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## A CRITICAL STUDY OF CLASSIC FAIRY TALES AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY RETELLINGS THROUGH A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract :** This research paper was inspired by the fairy tales that the researchers grew up with as children, and the contrasting feminist perspective provided by the contemporary retellings of those same fairy tales, that the researchers read as adults. The aim of this paper is to examine the regressive nature of select classic fairy tales that generations have grown up with by exploring the recurring tropes of the Damsel in Distress and Knight in Shining Armour that reinforce gender roles and other orthodox societal norms that go against the tenets of feminism. This paper also examines the reasons behind the choice of contemporary fairy tales for this paper and examines feminist features and how they complement modern society. There has been a huge impact of the classic fairy tales on generations that have grown up conditioned to the patriarchal norms found in such tales. It is only recently that there has been a movement against such classic fairy tales being circulated without making any changes even though feminism has been on the rise and times have changed. Hence, the researchers have expressed the need to revolutionise the classic fairy tales with ideas that are all-inclusive and empowering.

**Key words:** Fairytales, Retellings, Regressive, Contemporary, Feminist

### Introduction

Fairy tales have been around for centuries. On their own, they are fantastical tales of mythical creatures, magical forests, and enchanted castles. However, in their true nature, they were passed down orally from generation to generation, as tales that had lessons of morality, wisdom and warning - all eventually woven into simpler terms and wonderful stories written and printed so as to teach young children about the hidden aspects of the world.

Many classic fairy tales can be traced back centuries to their origins. When traced back, often deeper and darker variations of the stories can be found. These variations are usually a result of the social norms and common beliefs that were part of the social consciousness of those time periods. The fairy tales published were also often written by men, such as Charles Perrault (16<sup>th</sup> century), the Brothers Grimm (18<sup>th</sup> century) and H.C. Andersen (19<sup>th</sup> century). Hence, this often results in a predominantly male dominated viewpoint,

some of which in contemporary circumstances would be recognized as discriminatory, sexist and patriarchal in nature.

### **The Origin Stories and Their Regressive Nature**

The origin stories of many mainstream fairy tales are daunting and embedded with reprehensible themes and they must be looked at with a skeptical and questioning eye.

The tale of Sleeping Beauty can be traced all the way back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, titled as ‘*Sun, Moon and Talia*’ and written by Giambattista Basile. It was retold throughout the centuries as subsequent versions by C. Perrault, the Brothers Grimm and G. W. Carryl. In Basile’s version called *Sun, Moon and Talia*, the King does not stop at a kiss. He takes a look at Talia, is overcome by lust and “makes love to her.” This is a romanticization of rape, where he is so entranced by her beauty that on finding her he “felt his blood course hotly through his veins. He lifted her in his arms, and carried her to a bed, where he gathered the first fruits of love.” (Ashliman translation, 2009) *Sun, Moon and Talia; Briar Rose; Sleeping Beauty* and several other older retellings of the story justify the perpetrator’s crime and romanticize it. It generates the idea that consent is not important. This aspect of non-consent is not even addressed and instead the princess’s situation is considered as ‘lucky’ for having met the Prince. The tale even ends on the note,

**“Those whom fortune favors  
Find good luck even in their sleep.”**

Apart from its glorification of necrophilia and sexual assault, the female protagonist of the original and the older retellings has no other facet to her except for being beautiful and having a bountiful inheritance to her name. There is no significant mention of her intelligence, courage, strength, skills or prowess of any kind, as it is deemed unimportant and almost nonexistent. Her only credential- the only one that seems to matter- is her beauty. She is an object of desire- ethereal and innocent.

Be it Talia, Briar Rose or Aurora from the other retellings, the characters do not have a lot of agency and mobility. They are passive characters who do not have much to contribute to the story except for their physical features.

We see the men are often allowed to do whatever they please, especially when it comes to the oppression of women in society. Adultery by the King is accepted, and when his Queen learns of his affair, rather than holding him equally accountable, she seeks to murder Talia in retribution, thereby blaming only the other woman for the man’s infidelity, while he gets away scot-free.

Penned as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the French writer Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve and later Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont, *Beauty and the Beast* stands out as a work produced by women, though this too, within its retellings, carries the underlying instructions of compromise in an arranged marriage. In an article written by Jack Heckle, he observes that,

**“Harvard University Professor Maria Tatar, a noted expert on fairytale literature, points out that *Beauty and the Beast* was written at a time when arranged marriages were quite common in France, and that the story both reflects women’s anxiety about those marriages, and also attempts to reassure women that every man, no matter how outwardly ugly or potentially vicious they may appear, could turn out to be a prince. It also prescribes a normative behavior for these newly arranged brides to follow: be open, be accepting, be tolerant, and you will reveal the goodness inside your new husband.”** (Heckel Jack; “Why Feminism is Still An Awkward Fit for Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*”; online magazine *Tor.com*; Macmillan; 2017)

The several retellings of *Beauty and the Beast* have kept quite close to the original story. In all these retellings, Beauty is a character distinguished by her docility, selflessness and meekness. In *Beauty and The Beast*, despite Beauty having other qualities that empower her, it is her looks that are emphasized and it is her looks that literally make her persona, i.e., Beauty.

Both Beauty and the Beast are quite literally distinguished only by their physical appearance. The very aim of this story is to help people understand that true love is not superficial and bound by looks and yet this aim is defeated when characters' names are based on the description of their physical selves only. In *Beauty and The Beast*, Beauty is considered to be the ideal woman.

While on the one hand the Beast is allowed to be unconventional and even uncivilized to an extent, on the other hand Beauty must be always willing to make the best of her situation, no matter how dire, while the man sulks and broods. In these stories the woman's selflessness will definitely be rewarded in the form of a handsome prince thus, reinforcing the idea that a woman's greatest blessing in life can only come in the form of a man.

Another fairy tale of this research is the story of the classic tale of *Aladdin* that gained popularity by being featured in *The Tale of A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. In the earliest version *Aladdin* is not an orphaned boy, as portrayed in the popular rendition. Rather, he is a lazy young man who lives with his mother and does absolutely nothing to help improve their impoverished state. In this tale, an old magician disguised as Aladdin's long lost uncle, takes him out to the desert and forces him on an adventure to retrieve a treasure that he promises is meant for Aladdin. Aladdin passes through many underground passages and happens to come upon the lamp after which the familiar story follows.

Within this tale, a predominantly patriarchal function of social order can be observed, where the main forces driving the change are the Sultan, Aladdin, the Magician and the Vizier's Son. This can be seen with respect to the main female lead, where like many other female characters of fairy tales, Aladdin's object of obsession - who is referred to as The Princess throughout the story - has zero mobility and power over operations affecting her. She hasn't any control over the incidents impacting her own life but is rather controlled by the men around her.

Her main purpose in the story is primarily being the love interest of Aladdin, and the beautiful daughter of the Sultan. Her father wants to marry her off so that she can be taken care of by a man, who should also conveniently be rich enough to fill up the Royal coffers. Marriage here is more of a financial transaction where she is treated as an object that is to be bartered off to the highest bidder in exchange of gold and jewels. Thereby, objectifying and dehumanizing her.

These stories are so deeply entrenched in the standard idea of beauty, meekness and docility of a female protagonist and rigid ideas of femininity and masculinity that they appear jarring in the contemporary context. Concepts like empowerment, independence, respect and consent are alien to these tales. The female character who is the agent of her own life is unheard of in these fairy tales. Beautiful women are merely possessions to be obtained with or without their consent.

### **The Classic Tropes**

The messages that boys and girls get from fairytales are essentially very different and controversial in their own nature. Young boys are taught to be unafraid of any circumstance that is thrust upon them or any situation that they may fall into. They must take charge of the situation. Their emotional state of mind wasn't important and only their brute strength was highlighted. Generations of children grew up with stories that taught them that men were supposed to be the saviours and women, always the ones dependent on their help. Women are portrayed as vulnerable and in constant need of help from the men. The stories reinforce gender norms and set rigid gender dictats, thereby, setting gender stereotypes. This is in direct conflict with feminist ideology.

### **The Damsel in Distress Trope:**

One of the oldest and favourite tropes of classic fairytales is the 'damsel in distress' one. A number of fairytales- be it Rapunzel, Snow-White or Sleeping Beauty- have romanticized the idea of a beautiful maiden, who is weak and helpless, in a distressing situation, waiting for her bold and brave chivalric male hero to come save her and then often claim her hand in marriage.

The classic situations of distress are anything ranging from a vicious mythical monster, an evil stepmother or an overprotective father with secret agendas. Beauty, from *Beauty and the Beast*; is saved from her cruel and jealous siblings by circumstance, where she has to go live with the Beast. When she is with the Beast, he is her rescuer and she is thus saved from the wretchedness her siblings would subject her to, and instead gets to live like royalty.

This trope is centuries old and legend traces it back to the Greek myth of Princess Andromeda. Andromeda is a victim of her parents' fatal mistake of insulting Poseidon's nymphs and the only path to gain the forgiveness of the nymphs is to sacrifice their daughter to a sea serpent. They do so by leaving her naked and chained to a rock. Perseus is entranced by her beauty and eventually saves her, thus, citing the other stereotypical notion of the hero who saves the day and wins the beautiful girl.

Another ancient myth that is closer to home and echoes this trope is the epic of Ramayana. Here Sita is the beautiful damsel kidnapped by the ferocious demon king, Ravana. Eventually, she too, is rescued by her husband- Ram along with the help of Lakshman and Hanuman.

The damsel in distress's stereotypical character was romanticized further from the medieval, to the Gothic; to the Victorian periods till it made its way to early contemporary culture, showing changes in representations of the villains but sticking to the traditional format of a weak damsel to be rescued.

A speculation for the reason of this trope's survival across centuries could be Carl Jung's explanation in *Man and His Symbols* where he writes,

**"Girls in our society share in the masculine hero myths because like boys, they must develop a reliable ego-identity and acquire an education... [A woman is] trying to change herself into a more subversive kind of woman. As she grew older and [begins] to know herself better, she [begins] to see that for a man, life is something that has to be taken by storm, as an act of the heroic will; but for a woman to feel right about herself, life is best realized by a process of awakening."** (Jung Carl; *Beauty and the Beast*; *Man and His Symbols*; Ferguson Publishing; 1964; pg 137)

This 'awakening' in fairytales is often represented as true love. Such as the awakening from a deep curse induced slumber, or learning that the beast is more a man, or eventually living with a prince who has extraordinary wealth.

Though popularly perceived romantic, these stories are anything but that and it's time society woke up to this fact and stopped romanticizing such tropes. Such stereotypes not only instil the idea of 'having to be a hero' in men, but also objectify woman, as Troy Farah in his article on the evolution of the damsel in distress says,

**"A lot of men, consciously or not, want to rescue a woman, be their saviour, be needed. That's fine, but that attitude can do exactly what the Damsel in Distress trope does, turning a woman into an object to be won. It can neglect her needs and leads to unrealistic expectations."**

(Farah Troy; "Dystopia: How The Damsel in Distress Has Evolved"; Litreactor web magazine; (2013)

Hence, this calls for a need for more publications of contemporary retellings, where the woman though distressed, can figure a way out of difficulties with her own courage and wit and does not always need a male hero to save her.

### **The Knight in Shining Armour Trope:**

Complementary to this representation of women is the one of men as the chivalric knight in shining armour. There's nothing quite as appealing as a gallant knight in shining armour, brave and courageous, who swoops in to save the swooning maiden. Here, the focus lies more on the character of the knight than the maiden, or damsel. As described before, this glorification of chivalry emerged along with the notion of the damsel in distress. However, it was romanticized by the Victorian novelists and painters who were inspired



by the mythical stories of King Arthur and his Roundtable of Knights ruling in the court of Camelot. It was an age where royalty and nobility were celebrated. Even chivalry itself was a value system during the middle ages. It stood for loyalty and honour between knights.

However, instead of being contained within the boundaries of fiction from where it emerged, it leaked into socialization and perpetuated an indisputable notion of masculinity that could be toxic and could end up manifesting as being but natural to control and dominate a situation. This poses a danger to young boys who grow up and want to be the Knight in Shining Armour, who want to save the day and get the girl. This whole idea of chivalry today, stands as an opposition to the feminist idea.

Both of these tropes - apart from being highly gender specific to begin with - promote patriarchy and advocate the regressive idea of women and men conforming to only gender specific roles assigned to them. In a world that has moved forward and has accepted both genders and more, as equals in a society, these outdated notions should be reviewed and corrected in the fairytales read to young children.

### Tracing The Start Of The Fairytale Revisions

Hence as can be observed the primary reason for retellings of fairytales has been due to the emergence of the feminist movement across Europe and North America. This paper focuses on the viewpoints of leading feminists. In her research paper *Feminist Fairy Tale Retellings: A Genre of Subversion*, Laura Campbell writes that, the second wave of feminist revival in the 1970s led to fairytales being re-examined from a feminist perspective.

This was attributed to the increased political awareness and a rejection (by white, middle class, educated women) of the limitations of the stereotypical role of being a housewife that was idealized in earlier decades. Campbell talks about how the feminists of this wave fought for political and occupational equality, demystification of women's bodies, sexual freedom and equal rights. These aspects are seen in the fairytale revisions of the 1970s.

Campbell recognizes that the first instance of fairytale revision was Anne Sexton's poetry collection, 1971 *Transformation*, that retells some of the Grimms' fairytales in a feminist language.

In their paper *Reimagining Gender In A Tale As Old As Time: Gender And Narrative Play In Young Adult Retellings Of "Beauty And The Beast"*, Janieke Koning<sup>[5]</sup> comments that,

**"As feminist critics brought gender issues in literature to the foreground in the second half of the twentieth century, fairy tales and retellings were used to enculturate and socialize. Authors of fairy tale retellings influenced by modern women's movements sought to oppose the representation of women as passive agents and offer alternatives." (pg. 18)**

This was achieved by critiquing orthodox culture norms and challenging female stereotypes. This effort has been strengthened in the 21st century and has gained traction which can be seen in the increased output of contemporary retelling particularly in young adult fiction, such as the novels used as samples for this research.

### Looking At The Contemporary Retellings From A Feminist Perspective

For the purpose of this research, three contemporary retellings of classic fairy tales have been selected by the researchers to be used in contrast with the originals. The retellings used are, *Hunted* (2017) which is a retelling of the classic Beauty and the Beast written by Meagan Spooner; *Spindle Fire* (2017) which is a retelling of Sleeping Beauty written by Lexa Hillyer, and *The Forbidden Wish* (2016) which is a retelling of Aladdin written by Jessica Khoury.

Written in alternate point of views of both Beauty and the Beast, *Hunted* is a novel that emphasises the strength of Beauty, here Yeva. There is very little description of her physical features and more emphasis is laid on her skill sets.

Spooner challenges gender roles with her protagonist Yeva, who is taught survival skills as well as hunting using archery at an early age by her father. Contrary to the original tale, Yeva isn't the most gentle, graceful or even beautiful woman in the story; interestingly, in the book the only physical aspects of her 'beauty' are given once in a brief paragraph while her hunting skills and weapon making abilities are given the forefront of attention. Thus, breaking away from the original text, within which her beauty and caring nature were the essence of her existence.

Unlike the original tale, Yeva's elder sisters are supportive and they worry for her safety. Spooner frees them from the traditional 'selfish and jealous sister' stereotype that pits women against each other in literature, and empowers them with their own respective skill sets despite them not taking to hunting. When the family loses all their fortunes, the eldest uses her skills to sew comfortable clothes for Yeva to hunt in.

In this retelling, Yeva is a wild huntress and a survivor. Her idea of fun is tracking game in the woods. She hunts and guts rabbits for food and uses her perception and connection with nature for this purpose. She is the complete opposite of docile and meek and is overcome by a thirst for vengeance and boiling rage when she assumes that the Beast is responsible for her father's death. She is a dangerous foe to the Beast. There are multiple instances where she tries to kill the beast too.

**"The lust was rising in her, the wild hiss of revenge bubbling up to replace the hunter's cold reason. She wanted to feel the crunch of its skull through the handle of the ax, see its life spill onto the snow in a steaming torrent. She wanted to see the face of the Beast that killed her father in the moment it understood it had lost. She wanted to watch it die."**

(Spooner Meagan; *Hunted*; pg 113)

In the original story, 'True Love' was a major theme where the Beast wished to marry Beauty immediately, whereas *Hunted* has a muted undercurrent of romance between the two central characters. As Emily May, a prominent blogger from the website Goodreads, observes, "Surprisingly, it's very... not romantic...rather, the relationship between Beauty and this Beast is one between two outsiders who see something they recognize in one another. Yeva (aka "Beauty") is a trained hunter and she remains dedicated to her passion and her family throughout."

Lexa Hillyer's, *Spindle Fire*, is a retelling packed with feminist slant. The novel features strong female leads, on both the good side- being Princess Aurora (Sleeping Beauty) and her half-sister Isabelle or Isbe, and the bad side-being a Fae Queen Malfleur and her sister Queen Belcoeur.

In this story, it's a powerful move to not only make both of the leads of the novel female but to have them represented as disabled heroines- Aurora who ends up losing her sense of touch and voice and Isbe who is blind- sending out a positive message to empower the readers, that despite their physical shortcomings, they are not helpless and that they too, can make an impact on the world they live in.

The plot majorly revolves around the two princesses- Aurora and Isbe- the writer accomplishes this by killing off their purported princes early on in the story and making them overcome adversities on their own, by playing on their strengths.

Parallel to the heroines are the two female antagonists who wield incredible power and have a dark dominating presence. They too are sisters, but contrasting to Aurora and Isbe, they are estranged.

Hillyer's depiction of powerful female characters is a direct contradiction to the original as the protagonists in this retelling are active characters taking control of the situations they have ended up in and saving the day by themselves rather than waiting for help to arrive.

However though *Spindle Fire* seeks to have empowered heroines yet it stands as a stark example of what a retelling should not be. The book began with a feminist voice but very soon degenerates into stereotypes.

The plot that had initially promised action packed adventure gets completely overshadowed by the romantic aspect of the novel, wherein the heroines at critical parts of the plot are depicted as being suddenly distracted and dazed by the sheer attractiveness of their male friends. For example when the heroine Aurora finds herself transported to an alien land and almost assaulted by a knife wielding man, all she can do is romanticise him and analyse his physical features.

**“He sheaths the dagger and catches her before she faints. Again she is overcome by the heat of his chest, even through his tunic. She breathes in the crisp scent of grass on him and tries to steady herself as he rights her.**

**This man practically assaulted her a minute ago! It must have been a misunderstanding. She looks up at his jaw. Not as square as the eldest prince of Aubin. She would know. She’s studied many sketches of him”**

(Hillyer Lexa; *Spindle Fire*, pg. 59)

Another example of this is when even in the face of adversity, in the final chapters, Isbe can’t help but feel jealous and hurt when the time comes for Prince William to kiss Aurora and awaken her, thereby reducing her from a strong willed woman on a quest to help her sister, to a simple girl so infatuated with a boy that the high stakes of her mission fades away.

A Goodreads blogger, Ewa-lotta Neander, critiques the book as being all about boys, where despite the story having four strong female lead characters, both the pairs of protagonists and antagonists fall out with their respective siblings because of boys. She observes that the novel has a constant “thinking about boys, talking about boys, dreaming about boys.” theme.

Another Goodreads blogger, Dyan also observes “... [A] Worrying instance is that Aurora gets ‘practically assaulted’ and then thinks that it ‘must have been a misunderstanding’... [the novel is] just glazing over things that are not okay like real society does all the time.” this points at a subtext in support of victim blaming, where instead of questioning the mystery man’s motive she blames herself.

Another negative aspect of this novel is the constant sexist undertones. What was meant to be an attempt by the author, at highlighting social issues, ended up as speaking against it. At Aurora’s christening, each Faerie blesses her with a gift but in return robs her of another trait. When a faerie named Claudine blesses the baby with qualities like sweetness of temper and beauty of face in exchange for her voice, the King and the Queen agree to this exchange, reasoning that a princess with a gentle disposition and beauty wouldn’t really need a voice, thereby endorsing the notion that a princess is basically an ornamental figure to a kingdom.

Under the guise of portraying heroines who are independent, Hillyer instead tells a story with heroines who are of the belief that a man, preferably a love interest, would magically appear and solve their problems while also having the answers to all of their questions. They are constantly seeking a male shoulder to rely on.

Hence when a feminist message is to be conveyed in contemporary retellings, it is important that the author avoids mistaking stereotypical and patriarchal norms and sexist ideas for romance.

In a retelling of the popular tale of Aladdin, *The Forbidden Wish*, Jessica Khoury has revolutionized the story by introducing the Genie of the Lamp as a female entity named Zahra. Zahra has been trapped inside the lamp for 500 years and has almost given up all hope of ever being outside when Aladdin happens upon the lamp in a cave. In his daze, he runs his fingers across the lamp and this summons the jinn- Zahra, and the story begins.

All renditions of the classic have portrayed genies as only male characters. Thereby, suggesting only men can make things happen. This is changed in this retelling where the genie is female, thus introducing a strong female character in place of someone who has predominantly been a man.

Within the retelling, there are a multitude of strong female characters, namely Zahra the jinn, Queen Roshana and her descendant Princess Caspida as well as her Watch Maidens. In this rendition, Princess Caspida and her Watch Maidens are secretly vigilantes with exceptional combat skills. Every prominent female character in this story is fighting her own battle and their roles are not solely defined by the men around them like the jinn- Zahra, and her fight for freedom from the enslavement she had been sentenced to by the King of Jinns, Nardukha. Despite her friendship and budding romance with Aladdin, she still is persistent in her pursuit of freedom. The actions of both the male and female characters are a driving force for the plot to develop and unlike the original, while the male character is important, the idea of the Hero here, does not necessarily lie in his existence.

Despite *The Forbidden Wish* being a novel with a prominent romance sub-plot, unlike *Spindle Fire*, the romantic sub-plot doesn't dominate the main plot. As Natalie Monroe, a Goodreads blogger observes, "Although Zahra is attracted to Aladdin, she doesn't let her feelings get in the way of her real goal: to win her freedom. She manipulates him into making wishes to serve her desires." This is supported by a passage from the novel,

**"I'm bound to Aladdin as long as he has the lamp. But I won't let that stop me. I won't let anything stop me—not human or jinn. Because for the first time in four thousand years, I, Curl-of-the-Tiger's-Tail, Smoke-on-the-Wind, Girl-Who-Gives-the-Stars-Away, have a chance at freedom."** (Khoury Jessica; *The Forbidden Wish*; pg 52)

Khoury's characterization of Darian is that of a typical misogynist and this can be seen in various instances such as these interactions with Caspida:

**"Ruling is difficult enough for a man—a girl like you can't expect to carry this burden on your own."**(Khoury Jessica; *The Forbidden Wish*; pg315)

Aladdin calls Darian out on his objectification of women by declaring his claim on Caspida as ridiculous and Aladdin's view, from a male perspective, of Caspida as a human who deserves equal respect, is monumental in a character that existed in a time and a world where women weren't even considered equal citizens.

Thus, the retellings though sourced from the originals have tried to incorporate modern ideas and still maintain the fantastical universes while keeping alive the crux of the plot.

### **The Importance of Conveying The Right Message**

Fairytales have always been an integral part of society. The popularization of the classic fairytales came with the era of Disney and this company has dominated the fairytale scene since the late 20th century with their adaptations of fairytales, the earliest being in 1937- *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. However this massive production house had its own limitations too, as pointed out by academic U. H. Sharif in her thesis paper, *From Fairy Tales to Disney Movies: Gender Roles and Stereotypes Then and Now*, she notes that,

"Disney's animated films used to present stereotypical characters having a specific set of gender roles and behaviors. It exemplified what men and women should do, how they are supposed to look, and how they should act." (pg 37)

An example of the above would be the movie *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) in which, the portrayal of the Beast shows him to be quite literally a beast who only needs a woman's touch to turn him into a civilized entity. The Beast's initial treatment of Beauty can only be dubbed as chauvinistic.



It is only recently that Disney has been portraying fairytales from a contemporary point of view and this can be seen in a new generation of princesses with agency who aren't defined by their physical appearances and who actively fight against their oppressors for independence such as *Tangled* (a retelling of *Rapunzel*, 2011) and *Brave* (2012).

This change has also slowly made its appearance in the literature of India; there is a movement from the traditional figures of mythology into more feminist characters. A prominent example of this would be Amish's, *Sita: The Warrior of Mithila*, published in 2017 that challenges the tradition of the meek mythological figure of Sita, Amish's Sita, breaks all the stereotypes assigned to her, in the books she is a woman of valor who is shown to be "fielding armies single-handedly, is a champion archer, an efficient queen, and an able administrator...whose physical appearance is not prioritized on her portrayal." (Zehra Rosheena; "Book Review: Amish's 'Sita' Can Wield A Spear Better Than You"; The Quint Web Magazine; 2017)

In recent literature, most retellings are only aimed at the young adult genre. A group that has already grown up is integrated into society and understands gender roles. However, younger children are the biggest consumers of the fairytales and are still listening to and reading the stereotypical classic tales. This needs to be changed, as it would ensure that younger generations grow up empowered and outside the confinements of gender roles or sexist norms. Thus, there is an immediate need to revolutionize fairytale classics; and to ensure that there is an equal celebration of characters for their comprehensive qualities and skill sets rather than the superficial ones assigned to them on the basis of their gender.

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