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Gender Portrayal in Pakistani Fairy Tales



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Abstract

This study examines how Pakistani oral fairy tales, adapted into written and digital forms, negotiate Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation as repetition and variation. Rooted in Pakistan's rich oral heritage shaped by Persian, Islamic, and Indus Valley traditions, princess tales reflect deeply held gendered norms even as they undergo cultural reinterpretation. Guided by Hutcheon's (2006) *Theory of Adaptation* and Michelle M. Lazar's (2017) *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis*, this research investigates how repetition sustains cultural continuity, how gender roles are affirmed or challenged, and how adaptation functions as an ideological act. The study employed qualitative textual and narrative analysis combined with the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) classification system as the data analysis tool. Data were collected through document analysis of Folkloristan's print and online archive. The population comprised eighteen (N=18) Pakistani princess tales, including *The Frog Princess*, *Shehzadi Mircha*, and *Princess Scheherazade and King Shaheryar*, selected through total population sampling (18 tales). Findings reveal that these tales retain universal transformation patterns while embedding local values of faith, humility, and endurance; female characters gain moral and emotional agency, while male heroes grow toward empathy, confirming adaptation as creative renewal and cultural self-definition.

Keywords: *Gender Portrayal, Pakistani Fairy Tales, Adaptation Theory, Hutcheon, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, Folklore, ATU Classification, Princess Tales, Cultural Identity, Patriarchy*

Introduction

Fairy tales are cultural tools that serve to pass on values, moral codes, and gendered expectations from one generation to the next (Zipes, 2011, p.). 9–12). In Pakistan, princess narratives are a unique category in the tradition and hold a special place as they incorporate elements from local oral tradition with those from elsewhere, creating stories that align with local moral, religious and social values (Afridi et al., 2025, p. 2570). Structurally, these stories share similarities with the European fairy

tales found in the canonical collection, however, the narratives are reworked in Islamic, communal and cultural frameworks, which imparts a regional flavour to gender roles (Haq & Masroor, 2024, p. 29–44).

Fairytales have always been debated to have an ideology and affect the children's internalization of gender identity from an early age (Shaheen et al., 2019, p. 52–55). The traditional feminine form of the narrative appears to be linked to beauty, obedience and sacrifice, whereas the traditional masculine form is linked to dominant, rescuing and authoritative elements (Diekman & Murnen, 2004, pp. 376–379). This repetitious pattern adds value to gender-role socialization, especially for young viewers who take in the cues without analysis (Peterson & Lach, 1990, p. 188–191).

Some of these inherited structures are adapted in ways that are useful for their examination by contemporary adaptation theory. Linda Hutcheon's approach to adaptation sees it as an ongoing process of repetition and variation, in which the familiar/recorded narrative memory is maintained while new cultural significance is being added to it (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 4–8). This is complemented by Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis that focuses on how the discursive practice in the storytelling process either reinforces or undermines gendered power relations (Lazar, 2017, p. 372–375). Similarly, Bacchilega speaks of fairy tales as a powerful discourse that can reinforce and/or challenge the prevailing gender ideologies in the way it is re-told (Bacchilega, 2013, p. 5–9).

Folklore is also known as a means of continuity within social and historical experience, retaining values, customs and hierarchies of the communities which create it (Glassie, 1995, pp. 397–399). Fairy tales within a specific society can be telling statements that reflect or challenge dominant stereotypes as gender inequality is a critical issue in Pakistani society and this is evident in all spheres of life, including education, employment, and civic involvement. As Moiyviati points out, the disproportionate portrayal of gender roles in literature is measurable in terms of role development and socialisation (Moiyviati, 2017, p. 43). Danilewitz also points out that traditional gender roles assign men the role of provider and women the role of caretaker, which requires women to be loyal, subservient and obedient (Danilewitz, 1991, pp. 88–90). Gender-role ideology refers to "shared beliefs in society about the rights and responsibilities of men and women" (Coyne et al., 2016, p. 130–133). Like

Neikirk, one can also find many instances of fairy tales equating the beauty of the female figures with passivity, and the moral goodness of the females with silence (Neikirk, 2009, p. Zipes argues that the genre has historically included a moral resolution that reflects the social codes of the time (2013, pp. 39-41), whereas it is maintained by others that the genre has no moral resolution. 1-4).

Although Pakistan has a rich tradition of fairy tales, they have received limited research attention and there is a lack of knowledge regarding the presence of gender norms in these tales, how they are reinforced or challenged, and how they are adapted from oral to written and digital media, influencing children's perceptions of gender identity, agency, and social expectation.

Research Objectives

1. An exploration into oral Pakistani fairy tales and its adaptations in written and digital forms using Hutcheon's theory of repetition and variation.
2. To analyze the gender roles in the princess story in Pakistan and see how it conforms or challenges the society's norms.
3. To explore the trenchancy of a reframing of male and female characters in the process of adaptation as an act of ideology.

Research Questions

1. In what way is the adaptation of Pakistani oral tales of yesterday similar to and different from the canonical European tales, as outlined by Hutcheon?
2. What are the affirmations and contradictions of princess tales in Pakistani society regarding the gender roles?
3. What changes occur in the roles of the female and male characters in adapted versions?
4. How is it an act of adaptation, as an ideology and an interpretation?

Thesis Statement

The authors of this study assert that both through the process of adaptation and in written or digital retelling of these princess stories, the passive role of women is accepted and challenged to a certain extent by reinterpreting it as a moral endurance and by portraying the dominant role of men as a developing empathy.

Limitations/Delimitations

This study focuses on eighteen tales from the Folkloristan collection that have been

translated into English and only considers the text of a narrative, not variation in oral performance, regional dialects, or cinematic or dramatic adaptations of the tales.

Literature Review

This review brings to light the place of the Pakistani fairy tale in the global folklore scholarship and feminist literary criticism. It starts with a basic difference between folktales and fairy tales, traces the influence of the great European collectors of fairy tales, and looks at the differences between Pakistani versions and the fairy tales of Europe in the light of colonial history, religious foundation and cultural specificity (Zipes, 2011, pp. 9–12; Hutcheon, 2006, pp. 4–8).

Folktales, Fairy Tales, and Gender Discourse

Tatar describes folktales and fairy tales as interwoven but not identical manifestations of social ideals and human creativity, and folklore as a window into the social structures of a culture (Tatar, 2003, pp. xvi-vix; Dundes, 1980, pp. 1–4). Some people think fairy tales are not good preparation for reality, as they do not portray the world accurately, warns Ben-Amos (2020, p.). Bacchilega challenges this notion, however, with fairy tales being among the most pure expressions of collective psychic process (Bacchilega 2013, p. 33-36). 5–9). In children's literature, characterization by description is one of the most consistently gendered narrative patterns, Sveen adds (2005, pp. 27–30).

Several scholars such as Lazar have studied the ways in which the structures of discourse reinforce domination and subjugation, categorizing characters into strict gender roles (Lazar, 2017, pp. 372–387). Likewise, Coyne et al. use a feminist post-structuralist perspective on popular children's fiction, asserting that patterns of linguistic authority have an unequal distribution of men and women in sociocultural contexts (Coyne et al., 2016, p. 130–133). Baghor and Bencherrat further explore how stories pass on values and traditions from one generation to the next and how they help to form the social norms that children learn as they grow up (2025, pp. 178–181).

Theory of Adaptation and Cultural Translation

This study emphasizes Hutcheon's A Theory of Adaptation which sees adaptation as both a product and a process; repetition with variation so that new meaning is created without breaking away from the source material (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 4–8). Such a theoretical outlook is supported by Zipes who states that in the past fairy tales were

based on patterns that mirrored social and moral codes of the time (Zipes, 2011, p. 9–12; Zipes, 2013, pp. 1–4).

Pakistani Princess Tales and Cultural Specificity

Unlike the fairy tales of the West, Pakistani princess stories are inspired by Persian, Mughal, and regional folklore and have a moral lesson or a Sufi-based message (Aziz et al., 2025, pp. 708–710; Асылбекулы et al., 2024, pp. 45–48). Afridi et al. prove that gender-inferior roles are associated with obedience and beauty of females in the Pakistani oral tales, while gender-superior roles are associated with courage and strength of males (Afridi et al., 2025, p. 2570). Herodoc quests and magical helpers in Pakistani stories also embody specific communal values, as noted by Haq and Masroor (2024, p. 29–44).

Thematic analysis has been used in literature to recognize gendered patterns in qualitative literature data and has been influential in research into this (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. The feminist interpretation of Pakistani folktales by Ashraf (2018, p. 79-83) found two trends and modes of submission and subtle resistance in the depiction of women in the Pakistani folktales. 45–62). Attique et al. also follow the traces of rhetorical practices in the oral culture of the Punjabi minority that represents cultural and linguistic gender norms (Attique et al., 2024, pp. 307–330).

European Collectors and Comparative Frameworks

The moral structures of fairy tales are the ones that were codified by Charles Perrault (Zipes, 2013, pp.). The conventions of narration that were developed in 1-4 became more varied and the Brothers Grimm's darker stories reinforced the correlation between beauty and goodness (Grimm & Grimm, 2000, p. 330, p. 431) that was taught to generations of readers. Andersen opened up the field of emotional complexity and social critique (Hall, 1997, p.). Andrew Lang's compilations furthered the cultural scope of the genre by crossing continents to collect (Shaheen et al., 2019, pp. 15–24), while 24–41) was an extension of the 19th-century tradition of the romancer. 52–55).

Colonial Legacy and National Identity

British colonialism transformed the way stories were told in South Asia, as authors such as Kipling took native folk tales and gave them a colonialist spin (Afridi et al., 2025, p. 2580). In the post-independence period, Pakistani writers asserted these

stories to assert a national identity and Islamic values (Akbar & Malik, 2018, pp. 12–15). These stories have been influenced even more by the process of globalization and the media, in which regional motifs are combined with global narrative tropes (Adams et al., 2011, pp. 260–262; Ben-Amos, 2020, pp. 33–36).

Research Gaps

1. First, there is a lack of theoretical application of the adaptation theory to the process of oral to written transition in the Pakistani context; typically, it is adapted to other contexts.
2. Secondly, feminist folklore studies on Pakistani stories are still in their early stages and are not as developed as in the western context, which leaves a space for the understanding of locally different gender ideology and types of resistance.
3. Third, the studies conducted so far focus on English translated texts, which fail to take into account the potential for language and idiomatic differences in the Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi and Pashto versions to retain or modify the gendered meaning in the narration, calling for a multilingual comparison of the adaptation and construction of gender in Pakistani storytelling traditions.

Research Methodology

In this study, the research philosophy is interpretivist, meaning that the researcher is not interested in measurement but in interpretation of the meaning, which is socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, pp. 3–6). Because fairy tales are cultural products imbued with values, ideology, and gendered power relations, they are not objective facts; therefore, an interpretivist approach is used to experience the process of meaning negotiation in the Pakistani princess narratives. This philosophical foundation is congruent with the study's premise, which Hutcheon (2006, p. 1) states is that fairy tales are: They are not artefacts that are neutral, but rather ideological and interpretive constructions, which are culturally specific (4–8).

The study is therefore conducted using a constructivist approach, where the assumption that the study process is a discourse process or a process of construction of gender, morality and narrative meaning in the study process is not a fixed truth, but is built through the process of language and discourse (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79–83). This paradigm is based on the idea that Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (Lazar, 2017, pp. There are two theories that are applied together here. First,

Hutcheon's adaptation theory, which assumes gender representation to be discursively created and subject to reinterpretation in subsequent retellings, and second, the socio-cultural theory of gender representation (372–387) which assumes that gender representation is discursively created and is subject to reinterpretation across retellings.

The research method used is a qualitative textual and narrative analysis which is carried out by using Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) classification system which classifies folktales by using the recurrent motifs and structural patterns (Uther, 2004, pp. 1–5). In this approach, the function of the characters, plot of each tale, and the gendered distribution of power in both tales are given a close reading, and the tales from Pakistan are placed in a global typology of folktales for comparative analysis.

The study uses a three-phase qualitative content analysis theory by analyzing how motifs and gender-role patterns emerge in the stories, how tales are classified based on ATU type for thematic consistency, and how the stories are interpreted using Hutcheon's adaptation theory to check whether gender norms are affirmed or resisted or reframed ideologically (Hutcheon, 2006, pp. 4–8).

The population for this study is the complete population of eighteen Pakistani princess tales which are included in *The Princess Tales of Pakistan* (2024) compiled by Folkloristan, including *The Frog Princess*, *Shehzadi Mircha*, *Princess Aubergine*, *The Glacier-Hearted Rani Gwashbrari*, *Bahramgor and Shahpasand*, *The Legend of Queen Rukhshona*, *Princess Scheherazade* and *King Shaheryar*, and *Mirza Sahiban* etc. The small population size makes it appropriate to use sampling by total population, or census, rather than sampling by a subset of tales, as this would limit the representation of the various types of tales in the ATU classification, or fail to represent them altogether; and, given the small size of the population, no thematically relevant tale from the Folkloristan collection is left out of this analysis.

There are three steps to textual analysis: coding the text for motifs, character functions and gender patterns; categorising each tale in terms of ATU type for thematic consistency; and interpreting the text in light of Hutcheon's adaptation theory to determine whether universal archetypes are preserved or adapted for local cultural conditions.

Data Analysis

Introduction to Analysis

The previous chapters laid the theoretical foundations of the process of gender portrayal and adaptation and described the context of Pakistani fairy tales in the framework of adaptation as repetition and variation in the theory of Linda Hutcheon. This chapter explores how this is manifested in the Pakistani oral stories and how the stories further develop in the written and digital context while remaining (at the same time) simultaneously continuous and changing. The fairy-tale legacy has been transformed into moral and social values in the Pakistani society while maintaining the timeless nature of these stories. They are not merely copying the Western canon, they're remaking it, transforming it from familiar patterns to regional experiences of morality, spirituality and gender. In this respect, adaptation is both repetition and variation, it is a creative act as well as an act of remembrance (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 88). Each of the 18 tales in this chapter is an instance of remembering and re-creation. Todd Hutcheon, as the fourth speaker, will explore the adaptation of Pakistani fairy tales as repetition and variation. The fourth speaker Todd Hutcheon will discuss the adaptation of Pakistani fairy tales as repetition and variation.

In the context of adaptation, Pakistani fairy tales are seen as a 'dialogue' between invention and continuity. These retellings are located within a space that involves the intermingling of South Asian orality, spirituality and cultural symbols with inherited European frames for stories. The stories collected and adapted in Folkloristan illustrate this process of remembering and reinventing, in which iconic themes like the animal bride, the wrongly exiled princess, or the loving husband and wife bear local accents, identities and moral sentences, all unique to the multicultural landscape of Pakistan.

Adaptation as Repetition and Variation; Pakistani Fairy Tales through Hutcheon's Lens

The teller of these stories is anchored in the global tradition of wonder tales through the repetition. The enchanted-bride element in The Frog Princess (ATU 402) is structurally unchanged:

In a very rich and generous kingdom once there was a wise and good king, and he had seven sons. ... The king, as he had agreed, declared to his sons that the young prince

was to marry the frog. (The Frog Princess, ATU 402)

Repetition of Familiar Motifs

Marriage of the frog is a replication of the European idea of transformation through submission, but with a South Asian twist of the concept of filial piety and destiny. Likewise, Cinderella is re-rooted in vernacular domestic space of Shehzadi Mircha (ATU 510A):

Shehzadi Mircha, ATU 510A: "Once upon a time there was a merchant who had three daughters: the youngest was as red as a red chili, and was named Mircha.

Envy, disguise, and recognition are all present here, as in the rest of the novel, confirming Hutcheon's claim of the novel's title: *Adaptation: Builds on Memory*. Patterned recall is also illustrated in heroic cycles like Bahramgor and Shahpasand (ATU 300):

With him he carried the antimony powder, the cap of invisibility and the wand which made his wish come true according to the standard of nearness or distance. (Bahramgor and Shahpasand, ATU 300)

The repetition makes the magical tokens look more like quests to slay dragons in Europe, but the invoking of talismanic faith singles them out for their Islamic-Persian heroic cosmology and turns familiar enchantment into devotional courage.

Variation through Cultural Adaptation

Repetition ensures continuity, variation provides some local flavour. Pakistani interpretations are the process of making foreign themes into religious, class and geographical cultural idioms. Princess Aubergine (ATU 510B) is a European "unnatural bride" theme that turns into an agricultural miracle:

A fine aubergine, born of the mist and the cold soil before the gift of life— The child bloomed. (Princess Aubergine, ATU 510B)

This transformation places the Indus Valley fertility symbolism in the story, transforming vegetable magic into rural motherhood. Likewise, The Glacier-Hearted Rani Gwashbrari (ATU 709):

The storyteller naturalizes moral coldness as environmental metaphor, as Europe's weather system mirrors the subcontinental landscape, according to Hutcheon's theory of adaptation as "transcoding across contexts. In *Trickery, Greed and the Princess* (ATU 930), a parallel transformation takes place in which market barter takes the

place of courtly intrigue:

It was said that the princess would give one of her dainty fingers for a hundred rupees!
(ATU 930: AT Trickery, Greed and the Princess)

The economy makes pride a product and morality a local issue: beauty is transformed into a commodity and the story reflects a social hierarchy rather than just a story of greed.

Localizing Archetypes of Virtue and Evil

In these tales, indigenous moral codes were reconstructed as good and evil. The King and His Seven Daughters (ATU 451) places more value on humility than on physical beauty when it comes to the measure of moral worth, and instead of the jewel-like Western metaphors, it is the Pakistani language of salt that is used, virtues encoded in simplicity and sustenance. Cowardly behavior is inextricably tied to heroism in the following way: "Well, sometimes wives of cowardly men have to be brave!" (ATU 300), cowardly is somehow heroism. This inversion is a continuum that fuses the personal sacrifice of the individual with the moral duty of the crowd and makes a connector between heroism and collective feminine strength. Through its shape-shifting and feminized forms, Durdana Chelmard (ATU 480) regards "balaa" as indigenous evil, which differs from Western dragons. The heroine says:

She whispered 'Allah Hu Akbar' and with one cut of her sword, she beheaded the monster. (Durdana Chelmard, ATU 480)

The moral triumph here is a composite of the spiritual invocation and physical courage, a distinctly Islamic reworking of the fairy tale victory.

Adaptation as Intertextual Conversation

The fairy tale is a genre that appears in many forms around the world, including in Pakistan, and that often reflects European influences, making for an intertextual dialogue between societies. Princess Scheherazade and King Shaheryar (ATU 851) reworks the frame of the 1001 Nights, giving a new voice to Scheherazade and a new role to her husband.

Each morning a new story, each new opportunity to live; (Princess Scheherazade and King Shaheryar, ATU 851)

It is this line that embodies the theme of adaptation — a story told to ensure cultural survival. Similarly, Mirza Sahiban (ATU 888) is a semi-Persian version of the classic

European betrayal theme.

"When the brothers came ... an arrow came flying from the other side and pierced his neck. His last words? You played too low, 'You acted below. You played too low, 'You acted below. (Mirza Sahiban, ATU 888)

The lethal misinterpretation turns courtly intrigue into clan-bound honor conflict, moral violation to a local moral tragedy. These intertextual dialogues show the attitude of Pakistani writers in using the world narratives as their intellectual property and thus reflecting the concept of "repetition without replication" (Hutcheon) of world narratives.

Transformation of Setting and Symbolism

There's an idea of location that's always ideologically weighted, and that's the core of the adaptive process, in my opinion, spatial and symbolic translation. The Princess and the Pegasus (ATU 425B) has the mythical European winged horse becoming the region's Tish Haghur.

Together they flew into the air, when she climbed up on Tish Haghur. (The Princess and the Pegasus, ATU 425B)

This localization is a synthesis of Islamic angelology and Himalayan mysticism based on a Greco-Roman symbol. A setting in Legend of Love in Lahore (ATU 890) is an ideological memory:

Princess Zaib-Un-Nisa, built her own prison, Nawa Kot Garden in Lahore & the famous Chauburji. (Legend of Love in Lahore, ATU 890)

Landscape speaks for itself – a city with a feminine voice. The European ballroom gives way to the marketplace economy in Trickery, Greed and the Princess (ATU 930), and money has as much influence as magic in the story.

Adaptation as Continuity of Voice

Pakistani fairy tales do not just transform stories but the very act of storytelling; they preserve an oral history which is immune to erasure. The Sultan's heart softened as the nights unfolded" is the voice of the story in the case of Princess Scheherazade. Wisdom as feminine speech sustains the communal memory in The Legend of Queen Rukhshona (ATU 531):

She recounted her cleverness before the court, and made them laugh at justice. (The Legend of Queen Rukhshona, ATU 531)

Even the romantic tragedy of Legend of Love in Lahore makes storytelling a continuity of faith: "Oh Makhfi, it's the way of love, you only have to go alone. As Hutcheon says, adaptation is a repetition with difference and "innovative and creative use of stories that have been passed down".

Gender Ideology in Pakistani Princess Tales; Affirmation or Contradiction

In Pakistani fairy tales, its portrayal of gender is complicated, a reflection of and opposition to the traditional norms. These stories echo the male-dominated, family-centered and conservative ethos of South Asian society, while also raising subtle issues of resistance to the same structures within them.

Beauty, Silence, and Moral Obedience

Beauty and patience in many Pakistani versions are moral traits and not a right of the particular person. The Frog Princess equates female virtue with obedience: "The prince initially resisted the idea, but he obeyed his father's orders, and married the frog. Her value is in her willing, not her asserting, to gender-hierarchy in its will. Shehzadi Mircha also believes that feminine beauty is synonymous with endurance and humility:

"Under the guise of soot and spice, her beauty was revealed to the prince when she served with kindness, and he knew her heart." (Shehzadi Mircha, ATU 510A)

Princess Aubergine strengthens this relationship by suffering; her birth from soil is a symbol of female fertility sanctified by endurance. Beauty is never used for vanity, but always as a symbol of submission, a means of reaffirmation of traditional gender roles even as they are romanticized, throughout.

Jealousy, Rivalry and the Policing of Women

Female rivalries are an internalized instrument of patriarchy. The Glacier-Hearted Rani Gwashbrari is a tale where envy turns into solid ice: "Her face was as white as the moon on icy summits, but her heart as cold as the ice in her kingdom." Here, "cold" means an excess of emotion, and the woman who wants to exert power gives up warmth and humanity. In Trickery, Greed and the Princess, the deceptive mode of female emotion points to social control via moral warning, for her beauty is made rotten in the trip by avarice as she profitably deceives her way through the world. These stories re-create the "good girl/bad girl" binary, in which ambition is punished and purity rewarded.

Love, Loyalty and Resistance through Emotion

Even within these limits, love and its emotional uprising are always there. In Mirza Sahiban, female conscience trumps passion: Sahiban's act of breaking the arrows turns her from passive lover to tragic 'ethicist'. Love as knowledge and perseverance is another perspective by Shireen Farhad (ATU 400):

Then, she had a flash of realization that she no longer loved Khusrau, and she rode out to the mountain where Farhad was working and fell to her death. (Shireen Farhad, ATU 400)

Love is a moral and a critique, the nonconformity to perverse masculine power structures.

Female Intelligence and Moral Authority

In Pakistani folk tales, women often are given intellectual power, presented in the guise of modesty. In The Legend of Queen Rukhshona, intelligence trumps silence, the cleverness not shameful. Manual craft is self-sufficiency in The Basket-Peddler Princess (ATU 313): "She wove baskets by day and concealed her royal identity by night. Labour is the measure of honour, not of birth. In Durdana Chelmar, intelligence becomes empathy and faith fueled bravery, expanding the moral spectrum of female heroism.

The Heroine's Voice and the Limits of Power

Agency is still related in these stories, not absolute. The Princess and the Pegasus is a novel in which courage has to coexist with dependence: her victory is sealed by her marriage to the Prince, her independence is swallowed up by patriarchy. In The King and His Seven Daughters, the youngest daughter's declaration "Father I love you more than salt" sends him away, but then brings him back by way of marriage and reconciliation with his father. Bravery, in the case of Bravery; itself, Bravery in Panja Khan Rescues a Princess, is moved into domestic logic, heroism as service.

Moral Allegory with Feminine Strength

Time can compensate for male pride. In Bahramgor and Shahpasand the magical gifts are symbols for humility gained through the challenges of love. "Forgiveness is strength:" Behram Khan and Gul Andama (ATU 301)

Gul Andama happily accepted Behram as her husband, and together they went back to Rome where thousands lined the streets to welcome their valiant prince and legendary

princess. (ATU 301) Her acceptance isn't about giving up but about bringing a sense of peace and harmony to society.

Female Narration and Meta-Resistance

Storytelling is a feminist tactic. Rebellion is replaced with narration in Princess Scheherazade: "Each dawn brought a new story, and with it, another chance to live. This is a reminder of Hutcheon's notion of adaptation as "re-telling with intent. Revelation brings back the selfhood in Durdana Chelmard: "Chelmard drops his hat and shows himself, 'I am no man. I am a woman.'" Poetic, adaptive voices for women become voices of moral resistance when they become stories.

Reframing Male and Female Characters; Narrative, Voice, and Power

In the Pakistani fairy tales, there is an attempt to make the story "rewrite," but it is only a reorientation rather than a radical reinvention. The voice of the silenced is given voice and moral agency, and male characters are redefined in terms of humility and empathy.

Recasting the Heroine: From Ornament to Agent

Rescue is not the first step to the heroine's transformation; it's perseverance. Obedience, in The Frog Princess, is a test of faith, not a sign of weakness. Shehzadi Mircha brings the Cinderella model to housework, tying physical exertion with goodness: "Her name was spread throughout the land, and for her beauty and kindness; the prince, hearing of her grace, set out to find her. The Basket-Peddler Princess totally takes away the notion of royal idleness and emphasizes the importance of labor and modesty in the face of birth. The "blooming" of a Princess Aubergine is a metaphor for rebirth through struggle, a female act of self-realization which does not call for rebellion but resilience.

Emotion as Power: Women Who Speak Through Silence

Silence is a survival weapon. Emotional repression is literally expressed in the Glacier-Hearted Rani Gwashbrari: "Her heart was colder than the snow on her crown, and every smile she gave froze another joy. However, the image later fades as "the snow began to melt as she cried, and the valley became beautiful again. Restraint is a political virtue in The Legend of Queen Rukhshona and silence is a power that is performed through wisdom.

Reconstructing Masculinity: From Conqueror to Listener

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Manhood has moved from absolute domination to moral sensitivity. The success of Bahramgor and Shahpasand is not based on the sole action of a man, but requires magic cooperation and the help of women. The male hero's power is mediated by empathy in Panja Khan Rescues a Princess: "Well, sometimes wives of cowardly men have to be brave!". The King and His Seven Daughters is a book in which fatherly pride is interpreted as humility: "Father, I love you more than salt.

Interdependence and Mutual Redemption

Interdependence is the principle that is used to resolve gender relations, not antagonism. Behram Khan and Gul Andama, forgiveness takes the place of vengeance as the moral reach. Suffering is fairness, both die because they were faithful, and tragedy is spiritual symmetry, writes Shireen Farhad. Forgiveness makes both men and women human in Leela Chaanesar (ATU 451): "Leela learned of the situation, and asked Chaanesar for forgiveness and knelt before him.

Female Intellect and Storytelling as Authority

Storytelling is made to be the explicit feminist voice. Princess Scheherazade's story is literally one of survival, in her performance. In the same vein, Legend of Love in Lahore carries this over to that of authorship: "She used to sign her poetry with the pen name 'Makhfi' and the poetry is still kept as 'Dewan-e-Makhfi'." Durdana Chelmad's dramatic unveiling makes gendered masquerade creative authorship.

Male Redemption through Female Moral Vision

With women's moral wisdom, men find salvation. The male is more of a bystander in The Princess and the Pegasus; the heroine leads and the Prince is taught the lesson of tenderness by her valor.

Identifying and explaining how power is played and created in relation to context (Kingdoms, Class and Equality)

The negotiation of gender is shifted to the classroom and administration. In Trickery, Greed and the Princess, the princess's mind is a barrier to the transactional male desire. The king and his Seven Daughters turns the whole royal power on its head as the disguised queen turns out to be the former rebel, the youngest daughter: "To his astonishment, the queen was none other than his youngest daughter, the one who had rebelled all along.

Symbolic Rebalancing: Nature, Emotion, and Harmony

They are reflections of human morality, and follow the teachings of Sufi and animist cosmologies. When Rani Gwashbrari would cry out "As she cried the snow started to fall and the valley was once more in bloom"—emotional thaw becomes ecological renewal. Farhad's canal is a monument to the sharing of endurance in Shireen Farhad. The Princess and the Pegasus connects heroine valor to the transformation by the elements of fire and flight, and the coming together of the strengths of earth and sky.

Adaptation as an Ideological and Interpretive Act

Every adaptation reveals the ideology of the person or persons interpreting it (Hutcheon, 2006). The Princess Tales of Pakistan are a translation of oral history into moral and spiritual codes that are defined in post-colonial, Islamic and gendered contexts.

Adaptation as Cultural Negotiation

In the Pakistani versions supernatural causality is substituted by moral and spiritual causality. The Frog Princess is the story of a girl who is faithful to God's plans, or iman, even if they are difficult. The magic of transformation in Shehzadi Mircha is gained and not given. In Bahramgor and Shahpasand, heroism is measured by moral restraint and not by conquest, his weapons are for a fleeting moment and his lessons of humility are for life.

Ideology of Gender and Power

In The Glacier-Hearted Rani Gwashbrari, coldness is the ego and repentance is the remedy to moral coldness. The Legend of Queen Rukhshona proves that intelligence is real power in Islam, the power of hikmat, which is wielded through wisdom and compassion, as opposed to the trial by combat justice of the West. In Princess Scheherazade, the power of narrative is made explicitly feminine, the tyranny of storytelling is thus reformed.

Faith, Fate, and Justice: Reinterpreting Morality

Justice is not a rule of men, but of God. The Trickery, Greed and the Princess follows a story that is presented with a moral lesson, the Sufi way that the greedy person is caught with his own trap. The salt metaphor in The King and His Seven Daughters is the enlightenment that is attained by humility. Compassion means salvation by revelation in Durdana Chelmard.

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Foreign themes reclaimed through re-telling in local language give agency back to the culture. In *The Princess and the Pegasus*, however, flying is no longer a symbol of flight, but of belonging. In *Legend of Love*, the narrative landscape of Lahore starts to intertwine in the very act of narrating the city of Lahore and the love that makes Lahore a city of narrative. In place of European castles and woodlands, Mirza Sahiban uses sand and blood, invoking devotion into post-colonial moral realism.

Male and Female Redemption: Ideological Layers

Relational ethics, not individual triumph, are at the heart of redemption. Celebration is a statement of restoration in Behram Khan and Gul Andama. Leela Chaanesar brings repentance into equality: her act is not a form of submission but an act of moral renewal.

Adaptation as Interpretive Dialogue

Often, narrators are moralists. Humor challenges bravery in Panja Khan Rescues a Princess: "Some men's courage lies in their wives, if my husband isn't going to do something, then I'll have to —". The story ends with pedagogic irony in terms of material rewards. The Basket-Peddler Princess offers interpretive closure through work ethics, with the path, as opposed to the marriage, the story's meaning.

Digital/Written Retellings: Ideological Continuities

These stories now have a conceptual framework that has continued. Ongoing emphasis on the values of patience, humility, and faith through children's books, classroom readings, and animated shorts. Princess Scheherazade is an example of storytelling as empowerment, Shehzadi Mircha perseverance, and Mirza Sahiban loyalty as moral bravery. When the narrator, Durdana Chelmard, says: "Her disgraced former husband and his two wives beg her to forgive them, she forgives them, and they go away." Each new medium reimagines this compassion for characters, history, listeners — the message of Retelling remains the same, it is the virtue of mercy.

Findings

The study of the eighteen tales of Pakistani princesses shows adaptation is not only a means of cultural transmission, but it also is an instrument of ideological reinterpretation, supporting Hutcheon's (2006) notion of adaptation as "repetition without replication. In all the stories, the traditional motifs used in the international

version are preserved structurally, but they are re-rooted in Pakistani cultural and religious idioms, for instance, the snow-queen motif of the international version is used in "The Frog Princess" as an expression of iman (faithful acceptance of the divine will), and the dragon-slayer quest is used in "The Frog Princess" to denote the trials of a believer.

22Concerning gender ideology, the results reveal a constant duality where traditional norms of feminine beauty, servility and sacrifice are reinforced in stories like Shehzadi Mircha and Princess Aubergine, where women's value is linked to strength and moral service. At the same time, there are moments of resistance in the ways that women are using their intelligence and their narrative authority and agency, such as in "The Legend of Queen Rukhshona," "Princess Scheherazade and King Shaheryar," and "Durdana Chelmard," where they take back their voice, their wisdom, even their physical courage. Silence is sometimes more about resistance and moral fortitude than it is about submission.

The shift from the male and female character's role from dominance to empathy marks a larger ideological change from dominance to empathy. Male heroes like Bahramgor, Panja Khan, and 'The King' in 'The King and His Seven Daughters' are brought down from their pedestals, and become humble pupils of female moral consciousness. Heroines, in turn, transform from passive accessories into active moral agents who are strong not through rebellion, but through patience, intelligence and faith. The redemption in these stories is always joint and mutual (Behram Khan and Gul Andama, Leela Chaanesar), and never the outcome of personal triumph.

Last, adaptation is an ideological and interpretive process. These stories are not about justice that is determined by secular laws, but about justice that is determined by the "divine reciprocity" and the "Sufi moral logic." Deserts and rivers and gardens and markets supplant castles and courts, encoding post-colonial national identity. These patterns are continued from oral to written and digital retellings, revealing that Pakistani folk tales are a living cultural conversation that continually resets gender roles while maintaining a humility, compassion and faith-based sense of justice that spans several generations.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the process of translation of Pakistani oral fairy tales

into written and digital media in terms of the theory of adaptation as repetition and variation proposed by Linda Hutcheon, the reformation and/or subversion of Pakistani gender norms and ideology within the tales, the reframing of male and female characters, and the process of adaptation as an ideology and interpretive practice. The study employed Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (Lazar, 2017) and the adaptation theory of Hutcheon (1998) based on *The Princess Tales of Pakistan* (2024) which included eighteen stories such as *The Frog Princess*, *Shehzadi Mircha*, *Princess Aubergine*, *The Glacier-Hearted Rani Gwashbrari*, and *Princess Scheherazade and King Shaheryar*.

The results show that-adaptation in Pakistan is a twofold process, one to maintain the memory of a narrative and a second to reconstruct the ideology. The themes of the old fairy tales, such as magic, love proved by suffering and virtue's eventual triumph are reworked and reimagined in a Pakistani moral, religious and social context, particularly in the transformation of the *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella* themes in *Shehzadi Mircha* and *Princess Aubergine*. Instead, this substitution is an example of Hutcheon's (2006) definition of adaptation as the process of reproducing meaning without imitation, for which 'cultural translation' is needed to present inherited meaning in a new 'idiom'.

Gender roles in these adaptations were found to be affirmative and contradictory. Though most of the stories still portray women as emotional, moral, and giving up their lives for others, this is different in the context of Pakistani culture — submission is redefined as a woman being silent, which means that it is not a weakness, but a way of asserting herself as the moral man. The characters in *The Basket-Peddler Princess* and *The Legend of Queen Rukhshona* are all women who are the keepers of wisdom and strength; *Bahramgor*, *Panja Khan*, and *Behram Khan* are all men who are listening empathetic protagonists rather than conquerors. This is a change from power to compassion and from mastery to modesty that represents a greater shift in the power dynamics of Pakistan's narrative imagination.

Thus the study shows how adaptation works as an ideological engagement, as such, these stories rework the inherited narratives and reimagine national identity as both a religious and cultural affirmation and a gendered moralizing discourse. In this sense, storytelling is both a remembrance and a reframing of Pakistani identities as part of a

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global storytelling landscape, reinforcing the idea that adaptation is not simply a rehashing of past ideas and images, but a dynamic and evolving cultural conversation.

Recommendations

1. To carry out ethnographic research on the oral performance of stories in the rural and urban areas of Pakistan to document the adaptation of stories beyond the written word in communities.
2. Analyze similarities and differences between the Urdu, Punjabi and English versions of the same stories and how translation impacts moral and cultural nuances.
3. Conduct audience and educational studies into the meanings children and educators make while encountering adapted fairy tales in classrooms and media.
4. Include an eco-critical, psychological or media-study's approach and discuss the relationship between adaptation and climate narratives or digital storytelling.
5. Comparatively research Pakistani, Indian, and Middle Eastern adaptations to go beyond western academic approaches, identifying themes and different philosophical approaches.

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