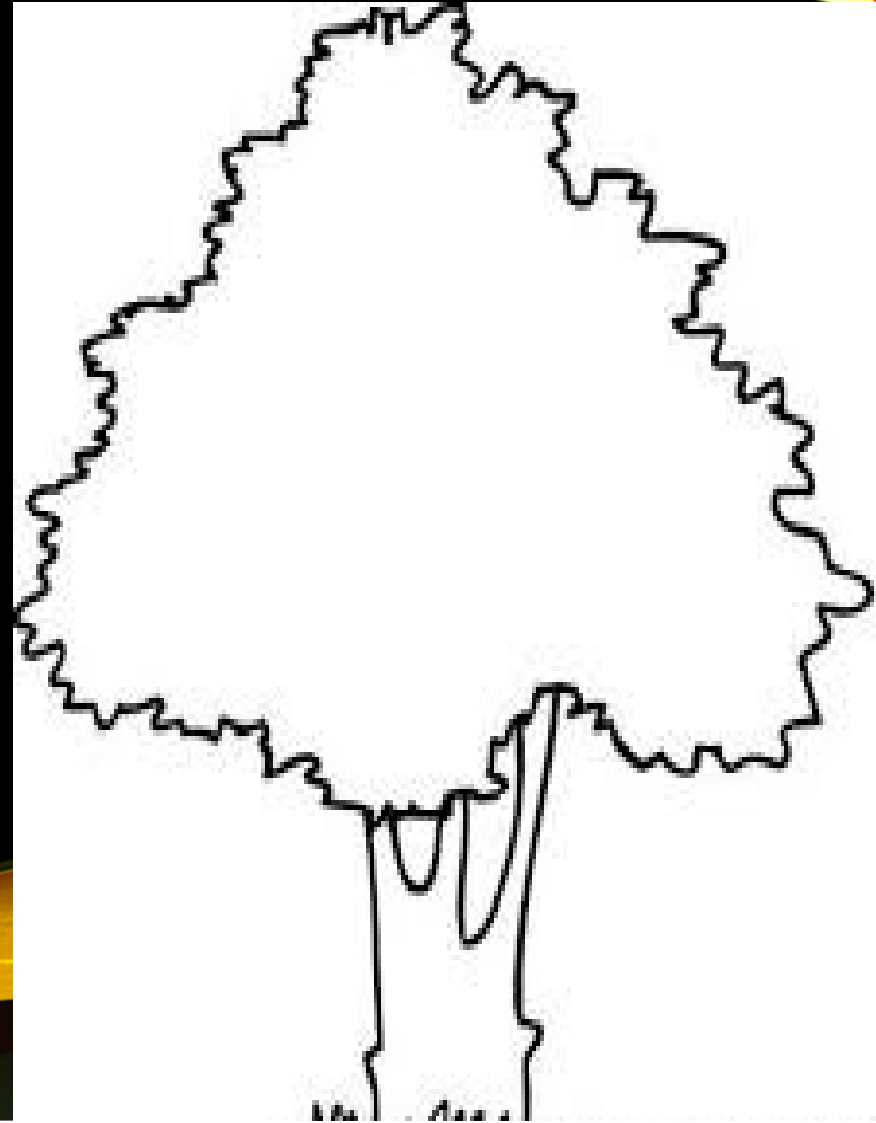


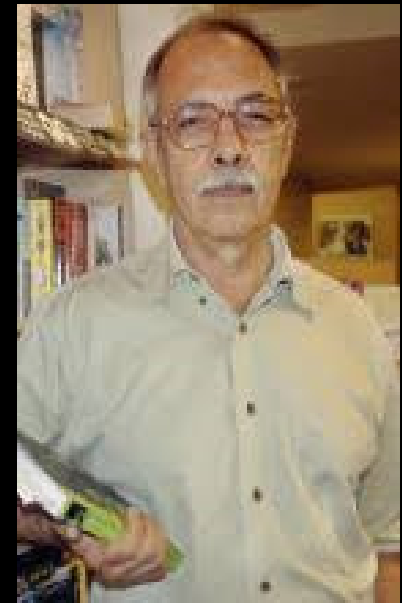
ON KILLING A TREE

GIEVE PATEL



ABOUT THE POET

Gieve Patel is an Indian poet, playwright, painter, as well as a practicing physician/doctor based in Mumbai. Patel belongs to a group of writers who have subscribed themselves to the 'Green Movement' which is involved in an effort to protect the environment.





ABOUT ON KILLING A TREE

- The poem 'On Killing a Tree' is one of the poems from Gieve Patel's poetry collection named 'Poems' published in 1966.
- The poem is set on a very visual plane. The descriptions are vivid and the mood is sad. There also hangs a sense of darkness upon the poem. The pain felt by the trees, as imagined by Patel, dominates the mood of the poem.

TITLE

- The title of the poem is simple and appropriate as it contains the major concern of the poet – merciless felling of trees. It indicates appropriately that the poem is about the process of killing a tree. The entire poem explains the view that killing a tree is not simple, short or easy process. Trees have tremendous strength and a great instinct for survival.



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.

It tells us that killing a tree is not easy. It is not a simple job. A jab of a knife is not enough. A tree grows straight out the earth, nourishing itself on the nutrients found in the earth, along with years of sunlight, water and air. And even though the bark looks irregular and scaly, leaves and branches sprout of it.

- 'leprous hide' - bark of the tree. Leprous because the surface of a bark is disfigured and irregular.
- 'hide' means skin. Here it means the bark of the tree.

STANZA 2

So hack and chop
But this alone wont 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
To former size.



The hack of a knife or an axe, or chopping off a bough is not enough to bring a tree down. These jabs may inflict pain on the tree but the pain is not enough to kill it. The 'bleeding bark', the part where it has been wounded or where a bough is chopped off, will heal with time. New green twigs will grow again; boughs chopped off will be replaced by new ones, which will grow into their former size.

- 'hack and chop'- hacking or chopping means cutting something, usually with a sharp instrument/weapon.
- unchecked'- unwatched; unstopped; uncontrolled

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.

STANZA 3

- In this stanza, the poet explains how a tree could be killed. He says to kill a tree, its root has to be pulled out. The root, which is the source of a tree's life, must be pulled out of its cave, in order to harm the tree. By 'earth-cave' the poet means the point, deep inside the earth, where the root is attached. Once the centre, the life source- the root is exposed, the tree becomes vulnerable. The source is described as white and wet, probably alluding to tree sap which is a white liquid.

- 'earthcave'- the earthbed, underground, where the root was firmly attached
- 'source, white and wet'- the root of the tree containing sap, which is which a white liquid and is made up of all the important nutrients and chemicals necessary to sustain it.

STANZA 4

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

- The exposed life source, which when left open to the sun and air, will be scorched due to the heat and the air won't be able to reach the scorched places to relieve it of the heat. Slowly, it will start to become brown, with all the softness fading out leaving a hard, lifeless remainder behind. With time, it will start to wither, become dry and bent out of shape, leaving a corpse where a tree used to be. In short, the exposure will leave the root vulnerable to all moods of weather, which will ultimately weaken the tree and kill it.

‘scorching’ - burning at a high intensity

‘withering’ - waning; fading from life

- The poem conveys the message that trees are living beings just like any other form of life. They have strong survival instincts and can withstand any crisis. It is not easy to kill them, for they have a never-say-die attitude. Everytime they are attacked, injured or scraped, they heal themselves and regain their glory. However, if they are uprooted and left in the air and the sun, they die.

We human beings must live just as trees do.





RHYME SCHEME

- The poem is written in free verse. There is no rhyme scheme and the length of the lines vary. Even the stanzas are not of equal length.