

No Men are Foreign

by James Kirkup

Central Idea of the Poem

The poem 'No Men are Foreign' is about the concept of global brotherhood and equality with any place for any kind of prejudice (partiality). The poet says that the whole world is one. There is nothing like strangers or people like foreign.

All of us have a common feeling of love and a common resource of our life in spite of different nationalities and religion or colour. We must unite to make everyone's life better. When we hate one another, we betray humanity. By indulging in wars against each other, we spoil the purity of this Earth which belongs to all of us. We all are human beings and we should remember that no man is foreign and no countries are strange.

Explanation of the Poem

Stanza 1

Remember, no men are strange, no countries foreign
Beneath all uniforms, a single body breathes
Like ours: the land our brothers walk upon
Is earth like this, in which we all shall lie.

WORD MEANINGS

strange	an unknown person
foreign	a country other than ours

Explanation The poet says that no person is stranger to us. There is nothing like a person being strange, who is not from our area or not from our native place. There is nothing like a country to be a foreign one that is not ours. There may be a difference in the way we eat, the way we talk and the way we dress ourselves but all these things still count to uniformity. We all are human beings. We may belong to different religions or castes, we may have different colours, we may speak different languages but above all these, we are only human beings. All the differences don't matter as we are brothers. We share a common land upon which we all walk, we all do our respective work, we all live and survive. At the end of our lives, we all shall lie on the same earth.

Stanza 2

They, too, aware of sun and air and water,
Are fed by peaceful harvests, by war's long winter starv'd.
Their hands are ours, and in their lines we read,
A labour not different from our own.

WORD MEANINGS

aware of	knowledge of something
fed	past form of feed
harvest	The produce from the fields
starv'd	shortened form of starved that means died due to hunger

Explanation In this stanza, the poet says that they, whom we call strangers or foreigners, also use the sun, air and water as we do. They too are aware of them and there is no difference in the way we use them. Thereby, the poet asserts that there is no foreigner among us. They get the crops and their eatables from the field as we do. They like peace as we do. During the war, even they have to face hardships and they die due to starvation as we would have. So, there is nothing like foreigners because all the things go parallel. They use their powers of hands to get the things done, as we do. Like us, they also speak to communicate with one another. So, where does the strangeness lie? Where do the foreigners lie? We are similar in every respect. Therefore, the poet stresses that there is nothing as to be called strange or foreign.

Stanza 3

Remember they have eyes like ours that wake
Or sleep, and strength that can be won
By love. In every land is common life
That all can recognise and understand.

WORD MEANINGS

wake	to arise/to get up
recognise	to identify

Explanation In this stanza, the poet says that how can someone be a stranger or a country be foreign with so much of similarity. He says that all of them, whom we call strangers, have eyes like that of ours. They too see the world like us. They too follow the course of earth everyday and sleep as well as wake-up. They too are sensitive like us. They have strength like us. They are courteous to love and sympathy, like us and even they can be won by it. Even they submit themselves to the lovely feelings. Over all, we can see that there is no difference in the way we live. Wherever we go, life has a similar mechanism, which is easily identifiable and can be understood with much ease. Summing up all these, the poet is right in saying that no men are strange and no country is foreign.

Stanza 4

Let us remember, whenever we are told
To hate our brother, it is ourselves
That we shall dispossess, betray, condemn.
Remember, we who take arms against each other

WORD MEANINGS

dispossess	deprive
betray	to cheat or to bluff,

Explanation The poet has proved the fact that there is nothing like strange or foreign. Everything has a similar frame. We all are same and nothing is there that can be used to prove dissimilarity. Still, there are some people among us, who disapprove of it, who try to break the feeling of brotherhood by provoking one against the other and destroying social as well as global harmony. These few people excite us to take the arms against our brothers, to hate them and to kill them. And, if we, in the fit of that provoking, do something wrong to our brothers, then we are harming our own spirits only. We are abusing our own serenity (peace). Our brothers, whom we should align, are subjected to the misdeeds that we do to them. We just degrade our own charm and this is a slap on the face of humanity. So, the poet says not to commit any such wrong deed and not to degrade humanity.

Stanza 5

It is the human earth that we defile.
Our hells of fire and dust outrage the innocence
Of air that is everywhere our own,
Remember, no men are foreign, and no
countries strange.

WORD MEANINGS

defile	to pollute
outrage	to overcome, to surpass

Explanation The poet further says that taking arms against our brothers not only pollutes our spirit but it also pollutes the whole earth we live upon. The hatred, jealousy inside our heart surpasses the good qualities and the innocence of the people. Whatever we do, in the state of provocation, is never justified and we make the surrounding polluted with our misdeeds. In the impression of strangeness and foreigners, we commit a grave mistake. We must not do any of the blunders under the pseudo (false)-impression of possession and self.

Poetic Devices Used in the Poem

Simile A device which compares two different things by using the words 'as' or 'like'.

- A single body breathes **like** ours
- Is earth **like** this

Assonance It is the repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words

- aware of sun and air and water
- A labour not different from our own

Rhyme scheme No rhyme. The poem is in free verse.

NCERT FOLDER

(Here we have covered questions given in the NCERT textbook along with their answers.)

I. *Thinking about the Poem* (Page 81)

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

(b) How does the poet suggest that all people on earth are the same?

Ans. (a) The poet is speaking about 'uniforms' of different colours, castes, creeds, religions and nationalities of the people.

(b) The poet says that though people of different nationalities look different from outside, but we all are human beings. We have the same body, the same needs, we use same resources.

2 In stanza 1, find five ways in which we all are alike. Pick out the words.

Ans. In following ways, we all are alike in stanza 1

(i) No men are strange.

(ii) No countries are foreign.

(iii) A single body breathes beneath all uniforms.

(iv) The land is same everywhere.

(v) The land where we all shall lie, is also the same.

3 How many common features can you find in stanza 2? Pick out the words.

Ans. Following common features can be found in stanza 2

(i) They, too, are aware of sun, air and water.

(ii) They, too, are fed by peaceful harvests.

(iii) Their hands are like ours.

(iv) In their lines we read.

(v) A labour not different from our own.

4 ".... Whenever we are told to hate our brothers ..." When do you think this happens? Why? Who 'tells' us? Should we do as we are told at such times? What does the poet say?

Ans. The perpetrators of wars, who have selfish motives to conquer and subjugate (conquer) others, incite 'brothers' to hate each other. They are the ones, who tell us to prepare for wars.

No, we should not do things their way. Other countrymen are like us only. So, the poet is true in his saying that no men are strange and no country is foreign.

Exam Practice

Extract Based Questions

[4 Marks each]

Read the following extracts carefully and choose the correct option.

1 Remember, no men are strange, no
countries foreign
Beneath all uniforms, a single body
breathes
Like ours: the land our brothers walk upon
Is earth like this, in which we all shall lie.

- (i) What does the poet mean by 'uniforms'?
 - (a) School children
 - (b) Army
 - (c) Police
 - (d) Different nationalities, languages, religions and sections of society
- (ii) What is the destined end of all the people?
 - (a) All will meet
 - (b) All will fight
 - (c) All will marry
 - (d) All will lie in the Earth they walk upon
- (iii) Which word in the extract means the same as 'unfamiliar'?
 - (a) Uniforms
 - (b) Countries
 - (c) Strange
 - (d) Single
- (iv) What should we remember?
 - (a) We all are great
 - (b) No men are strange or foreign
 - (c) Our uniform is very important
 - (d) Love yourself

Ans. (i) (d) Different nationalities, languages, religions and sections of society

(ii) (d) All will lie in the Earth they walk upon

(iii) (c) Strange

(iv) (b) No men are strange or foreign

2 They, too, aware of sun and air and water,
Are fed by peaceful harvests, by war's long
winter starv'd.

Their hands are ours, and in their lines we
read

A labour not different from our own.

- (i) What does the poet want to convey through the above lines?
 - (a) Rejoice everything
 - (b) We all are connected to the same source for our survival

(c) Physical power plays an important role in our life

(d) We all are different

(ii) How does the poet justify that all kind of labour is the same?

- (a) All labour needs efforts
- (b) All labour causes tiredness
- (c) All labour produces the same result
- (d) All labour is aimed at fulfilling our basic needs of survival

(iii) Which word in the extract is opposite to 'noisy'?

- (a) Peaceful
- (b) Aware
- (c) Harvests
- (d) Labour

(iv) What does the poet mean by the phrase 'War's Long Winter starv'd'?

- (a) War produces martyrdom
- (b) War brings laurels
- (c) War causes death and starvation
- (d) War spreads peace across the globe

Ans. (i) (b) We all are connected to the same source for our survival

(ii) (d) All labour is aimed at fulfilling our basic needs of survival

(iii) (a) Peaceful

(iv) (c) War causes death and starvation

3 Remember they have eyes like ours that wake
Or sleep, and strength that can be won
By love. In every land is common life
That all can recognise and understand.

(i) What similarity does the poet draw in different eyes?

- (a) All are black
- (b) All are spherical
- (c) All wake and sleep
- (d) All love to see the beauty

(ii) What can conquer the mightiest in the world?

- (a) Love
- (b) Hatred
- (c) Truth
- (d) Lie

(iii) Which word in the extract is similar to 'comprehend'?

- (a) Remember
- (b) Understand
- (c) Like
- (d) Recognise

(iv) What can be recognised easily as mentioned in the stanza?

- (a) Honesty
- (b) Cunningness
- (c) War
- (d) Common lifestyle

Ans. (i) (c) All wake and sleep

(ii) (a) Love

(iii) (b) Understand

(iv) (d) Common lifestyle

4 Let us remember, whenever we are told
To hate our brothers, it is ourselves
That we shall dispossess, betray, condemn.
Remember, we who take arms against each
other.

(i) What does the poet want us to remember?

- (a) That we shall dispossess, betray and condemn our ownself by hating our brothers
- (b) That we should be armed all the time
- (c) That we should hate any stranger, we meet
- (d) That we should die for our nation

(ii) What do we do when we hate our brothers?

- (a) Gain mental strength
- (b) Deteriorate our own character and spirit
- (c) Achieve satisfaction
- (d) Protect our national interests

(iii) Which word in the extract means 'lose'?

- (a) Condemn
- (b) Betray
- (c) Dispossess
- (d) Hate

(iv) Find the opposite of the word 'condemn'.

- (a) Belittle
- (b) Detest
- (c) Doom
- (d) Praise

Ans. (i) (a) That we shall dispossess, betray and condemn our ownself by hating our brothers
(ii) (b) Deteriorate our own character and spirit
(iii) (c) Dispossess
(iv) (d) Praise

5 It is the human earth that we defile.
Our hells of fire and dust outrage the
innocence
Of air that is everywhere our own,
Remember, no men are foreign, and no
countries strange.

(i) What harm do we cause to the Earth?

- (a) Flood it
- (b) Grow crops on it
- (c) Live on it
- (d) Defile it

(ii) Why is the innocence outraged?

- (a) Due to falsification
- (b) Due to poverty
- (c) Due to the stigma of hatred and jealousy
- (d) Due to war

(iii) Which word in the extract is similar to 'pollute'?

- (a) Hells
- (b) Defile
- (c) Outrage
- (d) Dust

(iv) Which poetic device has been used in the stanza?

- (a) Metaphor
- (b) Simile
- (c) Personification
- (d) Alliteration

Ans. (i) (d) Defile it

(ii) (c) Due to the stigma of hatred and jealousy

(iii) (b) Defile

(iv) (a) Metaphor

Short Answer (SA) Type Questions

[2 Marks each]

1 What does the poet mean by saying "no men countries foreign"?

Ans. By saying this, the poet means that the whole world is a singular entity despite all the possible differences in it and all the diversities of language, caste, colour etc.

2 Does the earth unite us in a sense? If yes, explain in the context of the poem.

Ans. Yes, the earth does unite us in one of the most beautiful senses. It is the earth that we walk upon and after our lives, we all shall lie inside it, which is our destined end.

3 In which context, 'harvests' and 'war' have been used by the poet?

Ans. 'Harvest' is symbolic to peace, when one does the cropping work in order to feed oneself, while 'war' has been used to show an intensity that is similar to starvation and destruction.

4 How is the labour not different for us and for the so called strangers?

Ans. The labour is not different for us and for the so called strangers because all of us have to do it for survival on a regular basis. Also, the hands and the mechanism we use are same.

5 How are the eyes of everyone similar according to the poet?

Ans. We have the same eyes as our so called strangers have. As our eyes wake and sleep so do theirs. As we dream of something, so do they. Hence, our eyes are similar.

6 What meaning does the poet imply by saying "strength that can be won by love"?

Ans. By saying this, the poet wants to imply the meaning that even the mightiest one can be conquered (won over) by the invincible (unbeatable) power of love. Love has that much capability which can be used to create wonders.

7 How can we say that there is a common life in every part of the land?

Ans. It can be said that there is common life everywhere. We share same resources and we all do labour. We are psychologically similar and we do understand the pain and pleasure equally.

8 How do we hate our brothers? Is it right?

Ans. We hate our brothers by taking arms against them, by judging them wrong and by seeing them as counterparts (replica). This is not right as when we hate others, we dispossess ourselves.

Long Answer (LA) Type Questions

[8 Marks each]

1 The poet has used various ways to establish the fact that we all are same. Explain these ways in accordance with the poem.

Ans. This poem is a revelation of the fact that the whole world is a union. Nothing is strange or foreign. No person or no country can be categorised to be strange. We are the people, who share this common land and hence, we can affirm that we are the same. Despite being from different countries, speaking different languages, believing in different religions, we all are same - the human beings.

We feel pain and the pleasure equally. We put our best and devoted efforts in the form of labour to procure the harvest. We are afraid of the war and rejoice at love. We share similar resources over the earth and our hatred is harmful for the earth. Keeping all these in mind, the poet has tried his best to establish the fact that we all are same.

2 Explain how does our hatred, jealousy and misdeed pollute our own earth.

Ans. The world is a union i.e. all the way a singular entity. We may belong to different nations, may speak different languages, may believe in different religions, but still we are same. Every person on this earth is our brother. If we are in brotherhood, we can share the joys of being together and enjoy the peace. But, if we stand against our fellow men, who are our brothers, and start a war with them, then we are polluting our own earth.

We not only lack our strength of character, but we are also criticising our own values. Our misdeeds, hatred and jealousy have no end which is a severe blow to the humanity and its concern. Therefore, we must remain intact to our values, to our ethics and to our dignity. Only these things can keep our earth away from being polluted and will remain a place to live in beautifully.

Self Assessment

Extract Based Question

Read the following extract carefully and choose the correct option.

- 1 Let us remember, whenever we are told
To hate our brothers, it is ourselves
That we shall dispossess, betray, condemn.
Remember, we who take arms against each other
- (i) Who, you think, says us to hate our brothers?
- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| (a) The Government | (b) The Fanatics |
| (c) Our ownself | (d) Religion |
- (ii) What happens when we hate our brothers?
- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| (a) We dispossess our ownself of noble virtues | (b) We are empowered |
| (c) The world recognises us | (d) We rule the world |
- (iii) What does the word 'betray' in the extract mean?
- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| (a) Stand by | (b) Hate |
| (c) Love | (d) Backstab |
- (iv) Why do you think the poet is against the war?
- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| (a) War creates warriors | (b) War destroys mankind |
| (c) War escalates growth | (d) War empowers the government |

Short Answer (SA) Type Questions

- 2 How can strength be won according to the poem?
- 3 What does the poet ask us to remember?

Long Answer (LA) Type Question

- 4 This poem suggests the need of universal brotherhood. How is brotherhood important for peace and prosperity of the world?