

Stylistic Analysis of Laxmi Prasad Devkota's Poem 'The Lunatic'

Dr. Sushil Kumar Shahi

Assistant Professor, Mid-West University, School of Management (MUSOM)

E-mail: sahidrsushil@gmail.com

Keywords:

*Stylistic,
foregrounding,
metaphors, analysis,
graphological,
semantic,
morphological*

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.3126/jnmr.v5i1.61390>

ABSTRACT

This study is based on a stylistic analysis of the poem 'The Lunatic' by a great modern poet of Nepal, Laxmi Prasad Devkota. This analysis focuses on the foregrounding, metaphors, graphological, phonological, morphological, and semantic levels to explore and analyze what the poet wants to convey by describing his own experiences, showing the complex relationship between the poet and people living in the society that is going through social transformation. Stylistic techniques and methods are tactfully used to unfold the hidden feelings and experiences of the poet's life. Keeping in view stylistics is the study of different devices employed in language that give literary style and beauty to any writing; this article aims to explore and reveal hidden realities of poetic lines used in the poem 'The Lunatic'. This analysis helps us understand the poetic expression that can beautifully provide the picture of social transformation through the conflict between the poet and society. The stylistic devices used in this poem are the setting of the poem, along with the figures of speech. This study examines how the changing social context affects the poet's feelings and thoughts when composing poetry. Furthermore, the article explores how figurative speech enhances the impact of poetry on the readers' thinking.

1. INTRODUCTION

Poetry creatively expresses the poet's ideas, thoughts, experiences, feelings, and imagination. As Richards argued in his book *Science and Poetry*, it is a beautiful form of communication. Poetry communicates information and stimulates the readers' feelings, thoughtful sense, and the author's life experiences through creative uses of linguistic elements (Popliawski, 2008). To understand poetry in the true sense, a reader needs to master linguistic elements; otherwise, a reader cannot appreciate poetry. A poet also needs to

focus on how to lead the audience to stay concentrated on accurately expressing poetic ideas and feelings to the audience (Furman et al., 2006; Sherry & Schouten, 2002). This article explores and analyses how Devkota, the great poet of Nepal, uses linguistic elements in his poem "The Lunatic". What is the clarity of style and the poet's ability to express his life experiences through aesthetic discourse?

Stylistics is an instrumental tool to examine the language of literature. It mainly examines language as used in literary writing. It helps readers and critics understand what the poet wants to say through poetic and literary language. Written literary texts widely use lexico-syntactic choices, phonological, graph logical, and poetics devices, consonance, simile, personification, metonymy, imagery, deviation, or foregrounding. In addition, metaphors and literary devices are used in literary writings to create meanings (Black, 2006). However, stylistics is a discipline often associated with the language and literature in the readers' community.

Stylistics provides ways of understanding and analyzing literary works. It works as a medium between literature and linguistic studies. It leads the observer and reader of language to examine how an author creates patterns and structure using language. Stylistics describes literary genres to make readers more straightforward about different literary writings such as poetry, play, fiction, and prose. As the methodology, it is mainly concerned with linguistic analysis. Modern stylistics focuses on literary criticism (McIntyre, 2012). In the context of poetry, stylistics helps readers examine meanings as realized in phonetic phenomena (Leech, 2007). An interpretation of a poem or any literary text should never be final; different readers are always free to make relevant and logical interpretations of a poem and literary work. Toolan (2016) argued that the stylistic receiver of a poem can understand meanings without prior knowledge of the language in which it is carried. Linguistic analysis provides readers with significant insights into the meanings and patterns of a poem by looking at phonetic, grammatical, and semantic levels.

Laxmi Prasad Devkota is a great modern poet in the history of Nepalese literature. He started writing poems at the age of six. He is the father of romanticism and dramatically contributes to the Nepalese language. He composed poetry Nepalese poetry in English. He initially composed "The Lunatic" in English. This poem is the best example of how Devkota uses language creatively to express different feelings and thoughts to evoke specific meanings.

2. METHODOLOGY

This section provides methodological considerations. The researcher read an anthology of poems entitled *The Lunatic and Other Poems*, written initially by Devkota in English, and selected the poem "The Lunatic" for stylistic analysis. The Russian formalists, especially Roman Jakobson, contributed to promoting and using linguistic analysis of literary works at the beginning of the 20th century (1960). Formalists gave importance to foregrounding and metaphors to develop a theory of literary interpretation to examine how a poem affects the reader's mind (Preminger & Brogan, 1993). Crystal (2007) argued that lexico-syntactic choices, phonological, graph logical, and poetics devices; consonance, simile, personification, metonymy, imagery, and deviation are the properties of language. All these elements help the author create a style or way of writing. Stylistics is a comparative evaluation of linguistic choice (Cureton, 2003). Literary stylistics studies the aesthetic selection and use of words and sentences in narratives, jokes, and literature (1971).

3. DIFFERENT LEVELS OF STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

3.1. Foregrounding: As Jan Mukarovsky argued (1991, as cited in Critical Theory by Adams), foregrounding is the intentionally violating form of standard language. It is a matter of deviation and defamiliarization.

3.1.2. Metaphor: Metaphors are understood as a way of comparing two things. It is the process of mapping and comparing. It helps in understanding complex perceptions through comparison. Both foregrounding and metaphors express what cannot be expressed easily in the form of scientific language. The linguistic elements as Crystal wrote (2007) are as follows:

3.1.3. Phonological level: It is concerned with examining the use of sounds to create effects and meanings.

3.1.4. Graphological level: It is concerned with rules of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and line spacing.

3.1.5. Grammatical level: It is about the analysis of sentence structure. Lexical Level: It is about studying individual words and phrases used to create meanings in the context. As a result, stylistic analysis helps analyze the poem "The Lunatic" to see how the poet uses elements of linguistics to create effects on the readers' minds. The analysis is to provide an objective account of how meanings created can be related to linguistic elements.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

"The Lunatic", written in 1951 is not just an expression of Devkota's own felt rage; instead, it contains conscious use of foregrounding, metaphors, sounds, patterns, lexical features, and metonymy.

4.1. Personification

Personification is to give qualities of human and living things to nonliving objects or ideas, using simile and metaphor, which are part of figurative language. The poem begins with a strong metaphor when the poet compares himself with an insane person.

Indeed, my friend, insane am I! (1)

Such is my plight! (2)

The above sentences deviate from the ordinary language of everyday communication. The poet's comparison is indirect but very strong as he accepts, he is a mad person. The first and second sentences show semantic deviation.

In the second stanza of "The Lunatic", the poet beautifully uses comparative similes and metaphors as below.

I see the flower in the stone (10)

While the enchantress of heaven is smiling unto me, (13)

Like flowers, (17)

A variety of moon birds (18)

I commune with them as they do with me, (19)

The poet gives the quality of the flower to the stone, a nonliving object and human quality to heaven, using the word 'smiling', which is genuinely human. He compares moon birds with flowers using the comparative simile 'like'. Human qualities are given to invisible objects and ideas when the poet uses similarities: "I commune with them as they do with me." As they talk to me, the poet shows his friendship with a heavenly idea which is beyond human perception. They refer to moon birds, stone, sound, and heaven. Moon birds are not seen with eyes, but the poet sees them in the form of flowers. The poet brings unseen ideas and

objects to the ordinary human level through poetic expression. Readers can sense and visualize they cannot be seen with open eyes. The way the poet makes unseen things and ideas visible is a matter of foregrounding.

With metaphorical expressions such as smiling like a flower, the poet can create meanings for the readers about himself as a man of sixth sense to see what ordinary people cannot see and sense. 'With the sixth, I operate (31).' Metaphorical expression becomes more apparent in the following poetic sentences.

To you, a rose is but a rose (34)

It embodies Helen and Padmini for me (35).

You call the mountains mute, (50)

Orators do I call them, (51)

Rose is compared to Helen, a Greek mythical human character and metaphor of beauty. Mountains are compared to orators to reveal the poet's feelings and sensibility to the people of the ordinary world.

4.2. De-personification

De-personification is also figurative language that gives humans qualities of animals and natural objects. It is the opposite of personification. The poetic lines below provide examples of de-personification in the poem "The Lunatic" by Devkota.

I am liquid poetry (37)

The compared element is the poet as a human being. Comparison is between humans and poetry that denotes ideas.

4.3. Metonymy

Metonymy is a figure of speech that shows an essential aspect of an experience or object and represents the whole picture of the experience or object. The following poetic sentences provide examples of metonymy by presenting a comparison of the poet with rational humans, which shows the poet and people's experiences during the 1950s when the rational world was creating a difference between rationality and irrationality with due emphasis on scientific thought and outlook.

May be I am a squint (109)

Or that I am a crack, friend, (110)

Like the serpent-tresses of Gorgons, (123)

Like a clouded day crashing down to earth in the thunderbolt, (129)

Like a tongue of fire, (137)

Like a wild, wild conflagration. (143)

I am infuriated like a forest fire, (144)

The poet represents the irrationality and ugly reality of nature. He compares himself with a squint, Gorgons, a clouded day, fire, wild and forest fire. The poet's expression is the aspect of the experience that implies a whole historical experience of the 1950s that witnessed a growing gap and conflicting relations between rational humans and irrational humans created by scientific advancement.

The poet uses the metaphors of beauty and ugliness as below.

I am the moon bird of the beautiful, (148)

The bird that steals the celestial fire! (151)

I am the wild eruption of a volcano insane! (153)

I am a whirl-brain, whirl-brain, (156)

Fire, insane and whirl-brain reflects ugly aspects of nature. The moon bird of the beautiful and the celestial fire represent beautiful aspects of nature. Both aspects are found in the poet, whose experience suggests a part of the complex relationship between sane and insane.

4.4. Lexical Features

"The Lunatic" contains open-class words compared to closed-class words such as determiners and prepositions. Closed-class words are sentence 'connectors' that join open-class words in a meaningful order in sentences (Fromkin et al., 2007). Table 1 shows the open-class words, such as all the poem's nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

Table 1

Open Class Words in "The Lunatic"

Nouns/Pronouns	Adjectives	Verbs	Adverbs
I	Whirl-brain	Hear	Surely
Flower	Beautiful	Taste	Absolutely
They	Fury-reddened eyeballs	touch	Highly
Moon birds	Cruel	Deny	Tenderly
Their	The terror-striking hero's	Commune	4
You	Upsetting values	Visualize	
Your	Cleaver	Work	
Ganges shore	Insane	Operate	
Brain	So sharp	Do	
Helen	One possessed	Danced	
Rose	Crazy	Rolled	
Thorns	Muddy	Embody	
Mountains	Thick and Thin	Basked	
Buddha	Hard reality	Shocked	
Heaven	Ever running correct	Called	
Storm	Smiling	Chocked	
Jaws	Eloquent	Dispatched	
Gold		Raised	
Poetry		Climb	
Solid		Declare	
20	17	Seeks	
		Grind	
		22	

The table shows that the poem consists mainly of nouns, pronouns, and verbs. Nouns are very clear, but in the case of some nouns, they are abstract, such as poetry and solid.

4.5. Graphological Level

The poem consists of eight stanzas with two to thirty-one lines. Most of the lines are complete with commas. The full stop comes at the end of each line in the whole poem. The poet uses commas, semicolons, and colons to give pause, as the whole stanza is in the form of a single complete sentence having more than one subordinate clause. Every line of the poem starts with a capital letter, which is also an element of foregrounding.

4.6. Poetic Sound Patterns

The whole poem is written in free verse. Free verse is a revolutionary poetic practice that breaks away from the use of the tradition of rhyme and meter. Modern poets such as Ezra Pound and Williams Carlos Williams wrote free verse poetry to oppose traditional poetry composing (Ferguson et al., 1996). Devkota also composed "The Lunatic" in free verse to break away from traditional poetic form. He used poetic license to write the poetry of new form in Nepal. However, he uses assonance and alliteration in the poem.

Assonance and alliteration

Rhyme can be encountered in a single line. The similarities can be realized in consonant sounds or alliteration.

Assonance

As is never written, nor ever printed, nor ever spoken (20)

One line meter (20) appeared as written, printed, and spoken assonance.

Alliteration

Rise before my eyes like tongueless things insane, (15)

On the line meter (15) appeared alliteration, eyes, tongueless, and things.

4.7. Deviation

Deviation is also foregrounding and describes unexpected irregularity. Devkota deviates from the standard practice of poetry. He uses a double hyphen (-) in a single line in the fifth stanza, as below.

I am moon-struck,
Moon-struck indeed,

The poet uses a double hyphen to highlight and emphasize his idea of a reflective mood. The poet uses exclamation without a complete stop at the end of many lines, as below.

Indeed, my friend, insane am I!
Such is my plight!

Using exclamation '!' is also a foregrounding in the poem to draw readers' attention towards what the poet wants to convey.

4.8. Imagery

Devkota uses imagery in the poem to appeal to the reader's senses while reciting the poem. He can create a scene in a way that makes it so that readers can easily visualize and see that image, feel it, and smell it. He uses descriptive language to add beauty and insight to his poetry. In "The Lunatic," the poet personifies moonbirds as human beings, 'Like flowers', 'A variety of moonbirds'. I commune with them as they do with me. 'While enchantress heaven is smiling unto me, the poet creates imagery of moon birds talking and heaven smiling, making readers part of that experience.

5. FINDINGS

The poem "The Lunatic" uses stylistic elements to create an aesthetic impression on readers' minds. The poem reminds readers of how modern poets make poetry a means of expressing social experiences and reality. The poem beautifully describes the historical context as Devkota speaks from the actual socioeconomic ground of the 1950s when the world began to practice capitalist values derived from the

theory of social Darwinism, which offers the idea that man can survive according to his / her capacity to adjust to the environment by defeating weaker animals. Devkota is trying to modernize the old story that puts man and nature into an organic whole by leaving much to readers' imagination that what the rational mind takes as false exists beyond ordinary perception. Repetition of indeed, my friend, insane am I! /Such as is my plight! Each stanza indirectly denounces meaningless domination made by science upon a ritual world filled with feelings, dreams, desires, and imagination. Rhythm and the variety of images add beauty to the description of the romantic and natural world; I am a crack, gnash my teeth, a forest fire, and my reddened eyeballs are a few of them provoking sensation in readers. Whatever Devkota says about reality and romance, he tells consciously. Even in terms of a shift from the description of romance to accurate comparison and contrast between the two worlds, inside and outside are done consciously, offering an idea that man's inner world always reacts to the world outside and outside influences inner life. He defends poetic truth, whose beauty lies in celebrating differences. He introduces readers to the weakness of scientific rationalism, whose ugliness lies in reducing things to calculation, indirectly pointing out that rationalizing everything in the words of Albert Camus is just an act of creating the new myth of capitalist Sisyphus. Overall, the poem's pattern is a complete whole that brings the inside and the outside world into an organic description with the poet's holistic epistemology, concerned with the understanding nature of being and the poet's insight into his indomitable creative virtue and intellectual perception.

6. CONCLUSION

The poet's primary responsibility is to make readers feel part of all experiences by choosing words that convey meaning and keep the harmony of thoughts. Word selection helps readers to understand the message the poet wants to convey. The choice of words and linguistic elements by Devkota in "The Lunatic" has made readers feel like they are going together with the poet, experiencing what the poet experiences. The beautiful use of metaphors and imagery has made the poem the most extraordinary poetic work ever written in the history of Nepalese English literature.

7. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION

The study's primary purpose was to explore how the poet tactfully used language in the poem. In addition, another aim was to examine the linguistic elements used by the poet in the poem that made him a great poet of Nepal. Mainly, this study is concerned with how Devkota uses words to create imagery to convey the message he desires to express through the poem.

8. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The researcher could not analyze each line of the poem to provide a complete picture of the analysis of the poem. He could not deal with Devkota in a broader historical context with more details.

References

- Adams, H. (1991). *Critical Theory Since Plato*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Black, E. (2006). *Pragmatic Stylistics*. Edinburg: Edinburg University Press Ltd.
- Crystal, D. (2007). *How Language Works*. London: Penguin Books.
- Cureton, R. (2003). "Linguistics and Literature". July 2019. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330485518 c: Users/SCS/Downloads/Stylistics.PDF](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330485518_c/Users/SCS/Downloads/Stylistics.PDF).
- Devkota, L.P. (2009). *The Lunatic & Other Poems*. Kathmandu: Shami Sam Mudranalaya.
- Ferguson, Margaret, et al. (1996). *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Fourth Edition. New York: www.Norton & Company.
- Fromkin, V., et al. (2007). *Language: Nature, Psychology, and Grammatical Aspects*. New York: 6Wordsworth.
- Furman, R, Lietz, C. and Langer, C.L. (2006). "The Research Poem in International Social Work: Innovations Qualitative Methodology". *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*.5. (3)November 2020. https://ualberta.ca/iiqm/backissues/5_3PDF/furman.pdf.
- Jacobson, R. (1960). Linguistics and Poetics. In T.A. Sebeok, ed, *Style in language*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, PP. 350-377.
- Kinneavy, J. (1971). *Anthology of discourse*. Englewood Cliffs. N.J: Prentice-Hall.
- Leech, G. (1969). *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. London: Longman.
- MacIntyre, D. (2015). "Linguistics and literature: stylistics as a tool for the literary critic". SRC Working Papers 1:1-11. <http://Symbiosiscollege.edu.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/eecomming.pdf>. (accessed 2020 Nonmember).
- Poplaswski, Paul ed. (2008) *English Literature in Context*. Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Sherry, J. & Schouten, J. (2002). A Role for Poetry in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Inc. (29), September 2002 DOI: 0093-5301/2003/2909 0005\$10.00. <https://www3.nd.edu/>.(accessed 10/8/2020).
- Toolman, M. (2016). "Stylistics in iconicity and Love's two orders of Language". *Journal of language Sciences*, Elsevier.2016. <http://dx.do.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2020.08>.