**ON KILLING A TREE**

**By– Gieve Patel**

**Introduction (1)**:

 In this poem, the poet symbolizes a deep-rooted evil. He says that a tree can’t be killed out just by hacking and chopping it. To put it to a permanent end, it should be uprooted entirely and left out to wither in the sun. In the same way, the social evil can’t be put out just by criticising them. The society should root them up to die forever.

**Introduction (2)**:

 The poem “On Killing a Tree” by Gieve Patel presents the sturdiness of a fully grown tree, strengthened by nourishment from the earth, the sun and the air. The poem also depicts the survival instinct of a strong tree which refuses to die even when its trunk and branches have been chopped off. The real strength and vitality of a tree lie in its deep roots. It is only when these roots wither that the tree loses its life.

**THEME**

“On Killing a Tree” is a scathing criticism of human callousness and cruelty in chopping down trees for agriculture, urbanization and industrialization. Apparently, the poem reads like a ‘How-to-Do’ manual of killing a tree but actually, it is a passionate appeal not to cut trees. The poem also applauds the sturdiness and resilience of trees in that they take all kinds of attacks and wounds in their stride but refuse to die. They may be wounded, scarred or maimed, but they bounce back into life by healing themselves in due course of time. One wonders if human beings can ever have that kind of attitude to life.

**TITLE**

The title of the poem is simple and appropriate as it contains the major concern of the poet – merciless and callous felling of trees. It indicates appropriately that the poem is about the process of killing of the tree. The entire poem explains the view that killing a tree is not a simple, short or easy process. Trees have tremendous strength and a great instinct for survival.

**MESSAGE**

The poem conveys the message that trees are living beings just like any other form of life. They have strong survival instincts and can withstand any type of assault, trauma or crisis. It is not easy to kill them, for they have a never-say-die attitude to life. Every time they are attacked, injured or scraped, they heal themselves and regain their glory. However, if they are uprooted and left in the air and the sun, they die. We human beings must live just as trees do.

**LITERARY DEVICES**

**Alliteration**

Alliteration is the repetition of sounds at close intervals. It is used to lend a lyrical or musical element to the poem.

**Examples**:

* The bleeding bark will heal.

(Here the poet has repeated ‘ b’ and ‘I’ sounds.)

* The source, white and wet.

(In this line ‘w’ sound is repeated.)

**Metaphor**

The metaphor is a comparison between two unlike objects, but the word of comparison ‘like’ or ‘as’ is not used. Instead of stating that one thing is like another, the poet identifies one with the other.

**Repetition**

Repetition ‘is using a word, phrase, or clause a number of times with the purpose of emphasis or to provide unity to the poem.

**Example**:

* 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.

Here the poet uses ‘pulled out’ and ‘out’ again and again to emphasize the effort involved in uprooting a tree and exposing its roots. It shows that the root of the tree is deeply fixed into the earth.

**Enjambment**

Enjambment is a figure of speech in which one line of poetry rolls on to the next line without any pause marked by a comma or a full stop. In this poem, there is enjambment in every stanza.

**Example:**

* Rising out of it, feeding

Upon its crust, absorbing

Years of sunlight, air, water,

 Here there is no punctuation mark at the end of the first and the second line. The first line rolls on to the second and the second is carried on to the third.

* So hack and chop

     But this alone won’t do it.

 Here the first line moves on to the second without any comma or full stop at its end.

* Miniature boughs

     Which if unchecked will expand again

     To former size

In these lines, full stop comes at the end of the third line. The first line rolls on to the second and the second rolls on to the third line.

**RHYME SCHEME**

 The poem has been written in free verse. There is no rhyme scheme and the length of the lines varies. Even the stanzas are not of equal length.

**Poetic Devices**

1. **Imagery**

Here very strong imagery has been used and it shows the growth of the tree by taking nutrients from the earth and absorbing sunlight, air and water from nature.

**Example:**

* Slowly consuming the earth Rising out of it, feeding upon its crust.

Absorbing years of sunlight, air, water. And out of its leprous hide sprouting leaves.

1. **Personification**

The poet portrays the tree as a human being throughout the poem.

**Example:**

Bleeding bark — the wounded bark is represent

**Useful Expressions**

* **Years of sunlight, air, water –**A tree consumes lots of sunlight, air and water to become a completely grown tree.
* **… leprous hide —**Discoloured bark.
* **… anchoring earth –**With the help of roots, the earth holds the trees.
* **And the strength of the tree exposed –**The strength of a tree lies in its roots. So to kill a tree its roots are to be exposed to the sun for dryness.
* **… scorching and choking –**When the trees are uprooted, they dry up.
* **Browning, hardening, Twisting, withering –**When trees are uprooted and exposed to the sun, they become hardened, twisted and start decaying.

**Value Points**

* To kill a tree is not easy because it takes lots of time.
* For growing on the earth, a tree feeds on its crust and consumes years of sunlight, air and water.
* The simple jab of a knife or an axe cannot kill a tree. They can only cause wounds to the bark and make them bleed.
* The strength of trees actually lies in its roots.
* Of all the parts of trees, the roots are the most sensitive parts. They hold them in the earth.
* But when they are uprooted and exposed to the sun, they become brown. The exposed roots become hardened in the sun and air and wither. Gradually they start withering away. Finally, trees are killed.