

Central Idea:

The poem “On Killing a Tree” written by Gieve Patel is symbolic of the evils prevailing in the society. In this poem the poet presents the tree as a parasite which consumes the earth’s nutrients by feeding upon the earth’s crust, which according to the poet is the destruction of the earth’s fertility. Leaves keep sprouting out of its leprous hide which is symbolical of the smaller evils which keep issuing from the larger/ bigger one’s (evil’s). We cannot kill a tree by a simple a of knife which is again symbolic of the bigger evils which cannot be get rid of by simple blows. To kill a tree we need to find its very source (roots), expose it and let its scorch and choke in the sun. Likewise, to get rid of an evil (kill an evil), its source has to be found and we need to drain its life in full and thereby leaving no chance of its sprouting/rising again.

Paraphrase:

Line (1 – 9): In these lines the poet says that it takes much time to kill a tree. Simple strike of a knife won’t kill it. The tree has grown slowly consuming the earth (earth’s nutrients). It feeds upon the earth’s crust and sprouts out of its leprous hide (hide which looks as if struck with loprosoy).

The descriptions given by the poet indicate the tree as a parasite which keeps consuming the earth. It feeds upon the earth’s crust by eating up all its nutrients, thereby, destroying its fertility. Leaves keep coming/ sprouting out of its leprous hide. The poet here means to say that smaller evils keep issuing from bigger one’s. Thus, the tree here is symbolic of bigger evils from which smaller evils keep coming / sprouting out.

Line (10 – 18): The poet says that the simple, single strike of knife cannot kill a tree. So, it should be cut in a rough and violent way (should be hacked and chopped). But even the chopping alone won’t kill the tree. It won’t give much pain to it. The bleeding bark of the tree will heal and the curled green twigs will sprout again from near the ground form where the tree has been cut. And if these small twigs are left unchecked, they will grow again into the size of former boughs.

In these lines the tree is again presented as the symbol of bigger evils. We cannot get rid of the bigger evils by simple and small blows as they will grow again and assume their former size (appearance).

Line (19 – 24): The poet says that the tree must be pulled out of the anchoring earth – trees are hold securely and tightly with the help of the roots in the earth. So, if we want to kill the tree, we need to kill its very source form

which it originates – i.e, the roots. And for this particular purpose we need to tie a tree by a strong rope and then pull it out of the earth's cave by using our full strength and the chop it entirely.

Here again continuing with its symbolic technique, the poet says that in order to get rid of the deep rooted evil , we must know its source expose it and kill it entirely with our full strength.

Line (25 – 29): The poet says that the real strength of a tree is its root. The source i.e, the white and wet root is the most sensitive part of a tree. It is that part of the tree which has remained hidden for years inside the earth. If we want to kill the tree, this pivotal part o f it has to be brought in the open by pulling it out with our full strength.

Here presenting the tree as a deep – rooted evil, the poet makes it clear that no one can end an evil utterly till its very source is found, exposed and duly destroyed.

Line (30 – 35): They poet says that the pivotal part – the root should be left in the sun and the air after it has been pulled out of the earth's cave. The root should be left in open to scorch and choke. It should be left there till it browns, hardens, twists and withers away. Only after letting it go through all this, the tree can be considered and s aid to be really killed.

Likewise, if we want to bring an evil to its very end, we need to find its very source to be rooted out. We need to drain away all the life and strength from it. We must not let it to linger in the society. We must not provide it (evil) any other chance of survival.

