Thumbelina's Struggle: An Exploration of Gender Expectations and Stereotypes

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Abstract: Our culture has always embraced fairy tales, which have a strong appeal to people all over the world. Fairy tales such as these are often seen as perpetrators of traditional gender norms. This abstract investigates the complexities between gender identity and fairy tales in the beloved classic fable Thumbelina by Hans Christian Andersen. To illustrate how fairy tales can reinforce or subvert stereotypes about men or women in society, this essay examines some problematic aspects drawing parallels with those in one famous folk tale from rural Bengal, called DedhAnguley from Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's collection of children's stories, ThakumaarJhuli. It also uncovers the gendered issues in Thumbelina's journey, a journey informed by the protagonist's relationship with other beings, and her understanding of the make-believe world. It also brings to light the way children's stories represent gender and how these relate to society's expectations. The study delves into the story and seeks to illuminate from it, deeper meanings of female strength, female empowerment, female resilience, and how all these manifest- the obvious value of female autonomy when you are a female in a patriarchal world. The tales produce impressions on impressionable minds to help build and rebuild societal values over time. As a result, the study aims to capture the potential of classics such as Thumbelina in channeling complex imprints in readers and creating concerns in their minds when they choose to approach the gender identity challenge in literature and culture through these or other modes of research.

Keywords: gender identity, power dynamics, gender roles, female strength, societal expectations

1. Introduction:

Works of Hans Christian Anderson, Grimms Brothers, and other Fairy tales have gone through immense critical dissection from diverse perspectives may it be social, economic, or political. The gender aspect has been dealt with in numerous works. Even in the Indian scenario, the folk literature of Bengal namely ThakumarJhuli has been scrutinised in a plethora of works. However, the comparative analysis of gender issues in Thumbelina (a Danish fairy tale) and DedhAnguley from ThakumarJhuli and the

significance of their retellings is yet to be explored. In this context, it is evident that the stark difference in the portrayal of two characters with a disability brings forward the stereotypical notions of society where the male character in ThakumarJhuli, a folk tale of Bengal braves all odds owing to his intellect and is celebrated for his courage and wit while the female protagonist in Anderson's Thumbelina is depicted as a victim of her circumstances and her so-called feminine qualities of beauty and kindness finally deliver her from her plight. This paper navigates through this contrast based on gender and the necessity of retelling the tales for the generations to come.

2. Concept of Gender Role in Literature

Literature is a reflection of life and it mirrors the gender issues prevalent in society along with the problematic power dynamics. Gender roles in novels, short stories, poetry, and drama not only reflect but also inculcatethe concepts of societal gender expectations and conventions based on gender identity. Various authors have explored this theme of gender expectations throughout the ages. These works tend to create a huge impact on the readers and contribute to normalizing the gender politics evident in society. However, there are some authors who have challenged these traditional gender norms and strived to break free from the shackles of old beliefs related to gender roles where traditionally the men are assigned the traits of valour and power while the female aspects of beauty and gentleness are celebrated. Moreover, the general perception depicted through literature is that the men rule the outer world while the women are confined within the domestic sphere. Literature plays the dual role of both supporting and disrupting these preconceived notions.

However, in the present scenario, gender studies in literature have transcended the boundaries of binary representation of gender and thrown light on characters who do not fit in the box and thus raise awareness about diverse gender identities. Authors team up the question of gender with race, class, and ethnicity to paint a realistic picture of the struggles of the marginalized sections of society. In the case of depicting the marginalization of women, Feminist authors have evoked questions on the themes of gender equality, the rightsof women, and the need for their empowerment.

For instance, Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" and Simone De Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" have examined how literature may be used as a weapon to break free from these restricting representations and societal gender expectations. The concept of gender is not static and hence its treatment requires the dynamic depiction of the transitions in society over the ages along with the perceptions of the contemporary world about behaviour and gender norms. Thus, literature acts as a medium of social commentary on gender expectations and rattles the readers with baffling questions about age-old thought systems.Hence, this enables society to examine the issues of power dynamics and gender equality and navigate through the practical difficulties in executing these concepts.

3. Concept of Gender in the Indian Context and Literature

Indian authors throughout generations have intricately woven issues of gender roles and gender expectations in their works while exploring a plethora of other cultural, social, and historical themes. Irrespective of the language and ethnic background, Indian works ranging from mythological stories to folk tales examine the power dynamics of gender in the Indian social setup and in a way challenge the conventional notions through their perspectives. While portraying the gender equations, the Indian authors have also reflected the diverse contextual backgrounds and social norms. The epics like the Ramayana or the Mahabharata have had a huge impact on later writings and thus the gender issues in these epics provide a foundation for the discussion on gender. While in some cases they reflect and conform to the existing beliefs yet sometimes they illustrate unconventional characters.

For instance, on one hand in the Ramayana, the plight of the female protagonist Sita and her victimisation in the hands of patriarchy sound relatable yet on the other hand, the Mahabharata breaks barriers and portrays Draupadi, the victim of the societal norms as a powerful character who exacts revenge on her wrongdoers with an elaborate scheme. Even Mahabharata is inclusive of the depiction of a warrior princess like Chitrangada who challenges all gender stereotypes. The presence of the other genders is also explored through the character of Shikhandi where the harmonious existence of the transgenders comes to the forefront (Jain,2018,p.89). Hence our epics although stick to the arc of traditional gender roles yet in certain aspects attempt to break free from the monotony of the traditional portrayal of gender stereotypes. A similar trait gets perpetuated into folk literature that findsits origin in these epics and being inspired by the epics they too portray women in a similar light.

The depiction of this dichotomy in the portrayal of women creates a mixed reaction in the minds of the readers. In ancient Indian society, women were glorified for their self-sacrificing nature. (Kapur, 2020, p.22), Hence literature of the then age tends tocelebrate the self-sacrificing meek and mild nature of women on one hand, yet on the other hand, the mythologies develop the sense of veneration for the weapon-wielding female goddesses. This creates a gap in the reader's mind and impacts society as well. For instance, the deification of women at one level praises the powerful women while in the social context, the rebellious female characters are subject to criticism. Regional diversity is also evident in examining women characters in literature. For instance, in Southern India the reference to the Devadasi system depict how the women were exploited in the name of religion and again in rural Bengal, we find the reference to the practice of Sati, an inhuman tradition that is often glorified in the ancient texts. The practice of Sati was portrayed as a sign of honour and reward and it robbed women of their rights over their bodies. (Spivak, 2023, p.99)

Female warriors and political figures such as Laxmi Bai, Razia Sultan, and Ahalya Holkar are well-known in Indian history for their valour and ability to challenge societal norms. Similarly, Bhakti and Sufi poets from these traditions used poetry to question

social assumptions about gender roles. Women mystics like Meera Bai and Akka Mahadevi also communicated their spiritual devotion through poetry. Even in traditional Indian dance forms like Kathakali, Bharatanatyam, and folk theatre,we witness stylized performances that highlight gender relations. Playwrights like Kalidasa tackled themes of love and desire in connection to gender issues in their works as well. In "Abhigyan Shakuntalam", the protagonist bears the brunt of the societal norms and is reduced toa hapless victim. Again in "Silapaddikaram" by Illango, the Tamil epic portrays two women Kannagi and Madhabi as contrasting elements. While the self-sacrificing wronged wife Kannagi is deified, the individualistic Madhavi (the dancer) is shown to be deprived of chastity and honour.

In modern Indian literature, we observea much-nuanced exploration of critical subjects like women's struggles, gender roles, and changes in social standards and politics. Notable authors like Rabindranath Tagore, Ismat Chugtai, Arundhati Roy, Mahasweta Devi amongst others have explored the themes of gender and sexuality of women and have conveyed to the readers the diversity of modern Indian writing that was yet to be explored. Apart from the impact of patriarchy and issues of gender equality, their works also highlight the gradual shift in power dynamics in today's world. The women's voice as reflected by Kamala Das in her poetry resonates with the passion and desire of women and sheds light on the need to further explore the feminist writing that challenges sex-specific responsibilities within the context of modern-day India. Their works never fail to provide an intricate portrayal of gender-power relationships that exist today.

Hence Indian literature explores a plethora of issues related to gender portrayal, power equation, social expectations, and the need for women's empowerment. While it reminds us of the social evils like dowries and abuse of women, it also brings to the forefront the advancement in society, the changing power dynamics, impact of globalization. The Indian storytelling method teamed with intricate weaving of the gender issues creates a mystical tapestry that narrates the tales of pain, deprivation, marginalization, and emergence of women from these plights. Hence literature becomes an amazing tool for contesting societal beliefs and for creating a strong impact on the reader's mind.

4.Overview of the texts
Thumbelina

Hans Christian Andersen wrote Thumbelina, a classic Danish fairy tale, in the nineteenth century. Mary Howitt went on to translate it into English. Although the novel does not explicitly address the topic of gender identity, several features and themes can be analysed in light of gender identity and gender biases.

- **Gender Identity**

The story unveils the experiences of a tiny child who is the size of a human thumb. Her small stature highlights her disability so she fails to blend in with either the human or animal world and stands out from her immediate environment due to her size and it defines her powerlessness (Helm,2023, p.6). Since she is not like other people, she struggles with identification and self-acceptance all the time. She is characterized by tenderness and beauty, the traditional qualities of femininity that patriarchy has perpetuated. Her experiences with animals and insects throughout the story influence her path because she chooses to react to circumstances passively rather than taking an active role in making decisions. However, the resilience depicts her self-discovery and character evolution in the context of cultural standards and expectations during the time the story was written, when traditional gender roles were rigid and confined. Thumbelina displays independence and self-discovery as she begins her voyage and meets many creatures. However, the portrayal of Thumbelina as the hapless "damsel in distress" who lacks agency and relies on external agents to overcome obstacles exposes the character to the debate on gender stereotypes and expectations.

- **Role of Marriage**

Thumbelina is sought by many male characters who want to marry her despite her dissent. This part of the story might be analysed in terms of traditional societal expectations, where marriage was considered not only crucial to a woman's identity but also her ultimate destiny. "The Traffic in Women" by Gayle Rubin examines the function of marriagein many countries critically and highlights the movement of women as a vital component of larger social and economic systems. The essay advances the conversations akin to anthropological studies where the conversations about gender, kinship, and sexuality are related to marriage. In the institution of marriage, women are frequently treated as commodities, traded to create alliancesuphold social order and establish kinship(Rubin,1975, p.173). Such matrimonial alliances also aim topreserve financial links between males, according to Rubin. The author reveals how gender, power, and economic issues intersect in the context of marriage, challenging traditional perspectives that dismiss women's agency within these institutions. Rubin's interpretation of the cultural and social institution of marriage concentrates on the exchange of women between males. She explores how marriage and familial relationships influence sexual control and social structure, building on the theories of Claude Levi-Strauss and other anthropologists. Thumbelina's objection to these developments, as well as her desire for freedom, could be viewed as a critique of traditional gender norms. Anderson reflects the ideology of contemporary society where the role of a woman in a domestic setup conforming to the norms was idealised. The coy, unquestioning, passivity of a woman celebrated the essence of womanhood. Even children's literature bears witness to the stereotypical portrayal of female characters. Thumbelina undergoes a transformation when she is made to prepare for an

arranged marriage and it narrates the impact of the pressure to conform to societal expectations based on gender identity. However, she proves her resilience by escaping from this situation to maintain her true identity. Nonetheless, the marriage to the flower prince at the end ties the plot to a typically anticipated end, although here the protagonist gives her consent in marrying the flower prince.

- **The Influence of Adaptations**

Anderson's Thumbelina has been adapted into a variety of formats like animated films and illustrated children's books, and still now it reigns supreme amongst readers of all ages as a timeless heartwarming tale. Toei Animation adapted the fairy tale three times: once as an animated short in 1975, then as a feature-length anime film Thumbelina in 1978, and finally as a World Fairy Tale Series episode in 1978. Golden Films also released Thumbelina (1992), which remains famous around the world. However, it is evident that different interpretations of Thumbelina, such as animated films and children's books, may provide varied perspectives on gender identity. Herein lies the tale's significance and timeless appeal.

Linda Hutcheon's "A Theory of Adaptation" provides a thoughtful examination of adaptation as a culturally varied and multifaceted process. Her study focuses on the intersection between adaptation and socio-cultural elements, which helps us understand how stories move across different media and cultural contexts.Within her postmodernist paradigm, Hutcheon investigates how adaptations frequently push the bounds of genre experimentation and narrative traditions where the repetition of the idea comes with certain variations that enrich the content with freshness and an element of surprise(Hutcheon,2006, p.4).Introducing intertextuality is critical to this work since it emphasizes the reciprocal nature of original writings translated for different audiences or mediums.The idea that changes are an essential part of a continual cultural discourse in which one creation impacts and is influenced by others appeals to Hutcheon.Thumbelina's numerous adaptations provide us with a variety of social perspectives on gender roles; nonetheless, they include the interplay of sex identification as well as the story's exploration of ambiguity, self-realization, and opposition to established gender standards. In some cases, change occurs in classic literature, providing unique observations about how portrayals of sexuality and individuality adhere to or challenge norms.

This research aims to establish a connection between the Danish fairy tale and the rural Bengal folk story, "DedhAnguley," with regard to gender roles as they share certain similarities.

Dedh Anguley

The popular Bengali folktale "DedhAnguley" is one of the noted fairy tales from "ThakurmarJhuli," a collection of Bengali folk stories penned by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder. The book published in 1907 contains a wide array of tales, including fables,

moral tales, and fantasy stories. "ThakurmarJhuli" is considered to be a treasure trove of Classical Bengali fairy tales and it is loved by readers across all ages.

- **Gender Identity**

The tale of "DedhAnguley" tells the story of an adventurous child who sets off on a journey, to a magical world. What makes the young protagonist unique is his size referred to as "one and a half fingers" in Bengali, which is not seen as a disability but a special trait that enhances his identity. This characteristic serves as inspiration for his quest, where he impresses readers with his intelligence, wit, and resourcefulness. Throughout the stories, the main character emerges as a figure whose bravery, loyalty to family, and quickthinking shine through his adventures. Surprisingly it is this perceived disability that becomes his strength, in overcoming challenges along the way.

Unlike the hapless heroine Thumbelina, DedhAnguley braves all odds owing to his intellect and emerges victorious. In the story, the child encounters various creatures with similar remarkable characteristics in an enchanted land, each with their special abilities. The story emphasises the idea that we should be proud of our individuality and embrace our differences. The issue of contemporary gender identification as it is known today is not directly addressed in this Bengali folk tale. However, because it serves as a lens through which we may evaluate larger issues, it allows the reader to understand things within the story in terms of gender identity, albeit indirectly. For example, the portrayal of female characters as archetypal child-bearers and dependent on their male counterparts reflects current social attitudes about gender roles.

Here the absence of the female voice raises the critical question of misrepresentation of women in the Bengali fairy tales. The hapless victim, the abducted princess, or the outcast of the mainstream are the typical roles assigned to the female characters where their destiny is dependent on the heroic actions of the male protagonists.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" which has a significant impact on post-colonial studies, looks at the ways that minority voices—especially those of women in colonized areas—are frequently silenced. Even children's stories mirror this harsh reality, and the readers' delicate minds are tarnished by gender politics. According to Spivak, the marginalization of subaltern voices is facilitated by their lack of representation in the political, social, and cultural domains. When institutions of decision-making are exclusive, subalterns might not be able to express their concerns. By critically analyzing and deconstructing these structures, Spivak's work highlights how important it is to provide room for real representation and the expression of the experiences of the underprivileged.

- **Role of Marriage**

"DedhAnguley" despite being a fairy tale that entails a world of talking animalsand enchanting adventures of the protagonist,never fails to reflect the then rural Bengal and provide a realistic socio-cultural representation of its traditions and cultural values.

The power dynamics and gender conflict are illustrated through the interaction between the protagonists' parents, who are yearning for a male child. The mother's incapacity to conceive and the subsequent predicament brought on by the child's abnormalities demonstrate the self-worth of women being related to parenting. But the narrative makes it clear very early that the child's abnormality is what makes him unique. In this tale, marriage is only brought up when the male lead decides to propose to the blind princess after curing her. The nature of the father-daughter relationship is questioned by the King's desperation and indifference in trying to marry off his daughter to wealthy thieves; this is a topic that is not extensively explored in the narrative yet it raises concern about the position of the female child in the family structure.The young hero marries the princess, proving his worth and insight and, in a way, rescues her from her situation. He receives the most from this marriage by getting the King's wealth, and the female character gets her sight and social approval by fitting into the expected gender position in society.

Simone de Beauvoir, a well-known philosopher, and feminist thinker from France offered insights into the significance of marriage in her influential book titled "The Second Sex" ("Le Deuxième Sexe") which was published in 1949. In her book, she explores the societal aspects of women's lives, including their experiences within marriage. According to De Beauvoir, society imposes gender roles onto women relegating them to a secondary position compared to men. She believed that marriage was an institution that reinforced these gender roles and restricted women's freedom. De Beauvoir criticized marriage as an institution that limited opportunities for self-fulfilment, among women. According to her marriage reinstates patriarchal norms, thereby trapping women in stereotypical gender roles and limiting their autonomy. She writes:

"Marriage is traditionally the destiny offered to women by society. They may accept it, of course, but few do, for few really want it."

In "DedhAnguley", marriage is treated in a similar light where the role of women has been reduced to the mere act of accepting the fate decided by the society and the "man (referring to the patriarchal system) exercises a sovereign authority over women".

- **The Influence of Adaptations**

"ThakurmarJhuli," a collection of stories, including "DedhAnguley," continues to weave the fabric of rural Bengal's oral tradition, passing it down through the generations. This timeless tale blends together elements of children's literature and valuable life lessons, resonating with universal themes and captivating readers with its ability to both entertain and educate. Though the media adaptations of this beloved story may be limited, a few animated television productions and a YouTube audio podcast have captured the bravery of the protagonist, instilling a deep admiration for the character's growth throughout the story.

Retelling or reimagining folk tales through adaptations not only preserves cultural traditions but also guarantees that the enchanting stories from "ThakumarJhuli" remain relevant for future generations. These adaptations bring a fresh perspective to traditional narratives, incorporating new themes and storytelling techniques that resonate with modern audiences. By drawing upon feminist theories, these adaptations offer an avenue for challenging oppressive gender roles and stereotypes found within the original tales. Contemporary authors have the opportunity to present alternative storylines that empower female characters, rather than depicting them as powerless and marginalized figures. This allows for a critical examination of traditional gender norms and offers a nuanced approach to storytelling.

5. Comparative analysis of Thumbelina and DedhAnguley

Despite the apparent differences between the cultural and geographical setup of the stories 'DedhAnguley' and 'Thumbelina', the inherent essence of the storytelling depicts the universality of human emotions and way of living. Gender politics reigns supreme in both these setups irrespective of the cultural divide. The problematic image of women being confined to the role of a wife and mother and being passive in the action further highlights the commonality. The 19th-century Danish tale Thumbelina shows the struggle of a woman escaping the shackles of a society trying to coerce her into a forced marriage while the tale from 'ThakurmarJhuli' reflects the cultural and social picture of Bengal, painting a realistic image of the the-then age where the role of a woman was confined to childbearing.

In Thumbelina, the female characters comprise Thumbelina's mother, the fairy godmother, Thumbelina, the toad's mother, and the field mouse. In each female character, we observe a streak of gender portrayal and role-playing according to contemporary societal expectations. For instance, Thumbelina's mother is confined to the role of praying for a child, and the wish is fulfilled by a Fairy godmother who assists the mother in conforming to the societal dictate of women fulfilling the duty of bearing a child. Thumbelina acts as the epitome of feminine beauty while her size and disability define her inferiority and prevent her from being the 'hero' of the story. Her petite stature makes her fall victim to untoward situations rendering her helpless and reducing her to a 'damsel in distress'. Her decisions are guided by her circumstances and surrounding characters, ranging from her being kidnapped or being confronted by the bugs or seeking assistance from the field mouse to survive the harsh winter. Although her resilient spirit and survival instincts are worth celebrating she fails to impress as an active decision-maker in her course of events.

The concept of assessing women based on their appearance and choosing their fate through marriage is an ancient practice that still remains dominant in today's world. Anderson has emphasized these troublesome features in a gentle story for youngsters with animal characters. The protagonist is originally praised for her beauty, but this turns out to be a worrisome trait, as it leads to her kidnapping by the toad. In the case

of marriage, her consent and self-will are completely disregarded. This is related to the universal fate of women throughout history, in which their consent is paralyzed and society decides their future. Again, among the bugs, Thumbelina's appearance is criticized and she is belittled, exemplifying the inclination to judge a woman's worth based on her outward appearance. Only through her relation with the swallow do we learn about her loving nature, and this aspect of the protagonist's character creates an impact on the readers. When the Fieldmouse forces her to marry the mole, once again it becomes clear that the other characters give no attention to Thumbelina's point of view, and therefore the voice of the woman in question is taken for granted which further depicts the gender politics. Here the Fieldmouse herself being a woman acts as a spokesperson of patriarchy as she coerces Thumbelina into an arranged marriage against her wish.

Even in Majumdar's 'ThakumarJhuli', the story DedhAnguley neglects the female characters. Firstly, the woodcutter's wife or the mother of the protagonist is shown pining for a male child which builds the base of gender politics. The interaction between her and the woodcutter defines the power relation as well. Since the instructions given by her husband were not followed by her it leads to verbal abuse. Her childlessness or barrenness becomes the key aspect of abusing her. Even her son, the protagonist "DedhAnguley" treats her as an agent for feeding him. Her interaction with her son is limited to fulfilling the role of feeding the child. The second female character being mentioned is the bride of the toad whose presence is hardly felt in the story. Lastly, the princess in the story is another helpless character whose blindness is treated not only as a handicap but also reduces her to a state where her fate can be decided careessly by her father who treats her as if of no value.

Illustrations of these books further create an illusionary fairy world that mesmerizes the readers and keeps them oblivious to the problematic affairs. For instance, in Thumbelina, the illustrations bring to life a make-believe fairy world created with eye-catching images of nature and animals. The imaginary depiction of animals in a human-like setup further enhances the interest of the young readers. The young minds are mesmerized by the beauty of Thumbelina and her fairy Prince. These deviate them from the problematic aspects and even create an impression of marriage as the game changer in improving the fate of the hapless female protagonist. By contrast, the illustrations of ThakumarJhuli are more simplistic yet stay true to the image of the lead character. Since the valour and intelligence of the protagonist are celebrated throughout the story, the lack of illustrations does not create much difference. DedhAnguley has no significant film adaptation yet the audio book on YouTube bring to life this story allowing the listeners to focus on the intellect and courage of the protagonist instead of his appearance. The animated adaptations of Thumbelina follow a different approach where the beauty of the character is prioritised along with her feminine gentleness and kindness. Even the colourful fairy world conveys a playful and cheerful tone and handles the problematic gender aspects in a light-hearted manner.

6. Significance of Retelling of the Tales

Nonetheless, these tales through their timeless magic percolate into generations and inculcate in the impressionable young minds the ideologies of an earlier social setup. Again, the gender gap or discrimination seeps into the minds of the readers who unknowingly normalise the gender roles and stereotypical gender expectations. This immensely necessitates the need of retelling the stories keeping the innocence of the imaginary world intact yet eliminating or editing the disturbing aspects. For instance, Thumbelina instead of being a helpless child may be portrayed as a resourceful valiant young girl who inspires the readers through her indomitable spirit and not just her outward appearance.Instead of being a passive recipient of the situations she could be shown as someone taking charge of the situation amidst all adversities and emerging victorious without relying on the Fairy Prince for being rescued. Similarly, in ThakumarJhuli if the retelling focuses on the bravery of the protagonist without sidelining the female characters, allocating substantial value to the female characters, it may eradicate the derogatory attitude towards women reflected through these tales. Finally, the retellings may serve the purpose of being a source of inspiration for young minds without instilling gender biases.

7. Modern Retelling of Fairy Tales

At present, there are some poignant retellings of fairy tales done by new-age authors where they have reimagined traditional stories from the feminist perspective, providing alternative narratives that challenge gender stereotypes and explore empowering themes. Some of the examples are as follows:

- "Cinder"is the first novel in Marissa Meyer's "Lunar Chronicles" series, which futuristically retells a traditional fairy tale in each volume. Instead of portraying Cinderella as the ill-fated victim, this dystopian world of "Cinder" projects a strong and resourceful protagonist who is a skilled mechanic, and thus draws the protagonist from the domestic sphere to the outer world through this rewriting of Cinderella.
- Angela Carter's collection of short stories named "The Bloody Chamber" is a repertoire of feminist retellings of traditional fairy tales, such as "Bluebeard" and "Beauty and the Beast" amongst others. Here Carter not only investigates topics of female agency and sexuality but also subverts conventional gender roles.
- In Neil Gaiman's "The Sleeper and the Spindle" we observe a unique blend of "Snow White" and "Sleeping Beauty". However, what sets it apart from traditional stories is its feminist stance. The author questions the conventional notion of a docile princess by presenting a valiant queen who sets out on a mission to save a sleeping princess.
- "Ella Enchanted" by Gail Carson Levine Gail Carson Levine's book adds a feminist twist to the Cinderella story by giving the protagonist, Ella, a curse that forces her to obey any command. Despite the curse, Ella remains a strong and

self-sufficient character who fights for autonomy. The film adaptation of this narrative reveals much about its scope and relevance.

These examples show how authors have reimagined and reclaimed traditional fairy tales, providing new viewpoints and inspiring storylines for readers.

8. Indian Retellings

The art of retelling a story from a feminist perspective is evident in the retellings of epics and mythological books like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's adaptation of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. However, the fairy tales of Bengal are yet to be retold and this defines the need of the hour where the empowering versions of Indian folk tales and fairy stories may inculcate in the young minds the much-needed concept of gender equality and allow their minds to levitate from the traditional gender stereotypes. Hence children's literature in both the international sphere and Indian folk literary scenario would create a positive impact instead of being limited to the purpose of providing aesthetic entertainment.

Conclusion

Retelling fairy tales from a feminist perspective is highly critical in today's world to challenge and alter the gender narratives that have originated from restricting gender stereotypes. The new age retellings aim to celebrate various unexplored perspectives, promote gender equality with storytelling traditions, and add to the continuing discussion about gender roles and representation. This enables the readers to confront and overthrow standard gender assumptions found in classic fairy tales. It instills in young minds the zeal to challenge gender conventions and unveil a more nuanced view of gender roles and expectations. Finally, the feminist retellings empower female characters by conferring them agency, depth, a voice, and active control over their fates.

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