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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.

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