



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR

Class: IX	QUESTION BANK (2023-2024) TOPIC: ON KILLING A TREE	SUBJECT: ENGLISH
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SUMMARY OF THE POEM

“On Killing a Tree” compares the process of cutting down trees to committing an act of murder. The poet presents this view in a satirical and sarcastic tone. The pain experienced by trees while being killed dominates the mood of the poem. The poem opens with the statement that “killing a tree takes a lot of time.” It can’t be done merely with a stab of a knife because the tree is strong over time, drawing its nutrients from the earth, sun, air and water. Its bark looks dull and discoloured yet new leaves are always coming out. A tree cannot be destroyed with just a few cuts or blows. The hacking and chopping is not enough to kill it. However, its injured and mutilated bark would heal over time and flourishing, green twigs will rise from its hacked base. If these small boughs are not cut, they will soon reach the original size of the tree. According to the poet, a real process that could kill a tree threatens cruelty and ruthlessness. The root of the tree is pulled from its embedded position, removing it from its protective layer. It is torn up from the ground in order to be shared with light and air. The outer coating consists of dead cells, which provides no further support for nutriment. Eventually, that core weakness of the tree is exposed due to drying out. When the cell membranes are disturbed, essential nutrients unable to get back into the roots and received by leaves evaporate completely. Without sustenance, life slowly desiccates from it and kills the plant.

Theme

“On Killing a Tree” is a satirical poem on human callousness and cruelty in cutting down trees for agriculture, urbanization and industrialization. The poem reads like a “How-to-Do” manual instructing on how to kill a tree but instead, it is a passionate plea not to chop trees down. The poem goes on to emote the sturdiness and resilience of trees that take all kinds of attacks and wounds in stride without dying. They may be wounded, scarred or maimed, but they bounce back into life after time by healing themselves. The human body may be incapable of achieving that kind of attitude.

MESSAGE

The poem conveys that trees are living beings just like any other form of life. They have strong survival instincts and can withstand any type of assault, trauma, or crisis. It is not easy to kill them, for they have a never-say-die attitude to life. Every time they are attacked, injured, or scraped, they heal themselves and regain their glory. However, if they are uprooted and left in the air and the sun; they die. We human beings must live just as trees do.

Poetic Devices

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of sounds at close intervals. It is used to lend a lyrical or musical element to the poem.

Examples:

- The bleeding bark will heal.

(Here the poet has repeated ‘ b’ and ‘l’ sounds.)

- The source, white and wet.

(In this line ‘w’ sound is repeated.)

Metaphor

The metaphor is a comparison between two unlike objects, but the word of comparison ‘like’ or ‘as’ is not used. Instead of stating that one thing is like another, the poet identifies one with the other.

Examples:

- The bleeding bark

Here the word ‘bleeding’ is a metaphor. The poet compares the sap oozing out of the bark of a hacked tree trunk to the blood of a human being or a living creature but does not use the word of comparison.

- leprous hide

Here the uneven, discoloured bark of a tree is compared to the discoloured and gnarled skin of a person suffering from leprosy. But the poet does not use ‘like’ or ‘as’.

Repetition

Repetition ‘ is using a word, phrase, or clause a number of times with the purpose of emphasis or to provide unity to the poem.

Example:

- The root is to be pulled out-

Out of the anchoring earth;

It is to be roped, tied,

And pulled out – snapped out

Or pulled out entirely,

Out from the earth-cave.

Here the poet uses ‘pulled out’ and ‘out’ again and again to emphasize the effort involved in uprooting a tree and exposing its roots. It shows that the root of the tree is deeply fixed into the earth.

Enjambment

Enjambment is a figure of speech in which one line of poetry rolls on to the next line without any pause marked by a comma or a full stop. In this poem, there is enjambment in every stanza.

Example:

- Rising out of it, feeding

Upon its crust, absorbing

Years of sunlight, air, water,

Here there is no punctuation mark at the end of the first and the second line. The first line rolls on to the second and the second is carried on to the third.

- So hack and chop

But this alone won't do it.

Here the first line moves on to the second without any comma or full stop at its end.

- Miniature boughs

Which if unchecked will expand again

To former size.

In these lines, full stop comes at the end of the third line. The first line rolls on to the second and the second rolls on to the third line.

Personification

The poet portrays the tree as a human being throughout the poem.

Example:

- Bleeding bark — the wounded bark is represented as bleeding.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem is written in free verse and the length of the lines varies. The stanzas are not of equal length.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

Q1.Can a “simple jab of the knife” kill a tree? Why not?

Ans:- Cutting a tree down with an unsophisticated knife will not kill it, and additionally, it might sap fluid from the tree. Though, the real reason a tree is alive is its roots that provide nutrients and keep it firmly seated in place.

Q2.How has the tree grown to its full size? List words suggestive of its life and activity.

Ans:- The tree has grown to its full size gradually. It has grown by slowly consuming the earth. It has risen out of the earth and has fed upon its crust. It has also absorbed light, air and water for years. Leaves have sprouted out of its discoloured bark.

Q3. In the phrase ‘consuming the earth’, who consumes the earth and how?

Ans:- It is the tree that consumes the earth by drawing its nourishment from the soil through its root. The diet required by the tree lies deep inside the earth and the root sucks and absorbs nutrients and nourishes the tree.

Q4. What is meant by ‘years of sunlight, air and water’?

Ans:- Years of sunlight, air and water means that the tree takes years together to grow up fully. In this course of time, it draws energy from sunlight, air and water.

Q5. Why has the tree’s ‘hide’ been called leprous?

Ans:- The bark on the tree has uneven textures and colors, similar to the skin of someone suffering from leprosy. Up to this point, the poet has been drawing a parallel between these two images.

Q6. What is the role of hacking and chopping in killing a tree?

Ans:- Hacking and chopping wound the body of a tree causing it great pain. They peel the bark of the tree and it appears to be bleeding when the sap oozes out. However, this pain or bleeding does not manage to kill the tree.

Q7. What is the meaning of ‘bleeding bark’? What makes it bleed?

Ans:- Bleeding bark denotes the sap oozing out of a tree when it is attacked with a knife or an axe. The word “bleeding” is metaphorically used to compare the sap to the blood from a wound of a human being and signifies pain of the tree.

Q8. What will rise from ‘close to the ground’? Why?

Ans:- Curled green twigs and miniature boughs will rise from the stump of the tree that is close to the ground. They will rise because the tree rejuvenates and revives itself as long as its root is intact.

Q9. What will happen if the miniature boughs are left ‘unchecked’?

Ans:- ‘Unchecked’ here means left free to grow without any harm or danger. If left ‘unchecked’, the new, green, delicate branches from the stump of a tree will expand and regain their original size.

Q 10. “No, The root is to be pulled out.” Why has the poet started this stanza with “No”? Or The poet says “No” at the beginning of the third stanza. What does he mean by this?

Ans:- Cutting and hacking a tree from the outside usually causes only pain, but that is not enough to kill it. The poet emphasizes this point by saying that ‘No’ is a word that requires pain for it to take effect.

Q 11. What is the meaning of “anchoring earth” and “earth cave”?

Ans:- “Anchoring earth” means the earth which gives a firm grip to the tree and keeps it from falling. Just as a ship anchored in the sea stays in its place securely and steadily, similarly the tree stands secure and stable with the support of the earth. “Earth cave” refers to the depth under the earth where the root of a tree remains sheltered safely for years. It is firmly attached to this point and a cave-like hollow is created when the root is pulled out.

Q12. How is the root of the tree to be pulled out? What is the result of this pulling?

Ans:- The base of the tree is tied to a rope and pulled out with a great force, which, in turn, results in a hollowing of the earth, exposing it to weather changes. This eventually causes the death of the tree.

Q13. What does the poet mean by ‘The strength of the tree exposed’?

Ans:- The expression ‘the strength of the tree exposed’ means the root of the tree is pulled out of the earth and thrown open at the mercy of harsh weather. Root is the source of the tree’s power. Once exposed to the scorching and choking sun and air, it withers away and the tree finally dies.

Q14. What is ‘the most sensitive’ part of the tree? What is it sensitive to and why?

Ans:- The root of the tree is its most sensitive part. It is sensitive to the heat and vagaries of weather on the open surface of the earth. It is so because it remains hidden safely under the earth.

Q15. How is the exposed root affected by the sun and air?

Ans:- As the air and sun start to dry out the exposed root of the tree, it becomes discoloured, dried up and hard. With its moisture packed away, it gets twisted and gnarled as none of its life remains and the process of killing it is complete.

Q16. What finally kills the tree?

Ans:- The withering of the pulled out root finally kills the tree. The root of a tree is the source of its strength. Once it is pulled out, it can no longer nurture the tree. The root is sensitive to sunlight and air. Once exposed, it gets dehydrated, brown and twisted. Ultimately it dries up and the tree yields to death.

Q17. What message is conveyed by this poem?

Ans:- The poem conveys the message that human beings have destructive temperament towards nature, but Mother nature has regenerative powers and cannot be destroyed easily. It has the ability to resurrect itself. Also, the tree teaches us that mere physical assaults cannot ruin us. As long as our root, our soul, is intact we can rise again.

Q18. Can a “simple jab of the knife” kill a tree? Why not?

Ans. No, a simple jab of the knife does not have the ability to kill the tree. It has to go through various processes. If its root is not removed from the earth, it will sprout again.

Q19. What finally kills the tree?

Ans. Digging up a tree and destroying it using the sun and air will kill the tree, rendering it brown, dry, and dead. Eventually, the tree dies.

Q20. How has the tree grown to its full size? List the words suggestive of its life and activity.

Ans. The tree has grown to its full size by consuming the earth, feeding upon its crust, absorbing years of light, air and water. Consuming, rising, feeding and absorbing are the words suggestive of its life and activity.

Q21. What are the two important stages for killing a tree?

Ans. There are two stages of killing a tree. The first is to remove the entire tree, exposing its roots to the sun and air, and the second is to scorch or burn off the root system before it even has a chance to heal. When the roots have turned brown, die, and become hard and withered, then your tree dies.

Q22. Write the meanings of 'anchoring earth' and 'earth cave'.

Ans. 'Anchoring earth' implies that the trees are held secure with the help of the roots in the earth. So long as the roots are firmly held by the earth, the tree is safe and cannot be killed by a simple jab of a knife.

Q23. How will the bleeding bark of trees heal?

Ans. When the blow of knives or axes does not kill trees, its bleeding bark will gradually heal its pain all the time and the green leaves will grow from the boughs. Actually, the strength of trees lies in its roots. When they are not uprooted, they will expand and grow into a complete tree.

Q24. How is the problem of deforestation raised in the poem?

Ans. Sadly, in our generation deforestation has become a major issue and forests are being cleared off to make doors, windows, furniture and fuel. This act has adversely affected our ecosystem. The poet seems to be an environmentalist and his urge to save trees is felt throughout the whole poem.

Q25. What is the central idea of this poem?

Ans. The central idea of this poem is that the uprooting of trees is not easy. Actually, his act is quite painful. In the same way, the human soul never dies. The poem beautifully expresses that before killing trees, we have to cause injury to them. The human soul is also difficult to be killed but external vagaries can mutually damage it. Like human souls, trees can also feel pain and suffering.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS – ON KILLING A TREE

Q1. How does a tree grow up?

Ans:- A tree takes many years to grow and develop. The seed sprouts out of the ground, and after growing and developing it has a root, which draws nutrients from the ground, sunlight, air, and water to nourish it. From its bark, the tree grows branches with leaves all over them. The tree caught the eye of a few people and they each came one day with a knife. Eventually, the bark was split but the tree continued to heal itself. The cuts made by knives healed and new branches grew in order to become its original size again. The tree would not die as long as the roots remained stable below the earth.

Q2. What relationship does the tree have with the earth?

Ans:- A tree has a deep relationship with the earth. It owes its very existence to the earth. The seed germinates in the womb of the earth and the baby plant sprouts out over the surface of the earth. The tree draws nutrients for it from the soil. It is the earth that gives it support to stand erect and protects it from falling. Giving a firm grip to its roots, the earth gives it ground to grow and assume a massive size. The earth keeps roots of the tree concealed, protecting it from exposure to the sunlight and the air which can prove to be very injurious for its existence. Thus, the earth helps a tree right from its birth to its survival. Even a chopped tree grows again out of the stump and gains the original, big size because the earth supports it.

Q3. What does the root of the tree look like when it is pulled out of the earth-cave? What happens to it when it is left exposed?

Ans:-The root of the tree is moist anti-white when it is pulled out of its hiding, the earth-cave. It is very tender and delicate as it has remained concealed for years together, away from sunlight and air. The root cannot tolerate the light and heat of the sun and the open air. When it is left exposed, it feels scorched and choked in the sun and the air. Initially, it starts changing its colour and becomes somewhat brown. Then it starts losing its tenderness. It becomes hard and its suppleness declines. Gradually, it withers away and becomes gnarled and twisted. Ultimately, life is completely drained out of it and it leads to the death of the whole tree. This is how exposure robs first the root and then the entire tree of its life.

Q4. What would happen if the tree is hacked and chopped?

Ans:- If the tree is hacked and chopped by a chainsaw and left in this state without damaging the root system, it will continue to provide nutrients to the stump of the tree. This stump will then be covered with new shoots that grow out of its surface. If these twigs are not pruned, hacked, or chopped down, the tree will keep on growing for years and eventually be as tall as it was when it was pruned. The tree's bark will heal and the tree will grow back to the same size. The tree has conquered the threat and hacking or chopping has failed to kill it. The safe root will bring back the life of the tree, which had once been lost.

RTC 1.

It takes much time to kill a tree,

Not a simple jab of the knife

Will do it. it has grown

Slowly consuming the earth,

Rising out of it, feeding

Upon its crust, absorbing

Years of sunlight, air, water,

And out of its leprous hide

Questions :

- (a) Name the poem and the poet.
- (b) Can we kill a tree just with a simple jab of the knife?
- (c) How does a tree grow up?
- (d) What does it absorb for years?
- (e) What does a tree symbolize in this poem?

Answers :

- (a) The name of the poem is 'On killing A Tree' and the name of the poet is 'Gieve Patel'.
- (b) No, we can't kill a tree just with a simple jab of the knife.
- (c) A tree grows up consuming the earth.
- (d) It absorbs sunlight, air and water.
- (e) It symbolizes a deep-rooted evil.

RTC 2.

So hack and chop

But this alone won't do it.

Not so much pain will do it.

The bleeding bark will heal

And front close to the ground

Will rise curled green twigs,

Miniature boughs

Which if unchecked will expand again

To former size.

Questions :

- (a) How should we kill a tree?
- (b) That alone can't kill a tree?
- (c) What will happen to Its bleeding skin?
- (d) What rises from close to the ground?
- (e) What is the meaning of 'miniature boughs'?

Answers :

- (a) We should kill a tree by hacking and chopping it.
- (b) lacking and chopping alone can't kill a tree.
- (c) It's bleeding skin will heal very soon.
- (d) Small green twigs rise from close to the ground.
- (e) 'Miniature boughs' means small branches.

RTC 3.

No,

The root is to be pulled out-

Out of the anchoring earth;

It is to be roped, tied,

And pulled out-snapped out

Or pulled out entirely,

Questions :

- (a) What should we do to kill a tree entirely?
- (b) What is the main anchor of the trees?
- (c) Where does the strength of a tree lie?
- (d) What should we do to its roots?
- (e) Name the poem and the poet

Answers :

- (a) To kill a tree entirely we should pull out its root from the earth.
- (b) The earth is the main anchor of the trees.
- (c) The strength of a tree lies in its roots.
- (d) The roots should be snapped and taken out of the earth
- (e) The name of the poem is 'On Killing A Tree' and the name of the poet is 'Gieve Patel'.

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