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## Red : Between Blood and Awakening

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#### Preface

The poem *RED* delves into the raw emotions of conflict, vengeance, and the illusion of righteousness that often fuel humanity's darkest moments. Through evocative imagery, it portrays a swelling tide of violence driven by blind faith and narrow-mindedness. The color *red*—symbolizing both passion and destruction—serves as a powerful metaphor for the fury that blinds individuals to truth and wisdom.

Rooted in Vedantic and Upanishadic philosophy, this poem invites deeper contemplation on the nature of ignorance (*avidyā*), anger (*krodha*), and attachment (*moha*), which have been recognized in Hindu scriptures as the primary obstacles to liberation (*moksha*). Through its verses, the poem subtly challenges the reader to recognize the illusion (*Maya*) of self-righteous aggression and to seek a higher truth beyond the transient turmoil of the material world. The question—“*Did you know?*”—is not merely rhetorical; it is an invitation to self-inquiry, a call to transcend the limitations of anger and violence through wisdom and self-realization.

#### 1. Literary Devices and Figures of Speech

The poem "Red" employs a range of literary devices to enhance its meaning and emotional impact:

- **Metaphor:** "The narcissists wave swept on" compares a movement or ideology to a wave, implying force and inevitable spread.
- **Personification:** "Vengeance armed with sticks and knives" gives vengeance human attributes, making it an active force.
- **Imagery:** Vivid descriptions like "red clad saviours" and "puff and grow" create powerful mental pictures of a swelling crowd.
- **Alliteration:** "Saviours, young and old, Holy crusaders" uses repetitive consonant sounds for emphasis.
- **Irony:** The phrase "Holy crusaders" juxtaposed with violent imagery highlights the contradiction between righteousness and destruction.
- **Symbolism:** "Red" is a potent symbol, possibly representing blood, revolution, or ideological extremism.

#### 2. Structure and Form

- The poem does not follow a rigid rhyme scheme but maintains a rhythmic flow through repetition and enjambment.
- **Enjambment:** "The crowds swelled on and on / As I watched them puff and grow" creates continuity and urgency.
- The stanza breaks emphasize shifts in focus, from describing the crowd to the poet's personal perception.

#### 3. Theme and Subject Matter

- The poem explores themes of violence, ideological extremism, and mass movements.
- There is an implicit critique of blind faith and destructive fanaticism.
- "Did you know?" suggests a hidden message, urging readers to reflect on deeper implications.

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#### 4. Tone and Mood

- **Tone:** The poet's tone is **critical and foreboding**, warning against unchecked fervor.
- **Mood:** The poem evokes a sense of **dread, chaos, and reflection**, prompting the reader to question the motivations of the "red clad saviours."

#### 5. Philosophical and Spiritual Interpretation

The poem RED presents a striking imagery of violence, narrow-mindedness, and the illusion of righteousness, all of which can be analyzed through the lens of Upanishadic and Vedantic wisdom. Below is a scriptural analysis of its themes:

##### 1. The Ignorance-Fueled Wave of Violence

"The narcissists' wave swept on, powered along narrow-minded lives..."

In Vedanta, ignorance (avidyā) is considered the root cause of suffering and delusion. The Katha Upanishad (1.2.5) states: "avidyāyām antare vartamānāḥ svayaṁ dhīrāḥ paṇḍitāṁ manyamānāḥ | dandramyamānāḥ pariyanti mūḍhāḥ andhenaiva nīyamānā yathāndhāḥ ||" "Living in the midst of ignorance and considering themselves wise, the deluded ones wander in various ways, like blind men led by another blind man."<sup>i</sup>

The violent mob in the poem, driven by narrow-mindedness, reflects this avidyā, believing they are righteous while being led by ignorance.

The Bhagavad Gita (3.16) warns against such action: "evam pravartitam cakram nānuvartayatiha yaḥ | aghāyur indriyārāmo moghaṁ pārtha sa jīvati ||"

"He who does not follow the divine cycle of righteousness (dharma) leads a sinful life, living in vain."<sup>ii</sup>

The mob, blinded by its own beliefs, mirrors this delusion.

##### 2. Violence and the Karmic Cycle

"Vengeance armed with sticks and knives, unleashing the fury of man's age-old strife!"

Violence and vengeance are condemned in Vedic wisdom. The Isha Upanishad (Verse 1) teaches: "īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ yat kiñca jagatyām jagat | tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā mā ḡrdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam||" "Everything in this world is pervaded by the divine. Enjoy it with renunciation, do not covet what belongs to another."<sup>iii</sup>

This verse suggests that attachment to material desires and vengeance leads to suffering.

Similarly, the Bhagavad Gita (16.21) warns against anger and hatred: "tri-vidhaṁ narakasyedaṁ dvāraṁ nāśanam ātmanaḥ | kāmaḥ krodhas tathā lobhas tasmād etat trayaṁ tyajet ||" "Desire, anger, and greed are the three gates to hell; therefore, one must abandon them."<sup>iv</sup>

Violence, fueled by vengeance, leads to self-destruction.

The Vachanamrut (Gadhada I-16) explains that a bhakta (devotee) should not hold grudges:

"One who harbors enmity towards another, even if that person is a great devotee, will never attain liberation."

Thus, the "fury of man's age-old strife" is a direct manifestation of krodha (anger), which Vedantic teachings advise against.

##### 3. The Illusion of Righteousness in Conflict

"Red clad saviors, young and old, Holy crusaders, they said so..."

This suggests self-righteousness (ahamkara), which is condemned in the Bhagavad Gita (2.71): "vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumāṁś carati niḥspṛhaḥ |nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ sa śāntim adhigacchati ||" "One who renounces all desires, lives free from possessiveness and ego, attains true peace."<sup>v</sup>

The Shrimad Bhagavatam (10.14.3) also warns against such pride: "jānanta eva jānantu kiṁ bahūktyā na me prabho |manaso vapuṣo vāco vaibhavaṁ tava gocharaḥ ||" "Even if some claim to understand You, O Lord, their words are meaningless, for Your glories are beyond the grasp of mind, body, and speech."<sup>vi</sup>

The mob in the poem represents those who claim to be "holy crusaders," but true wisdom (jnana) is absent. Their self-justified aggression is a symptom of ignorance.

##### 4. Seeing Through the Illusion – The Realization of Truth

"Yet I saw RED, did you know?"

The poet sees RED, symbolizing anger, destruction, and bloodshed. This moment of realization echoes the Mundaka Upanishad (1.2.12): "nāyam ātmā pravacanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutena |yam evaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyas tasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṁ svām ||" "The Self is not attained by discourse, intelligence, or much learning. It is attained only by one whom the Self chooses."<sup>vii</sup>

This realization aligns with the wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita (13.34): "yathā prakāśayaty ekaḥ kṛtsnaṁ lokam imaṁ raviḥ | kṣetraṁ kṣetrī tathā kṛtsnaṁ prakāśayati bhārata ||" "As the sun illuminates the whole world, so does the knower of the Self illuminate all knowledge."<sup>viii</sup>

Seeing RED could symbolize the realization of Maya—the illusion of worldly conflicts. Just as Arjuna saw the true reality in the Vishvarupa Darshana (Gita 11), the poet questions whether others recognize this truth.

##### 5. The Call for Transcendence

The poem ends with a deep question: "Did you know?"

This invites reflection—do we recognize our own kleshas (mental afflictions) and transcend them?

The Vachanamrut (Gadhada II-28) explains the nature of a realized soul: "A devotee who has overcome anger, greed, and ego, and who remains steadfast in God, alone attains liberation."

Similarly, the Shrimad Bhagavatam (11.19.45) states: "sarva-bhūta-samam śāntam brahmany ācarati sthitaḥ | dṛṣṭvā svaṁ brahma-rūpaṁ sa pare brahmaṇi līyate ||" "One who sees all beings as equal, remains peaceful, and realizes the Self merges into the Supreme Brahman."<sup>ix</sup>

The poet's realization of RED suggests a call to break free from illusion (Maya), a concept central to Swaminarayan Vedanta and Upanishadic teachings.

The poem RED resonates deeply with Vedantic wisdom by portraying:

- **Avidyā (ignorance)** leading to blind aggression.
- **Karma and Krodha (anger & vengeance)** as the root causes of suffering.
- **Ahankara (ego)** masquerading as righteousness.
- **The illusion of worldly conflicts (Maya)** and the realization of their futility.

The poem ultimately echoes the Upanishadic call for transcendence beyond violence and illusion, leading toward true wisdom (jnana) and liberation (moksha).

## 6. Historical and Cultural Context

- "Red" could symbolize **revolutionary movements, communism, or religious crusades.**
- The poem's imagery reflects historical moments where ideology led to violence.
- It may critique modern **political movements** that claim moral superiority while engaging in aggression.

## 7. Poet's Perspective and Emotional Mindset

- The poet appears to be an **observer**, witnessing mass fervor with skepticism.
- The poem conveys **disillusionment and concern**, perhaps drawing from personal or historical experiences.
- The closing line "Did you know?" implies the poet seeks to awaken awareness in the reader.

## 8. Target Audience and Purpose

- The poem addresses **society at large**, particularly those swept up in ideological fervor.
- It aims to **provoke thought, raise awareness, and criticize blind extremism.**
- The poet's purpose may be to warn against the dangers of mob mentality.

## 9. Conclusion and Personal Interpretation

- The poem leaves an **open-ended question**, encouraging introspection.
- The imagery of "red" could symbolize various movements, making it **universally relevant.**
- The personal takeaway is a reminder of **history's cycles of ideology-driven violence** and the importance of **critical thinking over blind allegiance.**

## Conclusion

The timeless wisdom of the Vedas, Upanishads, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, and Vachanamrut warns against the perils of unchecked anger and the illusion of moral superiority in conflict. The poem RED encapsulates this truth, illustrating how violence—no matter how justified it may seem—leads only to suffering and destruction. The mob, lost in its own self-righteousness, mirrors the avidyā (ignorance) that has bound humanity in cycles of karma for millennia.

Yet, within this storm of chaos, the poet finds a moment of realization—the recognition of RED as a symbol of both destruction and awakening. The final lines compel the reader to pause and reflect: Do we recognize our own entanglement in illusion? Can we rise above vengeance and seek true wisdom instead?

Just as Arjuna stood bewildered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, torn between duty and despair, we too are faced with the choice—succumb to the fury of conflict or transcend it through the path of self-awareness and divine knowledge. The answer lies in realizing that true victory is not won through the sword but through the conquest of the self.

## Reference

- i अविद्यायामन्तरे वर्तमानाः स्वयं धीराः पण्डितं मन्यमानाः ।  
दन्द्रम्यमाणाः परियन्ति मूढा अन्धेनैव नीयमाना यथान्धाः ॥ ५ ॥
- ii एवं प्रवर्तितं चक्रं नानुवर्तयतीह यः ।  
अघायुरिन्द्रियारामो मोघं पार्थ स जीवति ॥ 16॥
- iii ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।  
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् ॥ १ ॥
- iv त्रिविधं नरकस्येदं द्वारं नाशनमात्मनः ।  
कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत्त्रयं त्यजेत् ॥ 21॥
- v विहाय कामान्यः सर्वान्पुमांश्चरति निःस्पृहः ।  
निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः स शान्तिमधिगच्छति ॥ 71॥
- vi ज्ञाने प्रयासमुदपास्य नमन्त एव  
जीवन्ति सन्मुखरितां भवदीयवार्ताम् ।  
स्थाने स्थिताः श्रुतिगतां तनुवाङ्मनोभि-  
प्रायशोऽजित जितोऽप्यसि तैस्त्रिलोक्याम् ॥ ३ ॥
- vii परीक्ष्य लोकान्कर्मचितान्ब्राह्मणो निर्वेदमायान्नास्त्यकृतः कृतेन ।  
तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत्समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् ॥ १२ ॥
- viii यथा प्रकाशयत्येकः कृत्स्नं लोकमिमं रविः ।  
क्षेत्रं क्षेत्री तथा कृत्स्नं प्रकाशयति भारत ॥ 34॥
- ix किं वर्णितेन बहुना लक्षणं गुणदोषयोः ।  
गुणदोषदृशिर्दोषो गुणस्तु भयवर्जितः ॥ ४५ ॥