



## INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2023-24)

### QUESTION BANK – **THE TREES-** by Adrienne Rich

**Class: X**

**Sub: ENGLISH**

#### **Introduction**

This poem presents a conflict between men and nature. The poetess Adrienne Rich suggests here that the trees and plants used in the interior decoration in cities are as imprisoned. They need freedom. These trees want to move out to the forest where trees are decreasing day by day due to deforestation. The poetess says that everything has a deep desire for freedom. It is necessary for growth and wellbeing.

#### **Summary**

In the first stanza, the poetess says that the forest is the actual home of trees. So, all the trees are moving into the forest, which was empty for a long time. Here, trees are used as a metaphor by the poetess to show how drastically humans have destroyed the forests. They have cut down the trees to fulfill their needs and have confined these trees to the walls of their houses. But now, these trees have started their movement and are moving towards the forest. Since the forest was empty, no birds can sit on the branches of trees, no insects can hide in the trees and the sunlight can never disappear under the shadow of the trees. However, now that the trees have started moving, the empty forest will be filled by the trees by the next morning.

The second stanza explains the effort put by trees to free themselves from the boundaries of humans' houses. The poetess says that the roots of the trees work all night to separate themselves from the cracks of the veranda floor. The leaves of the tree try to put pressure on the glass so that they can break the glass ceiling. The small stems of the tree have become hard due to the continuous effort to free themselves. The long branches of the tree have shrunk because of the less space available for them to expand under the roof. Trees move slowly from home and look like newly discharged patients from the hospital. They are a little confused while moving to the clinic door as they are not able to believe that they are coming back to their actual home in the forest.

In the third stanza, the poetess says that she sits inside the home in the veranda and keeps the doors open. She writes long letters in which she hardly mentions the departure of trees to their empty forest. It's night time and the moon is shining in the sky. The poetess can smell the odour of leaves and lichen coming to her. The smell of trees reaches her in a similar way as a voice reaches a room.

In this stanza, the poetess listens to the whisper of the trees leaving the house. The trees reach the empty forest the next day and the house will become silent. Now, the poetess can hear the sound of glass breaking. As the glass breaks, the trees move in a hurry due to which they fall on each

other. The trees feel that the wind is welcoming them. The trees are so tall that they break the view of the moon into pieces like a mirror. Now, the moon looks like a crown on the head of the oak trees.

## POETIC DEVICES

1. RHYME SCHEME: No rhyme scheme. It is written in **free verse**.

2. PERSONIFICATION -

*The trees inside are moving out into the forest no sun bury its feet in shadow small twigs stiff with exertion The trees are stumbling forward Winds rush to meet them*

3. ALLITERATION - The repetition of the letter - L in "*long letters.*"

F in "*forest from.*"

S in "*sky still.*"

L in "*leaves and lichens.*"

4. SIMILE -

*like newly discharged patients* still reaches *like a voice into the rooms*  
The moon is broken *like a mirror*,

5. ENJAMBMENT - The sentence is being continued to the next line without a break – (the forest that was...trees by morning).

6. ANAPHORA - It is the repetition of a word at the start of two or more consecutive lines - (no insect hide no sun bury its feet in shadow).

7. IMAGERY –

*trees inside are moving out into the forest*  
small twigs *stiff with exertion*  
Night *is fresh*,  
*Smell* of leaves and lichen  
Head is *full of whispers*

## TEXTUAL QUESTIONS

## TEXTUAL QUESTIONS:

### Question 1:

- (i) Find, in the first stanza, three things that cannot happen in a treeless forest.
- (ii) What picture do these words create in your mind: "... sun bury its feet in shadow..."? What could the poet mean by the sun's 'feet'?

### Answer:

- (i) The three things that cannot happen in a treeless forest are listed below:
  - (a) the sitting of a bird on trees,
  - (b) the hiding of insects on the trees,
  - (c) the sun burying its feet in the shadow of the forest.
- (ii) The sun's 'feet' refers to the heat and rays of the sun that fall on the ground. Since there are no trees, there will be no shadow, the sun rays will fall on the ground directly. However, in a forest full of trees, the shadow hides the sun rays and it appears that the sun is burying its feet in the shadow of the trees in the forest.

### Question 2:

- (i) Where are the trees in the poem? What do their roots, their leaves, and their twigs do?
- (ii) What does the poet compare their branches to?

### Answer:

- (i) In the poem, the trees are confined within the limits of the poet's house. Their roots work all night to separate themselves from the cracks in the veranda floor. The leaves make attempts to move towards the glass and exert pressure to break it, while the small twigs get stiff and tight with exertion.
- (ii) The poet compares the 'long-cramped' branches shuffling under the roof to newly discharged patients from a hospital who look half-disoriented and confused after suffering long illnesses as they move towards the clinic doors. The large branches of the trees become cramped under the roof as they want to be set free so that they are able to spread themselves fully in the open air outside.

### Question 3:

- (i) How does the poet describe the moon:
  - (a) at the beginning of the third stanza, and
  - (b) at its end? What causes this change?
- (ii) What happens to the house when the trees move out of it?
- (iii) Why do you think the poet does not mention "the departure of the forest from the house" in her letters? (Could it be that we are often silent about important happenings that are so unexpected that they embarrass us? Think about this again when you answer the next set of questions.)

### Answer:

- (i) At the beginning of the third stanza, the poet mentions that the full moon is shining in the open sky in the fresh night. Towards the end of the stanza, she describes that the moon breaks into many pieces just like a cracked mirror and shines on the heads of the tallest oak trees. As the

trees move outside from her home, they cover some moonlight and it can be seen only in small portions. This justifies the fact when the poet says that the moon has broken into pieces.

(ii) When the trees move out of the house, the glasses break and the smell of leaves and lichen still reach the rooms of the house like a voice.

(iii) The poet scarcely mentions about “the departure of the forest from the house” in her letters because human beings generally don’t care for nature in the first place. Hence, she thinks that nobody would be interested to know how hard the trees are trying to set themselves free. She also mentions that if humans would have really cared for the trees, they would never think of destroying them. Therefore, we can understand that the poet could feel the whole beauty of trees moving back to the forest and she was immensely happy to realise it.

#### Question 4:

Now that you have read the poem in detail, we can begin to ask what the poem might mean. Here are two suggestions. Can you think of others?

(i) Does the poem present a conflict between man and nature? Compare it with A Tiger in the Zoo. Is the poet suggesting that plants and trees, used for ‘interior decoration’ in cities while forests are cut down, are ‘imprisoned’, and need to ‘break out’?

(ii) On the other hand, Adrienne Rich has been known to use trees as a metaphor for human beings; this is a recurrent image in her poetry. What new meanings emerge from the poem if you take its trees to be symbolic of this particular meaning?

Answer:

The poem may connote different meanings to different readers. The poet tries to explain two different things using the same metaphors in the poem.

(i) Yes, the poem presents a conflict between man and nature. Humans have always had the tendency to damage or harm nature without even realizing the usefulness and the benefits that mankind derives from it. They do mass deforestation which disturbs the environmental balance and results in destruction of natural scenic beauty. Man try to contain plants and trees within limited spaces that deny their natural freedom. Due to this reason, the branches of the trees want to spread themselves and feel the fresh air outside. Similarly, in the poem ‘A Tiger in the Zoo’, the poet shows that animals which are kept in cages are unable to enjoy their freedom as even they want to be set free and run around freely in the open space.

(ii) If trees have been used as a metaphor for human beings, then it could be said that just like trees, humans would also like to break away from the shackles of their busy schedules and restricting boundaries that life puts on them. Although men strive harder in their daily routines to earn a living, they don’t always have the privilege to enjoy its benefits. Modern life brings in a lot of physical comfort, but also has its equal share of drawbacks. Hence, even man wants to break free from all his tasks and enjoy the peaceful nature out in the open just like the trees.

#### **I. Read the following extract carefully and answer the questions that follow.**

1. The trees inside are moving out into the forest,  
the forest that was empty all these days where  
no bird could sit no insect hide  
no sun bury its feet in shadow  
the forest that was empty all these nights  
will be full of trees by morning.

- (a) What does the poet mean by empty forest? Why is it empty?
- (b) 'No sun bury its feet in the shadow', explain this line.
- (c) Which word in the stanza means "unoccupied"?
- (d) How will the empty forest be full of trees by morning?

Answer:

- (a) Empty forest means forest with no trees and it is so because humans have destroyed the forests for building cities and other uses.
- (b) Since the forests were empty, sunlight could reach the grounds directly and could ever hide under the shadows of the trees.
- (c) The word is 'Empty'.
- (d) The poet imagines that the trees are moving to the empty forest to settle there forever. This will enable the forest to be full of trees.

2. All night the roots work to disengage  
themselves from the cracks in the  
veranda floor.  
The leaves strain toward the glass small  
twigs stiff with exertion  
long-cramped boughs shuffling under the roof  
like newly discharged patients half-dazed,  
moving to the clinic doors.

- (a) Why do the roots work all night?
- (b) Why do the twigs get stiff?
- (c) Which word mean "to get free" in the stanza?
- (d) Which poetic device has been used in "like newly discharged patients" of the poem?

Answer:

- (a) The roots work all night so that they can free themselves from the walls put around them by humans.
- (b) The twigs get stiff due to the pressure they apply on the glasses.
- (c) The word is 'Disengage'.
- (d) 'Simile' has been used here using 'like' for comparison.

3. My head is full of whispers which tomorrow will be silent.  
Listen. The glass is breaking. The trees are stumbling forward into the night.  
Winds rush to meet them. The moon is broken like a mirror,  
its pieces flash now in the crown of the tallest oak.

- (a) Why would the whispers be silent tomorrow? (b) Why are the trees stumbling?  
(c) Which word in the stanza means the same as 'Quiet'?  
(d) Which poetic device has been used in the sixth line of the stanza?

Answer:

- (a) The whispers will be silent because the trees will move out  
(b) The trees are stumbling because they hurry to move outside after breaking the glass.  
(c) The word is 'Silent'.  
(d) '*broken like a mirror*' "Simile has been used for comparison

## **II. Answer the following questions in 40-50 words.**

### **1. Where are the trees at present? What do their roots, and leaves do?**

The trees are in the house. The roots try to free themselves from the cracks of the veranda floor, and the leaves make efforts to move towards the glass perhaps in search of light. The small branches become stiff as they try to pull themselves towards the light.

### **2. Why is the description of the moon different in the beginning and at the end of the third stanza?**

At the beginning of the third stanza, the poet says that one can see the whole moon shining in the open sky but in the end, the moon seems to be broken like a mirror and its pieces shine in the crown of the tallest oak tree. The change is caused by the shifting of the trees outside.

### **3. How does the poetess describe the night? How does she feel?**

It is night time. The night is fresh. In the open sky, the full moon is shining. The poetess feels the smell of leaves and lichen reaching inside the room. Her head is full of whispers. But she thinks that the next day these whispers will be silent.

### **4. Why are the trees described in the first stanza not useful for birds or insects?**

The trees described in the first stanza are either decorative plants kept inside a house, or they are shown only in a painting or picture. Therefore, they are not useful for birds or insects. Birds cannot sit on their branches. Insects cannot hide in them.

**5. Why is the poetess hopeful that the empty forest will be full of trees by the morning?** The poetess is quite optimistic. The natural barriers to contain and subdue nature created by man will be broken. The trees which have been deprived of their natural habitat will struggle to free themselves from the clutches of man.

**6. Justify the revolt of the trees and state two values which the man should possess to stop the revolt.**

**Answer:** The trees inside the house get suffocated as they grow. They try to free themselves from the cracks of the veranda floor and the leaves stretch out as if to move towards the glass. They are justified in their revolt. Men should learn the importance of trees.

**7: How does the poet describe the night? How does she feel?**

**Answer:** It is night time. The night is fresh. In the open sky, the full moon is shining. The poet feels the smell of leaves and lichen reaching inside the room. Her head is full of whispers. But she thinks that the next day these whispers will be silent.

**8: What happens to the roots and leaves of these trees at night?**

The roots of these trees are engaged into the cracks of the veranda floor. At night, these roots try to free themselves from the cracks. The leaves try to move towards the glass. Twigs become harden and the boughs try to expand under the roof.

**9: How does the poet describe the growth of the trees inside the house?**

**Answer:** These trees grow in pots and pans. So their roots feel cramped. These roots try to free themselves from the cracks of the veranda floor. The leaves need light. So they move towards the glass. The twigs are stiff and the boughs are like the newly discharged patients coming out of clinic doors.

**10: Why does the poet use the metaphor of newly discharged patients?**

A patient feels depressed in a hospital. As soon as he recovers, he is eager to leave the hospital. He rushes towards the clinic doors. In the same way, the plants in the pots feel suffocated. They are deprived of adequate light. So they stretch themselves towards the glass door, in the hope of finding the light.

### **III. Answer the following questions in 100-120 words.**

**1. The poem ‘The Trees’ present a conflict between man and nature. Describe the struggle of the trees and their victorious march to their natural habitat—the forest.**

The poem ‘The Trees’ is based on the universal and age-long theme — the conflict between man and nature. Nature has endowed innumerable blessings on man. However, the greed, arrogance and foolishness of man have constantly tested the patience of otherwise peaceful nature. When nature can’t bear any more, it revolts and causes havoc on man in the form of storms, droughts and floods. Man’s greed leads to deforestation. Forests without trees have become a curse for birds, insects and even for the sun. This disaster can’t be redeemed.

Any attempt to subdue and control nature will end in failure. Uprooting trees from their original habitat, the forests and confining them to artificial glass houses will end in failure. The trees rise against the onslaughts of men and wage a long and hard struggle to liberate themselves from the bondage of man. Ultimately, they are victorious. They return to their original home where they should be. Nature asserts itself and repulses man's attempt to exploit, subdue and tame it outside to the forest.

**2. Conflict between human and nature is always there. Nature is also rebelling against civilization and becoming destructive. Explain.**

**OR**

**A conflict between man and nature is going on, in this civilization pursuit, men are disregarding the natural growth of plants and trees. In total confinement, nature also rebels against civilization and becomes destructive. Elaborate.**

Answer: Man has been destroying nature due to personal and material pursuits. He is endlessly playing havoc with nature. He is trying to harness wind, solar energy and flora. In this pursuit man has forgotten that excessive destruction can carry us to any situation. Man is cutting trees and destroying the natural habitat. This is causing global warming with overall rise in temperature. If these practices go unchecked, we might soon be drowned due to melting of ice from polar caps. Man should wake up and save the planet earth from destructive forces of nature.

**3. The trees in the poem stretch out their branches, break remove common barriers and struggle hard even out in the open in their natural environment. Analyze the efforts one puts into breaking sway captivity and striving for freedom.**

**OR**

**Freedom is the basic theme of happiness for all creatures as well as plants. Explain this statement with reference to the struggle of the branches to come out in open in the veranda of the poet's house.**

Answer: It is true that freedom is the basic theme of happiness in this universe. Freedom is the true law of nature. This idea can be found everywhere and in all spheres, even the palace of gold is useless without freedom. We have read about so many national heroes who have sacrificed their everything for freedom and to make their country free. Freedom is the very first need for all for human beings as well as for animals.

In this poem, the poet has described the deep feelings of the trees that want to become free from human beings' prison. The description of struggle made by the branches to come out in open from the floor is too real and heart touching. The trees don't want to live in these surroundings. So they do their best to come out of the floor and window.

**4: 'Departure is painful'. So is the departure of the trees for the poet. What will happen after their departure?**

Just like the departure of someone close to us is painful, so also is the departure of a tree. When they are planted as a sapling, they look nice and enhance the beauty of our surroundings. But as they grow and spread out their branches, they look wild and require more space for their growth.



The roots create cracks in the floor and the leaves stretch out as if to move towards the glass, perhaps in need of sunlight. The soft twigs become strong and stiff. So the trees need to be removed from the house. No more do the leaves cover the sky, but the trees breathe and they are welcomed by the wind. The moon resembles a broken mirror, reflecting off the leaves. The poet reveals that she will feel lonely after the trees' departure.

**5: How does the poem 'The Trees' make a strong plea against deforestation?**

**Answer:** The poem, 'The Trees' sends home a strong message against deforestation. It highlights the importance of trees when the poet says that without trees there will be no shadow, no forest, no place for birds to sit, no place for insects to hide. As a sapling, the plant adds to the beauty of the surroundings when it spreads its branches, leaves and roots around. It gets the suit house. Thus, in the poem, the trees are welcomed by the strong winds and the moon. The poet does not want to mention the departure of the forests as she feels guilty for merely looking silently at them as they depart. This way, she subtly points out the thanklessness of man towards forests.

**6: Explain the phrase "the forest that was empty all these days". After reading the poem, for whom do you think are the forests needed? Imagine yourself like a tree in a forest.** In the poem, 'The Trees' poet Adrienne Rich subtly drives home the message about the importance of trees. Without trees, the birds would not have a place to sit, insects will have no place to hide and the sun would not bury its feet in shadow. As saplings, we enjoy the beauty of plants as they adorn the surroundings. But slowly, the tree spreads its roots, its branches and leaves, and seems to yearn to go outside where it can live and grow without any restrictions. No more does the tree look attractive indoors. The trees are however welcomed into nature by strong winds and the moon. The poet hereby emphasises that trees need to be kept alive, but should not be 'imprisoned' inside the house as they look more beautiful, and tend to thrive outdoors that is where trees belong.

**IV. EXTRACT BASED QUESTIONS**

*All night the roots work  
to disengage themselves from the cracks  
in the veranda floor.  
The leaves strain toward the glass  
small twigs stiff with exertion  
long-cramped boughs shuffling under the roof  
like newly discharged patients  
half-dazed, moving  
to the clinic doors.*

**I. Choose the option that lists the examples of exertion.**

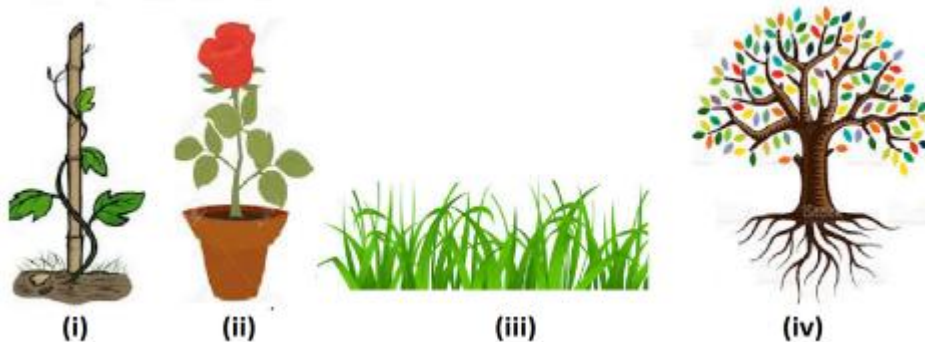
1. Neha had been up all-night keeping accounts and now she's resting.
2. Swati was running for five miles non-stop last evening.
3. Hemant is watching his favourite show and having snacks.

4. Sachin helped a senior citizen board a flight in the morning.

- a) 1, 2
- b) 2, 3
- c) 3, 4
- d) 1, 4

ANS- a) 1, 2

**II. Choose the image that represents the main object of the extract literally.**



- a) Option (i)
- b) Option (ii)
- c) Option (iii)
- d) Option (iv)

ANS- d) Option (iv)

**III. Choose the correct option that mentions the correct poetic device against the correct example.**

1	simile	long cramped boughs
	metaphor	like newly discharged patients
2	personification	small twigs stiff with exertion
	simile	like newly discharged patients
3	refrain	under the roof
	simile	leaves strain toward the glass
4	personification	like newly discharged patients
	refrain	half-dazed, moving

- a) Option (1)
- b) Option (2)
- c) Option (3)
- d) Option (4)

**ANS- b) Option (2)**

IV. The phrase, “newly discharged patients” suggests that the trees were

- a) angry or irritated because they were not receiving medical help or remedy, but now they’re cured and want to stay away from clinics.
- b) discontent or disturbed and in need of support from the clinic staff, but now their complaints have been addressed and they are content to live their lives.
- c) misunderstood or mistreated and in need of medical attention or care, but now they’re healthy and ready to step out and promote the facility.
- d) unwell or unhappy and in need of medical help or remedy, but now they’re cured and ready to venture out and live their lives.

**ANS- d) unwell or unhappy and in need of medical help or remedy, but now they’re cured and ready to venture out and live their lives.**

V. The extract talks about trees breaking out of confined spaces. This is a reference to women

- a) shifting away from their domestic confines.
- b) seeking revenge for their age-old oppressions.
- c) realizing the difference between friends and enemies.
- d) focusing on their family and home

ANS- a) shifting away from their domestic confines.

**B. Read the following extract and answer the questions/ complete the sentences that follow:**

*I sit inside, doors open to the veranda*

*writing long letters*

*in which I scarcely mention the departure  
of the forest from the house.*

*The night is fresh, the whole moon shines  
in a sky still open...*

I. The poet talks about the house as

- a) a safe sanctuary from predators.
- b) a place of confinement.
- c) a representation of family.
- d) a concrete alternative to a natural one

**ANS- b) a place of confinement**

II. The poet uses the indefinite article for ‘sky’ instead of the definite one. This is so because the poet is referring to

- a) the ceiling of the verandah as ‘a sky’ versus the door kept open, being ‘the sky’.
- b) some part of the sky still left open for women to explore, away from limitations set by patriarchal norms.
- c) the opportunities symbolized by an open sky outside can be utilized by a single woman.
- d) The portion of the sky bathed in moonlight versus the part that is still dark.

**ANS- b) some part of the sky still left open for women to explore, away from limitations set by patriarchal norms.**

III. The extract uses 'open' twice, suggesting different meanings. Pick the option that lists the correct meanings, respectively.

- a) entry point-vastness
- b) sharing a common space-great view
- c) allowing access and vision-expanse of space
- d) advantage-obstacles ahead.

**ANS- c) allowing access and vision-expanse of space**

IV. Choose the option that DOES NOT state the meaning of the underlined word. 'I scarcely mention...'

- a) tactfully
- b) hardly
- c) barely
- d) only just

**ANS- a) tactfully**

VI. Choose the option that correctly depicts the imagery in the last two lines of the extract.



(1)



(2)



(3)



(4)

- a) Option (1)
- b) Option (2)
- c) Option (3)
- d) Option (4)

**ANS- a) Option (1)**

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