

Poetry - 10.

Felling of the Banyan Tree

UNDERSTANDING THE POEM

Q. 1 Identify the lines that reveal the critical tone of the poet towards the felling of the tree.

Answer:

Dilip Chitre's "Felling of the Banyan Tree" contains numerous instances that reveal the critical tone of the poet towards the felling of the banyan tree. As such, "Its scraggy aerial roots fell to the ground"; "Sawing them off for seven days and the heap was huge"; "Fifty men with axes chopped and chopped"; "Insects and birds began to leave the tree"; "We watched in terror and fascination this slaughter".

Q. 2 Identify the words that help you understand the nature of the poet's father.

Answer:

"Felling of the Banyan Tree" by Dilip Chitre offers us with a plethora of instances and words or phrases that makes us understand the nature and temperament of the poet's father. From the narrative of the story, we can understand the absolute pragmatic nature of the father who had removed the trees as the family was moving to Baroda and had the surrounding property demolished. As such, certain words that can capture this side of the father are- "the structures were demolished"; "but he massacred them all"; "My father ordered it to be removed".

Q. 3 'Trees are sacred my grandmother used to say'— what does the poet imply by this line?

Answer:

In Hindu mythology, there are certain trees considered to be sacred and worshipped ardently by masses. There have been many legendary stories surrounding the neem tree, banyan, sheoga, tulsi, oudumber. However, the banyan tree is the most sacred of these and the eradication of a banyan tree is considered to be a sin as it was supposed to be worshipped in the holy scriptures. The cutting of such trees leads to mass disaster and destruction, resulting in plague and starvation. Through the line “Trees are sacred my grandmother used to say”, the narrator is mainly referring to the religious beliefs, fears, and prejudices of people enumerated in the folk tales.

Q. 4 ‘No trees except the one which grows and seethes in one’s dreams’— why is the phrase ‘grows and seethes’ used?

Answer:

The poet narrates his experience of getting to spot another banyan tree after shifting to Baroda. The view of this banyan tree reminds him of the one which his father had removed before shifting to Baroda. The memory of that banyan tree haunts him, often in his dreams where it appears faded and blurred, signifying the blemishing of its existence. The memory of the tree grows and sustains in his dreams with every passing day. Thus, the poet uses the term “grows”. Also, the poet employs the term “seethes”, perhaps to signify that the severed tree grows and grows with rage and anguish in an attempt to avenge her death. The image of the dead tree bubbling with vigor and anger causes the poet to use the term “seethes”.

Q. 5 How does the banyan tree stand out as different from other trees? What details of the tree does the poet highlight in the poem?

Answer:

The banyan tree has a unique appearance. The rings carved in its trunk is said to represent the existence of the tree since ancient times as the poet says, “The great tree revealed its rings of two hundred years”. The

mystic nature of the tree is revealed in the suspended aerial roots that reach the ground. Besides, there have been numerous tales that prove the purity of the banyan tree. The enchantingly mysterious appearance of the tree furthers its religious and spiritual significance. It is said the Buddha renounced under this tree in Bodh Gaya. The reference of banyan tree is also present in the Bhagvad Geeta, where Krishna said, “Of all the tree I am the banyan tree”.

Q. 6 What does the reference to raw mythology imply?

Answer:

The banyan tree seemed to the poet like some mysterious knot containing all the mythologies and stories since ancient times. When the tree was cut down, its scraggy aerial roots were brought down, destroying an age-old massive existence of a being occupying a circumference of fifty feet. When it was brought down, the poet felt as if all the knowledge and experiences contained in the tree since ancient generations had been effaced. The sordid truths and the enlightened inventories had all been wiped away by the removal of the tree.

Q. 7 ‘Whose roots lay deeper than our lives’— what aspect of human behavior does this line reflect?

Answer:

A banyan tree lives through lives and generations. It witnesses people, ages, change, amendments, cultural and physical shifts. It witnesses growth and replantation of civilization. The life span of a banyan tree is usually two hundred long years, expanding through several human generations. The long, knotted aerial roots seem to contain within themselves the knowledge and truth of life. Compared to the eighty years that a man lives, a banyan tree outgrows him to experience generational changes and upheavals. The strange, mystical and enchanting appearance of the tree, with its long old roots that seem to be soaked with old truths, hang rigidly to signify their unperturbed and

silent existence since ages. These trees have seen generations to grow and regrow and they have grown old along with time.

Q. 8 Comment on the contemporary concern that the poem echoes.

Answer:

The poet worries about the change that globalization and westernization of civilization have brought about. There is a dearth of real values and ideals amongst the new generation people who have hailed western culture, paying no heed to traditional values and culture. With the concept of instant need, people have forgotten to attend to the rooted yet invisible presence of tradition that had always played an important part in peoples' lives.

TRY THIS OUT

Q. 1 Most of us have had this experience of seeing trees in our neighborhood being mercilessly cut down in order to build a house or a public building or to widen a road. Describe any such experience you have had of the felling of a tree you were attached to, with reasons for your special attachment to the tree.

Answer:

For once, I had planted a mango tree in our backyard space when I was just five years of age. It was a mere experiment that I had tried out after being influenced by the "Vanmahotsava" program organized in our village. With years, the tree grew up, strong and stolid. After returning from classes, I used to water the plant and sit under it narrates my lessons and experiences of the entire day. The tree wouldn't speak except for the slight slouching and movement of its branches caused by the wind. I would take that as its consent my words. Years went by and I had to leave my place for higher studies. In the holidays I would return with my secret diary to sing my studies to her. She never disapproved of me. A year later, our backyard space was confiscated by the

municipality to widen the roads and had the tree uprooted. Huge machines were brought to displace the tree from its home. In this world, it's not just humans who are being displaced by natural and man-made calamities but nature too, that has to tolerate the indecencies and brutality of people.

Q. 2 Find out the equivalents for sheoga, oudumber and neem in your language and English and the equivalent of banyan in your language.

Answer:

In Bengali, “sheoga” is termed as “shoga” while “oudumber” and “neem” are termed in the same fashion. While the banyan tree is termed as “both gachh” in Bengali.

Q. 3 The adjective ‘scraggy’ is used to describe ‘roots’ in the poem. Find out two other items which could be described as ‘scraggy’:

scraggy.....

Answer:

“Scraggy” can be paired with a “pole”, to mean a long and lean pole. Besides, scraggy can also be used as an adjective to define a “puppy”, to denote its unhealthy growth.

Q. 4 Use the following adjectives to describe suitable items

Raw, Aerial, Sacred

Answer:

- Raw vegetables
- Aerial spirits
- Sacred Texts