CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Everywhere there is a connection everywhere there is an illustration, no single event, and no single literature is adequately comprehended except in its relation to other events, to other literatures", said Mathew Arnold prophetically in 1848. (qtd. Trikha 107) In general, comparison is a common instinct, true of human experience and inevitably reflected in literary response and aesthetic appreciation as well. As a comparative study facilitates a better understanding and provides a clearer vision, this thesis proposes a comparative study of selected short stories of three contemporary women writers of different nationalities- Angela Carter an English writer, Margaret Atwood, a Canadian writer and Suniti Namjoshi, an Indian writer- focussing on the elements of feminism and fairy tales in their short stories.

Angela Carter, a novelist, journalist, dramatist and critic, practitioner of magic realism, through her presentation of gothic themes, violence and eroticism,
has employed throughout her brief career, the language and motifs of the fantasy
genre to dramatize her sense that the old orders of the Western world were
breaking down. Her work represents a successful intersection between post-
modern literary devices and feminist politics. Carter was evidently a progressive
socialistic, feminist, university-educated woman, who from the very outset of her
writing career burst the bonds of the arch-restraints in a patriarchal society. An
unashamed fantasist, a fabulist of daemonic energy, Carter dwelt naturally in the
world of myth, dream and fairy tale. Angela Carter was accepted as the most
original of women writers of her generation. Her premature death in 1992 at the
age of 51 was an immense loss to the English literary world.

Salman Rushdie in his article ‘A very good wizard, a very good friend’ in
the New York Times, pays a glowing tribute lamenting Carter’s death and praising
her as a brilliant writer who failed to get due recognition during her life time:

She was the first great writer I ever met, and she was one of the best, most
loyal, most truth telling, most inspiring friend anyone, could ever
have...Angela Carter was a great writer. I repeat this because in spite of
her worldwide reputation, here in Britain, she somehow never quite has had
her due. Of course many writers knew that she was, that rare
thing...nothing like her on the planet, and so did many bewitched inspired
readers. But for some reason she was not placed where she belonged at
the centre of the literature of her time, at the heart. Now that she’s dead, I have no doubt that the size of her achievement will rapidly become plain. How sad that writers must die before we grant them their place in the pantheon. (5)


In the collection *Fireworks*, we have the realistic narratives dating from Carter’s travels in the early seventies to Japan. With their affectionate Asian exorcism, their preoccupation is with cross cultural love relationships as in, “A Souvenir of Japan” (FW 1-12) and “The Smile of Winter” (FW 39-46). A mythic executioner pursues an incestuous relationship with his daughter in “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter” (FW 13-22), a puppeteer is killed by his puppet in “The Loves of Lady Purple” (FW 23-38). In these extraordinary tales
Carter pinpoints the symbolism of city streets and weaves allegories around forests and jungles of strange and erotic landscapes of the imagination.

_The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories_ is a collection of stories retelling classic fairy tales, Carter’s masterpiece. With her rich language, delicious sense of irony and playful feminist spirit, Carter has created fairy tales for a postmodern age. In the titular story “The Bloody Chamber” (BC 7-41) she re-tells the Bluebeard legend and gives the old boy a taste of his own blood. In “Werewolf” (BC 108-110) she has wrought a horrific twist to the tale of Little Red Riding Hood as also in “The Company of Wolves” (BC 110-118), she presents two different versions of the Beauty and the Beast tale in “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” (BC 41-50) and “The Tiger’s Bride” (BC 51-67), an entirely new version of ‘Snow-white’ in “The Snow-Child” (BC 91-92) and a model of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ in “The Lady of the House of Love” (BC 93-107).

In _Black Venus_, with the exception of ‘Peter and the Wolf’ and ‘The Kiss’, the other stories are more realistic pieces with their technical and emotional complexity, and rational characters. The stories are peopled with historical or actual personages like Baudelaire’s black mistress, Jeanne Duval. The book also highlights the conflicts between high European style and the literature of the people.
Her last collection *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* focuses on the contemporary myth-making apparatus of Hollywood cinema. Her short story “The Donkey Prince” (62-72) that appears in the collection *Don’t Bet On The Prince* by Jack Zipes, suggests that gender roles are not biologically determined and that power can be used for the liberation of both sexes. Carter is an innovative writer who has made ample use of myth, fairy tale and eroticism to examine feminist concerns and other gender-related social and political issues in her writings.

Margaret Atwood, an internationally acclaimed poet, novelist and short story writer has emerged as a major figure in Canadian Letters. Using devices like irony, symbolism and self-conscious narrators, she explores the relationship between humanity and nature, the dark side of human behaviour and power relating to gender and politics. Popular with both the literary scholars and the reading public, Atwood has attempted to define and identify the goals of contemporary Canadian literature and has earned a distinguished reputation for her exploration of women’s issues. Merle Rubin in ‘Time Telescoping Tales’ rightly says: “Thoughtfully feminist, ecologically sensitive, a clear-sighted observer of social trends from urban alienation to rural isolation, Atwood is one of those writers who seem to function as barometers of their times”. (CLC; 84-97)
Margaret Atwood’s writings interweave fairy tale themes from Grimm and Andersen with the feminist issues she takes up for discussion. Like Shakespeare, Atwood too re-uses or re-tells old stories, modifying and usually subverting them, hiding their traces in order to reveal contemporary landscapes, characters and problems. She has made abundant use of fairy tale motifs. Generally and conventionally fairy tales limit gender roles; but Atwood’s fairy tale motifs act as liberating force. The genius of this fascinating writer perceives the fairy tale to be a means of constricting images that tradition has placed upon sexual identity.

Atwood, the winner of innumerable awards, is a skilful and prolific writer. Her short story collections include Dancing Girls and Other Stories (1977), Bluebeard’s Egg and Other Stories (1988) and Wilderness Tips (1992). Apart from her short story collections, Atwood has published two other works of short fiction Murder in the Dark (1983) and Good Bones and Simple Murders (1994). She has also published a fairy tale for children, Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut. (1995) Dancing Girls and Other Stories is a splendid volume of original short stories that illuminate the unexplored interior landscape of a woman’s mind. Here men and women still mis-communicate, still remain separate in different rooms, different houses or even different worlds. Atwood with an intermixture of fantasy, humour and unexpected violence depicts the complexities of human relationships, particularly between men and women, portraying real living characters who touch us deeply evoking terror, laughter, compassion and
recognition. These stories are littered with pregnant women, students and journalists; farmers, bird-watchers, ex-wives, adolescent lovers and dancing girls—all ordinary people, but here Atwood maps human motivation that we scarcely know we have. She also reveals her great insight into women and their central problem ‘men’.

Atwood’s Blue beard’s Egg and other Stories is a collection of stories from the prime of life. Sophisticated, reticent, ornate, stark, savage or forgiving, these stories reflect the war between the sexes and highlight the hopes and shortcomings of women, who bake for poets, sleep with their accountants, attribute their preference for awful men to fearlessness, and scarcely know how much they scare their own mothers. The material treated in this collection is mainly conventional, consisting of diverse relationships between parents, boy friends, ex-lovers, and new husbands. The title story “Blue beard’s Egg” is based on ‘the Fitcher’s Bird’ inter text.

Atwood’s third collection of short stories Wilderness Tips contains ten stories which take us into familiar Atwood territory to illuminate the logic of irrational behaviour and the innumerable complexities underlying ordinary existence. These neatly constructed present tense narratives unfold backwards and forwards over several decades and the characters define themselves or fail to do so
in terms of the way they and the world have changed over the years. Women abound in these stories in which men play an antic part.

*Good Bones and Simple Murders* (1983) is like an artist’s sketch book of caricatures, cartoons, introductory pieces, trial pieces and quick little exercises attempting to catch the essence of a subject and presenting it in an unusual light. Some of the pieces are flights of fantasy that float away into buoyant humour. Gravity holds other pieces closer to global concerns as overpopulation, war and ecological catastrophe. In keeping with these themes her style also fluctuates between frivolous amusement and high seriousness. Here her short pieces occupy the vague intersection between prose and poetry. They appear like tiny stories, but like poems they dive quickly into the heart of things, for smuggling subversive messages beyond the limits of conventional thought. In these prose poems she appears completely at ease being storyteller, poet, fabulist and social commentator all rolled into one.

*Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut* (1995) is a didactic fairy tale that Atwood wrote for her daughter. This fairy-tale parodies the traditional tale “Princess and the Pea” where insensitivity is the characteristic quality imposed on Princesses in a patriarchal set-up. It is a really funny fairy tale reeling in the smart-alecky humour of its impertinent heroine, Prunella and an alliteration of Ps that gives the tale a tongue-twisting energy with surprises at every turn. Though
overtly a children’s fairy tale; an in-depth study of the tale reveals its feminist undertones, that make it enjoyable to adults as well.

Suniti Namjoshi, an innovative writer of this century, has displayed in a very remarkable way her literary talents and experimented with a variety of literary forms—poems, novellas, novel, fables and children’s fiction within the restricted sphere of her literary career. An Indian by birth, Suniti now lives abroad in Canada, where she is very much at home having adopted a very western life style. Nevertheless, she is basically an Indian, which is evident in her works where there are allusions to Indian mythology and the Indian way of life. Namjosh’s complex intelligence, enriched by her Indian heritage and her broad culture, has given her work a shimmering complexity.

Namjoshi’s works mainly comprise of fables—The Blue Donkey Fables (1988), Feminist Fables, (1981) and “The Solidarity Fables” in Saint Suniti and The Dragon and Other Fables (1994). Retelling fairy tales, using techniques like inter textuality, fantasy etc., she bears a marked resemblance to Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter in her use of themes and techniques.

The underlying gospel that Namjoshi preaches in the bulk of her literary output is feminism. She makes use of fantasy for reconstruction or recreation and not as a means of escape from this world of harsh sordid realities. Fantasy serves
as a convenient vehicle to impart her radical feminist views. Her stories are without exception very modern, unusual fables that capture the reader’s imagination by their novelty. None of Namjoshi’s fables are compact but on the contrary, they are unusual, stimulating and thought-provoking.

*The Blue Donkey Fables* published in 1988 is a collection of artful feminist fables and poems that provoke scandalize and entertain. This work shows Namjoshi at her best as a satirist, a poet and a fabulist. These stories deftly point out the absurd ways in which human beings insist on categorizing anything strange as negative. *Feminist Fables* is a collection of ingenious tales that has become a minor feminist classic. In their timeless sweep through past, present and even future worlds they rework ancient myths, legends and fairy tales from east and west. From Scheherazade to Rapunzel, Medusa to Miss Muffet, they invent a mythology that simultaneously entertains and provokes and makes them a vehicle of new vision through the exploration of the female condition.

*Saint Suniti and the Dragon and Other Fables* is a collection of fantastic and thoroughly modern fables that explore with playful irony the concepts of decency, honour and sainthood. It takes as its literary imagery monsters such as Grendel’s Dam, religious icons such as St. Sebastian, the sentient creature of Indian folklore and the western archetype of the life-destroying dragon. The interplay of song, dialogue, narrative, postscripts and prayers combine to produce a
complex and enchanting parable. Apart from her fable collections, Namjoshi has written a novella, *Aditi and the One-Eyed Monkey* which is a modern fairy tale for children. Concealed behind this simple, interesting adventure story for children, lies a feminist tale of fantasy.

Even a cursory survey of Suniti Namjoshi’s literary output reveals to the reader that she occupies a very unique position in the Indo-Anglian literary scene. Unlike the other important Indian women writers, like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal, who generally focus their attention on social and political themes, Namjoshi on the contrary explores political and psychological themes—the power struggle and identity. Namjoshi also handles a theme particularly popular with western writers—Lesbian feminism. These themes are presented in an innovative way by employing the technique of fantasy, which is gaining popularity among Indian writers; like Anita Desai and Salman Rushdie.

Women writers have found the short story an ideal form to give expression to their innermost thoughts in a very precise and effective manner. Moreover, being generally overburdened with their domestic chores and consequently with little time at their disposal, they find this a convenient mode. Story telling is as old as campfires. Drawn together by the warmth of the fire, the terror of strange sounds in the darkness of night, the threat of danger, our early ancestors voiced
their fears and beliefs in story form. Originally stories, travelling from campfire and handed down from generation to generation, helped to create for early man his history and identity. Much of the earliest literature too has borrowed heavily from such pre-historic lore. In the introduction to *The Short Story* Wilfred Stone points out:

> All primitive cultures have their myths and legends—narratives of how things began, how the humans came, how the tribe survived, how the heroes fought. Though these tales are sometimes funny, their purpose is intensely serious. For the tribe that related them, they were gospel, the sacred word—not of mere make believe, but of belief itself. Since we no longer see the world as primitive storytellers did, a lot of this folklore, can seem alien and strange. But increasingly, in this latter day of ours, we read such lore with nostalgia moved by the power of things we have lost: the kinship with nature, sense of community, the certainty of belief. (1)

Moreover, stories have an extraordinary explanatory power. They explain the cause of seasons, the underworld and other phenomena. Yet stories are not sermons, “they tend to present rather than to preach; their values are more often implicit than explicit” (2), which the careful reader may decipher.
The short story though a distinct genre has no single English word to
denominate it and therefore a precise definition of the short story is impossible.
This umbrella term includes a variety of literary form like fables, anecdotes and
fairy-tales. Valerie Shaw in her The Short Story: A Critical Introduction draws our
attention to the phenomenon as its chief unique characteristic:

Because individual short stories keep revealing affinities with their
forerunners it is almost impossible to stabilize a definition of the genre; no
summary phrase can encapsulate the diversity of possible story types,
lengths and approaches. Consequently no one theory of short story form
prevails. (20)

Further it is impossible that any single theory by itself “can encompass the
multifarious nature of a genre in which the only constant feature seems to be the
achievement of a narrative purpose in a comparatively brief space.” (21)
Therefore, Shaw feels that “we should go no further than a rudimentary working
definition of the short story as a stretch of fictional prose which is shaped and
controlled so as to leave no margin of error in the way it creates a pleasing unified
impression on the reader’s imagination.” (22) Edgar Allen Poe too feels that unity
of effect or impression is of prime importance, which could be read at one sitting –
the short story. It was the intensity of impact rather than shortness that Poe valued
greatly.

13
The short story requires the reader's utmost attention on every minute detail in order to realize the final fulness of effect. The action of a conventional short story is compressed within a short continuous time frame and space. The number of characters are limited; they are revealed not developed. The background and setting are implied not rendered. According to Sean O’ Faolin the short Story writer prefers not to tell things directly but rather by implication, for explicit statement, “does not arrest our imagination or hold our attention so firmly as when we get a subtle hint. Telling never dilates the mind with suggestion” (qtd. Proffitt 3). This characteristic probably made it a suitable vehicle for Atwood, Carter and Namjoshi to convey their feminist message. Wilfred Stone in the introduction to The Short Story: An Introduction observes that there are three marked qualities of the short story that differentiates it from other forms of prose fiction – “the first quality is of course brevity. The second is its power of compensating for the consequences of shortness. And the third is the interaction of one and two” (Stone 6)

The chief difficulty that a writer of the short story encounters is how to be succinct without being shallow, how to create a single effect without creating a merely transitory one. This difficulty can be overcome to a certain extent by suggestion. Stone explains:
How does the short story achieve depth or the feeling of depth?

The short story writer cannot stop his narrative while his characters psyches are analyzed or their portraits painted. He cannot take time out to draw a scene. The storywriter must intimate the setting, imply the complexity, insinuate the character and the reader must infer the rest. When a story writer violates these practices as when Melville in “Bartleby the scrivener” stops the story to summarize background – the result seems awkward and static, inimical to the spirit of the short story. There are ways of avoiding such summarization, and they are all encompassed on one vital word suggestion. (7)

Compression and suggestion together create what Sean O’Faolain calls ‘the point of illumination’ (8). The beauty of the short story is that all the various elements are drawn to the point of illumination that shines with such brightness that all the past moments of the story stand bathed in radiant splendour. At the supreme moment the plot reaches its climax, the characters stand revealed in their fulness and the relationship between character and environment achieves a tentative equilibrium. Stone quotes Pritchett’s view:

[Every short story is a drama, but every writer of short stories has his own idea of what is dramatic. A story moves towards a disclosure and that may
be an event, a complete revelation of character; the close of a mood, the changing of an emotion, the clinching of an idea, the statement of a situation now completed. (9)

The short story in its myriad forms dates back as early as 2000 B.C. with the Egyptian tales 'Ship wrecked sailor' and 'King Cheops (Klufu) and the Magicians'. Ever since, short tales appeared over the centuries as Biblical stories, Animal fables, Love romances, Romances of Chivalry, Moral tales, until the 16th century when there was a sharp decline in short fiction with the emergence of the novel. However, it regained popularity in the 19th century as the modern short story – an almost wholly new literary type that was able to compete seriously for the attention of readers. Short story collections began to appear almost simultaneously in Germany, France, Russia and the United States during the first decades of the 19th century – E.T.A. Hoffmann, Henrich Von Kleist and Ludwig Tieck in Germany. Washington Irving, Edgar Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Bret Harte, Stephen Crane in the United States, Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Gogol, Ivan Turgenev, Anton Chekhov, Fedor Dostoevski, Leo Tolstoi in Russia, Guy de Maupassant, Prosper Merimee, Gerard de Nerval, Honore de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert and Alphonse Daudet Merimee in France. As a type of fiction, the short story had become as wide-ranging as the novel by the end of the 19th century. Some popular types included Gothic Fiction, Cowboy Westerns, Romances and Science Fiction; but there was
no limit to experimentation. By the 20th century the short story became a highly popular literary form in the hands of O’Henry (William S. Porter) Ring Lardner, William Saroyan, John O’Hara, J.D. Salinger, Hemingway, Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, Willa Cather, John Steinbeck, F’Scott Fitzgerald, Saul Bellow, Truman Capote, Langston Hughes, Bernard Malamud, Joyce Carol Oates, Flannery O’Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, Irvin Shaw, James Thurber, John Updike, Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Somerset Maugham, D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, Franz Kafka, Luigi Pirandello, Jorge Luis Borges, Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter and Suniti Namjoshi. All of these writers became masters of the craft and produced some of the most compelling and innovative short stories of the twentieth century.

The emergence of the modern short story in the 1880s and 1890s indicates that the written story enjoyed a period of significant development concurrent with the emergence of literary modernism. Dominic Head in The Modernist Short Story feels that “the short story encapsulates the essence of literary modernism, and has an enduring ability to capture the episodic nature of 20th century experience.” (1) The status of the short story in the 1960s in L.P. Hartley’s view was that readers were apt to ‘devour’ them singly on a newsheet, but were rather disinclined to read them in collections; the reason being the unusual concentration the genre demands.
Story telling is not something new, for people have been telling stories for thousands of years. Though the stories, early men told one another have not survived, yet we can guess what they were like from the ones that have come down to us from a recent past; from The Arabian Nights Entertainment, The Gesta Romanorum, The Decameron, and so on. Though we read and enjoy these stories we do not confuse them with Chekhov’s or Maupassant’s. There is a subtle difference between the spoken word and the written. Chekhov, Maupassant, Kipling and the rest arouse in us quite other expectations than do Scheherazade and Boccaccio. Walter Allen in The Short Story in English distinguishes the earlier short story as “a manifestation of the romance [with] its province .. the extraordinary. its aim, if not to astonish, was at least to surprise; its purpose to entertain.” (5) Preoccupation with form, compression of time, dependence on symbolism, analysis of personality, tendency towards paradox and ambiguity, uncommonness of themes, implications and authorial detachment are some of the distinguishing features of modern short stories. This preoccupation in varying degrees is evident in the short stories of Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi.

The short story is generally rooted in a single incident or perception and that is which mainly differentiates it from the novel. Certainly length alone does not, for the length of a literary form has much more to do with commercial considerations than with theories of literature or aesthetics. But we can easily discern a short story because we feel that we are reading something that is the fruit
of a single moment of time, incident, or perception. The emphasis of the modern story is on a single moment of intense experience, "Joyce’s epiphany concept, the sudden spiritual manifestation." (18) and it was thought undesirable to break down experience into smaller units leading to a complete degradation of meaning and value, as Head comments, “the ‘epiphany’ or ‘blazing moment’ came to form the structural core of modernist short fiction” (19)

Dominic Head challenges the existing notion of short stories unity - its supposed reliance on certain unifying devices, such as a single event, straightforward characterization, a coherent ‘moment of revelation’ - from which an easily identifiable ‘point’ can be recognized, for “short stories incorporate dis-unifying devices, which are seminal features of the literary effects produced in the genre” (134). Head constructs his own theoretical framework of the short story based on the works of Althusser and Bakhtin, to account for ‘the formal and narrative disruption discoverable in the short story and to reveal the relationship between literary form and social context. As Head challenges in The Modernist Short Story:

[T]he simplified ‘single effect’ doctrine derived from Edgar Allen Poe, which invites a reunifying approach to familiar short story characteristics such as ellipsis, ambiguity and resonance. The problem with this ‘unity approach’ is two-fold. First, it provides a vacuous theoretical mould for
defining the posited autonomy of modernist art, its supposed disembodiment from social contexts. Second its artificiality isolates modernist fiction from literary modernist experimentation generally, which gives rise to highly unstable work in which many elements are problematized. (135)

Examining the works of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Wyndham Lewis and Malcolm Lowry, Head explores the modernist restructuration of the short story form – their positive adaptation of formal convention and narrative technique. Head reveals how, modernist stories derive from a tension between formal convention and formal disruption through a close examination of such stories as Joyce’s ‘A Painful Case’ and ‘A Little Cloud’ Woolf’s ‘Kew Gardens’ and ‘Moment of Being’, Mansfield’s ‘Bliss’ and ‘The Garden Party’ Lewis’ ‘A Soldier of Humour’ and ‘The Death of Ankon’ and Lowry’s ‘Elephant and the Colosseum’ and ‘Forest Path to the Spring’. Head specifically argues:

Joyce subverts the single-effect story in delineating his ambiguous internal dreams that Woolf repudiates an ordered approach to fiction and the hierarchal world view it embodies, that Mansfield eschews ‘stable symbolism’ in order to reject a ‘fixed social hierarchy’ that Lewis ‘utilizes a
conventional story shape’ for his own satirical purposes and that Lowry cultivates the conventional closure he simultaneously flouts. (135)

A psychological approach with regard to characterization in the modern short story is generally practised.

The short story as a genre has greatly attracted women writers in different periods as well as in different countries. Atwood, Carter and Namjoshi too have fallen under its spell. Women have been generally regarded as sociological chameleons, adapting themselves easily to the class, life-style and culture of their male counterparts. British and American feminist critics in the 1970s were of the opinion that women writers had been silenced by and large, despite the argument that women themselves constitute a subculture within the larger framework of society. Women being the natural tale-tellers found the short story a convenient vehicle to impart their ideas, be it didactic ones or mere entertainers. A host of contemporary women writers have effectively employed this form and become prominent over the past decade. Contemporary women short story writers, who have appeared on the recent literary scene are Maeve Binchy, Leonara Brito, Judith Condon, Judy Corbalis, Daphne Du Maurier, Janet France, Mavis Gallant, Janice Galloway, Ellen Gilchrist, Penelope Gilliatl, Nadine Godimer, Mary Gordon, Mary Livin, Olivia Manning, Moy Mc Crony, Cania McWilliam, Alice Munro, Grace Paley, Sylvia Plath, Mary Scott, Helen Simpson, Francis Towers,
Christa Woolf, Katherine Anne Porter, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi.

The range of these women writers is astonishing; an infinite variety—there are domestic stories, stories about love and accidentally momentous meetings, the tormented relationships between parents and children, stories about growing up and about memory, old age and slick city living. The peculiar and the bizarre are set beside the banal: settings range equally far and wide, from small towns to America, to London and Glasgow, an Italian village to wolf-hunted mountain country. Language is stretched, explored, manipulated and once or twice made almost the subject matter of the story itself. Emotions are explored—passion, fear, tenderness, jealousy, wonder, rage, and there are marvellous evocations of ennui of adolescence, the trivialities and pettiness of claustrophobic family squabbles, the tiny frustrations, sadness and small necessary activities that form the warp and woof of female lives. Moreover, the short story form is an ideal form as far as women are concerned and best expresses the “fractured female identity that struggles to break out of centuries of enforced silence” (Gender and Literature.35) Jameela Begum in “Female Consciousness and the short story form” endorses this view:

All that has upsurged within the consciousness of the ‘undernourished’ woman’s silence finds a crystallized form in the short text— the truncated
novel, the short story form, is a tool for the female artist who forges a language, chisels a flexible form and mirrors an experience that reflects the rhythm of the body and mind. Both for poetic and economic reasons the short story form lends itself to the Kaleidoscope of female images that arrange and rearrange themselves in various patterns that are complimentary and contradictory to one another. (35)

The short story, more than any other literary form, by the very nature of its lack of rigidity enables the woman writer to liberate herself from conventional form and language, and thereby “bead her fantasy and her experiences” and “explore and experiment with her muted experiences” (37). The short stories both in content and form become a privileged vehicle for the self-expression of a woman. Jameela Begum believes that the short story form is ideal for the woman writer:

Its protean and indefinable nature tends itself readily to paradoxes, probings, self-reflexivity, and questioning. Since there are few firmly established conventions the woman writer gets a limited freedom to play with language, form and content; and to revive the age-old form of storytelling – myths, fairy stories, legends and folk-tales. The short story therefore imbibes an orality within it and the form becomes the perception of the woman writer. (IJPCL; 13)
Women writers having realized the immense potentiality latent in the short text have turned to short story writing, particularly in the last two decades. In the short stories, they generally focus their attention on the suffocating conditions of the female protagonists who struggle hard in this unjust male-dominated world to discover their true identity as daughter, wife, mother and above all, as human beings. Their stories centre on the desperation and frustrations, misunderstanding and incompatibility, sense of guilt, loneliness and alienation of women pitted against hostile circumstances. Very often, in women’s stories the theme of a search for self or quest for identity is taken up to analyze and explore the existential problems of a woman – the short stories of Carter, Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi are the best examples of this.

Women writers’ stories are generally ‘women-centred tales’ that inevitably present a “counter-system” or “an alternative way of looking at things” (Ramanujan 53) from the conventional or patriarchal system. Women-centred tales share certain common characteristics. They are unlike European tales of the Cinderella or Snow-White type, with ‘they lived happily ever after’ ending. The archetypal pattern of women-centred tales begins with marriage, followed by a separation and a final stronger reunion. Ramanujan observes in this context that the prince on his quest wins “a kingdom and a bride” as reward, but in the women-centred tale “it does not seem enough for a woman to be married. She has
to earn her husband, her married state, through a rite de passage, a period of unmerited suffering" (53).

Commenting on the women authored stories, Susan Hill in her introduction to *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Women’s Short Stories* remarks:

But what marks the stories out as having been written by women is some indefinable yet definite, sixth sense at work; probing identifying, dissecting, sympathizing, explaining, revealing and finally understanding. The stories may be angry, or tragic, but they are never cold; concerned with detail; yet never trivial. Each one earns its place for some individual quality; some flavour, some strength unique to itself as by virtue of sheer, interesting exciting good writing. Several have already stood the test of time, the rest will quite surely do so and be seen to have done so, many years from now. (xi-xii)

The modern short story has been moulded to convey the presence of the ‘other’ - the female. Women writers are able to “dream, fantasize and weave an imaginary world by using the form in innovative ways”, which in Ramanujan’s view, “permits the creation of women’s fantasy that denies in imagination the restrictions of reality, the constraints of family and custom, even within themselves” and enable them to “bypass their own superego and try to gain wish
fulfillment that is unavailable outside the world of the stories” (Ramanujan 53).
Other forms like the novel may be able to achieve all this and more, but the short story seems to be ideal for women writers in terms of time and space; for women being burdened with a number of chores have very little time and space to spend on writing.

Considering the connection between short stories and oral narratives, one discerns that oral narratives project a sense of togetherness and an atmosphere of a community gathering. This aspect has helped in recreating an environment of closeness in short story writing by women. Conversely, Joyce Carol Oates has recognized the affinity between the short story and a dream. She feels that it is like a verbalized dream that is arranged in space and that as the dream represents desire, the short story must therefore, be a representation of desires. Based on Oates’ comparison and Freud’s theory, one discerns according to Kalpana that “women’s stories can thus become portraits depicting women’s repressed desires or wishes.” (99)

Women have a close, natural affinity for the short story form. Kalpana’s comment in “The Short Story Genre, Post-colonialism and women writers” is very much pertinent:
Women are subjected to internalizing their experiences and hence they are highly self-conscious. Moreover, women are generally considered to be ‘instinctive’ and ‘sensual’ in comparison to men and because of these traits they are able to relate easily to the form of the short story, which is intense and compressed. Also being sensual and sensitive, they absorb more of what happens around them and they are able to portray the predicaments/oppressions/injustices/Joys of women with intensity and with a comprehensiveness that allows them to use the form inwards and depict the feelings and emotions of the inner body and mind. (100)

The modern woman exists in two spaces and her constant effort to do well at both levels causes tension and friction giving rise to different personalities and it becomes a significant search for woman to know who she is.

The short story has been in existence for a very long time. But unfortunately it is a genre that has been neglected by most literary theorists and critics. Aspiring fiction writers often assume that simply because it is shorter, the short story is an easier form for a beginner than a novel; a trial run, a preparation for the longer work. But that is not so. A serious short story is an unforgiving and extremely difficult form in which to succeed, at every level. Form is all important; but there must be content as well, a point and a point of view. As Susan
Hill in her introduction to *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Women's Short Stories* remarks:

The story may be slight, its subject matters of no greater moment, yet still every word must tell – there is no margin for error, no room for in-filling, no time in which to falter and dawdle, then to recover before the ‘final sprint’. It is in short an unforgiving form. Bad writing shows up Clichés jar. Everything must be sharply in focus, unambiguous though never unsubtle, crystal clear. (ix)

Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi with varying degrees of success have experimented with this difficult form to give expression to their thoughts precisely as well as effectively in their short stories.

The Thesis, divided into six chapters, highlights the feminist message or philosophy embedded in the short stories of Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi at the thematic level and explores the role of fairy tales as a literary strategy at the narrative level. The First chapter introduces the authors and discusses the salient characteristics and scope of the short story form in their hands. The next chapter entitled “Feminism and Fairy tales” explains the universality of fairy tales and their relevance even today. It traces the origin and
history of the fairy tales, highlighting its therapeutic value or significance for children who are able to overcome their Oedipal conflicts by reading fairy tales. The chapter also examines the close association of women with fairy tales, women being the natural spinners of tales. This natural association has prompted women writers to rewrite traditional tales from a feminist perspective, giving women a dominant role rather than their traditional passive one. Chapter Three “Fairy tales Reworked” examines the theoretical aspects of the reworking of fairy tales with particular reference to Atwood, Carter and Namjoshi, citing suitable examples from their short stories. Fourth Chapter “Sexual Politics” discusses the common feminist issues highlighted in the short stories of the writers under discussion. The chapter in particular focuses on the victimization of women in a patriarchal set up, simultaneously opposing the cultural construction of gender as illustrated by the strong, powerful and independent female characters depicted by Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi. Chapter Five “Language, Ideology, and Narrative” deals with the transgressive invention of narrative strategies that express critical dissent from dominant narrative, through techniques of fantasy, intertextuality, subversion, writing the body, use of feminine imagery and open-endings. The concluding chapter sums up the arguments.

The thesis thus aims to examine how three women writers of different nationalities have reworked traditional fairy tale narratives to present an alternative
female paradigm by bringing women to the centre and erasing the margins. They have also attempted to explore crucial feminist issues and to express their dissent of the dominant patriarchal regime that must inevitably change. This they have done by employing narrative techniques like fantasy, intertextuality, subversion and open-endings, ultimately rupturing conventional strategies and writing beyond the ending.