

## Where the Mind is Without Fear

-Rabindra Nath Tagore

### Summary

"Where The Mind Is Without Fear" is a pre-independent poem in which the poet sincerely urges to God to awake his fellow beings for the realization that the essential need to live in a free and united country. He wants his countrymen to awake and enjoy the life of full dignity and honor.

His countrymen would not be superstitious or believers of blind faith rather than they would lead the life of enlightened and educated. He wishes to the people, to be honest, open-minded and industrious. Then only they would stretch their **'arms towards perfection'** and the nation can actually achieve the apex of success.

They need to use their reasons over their blind faiths and must be ready to accept new thoughts and ideas. He requests God to free his country from manipulation, corruption, and slavery. He yearns for an awakened country where there would be freedom of the mind and expression of ideas.

The poem invokes the deep patriotic feelings. Our country is subjugated by castes, creed, superstitious beliefs and biased ideas. Tagore earnestly appeals to God that a country would be where people's **'head is high'** and **'knowledge is free'**.

His country would not be divided and fragmented into pieces due to their narrow thoughts. They should express their words not from the mind but from **'the depth of truth'** and heart.

He urges God to guide his countrymen for moral awakening to fight for their rights against British inhuman rules. Liberate them from the fear of oppression, repression, and subjugation. Unshackle the chains of fear and direct them to the paths of progress and prosperity.

They should be confident not confined. There would not be injustice and inequality in the country on the basis of caste, creed, and gender. Countrymen should be unprejudiced and open-minded accepting the new challenges and changes. They should lead their lives of decency and dignity.

To conclude "Where The Mind Is Without Fear" is a poem in which Tagore reveals his personal quest for the Divine and characterized by a variety of original themes both in thought and expression.

Therefore, this poem is remarkable to a great extent which expresses the intensity of the feeling of freedom. His poem is universal in its appeal and envisions the **'heaven of freedom'** and happier future for mankind.

Where the Mind is Without Fear Central Idea

"Where The Mind Is Without Fear" is a thought-provoking poem by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, an Indian writer. Tagore is a poet, dramatist and often refers to as '**the Bard of Bengal**'. It is one the best poems in the anthology called "**Gitanjali**" which was published in 1912 and won the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913.

When Tagore composed this poem his mind was confined by the chains of slavery like any others common citizens of India because India was under the clutch of the British Rule where freedom was like day-dreaming.

This poem is written in the form of prayer to God, the true bearer of freedom. He urges God throughout the poem with his mysterious concept of freedom from the struggle for awakening to his countrymen.

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#### **Critical Analysis of Where the Mind is Without Fear:**

"Where the Mind is Without Fear" was written during the reign of the British in India, prior to the country gaining its independence from colonial rule. In fact, Tagore died just a few years before 1947, when India became independent. So the country that he was living in was a country under oppression. However, the oppression was not just physical in nature, but mental as well. The Indian population had started believing that they would never be free. They were always afraid of what they would be subjected to next by the British administration. They had lost their self-confidence and dignity. Thus, their spirit had been entirely drained out of them and they were left pessimistic. Many Indians were denied admission into the elite educational institutes which were meant exclusively for the children of colonial officers. Only rarely were Indians admitted, and that too, if they were to gain entry there they had to belong to the upper classes, especially that class of the native population that chose to side with the British and were always at their beck and call. As a result of this, the Indian nation states were then willing to fight it out amongst themselves to curry favor with the colonial rulers.

All this upset the poet greatly. So he dreamt of a better tomorrow – one in which his country would stand up for truth, for hard work, for reason, and for determination. He wanted his countrymen to stand united against the British, make themselves irreprehensible and fight for their freedom. He wanted them to be open-minded and for their actions to speak louder than their words. By referring to God as "Father", he was saying that all of his countrymen were the



children of God. Hence they must not discriminate amongst themselves on the basis of caste or creed but must stand up for each other. They have a common goal – independence – and must work side by side to achieve it.

### Central Idea of Where the Mind is Without Fear:

In “Where the Mind is Without Fear”, the poet envisions the India of the future. In this country, no man will live in fear. Instead, they will have a strong sense of self-dignity. They will all possess a share of knowledge or wisdom. No Indian will discriminate against another on the basis of class or caste, and all its various states will join hands in the fight against the British. Every man will speak the truth, and try to achieve self-perfection. They will stop believing in their superstitions and question these with the help of reason instead. They will follow the path of God and both their thoughts and actions will be righteous. Only then will India be truly free – not just in political terms, but in human terms as well. They will be independent not just in name but also in spirit.

### Themes of Where the Mind is Without Fear:

#### Banga-bhanga (Division of Bengal):

In 1905, the Indian state of Bengal was divided into two parts by the British – West Bengal and East Bengal. East Bengal later became Bangladesh in 1971. The division was done according to the policy that came to be known as the ‘divide and rule’ policy. It was done on the basis of religious identity. In the regions included under West Bengal, the Hindu population was considerably greater than the Muslim population, and in the regions included under East Bengal, the Muslim population was present in a larger proportion than the Hindu population. The division of Bengal was known as “Banga-bhanga” in the Bengali language, “Banga” being the original Bengali name of the region (the mane of which was later Anglicized) and “bhanga” meaning the action of breaking something. This was an event that directly affected every citizen of the previously united territory of Bengal, and Tagore was no exception. Hence, it is probably the division of Bengal that he has in mind while writing lines 3 and 4 of “Where the Mind is Without Fear” in which he speaks about the nation being broken into fragments. Written as it was in 1910, you can see that five years after the event, the poet is still deeply saddened by it. In fact, the Indian festival of ‘rakhi’ (during which sisters tie Rakhi on the hands of their brothers) is derived from something that Tagore started. One auspicious day, Tagore appealed to all Hindus in Bengal to go out in the streets and tie a thread on the hands of their Muslim brothers, and vice versa. This was an initiative on his part to protest against the division of Bengal.

## Combination of East and West:

Tagore was not one of the staunch nationalists who believed that everything about the West was bad. In fact, he believed that many practices of the West could be incorporated into Indian culture to make it better. His novels like *Gora* and *Ghare Baire* speak of the synthesis of the two cultures. That a British boy could come to love India and consider his motherland was a radical message at the time. Those Indian women could be educated by English mistresses was another. Tagore was also greatly influenced by English poetry, especially that of the Romantics, and uses similar themes in his own poems. He also adopted many Western tunes for his Bengali lyrics. The most famous example of this is "Purano shei diner kotha", which was set to the tune of Robert Burns' Scots poem "Auld Lang Syne". In this poem, too, Tagore advocates the application of the Western virtue of reason to do away with the superstitions harbored by his fellow men. As we know, the reason was a legacy of the Age of the Enlightenment that came to England in the 18th century. However, Tagore felt that it ought to be adopted by the Indian peoples as well, for it would help them become more open-minded and teach them to have more confidence in themselves. Ultimately it would help them to gain their independence from their colonial rulers. This technique is known in postcolonial studies as 'using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house'.

## *The Tone of Where the Mind is Without Fear:*

The tone of this poem is dignified and inspirational. None of the things that Tagore describes seem to be impossible or even hard to achieve. In fact, he makes us feel that all those things are within our reach, and we only have to reach out and grab them.

## *Conclusion:*

"Where the Mind is Without Fear" is one of the best-known poems of Tagore. That is because its message can easily stand the test of time. Of course, it was inspirational to be the freedom fighters of India at the time in which it was written. However, it has continued to move readers for a century since then. The way in which it defines freedom is radical – not just freedom from the rule of another race, but freedom of the mind. That is the kind of freedom that every man craves, even one who is living in a supposedly free state. That is why its subject matter is relatable to all readers, and it inspires them greatly as well.



## Summary

The poem is a paean to British stoicism and masculine rectitude; almost every line in each stanza begins with "If". It is subtitled "'Brother Square-Toes' - Rewards and Fairies".

The poem's speaker says that if you can keep your head while those around you lose theirs; if you can trust yourself when others doubt you; if you can be patient and not lose your temper; if you can handle being lied about but not lie yourself, and being hated but not hating yourself; if you do not look too good or talk too wise:

If you can dream but not let those dreams cloud your reason; if you can think but still take action; if you can deal with both triumph and disaster; if you can handle it when others twist your truths into lies, or take the things you devoted your life to and turn them from broken into alive again:

If you can take all of your winnings and bet them in one fell swoop and lose them all and then keep it a secret; if you can use your heart and muscles and nerves to hold on even when there is only Will left:

If you can remain virtuous among people and talk with Kings without becoming pretentious; if you can handle foes and friends with ease; if you see that men count on you but not too much; if you can fill every minute with meaning:

Then you have all the Earth and everything upon it, and, as the speaker exultantly ends, "you'll be a Man, my son!"

## Analysis

This is, without a doubt, Kipling's most beloved poem, and, along with "The White Man's Burden", his most famous. Although T.S. Eliot would deem it only "great verse" and others "jingoistic nonsense," it is consistently ranked among the highest, if not the highest itself, of Britons' favorite poems. It was first published in the "Brother Square-Toes" chapter of *Rewards and Fairies*, a 1910 collection of verse and short stories.

While the poem is addressed to Kipling's son John, it was inspired by a great friend of his, Leander Starr Jameson, the Scots-born colonial politician and adventurer responsible for what has been deemed the Jameson raid that led

to the Second Boer War. The raid was intended to start an uprising among the British expatriate workers in the South African Republic, but there were complications and it was a failure. Jameson was arrested and tried, but he was already being hailed a hero by London, which was filled with anti-Boer sentiment. He served only fifteen months in prison and later became Prime Minister of Cape Colony back in South Africa. It appears that Kipling had met Jameson and befriended him through Cecil Rhodes, the Prime Minister of Cape Colony at the time of the raid.

In his autobiography *Something of Myself*, Kipling wrote of Jameson and "If-": "Among the verses in Rewards was one set called 'If-', which escaped from the book, and for a while ran about the world. They were drawn from Jameson's character, and contained counsels of perfection most easy to give. Once started, the mechanization of the age made them snowball themselves in a way that startled me. Schools, and places where they teach, took them for the suffering Young - which did me no good with the Young when I met them later. (*'Why did you write that stuff? I've had to write it out twice as an impot.'*). They were printed as cards to hang up in offices and bedrooms; illuminated text-wise and anthologized to weariness. Twenty-seven of the Nations of the Earth translated them into their seven-and-twenty tongues, and printed them on every sort of fabric."

"If-" contains a multitude of characteristics deemed essential to the ideal man. They almost all express stoicism and reserve - the classic British "stiff upper lip." In particular, a man must be humble, patient, rational, truthful, dependable, and persevering. His behavior in response to deleterious events and cruel men is important; he must continue to have faith in himself when others doubt him, he must understand that his words might be twisted and used for evil, he must be able to deal with the highest and lowest echelons of society, and he must be able to withstand the lies and hatred emanating from others. This group of ideal characteristics is similar to those expressed in "[\*The Thousandth Man\*](#)", another poem dealing with manhood.

The virtues expressed in "If-" are devoid of showiness or glamour; it is notable that Kipling says nothing of heroic deeds or great wealth or fame. For him the true measure of a man is his humility and his stoicism. Kipling's biographer, Andrew Lycett, considers the poem one of the writer's finest and notes in 2009 that "If-" is absolutely valuable even in the complicated postmodern world: "In these straitened times, the old-fashioned virtues of fortitude, responsibilities and resolution, as articulated in 'If-', become ever more important."



# NO MEN ARE FOREIGN

-James Kirkup

## About the poet: – James Kirkup

James Harold Kirkup (1918 – 2009) was an English poet, translator, dramatist, autobiographer and travel writer. He was the only son of a carpenter and studied in South Shields High School. Later he graduated from Durham University. He was a prolific writer and was skilled in writing 'haiku' and 'tanka'. His epic 'Pikadon' deals with the bombings of 'Hiroshima' and 'Nagasaki'. He wrote over 45 books and received the Atlantic- Rockefeller Award (1950). He became a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1962.

## Summary of the poem –

The poem deals with the theme of human equality and universal brotherhood. It is a wake-up call for the readers to realise the destructive effects of war and discrimination.

The **first stanza** starts with 'remember' indicating that people must reflect and remind themselves that the boundaries and discrimination in the minds of people are not real but creations of man's mind. He says that in spite of physical and cultural differences entire mankind is same and the divisions that make a country foreign are not made by nature hence unnatural. The entire earth is the home for mankind and therefore no country is foreign. Making reference to the Second World War, he says that soldiers who wear different uniforms are having the same humanity inside them. Despite the difference in their attires 'a single body breathes' in the sense that their emotions, needs and wants are the same. It is the same earth on which every human walks, thrives and will be buried after death. No matter what superficial differences we create; we shall lead the same type of life, and meet the same end.

In the **second stanza** the poet says that the basic needs of every human is the same. Everyone is bestowed with the ability to perceive and use the basic elements of nature like the sun, wind and water. People enjoy the bounties of nature during times of peace and face hunger during harsh winters and war. He means to convey the message that everyone has the same ups and downs in life during good and bad times and nature treats all living beings as equal. The hands of people in other parts of the world do the same type of work as we do and their thoughts and writings are similar to ours. Hence there is no difference among God's creations.

The **third stanza** tells us that people in other countries see, sleep and wake up just like us. They have the same physical and mental abilities. They too have an inner strength which can be dominated by force but won over by love. Love is the universal language that is understood by all and can win over the greatest of strengths. The poet

means to say that it is not through war but through empathy and love that people's hearts can be won.

The poet warns the readers in the **fourth stanza** by saying that we should be vigilant of the negative forces who want to profit by spreading difference and hatred. Politicians, religious leaders and people with vested interests instigate the common people to take up arms and fight against each other. In harming each other due to the hatred spread by selfish leaders, it is we who suffer and face huge losses while the leaders who spread such hatred enjoy benefits and lead secure and comfortable lives.

The **last stanza** speaks of the negative outcomes of hatred and war. When people think of others as different and fight against each other, the world gets polluted with hatred and the blood of the dead. The world becomes a hell due to the anger, hatred and enmity among humans. Purity and innocence in the environment surrounding us is violated resulting in grief and loss. The poet ends the poem by reminding us that all men are the same and we must not think of people living in other countries as foreign and the other countries as strange. He wants everyone to change their mindset and be united, so that there is no excuse for war.

#### Theme of 'No Men are Foreign'

The theme of the poem is universal brotherhood and renunciation of war. The poet tells us that all humans are the same and are brothers. We all have similar bodies and needs in life. Our livelihoods are same and so are our ends. We all flourish in times of peace and suffer during winter. We all work and think in similar manner and live in the same earth; therefore, we must overcome superficial differences and live in a united manner.

#### Message of 'No Men are Foreign'

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The poet gives us the message that superficial differences are no excuse for war. Xenophobia or fear of foreigners is the basis of war, and common people must realise that war does not benefit them in any way so they must avoid war and live like brothers. Hatred, anger, differences yield negative results and therefore must be avoided at all costs.

Some important lines and its explanations:

**'Beneath all uniforms'** – uniforms have been metaphorically used to refer to the different kinds of military dresses in different countries. It is ironical as it creates differences instead of uniformity. Uniform can also be said to be 'metonymy' standing for the military.

**'war's long winter starv'd'** – the starvation faced during war and winter. Here '*winter*' stands for the times of adversity when people suffer.



**'Remember'** This word has been repeated five times in the poem to emphasise the importance of implementing universal brotherhood.

**peaceful harvests'** - here the harvests are not peaceful but the peasants cultivating them are in peaceful times.

Question - Answers of 'No men are Foreign'

**1. "Beneath all uniforms..." What uniforms do you think the poet is speaking about?**

Ans. The poet is speaking of the various uniforms that soldiers of different countries wear or even the traditional dresses of people across which creates difference among people at the superficial level. He tells the readers that all men are similar beneath the uniforms.

**2. How does the poet suggest that all people on earth are the same?**

The poet tells us that beneath the superficial differences there is a sameness that unites all mankind. We walk on the same earth and on death are buried in the same earth. We enjoy the bounties of nature during the times of peace and face starvation during times of adversities. We work and think in similar pattern and our eyes and bodies function in the same manner.

**3. Why does the poet think that no men are foreign?**

Ans. The poet tells us that every individual has the same type of body, has similar needs, lead the same type of life in the same earth and go back to the same earth after death therefore all are alike.

**4. What do you understand by 'peaceful harvests'?**

Ans. Peaceful harvests refer to the crops grown and harvested during times of peace. The poet means to say that people can enjoy the bounties of nature during peaceful times.

**5. Elucidate- 'War's long winter starv'd'.**

Ans. The phrase means that common agricultural activities cannot be carried on during war; hence people face deprivation and starvation during war. The times of war is compared with long winter when the land is covered by snow preventing people from enjoying bounties of nature.

**6. Why does the poet say 'their hands are ours'?**

Ans. the poet means to say that the hands of people we consider as foreign do the same kind of work as we do.