

“THE SECRET OF MACHINES”- Questions and answers

1. Though the poem refrains from naming them explicitly, it is understood that there are clear references to many machines. Name any such and explain their functions.

Ans: In Rudyard Kipling’s poem *The Secret of Machines*, the machines speak in the first person, describing their powers and usefulness to mankind. Although they are not named directly, the poem clearly alludes to several types of machines. One is the steam engine, which uses steam power to drive locomotives and ships, enabling rapid transport of goods and people. Another is the electric generator, which converts mechanical energy into electricity, supplying power for lighting, industry, and household use. The telephone is also implied, allowing voices to be transmitted over long distances, making instant communication possible. The airplane is suggested through descriptions of flight, capable of carrying passengers and cargo across continents at great speed. Finally, the submarine is hinted at in the lines about traveling “underneath the seas,” used for exploration, research, and naval defense.

Through these examples, Kipling captures the vast range of human inventions, from land to sea to air. The poem acknowledges the strength, speed, and utility of machines, but also reminds readers that despite their apparent power, they are ultimately created and controlled by human minds. This balance of admiration and humility is a central theme of the work.

2. “Everything that a man does is done by machines too”. Elucidate.

In *The Secret of Machines*, Rudyard Kipling personifies machines, allowing them to speak of their abilities and roles in human life. The poem shows that almost every task performed by humans can also be accomplished by machines—often faster and more efficiently. Machines can build houses, produce goods, transport people and materials across land, sea, and air, and even communicate messages instantly over great distances. They can plough fields, generate electricity, drill for resources, and navigate underwater.

Kipling’s machines describe how they can harness natural forces such as steam, water, wind, and electricity to perform work on a massive scale. They take over labour-intensive tasks, from lifting heavy loads to manufacturing delicate items, thereby increasing productivity and reducing manual effort. This demonstrates the idea that “everything that a man does is done by machines too.”

However, the poem also reminds readers that machines, despite their power and versatility, are not independent beings. They cannot think, create, or act without human direction. All their strength and skill are derived from human invention and control. Thus, while machines can replicate nearly all human physical work, they remain dependent on the intelligence and imagination of their creators.

3. This poem was written in the year 1911. However, the meaning of these lines remains true even today. Do you think all good works of literature have this quality of 'timelessness' in them? Explain with examples.

Good works of literature often have the quality of *timelessness* because they deal with universal themes, human emotions, and truths that remain relevant across generations. Rudyard Kipling's *The Secret of Machines*, written in 1911, still speaks meaningfully to modern readers. The poem discusses the power, usefulness, and limitations of machines—a topic that is even more significant today in our age of advanced technology and artificial intelligence. Its central idea, that machines are products of human thought and must be controlled responsibly, continues to be important.

Other literary works share this timeless quality. For example, Shakespeare's plays, though written over 400 years ago, still resonate because they explore love, ambition, jealousy, and betrayal—feelings unchanged by time. George Orwell's *1984* remains relevant because it addresses surveillance, power, and loss of freedom, issues still faced today. Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore's poems speak of nature, love, and spirituality, which are universally relatable.

Timeless literature connects with readers across eras because it goes beyond temporary events to capture the essence of human experience. Kipling's poem achieves this by blending technological progress with a reminder of human responsibility—an idea that will remain meaningful as long as machines exist.

4. Can man made machines have feelings? Can they distinguish between good and bad? Read the penultimate paragraph of the poem and justify your answer.

In *The Secret of Machines*, Rudyard Kipling makes it clear that man-made machines do not have feelings and cannot distinguish between good and bad. In the penultimate paragraph, the machines themselves admit that they are only tools—capable of performing incredible tasks, but entirely dependent on the will and skill of their human creators. They have no emotions, conscience, or moral judgement. They cannot choose how their power is used; they simply obey the commands given to them.

This means a machine can be used for both constructive and destructive purposes. For example, the same technology that generates electricity for homes can also be used to power weapons. The poem warns that the responsibility for the consequences of machines lies entirely with humans. Since machines lack the ability to feel compassion, guilt, or empathy, they cannot decide what is right or wrong.

Kipling's message is a reminder that while machines may rival or even surpass human ability in strength, speed, and precision, they are ultimately lifeless creations. Their morality is entirely borrowed from the humans who operate them. Therefore, the ethical

use of machines depends on human judgement, making human responsibility the central theme of the poem's warning.

5. The whole poem highlights and appreciates the abilities of the machine; however, the following two lines reflect an opposite feeling:

a. *We are everything on earth - except the Gods*

b. *We are nothing more than children of your brain*

How do you explain this dichotomy?

In *The Secret of Machines*, Rudyard Kipling spends most of the poem praising the remarkable abilities of machines. They can travel across land, sea, and air, produce goods, generate power, and perform almost every physical task humans can imagine. This is reflected in the line "*We are everything on earth – except the Gods*", which shows their immense strength, versatility, and importance in human life. It suggests that machines can do almost anything, yet there is one thing they cannot be—divine or self-created beings.

The second line, "*We are nothing more than children of your brain*", offers the contrasting truth: machines, despite their power, are merely human inventions. They owe their existence, design, and function entirely to human intelligence and creativity. This humbles the earlier grandeur, reminding readers that machines are not independent entities but tools created and controlled by people.

This dichotomy highlights both admiration and caution. Kipling acknowledges the revolutionary power of machines while stressing their dependence on humans. The poem thus balances pride in human invention with the reminder that machines should never replace human judgement, creativity, or responsibility. It is this blend of awe and humility that makes the poem both realistic and timeless.

6. We are living in the age of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Augmented Reality. We are surrounded by machines in all spheres of our life. In light of this fact, analyse the poem as a commentary on the present day.

In *The Secret of Machines*, Rudyard Kipling presents machines as powerful creations capable of performing incredible tasks—lifting heavy loads, transporting people, generating power, and aiding human progress. Yet, the poem also warns that machines are not divine; they are "children of your brain," entirely dependent on human skill, knowledge, and control. This dual perspective resonates strongly in today's age of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Augmented Reality.

Modern machines—self-driving cars, virtual assistants, AI-powered tools—have extended human capability beyond imagination, mirroring Kipling's description of machines revolutionizing work and life. Like in the poem, they enhance efficiency,

connect people globally, and solve complex problems. However, the cautionary undertone of Kipling's words remains relevant. Despite their sophistication, machines still reflect human design, intent, and biases. They cannot surpass human moral judgment or creativity in a truly independent way.

The poem's message encourages responsible innovation. In the AI era, this means ensuring ethical use, preventing misuse, and remembering that machines are tools, not masters. Kipling's vision serves as a timeless reminder: technological progress is valuable only when guided by wisdom, empathy, and human responsibility, making his commentary as meaningful today as it was in his time.