

On Killing A Tree - Gieve Patel

Answers to NCERT Questions

THINKING ABOUT THE POEM

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

Ans: It takes a long time to kill a tree that has been nurtured and protected for so many years by mother earth. It grows big and strong therefore, it is not easy to kill it by making a simple jab on it with a knife.

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

Ans: It has grown to its full size by ‘slowly consuming the earth’, ‘feeding on the earth’s crust’, and ‘absorbing years of sunlight, air, water’. Its ‘bleeding bark’, the ‘curled green twigs’ will rise, and the miniature boughs will ‘expand’.

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

Ans: The bleeding bark refers to the fluid that oozes out of the part of the tree that has been chopped. It bleeds because of the sorrow, and pain it encounters as trees also have life.

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

Ans: The poet begins the third stanza with ‘No’ because he has ended the previous stanza with a warning that if left unchecked, the tree will grow back. He wants to emphasise to the cruel human beings that under no circumstances should he let this happen.

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

Ans: The expression ‘anchoring earth’ refers to the tight grip with which the earth is holding the tree together in the ‘earth cave’ that is hollow from which the tree’s roots are secured within her.

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

Ans: The expression ‘anchoring earth’ refers to the tight grip with which the earth is holding the tree together in the ‘earth cave’ that is hollow from which the tree’s roots are secured within her.

7. What finally kills the tree?

Ans: Once the root is hauled out of the earth, it is left to decay and dry in the scorching heat of the sun. It chokes in the blazing heat, and withers away never to be revived again.

Additional Questions

Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow: (4 Marks each)

1. “Slowly consuming the earth

Rising out of it

- (a)** Name the poem and the poet.
- (b)** What is the poem about?
- (c)** Explain ‘consuming the earth’.
- (d)** What is ‘it’?

Ans: (a) The name of the poem is ‘On Killing a Tree’, and the poet is ‘Gieve Patel’.

(b) The poem is about the destruction of a tree.

(c) ‘Consuming the earth’ means that the tree has grown by securing food and nourishment from the earth.

(d) ‘It’ refers to the interiors of the earth.

2. “Miniature boughs

Which if unchecked will expand again

To former size

- (a)** What is a ‘bough’?
- (b)** What does the poet mean by ‘unchecked’?
- (c)** What will expand again?
- (d)** What is the poet telling man?

Ans: (a) ‘Bough’ refers to the branches of a tree.

(b) The poet is telling man not to ignore the small twigs that grow out of the stub of the chopped tree.

(c) The unchecked twigs will grow and expand into its original size.

(d) The poet is telling the inconsiderate human being not to do an incomplete job. He is warning them of the possibility of the tree growing back, if the sprouting shoots are not destroyed completely.

3. No,

The root is to be pulled out—

out of the anchoring earth;

(a) Who is saying these words?

(b) Why does the poet say 'No'?

(c) From where has the root to be pulled out?

(d) What is the earth 'anchoring'?

Ans: (a) These are the words of warning said by the poet.

(b) The poet says 'No' to emphasise the need for controlling the regrowth of the tree.

(c) The root has to be pulled out from under the earth.

(d) The earth is anchoring the root of the tree.

Short Answer Questions (30–40 words: 2 Marks each)

1. Is it easier to chop off a tree or grow a new one?

Ans: The chopping, uprooting and killing of a tree may perhaps take a month or two. Just as it takes only a second to kill a man and bury him. However, to reach the chopped tree to its original size and glory would take many, many years.

2. How will the 'bleeding bark' heal?

Ans: Despite the pain and injury the woodcutter has inflicted on the tree, it will bleed for a while, and heal in the normal course. It is protected by the mother earth, who will ensure that healing takes place.

3. How does a tree stop growing completely?

Ans: The poet says that if the root is left underground, in all probability, fresh shoots will sprout and gradually, the tree will grow back to its original size. If a regrowth has to be curtailed, it has to be uprooted and destroyed completely.

4. Why has he called the root sensitive?

Ans: The poet has called the root sensitive because it is the life guard of the tree. It is kept safely under the ground, so that life is ensured. Just as a baby bird is protected by a mother under her wings, and a human being protects the child from all dangers, the

mother earth also protects the strength of the tree, the nerve centre of the tree, her child, the root within the safety of her bosom (close to her).

5. Contrast 'bleeding bark' with 'green twigs'. What is the poet trying to explain?

Ans: The bleeding bark and the red colour of blood refers to the stopping of growth or starting of the end i.e., death. Contrarily, the green twigs speak about fresh growth and the beginning of a new life. He has contrasted the harbinger of death, with that of life.

(Harbinger – indicator, or announcer. The cuckoo is the harbinger of the monsoons)

Long Answer Questions (100–150 words: 8 Marks each)

1. What has the poet tried to express in the poem, "On Killing a Tree"?

Ans: The poet Gieve Patel has presented a very beautiful yet ironical poem, 'On Killing a Tree'. He starts the poem with an ironical statement—It takes much time and strength to kill a tree. Then he explains the process of a tree's growth—it grows slowly and rises out of the earth by absorbing years of sunlight, air and water. So, it is not easy to kill a tree with a single stroke of a knife.

One may cut off the trunk of a tree and all its branches, but the root continues to keep it alive. The tree has deep roots which draws its sap from the earth. It gives rise to tiny twigs and miniature boughs. The poet very skillfully describes the process of killing a tree. If total demolition is not done, green twigs are sure to emerge from the bleeding bark. The miniature boughs (branches) will grow from close to the ground and grow back to its normal size. The source of the tree is its roots which is white and wet. The secret of its strength is that it is hidden inside the earth for years together. It is fixed firmly in the earth. Thus, to kill a tree it has to be uprooted, scorched and choked in the sun. After uprooting, the roots are to be exposed to the sunlight till they dry and become brown. Then it stops breathing. It becomes hardened, twisted and browned.

2. Write an autobiography of a tree.

Ans: It was over a hundred years ago that a little boy had planted me in the soil. I was a little seed. My mother is the earth and the atmosphere is my father. After a few weeks of being in the ground, I slowly developed tiny roots, and then one single stem rose above the surface of the earth. I was reared both by my mother, who keeps me firm and secure under the ground and gives me water and nutrition, and my father who gives sunlight and air. He is very liberal and grants me the freedom to sway with the times. I have grown big and strong, and my name is 'mango'. I have been providing food from the time I was about 5 years of age to human beings. Many birds also feed on the mangoes. Many of them build nests in between my branches. I give shade to tired passers by, and many who are homeless, sleep under my shade. I have always tried to be of service to everyone.

I am very old now. I have stopped bearing fruits. Nobody remembers the good times. The son of the little boy who had planted me, does not realise my value, and has decided to chop me off and sell me for some money. I don't think my parents can do any thing to save me. I however, through my autobiography, wish to tell human beings not to kill us. We are only there to serve you. I have to try and save my brothers and sisters. Well, I am very unhappy, my last day on the earth is scheduled to be ironically on the "World Tree Day."

The tragedy struck me and my master on the same day. He was very fond of me. As fate would have it, even in death, we were together. Both of us were burnt together on the same pyre. Two friends remained friends forever.

Self- Assessment Test

Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow.

1. "Upon its crust, absorbing

Years of sunlight, air, water

And out of leprous hide

Sprouting leaves.

- (a) Whose crust is being spoken about?
- (b) Who is absorbing sun, air and water?
- (c) Explain 'leprous hide'.
- (d) Where are the leaves sprouting from?

2. And pulled out—snapped out

Or pulled out entirely,

Out from the earth-cave,

- (a) Which poem is this extract taken from?
- (b) What is to be pulled out?
- (c) How has it to be pulled out?
- (d) Where has it to be pulled out from?

Short Answer Questions

1. 'And then it is done'. What is referred to here?
 2. How has the tree grown?
 3. Do you agree with the approach of the poet in expressing the destructive human attitude?
 4. How is it possible, in your opinion, to bring about a change in man, who seems to assume that the world is only for him to live on?
 5. Write a short paragraph on the process of growing a tree, and the emotions you experience as you see it grow.
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Long Answer Questions

1. Write an article for your school magazine on the topic, "The Barren Terrain.
2. Can you trace a relevance of the theme of the poem, 'On Killing a Tree' in the life of a human being? Elaborate.
3. You are a woodcutter. You have been given the contract to kill the tree. Write down your plan of action to bring down the massive tree.