WovenWords Felling of the Banyan Tree

Understanding the Poem

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

Answer

There are many expressions in the poem that reveal the critical tone of the poet towards the felling of the tree:
"Its scraggy aerial roots fell to the ground"
"Sawing them off for seven days and the heap was huge"
"Insects and birds began to leave the tree"
"Fifty men with axes chopped and chopped"
"We watched in terror and fascination this slaughter"

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

Answer

There are such words in the poem that help one understand the nature of the poet's father.
The father was a much practical man. Probably because the whole family was moving to Baroda, the father got all the trees removed and the surrounding property demolished. He was not an emotional man but a man of actions.
"the structures were demolished"
"but he massacred them all"
"My father ordered it to be removed"

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

Answer

There are many legends surrounding the sheoga, the oudumber, the neem and most of all the banyan tree. These are considered mythologically relevant and holy in Hinduism. Old folk who are deeply religious consider it sin to cut down these trees as they are to be worshipped according to the holy

scriptures. They even say that if one brings neem or peepal down by felling them they are cursed with ill fate. There are plenty of stories in our mythology that fear and plague our society with as many superstitions as possible. Thus, the poet is merely trying to convey the fears and religious beliefs of old folk like his granny.

4. No trees except the one which grows and seethes in one's dreams'– why is the phrase 'grows and seethes' used?

Answer

In the climax of the poem, the poet with his family moved to Baroda. There, the poet sees banyan tree. The memory of the banyan tree in his own garden rushes to him. And now that the tree in reality is dead, for his father brought it down, the poet carries its memories in his faded dreams. The poet personifies the banyan tree by saying that this tree is the one that grows in one's dreams, i.e., in poet's dreams. There in the dreams, the tree seethes, i.e., boils. It is to be considered for why the poet has used the second term. Is it possible that the tree is in anguish, because it was brought down, and thus it boils in anger while it grows in the poet's dreams though dead in reality.

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

In Bhagvad Geeta, Krishna said, "Of all the trees I am Banyan Tree". Banyan is considered to be the most pious tree in Hindu mythology. It is believed that Buddha renounced under the banyan tree in Bodh Gaya. There are many more such stories that this tree encompasses in its age old aerial roots that fall to the ground mysteriously. The poet is impressed by its huge figure as he says, "the great tree revealed its rings of two hundred years". The physical description of the banyan carves an image of an enigma. The tree's aerial roots dangling from above to reach out to the ground. They are the proof of all the years and decades the tree has lived. It is a tough tree and it takes more that usual effort to bring it down. And when it happens, all watched it fall in terror and fascination, the slaughter of the age old banyan tree. It fees as if a raw mythology was revealed it age to the poet and his folk.

6. What does the reference to raw mythology imply?

Answer

The Banyan tree is a mythological one, and when his grandmother calls it along with the other trees to be sacred. A religious sentiment is brought out in not just the poet but the reader as well. When the tree is slaughtered on the orders of the poet's father, a mystery is revealed. First the scraggy aerial roots were brought down unleashing age old trunk that had a circumference of fifty feet. It was a tree that had witnessed ages and held all the knowledge knotted inside. When it was brought down it felt as if all the mythology was revealed to the poet. The darkness and the concealed, the enlightenment it has secreted away since so long. The reasons and the answers to all the logics all was beheld by the tree and now was slaughtered.

7. 'Whose roots lay deeper than our lives' – what aspect of human behaviour does this line reflect?

Answer

A banyan tree's life cycle is a unique one, it grows as an epiphyte. It may live for more than 200 years or even 400-450 years. In contrast an average human life is of 70-80 years. It is clearly visible that one banyan alone may survive generations of humans. Banyan has strangled roots knotted in its trunk that grow for centuries. It transcends human life and rolls and grows with the knowledge that it witnesses all the while. The poet has subtly juxtaposed a human life to that of a banyan. For all its mythical hugeness that makes it an enigma a human is thrown into utter bewilderment and surprise for all the knowledge that it secrets away inside its vast trunk, which grows with its aerial roots that grow to reach the ground. They resemble the lives that it has lived again and again witnessing all the human lives that descended and perished with time standing tall and erect.

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

Answer

Poet is concerned about the pace with which the traditions are changing and are affected by modern notions. The value attached to the trees in earlier times is not of concern to people living in modern society. The old cultural values are breaking free giving way to western science and studies. The religious values that were inculcated in a child from her/his childhood are payed no heed. Life is busy and is consuming not just our time and space but our lifestyle. The moral values our tradition was

and is consuming not just our time and space but our lifestyle. The moral values our tradition was raised on are now treated as bygones. The poet wonders at the change our society is undergoing and has written the poem on it.