CHAPTER 3

Decoding the Misogynist Wisdom of Patriarchal Myths: Feminist revisionist consciousness in Suniti Namjoshi's Feminist Fables and The Mothers Of Maha Diip

3.1. Feminist Fables and Feminist Theory: Introduction

The Central claim of second wave feminists is that our gendered subjectivity is constructed by our languages and cultural practices and that it is only through them that the world has any significance to us. Therefore, second wave Feminism focuses on the cultural practices and ideological assumptions that construct a woman's identity in a patriarchy. This making of a new knowledge from the woman's point of view may entail the writing of a new language. For example, 'l’écriture féminine' or women's writing in French feminist theory developed by Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Monique Wittig and others, is a fundamental epistemological form that revises patriarchal representations of women. It also projects a feminist theory of culture which can transform sexist values. In Sexual / Textual Politics. (1985), Toril Moi suggests that one way of disrupting patriarchal logic is through the mimicry of male discourse. Moi gives the example of Irigaray who uses the mimetic strategy to undermine patriarchy through the overmiming of its discourses. As Moi points out, "a writer cannot pretend to be writing in some pure feminist realm outside patriarchy. If her discourse is to be received as any thing other than incomprehensible chatter, she must copy male discourse. The feminine can thus only be read in the blank spaces left between the signs and lines of her own mimicry.... Irigaray's is a
theatrical staging of the mime; miming the miming imposed on women, Irigaray’s subtle specular move (her mimicry mirrors that of all women) intends to undo the effects of phallocentric discourse simply by overdoing them." (p.140) Such strategies and proposals put forth by feminist theoreticians metamorphose into fictional representations in the works of feminist writers. By her mimicry of patriarchal logic, Suniti Namjoshi illustrates how sexist ideologies are embedded in the social language and cultural practices of patriarchy.

3.1.1. Disrupting patriarchal logic: Sabotaging the interpellative power of the ‘logonomic’ system

The feminist reader might also draw on the notion of ‘logonomic system’ in order to comprehend the material and political effects of the every day sexism that women encounter in a predominantly androcentric system. A ‘logonomic system’ is a set of rules prescribing the conditions for the production and reception of meaning.¹ It suggests that there are larger systems of meaning production which determine the way that we as readers are expected to decode them and receive them. In the case of statements made about women, it can be seen that “when a ‘logonomic system’ allows a statement offensive to women to be read as a joke, this signifies a particular structure of gender relations, one in which males are dominant as a group in relation to females but need to mask their hostility and aggression toward them"². In her Feminist Fables, Namjoshi examines the ways in which patriarchal ideologies force the reader to collude in the production of a knowledge that is sexist as self evidently natural. Analysing ideologies from a feminist perspective, she explicates the context in which they

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are produced and consumed and how they are used in forms of male bonding amongst certain sectors of the male population, so that the representation is not generally led by isolated individuals, but often forms a part of male leisure talk.

In her collection of Feminist Fables, Namjoshi debates about forms of sexism in our every day language and whether women can use language in an uncontaminated way. She examines some of the mythological representations of women and men and investigates how gender ideologies are produced and reproduced in popular culture. Namjoshi reformulates the notions of subjectivity, identity, experience and intentionality from a feminist point of view by reclaiming previously assimilated cultural histories as well as revising notions of fantasy and unconscious desire. She shows how the practice of reading as a woman, needs to oppose the ideological implications of classic plot structures, prising open alternative spaces of freedom for women within the text, against the often relentless logic of the story. Her Feminist Fables, resist the interpellative power of patriarchal narrative point of view which draws us into compliance with its dominant values. These Fables instead seek the moments or sites of resistance where the writing subverts or questions itself. As a feminist writer, Namjoshi re-articulates not just the authority of patriarchal myths, legends, fairy tales and classics, but the fear and anxiety they implicitly express in response to the counter power of women. Her Fables expose one persistent construction of male centered, reductive meanings that is visible in all narratives and myths. These intellectually insurrectionary observations and revelations of Feminist Fables are envisaged as a revisionist, revolutionary exercise charged with the
excitement of violating existing paradigms and discovering a new field of vision. These revisionist strategies involve radically disruptive and subversive kind of writing that question the stereotyped images of women as angels or monsters. They expose the spurious innocence, insignificance or humor of anti-feminist characterizations, ludicrously exaggerated notions of pristine feminine purity, chastity and virginity and display a heightened sensitivity to questions of sexism and gender. Feminist Fables also look at the ways in which the "feminine" has been defined, represented or repressed in the symbolic system of patriarchal language.

3.1.2. Decoding the political and social meanings of patriarchal literary representations:

Many of Namjoshi's literary fables show how the "literary" has an ineluctable political or ideological content and patriarchy provides the logic or the ideologies by which social relationships are made intelligible; shaping and reshaping the forms of intelligibility by which social reality is constituted. Namjoshi also focuses on releasing sexuality from the grip of patriarchy, so as to return it to the matrix of feminine desire. Her Feminist Fables shows how it is in social language that femininity and masculinity disclose themselves as polarized, ontological essences and how consequently these unwritten yet inviolable gender rules define the limits of women's experiences. These fables recognise the need to challenge the dominant ideological representations of femininity. They relocate the primary site of struggle as the female body itself and the restraints
imposed on it by contemporary patriarchal notions of that mysterious and threatened reality called femininity. Deconstructing the notion of `femininity', Catherine Mackinnon argues; "Socially, femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms. What defines woman as such is what turns man on. Good girls are `attractive'; bad girls `provocative'. Gender socialisation is the process through which women come to identify themselves as sexual beings, as beings that exist for men. It is that process through which women internalise (make their own) a male image of their sexuality as their identity as women. It is not just an illusion".

In Feminist Fables, there is a powerful evocation of the fundamental power of patriarchal ideology in our society and a suggestion that patriarchy informs our perception of social reality by being entrenched in knowledge itself.

3.1.3 Delineation of Consciousness - Raising': Reinterpreting the `personal' as the `political':

Feminist Fables, is in some sense a part of the `consciousness - raising' tradition in feminist writings. `Consciousness - raising' makes women aware of their own victimization in the patriarchy and thereby empowers them to validate their personal experience as a source of authority. Hence being a feminist means that no aspect of their daily personal, social and political life can remain unscrutinised. It is a process of reconceptualisation which women need in order to become aware of the effects of male domination. This "speak bitterness"4 approach uncovers the political and power mongering intentions of "Patriochialism" which authorises only men's experiences as the whole of
It becomes amply clear that 'Consciousness - raising' is a central process in politicizing the personal; not only is it intended to awaken women to the injustices of their secondary social position, but they are also encouraged to reassess their personal and emotional lives.

In her work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) Betty Friedan attributes women's 'sex role conditioning' to the effects of nurture rather than nature. Defining the 'Feminine Mystique', the chimerical problem of women that has no name, Friedan writes:

"The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity. It says that the great mistake of western culture, through most of its history, has been the undervaluation of this femininity. It says this femininity is so mysterious and intuitive and close to the creation and origin of life that man - made science may never be able to understand it. But however special and different, it is in no way inferior to the nature of man: It may even in certain respects be superior. The mistake, says the mystique, the root of women's troubles in the past is that women, envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing 'maternal love'... Beneath the sophisticated trappings it simply makes certain concrete, finite domestic aspects of feminine existence... into a religion, a pattern by which all women must now live or deny their femininity". (p.38)

The awareness that patriarchy is a ubiquitous phenomenon, is an indisputable, foremost feature of 'Consciousness - Raising'. Indeed as Kate Millett points out in *Sexual Politics*, one of the features of patriarchy is its very invisibility, its ability to masquerade as the 'natural' and inevitable form of social
organisation. As Simone De Beauvoir remarks in *The Second Sex*, "One is not born but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole which produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine". (p.295) In their co-authored work, *The Newly Born Woman*, (1986) Cixous and Clement adumbrate the feminist process of 'consciousness - raising' by an allegory of a 'tarentella dance' - signifying an orgiastic, frenzied but transitory interlude of freedom through which the woman ventilates her frustration and bitterness. In her introduction to this work, Sandra Gilbert refers to the "invisible but many legged tarantula of patriarchal law which governs women". (p.xii)

3.1.4. **Feminist Fables** as the revelation of 'a powerful infidel heteroglossia':

Furthermore, on a more sophisticated plane, each of Suniti Namjoshi's, feminist fables is a brilliant manifestation of a 'powerful infidel heteroglossia'. According to Bakhtin, 'heteroglossia' is another's speech in another's language serving to express the (speaker's) intentions, but in a refracted way. If patriarchy has created the illusion of monologic utterances monopolised by men, then feminists can dispel that illusion by appropriating the notion of 'heteroglossia', highlighting the 'dialogic' nature of all discourse, insisting that those contested voices be heard. In doing so, feminists substitute for the dream of a 'common women's language' or 'l'ecriture feminine', 'a powerful infidel heteroglossia'. The feminist discourse of Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* is by its very nature the
model of a complex 'heteroglossia', because it always contains and struggles against another's, in this case, androcentric, patriarchal assumptions and ideologies. In her feminist fables, "the female contains the male not monologically as the Universal Masculine is said to contain the female, but dialogically as the possibility of politically refracting the utterance of the other".?

Therefore, it can be seen that in the Feminist Fables of Namjoshi, the seemingly inculpable patriarchal, authoritarian discourse used in each fable contains within its frame work, a scathing, subversive and an ironic feminist commentary / aside / discourse which dispels any illusions of a hegemonic masculinist language. It re-establishes the validity of a dissident, defiant, mocking feminist voice, which contests and challenges the smug assumptions and stereotypes of patriarchy. The authority and complacency of androcentric assumptions engendered by patriarchal conditioning is destabilised by the 'dialogical polyphony' of 'other' feminist voices.

3.1.5. Inscribing a feminist idiom: Gaining new realities through authentication of women's experiences:

Language has always been the crucial site of power struggles. Therefore no writing can remain free from the political implications of ideologies. Language, its uses and powers, have been of foremost concern to feminists. Since reality is constructed through language, it is only through a radical deconstruction of the patriarchal language that women can empower themselves and gain a new reality and authenticate their experiences. The issue of women's language is the subject of much contemporary debate. A radicalized
manifestation of this issue has been the concept of 'l'écriture féminine' introduced by French feminist theorists envisioned as the blue print of a common language of women, "a discourse closer to the body, to emotions, all of which are repressed by the patriarchal discourse". This issue has several dimensions. On the most basic level is the silencing and suppression of women's expression. Margaret Atwood, illuminates this dimension in one of her short stories titled 'Giving Birth' in Dancing Girls and other stories (1977):

They call it 'giving birth'. Certainly it doesn't feel like giving which implies a flow, a gentle handing over, no coercion. But there is scant gentleness here; It's too strenuous, the belly like a knotted fist, squeezing the heavy trudge of the heart, every muscle in body and moving..... And 'delivering'...... who delivers what? Is it the mother who is delivered, like a prisoner being released? Surely not, nor is the child delivered to the mother like a litter through a slot. How can you be both the sender and the receiver at once? Was someone in bondage, is someone made free? language, muttering in its archaic tongues... needs to be renamed. (Atwood, 1977 : pp.228-229)

These are the blind spots of the male dominated language. In this passage, the female persona describes the breakdown of representative power of a language predominated by masculinist assumptions. In patriarchal discourse, words themselves become fetishes, barriers to communication instead of functioning as windows onto the world of woman's experiences. They impede the movement from word to the world of actual female experience. However, trapped as she is within a patriarchal linguistic and social frame work, it is difficult for any writer to distance herself from that frame work and write about
alternative structures and modes of thought, whilst still aiming to depict reality as it is lived and experienced. Therefore, there is a need for women to challenge the patriarchal bases of society, patriarchal constructions of reality and language by inscribing a feminist idiom. A feminist discourse can emerge as an alternative to the conventional language which is an index of patriarchal attitudes and contribute substantially towards the empowerment of women. Elucidating her theory of "écriture féminine", Cixous states in The Newly Born Woman "Every one knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. This is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in the direction, where it writes itself, where it dreams, where it invents new worlds". (Cixous and Clement, 1986: p.ix)

Language as an index of patriarchal attitudes becomes a treacherous medium, by constantly marginalising women's experiences. A feminist enquiry heightens the awareness of the material effects of images, words and the oppression which can be involved in them. Namjoshi's feminist fables demonstrate that patriarchal language functioning as a "forceful, cultural expression of woman's alterity" (Humm, 1990, p.29) does not merely name male superiority, it produces it. Words may seem innocuously transparent, they may appear simply to label a pre-existing reality. But feminists re-examine them to reveal the crucial role of language in the construction of a world picture that legitimates the existing patriarchal order. They show that meanings are not naturally present but are learned and shaped by cultural ideologies.
patriarchy, the 'woman' represents an enforced silence. She is a "mute symbol" of inarticulateness, misery and despair. In True Stories and Other Poems (1981), Atwood creates a haunting image of woman's mute misery:

I think of the woman
they did not kill
Instead they sewed her face
shut, closed her mouth
to a hole the size of a straw,
and put her back on the streets,
a mute symbol. (p.50)

3.1.6 Casting new truths of Contemporary Feminism into the Imperative Mode:

For a feminist writer, turning away from patriarchal construction of reality means to defy the 'specular logic' of patriarchy by which man projects his desire for a reflection of himself onto the woman and re-inscribe her subjectivity. Perhaps the most common and effective method by which women writers have addressed patriarchal views and assumptions is by revising the mythologies it has promulgated. In Namjoshi's Feminist Fables, the various myths and stories that have been used as paradigms for success, heroism, ideal male-female relationships are perceived with sceptical irony. The efficacy of romantic love as a staple of the traditional fairytale is also deconstructed in these fables. The set of myths or ideologies constructed on romantic love is just one area where, a normative ideology affects women's lives adversely. The ideology of romantic love, where romance is seen as the most important element in a woman's life and where women are literally taken over by passionate feelings, has
been so naturalised within our culture that it is sometimes difficult to `see around' it. Fairy tales do not have to affirm romantic love. Rather, they can be turned, or returned into fantastic narratives, dealing with sexuality, desire and death, drawing on the language of the unconscious with its ellipses, metamorphoses and reversals of meanings. The exploration of the sinister side of fairy tales with the interpolation of a contrapuntal, parodying feminist voice in these fables, casts new truths of contemporary feminism into the imperative rather than the subjunctive mode. They are revisionist tales based on a wide variety of sources such as Hindu mythological and Puranic lore, Greek myths, Grimm's fairy tales, Arthurian legends of courtly traditions and chivalry and also Arabian Nights. Suniti Namjoshi's Feminist Fables, is a collection of ninety five fables. With a distinctively unorthodox approach, they develop new concepts of myths, fairytales and legends. Breaking away with the stereotyped categorising of women, they explore the world of mythology and fantasy afresh.

3.2. Feminist Fables: Re-mythologizing myths:

This section re-examines the mythic identity of the `woman' in patriarchal culture. It re-makes meaning by exploring mythologies from a variety of sources and the traditional symbolic values and codes ascribed to women.

Suniti Namjoshi begins with a Hindu fable. "From the Panchatantra" (p) which is conceived as a pastiche of Hindu Puranic stories and epics. It forcefully communicates the sexist interpellations of patriarchal narratives and the semantic degradation, devaluation of `woman' and all that she represents in a patriarchal Hindu household. It reveals that images of women are constructed
on stereotypical sexist assumptions and "sexists are those whose actions, practices and use of laws, rules and customs limit certain activities of people of one sex but not the other". In this fable, a poverty stricken Brahmin finds great consolation in his 'indisputable' masculinity, Brahminical power and wisdom which would surely make him a proud father of a son.

In the holy city of Benares there lived a brahmin, who, as he walked by the riverbank, watching the crows floating downstream, feeding on the remains of half-burnt corpses, consoled himself thus: "It is true that I am poor, but I am a brahmin, it is true that I have no sons, but I, myself am indisputably a male. I shall return to the temple and pray to Lord Vishnu to grant me a son. (p.i)

The ironic humour is unmistakable in the following lines: "..... Lord Vishnu listened and Lord Vishnu complied, but whether through absent-mindedness or whether for some other more abstruse reason, he gave him a daughter. The brahmin was disappointed". Nevertheless the brahmin teaches his daughter and "Though only a woman, she was a brahmin, so she learned very fast". Brahmin and his daughter both decide to meditate and seek guidance from Lord Vishnu. While the brahmin has this irrepressible desire to be the father of a son, his daughter feels sub-human on account of her inferior, womanly status. Therefore when Vishnu appears before the brahmin and his daughter, she expresses a wish that she wants a "human" status: "Ah! that is much harder" remarks Lord Vishnu admitting his helplessness, hedges and prevaricates and "appoints a commission". Brahmin becomes a woman in his next birth and bears eight sons. As for the daughter her request is harder to fulfill. She would still
have to wait for the verdict of the commission appointed by Lord Vishnu. The status of a girl child in Indian patriarchal society, the feelings of disappointment and despair on the birth of a female baby, the inordinate desire for male progeny, the seemingly placid fecundity of an obsequious mother, the sexism and power equations revealed in this prototypical situation part of the Indian social context, are ironically adumbrated by Namjoshi.

In order to decode the colonising, sexist practices embedded in the patriarchal culture, Suniti Namjoshi institutes a trenchant feminist enquiry into a whole range of myths, conventions and linguistic codes perpetuated by patriarchal cultural practices. Beginning with the first fable, 'From the Panchatantra', where Lord Vishnu evades the requests of a brahmin female devotee for a 'human' status to the concluding piece, 'The Christening' where she ironically points out the social sanction for the secondary importance accorded to the woman in a patriarchy, Namjoshi unfolds the numerous dimensions of female degradation and threats to women's subjectivity inherent in conventional patriarchal practices. This transgression of the ideological boundaries of femininity becomes an important feminist gesture of 'border crossing'.

Myths and mythologies drawn from miscellaneous sources are also reworked from a feminist perspective. Feminist reworking of myths and mythologies expose the incongruity of patriarchally enforced borders. They represent real psychological, political and geographical 'border crossings' set into material realities, thereby concretising the dissatisfaction with the cultural
boundaries of femininity. This concept of 'border crossing', is central to feminist theory. In her critical work *The Newly Born Woman* (1986), Cixous focuses on the ritualistic ways in which women's experience of the world and their bodies are categorised as alien, witch like or historical by society in order that society can maintain the boundaries of patriarchal power. She also reiterates her faith in the exuberant possibilities of women's stories to break these boundaries. The feminist revisionist myth making exercises of Namjoshi transcend cultural boundaries, becoming not the product of community life in a particular geographical region so much as the product of women's common ground of experience in patriarchal societies. By this Namjoshi also foregrounds a fundamental issue of feminist concern: the enforced marginalisation and geographical dispossession of women in patriarchy. This has been summed up eloquently by Helen Cixous and Virginia Woolf in *The Newly Born Woman* and *Three Guineas* (1938) respectively. Cixous' question, "Where am I to stand? What is my place if I am a woman? I look for myself throughout the centuries and don't see myself anywhere" and Woolf's declaration, "As a woman I have no country, As a woman I want no country" articulate the feminine discontent with the andrarchy's unjustifiable exclusion of women. It also alludes to the ubiquitous phenomenon of women's oppression in patriarchy which is expressed in terms of her deterritorialisation. Patriarchy is the power of fathers. As Hester Eisenstein puts it, "The word 'patriarchy' might at first glance seem an inappropriate term to characterize the situation of women in the modern world, at least, in western industrialised countries. But users of the
term argue that, despite many differences of detail distinguishing the lives of women in the west from those of their sisters both in the developed socialist countries and in the underdeveloped third world, the fundamental fact of male domination over women could be discerned in all societies" (Eisenstein, 1984 : p.5)

The fable `Misfit' humourously depicts the predicament of a woman in a patriarchal heaven which seems so remarkably similar to the world that she had inhabited back home.

Finally she died and went to heaven. Everyone was nice. The King of Heaven was kindly and patriarchal, even grandfatherly. He seemed to like her. Whenever she caught his eye, he always smiled. It was made very plain that there was a place for her there. If she wished to fit in, she could quite easily. She in her turn was pleasant enough, never rude; but she took to seeking out isolated corners, and going off by herself, and, in general, avoiding society. One day, when the King of Heaven was passing through a great hall, he found her there, staring out of a window. He put his arms around her shoulders. "What's the matter', he said, 'Don't you feel at home ? Why are you unhappy ?' She wanted to cry and be a little girl again and say she was sorry, but all she said was, `It's very like home. That's what bothers me'. (p.69)

3.2.1. Re-visioning the Representations of Women in Classical Mythology :

Feminist deconstruction of patriarchal myths or revisionist myth making involves articulation of discontent. When woman looks at the patriarchal myths for a model to imitate, she is likely to be disappointed. In her work, Worlds within women: myth and myth making in Fantastic literature by women (1986)
Thelma J. Shinn opines that "Classical myths especially, usually the only ones considered when mythology is discussed, depict women as negative or passive models. Hera is a jealous wife, Aphrodite a faithless flirt and Hecate a witch. Among the mortals, the women fare no better - Clytemnestra's murder of her husband condemned all women, if The Odyssey is to be believed, while Penelope's patience wins her praise but cannot even protect her handmaids from condemnation" (p.19)

Suniti Namjoshi's reworking of classical myths seems to echo these sentiments. The fable 'The Nymph' (p.4) is the story of a Greek myth. Daphne, a nymph is chased by a God, Apollo, whose amorous advances she spurns and is transformed into a green laurel. Namjoshi's fable narrates the myth in short, staccato sentences:

The god chases Daphne. Daphne runs away.
Daphne is transformed into a green laurel. What does it mean?
That that's what happens to ungrateful women?

An insinuative feminist question foregrounds itself in the middle of the fable. This, happens to be the inexorable destiny of 'ungrateful women' who cannot reciprocate gracefully. Supposing that Daphne had yielded to the overtures of Apollo, what would have happened then?. Namjoshi considers this as another possibility:

Daphne says, 'Yes'. She says, 'Yes. Yes. Yes.' Apollo is pleased. Then he gets bored. Girl chases god. It is not very proper. Daphne gets changed. Into what is she changed? Daphne is changed into a green laurel. What does it mean? That that's what happens to ungrateful women.
Daphne says, 'Yes'. Then she keeps quite. Her timing is right. Daphne gets changed. Into what is she changed? Daphne gets changed. Into what is she changed? Daphne is changed into a green laurel. And what does it mean? It means, it obviously means, that trees keep quiet.

The woman as ‘subject’ in conventional mythological modes of representation is thus rendered mute, silenced and absent. The subversive vein of Namjoshi's fable reveals the misogynistic elements and the degradation of women as passive, helpless, distressed beings in classical myths. In a patriarchal society such as that of the ancient Greeks, which completely excluded women from social, cultural and political life, feared them and scorned them, misogyny not in frequently reached levels of particular intensity. It is sufficient to turn to one famous example among many; Hippolytus's invective against women in 'Euripedes' tragedy of the same name: “Oh Zeus, whatever possessed you to put an ambiguous misfortune amongst men by bringing women to the light of day? If you really wanted to sow the race of mortals, why did it have to be born of women? How much better it would be if men could buy the seed of sons by paying for it with gold, iron, or bronze in your temples and could live free, without women in their houses......”

In her essay, "Dangling Virgins: Myth, Ritual And the place of women in Ancient Greece", Eva Cantarella gives several examples from Greek literature of women dying by hanging themselves and traces a close, continuous almost obsessive relationship between hanging and the female sex.

Rejecting patriarchal Greek myths, Namjoshi challenges and dismantles the prescriptions of patriarchy embedded in these myths. The humiliating
transformation of Daphne into a green laurel tree is a metaphorical representation of woman's mute misery and sexual objectification.

'The Runner' (p.7) is a travesty of the mythological story of Atlanta, a beautiful princess, an indefatigable runner who challenges her suitors to defeat her in the running contest. As she cannot be vanquished, they try to distract her attention from her goal, Atlanta is tricked into losing by the device of dropping three golden apples which she pauses to pick up. Finally she is defeated and she gets married. Why? Because, according to the prognostications of the God's oracle, even an unconquerable woman like Atlanta is destined "to lose her own self through marriage". Namjoshi quotes from the 'god's oracle' in the Penguin translation of the original work.

'You have no need of a husband, Atlanta ... But you will not escape marriage and then, though still alive, you will lose your own self.'

But the circumstances behind Atlanta's defeat are rather mysterious. They do not even pretend to be satisfactory. It makes a sensible reader suspicious. Namjoshi makes an attempt to give some convincing reasons which could probably explain Atlanta's failure more satisfactorily and add to its credibility. The irony is unmistakable.

Why apples? Gilded or golden, what does it matter? She, the fastest runner in all Attica, cheated into losing for the sake of three apples? Doesn't make sense. The apples are symbolic. That's the right answer. One stands for wealth. But she was already a princess. One stands for beauty. But she was thought very beautiful. And one stands for health. A runner? Not in good health? Well then, the apples,
the apples distract. No, not Atlanta. Possibly her father, almost certainly her suitors. It couldn't go on. The men were getting bored, and a few were getting vicious. It was simply common:

The fable of 'Philomel' (p 102) is based on another Greek mythological character. The original Greek myth is given in parenthesis:

(Tereus raped Philomela and cut out her tongue in order to silence her. She was then transformed into the 'poetic' nightingale which sings so sweetly through Western tradition.)

As if that violent rape, that act of terror was not enough, Philomela was victimized further. Another atrocious crime was committed and Tereus cut off her tongue so that Philomela could not express her agony in words. Singing as a nightingale, her appalling misery touches no one, as it is melodious music that has no words and hence unintelligible. The mythological story of rape and transformation of Philomela into a nightingale is the tragic tale of a rape victim brutally silenced by mutilation:

She had her tongue ripped out, and then she sang down through the centuries, So that it seems only fitting that the art she practises should be art for art's sake, and never spelt out, no, never reduced to its mere message - that would appal.

"The Disinterested Lover" (p.113) is the story of Echo's unrequited love for Narcissus and his self obsession. On a deeper level, Namjoshi's fable points out the woman's existence within the narcissistic paradigm of her male lover where this narcissistic love culminates in a sort of egoistical nihilism.

She was very beautiful, no one denied it. Every morning she would walk to the lake and look at her-
The shepherd, Narcissus, would follow at a distance. When she was done, he would go to the lake's edge, and stand where she had stood. He would look for her image, but all he ever saw was a reflection of himself. One day, as the shepherd, Narcissus, was staring at his face, the beautiful woman returned to the lake. "What are you doing?" she asked the shepherd. 'Looking for your image.' 'But I live on the land, not in the water.' the beautiful woman said, 'You need not be shy. Here I am. Look at my face.' But the Shepherd, Narcissus, declined her offer. 'It isn't you I want,' he answered politely, 'only your image'.

In *A Room of One's Own* (1992) Virginia Woolf makes an interestingly similar observation about the woman functioning very much as a looking glass while longing at the same time to cry out, passionately and unrestrainedly: 'look at me!'. The woman of Namjoshi's fable faces the archetypal feminine predicament: She has to function as a mirror for the man. This has been elucidated by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*: "Women have seemed all the centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its normal size". Atwood's poem, "Tricks with mirrors" in *You Are Happy* (1974) can almost be read as a sequel to Namjoshi's fable. In the poem, the female persona describes her metamorphosis into a 'mirror' that reflects. Atwood gives an account of the sexual act which also becomes a consummate expression of male narcissism.

It's no coincidence
this is a used
furniture warehouse.
I enter with you
and become a mirror.
Mirrors
are the perfect lovers,
that's it. carry me up the stairs
by the edges, don't drop me,
that would be bad luck,
throw me on the bed
reflecting side up,
fall into me,
it will be your own
mouth you hit, firm and glassy,
your own eyes you find you
are up against closed closed
ii
There is more to a mirror
than you looking at
your full-length body
flawless but reversed,
there is more than this dead blue
oblong eye turned outwards to you.
Think about the frame.
The frame is carved, it is important,
it exists, it does not reflect you,
it does not recede and recede, it has limits
and reflections of its own.
iii
Don't assume it is passive
or easy, this clarity
with which I give you yourself.
Consider what restraint it
takes: breath withheld, no anger
or joy disturbing the surface
of the ice.
You are suspended in me
beautiful and frozen, I
preserve you........,
I wanted to stop this,
this life flattened against the wall,
mute and devoid of colour,
built of pure light,
this life of vision only, split
and remote, a lucid impasse.
I confess: this is not a mirror,
it is a door
I am trapped behind.
I wanted you to see me here,
Say the releasing word, whatever
that may be, open the wall. (pp.24-27)

The poem depicts the plight of a woman who has been dehumanised as a mirror. She reminds the man that as a human mirror, she is not passive. Her enslavement is not desirable to her. Like the woman in 'The Tricks with Mirrors', the beautiful woman in Namjoshi's fable, 'The Disinterested Lover' also functions very much as a looking glass while longing at the same time to cry out passionately and unrestrainedly and break out of her bondage.

"The Object" (p 121) is the revisionist tale of Medusa. The original story is given succinctly.

'Gorgo or Medusa, a terrible monster in Greek mythology.... had a round, ugly face, snakes instead of hair..... and eyes that could transform people into stone. She had two immortal sisters, who in art are also shown in the shape of Gorgons, Sthenno ("the strong") and Euryale ("the Wide-Leaping"), with whom she lived in the far West. Perseus went in search of Gorgo, killed her..... and escaped.'

In Namjoshi's fable, there is a radical deconstruction of the original myth from a feminist angle, marking a shift towards a feminist narratology. There is
an attempt to rewrite the version of the female subject, who in this case is 'Medusa', thereby, consolidating a new concept of female subjectivity, a version conceived in opposition to the implicitly masculine subject of classical myths:

She was staring at the sea. The sunlight was reflected in her gray eyes. But the waves didn't stop. The gulls didn't freeze. No leaf or twig was changed in its texture. And yet, the beach was littered with stone men. Some had fallen down. Some were still upright. Perseus watched from the top of a cliff and did not understand. Why had they come? What had they wanted? Why were the gulls and the trees quite safe? Did she only kill men? Still, nothing deterred him. Perseus was a hero and a man of action. He wasted no time. He scrambled around the cliff and polished his shield, and holding it before him, he invaded her presence. He did not look at her and he did not speak. But when he was close enough, he drew his sword and cut off her head. Then, tucking it carefully under his arm, he went away again.

Namjoshi's fable functioning as a feminist subtext of the classical surface text raises many questions about the putatively heroic act of Perseus. Perseus as a man of action, wastes no time. He makes no investigations and does not even wonder why it is that the trees and birds are spared from the sinister gaze of Medusa and only the men are turned into stones. He invades her territory without ascertaining her culpability. The reworking of the Medusa myth in Feminist Fables is reminiscent of the Circe - Odysseus confrontation in Margaret Atwood's mythical world of You Are Happy (1974). In the revisionist, mythical frame work of Atwood's "Circe / Mud poems" (pp. 46-70), Circe is depicted as a contemporary woman confronting Odysseus / contemporary man.
Circe bitterly remarks that she did not have the power to prevent Odysseus's arrival. She does not see herself as an enchantress, but rather Odysseus as a perfidious lover. He deceives her by playing the role of an orphan very convincingly and wins her affections. He unflinchingly takes everything she can give him: "I made no choice / I decided nothing / one day you simply appeared in your stupid boat / your killer's hands, your disjointed body, jagged / as a shipwreck, / skinny ribbed, blue eyed, scorched, thirsty/" (p.50)

Explaining the tendency to associate woman with the magical and the mysterious, Beauvoir clarifies:

"When man struggles to make society triumph over nature, reason over life, and the will over the inert, given nature of things; then woman is regarded as a sorceress..... The magician operates apart from society, against the gods and the laws, according to his own deep interest. Woman is not fully integrated into the world of men, as the other, she is opposed to them. It is natural for her to use the power she has, not to spread through the community of men and into the future the cold, emprise of transcendence, but, being apart, opposed, to drag the males into the solitude of separation, into the shades of immanence. Woman is the siren whose song lures sailors upon the rocks; She is Circe who changes her lovers into beasts" (Beauvoir, 1997: pp.196-197).

By the self same logic, woman is also the Medusa who petrifies and immobilises men by her gaze. Therefore man must remain vigilant. He must vanquish this sorceress, this inscrutable, unknown stranger that she is, by his power and appropriate her essence, her uncanny power.

A feminist perspective on Scylla, (p.53) the mythical female monster provided by Suniti Namjoshi in The Blue Donkey Fables (1989) reads thus;
Scylla: An Exegesis

A man-eating bitch: the term is exact, since she ate men, crunching them horribly, six at a time as a matter of fact, between her teeth. But it's easy to see, if we follow Virgil and exercise tact, that in this there's a certain propriety. For she had loved a man, and by him scorned, had thrown herself into the sea, there churned and yearned until transformed, and thus enabled to feed to satiety.

Now so much is clear: the gods are just and make a mockery of all our lust. 'Is' and 'ought' turn to 'seems' as we fulfil our horrid dreams.

But there is one point which still troubles me: what did the men she swallowed want to be?

In their feminist, revisionist representations of sinister, female, mythical figures such as Medusa, Circe and Scylla, Namjooshi and Atwood, re-examine the most ancient and universal of myths re-articulated by Beauvoir: woman as a sorceress, an enchantress, casting a spell over men and woman as a formidable, enigmatic 'other'. In her essay 'Castration or decapitation?', Cixous comments:

"If man operates under the threat of castration, if masculinity is culturally ordered by the castration complex, it might be sent that the back lash, the return, on women of this castration anxiety is its displacement as decapitation, execution, of woman, as loss of her head" (Cixous, 1981: p.43)

Cixous clarifies this further in 'Laugh of the Medusa' while explaining the fate of women in patriarchal culture:
"They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss... men have committed the greatest crime against women. They have made for women an anti narcissism. A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven't got! They have constructed the infamous logic of antilove". (Cixous, 1981: p.43)

Against this "infamous logic of antilove", Cixous asserts another;

"Too bad for them if they fall apart upon discovering that women aren't men, ... But isn't this fear convenient for them? Wouldn't the worst be, isn't the worst, in truth, that women aren't castrated, that they have only to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning? You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing....

... Men say that there are two unpresentable things: death and the feminine sex. That is because they need femininity to be associated with death: They need not be afraid of us. Look at the trembling Perseuses moving backward towards us....."(Cixous, 1976: p.885).

Cixous's account unravels the image of a different Medusa, no longer petrifying except to those who fear to look on an 'uncastrated woman'.

In the first chapter titled "Between the Mother and the Medusa" of her work, (Un) Like Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction (1983) Geraldine Meaney discusses an interesting interpretation of the Medusa myth. Meaney quotes from one version which identifies Medusa as a 'Great Mother Goddess'. (p.27) According to this version, Medusa's name means 'mistress', 'ruler', 'queen', 'she is the womb and tomb of the world: the primal, one and only ultimate reality of nature'. (p.26) Meaney points out that in earlier versions of the Medusa myth,
it was Medusa and not Perseus who assumed primary importance. The story of Perseus's slaying of the Medusa marks the overthrow of that earlier mythology and culture and the relegation of the 'female principle' to a secondary position. Medusa unlike her Gorgon sisters was not immortal, "She died ignominiously at the hands of a cheating adventurer". (p.28) Perseus killed her by trickery, avoiding her eyes and observing her image in his Athene's shield.

In her feminist revision of the Medusa myth (Thè Object), which is similar to Cixous's positive revision of the same myth, Namjoshi exposes the implications of a culturally prevalent quest myth which posits the heroic search for adult identity in terms of annihilation of the power of woman or the repudiation of the feminine. As Maggie Humm rightly points out in her discussion of myth criticism in Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics (1986); "Men maintain a culture's rituals as the translation of their own unconscious fear of women into mythical monsters or, particularly in the western tradition, into myth of rape and violence to women. Medusa is their traditional symbol of the castrating female, and perhaps part of feminist myth critics' obsession with Medusa can be explained by the internalised gynophobia which all women have as part of our patriarchal inheritance" (p.93)

Thus Perseus becomes an agent rather than potential victim, he appropriates Medusa's power, by decapitating her and using her head as a tool, a means of killing his enemies and hence the significantly appropriate title "The Object". Medusa becomes an instrument of 'his' will. As Geraldine Meaney puts it, "Medusa loses the power of the gaze. Perseus seizes the power of representation. ... The permutations of the Medusa
myth mark the different modes in which the 'other' (woman) has been restructured as a mirror to reflect male anxieties and apprehensions. The myth also indicates the extent to which the woman, who recognises and identifies the subject as hero is no more than a reflection of his own fears and desires". (Meaney, 1983 : p.49).

The fable 'Perseus and Andromeda' is a sequel to the story of Medusa's decapitation by Perseus. The epilogue to the quest involves Perseus's use of Medusa's head as a weapon to kill his enemies. In the course of these adventures, he rescues princess Andromeda and the story becomes a very conventional one of rewarded valour. Jupiter had ordered that Andromeda be sacrificed to a sea monster to pay the penalty for the boastful utterances of her mother, the queen. Perseus fights against the sea monster and rescues Andromeda.

Namjoshi's fable 'Perseus and Andromeda' (p.47) presents an ironic reversal of the classical 'hero and the passive damsel in distress' positions. The ironic humour of the fable which tears the original story of heroic chivalry and valour to pieces, is a pièce de resistance of this book of comic, feminist revelations:

And as usual the prince, the princess and the dragon: the function of the prince is to fight the dragon, the function of the princess is to serve as bait, and the function of the dragon is to take the blame. But suppose that the princess has ambitions of her own. She says to the prince, 'you be the bait, and I'll fight the dragon.' The prince demurs. 'What if you lose?'' he says. 'And what if you lose?' 'I have been brought up to fight dragons. Besides I am stronger and taller and manlier. And it's for me to take the risk and for
you to be safe. 'Every body else agrees with the prince. The princess is bound and tied to the stake. The dragon comes up and dragon and prince have a great fight. The prince loses. 'Okay?' says the dragon. 'Okay,' says the prince. The dragon shambles over to the waiting princess and is about to eat her, when the princess says, 'Are you willing to eat a helpless victim?' What?' says the dragon. 'Set me free,' says the princess, 'and I will teach you a brand-new game'. The dragon is intrigued and burns off her bonds. 'All right,' says the princess, 'now you be the prince, and I'll be you, and he can be the princess. 'They all change their clothes and the prince is tied to the princess' stake. 'Now what?' says the dragon, 'Do we fight once again?' No.' says the princess, 'now we go away. And don't worry about the prince, he's perfectly safe.'

Namjoshi's 'Perseus and Andromeda' is about a self-reliant, clever Andromeda who knows how to take care of herself by outwitting the dragon. She does not need the assistance of the prince. Even when he is vanquished, she learns to protect herself. His physical valour is ineffectual in the face of her wit, presence of mind and infinite resourcefulness. The hidden feminist implications are clear; no hero can keep the damsel's fears and insecurities at bay. She can only rely on herself. The myth of a passive, helpless damsel is exploded. Woman may succumb to fits of passive escapism, she may be seized by a desire to off load her responsibilities onto a broad shouldered hero. But he may not be powerful enough. A woman may not be a frail maiden, seeking the help of a charming prince. It is what she herself can do that really matters.
3.3. Unveiling the sexist schemata of fairytales and legends: Demystifying Female Immanence.

The radically revised and reworked fairy tales of Suniti Namjoshi show that the transgressive nature of the 'fantastic' provides a specific space for alternative view points for examining the hidden stresses in women's lives, the exposure of injustice, retribution and reversal. The distinctly feminist agenda is unveiled through sophisticated means of subterfuge and manipulation in the face of existing power relations. An attempt is made to think in terms of, potentially subversive (female) discourses not as excluded from and outside 'man-made' language but rather as "a plurality of alternative communicative sites that exist within and alongside the dominant (patriarchal) order". As Kim L Worthington puts it, "we do not have to look outside language for the locus of our self determining power, hypothesizing and exclusionary alienation which relies on the uninterpretability of untranslatable babble or the ex communicative silence of non signification. Using language is always more than an act of re-inscription. In language, we can challenge, question, and even shape the plural communities within which we are determined: creative language use is a condition of our partial self determination as subjects of/in discourse - an optimistic claim."  

In her reworking of fairy tales, Namjoshi examines the sexism that resides within the more general ideological framework and warns that such sexist schemata have to be resisted and deconstructed, because, otherwise they can easily come to be accepted as part of a particular culture's commonsense model of reality.
The fable, 'Thorn Rose' (p.10) is an ironic account of the disapproval, opposition and the ostracism that rebellious, anti feminine princesses face as a punishment for their 'wickedness'.

Have you heard the story of the little princess, who had a little brother who was going to be king? There were rumours about, the palace was full of them, of how strange she was, not lady-like, wore men's clothes. Of this last escapade there are echoes through history. When at last she understood that she couldn't ever be king, she challenged her brother to single combat. (She had no army.) The result was defeat. In some versions he lopped off her head. In others, he laughed and sent her to the attic. In the attic there was a spinning wheel, and there, she spun out her life for one hundred years and probably died.

As a caustic rejoinder to this story is another which is a subsidiary offshoot of the primary one of the sister of the princess who voluntarily chooses isolation and prefers her insular attic to the company of men.

And yes, she had a sister who didn't like preferred women. She clambered to the attic of her own accord, and when she fell asleep, nobody woke her: no women available.

The subversive reworking of the original fairy tale of the 'Sleeping Beauty', resists the narrative fixity and orthodoxy of the culturally sanctioned utopian vision of the ideal fairy tale romance. Such an approach opens out what has become narrowed and closed, so that culturally endorsed, accepted readings of fairy tales depicting male supremacy and female subordination are seen to be constructions, suggesting an interpretive closure. Traditional stereotypes of
female exclusion, confinement are substituted by multiple alternatives which endorse those unheard, denied, subsumed female voices.

Vindicating the view that fairy tales are "training manuals which serve to accultur ate women to traditional roles"\textsuperscript{21}, in his work, \textit{Feminist Literary Studies: an Introduction} (1984) K.K. Ruthven analyses the effects of fairy tales "What does a girl learn from (fairy tales ?). Principally that she is by nature a passive creature, like the princess who waits patiently on top of the glass hill for the first man to climb it. She learns also that she is symbolically dead (either asleep like Sleeping Beauty or incarcerated like Rapunzel) until brought to life by the man who will be the man in her life. Submissive and helpless, she must expect to drift from one kind of dependency to another without ever exercising her autonomy, her consciousness of which has never been raised. She should hope she is beautiful because beauty ranks as worthiness in androcentric scale of value. She should avoid being an ugly sister, cruel step mother, hag or witch, for men find all such women sexually undesirable. Fairy tales fragment the continuities of female life into discontinuous states, with a result that young princesses tend to regard hags and witches as belonging to a different species rather than as possible versions of themselves in a few years' time". (p. 80)

' The princess' (p.5) is another fable that exposes the absurdity of exaggerated ideals of femininity in the sexist framework of fairy tales. The options chosen for the female characters are so retrograde that they seem to be caricaturized representations of a ludicrously unreal, impractical ideology of feminine behaviour.
And so it was settled that she was a genuine princess. They had brought the equipment: seven thick mattresses stuffed with eiderdown, a magnificent bed, and a small green pea, which was placed with some care under the mattresses. They made up the bed and the princess lay down, but she couldn't sleep because of the green pea. The proof was conclusive. The pea was removed, and the royal parents embraced their daughter. She was very beautiful and exceptionally charming, and of course, her sensitivity was such that it was absolutely amazing. If anyone cried, she would suffer so much that no one was allowed to cry in the palace. If anyone was hurt, she would take to her bed and be ill for weeks. In consequence, no one who was hurt was admitted within. Sickness sickened her, and she could not bear to see anything that was in the least bit ugly. Only good-looking people and those in good health were allowed to be seen. The king, her father, and the queen, her mother, did their best for her, and the people of the city were quite proud of her - she being a princess and the genuine thing; but it soon became obvious that her skin was such that she was allergic to everything. Cotton was too coarse and silks too heavy. The king levied taxes and all the people were made to work hard at spinning and weaving. They worked very hard and grew very tired, but it wasn't any use, and finally, the princess caught a cold and died of it.

Namjoshi’s fable is a humorous, satirical imitation of the 'fairy tale' literature. Namjoshi reveals how 'feminine' functions as the 'other' which allows men to construct a positive self-identity as masculine. And because what is 'other' does not have identity in its own right, it often acts as an empty space to be ascribed whatever meanings the dominant group chooses. Thus women are frail not strong, emotional not rational so that 'masculinity' can be defined as
those positive qualities. By seeing women as 'other' to themselves, men can read into 'femininity' whatever qualities are needed to construct their sense of the masculine. So, a mythicized 'woman' becomes the imaginary location of male dreams, idealisations and fears. Throughout different cultures, 'femininity' is found to represent nature, beauty, purity and goodness, but also evil, enchantment, corruption and death. because men persistently see 'woman' as the 'other', Beauvoir argues that 'woman' as represented by men "has a double and deceptive visage...She incarnates all moral virtues from good to evil, and their opposites..... He projects upon her what he desires, and what he fears, what he loves and what he hates". (Beauvoir, 1997 : p.229) Namjoshi's fable 'The Ugly One' (p.14) demonstrates the truth of this observation. Viewed from the same exaggerated, absurd yardstick of feminine beauty and delicacy, 'The Ugly One' represents the other extreme of the spectrum of conventional patriarchal stereotypes. It is the portrait of an ugly woman who becomes an object of scorn, is despised by young boys and princelings as an unhealthy aberration, a spectre of failure. She is repulsive only because she is 'ugly'.

Once upon a time there was an extraordinarily ugly creature... its sex was indeterminate, but after its death people generally agreed that it had once been a woman. The creature was not unique, nor exceptional in any way: at birth, for example, there hadn't been a trace of any congenital defect. But, as time went on, she had tended to generate such extremes of disgust that, wholly without effort, she had, in the end, acquired a certain status. For doctors and psychiatrists she was the Unhealthy Aberration. For hard-working men she was the Spectre of Failure. For young boys and princelings she was the Object

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of Scorn. And for many little girls, and women also, she was wholly Non-existent, except when they suffered from hideous nightmares. In brief, for people in general she became the Living Example of what they most genuinely did not want to become. Had she been poor? They would not be poor. Had she been starving? They would eat well. Had she been stupid? They would be cultured. Had she been a drudge? They would have leisure. Unfortunately, these noble aspirations created problems. Not all could have leisure, not all could eat well, but that didn't matter. The values remained. Moral: Even the lowliest creature serves humanity, indeed, she serves and serves......

The fragile femininity of the princess and the ugliness of the other woman serve as exemplary tropes of female condition in patriarchy. The represent the two extremes of stereotypical views of women as either subversive or transcendental feminine symbols. She is either an extremely delicate, beautiful, helpless damsel or a disgustingly ugly beast. Both the conditions seem to be frightening and nightmarish. The feminist intention is clear because the fables present a case of 'resistant reading'. Namjoshi does not submit to the barrage of ideologies transmitted by original texts (fairy tales, myths, legends, epics etc.,) which are sites of ideological determination that mould readers by indirect interpellations. She questions them and puts up a resistance against their power, sanctity and supremacy by redefining their scope and nature. If we take our model of power relations from Michael Foucault, it is quite clear that "where there is power, there is resistance".22 As Foucault states: "We must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would only have
to decipher. The world is not the accomplice of our knowledge: There is no pre-
discursive providence which disposes the world in our favour'. Thus it is
tremendously liberating for a feminist writer like Namjoshi to realize that she can
intervene in the process of shaping the boundaries of patriarchal space. In this
regard, feminist resistance has been turbulently active.

'The Little Prince' (p.15) another fable based on a fairy tale presents a
topsy turvily interesting situation. The queen who is a wicked step mother to
the son of the king has an extraordinary ambition: She wants her daughter to
rule the kingdom. The princess is "tutored to assume the sovereignty of her
possible kingdom, while the prince is taught to be demure, shy, docile and
gentle". The queen begs the king for a small favour. She wants the king to give
a chance to the more capable child to rule the kingdom. As the prince fails in all
the tests and the princess emerges victorious, she is invested with the power to
rule the kingdom. But the princess' rule is opposed by the citizens.

..... Fortunately, the citizens had more sense. They all rose up as
one man and yelled at the place gates, 'We will not be ruled by
a woman.' They hauled out the prince and set him on the throne.
The wicked queen and her unlucky daughter were exiled
forever. And thus, order was restored, and justice done.

The ironic message is that 'order is restored and justice done' by
ensuring that sex role stereotyping continues undisturbed. Namjoshi sensitizes
the readers to the semantic deterioration of the word 'woman' which in itself has
acquired connotations of low status. The images of women are constructed on
the basis of stereotypical sexist assumptions.
In the fable, 'The Lesson' (p.8), a mother educates her little girl about the implications of obsequious 'subordination' in conventional wifehood. The most important quality of a good wife is that she must learn to hold her tongue: "Only little boys grow up to be Emperors. As for little girls, they marry Emperors, and they learn to hold their tongues..."

In this context, Suniti Namjoshi presents an interesting fable, with a convincing hypothesis about the domestication and subordination of the 'female' species. (The Anthropoi, p.9).

In the early history of man the race of men propagated themselves, and their children were born from out of their heads. There were handsome athletes and noble warriors, and they hunted and drank and were exceedingly clever. It so happened that they came across a species that was very like man, but quite evidently inferior. They conquered these creatures and trained them into slavery, transferring to them the burden of child-bearing and child-rearing, and the more troublesome tasks, which had no prestige or required no intellect. Some they raised like thorough bred horses, purely for their pleasure. On the whole, when suitably conditioned, the slaves proved tractable, and many displayed a most commendable loyalty to their particular masters. After the domestication of this species the civilization of man advanced apace, indeed, it is still advancing at a break neck rate.

The Fable 'The Anthropoi' focuses on the victimization of women in patriarchal societies. She is for man a sexual partner, a reproducer, an erotic object, As Beauvoir points out in The Second Sex, the domestic labours that fell to her lot because they were reconcilable with the cares of maternity,
imprisoned her in repetition and immanence; they were repeated from day to day in an identical form, which was perpetuated almost without change from century to century: they produced nothing new. 'Immanence' according to Beauvoir signifies the opposite or negation of transcendence, such as confinement or restriction to a narrow round of uncreative and repetitious duties: it is in contrast to the freedom to engage in projects of ever widening scope that marks the untrammelled existent. In the fable 'The Anthropoi', Namjoshi makes it amply clear that 'transcendence' as a state of release and freedom is only available to the 'male' of the species and therefore a masculine quality. Immanence becomes conversely a feminine virtue. Female immanence metaphorically connotes patriarchal society's inscription on the woman's body and mind.

'The Anthropoi', can be compared with Bradley's feminist science fiction, The Ruins of Isis (1978) which presents ideas that potentially challenge sexual power relations and satirise some of the grosser aspects of women's oppression in the contemporary world. The women of Isis see men as creatures programmed by their biology, recognisable only in terms of their natural, physical functions. Intellectual work is considered bad for them as it spoils them for their sexual and reproductive uses. The men are playmates, drudges and reproductive organs in human form. They are excluded from positions of power for their own good. The parallels between this and a patriarchal society's view of women are obvious. Male attitudes towards women in a sexist society are brought into sharp focus through defamiliarisation.
‘The Tale of Two Brothers’ (p. 34) ironically illustrates the binary opposition of male and female roles, its hierarchization and consequent devaluation of female functions.

There was once a man who thought he could do anything, even be a woman. So he acquired a baby, changed its diapers and fed the damn thing three times a night. He did all the house work, was deferential to men, and got worn out. But he had a brother, Jack Cleverfellow, who hired a wife, and got it all done.

In another fable ‘Green Slave Women’ (p. 61) Namjoshi states that the submission of woman to the man and her domestication has guaranteed an unlimited supply of docile slaves from time immemorial. Again and again, the question foregrounds itself: when will the ‘female’ of the species attain an equal status on a par with the male? Or as Namjoshi puts it in her allegorical fable, ‘Of cats and Bells’ (p. 74) ‘who will bell the cat?’;

‘Who will bell the cat?’ ‘Not I,’ said the Brown Mouse, ‘I have too many babies, and a hundred things to do, and a long shopping list.’ ‘Not I,’ said the Blue Mouse, ‘I hate silly fights and I believe in peace.’ ‘Not I,’ said the Little Mouse, ‘I am too little, and the bell is too heavy.’ ‘Nor I,’ said the Big Mouse, ‘I do not understand the nature of bells, and moreover, they bore me.’ ‘Well, I’ll bell the cat,’ said the Lunatic Mouse, ‘I’ll do it for a lark. It’s really quite funny.’ ‘No, I’ll bell the cat,’ said the Heroic Mouse, ‘I want the glory.’ ‘If we wait long enough,’ said the Clever Mouse, ‘the cat will die, and when we needn’t worry.’ ‘Yes,’ said the mice, ‘let us forget it;’ and some didn’t and some did.
The gender inequalities, discriminations and the imperfect conditions are never challenged. Any resistance to the established order or opposition evokes horror. The status quo is never questioned.

Once upon a time there was a mother, a father, and a daughter, and the daughter was a feminist, so she said to her mother, 'I am going to avenge the wrongs that you have suffered. I will not hurt or hate or kill, but I will try to change things.' This horrified her mother and she said, 'But my darling, I haven't suffered much. I have, on the whole, been perfectly happy, and your father has been good and gentle and kind to me.' 'But as much could be said of our cat,' said the daughter, 'Doesn't it bother you that both you and I are dependent on him?' 'I think we're very lucky,' answered her mother, 'And besides, to compare me to a cat is, I think, rather insulting. He would never say it. 'But that's just it, mother, in a good patriarchy the women are dependent, but they're not allowed to know it.' 'But we are all dependent on one another,' said her mother, 'That's how we live in human society.' 'But mother,' cried her daughter, 'can you not see that in society as it is, women only exist in relation to men and that men are primary?' 'But my dear,' said her mother, 'that's how it should be.' (Her Mother's Daughter, p.99).

Thus we find that a rebel or a feminist may be looked upon with suspicion and disapproval. Her urge to reform and avenge the wrongs may not be reciprocated by others. But it is equally ironically true in the case of an obedient wife, devoted mother and a hard working housewife trying to please the members of her family, in an altruistic fashion. She may also find herself utterly alone and supportless. Her abnegation of the self or self denial may be
dangerous. The ideal of an altruistic woman with a generous, noble heart, a woman who gives endlessly without expecting anything in return is an absurdity. This ideal of 'a hearty woman without a head' is unfortunately spurious and chimerical. Namjoshi's fable 'Heart' (p. 93) exposes the grotesque stereotype of the 'headless woman', that fabricates the idyll of the family, the feminine woman who is a masochist.

And then there was the woman who had no head, all heart she was. She was even called Heart, and not (as one might have expected) the Headless Woman. Her function in life was to serve other people and this she did with a willing heart. She cooked, she cleaned, she baked, she scoured, and she was always kind and loving and gentle, and never once complained of feeling tired. In the course of time her children grew up, her husband grew old, eventually he died and then he was buried. The Headless Woman was all alone. So she went to the Government to ask for a pension. And she didn't get it. Now I'm not suggesting that the Government was brutal. The problem was that she had no head and couldn't ask:

The fable 'Blood' (p.33) parodies the absurd and paranoid obsession with the ideals of female chastity and virginity in patriarchal societies. The snow maiden is so immaculately white and pure that only snow flows in her veins. She has no blood and that is why she cannot prove her virginal status. She can only melt and dissolve into tears. Because of this, the prince forsakes her.

What, so much snow? Day in and day out the snow falling? Day in and day out the Snow Maiden eats it, It keeps her arms snowy and soft. For how many years does the maiden eat snow? Year in and year out
till the Prince comes along. It keeps her breasts white and virginal. And then what happens? The Prince comes along. He marries the maiden. There is a ritual, but there isn't any blood. The Prince forsakes her. The Snow Maiden melts, she quickly dissolves into a quantity of tears. But blood? No blood. how could she bleed? Didn't he know that snow is white and spotless and pure, and didn't he know that she has no blood?

The old fairy tale of the fisherman and the salmon assumes a new dimension. The fisherman's wife who nags her husband to beg for a boon from the salmon again and again has the most fantastic request to make from the salmon. 'She wants greater power, she wants her freedom' (p.55), but more important than these, "She wants to be able to want what she wants" She is a 'foolish feminist' who is no longer satisfied with her secondary, submissive role as a wife. Therefore salmon advises the fisherman to divorce his wife as it is impossible for a decent husband to put up with a queer, iconoclastic, feminist wife who is obsessed with the notions of her power, identity and freedom.

In the disillusioned, feminist cosmology of Namjoshi's Feminist Fables, there are no fairy tale romances. The prince and the princess never live happily ever after. 'And then what happened?' (p.118) gives us a glimpse of their world and their squabbles.

The Prince married Cinderella. (It pays to have such very small feet.) But soon they started squabbling. 'You married me for my money,' was the Prince's charge. 'You married me for my looks,' was C's reply. 'But your looks will fade, whereas my money will last. Not a fair bargain.' 'No,' said Cinderella and
simply walked out.
And then what happened?

`A Room of His Own` (p.64) is a retelling of the Bluebeard story. This time things are different. Bluebeard has a very meek wife who obeys the dictates of her husband. She feels that he is entitled to a `room of his own`. She does not have any curiosity about the contents of his room. Her lack of curiosity makes him insane with fury and he is provoked, therefore he kills her. The moral of the fable is that Bluebeards always kill their wives whatever be the reason. Even the obedience of the wife would provoke them.

The fifth time around things were different. He gave her instructions, he gave her the keys (including the little one) and rode off alone. Exactly four weeks later he reappeared. The house was dusted, the floors were polished and the door to the little room hadn't been opened. Bluebeard was stunned. `But weren't you curious?` he asked his wife. `No,` she answered. `But didn't you want to find out my innermost secrets?` `Why?` said the woman. `Well,` said Bluebeard, `it's only natural. But didn't you want to know who I really am?` `You are Bluebeard and my husband.` `But the contents of the room. Didn't you want to see what is inside that room?` `No,` said the creature, `I think you're entitled to a room of your own.` This so incensed him that he killed her on the spot. At the trial he pleaded provocation.

The metaphor of the stallion and the mare in `Sheherazade` (p.42) makes it clear that Sheherazade is a prized possession of the Caliph. She is meant for the Caliph's pleasure. She will submit to the advances of the Caliph in much the same way as her mare submits to the advances of the Caliph's steed.
The Caliph's steed and the princess' mare mate in the gardens. Watch how the stallion mounts the mare. Watch how the mare submits to the stallion. So the Caliph at night will mount the princess. The princess will give much pleasure to him. This is the law. It pleases Allah. Caliph and stallion abide by it. In the stallion's paradise there are 1,000 mares. They are paradisal mares, they do not exist save for him. In the Caliph's place there are 1,000 women; they live or die as his whim decrees. They are unreal women. The Caliph's fantasies spin them thin. The Caliph is bored. He turns to the princess. He does not speak. If she does not amuse him, she will die for it. This engages him.

Sheherazade exists as an erotic object for the sexual gratification of the Caliph. In The Second Sex, Beauvoir elucidates this patriarchal reality; "Woman is her husband's prey and his possession. Woman is disclosed first as wife in the patriarchate, since the supreme creator is male. Before being the mother of the human race, Eve was Adam's companion; she was given to man so that he might possess her and fertilize her as he owns and fertilizes the soil; and through her he makes all nature his realm; He wishes to conquer, to take, to possess; to have woman is to conquer her;" (Beauvoir, 1997: pp.183-184).

The Caliph in Arabian nights is the primordial virile man who takes great pride in his sexuality as it is for him a means of obtaining submission of the woman who always represents the 'other'. He has the power to decapitate his mistresses. The ironic message of Namjoshi's fable is that both in the domain of beasts and men, sovereignty and power elude the female and become the preserve of the male.
Unveiling the power equations of sexual politics, Namjoshi's also focuses on the misogyny that is manifestly rampant in patriarchy. The loathing, disgust and woman - hatred find their expression in the disparaging remarks targeted at the woman's anatomy and pejorative, demeaning appellations for women that form a part of the sexism's vocabulary: The fable 'Whore, Bitch, Slut, Sow' (pp.23-24) explores the implications of such sexist terms. All the four words are venomously insulting terms for the 'woman', though the 'Bitch', and 'Sow', denotatively signify the 'female' of the canine and the swine respectively. These abusive words aiming at the scathing vilification of immoral women have no rational basis. They merely convey the contempt and woman hatred widely prevalent in a male dominated world. They contribute in a large measure towards the low self esteem and devaluation of women. In The Female Eunuch, Germaine Greer reveals how the language of reprobation becomes more and more concerned with lapses in neatness, which are taken to be equivalent of moral lapses. The concept of sluttishness or slatternliness with its compound implications of dirt and dishonour gives rise to a great family of nasty words, like 'slut' etc. Many words have lost the male portion of their meanings and have become exclusively feminine. The most offensive group of words applied to the female population are those which bear the weight of neurotic male disgust for illicit or casual sex. Namjoshi illustrates this observation of Greer in her fable;

Once upon a time there was a wicked woman, who was generally known as Whore, Bitch, Slut, Sow. Being a strong-minded woman and totally unashamed
of being herself, she made a petition to the Chief Judge. She asked that the labels she bore be changed to some others that would more accurately express her wickedness as a person, rather than, as they did at present, merely as a woman. The Judge, as it happened, was bored at the time. 'Very well,' he said, 'you can have a hearing, and the learned of the city, on the day appointed, will be asked to submit an alternative label. 'The day came and the Judge looked around and asked the scholars for the alternative label, but the Eldest Scholar looked embarrassed, 'The fact is, Your Honour, we have not been able to reach an agreement,' 'Really?' said the Judge, 'Well, I should have expected as much. I suppose you got lost in philosophical discussion? Never mind. Sit down. I'll do the job.' 'How about "thief"?' he said, turning to the woman. 'May it please you, Your Honour,' said the Eldest Scholar, '"thief" is excellent, but this woman renders service for moneys received, so unfortunately, Your Honour, that particular term is not applicable.' 'Well, how about "beggar"?' said the Chief Judge. But the Learned Scholar interposed once again, 'It is not quite clear, Your Honour, that being a beggar is in itself a sign of wickedness. Moreover, this unfortunate woman does not beg'. 'Oh,' said the Judge, 'How about "bastard"? No, I suppose you will find some other objection. Well, what is the problem? "Why are we having so much trouble?" 'The truth is, Your Honour,' the scholar replied, 'that her wickedness consists in the fact that she is a woman.' 'Ah,' said the Learned Judge, 'That is the answer. Go away, Woman, that is your name and your new label.'

Here, Namjoshi suggests that the term 'woman' itself has acquired connotations of low status and sexuality. People do not find the term 'man', when used for adult males, potentially insulting as they do, when the term

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'woman' is used for an adult female. The fable is a parodic revelation of the fact that the terms in English that are gender specific have a strong tendency to be derogatory towards women in contrast with available terms for men. There are a number of contrasting pair words in English, where one is male specific and the other is female specific. But the female term has acquired a connotative meaning distinctly different from that of its partner. As Deborah Cameron reports, feminists have discovered that "many languages have an underlying semantic or grammatical rule where the male is positive and the female is negative, so that the tenets of male chauvinism are encoded into language". (Mills, 1995: p.110). In her work, Feminist Stylistics, Mills provides several examples of contrasting pair words which are male and female specific such as male / female, courtier / courtesan, master / mistress, host / hostess, adventurer / adventuress. She remarks that although these are terms which are etymologically connected, the scope of the female specific term is different from that of the male specific term, being used to refer to some one of lower status and frequently having an overlaid sexual connotation. (p.111) These pairs of gender contrastive words reveal an ideology constructed on the edifice of hierarchical binary oppositions perpetuating male supremacist values. These oppositions are arranged along male / victor / master vs. female / mistress patterns emphasising her derogatory status and subordination to the male authority. In The Newly Born Woman, Cixous provides a list of such binary oppositions: "Activity / passivity, Sun / moon, Culture / nature, Day / night, Father / mother, Head / emotions, Intelligible / sensitive, Logos / pathos".
Defining these oppositions as "patriarchal binary thought", Toril Moi remarks in *Sexual / Textual Politics* that this "patriarchal binary thought", corresponds to the underlying opposition man / woman, heavily imbricated in the patriarchal value system. She analyses each opposition as a "hierarchy where the 'feminine' side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance". (p.104)

This feminist awareness of woman's invisibility and marginalisation in patriarchy finds an eloquent, metaphorical manifestation in 'The Christening' (p.122).

A Queen gave birth to a beautiful child, and when it was time to christen her, they invited everyone, but they forgot to invite the Wicked Witch. She was furious. She came anyway and screamed out her curse: 'The child shall be faceless for the rest of her life.' There was general consternation. The Witch disappeared and the parents of the child grieved bitterly. Then the Good Witch stepped forward. 'Can you do nothing?' pleaded the Queen. 'I can mitigate the curse,' answered the Witch, 'Though she is faceless, it will not be noticed.'

The ironic implications of the fable are unequivocally clear. The queens and princesses will always be 'faceless' in the 'kingdom' of kings and princes. It is incumbent on them to love, obey, adapt and suffer in silence. Romance, marriage and motherhood as socially institutionalised offer an irreconcilable loss of discovery of possible identity for women. Imprisoned in a man-made claustrphobic circle of 'immanence', she is excluded from the liberating powers of 'transcendence' which are available to men, "kings in shining armour", upholding the eternal sexist stereotype of strong and active men and weak, passive women.
The fable 'The loathly lady' (p.19) parodies and exposes the ludicrous and illogical nature of such sexist thought. It is a mockery of the high handed kind of chivalry practised by the knights in their shining armour. The women are never free, they simply do not have the time for themselves as they have obligations and commitments towards their husbands, fathers, and children. Even finding an answer to the 'woman's question' such as 'what women most want', becomes the prerogative of the knight. Of course, the knights are extremely chivalrous and patronising and do their best to find an answer.

But suppose that Queen Guinevere's Court had said to Arthur, 'If it pleases you, Your Majesty, "What women most want" is a woman's question, and it would be more fitting to send off a woman to find the right answer.' And suppose Arthur had agreed, then what would have happened? Imagine the scene. Queen Guinevere is on the throne. She looks at her ladies and asks for volunteers. A few step forward, but their husbands object, their fathers object, their children are too young, they are too young, and besides it's most improper. The Queen gives up. Arthur is sorry, but he had expected as much. He summons his knights and they throng about him. He has a hard time deciding which one to choose. He picks one at random. And after a year the knight comes back with the loathly damsel and a suitable answer. The answer's a good one and the men laugh. Then they settle down to a good dinner. Nothing is changed, no one is hurt, and even the knight's satisfied because the loathly damsel is changed overnight to a beautiful woman. Chivalry flowers. They are all of them gallant, and have shown some concern for the Woman Question.
The irony is that absolutely nothing can be changed, if the 'gallant and chivalrous' knights try to find an answer to the 'Woman Question'. This is one quest that requires women's compulsory participation. Namjoshi's "The loathly Lady" is a revisionary tale based on the story of Sir Gawaine, how Sir Gawaine, displayed the high nobility of knighthood. The knight's reward is always a virginal, chaste damsel. But suppose the damsel in distress who is rescued by the knight is already 'tainted' and impure, then what happens? The romantic tales of love, chivalry and gallantry do not answer this question satisfactorily. As revealed in the fable 'complaint' (p.85) in such circumstances, the knight would be greatly distressed and perplexed by what has happened.

Two knights in a forest. It's early in May. Bright sunlight filters through the leaves. A damsel in distress is weeping quietly. One of the knights has abducted this damsel. The other is her lover. The knights are fighting. Her lover wins. But the problem is that the damsel in distress has already been raped. The knight, her lover, is greatly distressed. How can he marry her? He grieves bitterly.

The knight 'obviously' cannot marry a rape victim. This brings us back to misogynistic practices in the patriarchy. Rape, an act of terror is the most brutal manifestation of woman hatred. To see rape within the system of female oppression is to understand its non-accidental and non-arbitrary nature and to gain insight into its special purpose for the class of men. The fable 'logic' (p.71) discusses 'rape' as an act justified by the ideology of sexism. According to this ideology male dominance over the female is a natural condition. Woman, having a will and her own self-interest, is a potential obstruction to male destiny.
and is therefore a priori bad, evil, and consequently the justifiable victim. The feeling of power and prestige rests with the male and it implies helpless submission for the female. 'Logic' forcefully attacks the ideology of sexism.

`All right', they said. 'you want equal rights, you fight the war.' 'Very well,' she said, 'I will fight the war. So she walked out of there, enlisted in the army and went off to fight. All her fellow soldiers were male human beings. They made her life extremely unpleasant. But after a few years the war was over and she returned. Reporters surrounded her and asked for comments. 'Well,' she answered, 'it was the usual thing. Men killed men, and women were raped. I killed a few men, but stopped short of rape.' 'So you've now qualified as a full human being?' 'Yes', she answered, 'rape, in fact, is not mandatory.'

The woman in the fable feels that she has qualified as a full human being. The implication is that in order to qualify as a full human being, as a soldier or a fighter, a man need not become a rapist. Why do they resort to rape? Rape, then is an effective political device. It is not an arbitrary act of violence by one individual on another. It is a political act of oppression perpetrated by members of a powerful class (males) on members of the powerless (female) class.

In the fable 'Further Adventures of the One Eyed Monkey' (p.29) based on a Hindu mythological story, the rape act is looked at from altogether a new angle. Given the commodification of woman in a patriarchal, conventional marriage, as the property of her husband, the one who has been sinned against is not the woman, but her 'husband' as his property has been defiled. In this system of justice, a rapist is punished and purified by performing a sacrifice, husband is

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also propitiated, only the 'woman' as a victim is ruined. This is the inexorable puzzling logic of patriarchy.

In the patriarchal social reality, the ideology of sexism reigns supreme. Its basis is not male achievement but rather maleness itself. It perpetuates and endorses the binary polarities male / female on hierarchized superior / inferior lines. In this social construction of gender polarities, masculinity is associated with 'dominance', femininity with subordination and domesticity. This has contributed to the stereotype of sex roles and division of roles according to gender. Feminist endeavour aims at the transformation and eradication of gender inequalities by pointing out the incongruities and absurdities of such rigid polarisations. One way of achieving this as a feminist revisionist exercise, is to re-evaluate by fictionally depicting the reversal of patriarchally enforced roles of men and women. Some of Namjoshi's feminist fables are masterpieces of such volte-face. 'Jack Three's Luck' (p.101) is a bouleversement of the eternal romantic love story of the girl marrying boy and living happily ever after as a dutiful, obedient, docile wife.

When Jack of the Beanstalk and his two younger brothers climbed to the top, they were seized by a giantess. She told the three of them that she would keep them as husbands, but they must cook and clean and make themselves useful and be generally pleasant. 'Never', shouted Jack and charged her with his sword, but she picked him up casually and tossed him through the window. "Well, what about you?" she turned to the second, but he crossed his legs and squatted on the floor and wouldn't say a word. Since he seemed pretty useless from her point of view, she motioned to a servant to have him removed.....
that left the third. When the giantess looked at
the third brother, he jumped to his feet and bowed
gracefully and said quickly that he felt very honoured.
That pleased the giantess. She married him immediately.
And since he did his best to be pleasant and useful, the
giantess loved him and was kind to him, so that it's
entirely possible that they lived happily ever after.

If it is possible to live happily as a home loving, dutiful, docile wife, it
should be equally possible to live as a home loving, submissive husband,
cheerfully doing all the domestic chores and keeping his wife contented and
happy. This subtle implication exposes the male pomposity, the absurdity of
sexist ideologies and its injustice: housewives represent the most oppressed
class of life - contracted unpaid workers, for whom 'slaves' is not too
melodramatic a description.

Feminist fables based on the Hindu mythology present a scathing
indictment of the "Pativrata Dharma" (devotion to the husband). According to
indigenous patriarchal norms, this is spelt out to be the goal for Indian women.
These social norms, demonstrating the degradation of women have doomed
them to a humiliating state of dependence. 'Swayamvara' (p.105), a
humourous masterpiece depicts a 'princess' who is undisturbed and
unembarrassed by her indelicate, not so lady like habit of 'whistling'. The
parents are aggrieved. Her father, the king announces that he will offer half his
kingdom and the princess in marriage to any man who can beat her at whistling.
When the princess excels all her suitors, her father is displeased. The princess has
a solution. She sets a test for all the suitors.
.... she turned to the suitors,
`Do you acknowledge that you were beaten fairly ?`
`No,' they all roared, all except one, `we think it was
magic or some sort of trick. `but one said, `Yes.'
`Yes', he said, `I was beaten fairly.' The princess
smiled and turning to her father she pointed to this
man. `If he will have me,' she said, `I will marry him.

Namjoshi's fable is a parody of the story of Atlanta, the famous Greek
princess who was also a runner. Atlanta could never be defeated by her suitors in
a running contest. Finally, she was tricked into loosing by the device of dropping
three golden apples which she paused to pick up. The revisionist fable of
Namjoshi shows a princess who unlike Atlanta, decides to marry a man, who has
the humility to acknowledge the fact he was beaten fairly. A man who can
readily admit his defeat appeals to the spirited, non-conformist princess of
Namjoshi's `Swayamvara'.

The `Doll' (p.108) presents another example of this ideological volte face.

In the fable, `the doll' functions as a symbol for the fragile male ego.

Two little girls are making a doll. It's a male doll.
It's made out of sticks. Perched on the sticks is a
round stone. That is its head. The doll is fragile. A
boy comes along. He stares at the doll. The little girls
tell him that name of the doll is Brittle Boy. The
boy gets mad. He smashes the doll. The two little
girls get very angry. They would like very much to
smash the boy. But they say to themselves that the
boy is fragile. They pick up the sticks, and start over.
3.4 Female Affiliations.

Another problematic issue explored by *Feminist Fables* is that of sexuality. There is a continuing debate in feminist theory about the nature of female sexuality. According to radical feminists, women's oppression originates from male control of women's sexuality. Radical feminists express the view that the sexuality of women has been stolen outright, appropriated by men - conquered, possessed, taken, violated; women have been systematically and absolutely denied the right to sexual self-determination and to sexual integrity. Kate Millett in her pioneering work *Sexual Politics* identifies sexuality, not as some simple, 'natural' experience of women and men, but as being socially constructed with political consequences and as being politically constructed with social consequences. Both first and second wave feminisms share the recognition that woman's oppression is tied to her sexuality. Radical feminists like Charlotte Bunch argued that it was heterosexuality that was the cornerstone of male supremacy. (Humm, 1992: p. 103). Such convictions paved the way for lesbian feminism. The feeling of lesbian feminists is often not strongly sexual. The emphasis is on female bonding, exhorting women to give support to each other rather than drain all their energies in total investments in men.

The strong bonds of love and affection that bind women to each other are explored as serious themes with all their nuances and connotations in *Feminist Fables*. But Namjoshi often camouflages the human identity of these characters in her fables, by providing metaphors of animals and birds. Hence there are elderly spinster mice, female beast, who loves women, a wren who is a feminist
and a lesbian. Namjoshi's ironic wit, feminist parodic idiom and extremely unconventional imagery go hand in hand with her shape shifting ability and her protean disguises as 'male, female, animal'. Her other work *Blue Donkey Fables* (1988) where both the Blue Donkey and Bhadravati, an Indian cow, are lesbians, provides insights into the disguises that Namjoshi's adopts to reveal her unconventional choices and preferences. In *Feminist Fables* there is an assortment of fables that celebrate and affirm the love of a woman for another woman.

"The Badge - Wearing Dyke and Her Two Maiden Aunts" (p.11) is the story of two elderly spinster mice who have lived together for twenty five years. They are poor, but respectable, and in their small circle, they are regarded as authorities on culture. A niece comes to visit them and stays for supper.

......She wore no make-up - that was unexceptionable - she had been to university - they believed in education - but she wore a number of badges bearing such extraordinary legends as: 'Gay Liberation is our Liberation' and 'Lesbians Ignite'. Fortunately neither of the spinsters could read without spectacles. Nothing untoward happened till after the evening meal, and perhaps not even then. As a prelude to conversation, one of them asked, "And why do you wear those badges, my dear?" The niece replied, "To protest against the discrimination that women suffer who love one another." "Oh," said the spinster, "but we love one another, and have done so for twenty five years. "Well, what I mean is, do you prefer women?" "Yes, on the whole, one is so much more comfortable with one's own sex, don't you think?" The niece was nonplussed. She took off her badges and offered them to the spinsters,
"Perhaps you should wear these?" But the spinsters declined, and in a curious way the niece felt glad when she wished them well and said 'Good Night'.

The aggressive slogans of lesbian feminist are juxtaposed with the quiet, unostentatious love and camaraderie of the two elderly aunts. The two spinsters do not feel it necessary to display the preferences for women by wearing badges. Their preferences are not necessarily 'sexual', but arise out of a simple logic: "one is so much more comfortable with one's own sex". Here, Namjoshi seems to echo Adrienne Rich's sentiments as revealed in her definition of the 'lesbian continuum', interpreted "to include a range - through each woman's life and throughout history of woman identified experience..... to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny..." 26

'A moral tale' (p.21) is a revised version of the story of the beauty and the beast. In Namjoshi's fable, the beast is a woman who has kind and liberal parents. Although her parents do not disapprove of homosexuals, they fear that social ridicule and humiliation would make them unhappy. Therefore, they are grief-stricken to hear their daughter express such thoughts. But the beast is unable to change her personality. She continues to be herself.

Boys didn't interest her. She fell in love with a girl. The girl disapproved, and she found that she was now the object of ridicule. She became more and more solitary and turned to books. But the books made it clear that men loved women, and women loved men, and men rode off and had all sorts of adventures and women stayed at home.
These romantic novels enlighten the woman. She has a brain wave, a tremendous insight into her state of mind. If to be a human is to be a heterosexual, then it logically follows that she is not 'human'; 'I know what it is,' she said one day, 'I know what's wrong: I am not human. The only story that fits me at all is the one about the Beast. But the Beast doesn't change from a beast to a human because of its love. It's just the reverse. And the Beast isn't fierce. It's extremely gentle. It loves Beauty, but it lives alone and dies alone.' And that's what she did. Her parents mourned her, and the neighbours were sorry, particularly for her parents, but no one was a fault: she had been warned and she hadn't listened.

Namjoshi began to think about being a lesbian as early as eleven or twelve and declared her views in print and at work in 1979. To put it in her own words, "Turning my back on unpleasantness and hostility had become a habit, as had the making of a distinction between a private world and a public one".27

In the fable 'The wicked witch' (p.40), a handsome young dyke has embarked on a quest for the 'Real Thing'. She consults a witch. The dyke's problem is that she has fallen in love with a beautiful woman, and though that woman professes some affection for her, she assures the dyke nonetheless that what she feels for her is not the 'real thing' and according to her the "Real thing is the love between a man and a woman". The problem can be defined as 'compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence'. The writer suggests three choices to the dyke; to turn into a man and go back to that woman and assure her that their love is the 'Real Thing'. The dyke rejects this because an unreal person (who in this case is herself masquerading as a man) cannot feel a real thing. The other choice is the "principle of corroborative reality": to get about
five hundred other people to go to that woman and affirm that the dyke's love for
er is the real thing. The dyke is not so sure. It doesn't make any difference to
her whether the people around her accept her love to be the real thing or not.
But the witch feels that the principle of 'corroborative reality' is important. The
fable substantiates the observations of the Adrienne Rich recorded in her essay
'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence'. Rich indicates that the
institution of heterosexuality holds sway over all women regardless of their
sexual object choices, having little to do with desire or choice at all: this is
heteroreality.

'The Example' (p.52) describes the stigmatized existence of a lesbian
feminist metaphorically. The sparrow couple come to know, that their children's
teacher, the wren is not a 'straight person' and her sexuality is not what it should
be, she is a spinster, a feminist and a lesbian. The parents fire her as they fear
that she might morally corrupt their children. Though the wren insists that she is
not harming their children and moreover her personal choices have absolutely
no bearing on her professionalism and her commitments as a teacher, the parents
refuse to listen. Their justification is that feminists maintain that the public and
private realms are inseparable.

"For Adrienne Rich - If She Would Like it" (p.70) is a tribute to
Adrienne Rich who created a new tradition of feminist scholarship by
sensitising feminists to 'woman-identified experiences'.

And after a thousand and one nights the Caliph was
willing to give her life and make her his queen
and keep her forever. But after a thousand and
one nights she was very tired. After a thousand and one nights and a thousand and one deaths, the Caliph's offer could mean very little. 'But what about your reward?' said the Caliph anxiously. Sheherazade turned to her younger sister. Dinarzade smiled. And it was then that Sheherazade answered, 'I have my reward, I have been given it'.

'The friends' (p.81) is about two women who are charmed by each other, who feel at ease in each other's company. They spend a lot of time with each other and are aware that walking through the woods as they do, is an ancient pastime for heterosexual lovers, which, strangely, even for them, might have the same meaning. They remain friendly, kind and cheerful and though they love each other in the same way as a man and a woman would love each other, they do not express their thoughts. The fable reveals that women, who prefer the companionship of other women, remain haunted by the 'heteroreality' of heterosexuality and its association with 'romantic love'. Heterosexuality serves to obliterate lesbian existence and maintains the lie that women have searched for emotional and sexual fulfilment only through men and not at all.

'I See You What You Are' (p.92) is an imaginative recreation of the episode from Twelfth Night, wherein Viola, disguised as a page is sent by Duke Orsino to woo Olivia by proxy. Olivia falls in love with her. Namjoshi rewrites the story and presents her conjectures before us:

But suppose that Viola had also been charmed, charmed to the point of little indiscretion? (And she wasn't indifferent: that praise was genuine.) Suppose she had said, 'I see you what you are, but you, you are deceived and Olivia understanding, had understood also that deceived she was not.
Suppose, these two charming women, had unabashedly declared their love for each other, knowing fully well that the other was a woman, would that have been wrong? asks Suniti Namjoshi. It is a rhetorical question that comes with a strong answer.

Would that have been wrong? Would that of necessity be dreadfully wrong? Because Viola does charm. And when was Olivia less than graceful? Foolish, perhaps, - Not foolish enough? - but never wrong.

The answer is unmistakable. According to Namjoshi, it would never be wrong for a charming woman like Viola to fall in love with a graceful woman like Olivia.

3.5 Demystifying the stereotype of the 'feminine woman'

In Feminist Fables, Suniti Namjoshi illustrates the destructive nature of a metaphysical belief in strong, immutably fixed gender identities. She perceives the pernicious influence of the crippling definitions of sexual identity which the rigid patriarchal order, enforces on a woman. The stereotype of the 'feminine' woman comes under a fresh scrutiny. The 'feminine' is exposed as an arbitrary category given to women's appearance or behaviour by patriarchy. 'Femininity' becomes a term which describes the construction of 'femaleness' by society and which connotes sexual attractiveness to men. In her fables, Namjoshi points out that this stereotype is more a fictional representation than a creation of individual character.

'Broadcast Live' (p.58) is a perfect portrayal of the stereotyped 'womanly woman' perpetuated by patriarchy.
The Incredible Woman raged through the skies, lassoed a planet, set it in orbit, rescued a starship, flattened a mountain, straightened a building, smiled at a child, caught a few thieves, all in one morning, and then, took a little time off to visit her psychiatrist, since she is at heart a really womanly woman and all she wants is a normal life.

The ironic humour of the fable, reveals the powerful stereotype of the 'super woman'. Although it is a mythical ideal, it creates many expectations and builds up an enormous amount of stress in women who are forced to straddle many worlds. Namjoshi demonstrates that underpinning modern liberal feminist thinking is the implicit affirmation that 'women's work such as mothering, domestic management and nurturance is still just that. But at the same time, women are encouraged to realise their true potential in public spheres not instead of but in addition to these commitments. This conviction contributes to the 'superwoman' myth which comes under fire from detractors like Namjoshi. She reveals how this stereotype of the 'superwoman' encourages women to overextend themselves to the point of mental and physical collapse showing that the naturalized association of women with home is not broken.

In 'Next Time Around' (p.59) a woman goes to sleep for 1,000 years, when she wakes up, she is beleaguered with questions about her age and marital status. The bewildered woman wonders why things have not changed even after 1,000 years.

And so she went to sleep for 1,000 years, 'When I wake up either things will be better or they'll be worse; or perhaps man will have destroyed himself completely and the women as well. In any event
things will be different; but as for me, I need a rest."
One thousand years slipped by slowly, or they slipped
by fast, to her it didn't matter; and when they were
over, she woke up and yawned. Half a dozen doctors
approached her at once. "What is your age? What is
your status? Are you unmarried or are you divorced?"
' Haven't things changed?' she asked the men. 'Oh,
yes,' they answered, 'In 1,000 years man has
advanced to the planets and stars. Our children
are well-fed, our women looked after; and every
single man has house of his own and a reasonable
income."

'The Amazon' (p.110) depicts a day in the life of a modern successful
career woman.

She gets up in the morning and drives to work,
encounters aggression: one or two trucks, one woman
driver, and one man. But several are courteous. To
these she is grateful. She stops at a store to buy
cigarettes. The owner overflows with insistent charm.
He tries to flirt. She does not flirt. The owner is
angered. She stops off next for a bottle of wine. The
salesman knows that women are ignorant. He tries
to advise her and calls her 'dear'. She tells him
politely that she knows what she wants. She adds,
as courteously as she is able, that she prefers on the
whole not to be called 'dear'. The salesman is
angered. She senses his rage and feels rather sick, but
does what she must. At work she is addressed as
'Miss' several times - and ideological problem: she has
academic titles, should she pull rank? The day wears
on. She quite likes her work. The people she works
with are gentle and liberal. And yet she suffers these
daily abrasions. But she hasn't been wounded, and
she hasn't been raped. 'Men suffer too,' her colleagues
tell her. She wants to give up. 'That doesn't make it
better,' she answers tiredly, 'that makes it worse'.
'The Gods' (p.35) is the story of a remarkable girl who is extremely good at everything. She is impeccable. The only one thing that is wrong, that which spoils everything is the fact that she is a woman. Everyone in the village is critical of her. "To be so damned good', they said, 'is not womanly'.

These fables re-examine cultural definitions of femininity which represent sex-role stereotyping. They try to formulate a crucial feminist concept of androgyne, which cannot be interpreted as a flight from fixed gender identities, but a recognition of their falsifying metaphysical nature. Such gender identities are rejected and the goal of the feminist struggle is envisaged as the deconstruction of the binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity and its byproducts such as the myth of a 'womanly woman'. In her work Women and Madness (1972) Phyllis Chesler agrees that 'femininity' is in effect a sex role stereotype and also proves that women's attempts to achieve it are prescriptions for failure, victimization and severe mental illness.

3.6 Parodying the representations of 'mothers' in the patriarchal order: Feminist Fables and The Mothers of Maya Diip.

The definition and value of motherhood, is a source of debate in contemporary feminism. Feminism distinguishes 'woman' from 'mother' in order to examine the psychological dynamics in patriarchal culture that absorb femininity into maternity. In her Feminist Fables and The Mothers of Maya Diip Namjoshi questions the representations of the mother in the patriarchal symbolic order. Her fables, 'The Giantess' (p. 29) and 'Myth' (p.106) are parodies of the
tyranny of institutionalisation of motherhood in a patriarchy and the consequent
c stereotypical expectations that are produced about 'motherhood'.

Thousands of years ago in far away India, which is so
far away that anything is possible, before the advent
of the inevitable Aryans, a giantess was in charge of
a little kingdom. It was small by her standards, but
perhaps not by our own.... It was not a kingdom,
but the word has been lost and I could find no
other. There wasn't any king. The giantess governed
and there were no other women. The men were
innocent and happy and carefree. If they were hurt,
they were quickly consoled. For the giantess was
kind, and would set them on her knee and tell them
they were brave and strong and noble. And if they
were hungry, the giantess would feed them. The milk
from her breasts was sweeter than honey and more
nutritious than mangoes. If they grew fractious, the
giantess would sing, and they would clamber up her
legs and onto her lap and sleep unruffled. They were
a happy people and things might have gone on in this
way forever, were it not for the fact that the giantess
grew tired. Her knees felt more bony, her voice
rasped, and on one or two occasions she showed
irritation. They were greatly distressed. "We love you,' they said to the tired giantess, 'Why won't you sing?
Are you angry with us? What have we done? 'You
are dear little children,' the giantess replied, 'but I
have grown very tired and it's time for me to go.'
'Don't you love us any more? We'll do what you want
We will make you happy. Only please don't go.' 'Do
you know what I want?' the giantess asked. They
were silent for a bit, then one of them said, 'We'll
write you a poem.' And a third one shouted.....
..........'We'll bring you many gifts of oysters
and pearls and pebbles and stones, 'No', said
the giantess, 'No'. She turned her back and
crossed the mountains. (pp.29-30)
The fable reveals the implication of self-destruction inherently present in the patriarchal stereotype of a generous, ever-giving, selfless, altruistic mother. French theory provides helpful concepts of the mother which recognise the complicated and sometimes contradictory social categories. In The Revolution of the Poetic Language (1974) Julia Kristeva describes 'mother' as a maternal body which is both a site of subjugated, socialised 'feminine' and is also the un-socialised 'pulsionistic' female subject with female power.

In her work, Of Woman born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (1986) Adrienne Rich describes how as a mother she was haunted and oppressed by the stereotype of the mother whose love is 'unconditional', the selfless nature of motherhood and the visual and literary images of motherhood as a single-minded identity. (pp.22-23). The image of the 'mother' created by patriarchy as a person who ought to love her children all the time, who exists to give them abundant, unambiguous tenderness and love is a myth according to Suniti Namjoshi. In the fables she elaborates on this peculiar stereotype which causes a lot of guilt and suffering to women, for which they are made the scapegoats.

In the battles between the demons and the gods the demons always won. This was because they had a lake of milk in the heart of their city. Whenever a demon was wounded or killed, they tossed him into the lake and he swam out again completely healed. The gods were unhappy. They went to Brahma, the senior god. "What shall we do?" they said, 'As long as they have this lake of milk, they are bound to win'. 'Think', said Brahma, 'think about the source of that milk'. So the gods thought. The answer was obvious. They went to the goddess and pleaded with her.
like little children that they too might be given some milk; and they looked so hungry and so very unhappy that she could not refuse them. And that is why, of course, the wars still rage. Whose fault is it? It's all Her fault, She gave in. (p.106).

The revaluation of the experience of motherhood in patriarchy was a major development of the women-centered analytical work of the 1970s. Shulamith Firestone and Simone De Beauvoir argued that to abolish motherhood in its current form would change society. Offering a radical reinterpretation of biological motherhood, in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) Firestone suggested that the material base for women's oppression lay not in economics but in biology. The fact that women and not men reproduce, Firestone argued, was the reason for the gender based division of labour on which patriarchy and its ruling ideology sexism, were constructed. Biological characteristics created a 'sex class system'. Beauvoir located the source of woman's oppression as her imprisonment within the circle of immanence'. Other feminists like Adrienne Rich argue that it is not motherhood itself which is the problem but way that society has institutionalised motherhood. For example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's fantasy novel *Herland* (1915) depicts a world in which motherhood can be gratifying but not oppressive in a society without men.

Conceived as a parody of Gilman's *Herland*, *The Mothers of Maya Diip* by Namjoshi raises certain disturbing questions about the feminist paradise of a 'matriarchate'. The stereotype of a 'womanly woman' who has to sacrifice herself at the altar of motherhood comes under a scathing scrutiny in *The Mothers of Maya Diip* of Namjoshi. As the name suggests, it is an illusory

* Henceforth referred to as 'The Mothers....'
utopia, insulated from the ideology prevailing in 'normal' heterosexual patriarchies. This ideal system of matriarchy is located in a princely state of India called the Maya Diip which is the state of mothers. "The thought that it might be a functioning reality made feminists tremble." (p.113)

The Blue donkey and her friend Jyanvi, a poetess and a lesbian feminist, are received by Saraswati, the daughter of matriarch of MayaDiip at the Bombay airport and taken to the island of Maya Diip.

Jyanvi is awed and overwhelmed by the maternal spirit that seems to pervade everything in Maya Diip. To her, this obsession with 'motherhood' appears distasteful. Jyanvi begins to wonder if a proper matriarchy would ever be a viable, sane, salutary substitute for patriarchy or wouldn't it enslave women in a different way to their reproductive functions?

Motherhood, be it biological or otherwise is the most sacred function of every adult woman of Maya. In the matriarchate of Maya Diip, all women who have achieved adult status are mothers. The great matriarch rules over all the mothers. Only female babies are accepted and nurtured. The male babies are ruthlessly abandoned. The society of Maya classifies all the mothers into three categories: grade A mother is the one who shares the burden of child rearing with the biological mother of the child. She is a co-mother. Grade B mother is the biological mother. Grade C mother is the one who does the chores. When she has worked long enough and can pay to have a daughter, she can apply for grade A status. A grade B mother, in order to become a biological mother is expected to pass some qualifying tests and emerge successful in them.
Although the society is a pacifist one, it has no use for a woman who is a 'non-mother'. The matriarch's daughter asks Jyanvi and the Blue Donkey, "If neither of you has attained motherhood, how did you achieve adult status?" (p.115). Jyanvi finds this very demoralising. "Why are children glorified here? Don't the lives and longings of women matter?" (p.122) asks Jyanvi despairingly. She is perturbed by the fact that Mayans consider women, who do not wish to be 'mothers' as 'freaks' or 'childish women' and such women are given therapeutic counselling by the Therapist's guild of Maya.

In a poetry festival, a regular affair in Maya, Jyanvi recites her song of a 'non mother' whose nightmare is to live in a house crammed with children, serving their insatiable needs. This rude gesture of Jyanvi shocks the matriarchate of Maya as she has sinned against motherhood, against the core of their identities, their religion and their family structure.

As a witty, hilarious parody 'The Mothers....' suggests that an ingenuous, insular matriarchate with its imposition of motherhood on all its women and the deification and exaltation of motherhood as the most desirable quality of every 'womanly woman' could be equally undemocratic and totalitarian, very much like a heterosexual patriarchy. At the same time, Maya Diip is also a conflict free 'Herland', a gynarchy. No individual woman is isolated and each woman bound to the other by ties of kinship, accepted loyalties and professional affiliations.

Asha, the Apostate, the daughter of the matriarch of Maya, rebels against the discriminatory policies of Mayans concerning the boys. She is exiled
to the forest. Here she builds her own empire, 'Ashagad' and brings up
'Ashans' or the pretty boys, the castaways of Maya Diip. These boys are
trained to become mothers ( of grade A and grade C status) in child rearing,
thereby conforming to traditional ideas of Maya Diip. In 'The Mothers......'
Namjoshi takes an ironic look at male hegemony prevalent in patriarchies.
Valerie, a western immigrant to the island of Maya Diip gives an account of the
grim practices of the heterosexual patriarchy. She enlightens the Ashans about
the ways of her society in their own language.

It was Valerie who burst out, "You know, I originally came from a country where the pretty boys rule.....
In patriarchal societies, the pretty boys grow to a large size and attempt to rule. Many of them then take up,
after a fashion, the functions of co-mothers....."
"You see the 'Ashans' and the 'Mayans' in my country lived together. And the 'Ashans' bullied the 'Mayans',
'I see' Mohan was doing his best to be polite,.....
'It would be an unusual arrangement, wouldn't it?
Why did the Ashans bully the Mayans? In what way?
Valerie struggled on bravely, "you see, the Ashans wanted the Mayans to bear their children......
Ashans in my country have enslaved the Mayans in order to force them to have their babies i.e. Ashan
and Mayan babies who then belong to a particular Ashan. Think of it this way..... Every Ashan
thought of himself as a kind of farmer, and every Mayan as a bit of land or a field which could be his property. The babies are branded by his specific genes. An Ashan is always the Grade A mother, and a Mayan is always the Grade B
mother' Valerie said, 'but the Ashan delegates his duties to the Mayan. Sometimes, if they're rich,
they hire a number of Mayans and very occasionally an Ashan or two to function as Grade C's. (pp.190-195)
By articulating the patriarchal reality using the terms and concepts of a person who is a perfect alien to the heterosexual patriarchy, Namjoshi reveals the reproductive power politics of our societies: the experience of motherhood in patriarchal institutions. She writes about the gender specific forms of woman's alienation and subordination. In a patriarchal culture, the masculine is set up as the norm and the 'feminine' is always the 'other'. Viewed from the 'Ashan or the Mayan' angle, patriarchal vision is exposed as unfair and unjust.

Such subversive passages reveal how women's reproductive functions are controlled by patriarchy. Their mordant humour, and dispassionate, objective tone that simulate the observations of an 'outsider' are meant to scandalise and provoke the reader. They expose the glib masculinist assumptions underlying the idealisation of motherhood in patriarchy.

In her fables, Namjoshi reveals how the female nature is violently repressed by patriarchal and misogynistic societies that have prevented the woman from fully knowing herself. She points out that the patriarchal culture is steeped in myths of male primacy in theological, artistic and scientific creativity. The creator is always the man, the creation itself is the female, who like Pygmalion's ivory girl or the 'mud woman' in the "Song of the Circe (You are Happy) has no name, or identity or voice of her own. They are products of the male imagination, objects created for the use of men. As Beauvoir elucidates, "the phallus as the transcendant incarnate turns, woman's self into an object, an other". This is the myth of 'woman'. "Woman is an imaginary formation and not a concrete reality: it is that old branding by the enemy now flourished like a
tattered flag refound and won in battle\footnote{\textsuperscript{30}} says Wittig dispensing the monolithic notion of 'Woman'.

The language in the fables of Namjoshi is never neutral, but closely linked to her feminist observations of the power structures of society. Feminist fables and The Mothers of Maya Diip unravel a dialectic of the unspoken authority of the mainstream patriarchal social thought and a counter authoritarian, subversive, ironic, feminist consciousness. It is a rethinking of the notion of authority itself in ways that emphasize revaluation of the predicaments of women who bear the realities of sexual oppression and gender based discriminations. In her works Namjoshi uses the parodic strategy to articulate a caricature of patriarchal culture's image of femininity which involves both rejection and subversion of its requirements. She avoids the seductions of naive essentialisms and works from within her position of double displacement to produce a parodic discourse which will undo the hegemony of the phallocentric order.

Namjoshi reveals a wide social consciousness and presents the anomalies with ironic incisiveness. Her playfulness with words and phrases, her argumentative wit yield up the richness of linguistic experience where denotation is mere surface and connotation endlessly inexhaustible. Wit, humour, satire, irony and parody become major tools. They strip the veil of familiarity from normality, to reveal its cruelty, perversity and unnaturalness. They reveal the constraints that the ideology of femininity physically as well mentally imposes upon all women. Namjoshi's Feminist Fables deconstruct the 'specular logic' of patriarchy. They re-evaluate woman's position in patriarchal culture as signifier
for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can impose his fantasies and obsessions on the silent image of the woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. By rewriting and re investigating some of patriarchal myths, legends, fairy tales, Namjoshi speculates about radical possibilities; what would happen if women refuse to be silent bearers of meaning, step out of their traditional function as ‘signs’, refuse the imposition of the gaze and become manipulators of ‘signs’? She questions the centrality of dominant, patriarchal ideological stances and refutes the ‘closure’ they represent by working within the dominant, prevailing values, subverts them consciously and exposes their spurious complacency.
NOTES

15. Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas, 1938, Rpt. as A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas. (Canada : OUP, 1992)
23. Foucault 67.
25. Greer 296.