Chapter Five

Conclusion

"Love is the Law"
Conclusion

Born in Bombay, India, in the year 1941, in an elite Hindu family, Namjoshi lost her father, Captain Manohar Vinayak Namjoshi - a senior test pilot in the year 1953 in a plane crash, at the age of 12. Her mother, Sarojini Naik Nimbalkar belonged to the princely states of Phalton, Maharashtra, India. Namjoshi acquired her early education in an American boarding school in the north of India and later was sent to Rishi Valley School somewhere in the south of the Indian sub-continent. From the University of Pune she obtained her graduate and post-graduate degrees in English Literature in the year 1961 and 1963 respectively. For a year she taught as a lecturer at Fergusson College, Pune and in 1964 was selected in the Indian Administrative Service. It was after she joined the IAS, she took up writing verse. She got her master’s degree in Public Administration at the University of Missouri in America after taking leave from the government of India in 1968, and in 1969, resigned from the IAS and attained her doctorate degree on the Cantos of Ezra Pound, at McGill University, Montreal, Canada (1969-1972). From 1972 till 1989, she lectured at Scarborough College, University of Toronto. It was during a sabbatical in 1978-79 that Namjoshi went to England and spent time in London and also at Cambridge and came across to the evolving feminist and gay liberation movements. Her literary career began with poetry, and later she experimented upon fables and fairy tales.

Being a radical lesbian feminist, Namjoshi wants to convey that gender oppression is the root cause of other forms of oppression that function at all levels in a male dominated society, and that institutionalized heterosexuality is the root of patriarchal control of women. Thus a new political, economic and social foundation is needed to end the patriarchy’s oppression of women. The writer attempts to do so through her fables and fairy tales, as they are imaginative and are woven around a world of fantasy, while in the real world discrimination is a continuous process. So after taking all these issues and organizing them according to her own desires, she finds solace and satisfaction. But this does not mean that in doing so she tries to escape from the situation. Her distortion of the original myths and the fairy tales and revisioning and rewriting them, is a means to question the conventional male biases about women. Her collection, Feminist Fables encompasses the large variety of experiences of the subordinated and the marginalized, and fictionalizes their cause with a view to upgrade their position and release them from traditional enslavement.
She has analyzed the effects of women's oppression at multiple levels such as reproduction, education, employment, self determination, political voice, body image, working to make it clear how these are part of a larger system of oppression.

By constructing mythical characters, Namjoshi deconstructs the notion of conventional gendering and emphasizes the irrelevance of human particularities. She also points out that identities are not fixed. They are 'fluid' and can be transformed into the desired shape. The process of change is painful yet essential. A new path has to be forged outside patriarchal discourse. The new identity is not a limited one as it is 'fluid'. It retains the scope for further reconfigurations and reinscriptions. The new woman who emerges is prepared to write down all this. Bhadravati, the Brahmini lesbian cow, appears like a goddess to Suniti the protagonist in *The Conversations of Cow*. She is the cow of a thousand faces who knows the art of transmutation. Her attributes symbolize that identity is constitutive of as well as by the persona.

Namjoshi’s concern is the actual process of marginalization and ‘othering’ through which the dominant cultures perpetuate patriarchal ideologies. In *The Blue Donkey Fables*, she criticizes the institutions which have created fixed notions about identities and female bodies. She deconstructs the stereotypical ideas about gender, societal constructs and culture. She dismantles binaries of good and evil, heroism and cowardice, wisdom and foolishness, truth and lies, angels and saints etc. Being the propagator of ecofeminism which takes the issues of women along with nature and animals’ rights, Namjoshi projects the fictional animals as dignified beings who unlike the real animals have self respect and resist humiliation. Her idea of pantheism puts a soul in every living and non-living objects and helps her to weave stories about animals. She shows her concern for ordinary animals such as cats, monkeys, donkeys, piglets, rabbits, frogs etc. who have been marginalized not only in the real world but also in literature.

Suniti Namjoshi’s fiction attempts to establish an alternative universe through the use of the fantasy mode. Namjoshi resorts to fantasy not to escape from reality but to reconstruct it. She reworks ancient and canonical myths and fables in order to define the new, feminist lesbian identity. In the process, she discovers untold stories and also creates new ones. Through the use of animal imagery, Namjoshi discusses the problems of the Third World women writers, animals’ rights, power hierarchy and sexual orientation. She herself is frequently the protagonist in her works. In this role her concern is to explore the motives behind and the consequences of categorizing
and labeling individual, races and communities as negative. She disrupts mainstream notions of gender, race, nationality and sexual preference.

In The Mothers of Maya Dip, the writer applies different radical feminist’s theories and projects the idea that discarding male domination would liberate the world from oppression. Procreation has been made suppressive by men. She wants to free women from biological maternity so as to free maternity from male domination. But at the same time all her efforts are wasted as differences and discriminations may exist even in a matriarchal society. The inner world of Namjoshi’s narrative accommodates multiple lesbian perspectives. Female desire is discussed openly and unabashedly. She redeems the dignity of women and presents them as satisfied happy beings who celebrate their own sexuality and femininity. She wants to convey that feminine theory, language and social order may be multiple and pluralistic like that of phallocentric order that translates from sexuality to language and theory. She also creates a new discourse of maternity that can generate societal association to provide women a new identity where they do not feel the necessity to decide between a career and motherhood. Her characters such as Valerie and Jyanvi find their salvation in their sexual choices as they escape from their male infidelity. The folklore format of the novel softens the edge of reality yet engages it in reflections on gender politics, while the inter-textuality evokes a continuing dialogue on the quest for identity.

Suniti Namjoshi's works explore the dialogic aspects of literature. The ancient oral tales, fairy tales, pagan and Christian mythologies are interpolated and furthered to create the meaning desired by the author. The collections engage in witty, ironic as well as discreet and sophisticated discussions on gender politics and female desire. The feminist renderings subvert the conventional motifs and create a powerful new vision. Namjoshi fundamentally questions the appropriacy of the tales told to children. Fairy tales and fables heard in childhood shape the notion of right and wrong and influence one's adult roles. In Saint Suniti and the Dragon she not only questions the notions of evil and good but also propagates feminine solidarity and attempts to find solutions to the dilemmas of contemporary existence. She defends women’s freedom to make sexual choices. Her cross-referencing is both artistic and purposeful.

Through her collection The Solidarity Fables, Namjoshi questions sexual politics and challenges the patriarchal constructs. She is against forceful adoption of heterosexuality, but she does not propagate lesbianism, as the choice of one’s own sex
is purely a personal issue. She attempts to reorganize the world with the re-writing of old fables and fairy tales, and interrogates the marginalization of the subalterns in a patriarchal society and inspires them to struggle for identity and autonomy.

Male writers developed their own culture of writing in which the role of women is marginalized and excluded. Her work *Building Babel* is suggestive of the process of the development of a new culture of writing that is gynocentric in nature. She also deals with the writer, art of writing, reader and readership and emphasizes the use of Web to make reading and writing interesting and convenient. Her technique of selecting the characters of old fairy tales and mythical archetypes provides her opportunity to revise, rewrite, construct and deconstruct the fixed notions and stereotypes of androcentric society. In *Building Babel*, we are introduced to the familiar literary and mythical characters with a little retention and a little inversion of the original. Little Red, Alice, Rap- Rap or Rapunzel, Mad Med or Medusa, Snow White, Cinders or Cinderella, Rose Green, Sister Sol, Lady Shy, Black Piglet, Verity and Charity etc. have been evoked from their original sources in order to get rid of the stereotypes and biases attached to them. In *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth*, her use of fantasy fills the gap between the huge divisions such as the East and the West, rich and the poor, lesbian and straight etc.

Apart from being a poet, a fabulist and a novelist, Suniti Namjoshi has experimented with Children’s Literature as well. As a feminist, she is dissatisfied with the dominant male discourse of traditional fairy tales, the sexist social values and institutions it supports. Classical fairy tales contain sexist and racist attitudes and serve the socialization process. They place great stress upon submissiveness and self-sacrifice, incarceration in homes for girls, and upon competition and accumulation of wealth for boys. They encourage children to emulate fixed gender roles and thus curtail their free development. Namjoshi’s fairy tales on the other hand aim at a just society that can be gleaned from the redirectional socialization process. Her tales provide equal status to both young boys and girls without discriminating. She emphasizes equal participation of children in every sphere of life. Like other fairy tale writers she provides equal opportunities. All the tales of *Aditi Adventures I- Unlikely Friends*, attempt to explore the psyche of children of the contemporary modern world. While providing amusement to children, the tales establish respect and affinity with creatures other than the Anglo- Saxon heterosexual male. They break down
stereotypes, boundaries and categories and challenge the stringency of norms applied to society by patriarchy.

Namjoshi is of the view that by altering and introducing unusual elements into the fairy tales, the child is compelled to discard a certain consistent reception and reconsider constituents and meaning. As children are the primary audience of fairy tales, these tales play an important role in early socialization. Feminist fairy tale writers try to change our outlook and defy our perception with regard to literature and society. Fairy tales are considered therapies for children as they open up unexplored spheres. They help children to control their lives. A characteristic feature of the fairy tale is to sort out existential quandary or quest for identity. This enables children to deal with crises and predicaments. Children are thus able to master these psychological problems.

The writer seems to be quite familiar with different parts of the world. In all the tales of the series of Aditi Adventures II- The Unexpected Monsters, she explores four diverse cultures of various European countries. She starts the adventure from Italy and then moves to Devon in England, her present home place. Then she takes the readers from Hungary to Czech Republic and familiarizes them with mountains, hills, rivers, language and people. Blue grotto, Island Capri, Mount Vesuvious, Curnae, clotted cream of Devon, Mogra flowers of India, forints- the currency of Hungary, tomb of Gul Baba, Kiraly Baths, River Danube, all are described in a beautiful manner.

The Unexpected Monsters is concerned with legendary characters of Europe, recast by the writer to dismantle biases associated with them. The tales act as directories to liberate children from ego disturbances with the use of fantasy that has the power to make the unfamiliar familiar. They also serve as guides for parents to deal with the difficulties of taming and raising children in an appropriate manner. The witty dialogues on identity and perception, lend the text a philosophical touch. In Namjoshi’s works, predictions and foretellings are fulfilled in alternative manners that disenchant believers. They visualize clearly the manipulations made by them in order to retain their faith.

Aditi Adventures III- Heroes, is not only concerned with children’s issues but also includes feminist aspects in order to make children aware of the prevailing disparities and to train them to counter the sinister forces of society. Her use of binaries and paradoxes such as magic/ realism, rationalism/ sentimentalism along with
the advancement in science and technology is a means to elevate the Third World nations such as India. *Aditi Adventures* are specifically dedicated to Namjoshi's niece, Aditi. They explore the psyche of all the children of the contemporary modern world. The readers are taken around the world to view multiple cultural traditions and the type of marginalization prevailing there. However, the usual fairy tales are meant to amuse, but Aditi stories are feminist fairy tales—highly philosophical that not only deal with children's issues but also consider feminist aspects in general and act as a guide to train them to understand the biased patriarchal societal norms. As modern tales they are enriched with the use of hi-tech gadgets and cultivate rationality along with the vital fairy tales contents such as, fantasy, miracles and magic in order to deal with the problems of the real world.

Namjoshi is concerned about subalterns and the marginalized, human and animal rights. She uses lesbianism as a counter discourse to patriarchy. She has depicted multiple perspectives of lesbian identities and leaves one's sexuality as a personal choice. Her experiment of creating a matriarchal set-up in *Mothers of Maya Dilp* is an attempt in that direction. She identifies herself with animals for culturally, they are considered as 'other'. She seeks solace in the animal world as it is placid, docile and simple. Through the fictional character- Asha of *Mothers of Maya Dilp*, she desires a patriarchy free set-up where both men and women along with flora-fauna enjoy equal rights and celebrate equal freedom. *Aditi Adventures* symbolize the ideal world where 'love is the law', a world where we find no discrimination among men, women, beasts and nature.