

**Azad Hind Fouz Smriti Mahavidyalaya
Domjur, Howrah**

Semester 1

AEC
(ABILITY ENHANCEMENT COURSE)

Compulsory English

Unit 1 : Poetry

Where the Mind is without Fear
Rabindranath Tagore

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Where the mind is without fear

Rabindranath Tagore

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 Poet:

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was an Indian poet, writer, playwright, composer, philosopher, social reformer and painter. He re-shaped Bengali literature and music as well as Indian art with Modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Rabindranath Tagore was born in **Jorasanko**, Calcutta. The name Tagore is the anglicized transliteration of **Thakur**. The Thakur family belonged to Pirali Brahmin class and was Brahmo by faith. Their ancestors were aristocrats from Jessore (Bangladesh). Tagore (“Rabi”) was the youngest of 13 surviving children, and was born on 7 May 1861 in Jorasanko, to Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi. He was raised by servants as his mother died in his early childhood and his father travelled widely. The Tagore family was involved with the Bengal Renaissance and published literary magazines; theatre and recitals of Bengali and Western classical music.

Tagore avoided formal education but was well-versed in drawing, anatomy, geography, history, literature, mathematics, Sanskrit, and English. He started writing at an early age (8 years) and published several books of poetry from the 1880s. His works were influenced by both Indian and Western traditions. His songs were chosen as the national anthems of two countries: India’s ***Jana Gana Mana*** and Bangladesh’s ***Amar Shonar Bangla***. Apart from poetry, songs, stories and dramas, Tagore wrote literary criticism, philosophy and on social and political issues. He was an educator as well and founded an experimental school in **Shantiniketan**. Tagore travelled, lectured and read his poetry extensively in Europe, the Americas and East Asia and became a spokesperson for Indian independence from British colonial rule. When the Jallianwala Bagh massacre occurred in 1919, Tagore renounced the knighthood he received in 1915 from the British Crown.

Tagore originally wrote in Bengali, but translated his poetry in English to reach a wider audience in the West. His poetry offered peace of the soul in harmony with nature to the West. Tagore became the first non-European and the first lyricist to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. The evaluation of Tagore as a poet was based mainly on the *Song Offerings (Gitanjali)*.

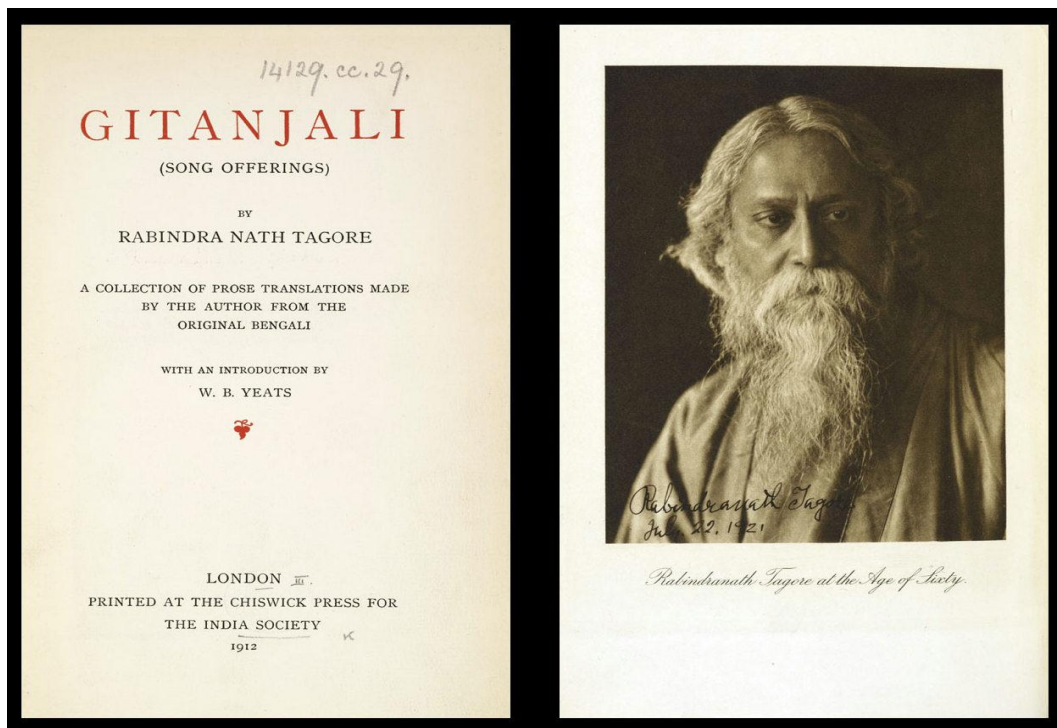


Rabindranath Tagore' *Gitanjali*:

Gitanjali (গীতাঞ্জলি/*Song Offerings*) is a collection of poems by Rabindranath Tagore. The theme of *Gitanjali* is 'devotion'.

The original Bengali work of 157 poems was published on 4th August 1910. The English version of *Gitanjali* called *Song Offerings* is a collection of 103 English prose poems which were translated by Tagore himself. It was first published in November 1912 by the India Society in London. The English *Song Offerings* became very popular in the West and Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913. The second edition was published by The Macmillan Company in 1913.

Eight years after the Nobel Prize was awarded, Rabindranath went to Sweden in 1921 to give his acceptance speech.



The Poem:

Where the mind is without fear is the English translation of *Chitto Jetta bhoyshunyo*. The Bengali poem was published in 1910 as a part of Tagore's *Gitanjali* as poem No. 35. At a meeting of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta in 1917, Tagore read out the English translation, which was then known as "*Indian Prayer*". It is a patriotic poem composed when India was under the British rule. The poem begins with the poet's idealized vision of India. The poet wants Indians to live in a free country with dignity and without any fear. The poet suggests that freedom can be achieved only when the mind is fearless and the head is held high.

Next, he says, knowledge should be available to all Indians. Educational institutions should allow all students irrespective of their caste, creed, status and religion and also provide one education for all, without any discrimination. The poet refers to the evils of Indian society under the British rule. The British policy of "divide and rule" created divisions among the Indians. The term "*narrow domestic walls*" describes these divisions based on race, religion, caste and faith. It also refers to the superstitions that existed in the community then.

Instead of fighting against each other, the poet wants all Indians to unite and fight against the common enemies of the country. He imagines a water-stream that cannot flow through a desert. The stream of reason cannot flow as it is lost in the sand of habit. He means Indians believe in superstitions and do not value reason. The poet wants Indians to question their superstitious beliefs by logic. Indians must become free from superstitions to achieve perfection – an ideal country. Only after years of struggle, Indians would reach their goal of creating an ideal country.

Finally, the poet prays to God asking him to awaken the Indians and help them reach this glorious place. He wants his fellow citizens to be guided by God so that they can transform India into a heaven of freedom.

Short Questions:

1. Who has written the poem, *Where the mind is without fear*?
Where the mind is without fear is written by Rabindranath Tagore.
2. Which country is referred to as '*my country*' by Rabindranath Tagore?
Rabindranath Tagore refers to India as '*my country*'.
3. Where was Rabindranath Tagore born?
Rabindranath Tagore was born in Jorasanko, Calcutta, in 1861.
4. Name the parents of Rabindranath Tagore.
The parents of Rabindranath Tagore were Debendranath Tagore and Sarada Devi.
5. When was Rabindranath Tagore awarded the Nobel Prize?
Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913.
6. Name the book for which Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913?
Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913 for *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*).
7. In which language did Rabindranath Tagore write *Gitanjali*?
Rabindranath Tagore wrote *Gitanjali* in Bengali.
8. Name the English translation of *Gitanjali*?
The English translation of *Gitanjali* is *Song Offerings*.
9. Who translated *Gitanjali* into *Song Offerings*?
Rabindranath Tagore translated *Gitanjali* into *Song Offerings*.
10. How many poems are there in *Gitanjali*?
There are 157 poems in *Gitanjali*.
11. How many poems are there in *Song Offerings*?
There are 103 poems in *Song Offerings*.
12. What is number of the poem '*Where the mind is without fear*' in *Gitanjali*?
The number of the poem '*Where the mind is without fear*' in *Gitanjali* is 35.
13. Who is addressed in the poem '*Where the mind is without fear*'?
'*Where the mind is without fear*' is addressed to God.

14. What should the mind be free of, according to Rabindranath Tagore?
According to Rabindranath Tagore, the mind should be free of fear.
15. What is meant by '*Where the mind is without fear*'?
'*Where the mind is without fear*' means a mind free of fear – fearless.
16. What is meant by '*head is held high*'?
The '*head is held high*' means 'a sense of pride and self-respect'.
17. What is meant by '*Where knowledge is free*'?
'*Where knowledge is free*' means where education is for all irrespective of caste, creed, religion and social status.
18. According to Tagore, what are '*narrow domestic walls*'?
According to Tagore, '*narrow domestic walls*' refer to being narrow-minded or having prejudices which divide people.
19. To what does Tagore compare a '*clear stream*'?
Tagore compares a '*clear stream*' to 'reason'.
20. To what does Tagore compare '*dreary desert sand*'?
Tagore compares '*dreary desert sand*' to 'habit'.
21. What has happened to 'reason' in Tagore's country?
Tagore feels his countrymen do not follow 'reason' but believe in superstitions which have become a 'habit'.
22. Who is referred to as 'thee' in '*Where the mind is led forward by thee*'?
'*Thee*' refers to God in '*Where the mind is led forward by thee*'.
23. Who is referred to as '*Father*' in Tagore's poem?
'*Father*' refers to God in Tagore's poem.
24. What is the significance of Rabindranath Tagore winning the Nobel Prize in literature?
Rabindranath Tagore was the first non-European and the first lyricist to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913.
25. What is the central theme of '*Where the mind is without fear*'?
The central theme of '*Where the mind is without fear*' is Tagore's vision of his free India where people would live with dignity without any fear.