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## The Road Not Taken: Walking the Path of Dharma

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### Abstract:

Robert Frost's "*The Road Not Taken*" is a celebrated modern poem that explores the complexities of choice, individuality, and reflection through the extended metaphor of diverging paths in a forest. This paper analyzes the poem through multiple critical lenses—literary, structural, philosophical, and spiritual—while drawing parallels with Indian philosophical traditions and scriptures such as the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Rig Veda, Vachanamrut, and the Shrimad Bhagavatam.

The poem's use of metaphor, symbolism, and irony enriches its exploration of human decision-making and the uncertainty of consequences. Structurally crafted in iambic tetrameter with an ABAAB rhyme scheme, it balances simplicity with depth. Thematically, it resonates with the Vedantic dichotomy of Shreyas and Preyas, the law of karma, and the spiritual imperative of Svadharma (personal duty), presenting the act of choosing as both a burden and a liberation.

By situating Frost's personal reflection within the broader canvas of spiritual self-inquiry, the paper demonstrates that "*The Road Not Taken*" transcends its Western literary context and harmonizes with universal philosophical truths found across cultures. The poem ultimately invites readers to embrace life's uncertainties with courage and introspection, recognizing that even the quietest choices define the path of the soul.

### Preface

"*The Road Not Taken*" by Robert Frost is a deceptively simple yet profoundly introspective poem that speaks to the eternal human experience of choice. Written in 1915 and published in 1916, the poem reflects the quiet yet momentous decisions that shape our destinies. Through the symbol of two diverging roads in a yellow wood, Frost captures the solitude of personal decision-making and the irreversible flow of life.

This poem is not merely about a walk in the woods—it is a mirror to the soul's journey. It speaks to moments when one must pause, reflect, and move forward without certainty. Rooted in modern sensibility, yet echoing timeless wisdom from ancient scriptures such as the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, the poem becomes a universal meditation on free will, destiny, and the inner compass that guides our lives.

Through gentle rhythm and evocative imagery, Frost invites readers to reconsider the hidden weight of everyday choices, and in doing so, to appreciate the quiet heroism of choosing one's own path.

### 1. Literary Devices and Figures of Speech

- Robert Frost's "*The Road Not Taken*" is a rich tapestry woven with various literary devices that deepen its philosophical essence.
- **Metaphor:** The central metaphor of the poem is the "road" symbolizing life's choices. The fork in the road represents a pivotal decision point in one's journey through life.

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- **Personification:** The roads are subtly personified as they seem to possess qualities such as the ability to “want wear,” hinting at their condition due to previous travelers.
- **Imagery:** Vivid natural imagery abounds: “yellow wood,” “grassy,” “leaves no step had trodden black.” These images stimulate the senses and place the reader in the poet’s shoes at that crucial moment of decision-making.
- **Alliteration:** Frost employs gentle alliteration in lines like “wanted wear,” enhancing the rhythm and musicality of the poem.
- **Assonance & Consonance:** These sound devices are less obvious but subtly present; for instance, the long “o” sound in “Oh, I kept the first for another day” slows down the pace, emphasizing hesitation.
- **Irony:** There is subtle irony in the poem. Though the speaker claims the road was “less traveled,” he later admits both roads were “really about the same.”
- **Symbolism:** The “two roads” are not just physical paths but profound symbols of life’s divergent choices. The final decision becomes a metaphor for individuality, destiny, and the consequences of one’s decisions.

## 2. Structure and Form

- **Rhyme Scheme:** The poem follows a consistent ABAAB rhyme scheme throughout its four quintains (five-line stanzas).
- **Meter and Rhythm:** Frost uses iambic tetrameter, which gives the poem a steady, flowing rhythm. However, occasional variations reflect emotional shifts.
- **Stanza and Line Breaks:** The poem is neatly divided into four stanzas. Strategic line breaks create a sense of pause, mirroring the speaker’s contemplation.
- **Enjambment:** Frost uses enjambment to extend thoughts beyond line breaks. For example:  
“And be one traveler, long I stood / And looked down one as far as I could...”  
This technique reinforces the continuity of thought and deliberation.

## 3. Theme and Subject Matter

At its surface, the poem is about a traveler choosing between two paths in a forest. Symbolically, it explores:

- **Life’s Choices:** Every individual encounters forks in the road—decisions that shape their future.
- **Regret and Reflection:** The sigh in the last stanza hints at either contentment or subtle remorse.
- **Individualism vs. Conformity:** Choosing the “less traveled” path may reflect non-conformity or simply the illusion of uniqueness.  
The deeper message suggests that our lives are shaped significantly by seemingly small decisions, and that the consequences of those choices are often irreversible.

## 4. Tone and Mood

- **Tone:** The tone is contemplative and introspective. Frost uses a conversational style that draws readers into the traveler’s quiet dilemma.
- **Mood:** The poem evokes a sense of nostalgia, slight melancholy, and philosophical curiosity. The reader is invited to reflect on their own life’s decisions and the “roads” they didn’t take.

## 5. Philosophical and Spiritual Interpretation

Robert Frost’s “*The Road Not Taken*”, though a modern English poem, resonates deeply with the core insights of Upanishadic, Vedantic, Bhagavad Gita, and Bhakti scriptures like the *Vachanamrut* and *Shrimad Bhagavatam*. Below is a detailed analysis of how the poem aligns with these traditions, with scriptural references:

### 1. The Symbol of the Two Roads – The Path of Discrimination (Viveka)

Frost’s image of two diverging roads parallels the Upanishadic concept of the twofold path of life: the *Śreyas* (good) and *Preyas* (pleasant), as found in the *Katha Upanishad*:

“श्रेयो हि धीरः अभि प्रेयसो वृणीत, प्रेयो मन्दो योगक्षेमात् वृणीत।”

– *Katha Upanishad 1.2.2*

“*The wise choose the good (shreyas) over the pleasant (preyas); the ignorant choose the pleasant for gain and comfort.*”

Just like the traveler who must choose one path and leave the other, the soul must discriminate between fleeting pleasure and lasting truth. The “less traveled road” may be interpreted as the inner, spiritual path—more difficult, yet ultimately transformative.

### 2. Irrevocability of Choices – Karma and Dharma

Frost writes:

“*Yet knowing how way leads on to way, / I doubted if I should ever come back.*”

This reflects the law of karma in Vedantic and Gita philosophy, where each choice leads to a new sequence of events and further karmic consequences, making it difficult to return to the exact moment of previous choice.

“न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत्।”

– *Bhagavad Gita 3.5*

“*No one can remain without performing action even for a moment.*”

The inevitability of action and the inescapable nature of consequence are central in both the poem and Vedantic metaphysics.

### 3. The Illusion of Difference – Maya and Advaita Vedanta

Frost later admits:

*“Though as for that the passing there / Had worn them really about the same.”*

This ambiguity reflects the Vedantic idea of Maya—the illusion of duality. What appears to be different (two roads, many options) may in fact be ultimately the same, part of the One Reality (Brahman) behind all appearances.

“एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति।”

– *Rig Veda 1.164.46*

*“Truth is One; the wise call it by many names.”*

This line shows how divergent paths may appear different to the jiva (individual soul), but all eventually lead toward the One Supreme Reality, if walked with awareness.

4. Regret, Reflection, and Self-Inquiry – Jnana Marga

Frost ends with:

*“I shall be telling this with a sigh / Somewhere ages and ages hence...”*

This “sigh” could symbolize self-inquiry (ātma-vichāra) and spiritual introspection—central to Advaita Vedanta and Upanishadic wisdom.

“आत्मा वा अरे दृष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यः निदिध्यासितव्यः।”

– *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2.4.5*

*“The Self must be seen, heard, reflected upon, and deeply meditated upon.”*

The sigh may not be regretful alone; it can also be a longing for Self-realization and wonder at the mystery of choice and Divine Will.

5. Divine Guidance and Satsang – Bhakti Scriptures (Vachanamrut & Bhagavatam)

In the *Vachanamrut* (Gadhada II-11), Bhagwan Swaminarayan says:

“God and His Sant always guide the jiva on the right path—but it is up to the jiva to follow it.”

This relates to Frost’s idea of individual responsibility—no one else can choose the road for you. However, Bhakti scriptures emphasize choosing the path under divine guidance.

Similarly, in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, the tale of King Bharata (Canto 5) illustrates how even a spiritually evolved soul, due to attachment (moha), can get diverted from the path—echoing Frost’s concern that one might not “ever come back.”

6. Free Will vs Divine Will – Synthesis in Gita and Vedanta

The poem raises the age-old question: Do we choose freely, or is everything predestined?

In *Bhagavad Gita 18.63*, Krishna says:

“विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु।”

*“Ponder deeply over what I have said, and then act as you wish.”*

Here, the Lord affirms free will after giving spiritual guidance. Frost’s traveler, too, exercises free will—but feels the weight of destiny nonetheless.

7. The Path of the Brave – Tapasya and Tyaga

Choosing the “less traveled” road requires courage, detachment, and willpower—qualities glorified in the Gita and Upanishads.

“नायमात्मा बलहीनेन लभ्यः”

– *Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.4*

*“This Self is not attained by the weak.”*

Spiritual realization—like taking the tougher road—is only achieved by those who walk with austerity, clarity, and conviction.

8. Personal Dharma (Svadharmā)

Frost’s act of choosing aligns with the concept of Svadharmā (one’s own duty):

“श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात्।”

– *Bhagavad Gita 3.35*

*“Better one’s own imperfect duty than another’s well performed.”*

This affirms the idea of choosing one’s unique path, even if unconventional—“the road less traveled.”

9. Liberation through Decision – Moksha through Discrimination

Finally, the poem can be read as a journey toward moksha (liberation). Each choice—conscious or not—brings the soul closer to or further from realization.

“तमेव विदित्वातिमृत्युमेति, नान्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽयनाय।”

– *Shvetashvatara Upanishad 3.8*

*“By knowing Him alone does one cross beyond death; there is no other path to immortality.”*

The “road not taken” may be symbolic of sadhana—the rarely chosen inner discipline that leads to truth and immortality.

Conclusion

Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” is deeply aligned with Vedantic and Upanishadic wisdom, even though written in a Western poetic framework. The poem becomes a spiritual metaphor for the journey of the soul, facing choices, living with their consequences, and ultimately seeking meaning beyond the visible. Scriptures from the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita, Vachanamrut, and Bhagavatam all emphasize that the right path may not always be the popular one, but it is the one that leads inward—towards truth, self-realization, and divine union.

6. Historical and Cultural Context

• **Date & Background:** The poem was published in 1916 during a tumultuous time—World War I. Though not

overtly political, it reflects the era's anxiety about choices and consequences.

- **Cultural Influence:** Frost, an American modernist, combines Romantic themes (individual and nature) with a modern sense of skepticism and realism.
- **Literary Movement:** The poem straddles **Romanticism** (nature, introspection) and **Modernism** (ambiguity, irony). It challenges the romantic ideal of the heroic lone path by revealing the illusory difference between the two roads.

### 7. Poet's Perspective and Emotional Mindset

- **Inspiration:** Frost was inspired by his friend Edward Thomas, who often regretted not taking certain paths during their walks. The poem, originally light-hearted, gained more serious interpretations over time.
- **Emotions:** The poem carries an undertone of nostalgia, quiet regret, and acceptance. The speaker anticipates future reflection with a "sigh"—a word loaded with ambivalence.
- **Autobiographical Element:** Though not explicitly autobiographical, it reflects Frost's own life dilemmas—moving to England, choosing a poetic career, facing personal loss.

### 8. Target Audience and Purpose

- **Intended Audience:** While the poem appears universal, it speaks particularly to individuals at crossroads—students, dreamers, decision-makers, philosophers.
- **Purpose:** Frost prompts readers to reflect on their own choices and paths. Is he encouraging non-conformity? Or highlighting the weight of all choices, no matter how minor they seem? The poem's ambiguity is its strength.

### 9. Personal Interpretation

Frost's "*The Road Not Taken*" is not just about a traveler in the woods—it is a meditation on the complexity of human choice. Though the speaker chose one road over another, he admits the difference was negligible, yet the outcome was life-changing. This contradiction mirrors our tendency to romanticize past decisions.

The final takeaway is both **empowering and humbling**: our lives are shaped not just by grand moments, but by subtle forks in the path—moments of hesitation, intuition, and courage. Personally, the poem resonates deeply, reminding us that while we cannot travel all roads, the one we choose becomes our unique story, "and that has made all the difference."

### Conclusion

In the closing lines of "*The Road Not Taken*", the poet imagines himself, years later, recounting his choice "with a sigh"—a sigh not of regret, but of depth. It is the breath of reflection, of recognizing that life is less about the road

itself and more about the way we choose to walk it. The poem does not offer a moral certainty but instead presents the ambiguity and mystery of life's unfolding path.

Its enduring resonance lies in its openness to interpretation—whether as a call to individualism, a meditation on fate, or a philosophical reflection on the illusion of difference. The poem ultimately suggests that the value of a choice lies not just in its difficulty, but in the authenticity of the chooser.

In an age of distraction and conformity, Frost's traveler inspires us to walk mindfully, to trust our inner resolve, and to recognize that every step—no matter how small—makes "all the difference."