

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 8: ON KILLING A TREE



ON KILLING A TREE

~Summary~

-by Gieve Patel**Stanza- 1**

It takes much time to kill a tree
Upon its crust, absorbing
Not a simple jab of the knife
Years of sunlight, air, water,
Will do it. It has grown
And out of its leprous hide
Slowly consuming the earth,
Sprouting leaves.
Rising out of it, feeding

Explanation: In this stanza, the poet comments on the way a person cuts down a tree in order to serve his purpose. The poet says that it is not easy to cut down a tree because a simple jab of the knife is never enough to wipe out its existence. The reason behind its strength is its consuming the resources which it has got from the earth's crust so powerfully. Years of absorption of sunlight, air and water from which the earth has made its growth so perfect that a jab of knife won't do much. It will come out with leaves again and will grow as ever.

Stanza- 2

So hack and chop
Will rise curled green twigs,
But this alone wont do it.
Miniature boughs
Not so much pain will do it.

Which if unchecked will expand again
 The bleeding bark will heal
 To former size
 And from close to the ground

Explanation: In this stanza, the poet further states the ways of cutting a tree. As the jab of the knife was not sufficient, the poet advises us to hit the tree severely in the form of hacking and chopping. But, the poet contrasts that even that won't be enough to kill the tree. This hacking and chopping would raise a pain to the tree but not good enough to kill it. The bark will ooze leak) out with the liquid secretion, but over a period of time, it gets healed. Then, the fighting spirit of the tree will make it alive again. From close to the ground, it will start a new life again by giving rise to new leaves and small boughs. These will make the tree so glorious again that it will acquire its former size. Therefore, it is not easy to cut or kill a tree.

Stanza- 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,
 Out from the earth-cave,
 And the strength of the tree exposed
 The source, white and wet,
 The most sensitive, hidden
 For years inside the earth.

Explanation: In the previous stanzas, the poet has discussed the various ways of killing the tree, but still the tree has managed to survive so the poet came up with another idea. He says that the root needs to be pulled out of the earth where it has stocked its strength. To do this, one needs to rope the roots, then pull out the whole mass outside. When the

roots are out of the earth cave, then the actual strength of the tree i.e. the roots are exposed to the sun or environment. The source of life of the tree which is roots, is now exposed and out and its root matter is white and wet with absorption of water. It is now subjected to the outside world. This is the actual start of the death of the tree as the life-source of free, its roots, are exposed.

Stanza- 4

Then the matter
Browning, hardening,
Of scorching and choking
Twisting, withering,
In sun and air,
And then it is done.

Explanation: In the previous stanza, the poet discussed the way a tree is uprooted and exposed to the surrounding. When the tree is uprooted and left open in the surrounding, then the sun starts drying it up with the burning heat. This intense heat makes the root of the tree getting choked in the air and sunlight. Heat makes the root brown which was white earlier and hardens it by soaking all the moisture content. Then, the root starts twisting from its original shape and finally gets withered from its parts. This brings the actual end to the life of the tree and that is how it is done in the end. The poet takes us into a detailed account of how we kill a tree, what suffering does it have to face and how harsh our attitude is for the ones which is the breath of our lives.

Conclusion of On Killing a Tree

On Killing a Tree Summary discusses how to completely kill a tree in quite an ironical sense that touches the heart of readers.

NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 111)

(Thinking about the Poem)

Question 1. Can a “simple jab of the knife” kill a tree? Why not?

Answer: No, a simple jab of the knife cannot kill a tree because the tree grows with a lot of nutrients and resources. Even if one cuts it, it will sprout again.

Question 2. How has the tree grown to its full size? List the words suggestive of its life and activity.

Answer: The tree has grown to its full size by consuming the earth, feeding upon its crust, absorbing years of sunlight, air and water.

The words suggestive of its life and activity are: absorbing, feeding, rising, consuming and sprouting.

Question 3. What is the meaning of “bleeding bark”? What makes it bleed?

Answer: The “bleeding bark” indicates the idea where the tree has been cut. Just like humans bleed blood when they get wounded, trees release a liquid at the place where they are cut. So, the tree bleeds.

Question 4. The poet says “No” in the beginning of the third stanza. What does he mean by this?

Answer: The poet says “No” in the beginning of the third stanza. It emphasizes that only cutting or chopping the tree will not cease its existence.

Question 5. What is the meaning of “anchoring earth” and “earth cave”?

Answer: The “anchoring earth” means that the earth works as an anchor to protect the tree and saves it from getting uprooted.

“Earth cave” implies the depth of the mother earth where the tree spreads its roots and gets nurtured.

Question 6. What does he mean by “the strength of the tree exposed”?

Answer: He means to say that when one tries to pull out the tree along with its roots which are spread deep inside the earth, one will understand the strength of the tree.

Question 7. What finally kills the tree?

Answer: When the tree is pulled out along with its roots and separated from the mother earth, one has to subject it to scorching sun and let it wither. This will finally kill the tree.

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