CHAPTER 1

Fairy Tales: Forming the Critical Frame
The fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm are very popular throughout the world. These tales were collected by two German brothers, Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859) at the beginning of the nineteenth century. These forgotten tales were collected after their enormous effort of reading ancient books and manuscripts and convincing the village people to tell the stories which they could recollect.

Stories and legends which were published by the Brothers Grimm are not recent ones but go hundreds of years back and for generations they were told by the parents to their children. It was not possible for the Grimms to collect all the stories because many tales were forgotten and some were lost in the darkness of long ages. In 1856 Wilhelm Grimm asserted that the Germanic folk tales had been translations of Indo-European myths. The Sanskritist, Theodor Benfy, found their inceptions in India. Joseph Bedier and other scholars considered these tales in terms of polygenesis, and this concept was also accepted by the Grimms. Various types of stories are found in the vast collection. Some of them are ugly and terrifying, but there are numerous delightful and interesting stories as well. Some stories like Cinderella and The
Sleeping Beauty were known in many European countries but other exclusive German tales were perhaps never heard outside the country. In the story Red Riding Hood where a little girl goes to meet her grandmother finds a wolf in the bed instead of the old lady refers to a time when wolves were creating terror and prowling over Northern Europe, thereby endangering the lives of the countryside peasants.

These tales provide a variety of characters which include Rumpelstiltskin, a wicked dwarf, Rapunzel, a maiden with long hair who was imprisoned in a tower by an evil witch, and the valiant little tailor who with his intelligence became king towards the end. In Grimm’s Fairy Tales, fairies, as we imagine them to be, are never mentioned anywhere although they are called ‘fairy tales,’ but plenty of giants, goblins and witches are found. The stories are translated into different languages and have influenced various talents, such as artists, musicians and other writers. Engelbert Humperdinck, the German composer wrote an opera on Hansel and Gretel. It is the story of the poor woodcutter’s children who after a tough journey killed the wicked witch who lived in a cottage made of bread and cakes. American animation film maker
Walt Disney made a film on *Snow White*, the beautiful maiden who was given shelter by seven kind hearted dwarfs in the forest.\(^1\) These narrative variants show the popularity of these tales.

Fairies are identified as supernatural elements and it is believed that once they were the inhabitants of this earth and could perform magic with the human beings. They were skilful magicians able to make themselves invisible at their will. They frequently enchanted the human beings and interfered in their lives. In many respects fairies are analogous to men but they are neither pure spirits nor human. In his *Secret Commonwealth* (1691) Robert Kirk describes them as possessing “a middle nature betwixt Man and Angel.”\(^2\) People in various parts of the world still believe in their existence. The fairies occupy a significant role in the folklore tradition of various countries. They have been also euphemistically referred to as “the gentle people”\(^3\) or “the good neighbours”\(^4\) for they might have power over the speaker. It was also not considered to be wise to wear green clothes for it was their favourite colour. It was further believed that people who have visited the enchanted fairyland face a series of difficulties. In the folklore tradition the fairyland is believed to be an underground
place, having resemblances with the kingdom of the Dead. The dark little people who were the earliest inhabitants of Europe were believed to have magical powers. From their activities and evil intention developed the imaginative ideas about the witches. In the west of England the little people were known as pixies; in Scandanavia they were called trolls or hill people; Kobolds in Germany and in Ireland they were famous as leprechauns. The idea and belief of fairies, spirits and water nymphs were brought by the Roman invaders in northern Europe. Ancient Roman and Greek myths are the sources of many modern fairy tales. Stories from the East and Norse legends of demons and trolls mingle with the European tales. The Arabian Nights, for instance, includes such tales as ‘Sindbad the Sailor’ which came from India through Persia into Europe.

Man’s earliest beliefs and fears are also projected in the fairy tales of the modern writers. Present versions of some popular fairy tales that we know today i.e. Cinderella, The Sleeping Beauty and Blue Beard were gathered and published by a Frenchman named Charles Perrault in the seventeenth century.
**Grimm's Fairy Tales** was a collection of hundreds of folk tales by the Brothers Grimm of Germany and published in the nineteenth century. Danish writer of fairy tales, Hans Christian Andersen also in nineteenth century wrote wonderful stories both with sad and happy endings. J. M. Barrie's play, Peter Pan was published in 1904 in which one of the best loved characters was the fairy Tinkerbell. The stories of the modern writers like J. R. R. Tolkien are highly influenced by traditional folk legends of Northern Europe. It is probable that his hobbits are nearer to the little people than from the fairies, which are popular in children's stories having butterfly wings and magic wands in their hands. 5

Folklore concentrates on the entire range of folk life, its customs, conventions, tales and traditions, transmitted without being written down. In other words, it provides us with an intimate knowledge of various sociological factors governing primitive life of man. The general idea is that folklore completely belonged to the past. But the fact is that all folklore is not old; it is an enduring tradition in present times. There are many different forms of folklore i.e. folk dance, folk songs, nursery rhymes, folk stories, etc. and this may be regarded as a continuing tradition. The
folklores were created in the past, but these have continued to be reshaped, reorganized and reconstituted. The fairy tales may be considered as a constituent element of folklore. D.L. Ashliman in his *Folk and Fairy Tales: A Handbook* (Greenwood Press, 2004) defines and classifies. Thus he says: "Folklore can be defined as information communicated from person to person and from generation to generation by word of mouth and through personal demonstration." He adds, "Folklore includes bed time prayers learned at home and then later taught from memory to a new generation of children, but it excludes prayers preserved in a printed catechism... Most, but not all, folklore is verbal: proverbs and narratives recited from memory, or possibly made up extemporaneously to satisfy a particular need, then recalled and related by succeeding narrators, sometimes for many generations." (p.29)

The word "folklore" is used to denote traditional belief, superstitions and manners of common people of the past. It still exists in recent times outside the accepted pattern, though detached from the mainstream and sometimes modified or sometimes presented in the unchanged version. One major factor in the field
of folklore studies is the collection and interpretation of folk tales. The Brothers Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, in their *Kinder- Und Hausmarchen* (1812 – 14) and *Deutsche Mythologie* started the scientific study of superstitions and folk tales. Many stories found in different parts of the world imply that they were carried by migrating people like sailors, merchants and travellers from one place to another. These ancient stories which were handed down through generations are divided into three classes:

a) myth

b) legend and

c) popular tales, created mainly for recreation.

The myths are holy representations of stories and they deal chiefly with past incidents, the cosmic significance of the formation of earth and heaven or the arrival of death or with those eternal mysteries such as the contrast between virtue and vice or the soul after leaving the body. Myths supply supernatural sanction to the tribal society in their traditional custom, behaviour and subsisting rituals by narrating what is believed to have happened in the primitive ages. Saga type legends are best described as winded and broken-off parts of history with Homeric heroes and several
stories of land overpowered by the sea. Borrowings from analogous tales were made to maintain their traditions of heroic personages and genuine historical events. Although the tales are related with definite places and persons, they are thought to have originated in the regions where they are collected. But in many parts of the world, it is found that these tales are similar with the saga – legends. The heroes are honoured with attributes familiar to giants, fairies and spirits; in various places, imprecations and taboos were believed as the creator of floods and other calamities.

The largest class of popular tales is chiefly told for the amusement of their listeners. They are not related to history or religious practices like legends and myths; rather these are really attractive stories of the illiterate persons. The circumstances that they deal with are intimate to the hearers and often discuss the events like matriarchy, ancient matrimonial customs that have disappeared long ago. The collection of fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm, Charles Perrault, J. E. Moe and others form various sources belongs to this type. Their main characteristic is the victory over impediments of the virtuous or the oppressed and sometimes of the clever ones even without the help of the
supernatural. This kind of stories travels easily from the early period as their concepts are familiar to most people in sunder areas with identical occurrences and extended plots. The pilgrims and crusaders of the Scared Land brought the stories of Indian literary collections in Arabic and Persians interpretation into Europe which seriously affected the folk tales of the continent.  

Roger Sale in his book **Fairy Tales and After** speaks about children’s literature and says that the books which are favourite to children are enjoyed by older people as well. The irreplaceable fairy tales may be regained imperfectly by isolated people after the extinction of a tradition but its real essence is damaged. A prolonged battle was fought roughly from 1700 to 1850 to obliterate fairy tales on the basis of an argument which the Houyhnhnm master calls “the thing which was not” and so it could not teach anything. Children require fairy tales to become fanciful, to know what is not real and to ascertain the hallucination of their own and others. “Fairy tales are no more ‘for’ children than are ‘not for’ children, no fairy tale I know distinguishes real from unreal to say nothing of fantasy from fact.” The optimistic outlook “things turn out right” towards the end signifies that fairy tales are
joyous and happy. But there seem to be exceptions. We may consider two popular fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm: The Juniper Tree, a horrible story and The Frog Prince an unjust story, yet are not absolutely different from the fundamental pattern of fairy tales. It is important that magic is used in fairy tales to cause terror and to vouchsafe the desire. Sale therefore points out: “The motive in Rumpelstiltskin is the great traditional motive of fairy tales, to triumph over our deepest fears with our deepest wishes.” 8 The ancient originators of fairy tales had great regard for their matters so they never changed anything in the story to gratify the audience. The animals seen in fairy tales are normally seen to co-exist with the human beings. They behave or talk in the same way as human beings do. The enchanted animals in Grimm’s Fairy tales, i.e. the bird in The Juniper Tree, the fox in The Golden Bird, the frog in The Frog Prince are found as most affectionate and socialized creatures. The chief system of children’s literature is laid among talking animals; and the animals which are connected with children can flatter and create again a realization that we are not isolated in the world. This seems to be one of the important messages of fairy tales. 9
Bruno Bettelheim in his book *The Uses of Enchantment* makes an effort to explore the meaning and importance of fairy tales. He stresses child psychology and tries to bring out the inner meaning of these fairy tales and shows how these tales create an effect in the child's mind. The fairy tales create edificatory impressions and consequently he can construct wishful creation of his own imagination and discover better ways of life. Though polarization controls the fairy tales as it did in the child's mind, the individuals in fairy tales are not ambivalent:

"A person is either good or bad, nothing in between." 10

These are certain popular endings in fairy tales. Thus Bettelheim has given us three types of conventional ending:

1. "If they have not died, they are still alive."
2. "And they lived happily ever after."
3. "They lived for a long time afterward, happy and in pleasure."

But Bettelheim also questions the validity of such traditional endings. He considers the child's psychosis in the context of the justification of such endings. He thinks that even children are conscious of the fact that human beings cannot defy death and
cannot live eternally. But it can be said that Bettelheim tries to demand a greater sense of reality from children. Even though they may not believe in the eternity of man, they can at least discover a moral paradigm in such fairy tales. Moreover the child is emboldened by the courageous activities of the hero and he believes that he can perform the same magic as the hero is shown to perform in the tales. Fairy tales are completely intelligible to the child as unequalled works of art. From his interest and requirement the child will educe various internal meanings from the same fairy tale. Bruno Bettelheim's attention is on a story's chief impulse and he intends to exhibit that fairy tales have a great psychological significance for children. Fairy tales offer charming attributes and adorn the life of the child though he does not even discern how the tales have created a distinctive impact on him. Fairy tales present religious implications because religion was a significant portion of life at the time when most fairy tales were initiated. According to G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis, the fairy tales are "spiritual explorations" and therefore "the most life-like" since they discover "human life as seen, or felt, or divined from the inside." Many dream-like characteristics may be found in fairy tales but its
principal benefit over dream is that it has its own logical structure of progress envisaged through its pattern of plot. While analyzing some stories of the Brothers Grimm i.e. Snow White, The Goose Girl, The Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella, Bruno Bettelheim discusses the Freudian concept of sex in men. Bettelheim refers to the oedipal complexities working through the characters of the fairy tales. Sometimes these familial complexities seem hard to be resolved; but it is through the struggle against such emotional complexities that one can find distinctive solutions to the problems of life. Thus the presence of sexuality in such fairy tales can finally provide an emotional support to the reader. 14

In his introduction to Tales of Grimm and Andersen W. H. Auden states that many people do not approve of fairy tales for children for different reasons. The fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm were popular literary forms in a feudal society which had faith in enchantment and hence are not capable of surviving in the present civilization. Fairy tale characters such as witches, giants, magic carpets, two–headed dragons do not have any existence. Yet it may create terror in the child’s mind while they read these stories. It is rather useful to teach the child necessary subjects of
reality. The reader of the fairy tales sometimes become identified with the essential perspective of the story. This personal identification sometimes becomes a great problem. Fairy stories as a genre present a “serious tale with a human hero and a happy ending.” At the commencement of the story the hero is found to be enigmatic or condemned because of his obtuseness, having no heroic potency; but towards the end he exhibits his heroism and astonishes everyone and thus becomes victorious in all spheres of life. According to Auden “the tale ends with the establishment of justice; not only are the good rewarded but also the evil are punished.” It is always seen in a fairy story that perils and distress are inevitable components leading to a favourable outcome at the end. The most important thing is that one should concentrate on what is essential at the immediate situation and that there is no need to be worried about adversity or success.

Jack Zipes in his Preface to *From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* points out that the Grimm’s tales are treated “as types of public representations” which mean “speech utterances formed through intra-subjective processes of thought and memory.” While writing a literary fairy tale, the author
constantly engages himself with the task of initiating a dialogue with the primary oral tradition of fairy tale. This constant communication helps the formalized system to work on the basis of a literary tradition. The general scheme found in Grimm’s fairy tales are:

a) The protagonist goes out into the external world to investigate various matters.

b) In several combats sometimes the protagonist helps the needful creatures or receives presents from peculiar but useful persons.

c) A fight with a mighty monster or a powerful person who tries to deprive the protagonist of gaining the favourable outcome.

d) The protagonist shows that he or she is expedient by using the present or by taking support from the creatures to whom he or she had once benefited.

e) Towards the end the protagonist receives profuse wealth or a satisfied union with someone.

Most of the tales are optimistic and their “once upon a time” keeps our craving active for a more beautiful world which can be formed
out of our dreams of a better bourgeois world. This was constituted by Grimms with strong utopian motifs added to their tales. In the chapter ‘Exploring Historical Paths’ Jack Zipes tries to show how contemporary society and political events such as Napoleonic war etc. influenced the Brothers Grimm and this is largely reflected in their tales. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, child abuse was rampant and this is clearly indicated in some stories of the Brothers Grimm i.e. The True Bride, Hansel and Gretel, The Juniper Tree. Thus these fairy tales may seem to be innovative. But such innovative fairy tales are anti – mythical. Whenever any fairy tale tries to be ingenuous and everlasting, it should essentially be transformed into the pattern of a myth. The mythical tradition is embedded in ancient ritual practices and primitive beliefs. Naturally the mythical stories are largely archetypal in nature. But the folk tales seem to share some of the salient characteristics of myths. These folk tales, natural and eternal, have under- gone a process of mythologisation.¹⁹

In The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales, Maria Tatar tries to point out that according to the folklorists the fairy tales are initially adult stories told at fireside assembly and only in
the last two or three hundred years it has come to be acknowledged as children’s literature. Fairy tales are an essential part of childhood and a child becomes spiritually impoverished if he or she grows up without them. It is said by Robert Darnton that “folk tales are historical documents, each colored by the mental life and culture of its epoch.” In Grimm’s *Nursery and Household Tales* one can find a contrast between the happy terminations and the hard facts of fairy-tale life. The stories describe the discord between the hero and the villain, and towards the end it shows how the hero comes to authority or ends in marriage after taking retaliation against the villain. Fairy tales have a particular attraction for children with their surreal occurrences and curious touches. German fairy tales exhibit again and again that the heroes are presented as victims. Maria Tatar thinks that fairy tales may not always be significant just because of their human visions or social codes of behaviour. In fact, these tales project an inflated vision of drab reality and this specific critical process may help ennoble the lives of children and adults.

Max Luthi in his book *Once Upon A Time: on the Nature of Fairy Tales* concentrates on some inner aspects of the fairy
tales. Fairy tale impulses have been adopted by noble literature of every age and it frequently shows the fanciful characteristics of the fairy tales. The fairy tales appeal to us not only for its judgment but the method by which it is presented before us. It may vary from one person to another and in different story tellers, but it still allures us. The marvelous phrase “Once upon a time” is not only found in German fairy tales, it is known and loved by all European people. “Once there was”; “One day there will be” – this is the starting point of every fairy tale. In the extensive sense, the fairy tale exposes a congruous world. *Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, The Seven Ravens, Hansel and Gretel* – these tales not only involve themselves with pleasant moments but frequently with deprivation and misery, barbarism and divulgence, torment and death. The fight with the dragon is not only a symbol for the battle against the dark forces of life; it is definitely a symbol for the struggle against the baleful conditions of the world. The Grimm version came lately to existence but other variations are related to ancient folk fairy tales which for centuries were told (verbally); the sources of those tales are lost and we are completely ignorant about those authors. An image of man is presented in the fairy tales
and with its style the hero is insulated but susceptible of entering into universal attachment. So we must expect that, in spite of the unilateral reasonable point of view of many adults, it will not be disregarded and pushed into oblivion by our descendents and by the arts. 22

Marianne Thalmaann in the introduction to The Romantic Fairy Tale: Seeds of Surrealism expresses the view that fairy tale is the perfect form which is compatible with the spirit of romanticism. In the Romantic tradition, there has been an attempt to locate an element of mysticality and spirituality in these fairy tales. As a result, there is even a tendency to discard the word “fairy tale”. Some have regarded it as a skilful form; others have attempted to find psychological, unintelligible qualities in it; even some others saw in them an escapist tendency. The fairy tale of the romanticists is known as “literary fairy tale”. Like the folk fairy tale, it has its kings, princesses, sorcerers and risks and adventures, but we do not find the characteristic happy ending of the folk fairy tale and the establishment of justice is omitted. It includes a complicated enigma with significant feelings and no human warmth comes in sight. 23
John Buchan in his *The Novel and the Fairy Tale* shows that the fairy tales made their appearances from the deepest place of human experiences and human imagination. These tales come out from the society where the life of man was not only difficult but also uncertain, while adventure as a rule was a part and parcel of human existence. It was a savage and perilous world and those who lived in it tried to evade from that situation in their tales. The real hero in all the fairy tales is the soul of man and not the youngest son or daughter or the ugly duckling or the stolen princess. The fairy tales show that human nature can surpass itself and become identical with god. No dragon or monster or wicked stepmother can impede the heroes of the fairy tales in the long as they are full of vitality. With a divine carelessness they reach their destination. They are imperishable until they have completed their tasks. The simple man in the fairy tales relieves himself of his impediments by exhibiting that the weak things can baffle the strong and sincere persons. The fairy tales are permeated by expectation and opportunity and so they make the world a joyous place.
Padraic Colum in his introduction to *The Complete Grimm’s Fairy Tales* points out that the traditional tales which were told for generations give an impression of the great desires of the common people. It discriminates the occurrences, which would clarify what heroes and heroines, sorcerers, dwarfs, giants the malicious and the disloyal were susceptible of. The fairy tales heroes and heroines after great struggles of life attain an ultimate excellence of life. They become judicious kings and lovable queens after subjugation and live happily thereafter. It is seen in fairy tales that prosperity is practicable but malice and untruthfulness are reprobated are castigated. The stories of the Brothers Grimm show that cruelty and vengeance for its own purpose have no position. The fairy tales of the Grimms stand against the authorised history; in other words it recreates, as against the historical past, an individuated past which is more significant than the recorded past.25

Jack Zipes in his introduction to *Victorian Fairy Tales, The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves* suggests that England did not undergo the flourishing of the literary fairy tale for children till the middle of the nineteenth century as compared to Germany and
France. In the early vernacular English works by eminent writers like Chaucer, Spencer, Marlowe and Shakespeare, folk customs, remarkable personage and supernatural occurrences came rapidly into it and the works that developed as a portion of the classical British literary tradition. The fairies and the elves seemed to have been banished from their native land. As in eighteenth century, the literary fairy tale was unsuccessful to prove itself as a self-governing kind. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the “civilized appropriation” of the oral folk tales which took place in France were undertaken by famous authors such as Charles Perrault, Madame Le Prince De Beaumont, Madame D’Aulnoy and many others. But in England these tales were not regarded as virtuous subject matter for the refinement of young people. The fanciful works in French, German and Danish were first to prepare a smooth easy way for the activity of the literary fairy tale and an argument in justification of the “imagination in cultural products for children”. The fairy tales infuse slowly into the mind an attitude of courageous ethical protest among the readers and the Victorian writers invariably had two perfect readers in their thoughts – the middle class parent and the child so that they should
succeed in taking a lofty and moral stand against “forces of intolerance and authoritarianism”. Allegorical patterns were used in most of the fairy tales of the 1840s and 1850s to assert Christian goodness in contrast with materialism which in English society was obviously the most perilous vices. These fairy tales exhibit a “profound belief in the power of the imagination as a potent force that can be used to question the value of existing social relations.” In the Puritan analysis, during the Republican form of government, fairy tale was largely discouraged. The 17th and the 18th century critical thinkers had a strong disgust of the imaginative aesthetics. They largely championed the rule of “reason” and “truth”. Thus “fairy tale” as a form of the fictitious was considered to be highly uncongenial for society. But the Romantic aesthetics in their configuration of imagination welcomed the fairy tales. But the Victorian tradition had been essentially squeamish and cynical about the fairy tales. Their moral preponderance largely contributed to their dislike of the fairy tales. Yet it must be argued that the industrial revolution largely transformed the social and intellectual pattern of society. This gradually led to the reintegration and popularization of the fairy tales.