

Class -X
English Poem
A Tiger in the Zoo

Summary of the Poem

Answer

The dweller of the forest is forcefully put in a cage. The tiger is caged in a zoo. There, in his artificial habitat, he walks in quiet rage. The stripes on his body are very distinct and can be easily seen. The stripes are darker in colour than the rest of his coat. The tiger moves very softly and quietly with his 'pads of velvet'. But the range of his movement is limited. He goes on moving around within the confines of his cage. The tiger doesn't relish the stares of the onlookers in the zoo. His rage or anger is suppressed.

The poet means that the zoo is not the rightful place of the tiger. He is a denizen of the jungle. His real place is in the wild. Had he been in the wild, he would have been lurking around in shadow. He must have been sliding quietly through the long grass to ambush his kill. He should be using the long grass and shadows as necessary covers to keep his movement undetected. He would know where he could get his favourite hunt — the plump deer. He should approach the waterhole quietly where animals and deer come to drink water.

Had the tiger been in the forest, sometimes he would stray into human settlement. He would stray around the outskirts of the village. These human settlements are at the jungle's edge. On seeing the villagers he would open his long sharp teeth and claws to terrorise the residents. But it would be just a show of power and strength to the villagers. He would have no intention of killing the villagers and entering their houses. The poet tries to say that generally the tiger never attacks till he is highly provoked. Killing is not his hobby but only the necessity of his food.

Unfortunately, he is locked in a concrete cell of a zoo. His powerful and strong body is of no use to him as he is put behind the bars. His movements have been limited. He is continuously moving about the length and breadth of his cage. He doesn't relish the curious stares of the visitors. He simply ignores their presence.

The poet describes how the day ends for the tiger. He doesn't go to sleep until the late hours of the night. He hears the sound of the cars of the zoo official patrolling at night. The stars shine brightly in the sky and so do his brilliant eyes at night. He is constantly looking at the brilliant stars. Alas, he watches the brilliant stars only behind the bars of his cage.

Q1. Notice the use of a word repeated in lines such as these:

(i) On pads of velvet quiet,
In his quiet rage.

(ii) And stares with his brilliant eyes
At the brilliant stars.

What do you think is the effect of this repetition?

Answer

This repetition is a poetic device used by the poet in order to increase the intensity of the tiger's rage and his helpless silence. 'Velvet quiet' refers to the quiet velvet pads of the tiger, which cannot run or leap. They can only walk around the limited space in the cage. The use of 'quiet rage' symbolises the anger and ferocity that is building up inside the tiger as it wants to run out into the forest and attack a deer, but the rage is quiet because it cannot come out in the open as it is in the cage. This double use of 'quiet' has brought immense beauty to the poem. Similarly, the use of 'brilliant' for the tiger's eyes as well as the stars also brings out the magnificence of these lines. The tiger has dreams of being free in its 'brilliant' eyes. It sees the stars (that have also been described as brilliant) with the same eyes. It stares at the brilliant stars with its brilliant eyes thinking about how beautiful its life could be in the forest. The repetitiveness of these words gives a wonderful effect to the poem.