

On Killing a Tree (Poem)

- Q1 : 1. Can a "simple jab of the knife" kill a tree? Why not?
2. How has the tree grown to its full size? List the words suggestive of its life and activity.
3. What is the meaning of "bleeding bark"? What makes it bleed?
4. The poet says "No" in the beginning of the third stanza. What does he mean by this?
5. What is the meaning of "anchoring earth" and "earth cave"?
6. What does he mean by "the strength of the tree exposed"?
7. What finally kills the tree?

Answer :

1. No, a simple jab of a knife cannot kill a tree because it takes many years for a tree to grow and rise out of the earth. Moreover, only a chop cannot kill it because it will slowly rise again and grow to its original size.

2. The unchecked growth of the tree has led it mature to its full size. It has consumed the earth and rose above it by absorbing years of sunlight, air and water from its crust.

The words suggestive of its life and activity are as follows:

- "Grown"
- "Consuming"
- "Rising"
- "Feeding"
- "Absorbing"
- "Sprouting"
- "Pain"
- "Bleeding"
- "Heal"
- "Expand"

3. "Bleeding bark" refers to the area on the tree trunk where it has been hit with the axe. It bleeds because the wood cutter has wounded the tree by cutting and chopping it.

4. In the beginning of the third stanza, the poet has said "No" to lay emphasis on the fact that mere chopping of the tree would not kill it. The tree would grow again and retain its original size.

5. "Anchoring earth" refers to the earth under which the roots of a tree are held firmly, thereby providing strength and nourishment to it.

"Earthcave" again refers to the earth. The poet calls it so, as the roots, which are the sensitive part of the tree, stay hidden securely under the earth.

6. The strength of the tree lies in its roots, which the poet asks to snap out in order to kill the tree. Thus, the phrase "the strength of the tree exposed" refers to the roots of the tree being exposed to sunlight and air.

7. The tree is finally killed when its roots are uprooted and it scorches and chokes in sunlight and air. This process leads to the browning, hardening, twisting and thereby, withering of the roots.