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The Unseen Mornings: A Study Of *Morning In A Slum* Through Literature And Philosophy

Dr. Krishna Panda**Preface**

Poetry has long been a medium to depict the stark realities of human existence, serving as both a mirror and a critique of society. "*Morning in a Slum*" is a poignant exploration of the struggles faced by those living in poverty. It paints a vivid picture of their daily hardships—waking up to the same cycle of labor, deprivation, and social neglect. The poem does not merely narrate their plight but compels the reader to reflect on the deeper implications of such a life.

Beyond its stark realism, this poem aligns with profound Upanishadic and Vedantic wisdom, offering insights into Samsara (the cycle of suffering), Karma (cause and effect), and Moksha (liberation). The spiritual teachings from the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Vachanamrut, and Bhagavat Mahapurana provide a lens through which we can understand the nature of suffering and the path to transcendence. It reminds us that, while life in the material world is full of struggles, inner peace and ultimate liberation are attainable through Karma Yoga, Bhakti, and spiritual wisdom.

Through this poetic lens, "*Morning in a Slum*" becomes more than a depiction of poverty; it transforms into a universal reflection on the human condition, spiritual endurance, and the search for higher meaning amidst worldly suffering.

1. Literary Devices and Figures of Speech

Poets utilize literary devices to add depth and artistic flair to their works. "*Morning in a Slum*" employs several such techniques:

- **Metaphor:** The phrase "wake of dawn" symbolizes the start of a new day, not merely in a literal sense but also as a cycle of struggles and hardships.
- **Personification:** "Those footsteps laze along" attributes human-like idleness to footsteps, emphasizing the sluggishness of life in a slum.
- **Imagery:** The poem paints vivid pictures of slum life—"Some stale beer bottles, on the floor strewn" conveys the disarray and struggles of survival.
- **Alliteration:** "Burnt toast" and "Porridges steam" highlight the everyday sensory experiences within the slum.
- **Irony:** The contrast between "Pa's have breakfast, while mama's scream!" underlines the gendered struggles within the slum.

2. Structure and Form

- The poem follows a free verse style, lacking a strict rhyme scheme, which complements its raw and realistic depiction of slum life.
- **Meter and Rhythm:** The poem does not adhere to a rigid metrical pattern, reflecting the unpredictability of life in a slum.
- **Stanza and Line Breaks:** Short, fragmented lines emphasize different aspects of the scene, drawing attention to crucial moments.
- **Enjambment:** Lines like "Stocked just now, / To be sold at noon" encourage a natural flow, guiding the reader seamlessly through the imagery.

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3. Theme and Subject Matter

- The poem depicts poverty and daily struggles in a slum, capturing the rawness of existence.
- Social inequality and gender roles emerge as implicit themes.
- The deeper message lies in the harsh realities of marginalized communities, shedding light on societal neglect and economic disparity.

4. Tone and Mood

- **Tone:** The poet adopts an observational and sombre tone, offering an unfiltered view of slum life.
- **Mood:** The reader may feel a mix of sympathy, melancholy, and realism, evoking contemplation on social injustice.

5. Philosophical and Spiritual Interpretation

The poem "Morning in a Slum" portrays the harsh realities of life in a slum, reflecting themes of struggle, suffering, and the cyclical nature of human existence. These ideas can be analyzed in light of Upanishadic and Vedantic wisdom, as well as insights from the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Vachanamrut, Shrimad Bhagavat Mahapurana, and other sacred texts.

1. Samsara (Cycle of Life and Suffering) – Upanishadic & Vedantic Perspective

The poem describes a daily routine of struggle, where slum dwellers wake up only to repeat their hardships. This reflects the Upanishadic idea of Samsara, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, which continues until one attains liberation (Moksha).

References:

- **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (4.4.3):** "As a goldsmith takes a piece of gold and gives it another form, so does the Self (Jiva) take a new body after leaving the old one."ⁱ
- o This verse highlights the continuous cycle of life and struggle, similar to how the slum dwellers experience daily suffering and repetition in their existence.
- **Shrimad Bhagavad Gita (8.15):** "Having attained Me, the great-souled ones, who are yogis in devotion, never return to this transient and miserable world."ⁱⁱⁱ
- o Here, Krishna defines the material world as 'Dukhalayam' (a place of suffering), aligning with the poem's depiction of slum life as a reflection of worldly miseries.

2. Karma and Social Inequality – Vedic and Vedantic Perspective

The presence of poverty and struggle in the poem reflects the law of Karma, which dictates that past actions shape present circumstances. While the slum dwellers endure suffering, Vedantic wisdom teaches that Karma is not merely fate, but also an opportunity for transformation.

References:

- **Mundaka Upanishad (3.1.10):** "One who has not renounced evil actions, who is not calm, and whose mind is unsteady cannot attain the Supreme."ⁱⁱⁱ
- o This verse teaches that one's current suffering may be a result of past actions, but liberation is possible through righteous living. The slum dwellers' struggles may be due to past Karma, but spiritual elevation remains within reach.

- **Shrimad Bhagavad Gita (3.9):** "Work done as a sacrifice for Vishnu has to be performed; otherwise, work causes bondage."^{iv}

o The poem's depiction of survival-driven labor (such as selling beer bottles) hints at Karmic entanglement. However, Gita encourages dedicating one's work to the Divine for liberation.

- **Vachanamrut (Gadhada I-56):** "A person bound by desires and worldly pleasures is trapped in a cycle of suffering, much like a bird caught in a net."

o The slum dwellers' repetitive existence aligns with this analogy, reinforcing the idea that attachment to mundane survival keeps one bound in Samsara.

3. Suffering, Detachment, and Liberation – Spiritual Insights

The contrast between daily struggles and ultimate liberation is central to Vedantic and Bhakti texts. While the poem captures the worldly suffering of slum life, scriptures provide the path to transcendence.

References:

- **Shrimad Bhagavat Mahapurana (11.23.57):** "He who remains detached in both joy and suffering attains the highest realization."^v
 - o This wisdom teaches that suffering, as seen in slum life, is an opportunity for detachment and spiritual growth.
 - **Isha Upanishad (Verse 1):** "Everything in this world belongs to the Lord. Enjoy with detachment and do not covet others' wealth."^{vi}
 - o The poem hints at material deprivation, but the Upanishads teach detachment from suffering through surrender to the Divine.
 - **Vachanamrut (Gadhada II-50):** "Even amidst poverty and hardships, one should always remember Bhagwan and never feel dejected."
 - o This message aligns with the resilience required in slum life, encouraging inner devotion despite external suffering.
- #### 4. Bhakti as the Path to Moksha – Transforming Life's Struggles

The poem ends on a striking note: "Pa's have breakfast, while mama's scream!" This chaotic imagery reflects domestic struggles and emotional turmoil, highlighting the lack of peace in material existence. Bhakti traditions offer devotion as a means to overcome worldly suffering.

References:

- **Shrimad Bhagavad Gita (9.22):** "For those who worship Me with devotion, I provide what they lack and preserve what they have."^{vii}
- o This verse assures that Bhakti is the ultimate refuge, even for those in the harshest conditions.
- **Shrimad Bhagavat Mahapurana (12.3.51):** "In the age of Kali, the only means of liberation is chanting the holy names of the Lord."^{viii}
- o The Slum dwellers' struggles can be transcended through divine remembrance—an idea echoed in Swaminarayan Vedanta through the Swaminarayan Mahamantra.

- **Vachanamrut (Gadhada III-7):** "A devotee who remains steadfast in Bhakti, no matter their circumstances, is truly blessed."

o Despite the challenges of slum life, devotion remains a pathway to peace and liberation.

5. Conclusion: Transforming Suffering into Spiritual Growth

The poem "Morning in a Slum" aligns deeply with Upanishadic, Vedantic, and Bhakti teachings, offering a lens to understand suffering, Karma, and liberation. While the material world is filled with struggles, scriptures affirm that spiritual wisdom, detachment, and Bhakti can uplift even the most distressed souls.

Key Takeaways:

1. Slum life reflects Samsara (the cycle of suffering), as described in Upanishadic and Vedantic philosophy.
2. Karma determines life's struggles, but right action (Karma Yoga) can elevate one's existence.
3. Detachment (Vairagya) and devotion (Bhakti) provide the ultimate solution to material distress.
4. The Vachanamrut and Bhagavad Gita teach that even amidst poverty, spiritual realization is possible.
5. Suffering is not an end but an opportunity to transcend material bondage and attain Moksha.

Thus, this poem serves as a modern reflection of ancient wisdom, illustrating how Vedantic and Bhakti insights remain timeless in understanding human suffering and transcendence.

6. Historical and Cultural Context

- The poem resonates with modern urban poverty, reflecting struggles common in developing nations.
- It indirectly alludes to capitalistic exploitation, where the lower class works relentlessly yet remains impoverished.
- The imagery of alcohol and gender roles suggests a patriarchal and economically distressed society.

7. Poet's Perspective and Emotional Mindset

- The poet likely observed these realities firsthand or empathized with those living in such conditions.
- The tone suggests a mix of frustration, realism, and a call for awareness.
- The poem could stem from either personal experience or a broader social commentary.

8. Target Audience and Purpose

- The poem is directed toward society at large, especially policymakers, intellectuals, and those unaware of urban poverty.
- It seeks to raise awareness and invoke empathy, rather than simply narrate an aesthetic experience.

9. Personal Interpretation

- "Morning in a Slum" serves as a poignant reminder of the economic divide and social neglect.

- The poem leaves an open-ended reflection, compelling readers to acknowledge these harsh realities.
- Ultimately, it urges society to move beyond apathy and engage in meaningful change, making it not just poetry but a subtle form of activism.

Conclusion

"Morning in a Slum" captures the raw essence of life in destitution, portraying the repetitive struggles and hardships of the underprivileged. It sheds light on the social and economic disparities that define urban poverty while subtly urging the reader to contemplate the deeper truths of existence. This poem is not just an observation—it is a spiritual inquiry into suffering, Karma, and the quest for liberation.

From an Upanishadic and Vedantic perspective, the poem resonates with the idea that worldly life is impermanent and filled with struggles, yet the ultimate goal is not to remain entrapped in this suffering but to seek a higher state of being. The Bhagavad Gita, Vachanamrut, and Bhagavat Mahapurana reinforce the notion that spiritual wisdom, devotion, and righteous action can help one transcend the cycle of Samsara.

Thus, this poem serves as both a social commentary and a spiritual reflection, reminding us that while suffering exists in the material world, the path to inner peace and Moksha remains open to all who seek it. It invites the reader not only to empathize with the struggles of the slum dwellers but also to introspect on their own journey towards self-realization and higher consciousness.

Reference

- i तद्यथा तृणजलायुका तृणस्यान्तं गत्वान्यमाक्रममाक्रम्यात्मानमुपसंहरति, एवमेवा-
यमात्मेदं शरीरं निहत्य, अविद्यां गमयित्वा, अन्यमाक्रममाक्रम्यात्मानमुपसंहरति ॥ ३ ॥
- ii मामुपेत्य पुनर्जन्म दुःखालयमशाश्वतम् |
नाप्नुवन्ति महात्मानः संसिद्धिं परमां गताः ॥ 15 ॥
- iii यं यं लोकं मनसा संविभाति विशुद्धसत्त्वः कामयते यांश्च कामान् ।
तं तं लोकं जयते तांश्च कामांस्तस्मादात्मज्ञं ह्यर्चयेत्भूतिकामः ॥ १० ॥
- iv यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः |
तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥ 9 ॥
- v एतां स आस्थाय परात्मनिष्ठा-
मध्यासितां पूर्वतमैर्महर्षिभिः ।
अहं तरिष्यामि दुरन्तपारं
तमो मुकुन्दाङ्घ्रिनिषेवयैव ॥ ५७ ॥
- vi ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् ॥ १ ॥
- vii अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥ २२ ॥
- viii क्लेदोऽपि निधे राजन्नस्ति ह्येको महान् गुणः ।
कीर्तनादेव कृष्णस्य मुक्तसङ्गः परं ब्रजेत् ॥ ५१ ॥