

NO MEN ARE FOREIGN

HANDOUT

Class : IX

About James Falconer Kirkup

James Falconer Kirkup was born on April 23, 1918, and died on May 10, 2009. He was an internationally acclaimed poet, novelist, playwright and translator. He wrote about 30 books, which include autobiography, novels and plays. His first book of poetry 'The Drowned Sailor at the Downs' was published in 1947.

No Men Are Foreign can be described as a post-colonial poem which talks of globalization and its resultant human unity worldwide. The poem was written in the 1940s when World War II had come to an end, and dissidents were revolting against the oppressive rule of the colonial powers. The sense of racial superiority of the colonial powers was being rejected by the local citizens. Kirkup's poem echoes these sentiments, and he wants his readers to celebrate these differences rather than to be enslaved because of them.

We have many ways of thinking of other people as different from us. They may belong to different countries or religions, follow a different lifestyle and speak a different language. In this poem NO MEN ARE FOREIGN, however, the poet reminds us of the many ways in which we are all the same – for we are all human. He tells us to give up narrow nationalism and stop building narrow domestic walls. He also exhorts us not to distinguish people on the basis of their appearance, religion, region etc. Most of the time this difference is artificially constructed on the basis of the fact that such men hail from a different part of the world than we do. In his view every human being is the same whatever clothes we may wear. We walk on the same land, and get buried also here. The apparent differences of lands and race are only superficial and not real.

Nature never differentiates between men of different countries. It transcends the differences based on geography, race or religion. The sun gives its heat and energy to all. Similarly, all of them need air and water to survive. They labour hard to survive with the same kinds of limbs and hands. During peace they prosper and have plenty of food to eat. However, long wars starve them.

The poem emphasizes the fact that people of different countries have same physical, mental and emotional experiences. They are in no way different even though they wear different clothes and speak different languages. The poet reiterates the futility of hating those who belong to other countries. When we hate others and wage war against them, we defile our own earth. The dust and smoke caused by the deadly weapons pollute the very air we all breathe. So, violence of all kinds should be stopped. It will lead us to a better life.

The dust & smoke caused by war weapons pollute the very air we all breathe. Thus we should never fight with others. We should remember that all of us are the children of the same God.. When there is no essential difference between us and them, where is the room for hatred, violence & war? In war it is not your blood or my blood that bleeds it is **HUMANITY THAT BLEEDS**. So, violence of all kinds should be stopped. It will lead us to a better life. Thus, the poet urges us that we should live in peace and harmony and do work for spreading fraternity all around us. Thus, this poem is an ardent appeal on the poet's part to rid our hearts of xenophobia and embrace the unity of man as a whole.

Stanza wise Summary of the poem:

Stanza 1.

In this stanza the poet emphasizes the value of universal brotherhood. He tells us why we must not hate our brothers and sisters who live in different countries. He asks us never to forget that people living in other countries are not strange or unfamiliar. They may fight for the army of their country, but beneath the uniform, we are all similar. All human bodies live and breathe in the same fashion. We are all brothers because we walk upon the same earth that we have divided into countries. We all shall meet the same earth in the end where we shall be buried after death.

Stanza 2

The poet gives us further evidence of the unity of man. He says that all the people of the world are nourished and nurtured equally by the elements of nature like sun, air and water. Everyone is united by the sameness of spirit. Like us the people of other countries too enjoy the harvest in peaceful times and dread starvation caused by long drawn wars. They too toil to earn livelihood and their destiny is similar to ours.

Stanza 3

The poet urges us to remember that the so called strange and foreign people sleep and wake like we do. Like us they too can be won over by love and not by force. Their experiences of life are similar to that of ours. Hence we all find something familiar in each other's life and identify with each other.

Stanza 4

The fourth stanza says that whenever we are asked by our leaders or our rulers to hate or exploit the people of other countries we must remember that this hatred will have a negative effect on us. It is a form of self-destruction. If we kill people of any other country, we are endangering human beings as a whole and their survival on earth. We would find ourselves cheated as it would deprive us of the bliss of universal brotherhood. We would condemn ourselves to a life of enmity and strangeness.

Stanza 5

The poet once again reminds us that war is futile and it spoils the very earth for which we take up arms against each other. The loss is common to all. The deadly weapons emit fire and ashes that spread all over and pollute the environment. This robs the air of its purity and the world becomes a more difficult place to live in. It is therefore imperative not to consider any human being as foreign and any country as strange. Everything is common and everyone is equal on earth. Hence we must build mutual respect and trust.

What a wonderful message this little poem has for us today, when the whole world is torn by strife, conflict and clash of ideologies, when the clouds of war are looming large over the world's horizon! Does not the poem remind us that when we go to war, we do not kill our enemies but only ourselves, for all men, to whatever race and colour they belong, are brothers. Let the war-mongering political and religious leaders of the world take a lesson from this poem and serve humanity by abjuring war for good.

Poetic Devices in No Men are Foreign:

Rhyme scheme:

The poet does not follow any identifiable rhyme scheme in this poem . So it is written in blank verse.

Poetic Devices

Metaphor:

A metaphor is a figure of speech that , directly refers to one thing by mentioning another. It may provide clarity or identify hidden similarities between two ideas.

For example :

Beneath all uniforms, a single body breathes -

Uniforms here basically stand for militaries that different countries in the world have. So the word uniform is indirectly compared to the militaries of different countries.

The poet again uses it in the 6th line : wars long winter starv'd

The starvation caused by the harsh winter has been compared indirectly to the wartime destruction.

The poet uses it for the last time in the 18th line when he compares wars with hells.

Alliteration:

The repetition of a consonant sound in two or more closely placed words is called alliteration.

The instances of alliteration in the poem are -

Stanza 1 - Body, breathes 'b' sound is repeated

Stanza 2 – war's, winter 'w' sound is repeated

Transferred epithet:

Transferred epithet is a figure of speech in which an adjective usually used to describe one thing is transferred to another.

An epithet is a word or phrase which describes the main quality of someone or something: for eg. ' a happy person"

Transferred epithet is when this adjective is transferred to a different noun like 'Happy birthday"

In this poem, the poet uses the device of the transferred epithet in the 6th line when he writes the phrase "peaceful harvests".

It is not the harvests themselves that are peaceful, but peaceful social and political conditions that prevent a shortage of crops or famine and make harvests possible.

Repetition: It is used in the entire poem.

The poet repeats the word 'Remember' 5 times in this poem to emphasize the message the poem has to convey.

Similarly, the last line of the last stanza 'Remember, no men are strange, no countries foreign' though reversed, is the same as the first line of the first stanza. This repetition emphasizes the core message of the oneness of mankind.
