

CHAPTER: - 8

TOPIC: - TO THE FOOT FROM ITS CHILD

PABLO NERUDA

SUMMARY

In this poem 'To the foot from its child' poet Pablo Neruda has used 'foot' as a metaphor to the trials and tribulations of human life, his birth and his death, his dreams and realities. The child 'foot' when it is born, does not have the awareness to be a Butterfly or an Apple.

But as the child grows up and faces the hardship of life like walking on stones and bits of glasses, the ladders and the paths in the rough earth, the foot realizes that it is merely a foot and it cannot fly like butterfly nor it can be bulging fruit on a branch.

Because the child's foot is hurt and injured while walking and doing everyday work; it starts wearing a 'Shoe' so the 'Foot' feels defeated and just like a fallen prisoner, is condemned to live in a shoe. In the darkness of the shoe, it soon begins to understand the world in its own way.

As the 'foot' is enclosed in the darkness of the shoe, it can only feel out like a blind man. It can only feel the hardships a man has to face to survive in this harsh world. It is also unable to see the other foot on a man's leg. Then age starts catching up with the foot i.e., the child grown into a young man, then he grows old and feeble.

The 'Foot' which is enclosed in the darkness of shoe also grows old. The soft nails of the baby foot grow harder and change themselves into opaque substance, hard as a horn. The tiny toes grow bunched and out of trim. They begin to look like eyeless reptiles.

Later as the young foot grows older they grow callused, they become rough and are covered with the scars of the injuries which occurred during the man's struggle to survive in this world. But this change is hard to accept.

Even though it is old now, the 'foot' blindly and without rest and sleep continues to walk. It continues to walk up and down, through fields, mines, markets and ministries, whether it is a man's foot or a woman's foot, the 'foot' invariably has no time to stop or take off the shoe. It has no time for love or sleep until when man decides to stop i.e., the man is dead.

Then the foot is buried underground unaware, because of the darkness inside. Even though it is buried, the foot is unaware that it has ceased to be a foot or if they were burying it, so that it could fly like a butterfly or could become an apple.

After a man dies his soul is free, but during his life time can never choose to follow his dreams or aspirations, because to survive he has to work hard and, the trials and tribulations of this life.

I. Answer the following questions in a word, a phrase or a sentence each: -

1. What would the foot like to be?

Ans: The foot would like to be a butterfly or an apple.

2. What does time teach the child?

Ans: Time teaches the foot that it cannot fly and also cannot be a fruit bulging on the branch of a tree.

3. Why does the child's foot feel defeated?

Ans: The child's foot feels defeated because the outside world does not allow the child's foot to fulfill its dreams.

4. Which words convey the real experiences of the foot?

Ans: The words 'stones and bits of glass, streets, ladders, and the paths in the rough earth' convey the real experiences of the child's foot.

5. What does the line 'until the whole man chooses to stop' mean?

Ans: The line, 'until the whole man chooses to stop' means until the person dies

6. What did the foot find when it descended underground?

Ans: When the foot descended underground it knows that it did not know that it had ceased to be a foot.

7. What does the 'shoe' represent in the poem?

Ans: The shoe represents societal norms and traditions by which one is bound or the framework given by society.

8. What would the foot like to be? March - 2015

Ans: The foot would like to be an apple or a butterfly.

9. Where is the defeated foot condemned to live according to the speaker of 'To the foot from its child'? March - 2016

Ans: In a shoe

10. What would like to be a butterfly or an apple in the poem 'To the foot from its child'? March - 2017

Ans: Foot / Child's foot

11. What would the foot like to be in 'To the foot from its child'? March - 2018

Ans: Butterfly or an apple

12. Mention any one of the places through which the foot walks in 'To the foot from its child'? March - 2019

Ans: Fields/ mines/ markets/ ministries

13. '..... Condemned to live in a shoe' suggests that the foot is March - 2020

a) a prisoner

b) a criminal

c) forced to give up its' dreams

Ans: a) a prisoner and c) forced to give up its' dreams

II. Answer the following questions in a paragraph of 80 – 100 words each: -

III. Answer the following questions in about 200 words:

1. Bring out the stages of hardships faced by the foot after being confined in a shoe.

OR

Explain the various stages of hardships faced by the foot after being confined in a shoe. March - 2015

Ans:As the child learns to walk and starts walking on stones, bits of glass, streets, ladders and the rough surface of the earth, the child's foot becomes aware of its role. It learns that it is a foot and cannot become a butterfly bulging fruit on a tree. Once it realizes that it is a foot, it is defeated in realizing its aspirations and gets imprisoned in a shoe. Inside the shoe, it tries to understand the world in its own way, alone, like a blind man groping (feeling) in the dark. During this period its soft nails of quartz become opaque, are bunched together, and look like eyeless reptiles with triangular heads, grow callused and are covered with faint volcanoes of death. These changes happen because, once the child's foot becomes an adult's foot, it walks as the foot of a man or woman and keeps walking in the fields as a farmer, or as a grocer in the markets, or as a miner in the mines or as a church minister or a government worker, until its death. Thus, the foot experiences the hardships of life and loses its 'soft' and flowery petal-like form.

2. Describe the different stages of transformation of the foot after it is condemned to live in a shoe?

March - 2018

Ans: In the poem 'To the Foot from its Child', the foot stands as a symbol for the body of a human being and the child is a symbol for the soul. The child's foot does not realise that it is a foot but wants to be a butterfly or an apple. But soon, the foot faces a lot of difficulties once when the individual starts walking. The harsh realities of life in the form of stones, bits of glass, rough roads, ladders make the foot understand that it cannot achieve its dream. Then, the foot is confined in a shoe and feels defeated and imprisoned. The tiny petaled toes grow inside the dark shoe and become hard and rough. The foot knows no rest, walks continuously through fields, markets, mines and ministries. It becomes deformed and the person grows old and dies. Throughout the life of a person, the foot leads life facing challenges, not realizing its dreams.

3. Trace the stages of the foot's transformation as portrayed in 'To the foot from its child'? March - 2019

OR

The poem "To the Foot from its Child" depicts the progression from childhood through adulthood to old age and finally, death. Discuss.

OR

The poem 'To the Foot from its Child' is a journey of human life. Elucidate.

OR

Describe the various stages that the foot goes through and what the foot learns and how it changes at each stage.

OR

Discuss how the journey of the child's foot is similar to the journey of life.

Ans:In the poem 'To the Foot from its Child', Pablo Neruda expresses his view of life using the metaphor of 'foot'. The poem begins with a description of the child's naivety. The child's foot does not know that it is a foot. It dreams of unlimited possibilities. It wants to become a butterfly enjoying unbridled freedom and enjoying the pleasures of life symbolized by apple.

The poet expresses the experience of the child's foot when it is exposed to reality in the real world. It walks over stones, streets, ladders, bits of glass, paths in the rough surface of earth. All these symbolically stand for obstacles, problems, difficulties and hurdles that one encounters in real life. When the child's foot faces these realities, it attempts to fight them, and it becomes aware that it was in an illusory world and it does not have infinite possibilities in life but has to serve as a foot only. It is also convinced that it cannot become a butterfly or an apple. The outside forces capture him and he is imprisoned in a shoe. Now, from that of an infant foot, it has grown to be an adult and now the adult has been forced to live like any human individual.

Then, we get a description of the changes that the child's foot undergoes inside the shoe. Its nice, soft, petal-like toes lose their 'lustre' and the nails become harder, the toes grow bunched and look like eyeless reptiles, grow callused and are covered with faint volcanoes of death. Inside the shoe the adult foot is like a blind man groping in the dark. This state depicts the helplessness of man when he faces the harsh realities of life as a member of the society. He slogs without respite and keeps on walking, until his death. He works in fields, markets, mines and ministries either as a man's or a woman's foot. He does not find time to enjoy his rightful pleasures of life like 'love' and 'sleep'. Finally, the foot ceases to walk when the man dies. When he is buried the foot goes underground. But now he does not know that he is no longer a 'foot'. In his consciousness he is equal to the child's consciousness and hence he again dreams of becoming a butterfly or an apple. Thus, the poet depicts his view of life, tracing its characteristics through different stages like infancy, reaching maturity, adulthood, old age and finally death. Thus, the poem also brings out a cyclical view of life - birth, infancy, maturity, adulthood, old age, death and rebirth.

4. Examine how Neruda's poem works out the contrast between colorful dreams and humdrum reality of life.

Ans:The poet uses 'foot' as a metaphor for the child and describes the dreams and realities of life. The child in the beginning is unaware that it is a foot and aspires to become a butterfly or an apple. As it grows and starts walking, facing the difficulties of life-walking on stones and the paths on the rough earth' it realizes it cannot become a butterfly or an apple, which signifies freedom. The child when it walks on rough surface wears shoe to protect the foot. The foot feels defeated and imprisoned inside the shoe. It feels like a blind person in darkness. It wishes to communicate with the other foot but unable to do so. As

change is natural, the 'foot' also grows young, then old and feeble. After death, it is buried underground and it is ignorant that there is darkness even in underground as it gains the child-like innocence. It again dreams of becoming an apple or a butterfly.

Man's spirit, dreams of enjoying unlimited freedom in this world, but it has to pass through several obstacles before it matures into an adult. He learns to face the humdrum realities of life, remains a prisoner and keeps on working until he dies. After death he loses all human awareness and again dream of becoming a butterfly or an apple.

5. Neruda's poem is a salute to the ordinary human being, who continues with life braving all odds? Do you agree? Give reasons.

Ans:Yes, Neruda's poem is a salute to the ordinary human being as he is the symbol of hard work. He is seen working continuously to achieve his goal in life, and lead a meaningful and complete life. The poet uses 'foot' as a metaphor for his view of life. Life begins in infancy and in the poem, life begins as an infant foot. The child's foot does not know that it is a foot. It starts walking over stones bits of glass. Streets, ladders and the rough surface of the earth. It realizes it is only a "foot" and cannot become a fruit or a butterfly. Since it has to serve the role of a foot it is imprisoned in a shoe. The child's foot as it grows old, serves as the foot of a man or a woman, working in the fields or a woman working in the fields, market, mines, ministries and work hard day and night until it dies. Thus, the freedom of the childhood is lost when a person become an adult facing a life of constant work and struggle.

6. Is Neruda criticizing how society crushes childhood dreams and forces people into rigid moulds?

Ans:Yes, Neruda tries to criticize the society that is crushing childhood dreams making them aware of their limitations and thus transforming people into rigid moulds. The poet uses 'foot' as a metaphor for his view of life. Life begins in infancy and in the poem, life begins as an infant foot. The child's foot does not know that it is a foot. It starts walking over stones bits of glass on streets, ladders and the rough surface of the earth. It realizes it is only a "foot" and cannot become a fruit or a butterfly. Since it has to serve the role of a foot it is imprisoned in a shoe. The child's foot as it grows old, serves as the foot of a man or a woman, working in the fields, a woman working in the fields, market, mines, ministries and work hard day and night until it dies. Thus, the freedom of the childhood is lost when a person become an adult facing a life of constant work and struggle. As a child one can think of infinite possibilities, while as an adult, one becomes aware of their limitations, The child's foot had more freedom than the adult's. The shoe' represents the framework given by the society in the form of society norms and traditions, a man has to abide by, thus enforcing people into rigid moulds.

7. What does the poem, 'To the Foot from its child' convey about life?

March - 2020

Ans: In this poem 'To the Foot From its Child', Pablo Neruda conveys his views of life, through his description of a foot.

The speaker in this poem describes the changes in a person's foot from childhood to death. Neruda has chosen the foot to represent man's body and the child represents his soul. The foot wants to be an apple or a butterfly. But it wakes up from these dreams and faces a life of constant work and struggle. The foot walks without stopping. It is defeated by the earth's roughness and gets imprisoned in a shoe. The tiny pedaled toes grow inside the dark shoe and become hard. The soft nails become rough like "eyeless reptiles". The foot becomes deformed, coarsened and robotic. It awaits its fate like the darkness of approaching death. The person grows old and dies. The soul moves on but the body (the foot) is buried and becomes a part of the earth on which fruit trees grow. Through this poem, Pablo Neruda conveys how life takes away people's free spirits until they are freed again by death.

RECAPITULATION:

- ✚ Foot- the symbol of the journey of life
- ✚ Continuously toiling
- ✚ The child's dream-butterfly or an apple
- ✚ Hardships teaching the lesson of reality
- ✚ Soft nails grow into hard opaque substance
- ✚ Blind foot walks everywhere
- ✚ Foot descending into underground
- ✚ Death marks the end of journey

EXERCISE:

ONE MARK

1. Name one of the things that the child's foot wants to be in Neruda's poem.
2. What do the soft nails of quartz change themselves into in "To the Foot from its Child"?
3. Where is the 'Child's foot' condemned to live?

FOUR MARKS

1. Bring out the stages of hardships faced by the foot after being confined in a shoe.

SIX MARKS

1. The poem 'To the Foot from its Child' is a journey of human life. Elucidate.
2. Bring out the contrast between Illusion and reality in 'To the Foot from its Child'.

'If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need'.