



ISSN: 3049-2017

IJMH 2025; 2(5): 132-135

© 2025 IJMH

www.themultijournal.com

Received: 13-10-2025

Accepted: 25-10-2025

Publish : 28-10-2025

Jayantakumar Panda

Student, Acharya Second Year,
Navya Nyaya, Dept. of Darshan,
Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri-
National Sanskrit University,
New Delhi

Leisure: A Pause That Awakens the Soul

Jayantakumar Panda

Abstract

William Henry Davies's poem "*Leisure*" is a lyrical meditation on the loss of contemplation in the modern, care-ridden life. Through its simple yet evocative verse, the poem laments a world too preoccupied with routine and materialism to appreciate the quiet wonders of nature and existence. This paper explores the poem through various analytical lenses—literary devices, structure, tone, theme, and cultural context—while also delving into its deeper philosophical resonance with Vedantic and Upanishadic wisdom.

Drawing upon sacred texts such as the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Shrimad Bhagavat Mahapurana, and the Vachanamrut, the study highlights how "*Leisure*" echoes the ancient call for inner stillness, mindful living, and the realization of the Self (Atman). The poem's plea for time to "stand and stare" aligns closely with the Indian spiritual ideal of witnessing (sākṣī-bhāva) and the yogic path of contemplation over constant action. Furthermore, the paper examines the poet's emotional perspective, historical influences, and intended audience to reveal how "*Leisure*" offers both a poetic critique of modern life and a spiritual vision for conscious living.

Ultimately, this study repositions Davies's work as more than a pastoral poem—it is a spiritual reflection that continues to resonate across time, cultures, and philosophical traditions.

Preface

In an age increasingly defined by speed, schedules, and superficial pursuits, William Henry Davies's "*Leisure*" stands as a timeless meditation on the forgotten art of stillness. First published in 1911, the poem's simple couplets disguise a profound philosophical insight: that the beauty and meaning of life are not to be found in relentless striving, but in the quiet act of observation—of nature, of the self, and of the divine play underlying all existence.

Rooted in a Romantic worldview and shaped by Davies's own experiences of solitude and marginality, the poem speaks a universal language that transcends cultures and centuries. Its spiritual undertones harmonize beautifully with the contemplative ethos of the Upanishads, the ethical clarity of the Bhagavad Gita, the divine intimacy of the Shrimad Bhagavatam, and the devotional vision of the Vachanamrut.

This poem is not merely a lament—it is a gentle wake-up call, urging us to return to the world as sākṣīs (witnesses), attuned to its subtle music and divine presence. In its plea to "stand and stare," "*Leisure*" offers an invitation to rediscover the sacred in the simple, the eternal in the everyday.

1. Literary Devices and Figures of Speech

William Henry Davies's poem "*Leisure*" is a masterful example of how simplicity in diction can be elevated through carefully chosen literary devices. Some prominent ones include:

- **Metaphor:** Time is implicitly portrayed as something controlling our lives, robbing us of the chance to enjoy beauty, as if it were a tyrant. The line "A poor life this is" metaphorically suggests spiritual poverty caused by worldly busyness.

Correspondence:

Jayantakumar Panda

Student, Acharya Second Year,
Navya Nyaya, Dept. of Darshan,
Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri-
National Sanskrit University,
New Delhi

- **Simile:** “And stare as long as sheep or cows” employs simile, comparing human beings to animals that live instinctively in the present moment—calmly, with presence.
- **Personification:** Nature is anthropomorphized—Beauty has a glance, feet that dance, and a mouth that smiles. The “streams full of stars” also personify nature’s quiet magic.
- **Imagery:** The poem is rich in visual imagery: “Streams full of stars, like skies at night” evokes a mystical scene where nature mirrors the cosmos.
- **Alliteration:** Repetition of sounds appears in “stand and stare,” “streams...stars...skies,” and “Beauty’s glance...feet...dance,” giving musicality to the verse.
- **Assonance and Consonance:** Subtle assonance in vowel sounds (e.g., “beneath the boughs”) and consonance (e.g., “streams full of stars”) enrich the poem’s lyrical quality.
- **Irony:** There’s a subtle irony in the fact that in modern life, surrounded by technology and comforts, we ironically lack time to enjoy the very life we’ve built.
- **Symbolism:** Nature, streams, animals, and stars symbolize serenity, presence, and the divine rhythm of life which contrasts the mechanical rush of modernity.

2. Structure and Form

- **Rhyme Scheme:** The poem follows a consistent rhyming couplet pattern (AA BB CC...), adding to the rhythmic harmony, mirroring the theme of natural beauty and flow.
- **Meter and Rhythm:** The poem generally follows iambic tetrameter, with each line having four iambic feet. This regular beat reinforces a sense of calm and balance.
- **Stanza and Line Breaks:** Written in a single stanza of 14 lines, the poem mirrors a sonnet in structure, though not in form. This unbroken flow underscores the theme of continuity and uninterrupted observation of life.
- **Enjambment:** There’s limited enjambment; each thought typically concludes within a line or couplet, reinforcing clarity and meditative pause.

3. Theme and Subject Matter

- **Central Theme:** The poem critiques the hurried pace of modern life, lamenting how material cares have robbed humans of the simple joy of mindful observation and communion with nature.
- **Deeper Message:** It urges readers to **reclaim time for reflection, aesthetic appreciation, and spiritual connection**—a call for a slower, more meaningful life.

4. Tone and Mood

- **Tone:** The tone is contemplative, critical, and gently didactic. Davies does not angrily protest but rather sorrowfully reflects.

- **Mood:** The poem evokes a mood of **nostalgia, yearning, and tranquility**. Readers may feel both a sense of loss and an invitation to rediscover wonder.

5. Philosophical and Spiritual Interpretation

- **Vedantic Echoes:** The poem’s message aligns with **Upanishadic and Vedantic philosophy**, which emphasizes “*sānti*” (peace), “*dhyāna*” (contemplation), and “*sākṣī-bhāva*” (witness consciousness). Like the *Isha Upanishad*’s caution against a life driven solely by action and desire, Davies critiques the over-engagement with worldly concerns.
- **Bhagavad Gita:** Chapter 2 speaks of the **sthitaprajña**—a person of steady wisdom—who remains unattached and observant. This poem subtly promotes such detachment from worldly cares to regain spiritual insight.
- **Vachanamrut (Swaminarayan tradition):** In *Gadhada I-37*, Swaminarayan emphasizes keeping the mind immersed in the form of God and nature’s divine order, resonating with the call for attentive living.
- **Christian Mysticism:** The poem shares themes with Christian teachings such as “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Stillness becomes a path to divine connection.
- **Ethical Values:** The poem promotes **mindfulness, ecological awareness, and spiritual awakening** as essential ethical pursuits.

The poem “*Leisure*” by **William Henry Davies** aligns profoundly with **Upanishadic and Vedantic wisdom**, as well as the teachings of the **Bhagavad Gita, Vachanamrut, Shrimad Bhagwat Mahapurān**, and other sacred scriptures of the Indian tradition. Below is a deep, scripture-based interpretation of how the poem resonates with this timeless wisdom:

Vedantic and Upanishadic Interpretation of “Leisure”

1. Core Message of the Poem

Davies laments a life so consumed with “care” that we no longer have time to “stand and stare” at the beauty of nature, of life, of divinity itself. He urges a return to simplicity, contemplation, and inner awareness—values central to **Vedanta** and **Upanishadic** teachings.

2. Upanishadic Parallels

The Upanishads teach that the **Supreme Reality (Brahman)** can be realized only through **inner stillness, detachment, and awareness of the Self**—all of which are implied in the poem’s advocacy for pausing and observing life with wonder.

• Isha Upanishad (Verse 1):ⁱ

“*Īśāvāsyam idam sarvam, yat kiñca jagatyām jagat...*”

“All this—whatever moves in this universe—is pervaded by the Lord. Renounce and enjoy.”

→ Davies’s call to observe nature instead of obsessively striving aligns with the Upanishadic principle of renunciation through inner enjoyment.

• **Kathopanishad (2.1.2):ⁱⁱ**

“Śreyaśca preyaśca manuṣyam etas tau samparītya vivinakti dhīrah...”

"Both the good (śreyas) and the pleasant (preyas) approach man; the wise man chooses the good."

→ The poem urges the choice of śreyas (contemplative life) over preyas (material busy-ness).

3. Bhagavad Gita Connection

• **Gita 6.10:ⁱⁱⁱ**

“Yogī yuñjīta satatam ātmānam rahasi sthitaḥ...”

"Let the yogi constantly concentrate on the Self in solitude."

→ The poem's emphasis on solitude and quiet observation reflects the yogic recommendation of secluded contemplation.

• **Gita 2.70:^{iv}**

“Apūryamānam acala-pratiṣṭham samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat...”

"Like rivers entering the ocean which remains unmoved, so too the wise man remains undisturbed by desires."

→ The imagery of streams and stars reflects **cosmic harmony** and tranquility found in **inner poise**, praised in the Gita.

4. Vachanamrut (Swaminarayan Vedanta)

In the **Vachanamrut**, Bhagwan Swaminarayan often speaks of the need to detach from worldly anxieties and engage in **darshan, meditation, and reflection on the divine form**.

• **Gadhada I-10:**

“One should not become engrossed in worldly affairs to such an extent that one forgets God.”

→ This aligns perfectly with Davies’s theme—**life filled with care but no contemplation is poor**.

• **Gadhada I-18:**

Bhagwan emphasizes the beauty of **remaining aware of God even in the midst of activity**, which is similar to the poem's invitation to remain spiritually sensitive amid life's movements.

5. Shrimad Bhagavat Mahapurān

• **Canto 1, Chapter 2, Verse 10:^v**

“Kāmasya nendriya-prītir lābho jīveta yāvata jīvasya tattva-jijñāsā nārtho yaś ceha karmaṇaḥ”

“Life’s desire should not be for sense enjoyment, but for inquiry into the Absolute Truth.”

→ Davies critiques a life consumed by superficial concerns and points instead toward **nature’s divine play**, inviting **reflection on the greater truth**.

• **Canto 10 – Krishna’s Vrindavan Līlā:**

The divine delight Krishna expresses in nature (forests, rivers, animals) mirrors the poem’s praise of natural wonders like **streams, squirrels, and stars**.

6. Additional Scriptural Resonances

• **Yajurveda (34.1):**

“Let us live in harmony with nature, performing actions in awareness.”

→ The poem echoes this call for **spiritual ecology**—living harmoniously, **not just efficiently**.

• **Taittiriya Upanishad (2.7.1):**

“Raso vai saḥ”— "He (Brahman) is the essence (rasa) of everything."

→ The poet’s admiration for **the essence of beauty in nature** reflects the Vedantic celebration of **divine rasa**.

7. Philosophical Resonance with Advaita Vedanta

Davies’s lament that we’re too busy to "stand and stare" subtly critiques **avidyā** (ignorance)—the mistaken identification with constant activity instead of the still Self (Atman). His poem aligns with Advaita’s teaching that **true knowledge arises in silence**, not in outer pursuits.

Conclusion: Scriptural Harmony with Poetic Vision

William Henry Davies’s “*Leisure*” is, in essence, a **secular sūtra**. It reflects a spiritual worldview that finds validation in **Upanishadic non-dualism, Gita's detached action, Bhagavatam's divine play, and Swaminarayan's path of constant remembrance**. It awakens the reader to the truth that **to pause and observe** is not idleness, but **divine alignment**.

In this way, “*Leisure*” becomes more than poetry—it is **pratyakṣa śāstra** (visible scripture), guiding us to reclaim the **sattvic joy** of a mindful life.

6. Historical and Cultural Context

• **Written in Early 20th Century (1911):**

Industrialization had taken firm root in Britain. The fast-paced, work-centric urban life was overwhelming traditional pastoral rhythms.

• **Romantic Influence:** Though written in the Edwardian era, Davies is influenced by **Romantic poets** like Wordsworth and Blake, who revered nature and decried mechanistic living.

• **Reaction Against Modernism:** As Modernism was rising with its fragmented, chaotic vision, Davies offered a counterpoint—simplicity, clarity, and harmony with nature.

7. Poet’s Perspective and Emotional Mindset

• **Background:** William Henry Davies led an unconventional life. Once a tramp and wanderer, his connection with nature and disdain for modern materialism were lived truths, not abstract ideals.

• **Emotional State:** The poem conveys a **sense of spiritual frustration** combined with **longing for harmony and inner peace**. It reflects personal wisdom gained from a life lived close to nature and outside the mainstream.

• **Autobiographical Element:** Davies, often on the fringes of society, wrote from experience. His inability to conform to “normal life” shaped this poetic protest against the loss of contemplative time.

8. Target Audience and Purpose

- **Audience:** Society at large—especially the urban, working class, intellectuals, and anyone caught in the web of hurried existence.
- **Purpose:** To **provoke self-reflection**, critique the blind chase for productivity, and to reawaken the reader to the lost art of stillness, wonder, and appreciation.

9. Personal Interpretation

- **Final Takeaway:** “*Leisure*” is more than a pastoral meditation—it’s a gentle yet firm call to **reorient life toward presence and awareness**. It reminds us that a life without time to “stand and stare” is spiritually impoverished.
- **Personal Resonance:** In an age even more fast-paced than Davies’s, the poem feels profoundly relevant. It evokes a personal resolve to reclaim inner quietude, to pause and marvel at the everyday miracles that surround us.

Conclusion

“*Leisure*” is far more than a pastoral poem; it is a spiritual reflection, a philosophical critique, and a heartfelt appeal. In its fourteen lines, William Henry Davies captures the essence of a life misdirected by “care”—a life alienated from joy, beauty, and presence. Yet through this recognition, the poem opens the door to another way of being: a life that honors contemplation, embraces wonder, and realizes the interconnectedness of all things.

When read through the lens of **Vedanta, Bhakti, and Yogic wisdom**, “*Leisure*” reveals itself as a modern echo of ancient truths: that the inner stillness which allows us to “see” is also the path to **Self-realization**. Just as the **rishi** sits in the forest, silent and inwardly awakened, the reader too is called to pause, observe, and awaken to the sacred flow of life.

In reclaiming time to “stand and stare,” we do not merely slow down—we return to our original nature: **peaceful, aware, and free**.

Works Cited (Suggested for Academic Use)

- Davies, William Henry. *Songs of Joy and Others*. 1911.
- *Bhagavad Gita*, Trans. Swami Sivananda.
- *The Upanishads*, Trans. Eknath Easwaran.
- *The Vachanamrut*, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.
- Wordsworth, William. *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*.
- Blake, William. *Auguries of Innocence*.

Foot note

- I. ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् ॥ १ ॥
- II. पराचः कामाननुयन्ति बालास्ते मृत्योर्यन्ति विततस्य पाशं ।
अथ धीरा अमृतत्वं विदित्वा ध्रुवमध्रुवेष्विह न प्रार्थयन्ते ॥ २ ॥
- III. योगी युञ्जीत सततमात्मानं रहसि स्थितः ।
एकाकी यतचित्तात्मा निराशीरपरिग्रहः ॥ 10॥

- IV. आपूर्यमाणमचलप्रतिष्ठं
समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति यद्वत् ।
तद्वत्कामा यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे
स शान्तिमाप्नोति न कामकामी ॥ 70॥
- V. कामस्य नेन्द्रियप्रीतिर्लाभो जीवेत यावता ।
जीवस्य तत्त्वजिज्ञासा नार्थो यश्चेह कर्मभिः ॥ १० ॥