

UNIT-6

WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR

Rabindranath Tagore

Structure

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6.0 Introduction

This poem by great Rabindranath Tagore was most likely composed in 1900. It was included in the volume called 'Naibedya', the original poem bears the title 'Prarthana' meaning prayer. In 1911, Tagore translated this poem into English. It appeared as poem 35 in the English *Gitanjali*, published by the Indian Society, London, in 1912. In 1917, Tagore read out the English version (then titled 'Indian Prayer') at the Indian National Congress session in Calcutta. The poem is a prayer to God. It was written by Rabindranath Tagore during the time when India was under the British Rule and people were eagerly waiting to get their freedom from the British Rule. This poem had given a lot of strength to the people who were struggling for India's independence. It is a prayer to the Almighty for creation of a peaceful nation free from any kind of scheming or polluted powers.

6.1 Unit Objectives

The objective of this unit/poem is to help the students in appreciating the poetic capabilities and deep insight of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry. The students need to be well versed in understanding the finer aspects of Tagore's poetry which aimed at inculcating a sense of self dignity, truthfulness, rationality, broadmindedness making them fearless and hardworking.

6.2 About the Poet

Rabindranath Tagore, popularly known as Gurudev, restructured Bengali literature and music, as well as Indian art during the 19th and early 20th centuries. He became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for his collection of verses and songs known as *Gitanjali*. Tagore introduced new prose and verse forms, and also popularised the use of colloquial language in Bengali literature that freed Bengali literature from traditional models based on classical Sanskrit. Tagore was

also supportive in introducing the best of Indian culture to the West and vice versa. He is by and large regarded as the most exceptional creative artist of the modern Indian subcontinent.

He wrote primarily in Bengali but translated many of his works into English to be read worldwide. His best known works are *Gitanjali* (meaning “*Song Offerings*”), *Gora* (meaning “*Fair-Faced*”) and *Ghare-Baire* (meaning “*The Home and the World*”). His writings, eulogised worldwide, are held in high regard for their lyricism, colloquialism, naturalism, and unnatural contemplation. He founded, Visva-Bharati University, where we can have a look at his rich legacy. His novels, stories, songs, dance-dramas, and essays deal with both political and personal themes.

His compositions were chosen by two nations as national anthems: India’s *Jana Gana Mana* and Bangladesh’s *Amar Shonar Bangla* are both composed by him.

In 1915, he was granted knighthood, a British Crown but he renounced it in protest against the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre. His views on culture, education, poverty, gender and freedom are relevant in the 21st century as well.

6.3 About the Poem

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
 Where knowledge is free
 Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
 By narrow domestic walls
 Where words come out from the depth of truth
 Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
 Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
 Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
 Where the mind is led forward by thee
 Into ever-widening thought and action
 Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

The poem was written at a time where Indians were under the British Rule. By yearning for an awakened country where there would be freedom of the mind and the spirit, the poem invokes deep patriotic feelings among the readers. By praying for a freedom of spirit, education, work the poem actually highlights the condition of the country then –Subjugated, dependent, bound by cast creed, superstitious beliefs and prejudices

Throughout the poem the poet has yearned, prayed, appealed for a country which would be the “heaven of freedom” thus giving us, the readers, a state to aspire for. The poem has always had a global appeal and is relevant even today. The same yearning continues. The yearning for a world where there would be freedom of the spirit, dignity, where people would not cower in fear of subjugation.

The poet wishes that in his country everyone should be fearless and honoured. He wishes a free country where one can acquire knowledge without restriction. He wishes that his country should not be divided on the basis of narrow-domestic walls of caste, class, colour, religion, creed and religion. He wishes that his countrymen should be honest and truthful. They should strive tirelessly to achieve perfection in all their undertakings. They should not be led astray by bad habits and thoughts. Their mind should be led forward towards noble thoughts. He prays to God to raise his country into the heaven of freedom.

6.4 Summary

Rabindranath Tagore sketches a moving picture of the nation; he would like India to be. In lines 1-2, the poet pledges to the Almighty that his country should be free from any fear of oppression or forced compulsion. He wants that everyone in his country should be free to hold their heads high in dignity. He dreams of a nation where knowledge or education would be free that is education should not be restricted to the upper class only but everybody should be free to acquire knowledge. There should not be any caste distinctions or gender distinction when it comes to education.

Tagore, in his poem ‘Where The Mind Is Without Fear’ wishes for a world which is not ‘fragmented’ by prejudices based on caste, creed, color, religion or other baseless superstitions. Prejudices and superstitions should not divide the people in groups and break their unity (line 4). He wants a nation where people are truthful, not superficial and words should come out from the depth of their hearts (line 5). The sixth line of ‘Where The Mind Is Without Fear’ talks about the poet yearning for a country where people would strive without getting tired to reach perfection leaving behind prejudices and old traditions. In the next line, line 7, Tagore wants the power of reason to dominate the minds of his countrymen, he does not want the ‘stream of reason’ to be lost amongst outdated customs and traditions and only that can direct the mind towards selfless thoughts and everlasting action. In the final line of the poem, Tagore asks the ‘Father’, presumably God to awaken his country into such a heaven of freedom.

6.5 Key Terms

Fragments: small pieces

Narrow	: Limited in amount, or scope
Domestic	: Existing or occurring inside a particular country
Tireless	: Having or showing great effort or energy
Striving	: to make great efforts to achieve or obtain something
Stretches	: to straighten or extend one’s body or a part of one’s body to its full length
Clear	: transparent; unclouded
Stream	: A small, narrow river
Dreary	: monotonous, Depressingly dull and bleak
Thee	: An older form of the word “you”
Ever-widening	: Constantly increasing in scope

6.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

1. How can the head be held high?

Ans: The head can be held high when there is no fear in the mind.

2. What does the poet mean by ‘narrow domestic walls’?

Ans: Poet means that class, colour, caste, creed and religion are the narrow domestic walls.

3 In what kind of heaven does the poet want his country to be?

Ans: The poet wants his country to awake into a heaven of freedom, sound reasoning and righteous action.

6.7 Explanation of Important Passages

Passage 1

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
 Where knowledge is free
 Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
 By narrow domestic walls
 Where words come out from the depth of truth.

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from Rabindranath Tagore’s famous poem “Where the Mind is without Fear” In this poem the poet wants his country to awake in the freedom of mind thought, speech, education, belief practice and behaviour.

Explanation:

In these lines, the poet prays to the Almighty that everyone in his country should be fearless. People of his country should be free to hold their heads high in self-respect without having any fear of oppression or compulsion. In his country education should not be the monopoly of the rich and the affluent. The distribution of knowledge should not be restricted by narrow ideas and loyalties. The poet feels that the world of man is fragmented; it is restricted to small mutually exclusive compartments. The poet prays that the minds of his countrymen should not be engulfed in prejudices based on caste, class, colour, religion, creed, region and narrow superstitions. On the other hand, their minds should be enriched by thoughts and actions, which are worthy and beneficial to the nation. He feels that the words of truth should come out from the depth of the heart and should be spoken courageously in the open for the world to hear.

Passage 2

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
 Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
 Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
 Where the mind is led forward by thee
 Into ever-widening thought and action
 Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake

Reference to the Context: These lines have been taken from Rabindranath Tagore’s famous poem “Where the Mind is without Fear” In this poem the poet wants his country to awake in the freedom of mind thought, speech, education, belief practice and behaviour.

Explanation:

In these lines the poet prays that his countrymen should work for perfection in everything with the help of reason, leaving aside superstitious rituals. They should not be led astray from their goal in the dry desert of dead habits, that is, in a place where outdated customs and traditions are followed. His countrymen’s mind should be led forward into progressive thought and action, that is, they should be led by the power of reasoning to focus on the future with scientific thought. Tagore wants his country to awake to such a state of sound reasoning and righteous action. He prays to God, that his country should awake into a heaven of freedom.

6.8 Questions and Exercises

Answer the following Questions in 20 to 30 words each.

1. What does Tagore mean by ‘narrow domestic walls’?

Ans: According to Tagore narrow domestic walls are the walls of caste, class, colour, creed and religion. These walls create prejudices and divide the people in groups and break their unity .

2. How can people achieve perfection?

Ans: According to the poet people can achieve perfection by striving tirelessly in all their undertakings leaving behind prejudices and old traditions.

3. What importance does Tagore ascribe to knowledge, truth and reason?

Ans: Tagore wants his country to awake in a state of sound reasoning and righteous action. He feels that proper knowledge, should be accompanied by truthfulness and logical reasoning.

4. Why does the poet repudiate the idea of narrow domestic walls?

Ans: According to the poet, narrow domestic walls are detrimental to the overall growth of the nation. These walls create a rift between the society.

5. What type of strength does the poet pray for?

Ans: The poet in a patriotic mood prays for awakening of the country that is independent, where the people are free to express their thoughts, ideas and are free from all kinds of bondage.

Answer the following questions in about 200 words.

1. What kind of freedom does Tagore visualise for his country?

Ans: Rabindranath Tagore in this famous poem prays to God to awake his country in a heaven of freedom. This poem was written when India was under the British rule. So he wanted his country to get freedom from the British imperial rule. Tagore aspires of a true comprehensive society that should be knowledgeable, rational, truthful, hard-working and broad-minded to make his nation achieve true freedom — a kind of spiritual freedom.

Tagore pledges to God that his country should be free from any fear of oppression or forced compulsion. He wants that everyone in his country should be free to hold their heads high in dignity. He dreams of a nation where knowledge or education would be free that is education should not be restricted to the upper class only but everybody should be free to acquire knowledge. There should not be any caste distinctions or gender distinction when it comes to education.

The poet craves a world which is not ‘fragmented’ by prejudices based on caste, creed, color, religion or other baseless superstitions. Prejudices and superstitions should not divide the people in groups and break their unity. He wants a nation where people are truthful, not superficial and words should come out from the depth of their hearts ,where people would strive without getting tired to reach perfection leaving behind prejudices and old traditions.He wants the power of reason to dominate the minds of his countrymen, he does not want the ‘stream of reason’ to be lost amongst outdated customs and traditions and only that can direct the mind towards selfless thoughts and everlasting action based on truth and fearlessness.

Tagore, infact, pleads to the Almighty that apart from territorial independence, his country should also have spiritual and intellectual freedom.

2. Write a note on Tagore’s concept of ‘ the heaven of freedom’.

Ans: Rabindranath Tagore in this famous poem pleads to the Almighty that apart from territorial independence, his country should also be blessed with spiritual and intellectual freedom.

Tagore aspires of a true global society that should be well-informed, realistic, honest, hard-working and tolerant to make his nation achieve true freedom — a kind of spiritual freedom.

Tagore pledges to God that his country should be free from every kind of fear of oppression or forced compulsion. He wants that everyone in his country should be free to hold their heads high in dignity. He dreams of a nation where knowledge or education would be free for all and it should not be restricted to the upper class only but everybody should be free to acquire knowledge. There should not be any caste distinctions or gender distinction when it comes to education.

The poet craves a world which is not divided by prejudices based on caste, creed, color, religion or other baseless superstitions. Prejudices and superstitions should not divide the people in groups and break their unity. He wants a nation where people are truthful, not superficial and words should come out from the depth of their hearts ,where people would strive without getting tired to reach perfection leaving behind prejudices and old traditions.He wants the power of reason to dominate the minds of his countrymen, he does not want the ‘stream of reason’ to be lost amongst outdated customs and traditions and only that can direct the mind towards selfless thoughts and everlasting action based on truth and fearlessness.

3. Comment on the wide gap between the reality of contemporary India and Tagore’s concept of India.

Ans: Tagore’s desired India to become a heaven of Freedom. By this he dreamt of a global society where the society was not divided on the boundaries of colour, caste creed and religion.Tagore

does not talk about independence from the British rule rather he craves academic and sacred freedom for every citizen.

He wants his nation to rise above paltry issues and prejudiced intolerance and rise high above into the world of freedom of thought and expression based on truthfulness and courage. Tagore wanted that his countrymen should work for perfection in everything with the help of reason, leaving aside superstitious rituals. They should not be led astray from their goal in the dry desert of dead habits, that is, in a place where outdated customs and traditions are followed. His countrymen's mind should be led forward into progressive thought and action, that is, they should be led by the power of reasoning to focus on the future with scientific thought. Tagore wants his country to awake to such a state of sound reasoning and righteous action.

But, the reality of contemporary India is all together different. Even in the 21st century Indian society is largely divided on caste, colour and religious lines. Corruption and nepotism is rampant in all walks of life. Education and Health services are going beyond the reach of common man. A large section of Indian society is interested in filling their own coffers exploiting the natural resources to the maximum.