the other Mayan mothers praise motherhood, Jyanvi expresses her indifference to children, positing them as obstacles to her love:

> They were clean, and quick and sprightly,
> They scampered in the sun.
> 'I must go,' I said politely,
> and left true love alone. (132)

Despite Jyanvi's dislike for children, she is appointed as a Grade C mother for the welfare of Gagri the Good, the Matriarch's grand daughter and heir and the daughter of Asha the Apostate, who has been exiled for her blasphemous thoughts of bringing up the male children alongside the females. The Day of the Oracles arrives and the goddess prophesies that the one who suffers change and yet remains the same shall

become the next Matriarch. It is assumed that Saraswati shall reign successively and the corruption in Maya Diip sprouts its first seeds.

Part II of the narrative takes us to an alternative place, Ashagad that is an all-male utopia headed by a woman, the Matriarch's daughter, Asha the Apostate. The prophesy results in the banishment of the Matriarch along with Saraswati, Jyanvi and the Blue Donkey to the forest, and Sona and Gagri the Good as hostages by Shyamila the Civil who usurps the throne with the help of Sarla Devi. Through their action, Namjoshi suggests that power is innately corruptive and the lesbian utopia falls short of turning into a dystopia. The matriarch and others find shelter in Ashagad, or the Fortress of Hope, populated by young men rejected by the Mayans and stolen from the 'Tree of Life' known as the 'Tree of Death' in Maya Diip, and trained to become perfect 'mothers'. The young men also pass tests to attain adult status and beseech the 'Tree of Life' to grant them baby boys. To express their need for babies, they carve short, wooden rods, which represent the Tree itself.

The male utopia is on the verge of perturbation when Valerie acts as the Serpent in the Garden of Eden, corrupting the innocent creatures. Valerie explains the working of a heterosexual patriarchy to the young Ashans:

> ...the Ashans enslaved the Mayans and divided them up among themselves. The more important the Ashan, the more he owned...only the Ashans mattered to the Ashans and only the Mayans mattered to the Mayans...that the Ashans had all the power...Every Ashan thought of himself as a kind of farmer, and of every Mayan as a bit of land or a field which could be his property. (192)

Valerie explains that an Ashan is always a Grade A mother whereas a Mayan is always a Grade B mother. She acquaints the young Ashans with the concepts of

slavery, rape and war that becomes a time bomb for the Mayans and results in the imprisonment of Valerie. Saraswati thinks that the Ashans are futile as they are warlike and sterile and cannot even reproduce, but feels the need of these very Ashans to regain the Matriarchate of Maya. In return Asha expects a change in the Mayan system with decent education and training for the young boys to make them capable Grade A and C mothers, since they cannot become biological mothers. The Matriarch turns down the plea and the issue is left unsolved.

The crisis is, however, resolved in Part III, when a group of American commandos, who turn out to be androids later, come to rescue Valerie despite her wish to stay. The androids seize Valerie and the other women in their helicopter in order to take them to Paradise. Paradise, in this world, turns out to be an island inhabited by 'gallants' and 'mothers'. The gallants worship the mothers to the point of romantic adoration, which makes motherhood a responsibility that no one is willing to take. The adulation of the gallants reaches its greatest height when, having a shortage of mothers, they begin killing themselves and reciting some romantic poetry before dying:

> When the Gallants commit suicide, they leave behind a couplet, sometimes a quatrain... It has become a custom, a tradition – the poetic thing to do – to die with a song on your lips. (229)

This extreme idealism and laudation becomes the rescuing aid for the mothers of Maya Diip. The Queen of Paradise and the Matriarch complot to march on Maya Diip with an army of gallants to restore the lost matriarchy. The Blue Donkey is given the charge of the food supplies and the medical wing and is appointed Supplier General and Chief of the Medicinal Corps. Jyanvi, who shirks all responsibility, is

commissioned the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces of Air, Fire and Water. The gallants' eccentric behaviour gives them a chance to serve the mothers and the Matriarch's astuteness makes Shyamila the Civil and Sarla Devi capitulate and the administrative powers are restored to the Matriarch. The abdicating Matriarch appoints Shyamila the Civil as the Supreme Mother of the gallants accompanied by her lover Sarla Devi. Asha returns to her dominion and the Matriarch urges her other daughters to choose their self-willed paths. Namjoshi ends the narrative with the enthronement of Jyanvi, the woman who is least ready to take the responsibility, as the new Matriarch.

The Mothers of Maya Diip weaves fable and travelogue, utopia and science fiction, poetry and prose together to present a separatist community. From Mayanagar, the Mayans are transported to Ashagad, and then to Paradise in a helicopter. The gallants of Paradise club together as the Avians, the Fire Throwers and the Water Workers to reinstate the Matriarch. The Avians plan to reduce the city to cinders and the Water workers plot to produce a tidal wave to inundate the whole island. Just as both utopia and science fiction posit a wishful construct of an historical alternative dealing with communities outside the space and time of the author with satire implicit in them, Namjoshi's utopian science fictional text is located in a different space and time and proposes a 'more perfect' principle and better organized communal relations. The moral of the fabulous fantasy is clear: the problem of women's oppression is grave and calls women forward for radical reforms.

Namjoshi's separatist utopian fiction is surely a lesbian text written by a lesbian promoting lesbianism. The Mothers of Maya Diip legitimizes that a woman's love for another woman is quite natural and that heterosexuality is a cultural construct. A woman's identity is not only defined in terms of her relation to the male world but

also in terms of her bonding with other women emotionally and politically. And lesbian writers encourage the view that lesbians are not just two women in a sexual relationship but also those women who share quality time with each other. In the words of Lillian Faderman:

> "Lesbian" describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed towards each other – sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. By preference the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other. [11]

The Mothers of Maya Diip pictures such a lesbian world where women are allied to each other in emotional, political and professional ties. Maya Diip conforms to the 'utopian' model characteristic of cultural feminism and radical feminism of 1970s, where women cease to co-operate with men on a daily basis, as explained by Sonya Andermahr, and see separatism as a final solution to the problem of women's oppression:

> [We see]...lesbian separatism as ...a viable, permanent alternative, which will prepare us for the time when we will be able to reinstate new forms of old matriarchal societies and when, once again, the Female Principle will have jurisdiction over the earth... [12]

The 'utopian' model of lesbian-feminism emphasizes that a woman's identification with other women is total and exclusive. Women engage in a relationship of universal sisterhood together in a quest of self-realization in and through the lesbian Nation governed by the principles of solidarity and love. The utopian model is a wish-

fulfillment fantasy of sisterhood and mutual love. It articulates that the emotional and psychological needs of lesbians have not been recognized in a heterosexual patriarchy, and that, these needs can only be fulfilled in a separate world outside patriarchy.

Maya Diip, therefore, conforms to the utopian model where women come together to overturn male supremacy. Women's needs and identities are preserved in a world devoid of men and celebrate the idea that separatism is a better alternative. It expands Adrienne Rich's notion of "lesbian continuum" as embracing:

> ...many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support. [13]

The text also validates that it belongs to the genre of lesbian literature as it paints strong images of women in love with each other, for instance, Jyanvi and Saraswati, and Shyamila the Civil and Sarla Devi.

Through Feminist Fables and The Mothers of Maya Diip, Suniti Namjoshi firmly supports that heterosexuality is not a preference for women but an imposition. Therefore, women are free to question it and present an alternative, "a freeing – up of thinking, the exploring of new paths, the shattering of another great silence, new clarity in personal relationships" [14], as Adrienne Rich puts it. Although the utopia falls short of turning into a dystopian nightmare, Namjoshi maintains that it is definitely a more preferable choice to oppressive heterosexual patriarchal hegemony, for which she resolves the chaos at the end. As Diane McGifford points out, Namjoshi understands that "power corrupts all and that even women must square their ideals with reality". [15] Yet, it is a better place to live in, a place "no Mayan would want to

escape" (146), and Suniti Namjoshi mingles community and individuality, Western feminism and Eastern community to suggest that "common good and individual needs are the beginnings of a better society". [16]

NOTES

1. Suniti Namjoshi, Because of India: Selected Poems and Fables (London: Onlywoman Press, 1989) 78.

2. Anannya Dasgupta, " 'Do I Remove My Skin?': Interrogating 'Identity' in the Fables of Suniti Namjoshi," Unpublished Manuscript, 2001.

3. Suniti Namjoshi, Because of India, 22.

4. Suniti Namjoshi, Because of India, 79.

5. Chelva Kanaganayakam, Configurations of Exile: South Asian Writers and Their World (Toronto: TSAR, 1995), 50.

6. Savita Goel, "Suniti Namjoshi's Feminist Fables: A Minor Feminist Classic," Indian Women Writers: Critical Perspectives, ed. J.K. Dodiya and K.V. Surendran (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1999), 177.

7. Suniti Namjoshi, Feminist Fables (India: Penguin Books, 1995), 2. All quotations from this text are from this edition. Further references from this selection will be given by page numbers in parenthesis.

8. Savita Goel, 181.

9. Diane McGifford, "Suniti Namjoshi (1941 -)," Writers of the Indian Diaspora: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Source Book, ed. Emmanuel S Nelson (USA: Greenwood Press, 1993) 293.

10. Suniti Namjoshi, The Mothers of Maya Diip (India: Penguin Books, 1991), 113. All quotations from this text are from this edition. Further references from this selection will be given by page numbers in parenthesis.

11. Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present (New York: William Morrow, 1981) 17-18.

12. Quoted in Sonya Andermahr, "The Politics of Separatism and Lesbian Utopian Fiction," New Lesbian Criticism, ed. Sally Munt (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) 135.

13. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Signs 5 (Summer 1980) 648-49.

14. Adrienne Rich, 177.

15. Diane McGifford, 296.

16. Diane McGifford, 296.

6

CONCLUSION

"And then, of course,"
she was saying,
"We have grown so great
that now we dream
only of the possible."

(Namjoshi, 1980)

We began the research with the complex task of trying to comprehend feminism as a theory and a movement. By studying the efforts of various feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Elaine Showalter, we grasped that feminism is a state of protest against socio-cultural exploitation and a fight for human rights. Reading feminist theory enabled us to acknowledge that women have been victims of oppression not only on the basis of sexual differences but also on the basis of caste, race and nationality. The biological difference is at the core of the cultural construction of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' gender. As a result, women have been ascribed with the notions of passivity, humility and submissiveness. They have been ill-treated because they are women, the men's 'Other'.

Feminism as a movement began with the struggle for the right to vote and expanded its horizon to include issues regarding reproductive rights, childcare, equal wages for equal work and equal human rights in all spheres of life. Numerous organizations were set up to expose the hypocrisy of the patriarchal system that positions men as superior to women. Silencing of women at home was accompanied by the silencing of women in literature. Feminist Criticism threw light on the fact that women are denied a definite status in the

literary field and are forbidden from proving their creative potential. The reading of Mary Ellman, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar helped us to discern that women have been stereotyped as either the angel or the monster and had to conform to the patriarchal model in their writing as well.

After getting our first insights into feminist theory, we looked at the feminist movement in Canada in detail. We realized that the Canadian feminist theorists, writers and activists have taken tremendous pains in their goal of CR or consciousness-raising and reformation of the status of women in society. We studied the history of the women's movement in Canada in its 'first' and 'second' wave. We read the experiences of Margaret Atwood, Anne Cameron, Barbara Godard and others to know how women in Canada have been victims of discrimination on the basis of sexual, economic and socio-cultural difference.

The history of the feminist movement in Canada enabled us to perceive that 'feminism' is an umbrella term for various forms of protests on specific grounds. The rise of women groups striving for equality led to the birth of Socialist Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism and so forth. Beginning with equal rights and suffrage, feminists organized as Liberal feminists to point out that the laws made by men are predominantly in favour of their own sex and restrict the freedom of women. The liberal feminists struggled for changes in legal rights for women including the right to abortion and day-care facilities.

The Socialist feminists felt that the basic structural patterns of the society need to be changed as it is the social constructs of gender, class and race that act as an hindrance in women's emancipation. They revolted against poverty, unequal pay and even unpaid

work. They firmly believed that capitalism is the root cause of women's oppression and that its eradication is a must. Capitalism makes women economically dependent on their fathers and husbands, which makes men have control over them. Since man earns, he gains power over woman and reduces her to a servile position.

Apart from the Socialist and Liberal feminists, a group of feminists emerged known as Radical feminists who believed that patriarchy is at the centre of women's subjugation. The patriarchal familial structures delineate women as servants in the household dependent on men economically and psychologically. Women can, therefore, be emancipated only if they disregard patriarchy completely and organize a universal female culture. Marriage and love encourage subordination and should be completely forsaken.

Radical feminism gave birth to Cultural feminism that sought a more humane view of the world where women would not be treated cruelly by men. The difference between men and women, according to the cultural feminists, is not biological but cultural. Hence, women need to deconstruct the notion of 'masculine' and 'feminine' gender that relegates women as inferior. The Lesbian feminists, who perceived women as independent of the heterosexual societal structures and defining their relation with respect to themselves only, proposed the extreme radical views. Reading lesbian feminism made us comprehend that lesbians are not only two women engaged in a sexual relationship, but also women who share quality time, experiences and feelings with each other outside patriarchy. The lesbian feminists, therefore, theorized that separatism was the final answer to the problems of women.

The proposed research enabled us to grasp the various facets of feminist theory and criticism. With these inputs, we proceeded with the study of English Canadian feminist writers involved in their task of breaking classical archetypes of women as 'pretty' 'humble' 'chaste' 'meek' and so on. We studied the import of fairy tales, folk tales and fables by studying the theories proposed by Bruno Bettelheim, Gretchen Sankey and others. Picking up traditional tales of Cinderella, The Little Mermaid, Rapunzel and the classical myth of Eve, the Canadian feminist writers indicate the presentation of women as 'pickled' and 'preserved' for the male gaze in literature. These writers flip the normal stories to depict women as potential human beings with courage and resolution. The Canadian fabulist voices display their creative talent by designing strong images of women defying patriarchal norms and finding solace and comfort in lesbian intimacy.

The next significant task was to seek a context to position Suniti Namjoshi as a writer. Undoubtedly, she is a writer of the Indian Diaspora who migrated to the United States, then to Canada and finally settled in England. But her refusal to retrieve nostalgic experiences of her stay in India makes it difficult to locate her as an Indian writer or Indian Writer in the Diaspora. Her lesbian feminist perspective motivates us to place her in the Western feminist writing tradition but her recourse to Indian philosophy and culture make that impossible as well. Thus, Namjoshi's works make her recognized as a writer beyond categorizable limits.

A lesbian from India and influenced by Western feminist theory, Suniti Namjoshi shows evidence of both her Indian and lesbian reality in her works. The impact of Hinduism and Indian philosophy is clear in her bringing up of the Hindu concept of fluidity and

flexibility of identity and the transmigration and transgression of sexual boundaries. Combining her understanding of Hinduism with the Western separatist ideologies, Namjoshi paints a unique world inhabited by women in a position of power and men in a position of inferiority.

In the tradition of her contemporary English Canadian fabulist writers, Namjoshi presents women in the three stages designated by Elaine Showalter as the 'Feminine', the 'Feminist' and the 'Female'. Through the rewriting of fables and fairy tales, she theorizes that heterosexuality and patriarchy ascribe negative and passive roles to women forcing them to hold their tongues. By transgression of gender constructs, women can liberate themselves from suppression and discover their real strength. Since male dominance restricts them, it should be overthrown completely. Her radical views are fully articulated in her utopian model of a matriarchal world where men are extremely insignificant and incapable.

To conclude, Suniti Namjoshi's works posit a hope for a better society based on improved man-woman relationships, resistance to heterosexual and patriarchal oppression, legitimacy for nonconformist sexual relations, realization of women's potential and a sense of belonging to women. The need to validate her radical tenets makes her a writer who refuses to conform to traditional modes of writing and invent new strategies of narration and style. Her exportation of Western and Indian philosophy mingled with wit, jocularity and sarcasm paint a beautiful and more humane world to live in and, therefore, are marked with a celebration of womanhood.

7

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