

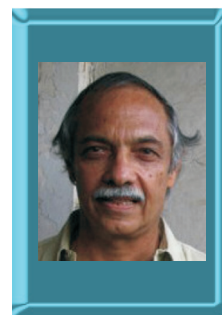
ON KILLING A TREE

Gieve Patel



Gieve Patel, born in 1940, is an important presence in the history of modern Indian poetry in English. He is a poet, playwright and painter, as well as a doctor by profession. He has written three books of poetry (*Poems, How Do You Withstand, Body and Mirrored Mirroring*); three plays (*Princes, Savaksa and Mr Behram*); and held several exhibitions of his paintings in India and abroad. He lives in Mumbai.

He held his first show in Mumbai in 1966 and went on to have several major exhibitions in India and abroad. Patel participated in the Menton Biennale, France in 1976 India, Myth and Reality, Oxford in 1982; Contemporary Indian Art, Royal Academy, London 1982.



Growth of a tree is a long process but killing of a tree is a longer process. The poem contains words and images suggestive of this violence.

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.

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.

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.

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

Glossary

jab dʒæb	sudden rough blow.
leprous hide leprəsˈhaɪd/	like skin of a leper; (here) the scales on the bark of the tree.
hack hæk	cut roughly by striking heavy blows.
curl kɜːl	a piece of hair which grows or has been formed into a curving.
twig twɪɡ	a small thin branch of a tree or bush.
bough bau	a large branch of a tree.
anchoring earth ˈæŋ.kəˈrɪŋ/ˈɜːθ	trees are held securely with the help of the roots in the earth.
snapped out ˈsnæptˈaʊt	chopped out.
scorching and choking skɔː.tʃɪŋ/ˈænd/ˈtʃəʊkɪŋ/	the drying up of the tree after being uprooted.
wither ˈwɪðər	(to cause) to become weak and dry and decay.

Understanding the Poem

1. Growth of a tree is a long process; killing of a tree is a longer process. Do you agree?
2. How has the tree grown to its full size? List the words suggestive of its life and activity.
3. What does the poet mean by the bleeding barks? What makes it bleed?
4. The poet says ‘No’ in the beginning of the third stanza. What does it signify?
5. What does the poet mean by the earth-cave?
6. What according to the poet can kill a tree?
7. How do you find the style employed by the poet in the poem ? Read the poem once again

Learning about the literary devices

1. Beginning with the title, what are the words and images that are suggestive of violence in the poem.

Discussion

1. The poet says that killing a tree is not so easy. Do you agree?
2. Make a 300 word presentation on any one of the following:
 - a. Global warming.
 - b. How can I contribute to a greener and healthier earth.
 - c. Impact of smoke and fuel on human health.

3. What are the environmental hazards that your city faces?
4. In what way felling of trees is an environmental hazard?
5. Find out the environment related news items in the leading local dailies. Paste the pictures and reports on your notebooks.

Suggested Reading

Felling Trees by G.M.Hopkins.

Quote to remember

*I think I shall never see a poem as
lovely as a tree.*

Joyce Kilmer

Tongue Twister

Pick a partner and practice passing,
for if you pass proficiently,
perhaps you'll play professionally.