

Beehive (Poem- 8): - On Killing a Tree (IX)

- Gieve Patel

The Author

The simple poem with a profound meaning, ‘On Killing a Tree’, has been written by **Gieve Patel**, a famous Indian poet and playwright. He was born in Mumbai, and has completed all of his education from Mumbai. There are many plays and poetry collections to his credit. However, he is better known for his poems. You may refer to **slide no. 2** for more information on his life and works.

Introduction

The poet through this poem ironically conveys a profound message to the readers on saving trees. He ironically conveys a message that we should not cut trees. He says that trees are living beings just like human beings or any other form of life.

Throughout the poem, the poet has described various effective steps to completely kill or destroy a tree. You might ask as to how he is trying to stop the killing of a tree. But, yes, he is truly trying to stop the killing of trees by sensitising people towards to importance of trees in our life by the effective use of irony in the poem.

What is an irony?

An Irony is a figure of speech in which a witty language is used to convey insults or ridicule or scorn, especially saying one thing but **implying the opposite**. We may also call it ‘sarcasm or satire’. For more examples on ‘Irony’, you may refer to **slide nos. 3 & 4**.

Irony: a Literary Tool in the Poem

The poet, **Gieve Patel**, has effectively used irony and has successfully conveyed his intended message to the readers. In the poem, he meticulously explains all the effective steps to completely finish off a tree, but implies just the opposite. He means to say that trees are very important part of our life. They are living beings just like any other form

of life, we should not destroy them. Indirectly, he persuades the readers not to destroy trees and equates it with “killing” a human being.

IRONY IN THE POEM – POET SUGGESTS STEPS FOR COMPLETELY KILLING/DESTROYING TREES BUT IMPLIES SOMETHING ELSE.

What is the message of this irony? The message (opposite meaning) is that we should not cut trees (*However, in the poem, the poet has explained the steps in killing trees*). He is also showing the cruelty and insensitivity of selfish human as the process of killing a tree itself is really cruel.

Stanza -1

*It takes much time to kill a tree,
Not a simple jab of the knife
Will do it. It has grown
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.*

Explanation: - In the first stanza, the poet says that a simple cut does not destroy a tree; it takes a long time to kill it. A sudden rough blow of the knife will do nothing to the tree because it has grown up strong by consuming the earth slowly. It grows up and rises from the crust of the earth, absorbing years of sunlight, air, water. In simple words, it takes nutrients from the soil to grow into a big tree. And from its discoloured and uneven bark, the branches and leaves come out.

Stanza -2

*So hack and chop
But this alone won't do it.
Not so much pain will do it.
The bleeding bark will heal
And from close to the ground
Will rise curled green twigs,
Miniature boughs*

*Which if unchecked will expand again
To former size.*

Explanation: - In the second stanza the poet says that cutting the tree roughly by striking heavy blows and chopping won't do anything to the enormous tree. It will not feel any pain and its bleeding bark will heal very soon. If we cut from the bottom, that is, from close to the ground, the curled green twigs will start growing with mini branches coming out. If they are unchecked, then they will expand again to their normal and formal size as they used to be earlier.

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 beginning of the third stanza, the poet utters the word 'no', because just a small cut with a knife or chop with an axe will not harm a grown up tree. So now, he **sarcastically/ironically explains the steps to kill a tree to the readers**. He ironically says that for killing a tree, firstly, the roots have to be pulled out from its anchoring/holding earth, that is its mother whom the tree holds tightly and securely. He says that it has to be pulled out entirely or tied up with a rope and then chopped into pieces. And once, a tree is separated from the earth cave, when the source (roots) which is white and wet, which is the most sensitive and hidden part of the tree, is exposed out, then the tree loses its strength.

Stanza -4

*Then the matter
Of scorching and choking
In sun and air,*

*Browning, hardening,
Twisting, withering,
And then it is done.*

Explanation: - In the last stanza the poet says that once the tree has been uprooted, it gradually withers and dries up due to the sun and wind. It turns into brownish colour, hardens up, twists and finally sheds off its skin under different weather conditions. And then, the process is over. Now that the tree is killed completely and nothing is left.

Conclusion

In short, we can say that the poet, Gieve Patel, describes the **cruelty of man in killing/destroying** the **tree** with **irony** and conveys a message that trees are an essential and integral part of our life, and so we should not cut them. Thus, he sympathizes with the **tree** and nature in general as it is being destroyed day-by-day by selfish humans.

Vocabulary

Jab – to hit something forcefully	with the help of the roots in the earth
Crust – upper layer of the earth	Snapped out - chopped out
Absorb – to take something in slowly	Roped – tied with a rope
Consuming – using fuel or energy	Pull – remove
Leprous hide - discoloured bark	Sensitive – delicate
Sprout – to produce leaves	Entirely – completely
Hack - cut roughly by striking heavily	Matter - situation
Chop – cut in pieces	Scorching and choking - the drying up of the tree after being uprooted
Bleed – to lose blood	Hardening – to become hard
Heal – to become well again	Twisting – turn
Bark – outer cover of a tree	Wither – to become weak/fade away/dry up
Miniature boughs – small branches	
Former size – previous size	
Anchoring earth - trees are held securely	
