

On Killing a Tree



G i e v e P a t e l

Gieve Patel (1940-) is a renowned Indian poet playwright and painter. In his poetry, Patel uses a syncopated rhythm. He brings the flavour of everyday's speech in his poetry. Some of his notable works are *Mirrored, Mirroring* (1991), *How do you withstand, body* (1976).

The poem is about the harm done to the environment by human beings. In a voice of sarcasm and irony, the poet speaks of man's violence and impatience towards nature. The poem is written in free verse.

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.

So hack and chop
But this alone won't do it.
Not so much pain will do it.
The bleeding bark will heal

jab : short thrust

leprous : relating to leprosy (a kind of skin disease)

hide: here, the bark of a tree

sprouting : growing

And from close to the ground
Will rise curled green twigs,
Miniature boughs
Which if unchecked will expand again
To former size.
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.
Then the matter
Of scorching and choking
In sun and air,
Browning, hardening,
Twisting, withering,
And then it is done .

miniature: very small
curled: folded up
withering: drying