



# The Influence of Beauty Standards on Women's Lives: An Exploration of *The Bald Wife*, a Folk Story from West Bengal, through a Feminist Lens

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**Abstract.** From ancient times to the present day, the initial judgments we make about girls and women have heavily relied on their physical appearance and their adherence to society's traditional beauty standards. Literary works from different time periods have delved into the notion of beauty. Folktales, passed down through generations in specific regions, reflect the cultural beliefs and traditions of those places. These tales often depict the prevailing beauty standards, particularly for women, perpetuating these ideals across generations. Female characters in these folktales are typically portrayed in alignment with these established beauty norms. One such illustration can be found in *The Bald Wife*, a captivating story from *Folktales of Bengal*, a compilation of Bengali folk tales authored by Lal Behari Dey. Employing close textual analysis and feminist theory, this research investigates how female characters are represented in relation to society's constructed beauty ideals. Additionally, it explores the negative repercussions of these ideals on women who do not conform, as well as the reinforcement of gender inequalities and harmful stereotypes. By interrogating these traditional beauty norms, this analysis contributes to ongoing feminist conversations, advocating for a more inclusive society that embraces diverse notions of beauty.

**Keywords:** Folk tale, Feminist analysis, Beauty standards.

## 1 Introduction

From ancient times to the present day, when we meet a girl or woman, our initial judgment of her is often based on her physical appearance and how well she aligns with society's conventional beauty ideals. This trend has persisted despite the progress and advancements of our modern world. In our society, a woman's appearance is given a lot of importance, often overshadowing her other qualities. Her value and how she is treated by family, friends, and society depend largely on her beauty. The more beautiful a woman is considered, the more she is valued and treated well. This obsession with physical beauty is so strong that it is seen as an essential quality of being a woman. These standards of beauty are created by society and are not fixed or based on any objective criteria. Despite this, women still strive to achieve these beauty ideals because

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their worth and validation are tied to them. These beauty standards often reflect a preference for specific body types, skin tones, and facial features. Different cultures and time periods have their own ideas of what is considered beautiful. Women who don't fit within these narrow beauty norms face many challenges in their lives. They may try to conform to these ideals by engaging in behaviour like dieting and using cosmetics, instead of focusing on their true values and what really matters in life. Sometimes, not meeting these beauty standards can have negative effects on a woman's physical and mental well-being. Various societal institutions such as the media, fashion industry, and advertising play a significant role in promoting and reinforcing these arbitrary beauty ideals.

Feminists have raised their voices against the practice of judging women based on their appearance and the challenges created by beauty standards. They aim to create awareness about the arbitrary nature of these standards and advocate for a society that embraces women of diverse appearances. Influential feminists such as Beauvoir (1949), Butler (1956), Wolf (1990), and others have examined the concept of beauty standards related to women, exposing their harmful effects on women and society. They emphasize that throughout history, women have been treated as objects by a patriarchal society, with their worth solely determined by their physical appearance, disregarding their skills, qualities, and virtues. This objectification has led women to be valued primarily for men's pleasure, and women themselves and others judge them based on these beauty standards. Feminists argue that the creation of these beauty ideals aims to control women and maintain dominance over them. Unrealistic beauty standards contribute to the objectification of women, reducing them to objects of desire and leading to increased incidents of sexual harassment, discrimination, and gender-based violence. Society's excessive focus on physical appearance perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces gender inequalities.

In various literary representations throughout different times, the society's notions and conceptions of beauty standards for women are explored. Folktales, originating from the narratives crafted by folk of a particular region often embody that region's culture, traditional beliefs, conventions, etc. Many folktales portray the society's conventional beauty standards, particularly related to women, and transmit these traditional beauty ideals from one generation to another. These stories provide insights into how people in different times and places perceived beauty. Women in these tales are often depicted in accordance with the traditional beauty standards, and some stories also highlight the challenges and obstacles faced by women who do not meet these societal expectations. One such example is *The Bald Wife*, found in the collection entitled "Folktales of Bengal" by Lal Behari Dey. This story exemplifies the typical notion and traditions of evaluating a woman based on her beauty, and the detrimental effects such as oppression and exploitation faced by women who do not conform to societal beauty standards. It also explores how a woman can defy these beauty standards if she wishes and highlights other traditional conventions surrounding women's beauty standards.

This paper aims to analyze the story *The Bald Wife* through feminist and beauty standard theories, examining how the female characters are portrayed based on societal beauty ideals within the narrative. It seeks to delve into the negative consequences such as oppression, objectification, and marginalization faced by the woman who does not conform to the beauty ideal. In addition, by exploring the traditional beliefs about female beauty presented in the story, the paper intends to shed light on how these

standards contribute to gender inequalities and perpetuate harmful stereotypes. This analysis strives to contribute to the ongoing discourse within feminism by challenging and critiquing the conventional beauty norms imposed by traditional society, advocating for a more inclusive society.

## **2 Research gap and objectives**

Folktales of Bengal, by Lal Behari Dey holds a special place in the literary landscape of South Asia. Its stories have been passed down through generations, entertaining and educating readers of all ages. However, in the existing body of research on Folktales of Bengal, there is a surprising absence of research works focusing on the story *The Bald Wife* from a feminist perspective.

The objectives of this paper are to analyse the story *The Bald Wife* using feminist and beauty standard theories to understand how the female characters are portrayed based on societal beauty ideals in the tale. The paper also attempts to analyse the negative effects of deviating from beauty standards depicted in the story, such as experiencing oppression, objectification, and marginalization for women who don't meet those standards and examine the traditional beliefs about beauty in the narrative, revealing how these standards contribute to gender inequalities and harmful stereotypes. The paper also contributes to the ongoing discourse within feminism by challenging conventional beauty norms imposed by traditional society.

## **3 Methodology**

In this study, the primary text analysed is *The Bald Wife* taken from Lal Behari Dey's book *Folktales of Bengal* (1883). It is important to note that this story shares similarities with the Bengali tale *Teko Bou* from Thakurmar Jhuli by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder. However, our research specifically concentrates on a detailed examination of *The Bald Wife* alone.

The paper utilizes a qualitative research methodology to analyze and interpret the story *The Bald Wife* within the framework of feminist theory and beauty standards.

## **4 Literature review**

Throughout history, many feminists have engaged in discussions surrounding feminine beauty and its impact on women and society. Simultaneously, researchers from different fields have extensively examined and explored the portrayal of female characters on the basis of their physical appearance on different genre of literature, with a particular emphasis on folktales and fairy tales. In this section, we delve into a selection of these works, which shed light on the subject and provide valuable insights into the representation of women in such narratives.

Beauvoir, in her groundbreaking book *The Second Sex* (1949) examines the idea of beauty standard related to women and exposes its detrimental effects on women and society. She points out that throughout history, women have been treated as objects by

a patriarchal society. Their worth has often been solely determined by their physical appearance, disregarding their skills, qualities, and virtues. This objectification has led women to be seen and valued primarily for men's pleasure. Women themselves and others judge them based on these beauty standards.

Beauvoir also highlights that when women don't fit into these beauty norms, they feel marginalized and excluded. The pressure to conform to these standards restricts women's freedom and independence. Instead of focusing on developing their skills and personal growth, many women feel compelled to invest time and resources in external things like cosmetics and dieting. This longstanding societal practice of using beauty as a measure of a woman's worth perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces power imbalances between men and women. It supports the stereotype that women exist solely for the entertainment of others. By shedding light on these truths about beauty ideals, Beauvoir aims to raise awareness among women and society as a whole. Her goal is to challenge the objectification of women and create an inclusive society where women are valued for their abilities and contributions.

Butler (1990) argues that gender is not something we are born with, but rather a concept that is shaped by society. It is constantly reinforced through the way we act and present ourselves. Beauty standards play a significant role in this process. Society tells women how they should look and behave, emphasizing specific physical attributes. These ideals create a framework for judging women. Those who conform to beauty norms are more likely to be accepted and recognized, while those who don't may face criticism. Butler also states that the performance of femininity is not an inherent quality of being a woman; it is a learned behaviour taught by society. From a young age, cultural practices and interactions shape our understanding of what it means to be a woman and how we should look.

Wolf (1990) notes that the beauty ideal is not driven by individual preferences but rather shaped and governed by influential institutions of society. The writer also emphasizes the reality that the beauty myth places a strong emphasis on physical appearance and ties women's worth to their ability to conform to these ideals. The main objective of creating this beauty ideal is to control women and keep them in dominance. She argues that these ideals negatively affect women's confidence and limit their opportunities. It compels women to pursue unrealistic beauty standards and diverts them from achieving true attributes of life. Failing to meet these beauty ideals, makes women feel insecure and self-doubted. The writer points out that the beauty industry, media, and advertising agencies are key contributors to promoting and perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards. The writer states, "There is no legitimate historical or biological justification for the beauty myth; what it is doing to women today is a result of nothing more exalted than the need of today's power structure, economy, and culture to mount a counteroffensive against women." (Wolf, 1990:13)

Nanda (2014) examines the origins, evolution, and impact of folktales on society, particularly on children's perception. The author explores well-known folktales such as Snow White, Cinderella, and Red Riding Hood, highlighting their tendency to prioritize feminine beauty when portraying female protagonists. These stories reflect the traditional association between beauty and goodness, as well as ugliness and wickedness. Typically, beautiful women in these tales are depicted as virtuous, passive, innocent, and dependent on men for their well-being. In contrast, negative female characters are portrayed as ugly, evil, or deceitful. "In the fairy tales, passivity is the most valued and

honored attribute a woman can possess in life. It is not the female who can save herself from harm or an undesirable situation; it is the male that must save her" (Nanda, 2014: 248).

Furthermore, these narratives often depict stepmothers negatively, attributing traits such as vanity, jealousy, or knowledge of black magic to them, perpetuating the stereotype that stepmothers are inherently malicious. Ambitious women in these tales are also portrayed as evil, ugly, or manipulative, often exerting power over other women and men. However, the author also uncovers the presence of exceptional female characters within these stories who defy societal expectations, raising their voices to overcome obstacles and take control of their lives. The author emphasizes the importance of introducing more diverse roles for women in fairy tales. These roles could include business owners, warriors, and single or widowed individuals, reflecting the evolving roles of women in society. By expanding the range of female characters in these narratives, it becomes possible to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and provide children with a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of women's capabilities and potential.

Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) explore the prominent portrayal of feminine beauty, with a focus on the works of Grimm Brothers. It examines how this emphasis on beauty perpetuates gender inequality and how these stories highlighting this theme have endured and reproduced over the centuries. By analyzing fairy tales, it becomes evident that the ideal of feminine beauty, which prioritizes the physical attractiveness as a vital trait for women, is consistently emphasized in these narratives. They find that female characters are often described in terms of their looks, focusing on features like fair skin, long hair, and delicate traits. These portrayals reinforce the idea that a woman's worth is primarily determined by her physical attractiveness.

"Not surprisingly, among the many messages contained in fairy tales, those concerning the importance of feminine beauty, especially for younger women, are paramount. Young women are more often described as 'beautiful', 'pretty,' or 'fair' than are older women or than men of any age are described as handsome. Furthermore, beauty is often associated with being white, economically privileged, and virtuous" (Sperry and Grauerholz, 2003: 722)

The analysis also uncovers several themes related to physical appearance in fairy tales. Beauty is often associated with goodness, while ugliness is linked to evil or negativity. Hard work and beauty is often rewarded, while lack of beauty can lead to punishment or exclusion. Beauty is sometimes connected to race and social class, with white and privileged women more commonly depicted as beautiful. Women's beauty receives more attention than men's, and there are strong messages about competition among women and the importance of beauty for female characters. The study also explores how references to physical appearance relate to the frequency of story reproductions. It finds that tales with more mentions of female beauty tend to be reproduced more often. The conclusion highlights that while there may not be a deliberate conspiracy to control girls and women through these stories, but the impact of these messages still perpetuate gender behaviours and values.

Zhang (2021) explores how peer, parental and media influences contribute to body image and dietary concerns. The work also examines how the desire to conform to the culturally defined beauty ideal impacts physical and mental health of women across various social norms and cultures. The pressure to meet these ideals is exposed,

highlighting the effects on individual's well being and self-perception. This study reveals that the normative social influence plays a significant role in shaping women's pursuit of an idealized body image prescribed by their culture. Different countries have different beauty norms, with some cultures valuing a larger body size as beautiful. Women often feel dissatisfied with their bodies and lack confidence due to the pressure to conform to societal beauty standards. Many individuals resort to extreme measures, such as extreme dieting or disordered eating patterns, in their efforts to fit these body conformity ideals. The dissatisfaction with body image and excessive focus on appearance sometimes leads to negative mental health outcomes, including eating disorders, depression, low self-esteem, and increased negative emotions. In writer's words, "Despite the negative effects on human health, the conformity of attractive women's bodies images may lead to the results of unconfidence and abnormal psychology under conformity pressure" (Zhang, 2021:239). By highlighting the negative consequences of body conformity and promoting self-acceptance, the author advocates for a healthier approach to body image that considers individual diversity and challenges societal beauty norms.

Berlianti (2021) examines the portrayal of female characters in the classic fairy tales like Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty. The findings of this work reveal that these stories reinforce gender stereotypes through their narratives and character portrayals. One important finding is that the main female characters in these fairy tales are typically beautiful but suffer physically and emotionally. They are often portrayed as weak and submissive, relying on a prince or others to save them and create a happy ending. This reinforces the belief that women are dependent on men and incapable of protecting themselves. The notion of beauty plays a significant role in these fairy tales. The characters' physical appearance is highly valued, overshadowing other qualities like intelligence, bravery, or independence. This emphasis on looks suggests that a woman's worth and happiness are determined by her appearance. Additionally, the work highlights that women are often depicted as passive and inferior in these tales. They are expected to be polite, obedient, and helpless, while qualities like aggression and ambition are seen as negative traits. This reinforces traditional gender roles and perpetuates the idea that women should be submissive and not seek leadership positions. The female protagonists of Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty face challenges posed by villains and rely on the help of others, particularly male characters, to overcome these obstacles. They do not actively contribute to their own success but instead depend on external intervention. Their ultimate goal is often to marry a prince, which is facilitated by their beauty and kindness. This further emphasizes their passive nature. The research highlights the fact that these classic fairy tales contribute to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. They portray women as dependent on their appearance, passive in their roles, and in need of male intervention to find happiness and fulfillment.

## 5 Findings and Discussion:

### 5.1 Analysis of the story *The Bald Wife* through the Lens of Feminist and Beauty Standard Theory

Feminism, as defined by the Oxford dictionary, is the advocacy of women's right based on the principle of equality between sexes. From this definition, it is understood that the essence of feminism lies in striving for equal rights and opportunities for women. It challenges norms and traditions dictated by society which prioritizes men over women. Feminism has evolved through different waves, each with its own focus and goals. The first wave emerged in the late 1800s and early 1900s and fought to achieve the legal rights of women, like the right to vote, whereas the second wave appeared in the 1960s and 1970s and focused mainly on social and cultural rights like equal rights at work, the right to make choices about bodies etc. The third wave of feminism emerged in the 1990s and continues today, emphasising empowerment, intersectionality and embracing diversity. During this wave, feminists were really concerned about how society defines female beauty and how it affects girls and women. Feminists noticed that the media and advertising industry often promote very specific and unrealistic ideas of beauty. They highlighted how these standards often led to negative body image, low self-esteem, and harmful practices like dieting or cosmetic surgery.

Beauvoir (1949) and Mulvey (1989), explore the concept of the "male gaze" and how it contributes to the objectification of women. The writers argue that mainstream media and cultural representations often present women as objects of male desire, perpetuating narrow beauty standards and reinforcing patriarchal power dynamics.

"In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female(...). In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey, 1989: 19).

Similarly, Wolf (1990) and Orbach (1984, cited in Diamond, 1985) critique the beauty industry's role in promoting unrealistic beauty ideals and creating insecurities among women. They argue that the beauty industry profits from women's dissatisfaction with their bodies and perpetuates an unattainable standard of beauty. This beauty ideal prioritizes youth, thinness, and specific physical features. Bordo (2004) argues that beauty standards are seen as a form of social control and oppression. They suggest that focusing on women's physical appearance distracts from their achievements, intellect, and other valuable contributions, reinforcing gender inequality and limiting women's agency.

"Most women in our culture, then, are disordered when it comes to issues of self-worth, self-entitlement, self-nourishment, and comfort with their own bodies; eating disorders, far from being 'bizarre' and anomalous, are utterly continuous with a dominant element of the experience of being female in this culture." (Bordo, 2004: 57).

Intersectional feminism recognizes that beauty standards are influenced by various forms of oppression, including racism, ableism, and classism. These standards often exclude and marginalize women who don't fit into the narrow norms, which are typically based on white, able-bodied, and upper-class ideals. In response to these exclusive

beauty standards, intersectional feminism aims to challenge them and promote a more inclusive and diverse understanding of beauty. It acknowledges that women's experiences and diversity should be embraced, rather than conforming to a limited set of ideals. Intersectional feminists, such as Crenshaw (1991) and bell hooks (1992, 1984) highlight how beauty standards are not universal but are shaped by multiple social factors, resulting in different experiences and challenges for women of different backgrounds. Feminist analysis also acknowledges the power dynamics that exist within beauty standards. These standards are reinforced by institutions and media, granting privileges to women who conform while marginalizing those who don't. This power imbalance reinforces patriarchal structures and objectifies women.

The above scholars through their work challenge the notion that there is a singular standard of beauty and promote the celebration of diverse forms of beauty. They work towards dismantling the power structures that perpetuate oppressive beauty norms by advocating for more authentic and representative media portrayals, supporting body-positive movements, and promoting self-acceptance and self-love. They call for embracing diverse body shapes, sizes, and appearances, challenging the narrow definitions of beauty. They critique the portrayal of women in media, including advertisements, films, and magazines, which often perpetuate unrealistic beauty ideals and contribute to negative body image. "Killing Us Softly: Advertising's Image of Women" is a documentary series that critically examines the portrayal of women in advertising and its impact on society.

"Women's bodies are turned into things and objects. Now of course this affects female self esteem. It also does something even more insidious – it creates a climate of widespread violence against women" (Jhally and Kilbourne, 2010).

In the story *The Bald Wife*, it is found that a situation is portrayed where the older wife faces a lack of love and respect from her husband due to her non-conformity to traditional beauty standards. The lack of hair makes the elder wife appear unattractive because long hair is considered essential for women's beauty. This narrative highlights the issue of objectification of women under the guise of beauty. In contrast, the younger wife is treated with affection and regard because she aligns with the conventional norms of beauty. This arbitrary beauty standard creates a discriminatory divide between the two wives, and the oppressive power of false beauty norms leads the younger wife to mistreat the older wife. The elder wife is subjected to harsh treatment, assigned excessive chores, denied proper nourishment, and criticized relentlessly by her younger counterpart. The mistreatment inflicted upon the older wife reaches such extreme levels that she is compelled to leave her home in search of peace and happiness. This mistreatment is a form of oppression based on the elder wife's perceived lack of physical attractiveness. It highlights how women who deviate from societal beauty norms are often devalued and marginalized. It emphasizes the objectification of women, where their worth is reduced to their physical appearance, overlooking their individuality and inherent value as human beings. It also perpetuates the idea that a woman's worth is contingent upon her adherence to conventional beauty standards. When the elder wife is transformed into a beautiful woman through the blessings of 'Muni' and receives love and favorable treatment from her husband, it reinforces the notion that a woman's worth is determined solely by her external appearance. "When she got out of the water, what a change was seen in her!" (Dey, 1883: 415). By highlighting the mistreatment and objectification experienced by the elder wife, the story sheds light on the



detrimental effects of societal beauty standards on women's self-esteem, self-worth, and overall well-being. It prompts readers to question and resist these norms, advocating for a more inclusive and diverse understanding of beauty that celebrates women's individuality.

Furthermore, the story highlights the traditional practice that women are judged solely on her physical appearance rather than their inner beauty. The elder wife, in contrast to the younger wife, is not evaluated for her inner kindness and beauty, but rather for her external attractiveness. When the elder wife decides to leave her home to escape the inhumane treatment inflicted by the younger wife, she sets out on a transformative journey. "The elder wife, now become completely bald, determined to go into the forest, and there either die of starvation or be devoured by some wild beast" (Dey, 1912: 269). Along her path, she exhibits remarkable kindness and compassion by extending a helping hand to those who are suffering. She encounters various plants and animals and treats them with kindness and gratitude, demonstrating compassion and empathy. The blessings bestowed upon the elder wife by the plants and animals can be interpreted as a symbolic recognition of her inner beauty and strength. The cotton plant provides her with beautiful garments, emphasizing that beauty goes beyond external appearance. The plantain tree offers her satisfying food, emphasizing the importance of nourishment and self-care. The Brahmani bull grants her the ability to travel effortlessly, symbolizing empowerment and freedom. The Tulasi plant assures her of her spouse's love, suggesting that true love should not be solely based on physical attractiveness. Her acts of empathy and assistance demonstrate the depth of her character and reveal the true beauty that resides within her. Through her selfless actions, she challenges the notion that beauty is solely defined by physical appearance, highlighting the importance of inner qualities and genuine human connection. The story also raises the truth that a woman's external beauty does not ensure her intrinsic goodness. Despite the younger wife being portrayed as beautiful, her inhumane and oppressive behaviour towards the older wife reflects this truth. Unfortunately our society is more concerned with a woman's physical beauty rather than skill, intelligence and quality.

In societies where long and beautiful hair is considered a sign of femininity and attractiveness, the portrayal of a bald wife can be seen as a challenge to traditional beauty norms and societal expectations regarding women's hair. The elder wife's decision to embrace her baldness sends a powerful message to women and society, encouraging them to accept their natural appearance, including any type of hair or even no hair at all. It challenges the idea that beauty has to fit a specific mold in terms of hair, complexion, or body shape. However, it is important to acknowledge that this story also reinforces certain longstanding societal notions and concepts regarding ideal female beauty. In our society, when a woman fails to rebel against her oppression and exploitation and instead resorts to self-harm or even contemplates taking her own life, society often responds with sympathy and support. On the other hand, when a woman stands up for herself and asserts her own rights and protection, she is often viewed as aggressive, and her actions may not be seen in a positive light. Our society tends to appreciate women who embody qualities such as submissiveness, kindness, and forgiveness. In this story, the older wife is depicted in a similar manner: she is portrayed as kind, submissive, and forgiving. Despite being subjected to oppression and exploitation, she does not protest but rather wishes to spend her days in the forest, either starving or being consumed by animals. Her encounters with the plants in the forest showcase her

nurturing and caring nature. Her actions represent the idea that women are traditionally expected to be selflessly devoted and compassionate caregivers and protectors of life. It reinforces the conventional expectations placed on women to possess qualities like kindness, submissiveness, and forgiveness. Despite the challenges she endures, her gentle and sacrificial nature presents her as a role model who fits societal ideals of femininity.

The story presents the older wife as a virtuous person, and as a result, she undergoes a transformation and becomes physically beautiful: “What a change! The old, bald hag turned into the very Queen of Beauty herself!” (Dey, 1912: 272). On the other hand, the younger wife is depicted as the story's antagonist and eventually becomes physically unattractive. When muni told her “to bathe in the tank, and plunge only once into the water”, she did not obey his instructions and in order to enhance her beauty, she took two plunges into the water and unfortunately, she “came out as bald and ugly as before” (Dey, 1912: 273). This narrative choice reflects a common convention in our society where women who are considered unattractive are often cast as villains, while those who fit conventional beauty standards are seen as good. However, it's important to note that this convention is arbitrary and lacks a basis in reality.

## 6 Conclusion

This research paper explores the pervasive influence of beauty standards on women and their portrayal in folktales, focusing on the story of *The Bald Wife*. It highlights how these standards often exclude and marginalize individuals who do not conform, leading to detrimental effects such as low self-esteem and perpetuated gender inequalities. The baldness of elder wife defies the narrow definition of beauty imposed by society and questions the unfair standards imposed on women. Through her transformative journey, the story highlights the importance of inner qualities like compassion and empathy, emphasizing that true beauty goes beyond physical appearance. However, it is important to recognize that the story also reinforces some traditional gender roles. This story highlights how society tends to value women who embody traditional qualities of submissiveness, kindness, and forgiveness. The portrayal of the elder wife, who silently endures oppression and represents these ideals, reinforces societal expectations and norms surrounding the role of female. This analysis contributes to the ongoing feminist discussion by challenging conventional beauty norms imposed by society. It reveals the harmful effects of these norms on women's self-esteem, self-worth, and well-being, encouraging readers to question and resist societal beauty standards.

However, it's important to acknowledge that this paper has some limitations. It only examines one folktale, so it doesn't provide a complete picture of different perspectives. Future research should explore more folktales from diverse cultural contexts to gain a broader understanding of beauty standards.

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