



**INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH- (2022-23)**

QUESTION BANK – FATHER TO SON by Elizabeth Jennings

Class: XI

Sub: ENGLISH CORE

INTRODUCTION

The poem brings out the agony of a father who has lost all kinship with his son. The son is now grown-up. He lives in his own world. He has no feeling of any relationship with his father. The father bitterly feels the pangs of this emotional separation. He wants the same kind of bond with his son as he had when the son was a little child. Instead of coming together they are drifting apart. There is a gap of understanding and communication.

Such a situation is a common feature in most of the families. The new generation wants to live life on its own terms. The youngsters think independently. They cease to be on talking terms. Father feels helpless. He is ready to forgive the child provided the latter feels sorry. But he rarely tries to understand the young boy's likes and dislikes, demands and dreams. The conflict is never resolved because they refuse to compromise.

THEME

The theme of the poem is the generation gap which occurs when the communication link between two generations breaks due to a mutual lack of understanding, tolerance and acceptance. The poem highlights the internal conflict a father undergoes when his son becomes old enough to define his own interests, thoughts and perceptions. The brooding father complains that he cannot understand his child despite having lived together for many years in the same house. The father tries to continue a relationship based on what he knew of the son from his youngest years but of course, the son has change over time. The tone is almost pleading, attempting to find a link with his grown-up son.

SUMMARY

The father complains that he does not understand his own child. Though they have lived together for so many years under the same roof. The father tries to build up a relationship with his son from the early years, in a manner when his son began to recognize people around, to crawl and to walk in a desperate attempt. The father wonders whether he has destroyed the seed of his off-spring or sown it where the land belongs to his heir and none is his. Both father and son continue to speak like strangers now and there seem no signs of understanding in the air between the two. In traditional belief, the son is created and born to the likings and designs of his father, yet in this

case, the father cannot share what his son loves. Most of the time silence surrounds them. The father's greatest wish is for his son to be 'The Prodigal' son who will very soon return to his father's house; the home which he always knew. This is definitely the better alternative rather than to see his son move out into the world blindly on his own, by himself and fall into trouble. The father is ready to forgive him at any cost as long as he is able to reshape him up from the long-bounded sorrow to a new love. Both father and son all over the world must learn to live on the same globe and on the same land. Both father and son want to forgive each other, but neither is ready to take the first step of asking for forgiveness from the other. However, the situation can improve if they find a way of getting closer to each other.

DETAILED EXPLANATION

**I do not understand this child
Though we have lived together now
In the same house for years. I know
Nothing of him, so try to build
Up a relationship from how
He was when small.**

The father unhappily reflects on his inability to understand his own son. They have been staying in the same house for years but, due to non-communication and a lack of understanding, both son and father are not able to understand each other. The father does not know much about his son's interests, likes or dislikes. Thus, he tries to build up the same kind of relationship as he used to have when his son was a little child. The father has now perhaps realized that there is a lack of understanding between his son and himself and he wants to take measures so that their relationship improves.

**Yet I have killed. The seed I spent or sown it where
The land is his and none of mine?
We speak like strangers, there's no sign
Of understanding in the air.
This child is built to my design
Yet what he loves I cannot share.**

The father wonders whether he has destroyed the seed of his off-spring or sown it where the land belongs to his heir and none is his. The father feels that though the child is his son but perhaps he lives in a world different from him. Both father and son behave like strangers. There is lack of understanding and a communication gap which makes them behave not like father and son but more like strangers. The father says that physically the child resembles him but he does not appreciate what his son likes.

**Silence surrounds us. I would have
Him prodigal, returning to**

**His father's house, the home he knew,
Rather than see him make and move
His world. I would forgive him too,
Shaping from sorrow a new love.**

Silence surrounds their relationship because there is a complete lack of communication between them. The father's greatest wish is for his son to be 'The Prodigal' son who will very soon return to his father's house; the home which he always knew. This is definitely the better alternative rather than to see his son move out into the world blindly on his own, by himself and fall into trouble. He does not want the son to start life afresh without the father. The father is ready to forgive him at any cost as long as he is able to reshape him up from the long-bounded sorrow to a new love.

**Father and son, we both must live
On the same globe and the same land.
He speaks: I cannot understand
Myself, why anger grows from grief.
We each put out an empty hand,
Longing for something to forgive.**

Both fathers and their sons all over the world must learn to live together in spite of their misunderstandings and differences. At this point in the poem, the son speaks for the first time and admits that he too feels the sadness of the broken relationship, but he is angry due to his confusion. Both father and son want to forgive each other, but neither is ready to take the first step of asking for forgiveness from the other. However, the situation can improve if they find a way of getting closer to each other.

POETIC DEVICES

1. **SIMILE**- A simile is a figure of speech that compares two different things in an interesting way. *Eg. We speak like strangers*
2. **ALLITERATION**-the occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words. e.g. *Silence surrounds us, the home he knew*
3. **ALLUSION**- *Allusion means an indirect reference. It is a figure of speech in which a reference, typically brief, to a person, place, thing, event, or other literary work with which the reader is presumably familiar. It does not describe in detail the person or thing it refers to. Eg, reference to "prodigal" son story from the Bible.*
4. **ANTITHESIS**: In this figure of speech two contrasting or opposing ideas are put together. For example,
 - (a) The land is his and none of mine
 - (b) Shaping from sorrow a new love

I. REFERENCE TO CONTEXT: Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

**A. I do not understand this child
Though we have lived together now
In the same house for years. I know
Nothing of him, so try to build
Up a relationship from how
He was when small.**

- (a) What problem do the given lines highlight?
(I) communication gap (II) generation gap
(iii) conflict regarding opinions **(iv) both I and II**
- (b) What happened when he tried to build a relationship with him in his childhood?
(I) he was successful **(II) his efforts were in vain**
(III) he was not interested (IV) None of the above
- (c) Which literary device has been used in the last line of the above extract?
(I) metaphor (II) personification (III) simile **(IV) alliteration**
- (d) What kind of a relationship does the speaker want with the child?
(i) like other relationships between father and son (ii) just like the son has with the mother
(iii) like his friend **(iv) just like they used to have when the child was small**

**B. Yet I have killed
The seed I spent or sown it where
The land is his and none of mine?
We speak like strangers, there's no sign
Of understanding in the air.
This child is built to my design
Yet what he loves I cannot share.**

- (a) Why does the father use 'I' in the line 'The seed I spent or sown it where'?
(I) to acknowledge his sorrow
(II) to let his son know his importance
(iii) to acknowledge his role in the strange relation
(iv) to make him understand about him
- (b) What is the meaning of 'This child is built to my design Yet what he loves I cannot share'?
(I) His son looks like him and they share everything with each other
(II) His son looks like him yet they don't have anything to share
(III) His son should follow his footsteps but that is not the case
(IV) Neither does his son looks like him nor he understand him
- (c) Which literary device has been used in the fourth line of the above extract?
(I) metaphor (II) personification **(III) simile** (IV) alliteration
- (d) What is the rhyme scheme of the given lines?
(i) Abccbcb (ii) Abcabca (iii) Ababacc (iv) Aabbcca

6. What is the father's complaint against his son?

The father complains that he is losing touch with his own son. Their relationship is under strain. They live like strangers in the same house. The son wants to live life on his own terms and free himself from parental domination.

7. What does the poet mean by 'silence surrounds us'?

The father is troubled because there is no interaction between them. Though they have been living under the same roof for years but they do not understand each other and live like strangers. Their outlook and temperament are different. They have a communication gap along with the generation gap. So, both are unhappy and want to come closer but they can't help it.

8. Father and the son behave like strangers to each other. What can be the possible reason with for this?

They both act and behave like strangers due to lack of understanding with each other. A growing son has his own ambitions and aspirations. Elders must try to act like friends rather than command their children to behave according to their orders.

9. What do the words 'an empty hand' signify?

The words 'empty hand' signify that both the father and the son want to forgive each other and extend a hand of friendship to each other, but neither of them is willing to be the first one to do so. This means that although they are longing to forgive each other, their egos are coming in the way so that none of them wants to be the first one to do so.

10. Is the father responsible for the present situation? What are your views?

Yes. I think the father is responsible for the present situation. We do not get to hear the son's version about his relationship with the father here. But the father is guilty of allowing continued silence or non-communication between them and also not understanding the son's aspirations and feelings.

IV. Long Answer Type Questions

1. How far has the poet succeeded in transforming a purely personal matter to a universal experience prevalent in modern times?

The poem begins on an autobiographical note. The speaker i.e., the father recounts his own experience. He talks about the non-functional father-son relationship. He neither understands his son nor knows anything about him. In spite of living in the same house, the distance between father and son has increased. There is lack of communication between them. They either talk like strangers or silence surrounds them. The father is unable to share what the son prefers to do. The distance has reached to sorrowful limit. Even then the father is willing to shape a new love and build up a fresh relationship. His grief takes the form of anger and they fail to reach any compromise. This maladjustment or growing break-up of relationships is typical of the modern materialistic age.

2. What sort of father-son relationship has been depicted in the poem 'Father to Son'?

The poem depicts a father-son relationship which exists in name only. The two have been living together in the same house for years. Even then the father does not understand his son. He confesses that he knows nothing of his son. The bond of affection between them lie broken. They

have become formal just like strangers. Although the son resembles his father physically, yet he had his own vision, dreams and aspiration. He is not home bound and is not afraid to venture forth. The protective father is willing to forgive him for incurring loss of material wealth provided he returns home. The painful experience of lack of communication fills the father with utter helplessness, anger and grief. His efforts to restore the relationship fail as there is no response from the other side.