INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2026-27)
CLASS – X
QUESTION BANK - SNAKE

Summary

"Snake" by D.H. Lawrence is a narrative poem. The narrator goes to fill his pitcher at a water-trough but finds a snake drinking there, so he waits for his turn. He gives a detailed description of the snake and its movements as he watches it with fascination. However, he remembers what he has been taught: that golden snakes in Sicily are poisonous and should be killed.

After drinking its fill, the snake slowly moves back into its hole. When its back is turned, the narrator picks up a log and strikes it. He watches the snake disappear quickly into its hole. However, he soon regrets his action. He realises that he should not have behaved in this manner and is filled with guilt and shame.

The poem explores the theme of moral consciousness. Was it right to kill the snake, or was it wrong? Through this incident, the poet examines the conflict between human instincts and socially accepted beliefs. We are often taught to fear and get rid of things that are considered different or dangerous, even when they do not pose an immediate threat to us. Thus, the poem highlights the conflict between what we are taught to believe and what we instinctively feel.

Stanza-by-Stanza Explanation

Stanza 1-2: On a very hot day, the poet (in his pyjamas) goes to fetch water from a trough near a big carob tree. He finds a snake already there, drinking. He has to wait his turn — like a polite second visitor.

Stanza 3-5: The snake comes down from a crack in the wall, pours its soft yellow-brown body over the trough, and drinks quietly and calmly. The poet notices how peaceful and unhurried the snake is — like cattle drinking water.

Stanza 6: The snake looks up at the poet in a relaxed, unconcerned way, flicks its tongue, thinks for a moment, then goes back to drinking. The poet notices the snake's earthy color, connecting it to Sicily's volcanic soil (Mount Etna is nearby).

Stanza 7: Here the conflict begins. A voice — what he calls "his education" — tells him that golden snakes are venomous and dangerous, so he should kill it (unlike black snakes, believed to be harmless).

Stanza 8: Another inner voice, representing social pressure about masculinity, tells him a "real man" would grab a stick and kill the snake right now.

Stanza 9: But he admits the truth — he actually likes the snake. He's happy it came to his trough like a peaceful guest and will leave quietly afterward.

Stanza 10: He questions himself: Was not killing it cowardice? Was wanting to talk to it strange? Or was it humility — feeling honored that the snake trusted him enough to visit? He decides — yes, he felt honored.

Stanza 11: The voices insist again: real courage means killing it. But he admits he was afraid — yet even more than afraid, he felt honored that the snake came to him from the earth like a guest.

Stanza 12-13: The snake finishes drinking, looks around lazily "like a god," and slowly begins turning back toward the hole in the wall to go home.

Stanza 14: As the snake starts entering the dark hole, a strange feeling of horror and protest rises in the poet — something about the snake going back into the blackness disturbs him, now that its back is turned.

Stanza 15: Almost without thinking, the poet puts down his pitcher, picks up a log, and throws it at the trough.

Stanza 16: The log misses the snake, but the snake panics, thrashing quickly and disappearing into the hole. The poet stares at the hole, stunned by what he's just done.

Stanza 17: Right away, he feels deep regret. He calls his action "paltry," "vulgar," and "mean," and blames the same "education" (social conditioning) that pushed him to act this way.

Stanza 18: He compares himself to the sailor in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" who killed an albatross and was cursed for it — a symbol of harming something sacred or innocent. He wishes the snake would return.

Stanza 19-20: He now sees the snake as noble — like a king temporarily banished to the underworld, deserving to be crowned again. He realizes he missed a rare chance to connect with one of the great, dignified beings of nature ("lords of life"). He ends by saying he has "something to expiate" — something to make up for — his small, shameful act of pettiness.

Key Theme

The poem is really about the conflict between instinct/reverence for nature and social conditioning/fear-based reactions. Education can make people act against their true feelings — and cause deep regret when we do.

Literary Devices

Assonance: Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in the same line

The sound of /ee/ in “For he seemed to me again like a king” and the sound of /i/ in “Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?”.

Consonance: Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line

The sound of /n/ in “Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld” and the sound of /r/ in “And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.”

Enjambment: It is defined as a thought in verse that does not come to an end at a line break; rather, it continues to the next line.

For example,

"I looked round, I put down my pitcher, I picked up a clumsy log

And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter."

Imagery: Imagery is used to make readers perceive things involving their five senses.

For example, "Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld", "And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords" and "And I wished he would come back, my snake.

Rhetorical Question: Rhetorical question is a question that is not asked in order to receive an answer; it is just posed to make the point clear.

For example, in the last part of the poem the author uses it emphasizes his point such as, "Into the burning bowels of this earth?" and "Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?"

Simile: It is a device used to compare something with something else to make the meanings clear.

For example, in the second last stanza of the poem, "For he seemed to me again like a king/Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld"

Symbolism: Symbolism is using symbols to signify ideas and qualities, giving them symbolic meanings that are different from literal meanings.

Here "lords of life" and "king" stand for the supremacy of that innocent creature.

Questions and Answers:

Q.1 Why does the poet decide to stand and wait till the snake has finished drinking? What does this tell you about the poet?

Ans: The poet decided to wait till the snake finished drinking because the snake came before him and he was drinking water. This shows that poets respect nature and every creature.

Q.2 In stanza 2 and 3, the poet gives a vivid description of the snake by using suggestive expressions. What picture of the snake do you form based on this description?

Ans: The snake that came to the water trough from a fissure in the earth was yellow-brown and soft-bellied. He sipped with his straight mouth and softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body, silently.

Q.3 How does the poet describe the day and the atmosphere when he saw the snake?

Ans: The author described the day as a very warm and sunny day. For the author, it seems like a Sicilian July where Mount Etna is smoking.

Q.4 What does the poet want to convey by saying that the snake emerges from the 'burning bowels of the earth'?

Ans: From the above line, the poet conveys that, Snake emerged from a fissure in the earth. The snake came from down the earth where it is dark like hell.

Q.5 Do you think the snake was conscious of the poet's presence? How do you know?

Ans: No, the snake was not aware of the presence of the author. The snake was drinking water peacefully.

Q.6 How do we know that the snake's thirst was satiated? Pick out the expressions that convey this.

Ans: After drinking the snake, silently lifted his head satisfied and flickered his branched tongue from his lips 'as one who has drunken' and slowly proceeded to draw his slow length curving round and climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.

Q.7 The poet has a dual attitude towards the snake. Why does he experience conflicting emotions upon seeing the snake?

Ans: The poet was conflicted after seeing the snake. On one hand, he wanted to respect nature and let the snake drink water peacefully but on the other hand, he was afraid that the snake was poisonous and that he should kill him.

Q.8 The poet is filled with horror and protest when the snake prepares to retreat and bury itself in the 'horrid black', 'dreadful' hole. In the light of this statement, bring out the irony of his act of throwing a log at the snake.

Ans: After drinking water the snake was slowly moving into the hole, the author picked a log and threw it over the snake. Upon hearing the sound of the log, the snake moved faster into the black hole. The author regretted his action and felt dreadful.

Q.9 The poet seems to be full of admiration and respect for the snake. He almost regards him like a majestic god. Pick out at least four expressions from the poem that reflect these emotions.

Ans: The poet considers him 'like a god' and wishes the snake would come back so that he could crown him 'like a king'. He feels he had missed his 'chance with one of the lords' when the snake went back into its hole.

Q10. What does the poem teach us?

Ans: The poem teaches us not to blindly follow what society teaches us but to trust our own sense of right and wrong. It also reminds us to respect all living creatures and not harm them out of fear or prejudice.

11. Why was the poet confused?

Ans: The poet was confused after seeing the snake because the snake was yellowish and his social education has taught him that snakes are poisonous and we should kill them. But the poet wanted to respect the snake.

Extract-Based Questions

Extract 1:

"He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom

And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the edge of the stone trough

And rested his throat upon the stone bottom..."

Questions & Answers:

1. Where did the snake emerge from, and what was its destination?

A: The snake emerged from a dark fissure in the earth-wall and moved down toward the speaker's stone water-trough to drink.

2. How is the physical movement and appearance of the snake described in these lines?

A: The snake is described as having a "yellow-brown slackness" and being "soft-bellied" as it trailed down into the trough.

3. Why did the speaker feel like a "second-comer"?

A: The speaker felt like a second-comer because the snake was already present at the water-trough drinking when he arrived with his pitcher.

4. Identify the visual imagery used in the phrase "yellow-brown slackness".

A: The phrase uses vivid sensory imagery to capture the relaxed, slow, and unhurried physical form of the snake.

Extract 2:

"The voice of my education said to me

He must be killed,

For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous."

Questions & Answers

1. What did the "voice of education" command the speaker to do?

A: The voice of education commanded the speaker that he must take a stick and kill the snake.

2. Why was the gold snake considered dangerous in Sicily?

A: In Sicilian local tradition, golden snakes are believed to be venomous, whereas black snakes are considered harmless and innocent.

3. What internal dilemma did these voices create in the speaker?

A: The voices created a conflict between the speaker's social conditioning—which urged violence—and his natural feeling of affection and reverence for the creature.

4. What does the term "voice of my education" represent symbolically?

A: It symbolizes the rational, artificial societal training and prejudices that often corrupt natural human empathy.

Short Answer Type Questions

Q1: Why did the speaker go to the water-trough, and why did he decide to wait?

The speaker went to the water-trough carrying a pitcher to fetch water on a hot Sicilian July day. He chose to wait because the snake had arrived first, making the speaker feel like an honoured host waiting for a guest.

Q2: How did the snake behave while drinking water at the trough?

The snake drank quietly from the dripping tap, lifting its head dreamily like drinking cattle. It flickered its two-forked tongue, mused for a moment, and looked around unseeing like a god.

Q3: Why did the speaker throw a log at the snake?

As the snake was retreating back into the dark fissure, a sudden wave of irrational protest and horror overcame the speaker. Yielding to societal fear once the creature's back was turned, he threw a clumsy log at the trough.

Q4: Why does the speaker compare his action to the shooting of the albatross?

AThe speaker compares his act to the shooting of the albatross because both represent a cruel, unprovoked betrayal of a harmless creature of nature. He felt deep remorse for violating the sacred hospitality extended to his guest.

<u>Long Answer</u>

Q1: Discuss the conflict between human education and natural instinct as depicted in 'Snake'.

D. H. Lawrence highlights the deep divide between civilized human intellect and intuitive natural empathy. When the speaker encounters the golden snake on a scorching day, his innate human instinct fills him with awe and humility, viewing the creature as an honoured guest and a divine "lord of life". However, his rational social conditioning—termed the "voice of my accursed human education"—urges him to act aggressively, insisting that golden snakes in Sicily

are venomous and must be killed. Overcome by this social pressure, he hurls a clumsy log at the snake. His immediate remorse proves that civilized education often instills fear and pettiness, severing humanity's spiritual bond with nature.

Q2: "And I have something to expiate: A pettiness." Explain the speaker's moral realization at the end of the poem.

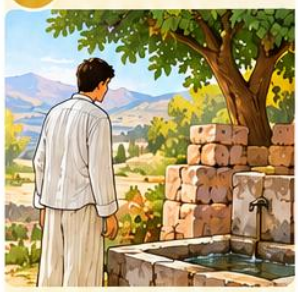
At the end of the poem, the speaker undergoes a profound moral realization after throwing a log at the departing snake. Seeing the creature convulse in "undignified haste" into the wall fissure, he instantly despises his mean and vulgar behavior. He realizes that his fear and societal conditioning caused him to betray a noble, peaceful guest that had sought hospitality at his trough. Re-evaluating the snake as "a king in exile" and "one of the lords of life," he grieves over losing a sacred encounter with nature. By acknowledging his "pettiness," he accepts the spiritual duty of expiating his sin and wishes for the creature's return.



Snake

by D. H. Lawrence

1 A hot day



On a very hot day, the speaker comes down the steps with his pitcher to drink water.

2 The snake appears



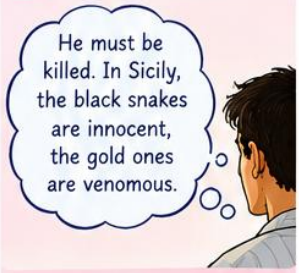
A snake is already there. It comes from a crack in the wall, lowers its head and drinks quietly from the trough.

3 He looks at me



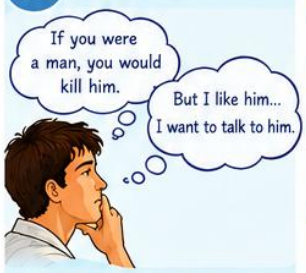
The snake lifts its head, flickers its tongue, and looks at the speaker vaguely, like a drinking animal.

4 The voice of education



The speaker's "voice of education" tells him to kill the snake, because gold-coloured snakes are venomous in Sicily.

5 Other voices



Other voices in him say to kill it. But he feels honoured. He likes the snake and is glad it came as a guest.

6 The snake leaves



The snake finishes drinking, lifts its head, flickers its tongue, looks around like a god, and slowly turns to go back into the hole in the wall.

7 The speaker panics



As the snake enters the black hole, he feels a sudden horror and protest. He is afraid, but he still feels honoured.

8 He throws a log



He puts down his pitcher, picks up a log and throws it at the trough, hoping to stop it.

9 The snake disappears



The log misses. The part of the snake left behind convulses quickly and disappears into the black hole.

10 Regret



He immediately regrets it. He feels it was a mean and vulgar act. He despises himself and the voices of his education.

11 The snake as a king



He thinks of the albatross and wishes the snake would come back. It seemed like a king, a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld, waiting to be crowned again.

12 The final thought



He realises he has lost his chance with one of the lords of life. He feels he has something to expiate — a pettiness.

Main Theme

The poem shows the conflict between human fear, ignorance and kindness. It reminds us to respect all life, even the ones we fear or do not understand.

