



STUDY COURSE MATERIAL - 3

ENGLISH

SESSION-2020-21

CLASS-X

TOPIC: POEM [DUST OF SNOW] by Robert Frost

❖ About the Poet

- ✚ Robert Lee Frost (March 26, 1874 - January 29, 1963) was an American poet. His work was initially published in England before it was published in America. Known for his realistic depictions of rural life and his command of American colloquial speech, Frost frequently wrote about settings from rural life in New England in the early twentieth century, using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes.

Poem

*The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree*

*Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.*

Word Meanings

1. Shook- - shake
2. Hemlock- a poisonous tree with small white flowers
3. Rued- held in regret

Central Idea

The poem "Dust of Snow" by Robert Frost is a simple and short poem, yet with a deeper and larger meaning. This poem throws light upon the unimaginable healing power of nature and tiny things. From a bad mood to ill-health, there is nothing that can't be cured by nature. The author was experiencing one such bad day when a crow's movement near a hemlock tree dusted snow upon him. The snow instantly makes him happier. His day gets a lot better. Thus, the supremacy of nature as a whole made him realise how petty his problem was. The fact that hemlock tree is poisonous combined with crow being the indicator of doom and fear are used in the poem as the carriers of happiness in the life of narrator is ironical. The poet, through these objects has tried to highlight that sometimes creatures linked with negative aspects of life can be the bringer of change and happiness. Being outdoors in nature, with all its unpredictability can benefit anyone, anywhere at any time.

Summary

The poem is set in a scene where the poet is in a bad mood and is walking by a tree, a hemlock tree. Hemlock tree is a poisonous tree. As he passes by, a crow happens to throw some snow dust on him. Whether it falls on his head or shoulders is unknown as there is no specific mention in the poem. Also, the readers are left in doubt about the bird's specific action. Whether the crow was landing, shivering with cold, re adjusting itself on the branch or taking off, it happened to send some particles of snow upon the author. Here, the two agents of nature, the hemlock tree and the crow are signifiers of sadness and gloom just like the poet's mood was in the opening scene.

For reasons unknown, the author was having a terrible day. But the falling of the snow on his head lifted his mood instantly. He had already spent his day in a bad mood but the rest of it was saved by the crow and the hemlock tree. Generally,

hemlock tree and crow are used for negative references but the poet used them beautifully to portray that inauspicious things can bring joy and happiness too. One must not take things for granted and should be open and accept whichever way the nature chooses to bless us.

Literary Devices

★ **Rhyme Scheme-** abab cdcd

★ **Alliteration-** the occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words. The instances of alliteration are as follows-



**Has given my heart
And saved some part**

★ **Inversion** - when the structure of a sentence is changed by the poet to create rhyme, this poetic license is called inversion. In stanza 1, inversion can be seen.

★ **Assonance** - the prominence of a vowel sound throughout a line is called assonance. In stanza 1, line 2 - "Shook down on me" - 'o' sound is prominent.

★ **Enjambment** - when the same sentence continues to the next line without the use of any punctuation marks, it is called enjambment. It has been used throughout the poem.

Questions and Answers

Q1. What is a “dust of snow”? What does the poet say has changed his mood? How has the poet’s mood changed?

Ans. “Dust of snow” refers to the tiny particles of snow. The particles are so small that poet referred to them as “dust”. The poet was in an awful mood when particles of snow had fallen on him. This changed the poet’s frame of mind instantly and his day got a lot better.

Q 2. How does Frost present nature in this poem? The following questions may help you to think of an answer.

- **(i) What are the birds that are usually named in poems? Do you think a crow is often mentioned in poems? What images come to your mind when you think of a crow?**

Ans. Birds like sparrow, nightingale and peacock are more than often named in poems. Unlike these birds, crows are often seen as the indicators of doom and fear. They are often used for negative references.

- **(ii) Again, what is “a hemlock tree”? Why doesn’t the poet write about a more ‘beautiful’ tree such as a maple, or an oak, or a pine?**

Ans. Trees are also seen as mighty creatures imparting wisdom as they’re too old. They give out oxygen and absorb the carbon dioxide which is connected with absorbing all the negative energy. But there are trees that are poisonous too, like a hemlock tree. The poet does not mention a more ‘beautiful’ tree such as maple, oak or pine because he wants to indicate a sad scene. Being poisonous, a hemlock tree is considered bad and so, he refers to it.

- **(iii) What do the ‘crow’ and ‘hemlock’ represent – joy or sorrow? What does the dust of snow that the crow shakes off a hemlock tree stand for?**

Ans. Both crow and the hemlock tree represent sorrow. Frost has used both the negative creatures (crow and the hemlock tree) as the carriers of positivism and strength that transformed his day for the better. By not using birds like sparrow and nightingale and trees like maple, oak or a pine, the poet has tried to break down all the preconceived notions we have about certain agents of nature. He has tried to make us understand that we see the world not as how it is, but as how we want to see it. Thus, the crow sitting and a hemlock tree together made his day better. The dust of snow stands for joy.