



QUESTION BANK -THE VOICE OF THE RAIN – by Walt Whitman

Class: XI

Sub: ENGLISH

Introduction

The poem 'The Voice of the Rain' is written by Walt Whitman. It is a conversation between the poet and the rain. The rain explains its eternal journey in its birth-place, i.e. earth to the poet. The poem 'The Voice of the Rain' by Walt Whitman signifies the eternal role that the rain plays in nurturing, quenching and purifying the various elements of Earth. The rain returns the favour to its place of origin from where it rises unseen from the depths of the water and from the land. The rain itself is explaining to the reader about its origin, work and its cyclic movement. A comparison has also been drawn between rain and music as both of them make the world livelier and return to their place of origin after fulfilling their purpose.

*And who art thou? said I to the soft-falling shower,
Which, strange to tell, gave me an answer, as here translated:
I am the Poem of Earth, said the voice of the rain,*

The poem begins with the poet asking for the identity of the soft-falling rain shower. Much to the surprise of the poet, the rain replies to his question which the poet translates for his readers. The rain in its own voice tells the poet that she is the poem of this Earth. The rain is trying to say that, as music or poetry gives pleasure to human beings, the rain gives happiness to mother Earth.

*Eternal I rise impalpable out of the land and the
bottomless sea,
Upward, to heaven, whence, vaguely form'd, altogether
changed, and yet the same,*

The poet says that the rain is an eternal process, but it takes different forms at different times. It rises from the land and the deep sea in the form of intangible water vapour and goes up to the sky. There it takes an indistinct shape in the form of clouds. Although it changes in its form or shape, its core matter remains the same. Since vapour and clouds contain water they can get transformed into the other.

*I descend to lave the droughts, atomies, dust-layers of
the globe,
And all that in them without me were seeds only, latent,
unborn;*

The raindrops pour down from above to wash away droughts and dust layers enveloping Earth. It satisfies the thirst of the dry Earth and heals everything that is degrading and is lying lifeless.

The showers remove the dust particles and make Earth clean and green.
The rain also helps in the germination of seeds which were lying dormant due to a dry spell.

***“And forever, by day and night, I give back life to
my own origin,
And make pure and beautify it;
(For song, issuing from its birth-place, after fulfilment, wandering
Reck’d or unreck’d, duly with love returns.)***

The rain is involved in a continued process of giving life on Earth by providing water to dormant seeds and making the Earth more beautiful and full of greenery. Rain helps in enhancing the beauty of Earth as, in the absence of water, everything turns dull or lifeless and dust accumulates everywhere.

The last two lines are the poet’s own words and his reflections upon the answers given by the rain. The poet observes that the life of rain is similar to that of a song. A song or poem is creativity at its best. It has the power to calm, heal, rejuvenate, transform and thrill. In the same way, repeated evaporation and condensation purifies the rain. The entire environment gets drenched in the rain, dust particles settle down and there is greenery everywhere which makes the whole Earth beautiful to look at. The poet therefore draws a parallel between rain and music as both have rhythm and ability to thrill. Both of them rejuvenate and beautify life.

POETIC DEVICES

- The poem is a **free verse** without any rhyme scheme.
- **Personification:** The rain has been personified as it has been given a voice in the poem.

*I am the poem of Earth,
I descend to lave the droughts
I give back life to my own origin.*

- **Metaphor:** “*I am the Poem of the Earth*”, compare rain to a poem
- **Parallelism:** In the last two lines, the poet has drawn a parallel between the rain and the song of a poet.

For song, issuing from its birth-place,

- **Hyperbole:** ‘*Bottomless sea*’, exaggeration to give effect.
- **Imagery:** ‘Soft-falling shower’
- **Alliteration** – “*(s)aid I to the (s)oft-falling (s)hower*”,
(w)hence, (v)aguely form’d,

I. Read the extracts and answer the questions that follow:

1. *“And who art thou? Said I to the soft falling shower,
Which, strange to tell, gave me an answer, as here translated:
I am the poem of Earth, said the voice of the rain,”*

- a. Name the poem and the poet.
- b. Who does ‘I’ refer to in the first and the third line of this extract?

- c. What do you understand by the phrase ‘Strange to tell’?
- d. How has the answer been conveyed to us and what is it?

Ans.

- (a) The poem is ‘The Voice of the Rain’, and the poet is Walt Whitman.
- (b) ‘I’ refers to the poet in the first line of the poem. ‘I’ refer to the Rain in the third line of the poem.
- (c) The phrase “strange to tell” means that it is quite strange for the poet to believe and express in words that the rain replied to his question.
- (d) The poet then proceeds to translate what the Rain told him. The voice of the rain told the poet that it was ‘the Poem of Earth’.

2. *“I descend to lave the droughts, atomies, dust- layers
of the globe,
And all that in them without me were seeds only, latent,
unborn;”*

- a. With what purpose does the rain descend from the sky?
- b. How does the rain help the seeds?
- c. What is latent and unborn and why?
- d. What does the phrase ‘*lave the droughts*’ mean?

Ans.

(a) The Rain descends or falls on the surface of the earth to eliminate droughts, wash away the tiny particles and settle down the dust-layers.

(b) The Rain reinvigorates the dry lands and gives life to the seeds that, otherwise, would have remained dormant and unborn.

(c) The seeds are latent and unborn because they don’t get water essential for growing or sprouting into life.

(d) The phrase ‘*lave the droughts*’ means that the rain falls on the surface of the Earth to wash(refresh) the drought-filled land.

III. Answer the following questions in 30-40 words:

Q1. There are two voices in the poem. Who do they belong to? Which lines indicate this?

Ans. The poem begins in a conversational tone. The two voices in the poem are the voice of the poet and the voice of the rain. The lines that indicate the voice of the poet is, “And who art thou? Said I to the soft-falling shower,” and the lines that indicate the voice of the rain is, “I am the Poem of Earth, said the voice of the rain”.

Q2. What does the phrase "strange to tell" mean?

Ans. The phrase "strange to tell" means that it is quite strange (unusual/unexpected) for the poet to believe and express in words that the soft-falling rain replied to his question. At the beginning of the poem, the poet inquires the rain about its identity, to which the rain replies that it is the 'Poem of Earth'.

Q3. Why are the last two lines put within brackets?

Ans. The lines in the bracket indicate the reflections, observations and thoughts of the poet. He makes observations about the life-course of a song and draws similarities between the life-cycle of a song and rain.

Q4. What does the rain do to the things day and night?

Ans. The rain falls on the earth, and washes away the drought, it also helps the seeds to germinate and bring forth new life on the earth. Without it, all life on earth would become lifeless.

Q5. What answer did the rain give to the poet about its origin?

Ans. The rain answered that it was the poem of the earth. It rose eternally out of the land and bottomless sea into the sky. There its form changed but essence remained the same.

Q6. On what does the 'rain descend'? What does it do to the things on which it falls?

Ans. The rain descends on droughts, atoms and dust particles on the surface of the earth. It also falls on everything that is on the earth. It gives life to the things on which it falls. The things that do not get rain remain like seeds latent and unborn.

Q7. 'Behind the apparent simplicity, the poem hides a deep meaning'. What exactly does the poem convey to the reader?

Ans. The poem conveys that like a poem, the rain is also everlasting and has an unbreakable chain of life cycle. It rises from the earth, comes back to it. The song also issues from its birth place, wanders here and there, whether heeded to or not, returns with love to its own origin.

IV. Answer the following questions in 100-120 words:

Q1. There is a parallel drawn between rain and music. Which words indicate this? Explain the similarity between the two.

Ans. The lines, "I am the Poem of Earth", said by the voice of the rain, reflects a connection between rain and poet. This connection becomes more easily visible in the final two lines, "(For song, issuing from its birth-place, after fulfillment, wandering Reck'd or unreck'd, duly with love

returns)”. In these lines, the poet draws similarities between rain and music observing that the life-cycle of rain and song are alike. The song issues from the heart of the poet and travels to reach others. It wanders and, whether heard and enjoyed or not, eventually returns to its creator with all due love. Similarly, rain originates from the earth, and after fulfilling its role of spreading beauty and purity, returns to its origin. Both are perpetual in nature. Moreover, the sound of the soft-falling rain is in itself a kind of music.

Q2. How is the cyclic movement of rain brought out in the poem? Compare it with what you have learnt in science.

Ans. In the poem, the water rises from the 'land and the bottomless sea' to reach the sky. There, it transforms itself into vague formation of clouds, different in their structure than the water from which they originate. After wandering, these clouds descend to the earth in the form of rain to provide relief to the drought-ridden areas and infuse life into the unborn and latent seeds. The rain renders the earth with beauty and purity. In science, we learn the cyclical process of rain in terms like evaporation, condensation, precipitation, flowing rivers, ground water and ocean water etc., while in the poem the same process becomes interesting and unusual. The rain speaks itself to describe its course.

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