

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LITERATURE, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE



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CLIMATE CHANGE**

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Preface

In recent decades, the study of literature has expanded beyond the aesthetic and linguistic domains to engage deeply with ecological consciousness, environmental ethics, and representations of the natural world. Climate change, as one of the most pressing concerns of our times, demands not only scientific investigation but also cultural, philosophical, and literary reflection. Literature, as a mirror of human experiences and values, offers profound insights into how societies perceive, interpret, and respond to ecological crises. Thus, the interdisciplinary engagement between literature, environment, and climate change has become both relevant and necessary.

The chapters included in this volume reflect a wide spectrum of critical approaches, ranging from eco-criticism, cultural studies, and postcolonial readings, to explorations of indigenous knowledge, sustainability, and climate narratives. Together, these contributions demonstrate how literary and cultural studies can inform and enrich our collective understanding of ecological challenges, while also inspiring new pathways of thought and action. By situating environmental themes within cultural narratives, such studies highlight literature's capacity to foster empathy, deepen awareness, and inspire responsible action toward the natural world.

We wish to thank our contributors, not only for waiting patiently throughout the process but also for making this book possible. We also extend my heartfelt gratitude to Prime International Publication for their unwavering support and commitment in bringing this work to fruition. We hope that this book serves as a valuable resource for students, teachers, and researchers, and that it inspires continued dialogue and interdisciplinary exploration on literature, environment, and climate change.

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CHAPTER-18

ECOFEMINISM AND GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN AMBAI'S SHORT STORY, THE FOREST

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Abstract

Ambai in her Short Story *The Forest* explores the Psychological disturbances and anguish of the protagonist, Chenthiru due to the negligence she faces in the hands of her husband and family. She realizes that not only her kith and kin but the entire society causes such a dismay and vexation which leads her to decide to take refuge in the forest. After much altercation she goes to the forest where she envisions her life in comparison to that of mythological character Sita from Ramayana. She envisages her own life as a woman with grit and determination amidst the patriarchal impositions on a woman as a daughter, wife and mother. Ambai effortlessly portrays this character of Chenthiru as a strong Puissant woman who intends to rewrite Ramayana as Sita Ayanam ie story of Sita.

Keywords: Feminist, Gender, Nature, Forest, Mythology, Patriarchy.

Introduction

Ambai makes Chenthiru as a voice of women who defy oppression under anybody's hand irrespective of Father, husband, son or societal pressures. Chenthiru as a child is intelligent in seeking knowledge from her parents and people around her. They wonder how a girl child is so inquisitive to know everything. Her quest for knowledge is sometimes ridiculed. Her love for trees and greenery is vividly illustrated by Amboina's a little girl when she is found seated beneath a tree, her father teases her that the tree is her mother and that he has found her a baby there

some years back. Her mother also sneers at her seeing her sob. She feels maybe this could be the cause for her affinity towards trees and woods: Like hermits and saints her thoughts drive her often to seek solace in nature.

There is always a yearning to explore the dense secrets of the forest. Her actual intention is to self-introspection discover who she is. How else can she prove her mettle? She has been the pillar of support to her husband in his business. She has helped him in taking important decisions rendering valuable ideas that has given continuous successes. But today she is totally neglected. Neither her husband Thirumalai nor her son karmegam pay heed to her. She feels annoyed and dejected when ignored. Her enthusiasm in business and wise decisions are not considered now. The reason is she being a woman cannot be given the partnership. She is educated, clever and capable of fore running the business. Once they have reached the pinnacle, they no more need her. Chenthiru decides to forsake them and spend some time in the forest. She writes to the forest department and receives an official letter permitting her stay in the forest guest house. Her husband laughs at her decision and tells her that women cannot stay in a forest. That has not been the practice. Forest is a place of perils and lurking dangers. So a woman cannot go alone to the woods without a man accompanying her.

In Ramayana, Sita's safety was vouchsafed only by Rama's presence. But Chenthiru refuses to lend her ears to them. She is steadfast in thought and action. Her husband sends his brother to drop her in the car. But she gets down after a while and takes a bus to the forest region. There she is given a warm welcome by a forest guard and taken to the guest house where she stays. Like Wordsworth who seeks wisdom in nature her mind and soul longs to take refuge in the dense and depth of the forest to unravel the mystery of life. She is satisfied with the arrangements there in the room allotted to her. It has table near the window through which she anxiously tries to get a glimpse of the forest. After having the food served, she feels refreshed and pens down her to do things there. Then after a nap she goes out for a walk where she converses with the tribal women there. She is amazed at them both for their knowledge of their world and their ignorance of the world outside. She reminisces

her brother-in-law has brought her like Lakshman bringing Sita to the forest. Chenthiru compares herself to Sita and envisages within herself if Sita has showed defiance to Rama by asking Lakshman to beware of her brother who never loved anyone. She has been put to ordeal so many times, once she has to jump into fire to prove her chastity. Another time for the sake of his subject's acknowledgements of her purity. She asks Lakshman how long she can endure such humiliation. She cannot resist it any more. Lakshman tells Sita that his brother has commanded him to abandon her in Atavi, the forest. She has to live in the ashram of Valmiki in the forest. She tells him that forest life is not new to her.

She has sacrificed all comforts of nobility for Rama and accompanied him to the forest. But he was not grateful to her for her devotion towards him. He has only respected her love and purity. Here, Ambai revolutionizes the character of Sita through Chenthiru. She only portrays her as a replica of Chenthiru. In the modern society, Sita would have refuted the patriarchal dogmas of our society. Ambai compares and juxtaposes the modern Chenthiru with the fictional Sita. This Sita of Ambai is not the submissive and docile queen of Rama but an alter ego of Chenthiru in her mind. She envisions this Sita questioning and chiding Valmiki for glorifying only Rama and downsizing the virtues of other characters. He has been loyal to his king as a subject but not as an author to his literary creation. So she firmly tells him that she is going to rewrite her life and character. It is not Rama ayanam but her story is her Ayanam. These stern words appear fiery to the eyes of the sage.

Sita feels relieved from bondage and oppression of chauvinism that has been suffocating her. Now she is independent and free to roam around the forest like a free girl hopping around in fun and frolic mindset. Chenthiru is hopeful of making Sita a rebellion. How King Janaka found Sita as a boon given to him by Mother Earth, Chenthiru's father gets her from the bottom of a tree where his wife's rebirth happens that stormy night when when car breaks down near the tree. That is the reason why her parents call her the tree's child. Chenthiru considers that tree as her soulmate and shares her likes and dislikes, confides everything to the tree. She tells the tree was responding to every word she uttered. This bonding evolved

gradually as a love for nature. Whenever her mind is perturbed, the green atmosphere has a healing effect on her. She spends more time in her garden and estates of her father where he was working when she was a child. She relishes the simple food of the forest cooked of tubers, greens and herbs. Chenthiru compares herself to Sita in facing disappointment trusting the ideologies of the world. She being a woman is not feeble or weak but able to draw energy from the trees and the tranquility of the forest that make her strong. Chenthiru enters the world of fantasy where Sita meets Ravana who is kind to her. He is polite in words and behaviour. He narrates how he and his wife Mandodhari found a female baby in the lotus pond smiling and crying louder that she will kill Ravana.

His wife panics and places the baby in a box, then sets sail the floating box in a river. He now calls Sita as his daughter fondly patting her hands. After Rama forgives him in the battlefield he renounces everything, his kingdom and temporal pleasures and seeks refuge in the forest. His soul is Happy here without anxieties and pangs of failure. Sita then requests him to teach her to play the veena with which he creates a divine music. Chenthiru has learn to play violin and now is delighted to see her Sita play the veena. Ambai, thus interweaves the real lives of men and women of today's world like Chenthiru with the mythological characters of Sita and Ravana. The forest has a panacea to all their melancholy. It turns an elixir helping both Chenthiru and Sita reinvent their potential.

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