



Female Heroism and Folktales: Analysing the Social Construction of Hero in the Middle Ages through Select Kashmiri Folktales

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Abstract

Heroism is typically tied to gender in the sociology of heroism that views male as the bearer of physical prowess. The female gender is excluded from the debate of heroism and is regarded as belonging to the domestic world. A similar orientation is visible in literature of the middle ages where the public sphere is masculine, and a private, domestic sphere is feminine. Scholars have perceived the conventional focus on men's heroism as a hurdle to be overcome in academic discourse. The present paper is an attempt to address this problem via the medium of Kashmiri folktales. The paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach and performs content analyses of four Kashmiri folktales, viz., *The Tale of a Princess*, *All for a Pansa*, *Azad Bakht's Tale*, and *The Tale of the Goldsmith*, the exact dates of whose genesis are unknown, and which can be as ancient as humankind itself. This study deconstructs the social construction of a hero, i.e., the image of a hero as formulated by sociologists, and progresses towards female heroism, wherein a female undertakes heroic actions and demonstrates endurance. This paper shows that the Kashmiri folktales expose us to a type of female figure who survived the Middle Ages, shattered the gendered patterns of heroism, and acted autonomously.

Keywords: Classical Social Theory, Female Hero, Gender, Heroism, Kashmiri folktales, Middle ages, *The Tale of a Princess*, *All for a Pansa*, *Azad Bakht's Tale*, *The Tale of the Goldsmith*.

Introduction

Hero is generally defined in terms of the willingness to put others first while risking one's own life, whereas, heroism is a conduct of the hero involving certain actions that serve a social goal. Due to the social purpose behind the heroic deeds, heroism is closely linked to society. Frisk (2019) links heroism to the conventional social theory and contends that sociologists have increased our understanding of heroism by clarifying the social structure of heroic figures, heroic activities, and hero worship (p. 88). Sociologists hold a diversity of viewpoints on the hero, who they define as someone who "returns from a journey with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men" (Campbell, 2004, p. 28), or as "Great Men who have impacted the course of history" (Carlyle, 2001. p. 5).

During the middle ages, heroism was in vogue. Hero was a human being who lived at the furthest reaches of the realm of possibility. There was a need for a hero in every activity and path of life. A hero was created by society as a contrast to itself when a troublesome circumstance arose, and the conventional response to that crisis was against society. A hero, therefore, was both a social agent and a social captive (Edwards, 1979, p. 33). Society played and continues to play a crucial role in eliciting heroic deeds from an individual who is not always a larger-than-life figure. He can also be a regular person who is motivated by a desire to serve others through courage and self-sacrifice.

Sociologists view hero as a 'man' whose heroism is linked to 'his' physical prowess. Woman, on the other hand, is confined to the domestic realm, where she is thought to be primarily inert (Featherstone, 1992, p. 161). Because women are not addressed when the concept of hero is discussed in classical literature of sociology, it can be regarded that heroism is tightly associated with masculinity in the sociology of heroism. Studies in gender stereotypes have shown that male gender roles include attributes such as daring, adventurous and courageous more than the female gender (Williams et al., 1999, pp. 513-514). Similar to this, in English literature, Rose says,

The stress on movement and adventure, on rescue, rule, exploration and conquest is...distinctively masculine...the public sphere becomes...masculine. Women...are excluded from the questing, striving and conquering that both forms the heroic subjects and characterises his actions...what is female becomes increasingly confined to a domestic...private world. (Rose, 2004. p. xi).

It has thus been asserted that literature has continued to exhibit patriarchal inclinations. However, the forms of folklore, particularly certain folktales, have the capacity to debunk the gendered patterns of heroic opportunities, if the influence of patriarchal sensibilities do not shape the studies in folktales, as had happened in the 19th Century.

This study is based on the hypothesis that the female¹ heroism represented in Kashmiri folktales contradicts several pre-existing gender assumptions about heroism promulgated by sociologists. To prove this hypothesis, the study performs content analyses of four Kashmiri folktales viz. *The Tale of a Princess*, *All for a Pansa*, *Azad Bakht's Tale*, and *The Tale of the Goldsmith*. This research makes an attempt, thus, to deconstruct the social construction of a hero, and move towards female heroism where female characters perform heroic actions, and portray endurance.

¹ Throughout this paper, the words female/females and woman/women are used interchangeably.

Heroism and Folktales

In order to understand the heroes of Kashmiri folktales and move ahead to comprehend the female heroes, it is important to understand the culture that created them and briefly explore how Kashmiri medieval society was.

Kashmir was inhabited wholly by Hindus till the beginning of the 14th century. The majority of Hindus were converted from Hinduism to Islam after the 14th century. The Muslims, though in small numbers, came to Kashmir from Central Asia and Persia with many occupations, ranging from carpenters to traders. For a time, foreigners like Afghans under Durrani Empire also ruled Kashmir. They were followed by Sikhs from Panjab and Dogras from Jammu. The result of this was the rule of kings from several ethnicities: Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Afghans, Sikhs, and Dogras - who each held power for hundreds of years and left their imprint on the culture and language of the people, divided loosely into Pre-Islamic and Islamic rulers, over the past five millennia. The character of Kashmiri people is therefore a composite result of the diverse influences brought about by these different circumstances – the Aryan value system, Buddhist ethics, Mohamedan religion, and the exploits of foreign invaders and rulers (Kapur, 1992, p. 119). This also sheds light on the fact that the Kashmiri people have always been subject to the control of a monarch. The earliest reference to the monarchical society of Kashmir is recounted from the primeval time up to 1149 AC in Kalhana's *Rajatarangni*². The monarchical regime resulted in the common people's voices and concerns being somehow unheard and lost, as they could not reach the higher authorities. There thus arose a need in the common Kashmiri folk to instil in themselves the desire to solve their problems on their own. Perhaps, this was one of the factors that changed Kashmiri community's way of utilizing storytelling.

Folktales of Kashmir came out as a suppressed desire out of the imagination of common mass. Folktale in its simplest form is a customary story that individuals of a specific locale or group rehash among themselves, and is considered to be anonymous, timeless, and placeless with no unique creator (*Merriam-Webster's*, n.d.). The storytellers took it to themselves to create and narrate stories that would present a hero as someone who is no other than common man, an ordinary human being just like the audience, and still was in possession of heroic qualities. The main purpose behind narrating such tales was to generate and ingrain in the common people an urge to become heroes of their own lives, and to resolve their own issues without having to rely on some outside authority to intercede for them.

A folktale is full of action, usually involving a hero who is honourable, courageous, selfless, and kind. The heroic actions in a folktale are also influenced by the social surrounding of the hero. According to Bascom (1954), folktale does not evolve from a void; rather it is a product of a society wherein it performs various functions that involve education, validation of social behaviour, conformation, and escape (pp. 343-346). These functions can be grouped into a single function of imparting stability to the society. Hence, a hero in a folktale acts as a vehicle to impart stability to the society as he fosters the sense of comradeship and solidarity.

In her book *Fearless Girls, Wise Women, and Beloved Sisters* (1998), Kathleen Ragan collected and compiled one hundred folktales and fairy tales about strong, intelligent, and brave women from around the world. These folktales feature female characters who are courageous mothers, clever young girls, and warrior women, who save villages from monsters, rule wisely over kingdoms, and outwit judges, kings, and tigers. In the one hundred

² *Rajatarangni* (River of Kings), is an account of the history of Kashmir, written in Sanskrit between 1148 and 1149 by Kalhana Pandit, a poet and historian (c. 12th century).

folktales collected, Kashmiri folktales are not included. However, this book has opened a space for dialogue and, it can be said that, in folktales, a hero and his heroic behaviour can be described as androgynous. It does not matter whether the hero is male or female; what is more important is the hero's act. But, when heroism in folktales is studied and analysed, consideration of a hero to be an androgynous figure is not clearly given emphasis. A pattern of undervaluing or neglecting the brave and noble acts of female characters has existed all across the history of folktale studies. The *magnum opus* in folktale collection, the Grimm's folktales, does not contain as strong heroines as the ones Kay F. Stone - a scholar of traditional folkloristics - found through her analysis of other collections in which there were strong, autonomous female protagonists different from the ones found in popular collections and Disney productions (Stone, 1975, pp. 43-44; 2008). The fact that the heroine in many types of tales is the active leader of events is even frequently overlooked by the prestigious scientific research instruments as Aarne and Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale* and *Motif Index of Folk Literature* (Lundell, 1983, p. 240). In a similar context, Lundell notes:

A reader of unabridged collections of folktales, and fairy tales, soon realises, however, that the model for female conduct reflected in such tales over a wide geographical area is far from confined to a submissive beauty of popular selections and Walt Disney's dramatizations. Furthermore, folktale scholar soon finds that a similar tendency to present an image of passive and subordinate heroine exists in such scholarly research tools long considered fundamental as Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale* and Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature*. (Lundell, 1989, p. 149)

In the study and analysis of Kashmiri folktales, the same prejudices remain as researchers have not envisaged the potential of what we term female heroism in these tales. The most fascinating aspect of Kashmiri folktales is how storytellers have not gendered the heroes. The tales were told publicly, thereby, a mingling of private and public arena of the past is prevalent in them. The storytellers recounted stories in which the hero was either a man or a woman, with no preference for one gender over the other when it came to becoming a hero or performing heroic acts. This aspect is not researched as far as the present researchers' knowledge is concerned, and the purpose of this paper hence is to fill this gap in folktale scholarship by re-reading four Kashmiri folktales, as discussed in the following pages. It is hypothesised that female characters in folk literature have far more than the traditionally female virtues ascribed to them, such as caring for others, and that heroism is not gender centric but rather androgynous. In order to support this thesis and demonstrate how the selected Kashmiri folktales present women of heroic performance who challenge gender stereotypes, the tales are first summarised and then examined through the prism of the classical social theory of heroism, or the sociology of heroism.

'Female Heroism' in Selected Folktales

The Tale of a Princess

The tale opens with a certain nameless king defeated in a battle who flees with his family to a distant yet safer place, but in a haste, forgets money at his prior abode. Without money, the king and his family would have died of hunger had not his daughter-in-law - the princess of the title - came to their rescue. The princess being a wise woman had made sure to carry some rubies with her to be utilized in the hour of need and since there was an exigency in her family, she does not think twice before handing over a ruby to her father-in-law to sell it in exchange for money and buy them food. The king, however, is duped by a clever merchant who takes him to the latter's house and traps him in a pit. The same fate is met by the prince

and his mother, the queen, who could not detect the trickery behind the merchant's words and actions. The princess, being the only one left behind at the house, sets out to search for her missing family members and lands at the merchant's shop who planned to deceive her in the same manner and confine her in the pit. The princess, who is sagacious enough to sense the merchant's dishonesty, does not agree to go inside his house, and in the meantime hears the voices of her husband, father-in-law and mother-in-law coming from inside. She threatens the merchant to take him to the king if he does not set them free, and the merchant due to the fear of punishment lets them out at once.

The princess from here takes a detour and set out on another unknown journey. She keeps walking until she reaches some other country where she disguises herself as Ganpat Rai, the son of a merchant. In that country a merchant is grief stricken as his family is afflicted by an ogress who devours the merchant's new-born sons the same night they are birthed. Ganpat Rai (the princess) resolves to save the merchant's to-be-born child from the ogress as his wife was expecting a baby at midnight. The princess being a brave woman not only prevents the ogress from opening the door but also seizes her by the hair and throws her down showcasing her strength and valour. In this manner she saves the merchant's child and his family from the ogress risking her own life. The princess is determined to restore her lost kingdom and return to her country for which she gathers all the troops of her father-in-law and stirs them up to fight for the recovery of their kingdom. In the end, a battle takes place where the princess' father-in-law and his troops come out victorious. In this manner, the princess through her perseverance, courage and spirit of a warrior retrieves their kingdom.

All for a Pansa

The tale unfurls with a disappointed merchant whose source of discontent is his only son who is a stupid fellow. But the merchant's wife, like all mothers, turns a blind eye towards her son's ignorance and wishes for him to get married. The merchant, however, before agreeing to this demand of his wife wants to test his son's intelligence again. For this, he devises a task for his son to be fulfilled through the medium of solving a riddle. He hands over three pansas (Indian currency) to him and asks him "to go to the bazar, and with one pansa to buy something for himself, to throw another pansa into the river, and with the remaining pansa to get at least five things - something to eat, something to drink, something to gnaw, something to sow in the garden, and some food for the cow" (Knowles, 1893, p. 145). The son goes to the market but because of his foolishness cannot understand the significance of his father's command and is perturbed. At this point, a hero comes to the rescue of the man but there is a twist in the preconceived notion of a hero as the saviour is not a male but a female.

This woman is the daughter of an ironsmith who comes forward selflessly to help the merchant's son when she sees him in distress. She hears about the merchant's command and at once understands the riddle. She then asks the man to buy a watermelon and take it to his father as this is the answer to his riddle. The merchant is surprised at his son's venture and is sure enough that he has taken someone's help which his son confesses. The merchant agrees to get him married but on the condition of marrying him to the ironsmith's daughter only. They are then married but the man being stupid falls for the words of his friends who advise him to beat his wife every day to keep her in spirits. The ironsmith's daughter, even after having knowledge of his to-be husband's plan, does not change her decision to marry him as she believes there is a difference between what a man says and what he does. She, however, is proven wrong as on the very first night after their marriage, the merchant's son comes to beat her. She uses her wits and saves herself from her husband's beating for seven days and on the eighth day goes to her father's house.

Back at home, the merchant's wife asks her husband to give a chance to their lone son in business. The merchant, even though hesitant, is not able to turn away his wife and so invests some of his money into his son's business. But the son being true to his nature falls into the trap of a clever gambler who is a professional at duping people and to that gambler, the merchant's son loses all the money and belongings in a game of gambling. After losing, he is not allowed to return but is locked in a prison by the gambler who is a woman. Once again as a saviour came forward the ironsmith's daughter - his wife. Being a shrewd woman, she defeats the clever gambler in her own game not just once but multiple times until she is successful to rescue her husband and abstain the money and belongings. The couple go back to their home where instead of being thankful to his wife, the merchant's son being ignorant and foolish is reminded of the pending beating he has to lash out on his wife. The ironsmith's daughter has a moment of realization, and she cannot continue to put up with her husband's cruelty and stupidity. She comprehends from her fallacy of the past, and for the first time gets vocal against her husband, and declares him stupid, which he was since the beginning. The merchant too at the end hands over all the jewels and the belongings to his daughter-in-law, who he considers to be too good for his son.

Azad Bakht's Tale

A vizier has committed the crime of comparing his king to a merchant, and the monarch regards it to be a severe offence. The king suspects the vizier of lying to him regarding that merchant, and wishes to execute him, but because his lie has not been proven, he is given the opportunity to prove himself innocent before the king, and until that time, he is imprisoned. The vizier's wife on hearing about her husband rushes from room to room lamenting her fate for not having a son. According to her, having a son even if illegitimate, would have been preferable to having only a daughter. This occurrence in the tale throws insight on the preference for having a boy over a girl, and how daughters are considered to be weak and incapable of assisting their families in times of need.

The vizier's daughter, fondly raised and educated by her father, takes it upon herself to save him, and prove his innocence thereby proving her mother wrong for not believing in her. She is aware that nothing can change their fate until they do something about it. She at once resolves to set out in search of the merchant whom her father has mentioned to the king, and for which he has been condemned. She heads out on a quest, passing through one town after another until she reaches her destination. There she finds the merchant and the dog about whom her father had adverted. In order to take this dog and its master - the merchant - before the king, she devises a plan thus showcasing her wisdom and intellect which was heroic in itself, for she makes accurate use of her senses at the proper time of need. In the end, she is successful to prove that her father is innocent and that he wasn't lying before the king.

The Tale of the Goldsmith

The Tale of the Goldsmith again introduces us to a kind of female hero who through her sharp wits and clever mind takes revenge on her husband and his lover. In this Kashmiri folktale, a goldsmith who is already married has fallen in love with a princess who reciprocates his love but due to the social class difference, they cannot get married. The wife of the goldsmith, a clever woman understands the cause of her husband's pain and quite selflessly, as she portrays herself to be, is motivated to help him get united with his beloved, thereby risking her own married life.

Ann Gold (1997) comments about women as being outspoken saying that "women speak with authority; if men accept and act on their wives' council, all goes well" (p. 111). In the events that follow, it is the goldsmith's wife who directs the acts of her husband and his

beloved, the princess. The goldsmith's wife is the one who asks the goldsmith, her husband, to toss two gold balls into the princess's chamber so that she is aware of his presence. It is once again up to her to comprehend the underlying importance of the princess's acts, and she requests her husband to go to the princess's garden to meet her. She protects the princess and the goldsmith from the king's wrath by swapping places with the princess in the prison where they were held together after being captured in the garden. In the end, it is her plot that forces the king to give his daughter - the princess - to the goldsmith's wife as restitution for the loss of the dancing girl, who was actually the goldsmith in disguise and was plotted in the king's chamber by the shrewd woman.

However, there are instances where it appears like she is punishing her husband and seeking vengeance from him for his betrayal under the guise of providing assistance. She initially gashes his nail and urges him to treat it with red pepper and salt. Second, she has him strip down to his underwear, rub ashes all over his body, and transform into a mendicant. Third, she humiliates him by dressing him up as a dancing girl and handing him over to the king. Her vindictive psyche is revealed when, while handing over the princess to the goldsmith, she says, "You must learn, and she must learn" (Stein, 1989, p. 31). This statement, constructed by the goldsmith's wife, foreshadows the fact that their lives would not be as easy and pleasant as they had hoped, as neither her smart deeds nor her wiles will cease very soon, for she has a lesson for both of them to learn.

In the Kashmiri folktales summarised above, we can identify different hues of women portraying heroic actions - being the heroes of their own lives, and of the lives of those associated with them. These tales contradict the views upheld by sociologists regarding heroism for ages. They present a kind of hero who could have inhabited the Kashmiri society in middle ages, and is not typically a male but a female standing in opposition to the sociologists' views of a hero.

Featherstone (1992), a sociologist, claims that everyday life, reproduction and care is the sphere of women whereas sphere of danger, violence and courting of risk is for men (p. 165). *The Tale of a Princess* controverts this view as we see that it is an odyssey of a female who through the virtue of her heroic actions controverts the sociology of heroism that places men at the apex of performing heroic deeds and women in domestic spheres. In this tale, we see certain instances where the princess's actions demonstrate her heroism. Firstly, she decides to help her in-laws at the time of need. The selflessness of the princess and her motivation to help her family mark her first heroic action. Secondly, the bravery she shows while dealing with the merchant, and her courage to handle the situation fearlessly mark her as a heroic figure. Thirdly, she helps the family of another merchant from an ogress, risking her own life in the process, which is a path of heroism described as an extreme form of selflessness, and is characterised by the commitment to serve others despite the significant danger of personal damage or death (Frisk, 2019, p. 92). Bolen, in *Goddesses in Everywoman* states that, "There is a potential heroine in everywoman. She is the leading lady in her own life story on a journey that begins at her birth and continues through her lifetime" (1985, p. 283).

As Burrows, Lapedes, and Shawcross (1973) note, a quest is "ultimately the activity of finding the Self, to unite the conscious with the unconscious. . . [and is] the goal of the hero" (p. 460). The journey of the princess in *The Tale of a Princess*, too, is that of discovery and development, of merging aspects of herself into a full, yet complex identity (Frontgia, 1991, p. 17). She does what neither the king nor the prince - both male - resolve to do, exhibiting the true essence of female heroism.

A female also portrays characteristics of a vengeful hero having both the authority and the wit to correct the wrong done to her and take revenge for it. In *The Tale of the Goldsmith*, the goldsmith's wife is a vengeful hero and the underlying objective beneath her altruistic and helpful behaviour throughout the tale is to take revenge from her husband, which she achieves through her cunning as she is the maneuverer of events to fulfil her own motive. She is not a weak woman who weeps or breaks down after learning of her husband's treachery as illustrated from the series of her actions in the summary above. She depicts a strong lady who does not easily relinquish her position but seeks revenge from her husband, refusing to forgive him and vowing to continue to teach him a lesson. She may appear to some as a classic hero, and others as an anti-hero, but, she falls perfectly under the category of a vengeful hero, a hero who acts on the basis of vengeance (also known as retribution or revenge), whether for a wrong done to them or their people/race.

Azad Bakht's Tale delineates heroism of a daughter in a society where daughters were confined to their homes and were not encouraged to participate in public affairs. Male child was given preference as he was considered to be the saviour of family in times of need. *Azad Bakht's Tale* perfectly depicts this thought process prevalent in the Kashmiri society of the Middle Ages. It challenges society's expectations of a daughter and reverses it, since it is a daughter, not a son, who emerges as a rescuer for her parents. It narrates the heroism of a daughter who, in order to save her father, risks her own life. This tale perfectly portrays how a daughter does not let her parents down and saves her family which is in contrast to what people were conditioned into believing in the medieval times i.e., only sons could be the saviours of their family. This tale asserts how daughters too can perform heroic actions and save others, if given a chance. In this tale, the daughter gets a chance to save her father and her mother's demeanour changes dramatically. When she comes home after two full months with the merchant and his dog, her mother's thought process is different from how it was in the beginning. She has progressed from doubting her to declaring that "she would be the one to save them all". She therefore is the hero of her family and rightly affirms so through her actions, progressing ahead of the gendered roles she was expected to perform.

The concept of hero linked to performance of actions is defined differently by different scholars. Frisk in his research paper has provided the view sociologists like Carlyle and Weber held regarding a hero. According to Carlyle and Weber, a hero is exclusively a man who takes action. Heroism has been tied to physical strength...the hero has typically shown traditionally masculine virtues, including competitiveness, power of will, and risk-taking (Frisk, 2019, p. 96). Hence, sociology of heroism elevates only those who are physically powerful to the status of heroes. Another school of thinkers consider that heroism cannot be defined just by physical deeds; mental fortitude is also required to be heroic. Neumann holds a view that is in contrast to the views held by Carlyle and Weber, as he clearly states that their concept limits women's skills in heroism, because, according to him, heroism is linked to mental power as well as physical strength. Heroism is born out of consciousness, and heroic acts whether physical or mental are emblematic of an individual's underlying psyche (Edwards, 1979, p. 38-39).

Classical social theory regarding heroism somehow restricts women's potential to be heroic since women's heroism is mainly based on cerebral stamina and knowledge rather than accomplishing something great physically (Edwards, 1979, p. 39). From this definition of heroism and the place of women in it, the folktale *All for a Pansa* is totally apposite as in this tale, a woman shows heroism through her mental strength. Instead of breaking bones and utilising physical strength, it is a woman who, by using her sharp wit, presence of mind, unselfish character, and courage, not only salvages her dumb husband (a man), but also retrieves the merchant's (a man) hard-earned money. Moreover, she saves herself, too, from

the clutches of her husband by raising her voice, which, again, is heroic as a woman with a voice is, by definition, a strong woman. Woman with a voice is assertive, not aggressive. Her strength and valour are not physical but mental and through this psychic strength, she provides a new tangent to heroism that is not determined by physical prowess solely. The ironsmith's daughter also portrays heroism of marriage which "while demanding courage equal to the heroic action ...requires not direct aggression but self-sacrifice and endurance" (Rose, 2004, p. xv) as she continues to live with her husband and help him out of his troubles even after his impudent and indecorous behaviour towards her. Apart from that, her heroism is portrayed by her embarking on a quest for her missing spouse, for a quest is regarded as a symbol of heroism. As Sherman (2008) states, "a quest is a long and often difficult search for something... In story, quests are generally adventurous expeditions made by the protagonist...The quest may be for an object, to right a wrong, or for knowledge that will save the protagonist or the protagonist's people... The quest itself is always difficult and often dangerous" (p. 377) and "the heroine is usually taken on a quest that takes her through strange and difficult lands" (p. 376). The ironsmith's daughter set out to save her husband without considering the risks she might have to endure, thereby demonstrating her heroism. In the other folktales, too, the female protagonist goes on a quest to save someone like her husband in *The Tale of a Princess*, or her father in *Azad Bakht's Tale*.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to ascertain how female characters in Kashmiri folk literature have far more to offer than the traditionally female virtues ascribed to them by the society such as caring for others. It aimed to convey that females are heroic and female heroism in folktales, particularly Kashmiri folktales, antipodes some already prevailing gender stereotypes related to heroism as propagated by sociologists. Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that female characters perform heroic actions and portray endurance in Kashmiri folktales. *The Tale of a Princess*, *All for a Pansa*, *Azad Bakht's Tale* and *The Tale of the Goldsmith* introduce us to a type of female character, a physically and cognitively powerful female hero, who breaks the gendered patterns of heroism and acts autonomously. This female hero pursues all the heroic characteristics thereby deconstructing the social construction of heroism and shattering the gendered preconceptions associated with it. The female heroes of Kashmiri folktales not only demonstrate heroic actions but also perseverance. Their heroic actions are not necessarily physical, as they rely on intellect to deal with tough situations, overcome their enemies, and save themselves and others selflessly. These female heroes are brave and charismatic figures who have the motivation of performing heroic actions and portraying endurance. The world, and particularly the third world, has had a difficult time recognizing autonomous and aspirational women who are capable of processing information, acting courageously, having the urge to help others selflessly, and making their own independent judgments. The sociology of heroism has clung to the idea of women as decision acceptors and chore doers while men as the performers of heroic actions. Learning about female heroes, like in these folktales, can inspire readers, especially female readers, with reverence and awe – and motivate them to be heroic themselves. Given the dominant role of male heroes in many tales, it is quite a remarkable feat to find stories that portray women as heroes. This research paper aims to extend the boundaries for folktales from across the world to be re-read and analysed from a female hero's perspective, resulting in a step forward in folktale scholarship.

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