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## Shadows of Transition: Analyzing 'Purgatory' Through Literary and Philosophical Lenses

**Dr. Krishna Panda****Preface**

The poem *Purgatory* delves into the haunting liminal space between life and death, where souls remain trapped in an eerie stillness, waiting for their fate to unfold. It explores themes of existential uncertainty, karmic consequences, and the unknown journey of the soul beyond mortal existence. The imagery of darkness, lost light, and frozen souls resonates with the metaphysical struggles discussed in Vedantic and Upanishadic philosophy, where the soul (*jiva*) is caught in the cycle of birth and rebirth (*samsara*), bound by the weight of karma.

This poem is an exploration of the soul's intermediate state, mirroring descriptions found in Hindu scriptures such as the *Garuda Purana*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Vachanamrut*, and *Shrimad Bhagavatam*. The existential dilemma of the souls in *Purgatory* reflects the philosophical idea of *antara-bhava*, the transitional phase between lifetimes. It also raises profound questions—do our past actions determine our fate? Is there a way out of this darkness? The poem invites the reader to contemplate these spiritual and philosophical mysteries, seeking enlightenment amidst the void.

This research paper explores the poem *Purgatory* by analyzing its literary devices, structure, themes, tone, and philosophical implications. The poem vividly portrays a state of limbo, reflecting deep existential and spiritual concerns. Through a detailed literary and thematic analysis, this paper unveils the layers of meaning hidden within the poem and its relevance to religious and philosophical discourses.

**1. Literary Devices and Figures of Speech****Metaphor:**

The poem uses purgatory as an extended metaphor for a state of existence where souls are trapped between life and death. The imagery of "cold storage" represents the stagnation of the soul, emphasizing the torment of uncertainty.

**Personification:**

The phrase "For life is knocked out of them!" suggests that life is an active force that has been forcefully taken away, personifying life itself.

**Imagery:**

The poem is rich in dark imagery—"dark and dingy place," "ghastly and stony," "groping darkness." These descriptions create a bleak and eerie atmosphere, emphasizing the suffering of the souls.

**Alliteration:**

The repetition of consonant sounds, such as in "Fixed in the darkness" and "Stare without a blink always," enhances the poem's rhythmic quality.

**Symbolism:**

Light and darkness serve as powerful symbols. "Each soul imparts some light, No light has ever shone" suggests that individual souls contain inherent potential, yet they remain overshadowed by the darkness of purgatory.

**2. Structure and Form****Correspondence:****Dr. Krishna Panda**

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The poem follows a free verse structure, emphasizing the chaotic and uncertain nature of purgatory. The lack of a fixed rhyme scheme mirrors the endless waiting and unresolved fate of the souls.

#### **Enjambment:**

Lines such as "Each soul imparts some light, / No light has ever shone" continue thoughts beyond the line break, reflecting the continuous yet stagnant nature of purgatory.

#### **3. Theme and Subject Matter**

The central theme revolves around existential limbo, suffering, and the ambiguity of fate. The poem raises questions about the afterlife and the notion of justice in the spiritual realm.

#### **4. Tone and Mood**

##### **Tone:**

The poet's tone is melancholic and reflective, contemplating the grim nature of purgatory and its implications for the human soul.

##### **Mood:**

The mood evokes a sense of despair, hopelessness, and eerie stillness, aligning with the poem's depiction of souls in a state of frozen uncertainty.

#### **5. Philosophical and Spiritual Interpretation**

##### **Alignment of the Poem "Purgatory" with Upanishadic and Vedantic Wisdom**

The poem Purgatory evokes a haunting vision of souls caught in a liminal space—neither truly alive nor completely dead, frozen in time, waiting for their fate to unfold. This theme deeply resonates with Upanishadic and Vedantic philosophy, which discusses the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara), the nature of the soul (Atman), and the consequences of karma. The poem's imagery of darkness, waiting, and lost light reflects the metaphysical struggles described in Hindu scriptures.

##### **1. The Concept of Samsara (Cycle of Birth and Death)**

In Vedantic thought, the soul (jiva) is bound by the cycle of samsara, constantly moving through birth, death, and rebirth based on accumulated karma. The idea of souls trapped in a state of limbo in Purgatory aligns with descriptions found in Hindu texts about intermediate states between rebirths.

•**Bhagavad Gita (2.22):** "Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on new ones, so the embodied soul casts off worn-out bodies and enters into new ones."<sup>i</sup>

This verse suggests that the soul is never truly static but transitions from one existence to another, much like the frozen souls in the poem awaiting their next journey.

•**Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (4.4.3):** "As a goldsmith, taking a piece of gold, shapes it into another, newer, and better form, so does the Self, having cast off the body, take

on another form that is new."<sup>iii</sup> This passage mirrors the uncertain state described in the poem, where souls await their transformation but remain stuck in darkness.

##### **2. The Intermediate State (Antara-Bhava)**

Hindu philosophy recognizes an antara-bhava (intermediate existence) between death and rebirth, where the soul undergoes purification based on its past actions.

•**Garuda Purana (2.47-2.48):** "After death, the soul lingers in an astral body for some time before being reborn according to its karma." This aligns with the poem's portrayal of souls in limbo, "neither dead nor living," standing motionless, awaiting their fate.

•**Chandogya Upanishad (5.10.7):** "Those whose actions have been good will attain good birth, and those whose actions have been bad will be reborn into suffering."<sup>iii</sup> The poem's imagery of lost light could symbolize souls who failed to attain enlightenment and now wander in darkness.

##### **3. Light and Darkness: The Journey of the Soul**

The poem contrasts the souls' "lost light" with the surrounding "groping darkness," symbolizing ignorance (avidya) and lack of self-realization.

•**Mundaka Upanishad (2.2.5):** "Those who are deluded by ignorance think they are wise and wander about, afflicted by many sorrows, like blind men led by the blind."<sup>iv</sup> The poem's depiction of stagnant souls reflects this state of ignorance, where they remain "frozen" in suffering due to their lack of spiritual progress.

•**Vachanamrut (Gadhada I-64):** "A soul entangled in material existence is like a traveler lost in darkness, unable to see the true path." Just as the poem describes souls "staring at their dull, empty future," the Vachanamrut highlights how souls trapped in material ignorance cannot perceive the path to liberation.

##### **4. The Role of Karma and Liberation**

The concept of karma plays a crucial role in determining the fate of souls in the afterlife. Those burdened by negative karma experience suffering before their next birth, much like the lost souls in Purgatory.

•**Bhagavad Gita (4.17):** "The intricacies of action (karma) are difficult to understand. One must discern between righteous action, forbidden action, and inaction."<sup>v</sup> The souls in the poem could represent those trapped due to unresolved karma, waiting for the consequences of their past deeds.

•**Shrimad Bhagavatam (11.22.50):** "Bound by karma, a soul wanders through various existences until it attains true knowledge and liberation."<sup>vi</sup> The poem's theme of souls

"put in cold storage till their time has come" echoes this process of karmic unfolding.

### 5. Path to Liberation: The Way Out of Darkness

While the poem does not provide a resolution, Vedanta offers a way out of the cycle of suffering—self-realization and devotion to the divine (bhakti).

•**Katha Upanishad (1.3.11):** "The wise choose the path of self-realization, while the ignorant remain in the cycle of birth and death."<sup>vii</sup> The souls in Purgatory appear stuck due to their ignorance, unable to move toward liberation.

•**Vachanamrut (Gadhada III-2):** "Those who surrender to God with pure devotion will not be bound by their past karma and will attain ultimate liberation." The ultimate escape from the limbo of Purgatory is spiritual enlightenment, as prescribed in the Bhagavad Gita and Vachanamrut.

The poem Purgatory beautifully encapsulates the idea of souls caught in the transitional phase between death and rebirth. The imagery of darkness and stagnation aligns with Vedantic discussions on samsara, antara-bhava, and the consequences of karma. Scriptures like the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Garuda Purana, Shrimad Bhagavatam, and Vachanamrut affirm that souls burdened by ignorance and unresolved karma remain in limbo until they attain self-realization. Ultimately, Vedanta teaches that through spiritual wisdom and devotion, one can transcend this state and merge with the eternal light of Brahman.

Thus, Purgatory serves as a poetic meditation on the existential struggle of the soul, urging readers to reflect on their own journey toward enlightenment.

### 6. Historical and Cultural Context

The poem's themes are universally relevant, but they may have been influenced by historical or personal reflections on war, suffering, and the transience of life. The imagery of "thousands joining every day" could hint at collective tragedies such as pandemics, wars, or mass suffering.

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

The poem's depiction of frozen souls suggests a deep contemplation of human mortality and the afterlife. The poet may have been influenced by personal experiences with grief, loss, or existential questioning.

### 8. Target Audience and Purpose

The poem addresses readers interested in spirituality, philosophy, and existential thought. It serves as a reflection on the uncertain fate of souls and provokes contemplation on the nature of life and death.

### 9. Personal Interpretation

The poem Purgatory offers a chilling yet profound exploration of the intermediate state between life and

death. It raises philosophical and spiritual questions about the fate of the soul, justice in the afterlife, and the consequences of one's actions. The poem leaves readers in contemplation, reflecting on the impermanence of life and the mysteries beyond it. Ultimately, it serves as a poetic meditation on the transient nature of existence and the search for ultimate liberation.

### Conclusion

Purgatory is more than just a depiction of souls lost in the shadows—it is a reflection of the human condition, where individuals often find themselves stuck in states of indecision, spiritual ignorance, and karmic consequences. The poem serves as a metaphor for the transient yet uncertain nature of life and death, resonating with the timeless teachings of Vedanta, which emphasize self-realization as the path to liberation (moksha).

Through its evocative imagery and profound symbolism, the poem urges the reader to question their own spiritual journey. Are we merely wandering souls, waiting for destiny to unfold? Or do we actively seek the light of wisdom and transcend the darkness of ignorance? In the end, Purgatory reminds us that while the soul may temporarily dwell in the shadows, the ultimate goal is to merge with the eternal light of truth and liberation.

### Reference

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तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा  
न्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही || 22||
- ii तद्यथा तृणजलायुका तृणस्यान्तं गत्वान्यमाक्रममाक्रम्यात्मानमुपसंहरति,  
एवमेवायमात्मेदं शरीरं निहत्य, अविद्यां गमयित्वा, अन्यमाक्रम-  
माक्रम्यात्मानमुपसंहरति || ३ ||
- iii तद्य इह रमणीयचरण अभ्यासो ह यत्ते रमणीयं योनिमा-  
पद्येरणब्राह्मणयोनिं वा क्षत्रिययोनि वा वैश्ययोनिं वाथ य इहा  
कप्यचरणा अभ्यासो ह यत्ते कप्यं योनिमापद्येरणश्वयोनिं वा शुक्रायोनिं  
वा चाण्डालायोनिं वा || 5.10.7 ||
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तमेवैकं जानथ आत्मानमन्या वाचो विमुञ्चथामृतस्यैष सेतुः || ५ ||
- v कर्मणो ह्यपि बोद्धव्यं बोद्धव्यं च विकर्मणः |  
अकर्मणश्च बोद्धव्यं गहना कर्मणो गतिः || 17||
- vi तरोर्बीजविपाकाभ्यां यो विद्वाञ्जन्मसंयमौ ।  
तरोर्विलक्षणो द्रष्टा एवं द्रष्टा तनोः पृथक् || ५० ||
- vii महतः परमव्यक्तमव्यक्तात्पुरुषः परः ।  
पुरुषान्न परं किञ्चित्सा काष्ठा सा परा गतिः || ११ ||