

L.N. Mithila University, Darbhanga

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B.A. (Part-II) English Composition
50 MARKS

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TOPIC: The Gift of the Magi
(Short story): O. Henry
Critical appreciation

The Gift of the Magi is a typical short story written by O. Henry, an American short story writer. He is considered to be greater than G.D. Maupassant in plot construction and surprise ending of the story. O. Henry had a gift of humour and gusto of his own which makes him distinct from other story writers.

The story in discussion is concerned with an unfortunate couple - Jim and Della. Jim, a laborious husband earns twenty dollars a week. Out of this he pays eight dollars as house rent and with the rest amount of money he has to meet both the ends of the family members. His wife, Della has to face several difficulties. Anyhow she has been able to save only one dollar and eighty seven cents. When the Christmas comes, both of them ~~are~~ earnestly wish to give presents to each other befitting their love and devotion, and for this they sacrifice their best possessions. Della sells her lovely locks of hair to purchase a platinum chain which her husband needed for his gold watch. On the other hand, Jim sells his gold watch to buy a set of combs made of tortoise shell for his wife, Della. When the time comes to exchange their

presents, they are deeply shocked, because in absence of watch the platinum chain is of no use, and, similarly in absence of the locks of hair the set of combs is useless. Even then they preserve the presents and reveal their true and deep love for each other.

The Gift of the Magi is a superb specimen of craftsmanship. The presents exchanged by the couple have lost their utility but they are the examples of true and unshakable love between the wife and husband. The Christmas provides the background against which the action of the story moves on. The financial crisis in the family does not prove to be a hindrance on the path of their love. In the outset of the story, we find Della counting coins time and again. As the story develops the elements of surprise get momentum and finally it comes to an unexpected end. When there is exchange of presents between the couple, they are taken aback. Similarly the readers also fail to guess about the end of the story. Humour and Pathos

Humour and Pathos are the distinctive features of the story. We have a feeling of pity at the scanty income of Jim and Della. When Della brings out her present, Jim laughs and falls on the coach. This action of Jim provokes laughter and pathos. Della's sacrifice of her lovely locks of hair to purchase a platinum chain for her husband reveals her true love. Thus, the present story is a masterpiece of artistic creation of O. Henry. The title is highly attractive and suggestive, and shows how the husband and the wife are really the magi of the modern times.