

**Semester - IV**  
**EC – 1 (B) American Literature**  
**Unit - III**

## **The Gift Outright by Robert Frost**

The land was ours before we were the land's.  
She was our land more than a hundred years  
Before we were her people. She was ours  
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,  
But we were England's, still colonials,  
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,  
Possessed by what we now no more possessed.  
Something we were withholding made us weak  
Until we found out that it was ourselves  
We were withholding from our land of living,  
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.  
Such as we were we gave ourselves outright  
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)  
To the land vaguely realizing westward,  
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,  
Such as she was, such as she would become.

### **Introduction:**

Robert Frost has always been considered as one of the greatest lovers his country. He has written a number of poems which deal with American way life and culture, and with the beliefs, manners and customs of the American people. The American ideals of democracy, liberty and fraternity find brilliant expression in most of his poems.

- His poem, *The Gift Outright*, reveals his patriotic fervour, and presents the history of his country since the days of colonialism.

- It was recited at a gathering of the Phi, Beta Kappa Society at the William and Mary College, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, 1941, and was published in Frost's volume *A Witness Tree* in 1942.
- It was later recited before a distinguished audience on the occasion of the Inauguration ceremony of President Kennedy on January 20, 1962.
- It helped Frost established his reputation as a truly national poet.

*The Gift Outright*, a short poem of 16 lines, has summarised the history of colonisation in America, and the growth of love and devotion that the settlers came to shower on this land. It is one of the best patriotic poems ever written about America and American people. The poem has a political tinge; but it is chiefly a piece of poetry, and not that of propaganda. The poem may be said to project the national feelings of American people in an emotionally touching manner.

## **Summary of the Poem *The Gift Outright***

Robert Frost's poem *The Gift Outright* renders its readers with many interpretive options as to what analogies he is hiding behind his words. In his poem, the poet is trying to emphasize that triumph, surrender, and sacrifice are what led to the outright gift that is America. For years, what is now America was a colony under the reign of the British; American's identities were not solely in themselves but partially based in the British traditions that had been heavily emphasized- because of this many struggled to become one with the land.

Colonials slowly fought for independence in each of the states; Frost uses this to exemplify when the Americans began to triumph over England's rule and make the land your own:

“...She was ours  
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,  
But we were England's.

The author uses these lines to show that they do have small victories towards the progression of their own nation/land. But they are still England's and are failing to be part of the change that will shape and solidify their nation state; they possess the land, but the land does not possess them- they took over the land without taking over the responsibilities she came with.

Triumph can only come if there is once a trial, and at times humanity surrenders to the trials they face. The gift of land came at a personal expense, a sacrifice; because they would not receive without first giving:

“Such as we were we gave ourselves outright”  
... Such as she was, such as she will become.”

In these lines, Frost is demonstrating that the imperfect citizens gave themselves to the imperfect land to build something much greater; the dedication of the people will help America to achieve its full potential by enhancing her with art and stories. Surrendering parts of themselves to the development of America is not the only sacrifice Frost exemplifies in his poem. The decolonization of America and the personalization of her land was the cause for the passing of many lives.

The sacrifice and demise of many souls was subtly mentioned by Frost:

“The deed of the gift was many deeds of war”.

Frost is trying to prove that although the gift was outright, it was merely the opposite. The land was not entirely the peoples; it was fought for- a lot of conflict and oppression was ensued to create a free nation. Frost adopts the use of brackets; this allows for war to be mentioned indirectly but insists that the wages of war that resulted in victory, not be forgotten.

Frost’s poem captivates the readers, making them feel the responsibilities and duties of the land that the Americans once felt as their own. Such allowed construal as the poem progressed and the meaning behind *The Outright Gift* became increasingly complex, and intimate.

## **Critical Appreciation of the Poem *The Gift Outright***

The poem, *The Gift Outright*, marks an outstanding achievement by Robert Frost in the field of patriotic poetry. It is one of the most remarkably patriotic poems about America and American people, and abounds in national sentiments and a sense of pride in this country. It contains a history of America since the colonial times in an extremely condensed form. In a very short space of sixteen lines, it tells about the change in attitude that occurred among the British settlers in America towards this country of their adoption.

At first, they treated it as a colony established by them, and themselves as its alien possessors or colonisers. But this attitude was responsible for their weakness as a people. They possessed the country, but they did not have a feeling of oneness or identity with it. The sense of alienation deprived them of the strength that comes from pride in, and devotion to, one's country.

The British settlers continued, for a long time, to regard England as their fatherland and America only as a colony where they had settled for material gains. Gradually, however, they realised that they ought to treat this country (America) as their own country and themselves as its own people, and they should be willing to sacrifice themselves for its freedom and well-being. They then found salvation in surrender and made a gift outright of themselves to this country, and developed a sense of pride in belonging to it, and in being its people, not outsiders or colonisers. They developed a sense of oneness with the country.

Thus, the poem, in a way, is a piece of national history, but the poetic element in it remains unsuppressed by the narration of the history.

**.....the end.**

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