

The Trees

Answers to NCERT Questions

Thinking about the Poem

1. Answer the following questions:

- i. Find, in the first stanza, three things that cannot happen in a treeless forest.
- ii. What picture do these words create in your mind: "...sun bury its feet in shadow ..."? What could the poet mean by the sun's 'feet'?

Ans:

- i. Three things that cannot happen in a treeless forest are:
 - a. no bird can sit on them,
 - b. no insect can hide in them
 - c. there can be no shadow of the sun.
- ii. The picture is that of shadow caused by the sunlight falling on the trees. By the sun's 'feet', the poet means the top of the trees.

2. Answer the following questions :

- i. Where are the trees in the poem? What do their roots, their leaves, and their twigs do?
- ii. What does the poet compare their branches?

Ans:

- i. The trees in the poem are decorative and they are inside the house. They are in the pots and pans. Their roots try to free themselves from the cracks in the veranda door. Their leaves go toward the glass and small twigs become stiff.
- ii. The poet compares their branches to newly discharged patients.

3. Answer the following questions :

- i. How does the poet describe the moon:
 - a. at the beginning of the third stanza, and
 - b. at its end? What causes this change?
- ii. What happens to the house when the trees move out of it?
- iii. Why do you think that the poet does not mention "the departure of the forest from the house" in her letters? (Could it be that we are often silent about important happenings that are so unexpected that they embarrass us? Think about this again when you answer the next set of questions.)

Ans:

- i. Poet describes the moon as :

- a. At the beginning of the stanza, it is the full moon.
 - b. In the end, it is like a broken mirror. The cause of this change is the growth of trees in the pots.
- ii. The house undergoes a change. Its glass is broken. Winds rush inside the house.
- iii. The poet does not mention it because this is a common thing and is known to all. This is not something extraordinary.

4. Now that you have read the poem in detail, we can begin to ask what the poem might mean. Here are two suggestions. Can you think of others?

- i. Does the poem present a conflict between man and nature? Compare it with A Tiger in the Zoo. Is the poet suggesting that plants and trees, used for 'interior decoration' in cities while forests are cut down, are 'imprisoned', and need to 'break out'?
- ii. On the other hand, Adrienne Rich has been known to use trees as a metaphor for human beings; this is a recurrent image in her poetry. What new meanings emerge from the poem if you take its trees to be symbolic of this particular meaning?

Ans:

- i. Yes, the poem presents a conflict between man and nature. The man has harmed nature much. He has cut forests. Now he is content to have decorative plants in his house. But these decorative plants cannot afford shelter to birds or insects. Here, like the zoo animals, the plants are imprisoned. They get fresh air only when they move out.
- ii. The new meaning is that men are also like trees. If trees are not free to grow, men are also not free. They remain imprisoned in the world of their own. The poet sits in her room. She remains in her room like a decorative plant.

5. You may read the poem 'On Killing a Tree' by Gieve Patel (*Beehive*—Textbook in English for Class IX, NCERT). Compare and contrast it with the poem you have just read.

Ans: 'The Trees' deals with 'trees' that are not real. They are either in a picture, or they are only decorative plants. On the other hand, 'On Killing a Tree' deals with the subject of how to kill a tree. Both poems are related to trees.

Additional Questions

Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow: (4 Marks each)

1. The trees inside are moving out into the forest,

the forest that was empty all these days

where no bird could sit

no insect hide

no sun bury its feet in shadow

the forest that was empty all these nights

will be full of trees by morning.

- a. From where are the trees moving out into the forest?
- b. Why can't birds sit or insects hide in them?
- c. How was the forest 'all these nights'?
- d. Are these trees useful for birds and insects?

Ans:

- a. The trees are moving out of the mind of the painter and coming on the canvas.
- b. These are not real trees. These are the trees in a picture or are decorative trees in a house. So birds can't sit or insects cannot hide in them.
- c. All these nights, the forest was empty.
- d. No, these trees are not useful for birds and insects.

2. All night the roots work

to disengage themselves from the cracks

in the veranda floor.

The leaves strain toward the glass

small twigs stiff with exertion

long-cramped boughs shuffling under the roof

like newly discharged patients

half-dazed, moving

to the clinic doors.

- a. What do the roots do all night?
- b. How are the small twigs?
- c. What are the boughs compared to?
- d. What do the leaves do?

Ans:

- a. All night the roots work to free themselves from the cracks in the veranda floor.
- b. The small twigs are stiff.

- c. The boughs are compared to newly discharged patients.
- d. The leaves strain towards the glass.

3. I sit inside, doors open to the veranda

writing long letters

in which I scarcely mention the departure
of the forest from the house.

The night is fresh, the whole moon shines
in a sky still open.

- a. Where is the poet sitting?
- b. What is the poet doing?
- c. What does she not mention in her letters?
- d. How does the poet describe the night and the moon?

Ans:

- a. The poet is sitting in her room.
- b. The poet is writing long letters.
- c. She does not mention the departure of the forest from the house.
- d. The night is pleasant and fresh. The full moon is shining.

4. the smell of leaves and lichen

still reaches like a voice into the rooms.

My head is full of whispers

which tomorrow will be silent.

- a. Where is the poet sitting at present?
- b. Which smell is reaching her?
- c. What is her head full of?
- d. What will be silent tomorrow?

Ans:

- a. At present, the poet is sitting in her room.
- b. The smell of leaves and lichen is reaching her.
- c. Her head is full of whispers.
- d. Tomorrow, the whispers will be silent.

5. Listen. The glass is breaking.

The trees are stumbling forward

into the night Winds rush to meet them.

The moon is broken like a mirror,

its pieces flash now in the crown

of the tallest oak.

- a. What does the poet say about the trees?
- b. What rushes out to meet the trees?

- c. How does the poetess describe the moon?
- d. Why does the wind rush?

Ans:

- a. The poet says that the trees are stumbling forward into the night.
- b. The wind rushes out to meet the trees.
- c. The poet says that the moon is like a broken mirror.
- d. The wind rushes to meet the trees.

Short Answer Questions (30–40 words: 2 Marks each)

1. What is the central idea of the poem, 'The Trees'?

Ans: The central idea of the poem is the conflict between man and nature. A plant is brought inside the house when it is a sapling. But as it grows into a tree, it gets suffocated with the limited space available. So it departs to feel free. The tree is thus, moving out to occupy the now empty forest, made so by man's indiscriminate felling of trees. Humans must understand the negative impact of their actions on nature and mend their ways before it is too late.

2. Where are the trees at present? What do their roots, and leaves do?

Ans: At present, the trees are in the house. The roots try to free themselves from the cracks of the veranda floor, and the leaves make efforts to move towards the glass, perhaps in search of light. The small branches become stiff as they try to pull themselves towards the light.

3. Why is the description of the moon different in the beginning and at the end of the third stanza?

Ans: At the beginning of the third stanza, the poet says that one can see the whole moon shining in the open sky, but in the end, the moon seems to be broken like a mirror and its pieces shine in the crown of the tallest oak tree. The change is caused by the shifting of the trees outside.

4. Justify the revolt of the trees and state two values which the man should possess to stop the revolt.

Ans: The trees inside the house get suffocated as they grow. They try to free themselves from the cracks of the veranda floor and the leaves stretch out as if to move towards the glass. They are justified in their revolt. Men should learn the importance of trees.

5. How does the poet describe the night? How does she feel?

Ans: It is night time. The night is fresh. In the open sky, the full moon is shining. The poet feels the smell of leaves and lichen reaching inside the room. Her head is full of whispers. But she thinks that the next day these whispers will be silent.

6. What is the theme of the poem, 'The Trees'?

Ans: The theme of the poem is the disappearance of trees. This poem also brings out the idea of conflict between man and nature. Man is doing more and more harm to nature. Nature is getting angry. Man's existence on this planet is in danger. Thus, it becomes the foremost duty of every citizen to work for the protection of the environment.

7. Why are the trees described in the first stanza not useful for birds or insects?

Ans: The trees described in the first stanza are either decorative plants kept inside a house, or they are shown only in a painting or picture. Therefore, they are not useful for birds or insects. Birds cannot sit on their branches. Insects cannot hide in them.

8. What happens to the roots and leaves of these trees at night?

Ans: The roots of these trees are engaged into the cracks of the veranda floor. At night, these roots try to free themselves from the cracks. The leaves try to move towards the glass. Twigs become harden and the boughs try to expand under the roof.

9. How does the poet describe the growth of the trees inside the house?

Ans: These trees grow in pots and pans. So their roots feel cramped. These roots try to free themselves from the cracks of the veranda floor. The leaves need light. So they move towards the glass. The twigs are stiff and the boughs are like the newly discharged patients coming out of clinic doors.

10. Why does the poet use the metaphor of newly discharged patients?

Ans: A patient feels depressed in a hospital. As soon as he recovers, he is eager to leave the hospital. He rushes towards the clinic doors. In the same way, the plants in the pots feel suffocated. They are deprived of adequate light. So they stretch themselves towards the glass door, in the hope of finding the light.

Long Answer Questions (100–150 words: 8 Marks each)

1. 'Departure is painful'. So is the departure of the trees for the poet. What will happen after their departure?

Ans: Just like the departure of someone close to us is painful, so also is the departure of a tree. When they are planted as a sapling, they look nice and enhance the beauty of our surroundings. But as they grow and spread out their branches, they look wild and require more space for their growth. The roots create cracks in the floor and the leaves

stretch out as if to move towards the glass, perhaps in need of sunlight. The soft twigs become strong and stiff. So the trees need to be removed from the house. No more do the leaves cover the sky, but the trees breathe and they are welcomed by the wind. The moon resembles a broken mirror, reflecting off the leaves. The poet reveals that she will feel lonely after the trees' departure.

2. How does the poem 'The Trees' make a strong plea against deforestation?

Ans: The poem, 'The Trees' sends home a strong message against deforestation. It highlights the importance of trees when the poet says that without trees there will be no shadow, no forest, no place for birds to sit, no place for insects to hide. As a sapling, the plant adds to the beauty of the surroundings when it spreads its branches, leaves and roots around. It gets the suit house. Thus, in the poem, the trees are welcomed by the strong winds and the moon. The poet does not want to mention the departure of the forests as she feels guilty for merely looking silently at them as they depart. This way, she subtly points out the thanklessness of man towards forests.

3. Explain the phrase "the forest that was empty all these days". After reading the poem, for whom do you think are the forests needed? Imagine yourself as a tree in a forest.

Ans: In the poem, 'The Trees' poet Adrienne Rich subtly drives home the message about the importance of trees. Without trees, the birds would not have a place to sit, insects will have no place to hide and the sun would not bury its feet in shadow. As saplings, we enjoy the beauty of plants as they adorn the surroundings. But slowly, the tree spreads its roots, its branches and leaves, and seems to yearn to go outside where it can live and grow without any restrictions. No more does the tree look attractive indoors. The trees are however welcomed into nature by strong winds and the moon. The poet hereby emphasises that trees need to be kept alive, but should not be 'imprisoned' inside the house as they look more beautiful, and tend to thrive outdoors that is where trees belong.

Self- Assessment Test

Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow.

1. The trees inside are moving out into the forest,
the forest that was empty all these days
where no bird could sit
no insect hide
no sun bury its feet in shadow
the forest that was empty all these nights
will be full of trees by morning.

- a. Name the poem and the poet.
- b. Where are the trees moving to?
- c. Why can't sun bury its feet in shadow?
- d. What type of trees are these?

2. My head is full of whispers

which tomorrow will be silent.

Listen the glass is breaking.

The trees are stumbling forward
into the night. Winds rush to meet them.

The moon is broken like a mirror,
its pieces flash now in the crown
of the tallest oak.

- a. What are the trees doing in the night?
- b. What will be silent tomorrow?
- c. Explain, 'winds rush to meet them'?
- d. What is happening to the glass?

Short Answer Questions

1. Where do the trees go? Why?
2. Why is the forest empty?
3. What are the roots doing?
4. How do the trees look at night?
5. What was the poet's reaction when the trees were moving out?

Long Answer Questions

1. What message does the poet want to convey through the poem, 'The Trees'?
2. The basic theme of happiness for all living beings is freedom. Explain with reference to the poem, 'The Trees'.