



O. HENRY'S THE GIFT OF MAGI- THEMATIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Literature is an artistic written work, combination of facts, truth, false, histories and predictions in the form of poetry, prose or drama. This paper highlights thematic analysis of O. Henry's The Gift of Magi. It focusses on the theme of sacrifice. deals with Introduction, themes and conclusion. It delineates the human relationship between Jim and Della. Humans struggle to exhibit their lang lasting love, impact of sacrifice on human mind. It fascinated the readers with human touch. This story is an old story but shown tremendous impact on the readers. For this paper we analyzed various secondary sources and text of the story. The main aim in writing this paper is to emphasize the role of human relations in our day to day life. It covers presentation of role of literature in the human life, how it effects the society and in turn, how it gets effected by the same society. It appeals us greatly due to its essential features including thought, feeling, imagination, and beauty of style and form etc. literature heightens our awareness of human life , provides aesthetic pleasure and relief to the common man. O. Henry is a prolific American short story writer. He dealt with realism, combination of sarcasm and twist at the end of story. It is an amalgamation of humour and pathos, emphasizes upon middleclass city dwellers problems. He is empathetic towards middle class melodies, concerns with financial constraints, exchange of gifts, love, human bond is well portrayed in this story.

Key Words: Sacrifice, empathy, love, marriage, experience.



I INTRODUCTION

Short story became very popular in the modern era. It plays crucial role in our lives. The main reason behind it is filled with morality, short in length. Stories replace the other genre forms like novels, plays, poetry. It is composed in prose form and understandable to the modern readers. Modernity brought transformation in the minds of readers and caused numerous interpretations.

American short story writer and novelist in the English language, born Greensboro, North Carolina, US. Educated at the Linsey street High school in Greensboro. He worked as a drug store clerk and book keeper. In 1902 he migrated to New York, penned a story for the New York Sunday World magazine. His first work Cabbages and Kings portrayed wonderful characters.

His most popular stories The Gift of Magi, Heart of the West are fascinating stories of Texas range. His writings are concerned with common man problems, human generosity, selflessness.

He depicts the excitement, struggles, diversity, and the American dream in 20th century cities. His characters are clerks, shop girls, and thieves. His stories are sarcastic and focus on the silliness of life. O. Henry's stories exalt the English language using a rich mix of wit and irony, writes eloquently of the everyday lives of New York people. His renowned quality is twist in the climax.

Objectives of the paper : The main purpose of the research paper is to explore the aspects of themes in this short story. These characters, ethics and human relationships are objective for this paper.

Hypothesis: In the Gift of the Magi characters reveal human relations, emotions, emotional care impact on their sacrifice and love. Exchange of gifts, reflect human nature and cause.

Materials and Methodology : For this purpose of writing, relied upon the book of Path Finder Communicative English for Undergraduate students published by Orient Black Swan 2023. We used qualitative method for this research paper. Analysis of the summary and characters have been used for this research paper. We studied this story numerous times, analyzed the story and interpreted in our own language.

The story begins:

O. Henry is one of the poignant short story writers in the world. His literary works showed impact on the readers immensely. As a short story writer his art, penmanship brought change in the human relationships of people. The short story, is perhaps, the most difficult art of



composition ; it is not greatly favored in the literary market. It is not as half as eclectic or independent half a century ago. Literary forms especially short story is a tiny literary piece, connects the minds of the people. In this materialistic world, people need to learn some values, if we consider short story it is easy to grasp the content in one stretch or two stretches. Novel reading is a tedious one than short story. Stories help to improvise cognitive development, values. Humans aspire for their identity choose their values and establish their beliefs. In the words of eminent scholar Dr. Abraham Maslow survival has a higher priority than security, which has a higher priority than social acceptance. Psychologists identified Reticular Activating system near the top of the Brain stem. The amygdala produces neuro chemicals that cause emotions consistent with the nature of environment , values and beliefs.

Caring definition runs thus : It is a feeling for others, exhibits the interest in, support for, the welfare of others with fairness, impartiality and justice in all activities. It covers showing reverence to others feelings. Caring is reflected in many activities such as friendship, membership in social clubs and professional societies, family. Empathy begins with showing concern and understanding the feelings of others point of view. Sharing is a virtue that describes the transfer of knowledge commodities and facilities with others. Sharing should be genuine , , maximizes positive the happiness for all, strengthen the human relationships.

A prominent English Poet John Donne poetic lines illustrate empathy :

“Never send to know for whom the bell tolls , it tolls for thee”

The poet speaks to the heart of the link between empathy and caring another’s pain is one’s own. To feel with another is to care.

According to Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary Sacrifice is defined as” to give up something valuable for something more important.” We often experience in our real life willingly give up their things for the sake of beloved ones. This theme is well reflected in literature. In this story two characters Jim and Della sacrifice their valuable gifts for themselves. They exhibit their love , is highly appreciated in this story. They experience sacrifice as mutual love, respect, it gives solace for their hearts.

Section 1 : Themes of the story

The Gift of the Magi theme revolve around the true meaning of love, sacrifice and generosity. The main themes are unconditional love, the greatest gift, sacrifice, and selflessness, sacrifice for happiness, poverty Vs richness of spirit, value beyond price, Irony and wisdom, foolishness as wisdom.

Un conditional love : This is the most significant theme in this story. It emphasizes that the deep, selfless love between Jim and Della is for more valuable than any material possession.

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The Greatest Gift : Their actions demonstrate that the willingness to sacrifice for a loved one is the greatest gift one can give. The narrator concludes by calling them the wisest of all givers because they are originated from the heart.

Sacrifice and selflessness : Both Jim and Della sell their most treasured items della's beautiful hair and Jim's gold watch to buy a gift for the other.

Sacrifice for happiness : Their motivation is purely to make the other person happy, showing selflessness over material attachment.

Poverty Vs Richness of spirit : The couple is very poor financially , but their love and generosity make them rich. The story contrasts their meagre surroundings with the abundance of affection they share.

Value beyond price : The story argues that the emotional value of an act of love is infinitely greater than the monetary value of a gift.

Irony and wisdom : The story's famous twist ending-where Della sells her hair for a watch chain and Jim sells his watch for combs creates an ironic situation where their gifts are rendered useless.

Foolishness as wisdom : On a practical level, their actions are foolish, as they destroyed the only means to use the gifts. However, the narrator deems by time, love, suggesting that acting from the heart, even if impractical , holds a greater wisdom.

At the end of the story, the narrator calls Jim and Della two foolish children, they are the wisest of all. This statement captures the deeper meaning of true wisdom and love. According to author , real wisdom does not lie in material possessions or wealth, but from the ability to sacrifice selflessly for someone you love.

Section 2 : O. Henry uses irony to project their so called foolish actions were actually wise because they come from true love and selflessness. The narrator portrays that the Magi – the three wisemen who brought gifts to baby Jesus were considered wise because they offered gifts with love. In the same manner, Jim and Della sacrifice their gifts and considered modern Magi. The author states wisdom not as cleverness but as the ability to put another person's happiness before your own. Jim and della teach that the greatest gift that comes from the heart. Even though Jim and Della might appear foolish in a practical sense, their deep affection and unwillingness to give up what they cherish most make them the wisest of all. This story reminds us that wisdom lies in love and giving.



Jim's final reaction shows how much he truly cares for Della, not for her appearance or the gifts, but for her appearance or the gifts, but for her heart and the love behind her actions. When he finds that Della has cut her hair, he gently reassures her, saying that nothing could make him love her any less. It states that he values Della's feelings more than the expensive watch chain she brought him, also reveals that he sold his watch to buy her a set of combs for them are willing to sacrifice their most precious possessions for each other. They gained something for greater the realization of how deeply they love each other.

If Della had a short hair in the beginning of the story, she would still have tried her best to buy special Christmas gift for her husband, Jim. Her determination to express her love would not change with her circumstances. She would surely find another way to express her affection. Her sacrifice reminds us that the true love always finds a way. Even without her hair, her heart would still shine with the same love and devotion, making her truly wise like the magi.

Section 3: Unconditional love and Emotions :

Un conditional love is the nature of the deeper self. This is the love that sustains all the workings of human interactions, other beings, the universe and the beyond. This is the love that is present behind all desires, emotions, striving and seeking. In a way, this unconditional love is the divinity within trying to connect with the divinity without. Every other love is a minute reflection on the surface of this deeper love.

One way this love can be actualized within us is as the quiet yearning of the divinity present within a sacred space of our heart, wanting to connect to vastness, peace, boundlessness and unending delight. This can also be felt as the quiet adoration within our heart longing to touch the consciousness of a specific divine presence that we love. Often, vital rushes taint this pure, un conditional love connection as the vital brings in its own limiting conditions and demands into the unconditional nature of this love. With a fair degree of discrimination and purification of our vital life -energies, we can hold a quieter yearning within our heart, to connect to our divine presence or vast infinity above. Then we can become a ready instrument into which the higher consciousness can flow in and mould us.

Every human connect that we form can be seen as an opportunity to maintain our unconditional love connection present within us all the time with sincere aspiration, sufficient Sadhana and a dedicated offering of our self to the Deeper self, sooner or later, this grace is sure to be bestowed on us. A higher sadhana is to aspire to sense this yearning for the unconditional love of the deeper self all the time in the background of our awareness.



The deeper self is profound! Its contact and connect is direct, gentle and deep. To progress on the path of our deeper self, one of the key requisites is to practice holding a state of purity. Purity is like taking a bath in our consciousness each day.

Della maintains purity by refraining from attraction, pulls away from doubts, interested in the clarity of thoughts, widens her heart beyond boundaries, preferences and barriers. She keeps her emotions pure, straight forward, all embracing and deep. She is not being charmed by love that needs hat to sustain the love and practices love that can be unconditional love in a steady state. She holds great strength and inner power and using them with integrity and authenticity for the deeper well being of all. She keeps heart remaining free and above the seductive traps of fear, suspicion, depression and any compulsive habits of nature.

Della sacrifice and offers her love towards Jim. This offering is an interchange where the human offers her seat to another human in the life journey, and permeate divine qualities and nature into the human. This offering creates a transformation at a fundamental level of the human nature. In the story of evolution, there could be a next stage beyond the human. This stage can be one where the conscious human can connect, in a real sense, with his /her creator and embody the higher nature and presence more within their human nature.

The more we are purified, the more we can perform this offering and receive the descent. When and how the divine reciprocates to this offering is not in our hands. It is a matter of grace. It is a matter of our sincerity. A state of quiet inner gladness is conducive for the welcome presence of Grace. Any external challenges and limitations from within us that we encounter, need to be first countered through human effort. Then, they can be offered into the inner flame, with an aspiration that they are transformed. Della is aware of the nature of thought, word, emotion, energy, sensation, body and habits are working in their perfect condition or with sincere aspiration to evolve. She controls her limited thoughts as lucid, novel and centered as possible. She transforms fluctuating emotion as unconditional, nurturing and caring as possible. She makes the affected energy as strong, fear free and confidently poised as possible. Her unconditional love penetrates into the heart of Jim. She interacts with Jim, Jim also reciprocates his love towards her. Her thoughts, words, emotions, energy, sensations and actions interact with Jim's thoughts, words, emotions, energy, sensations and actions. Thoughts interface with emotions, energy, sensations, etc. In this process the quality of consciousness influences the other's and, in turn gets influenced by others, day and night. They learn to listen the inner guidance within us and act with trust. They feel a quiet gladness that becomes present by itself, then it is a clue that they move in the right direction indicated by the deeper self.

The Gift of the Magi means in the Bible the three wise men who brought precious gifts for new born infant Jesus. The author describes the sacrifice and love towards each other. Della wishes to offer a Christmas gift. But she doesn't have enough money to buy him a gift. Della

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had one dollar Eighty seven cents. She counts it thrice. Jim had an ancestral watch, the watch was kept aside, it doesn't have the strap. So Della decided to buy a strap for Jim's watch. Della cut off her hair and sold it for twenty dollars. Now she has twenty one dollars and eighty seven cents. She bought a platinum strap for twenty one dollars and she returns back home with eighty seven cents. Jim returns home and brings ivory combs for Della. Ivory combs are nothing but the combs made of tortoise shell. Hence, the story shows the love between Jim and Della. Jim hugs her and expresses his love towards Della. By the end of the story No matter how big the gift is but the effort matters. Gifting each other expresses how much they love each other.

The write uses Della, Jim to portray the theme of love as well as the Magi. At the conclusion of the story author mentions "Every where they are the wise ones. They are the Magi." He uses the biblical reference to the Magi. Della shows her commitment to Jim. Bothe admire their sacrifices made for each other. In the Gift of the Magi the author refers watch, money and hait as temporary physical items to represent love, sacrifice, a more meaningful life.

Emotional care is well depicted in this story. Della's interaction with Jim is an overwhelming one. It runs thus:

"Cut it off and sold it", said Della.

Don't you like me just as well, any how?

I'm me without my hair, ain't I?

Della hugs Jim to her bosom, looks into Jim's dull eyes and smiles , asserts

"My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

Della with strong enthusiasm expresses her words I searched all over the town and bought a strap for it. At the end of the story they realize about their gifts and remember art of giving Christmas presents. Here sacrifice , art of reciprocation of love is represented through Magi to the humanity. The author mentions the importance of gift giving through Magi is a remarkable one. This illustration of Magi shows impact on the humanity and strengthens the relationships. Emotional care plays a vital role in our lives. O. Henry succeeded in portraying the theme of sharing, caring emotions in this story.

CONCLUSION:

The Gift of Magi story deals with emotions, familial relationships, bond and empathy. It highlights what the partner feeling in the brood of silence, and survival skills. It is a portrayal



of human relationships , empathy, receptivity subtle signals of feeling from another person can be received and mimicked by one's own emotional brain.

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