



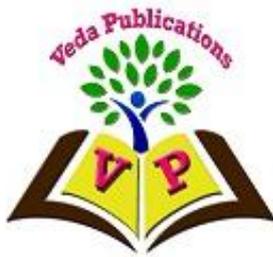
SIGNIFICANCE OF FOREST IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT



Literature records the socio cultural political environment of the contemporary period and forests play a very significant role accentuating the fact that humans are the products of nature. Nature is omnipotent. Literature across the globe reflects the nature's major role in human life. Human's sentiment towards nature is universal. Forests are the treasure trove of natural resources. Writers' love and respect for nature is revealed through the literary works they produce highlighting the fact that human life is barren without nature. The scholars could note the fact that both in English and Indian literature the role of forests are notable. The significance of forest is lucidly revealed in major genres of literature like Plays, novels, poems and there always lies a tacit relation between the writers and the forests. Select works are pecked from literature as source material to demonstrate the importance of forest in Children Literature. Children are the pillars of future and good values should be imbued to make them better humans and understanding and respecting nature and natural resources is one of the ethics the children have to learn. The paper pegs select stories from children literature to illuminate the significant role of forest.

Keywords: *Forests, Children, Literature, Nature.*

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of forest is not only pertained to trees and plants but also to other species like birds, animals and reptiles. Literature is one of the major sources that enhance the significance of forest in human life and society. Different genres of literature lucidly reveal the trajectories of forest resources. From children literature to texts allied to philosophical concepts, the symbol of forest is expertly used as a tool for powerful expressions. Forests transcend time, culture and society. The passive presence of nature and forest at the back drop of plot, construction and motif of a literary work can always be felt. Forests are the metonymy of unadulterated environment complementing contradictory elements of freedom and restrictions. The concept of freedom is woven with restrictions as freedom could be enjoyed only when an environment is protected and saved and thereby establishing eco balance for a healthy society. The entire universe and the life therein is the configuration of anti thesis. Day and night, good and evil, superior and subordinate and life in city and forest are the major basic structures for the development of humans. City life in literature is often portrayed in the canvas of busy environment promoting materialism and rationalism accentuating the fact that literature mirrors the society and the forests are always depicted as pure, unadulterated beauty, a gift of God which should be preserved and relished by humans. Reference to forest is replete in Indian literature and also in Western literature.

Forest is not just the place of trees and plants; it is a connotative term signifying contradictory elements. It is considered to be the place of serenity, peace and purity on one hand but on the other hand it is the place that endangers human life, not a congenial place for the humans to live. In fact people are discouraged to infringe the space of the animals and other species live in the forest. Children's literature is designed to be more adventurous, rustic entangled with the tint of danger to kindle interest and desire to read. Every writer has a tacit understanding with the target readers. Pastoral environment, venturing into forbidden territories, study of birds and animals are some of the areas that attract the attention of children.

Children's literature on forests offers dangerous beauty and the children's attention is always propelled towards beauty where danger lurks behind.

FOREST IN CHILDREN LITERATURE

Fairy tales are widely read not only by children but also by adults. It is difficult to trace the origin of fairy tales but some of the tales have been narrated orally by older generation of a village basically created for adults but later adapted to entertain children. The tales for children aim to teach and delight. Literature is one of the major sources that have a strong impact on society and the children's literature is created to imbibe moral and ethical values. But mere didacticism in children's literature will elicit only faint response from children. Hence Children's literature blends didacticism and romanticism to educate and entertain. The concept of Forest is presented to illumine the unadulterated environment permeated with natural beauty; nevertheless always danger lurks behind the beauty and it is the dangerous beauty that attracts humans. It is a known fact that humans have inkling for exploring dangerous territories for adventure and forests are one of the major fields that fascinate humans and children are no exceptions. Forests and adventures are the milieu of children's literature.

HANSEL AND GRETEL

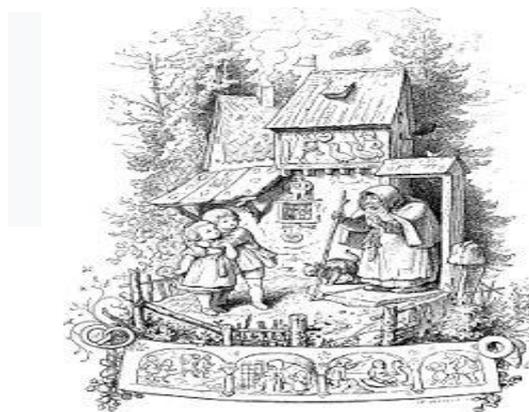


Illustration by [Ludwig Richter](#), 1842

Hansel and Gretel is a well known fairy tale of German origin published in 1812. The story revolves around the two children Hansel and Gretel, a young brother and sister who live with their father,



a wood cutter and step mother. When famine hits the village, the step mother instigates their father to abandon the children in the forest. The woodcutter reluctantly agrees to his abusive wife and leaves the children in the forest. The placing of the story shifts to the forest where a cruel witch lives anxiously waiting for the prey. Unfortunately the children fall prey to the witch. The witch engages Hansel and feeds him to make him fat and enslaves Gretel to engage in house hold chores. When the witch decides to eat first Hansel and then Gretel, she starts preparing to cook; Gretel pushes the witch into the fire thereby saving their lives by her timely gesture. The children return home by taking away the jewels and precious stones accrued by the witch. Their father welcomes and informs them about the death of their step mother. They all lived happily thereafter. The main events of the story are placed in forest to arouse the curiosity of the young readers to read more because forests are always a forbidden territory for the children but forbidden fruit is always sweet and children are no exceptions.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Beauty and the Beast is a fairy tale that is commonly told by older generation is written by a French novelist Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve and published in 1740 in *The Young American and Marine Tales*. Considering the length of the Villeneuve's version, Jeane-Marie Leprince de Beaumont abridged it and published in 1756 in the *Children's Collection*. Since then variants of the tale emerged across Europe. It is one of the most popularly told fairy tales even today. According to the researchers at Universities in Durham and Lisbon, the story might be originated 4000 years ago.

The epic centre of the story communicates a moral message to the readers that goodness always wins in the end. The story deals with a wealthy merchant who is a widower and lives with his six children three daughters and three sons. Among his three beauty daughters, the youngest named Beauty is gifted with unadulterated beauty, complementing her name and kind heart. The other two daughters are wicked and selfish. After some years, the merchant faces loss in his business and they are forced to live in a small farm house.

One day the merchant sets forth on a business trip to the city and asks his children what gifts they want. The kind and beautiful beauty asks for a rose. The business trip of the merchant is a failure and he returns home penniless. One the way, he loses his way in a forest during a storm. He seeks shelter in dazzling palace. He is offered food and drink by a hidden figure. The next morning when he is about to leave, he sees a beautiful rose in the garden. Remembering his daughter Beauty, he plucks the rose for her. He confronts a hideous Beast, the owner of the palace. The Beast offers beautiful gifts along with the rose to the merchant on one condition that he should bring one of his beautiful daughters to the beast. The merchant returns and narrates the episode to his children. The kind beauty accepts to return to the Beast. The Beast treats Beauty like a princess bequeaths her with all precious gems and jewels and lives in a lap of luxury. Beauty is awed by the love and affection that the Beast bestows on her. But she goes home with the permission of the beast to see her family members but when she finds the beast lying in the forest taking his last breath, she rushes there and her pure tears acquits him from the curse and transforms to a handsome prince.

The main events in the story take place in the forest. The forest is the place where the cursed Beast awaits for true love so that he could be absolved from the curse. The true love of beauty liberated him from the curse. The forest is depicted as an ideal place where goodness is hidden. One has to explore and unearth the hidden treasures of true love and beauty. Keats observes, *Beauty is truth and truth is beauty*. Nature is omnipotent and trees live through generations. Forests are replete with natural vegetation and the literary scholars never miss quote the richness of forests.

The forests depicted in these stories are passive but plays a vital role in the story. It implicitly communicates the philosophy of life that blends joys and sorrows. The stories also emphasize on poetic justice punishing the evil and protecting the good. These fairly tales are created to teach the significance of forest to the children and also to dissuade them from venturing into the forest alone. The dangers that linger in the forest are the milieu of the fairy tales. Nevertheless these fairy tales also edifies the



children to love and respect the natural resources of forests.

The children literature by and large belong to floating literature as the stories are told to children orally by the older generations in the village which later found its way in printing. These stories are adapted with minor changes during the course of time complementing the psyche of the story teller reflecting socio cultural environment of the contemporary period. Late nineteenth century and early twentieth century can be acknowledged as *Golden Age of Children's Literature* as many books are published during this period.

The Jungle Book published in 1894 is a collection of stories written by Rudyard Kipling. The stories are in fables dealing with relationship between animals and Mowgli, a boy who is raised by the wolves in the jungle. This small boy has been called the *man-cub* accentuating the environment in which the boy lives. Linguistic relativism in one of the major tools the writers for effective expression of ideas. To illumine the boy's life in jungle, he has been called as man-cub instead of the simple term *the small boy*. Animals in this story are used in anthropomorphic manner giving moral lessons. Every animal has been named as humans, Shere Khan, the tiger, Baloo, the bear, Bandar log, the monkeys, kaa, the crow, Rikki- Tikki, the mangoose and Tooman, the elephants. This is one of the most popular books of children's literature of 19th Century.

Rudyard Kipling was born in India, and hence the readers could note that the animals in the stories bear Indian names implicitly revealing the author's strong association with India. This story also unveils the different facet of forest dealing with the life of animals. The concept of forest not only involves trees and plants but also animals living there. Forest plays a significant role in children's literature as the thinkers and scholars of the society feel the need to imbue the quality to protect and preserve among children. A report by Tim Gill for the London Sustainable Development Commission sets out to find the benefits the children acquire in the company of nature. The report thus reads, *Natural environments are said to have restorative qualities that help in relaxing and coping with everyday stress. They are claimed to promote adaptive processes in*

child development (for instance motor fitness, physical competence and self-confidence). They are said to support learning and education. The report attempts to find out the influence of nature in the development of children. Forest schools and Garden schools create a congenial environment of children to learn to cope up with ups and downs and systematic training. Nature is divine. Humans learn discipline from nature. Hence children literature deals more with natural elements establishing a mind set for the children to respect and admire nature.

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