

TENDER HEART HIGH SCHOOL, SEC. 33 B, CHD.

CLASS : IX

SUBJECT : ENGLISH LITERATURE

POEM : A WORK OF ARTIFICE

Explanation: Marge Piercy (March 31, 1936 - till present) was born in Detroit, Michigan. She is an American progressive (who works for the progress of women in particular) activist and writer. Piercy was the first member of her family to attend college, and win a scholarship to attend the University of Michigan. She developed an avid love for books during a period of her illness when she didn't have any other work to do. She got to know about a fascinating and different world of creativity and imagination through her reading of various kinds of books. Eventually she turned to writing. 'A Work of Artifice' brings out the miserable plight of women in male-dominated societies in which women are treated as an object of mere decoration. Women are denied all opportunities to grow to their optimum potential. They are made to accept their subordinate role within the four walls of their homes.

At the literal level, the poem 'A Work of Artifice' is about a bonsai tree kept in a pot, an attractive decoration piece. The tree is carefully and lovingly pruned by the gardener to reduce its height so that it does not grow beyond nine inches.

CLASS: IX

SUBJECT: ENGLISH LITERATURE

The main idea projected in this poem through the metaphorical use of the bonsai tree is that the stunting the growth of women is a clever trick played by men. The bonsai tree would have grown 'eighty feet high' if it had been grown on the side of a mountain but was pruned and dwarfed for a particular role. This is what, men do with women. They begin early to condition women to fit into socially acceptable roles. They (Males) tell them ^{now} to feel protected within the domestic walls, look attractive and do domestic chores. They (Women) are made to believe that it is in their nature to be small, weak and domesticated.

It is, however ironical that men who stunt women's physical, mental and spiritual growth still look to the women for loving touch, comfort and admiration.

LINE-WISE EXPLANATION:

Lines 1-5: Bonsai is the Japanese and East Asian art of growing and training miniature trees in containers, developed from the traditional Chinese art form of Penjing. It is pretty natural to keep the bonsai tree in a pot in a room as a decoration piece or as a miniature representation of nature. The poet begins the poem, by strongly referring to the bonsai tree, stating that the tree could grow

CLASS: IX

SUBJECT: ENGLISH LITERATURE

eighty feet tall had it been allowed to grow outside the pot preferably allowed to grow on the side of a mountain till it is cut down by lightning. As we read the poem minutely we realise that the bonsai tree represents an oppressed woman who is not allowed to grow fully, physically, mentally and spiritually by men.

- LINES 6-14: The gardener who basically represents the woman's husband or lover - subjects the bonsai tree to constant pruning and does it allow it to grow more than just nine inches. The poet wants to convey on metaphorical level that a male's woman who is representative of all oppressed women in patriarchal society is not allowed to be self-reliant, independent and decisive by the males. The gardener very happily and carefully prunes it to stop its growth so that it does not get affected because of its natural growth in its natural habitat i.e. on the side of a mountain.

LINES 15-16: The man, like the gardener, tells his woman that she is lucky to be in a home doing domestic chores as she is small and weak. Just as the Bonsai tree is safe and protected in a pot, so is she in her home. It is clear that like the gardener, a man also understands or considers a woman to be a 'pet' or a 'possession' that he

CLASS: IX

SUBJECT: ENGLISH LITERATURE

Keeps protected within the four walls of his home. Everyday as the gardener whittles (reduces the size of something) back the branches of the bonsai tree the gardener croons (sings) in happiness and emphasises the fact that it is your nature to be weak^{cozy} and small and same is the plight of women in this patriarchal society despite a lot of advancement which has taken place around the globe. A few narrowminded males cannot bear women doing all types of work and establishing their own individuality. The gardener or the male considers the tree or directly a woman to have got a pot to grow in absolutely safe from all natural calamities i.e lightning, rain and thunder or to have got four walls in case of a woman to protect herself from any type of peril that can lurk around a woman who steps outside to explore her potential.

LINES 22-24: In the last lines of the poem the poet brings out the fact^{that} a tree's conditioning (pruning) must begin early in life so that it remains small (little), weak and comfortable or the conditioning of women must also begin early so she remains a dependent woman as he desires her to be. This conditioning specifically refers to controlling the way somebody grows and behaves. The man ensures that she willingly subjects

CLASS: IX

SUBJECT: ENGLISH LITERATURE

herself to accepting the role of a tamed creature i.e. small, weak and subjugated.

The poet here apparently mentions how men oppress women and stunt their growth. Women are made to curl their hair in order to look attractive or bind their feet to keep them small. Their brains are stunted. They are made to accept the fact that this particular way of looking attractive suits them or this is the only way they can be accepted in society.

The last two lines are ironic. The men who stunt the growth of women still want admiration and comfort from them which seems utterly impossible.