

The Gift of India

by Sarojini Naidu

1. (a) Analyse the poem 'The Gift of India' and discuss the speaker and theme of the poem?

Answer: The poem "The Gift of India", composed by Sarojini Naidu is a tribute to the Indian soldiers who had sacrificed their lives in the First World War. The speaker of the poem is Mother India herself, who has decided to speak up for the sake of her sons' honour. The theme of this poem is the queries of Mother India that she makes to the colonizers for whom her sons sacrificed their lives. She asks them if they can measure her grief and her tears or know her sufferings when she watches all war proceedings. She says that they can never truly understand the pride that fills her heart, in spite of her despair.

The poet suggests that the speaker, despite her sadness and deep-rooted anguish, is proud of her sons who have fought bravely and brought victory. She gives expression to the voices of countless Indian mothers whose sons have fought in the war. The poet says that the people of the great warring nations can never realize the small hopes of these mothers and the pain of praying for the safety of their sons. She asks if they can understand the vision of glory that she sees, which is drastically different from what they see. Her vision of victory and glory is a sad one because she had to lose her sons to gain victory. This victory has come after the loss of so much blood is sad and meaningless to her.

(b) To whom is the poem homage from the poet?

Answer: 'The Gift of India' is a poem written by the Indian poet and freedom fighter Sarojini Naidu also known as the 'Nightingale of India'. The poet speaks on behalf of Mother India who is eulogizing the great works of her sons, many of whom have died fighting for the victory of their temporal rulers. The poem is a tribute to the contribution of Indian soldiers in World War I. More than a million Indian soldiers from the British Indian Empire served in the Allied forces in the First World War. A large number of them sacrificed their lives in a war that had nothing to do with them or their motherland. Indian troops fought in different locations of significance to the allied stronghold and had an important share in many of the battles throughout the course of the war. However, the contribution of the Indian soldiers is overlooked in the vast expanse of the War's history. The selfless sacrifices of the Indian soldiers done for the colonizers have been praised in Naidu's poem 'The Gift of India'. The poem not only concentrates on the theme of soldiers making their ultimate sacrifice for someone else's war but also talks about the numerous benefits the foreign countries reaped from India. The poet regards these benefits as gifts given by India to the colonizers, which have not been appropriately appreciated and received.

(c) What does the poem say about the benefits that colonisers have gained from India?

Answer: 'The Gift of India' is a poem that celebrates India's contribution to the causes of others. It is also a very strong war poem that concentrates both on the evils of destruction that wars bring, and the mourning, as well as the courage, honour, and recognition of the heroes who fight in it. The poem mentions how India gave thousands of her sons when Britain needed them in order to fight evil powers during the First World War. The soldier sons of India went to fight in favour of Britain and laid down their lives in distant lands where they were buried. These sons of the soil did not even get a grave in their motherland. They fought long as they lived and they died honourable deaths at the hands of the enemies. During the Great War, Britain made full use of India's material resources as well as benefitted from the valour of her sons. The poem says that India had showered great favours even on her colonisers and they did not appropriately appreciate her greatness. Without the help of India, the British could have never gained such great victory in the war. The victorious allied powers owed great gratitude to India, which was not duly paid to her.

Long Questions and Answers

1. What do gifts symbolize? Justify the title of the poem 'The Gift of India'

Answer: The title of the poem 'The Gift of India' by Sarojini Naidu has many connotations.

Gifts symbolize many things according to the occasion, the time period history, and the society. Gifts are often given in gratitude, celebration, or commemoration. Gifts are given to express or reinforce love, friendships, and political or social alliances. Sometimes gifts are given out of the sheer joy some people feel by giving to those in need.

The title 'The Gift of India' evokes a sense of pride to the people of the country of attaining freedom from the shackles of the British. The poetess compared the lives of the dead to the pearls strewn in abandonment along the waves which can be considered as bright and shining gifts of India's manhood buried in the foreign land. The invaluable gift of so many lives who fought against the British can never be undermined. The history reveals that the disposition of the English towards the Indians was no better than that of the Americans towards the black slaves.

The title of the poem can also be seen from the perception of Mother India as a giver involving a vast country rich with natural resources. She can produce rich resources of raiment, food or gold in abundant generously. To the delight of the takers, her resources remain strewn about in all directions. From time immemorial, the tradition of this country is to offer food, clothes and other valuables to the seekers who came for shelters. But the looters filled their coffins with rich booty wherever they lay their hands on.

The quality and the number of gifts the motherland is capable of providing baffles one's imagination. Her brave offspring are often summoned abroad to the call of duty. The bodies of these heroes are not simply an organic matter, born to die. The value of their lives can be compared to the most valuable jewel of the mother earth.

Thus the poem 'The Gift of India' is a celebration and a demand for accounting as Mother

India proclaiming proudly her gifts to the west including her sons who were martyred in the battle of the First World War.

2. What is the major gift India gave and in what way was it used? Based on your opinion, explain how selecting appropriate gifts is essential. You may use the points below for reference.

- the futility of waging wars
- several thousand people died in a war not concerning the political interests of India
- gift India gave to the English was manpower to support the English army
- separation from family and friends, working for a purpose not serving their needs or interests and forever shattering bonds was the cost Indians paid to prepare the exquisite gift
- reminder to people to be wise about the gift they give to the others

Answer: 'The Gift of India' narrates the fate of India's gift to the world. The theme of the poem is an emphasis on the futility of waging wars and the setting of the poem dates back to the times of World War I. At that time, Indians were fooled by the English who forced them into joining the army. Their fate was sealed when several thousand people died in a war not concerning the political interests of India.

India is a land of diversity, bravery, sacrifice, brotherhood, tolerance, freedom and has welcomed guests to its land since the very beginning. Apart from wealth and multi-cultural diversity, India is known for its loyalty towards all its allies. The gift India gave to the English at the time of World War I was manpower to support the English army and its allies at the cost of separation of families and walking towards an unknown future. Indian soldiers had travelled to various unknown lands to support the British. This was the major gift India gave to the world.

Separation from family and friends, working for a purpose not serving their needs or interests and forever shattering bonds was the cost Indians paid to prepare the exquisite gift. Wars have always done harm. Indian soldiers had to face the wrath of wars, which held no meaning and was of no gain to the citizens.

A gift is a mark of celebration for an event or serves as a means of gratitude. It is prepared to keep in mind the interests of the person and that the gift lasts forever. In any case, the gift, India had given to the English was none other than her own sons - a gift which no longer remained a gift and became a factor contributing to the destruction of the world. All efforts made in preparation for war are futile and in a way, it can be said that the gift that Mother India prepared was rendered useless as soon as it was presented. It resulted in loss on the Indian as well as global fronts.

Sarojini Naidu's 'The Gift of India' is a reminder to people to be wise about the gift they give to the others and remember that a gift is given only as a token of happiness, not as a weapon to hurt others, both physically and emotionally. Although gifts must be prepared considering the interest of the person, it must be a message of peace and love to them and

to the world.

3. 'The Gift of India' is a poem which describes sufferings of Indians at the hands of English during the colonial period. Support this statement using references from the poem. You may use the points below for reference.

- poem is a celebration and demand for accounting as Mother India
- proclaims proudly her gifts to West • India's wealth looted and heritage destroyed
- Mother India is in conflict because she sees her children grow and get stronger through the torture they endure
- poem a message to the future generations who have the privilege of breathing free air

Answer: The Gift of India is a poem written in 1915, which is both a celebration and a demand for accounting as Mother India proclaims proudly her gifts to the West, including her sons who were martyred in the battlefields of the First World War. It describes the plight of Indians during the period of colonization. All of India's wealth and treasure were looted by the colonizers, which once formed the identity of the country. It included wealth, culture and manpower. On the other hand, it is described that Mother India had donated her wealth to help countries due to her philanthropic nature. The line "Priceless treasures torn from my breast" supports the idea of India's wealth looted and heritage destroyed.

In the poem, it is Mother India who speaks. A mother is concerned about her children's welfare but also cannot let go of her pride when her children achieve success. No matter how enduring the condition may be, when a child succeeds, a mother is the happiest. She tries her best to do things for her children's welfare and encourages them to walk on the path though it might be the riskiest of all. Mother India plays a similar role and portrays the role of a caring and concerned mother who seeks acknowledgement for the children's contribution, which is seen as a gift to the world. However, she cannot bear to see her children being tortured and her home destroyed. In her, she has pride because her children succeed but cannot let go of the situation because it is the same factor, which is responsible for the welfare of her children. Here, welfare can only mean the success Indians achieve in foreign lands and their growth as brave Indians.

*"Or compass the woe of the watch I keep?
Or the pride that thrills thro' my heart's despair"*

The above lines are evidence for the fact that Mother India is in conflict because she sees her children grow and get stronger through the torture they endure.

Overall, the colonial period was a period of sufferings for Indians who gave up all their worldly pleasures and sacrificed their families for the freedom of their motherland. They continued fighting the war for the English and attained freedom at the cost of their lives. They survived terror to let future generations live in freedom. The final line of the poem 'Remember the blood of my martyred sons!' is the apt expression for the emotion expressed during the colonial period. The final line is not said to the Englishmen but to the future generations who have the privilege of breathing free air.