



Sweat, Soil, and Survival: A Literary Analysis of Sita Ram Adhikari's *Love Labour*

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Abstract

Background: Nepali poetry has historically served as a vital medium for expressing cultural values, rural identity, and environmental consciousness. Within this tradition, contemporary poets like Sita Ram Adhikari contribute significantly to agrarian and ecological discourse through stylistically rich poetic works. **Objective:** This study aims to analyze the stylistic elements of Adhikari's poem *Love Labour*, exploring how the poet's use of diction, tone, imagery, figurative language, and structure enhances the thematic portrayal of ancestral pride, love for land, and ecological awareness. **Methods:** The research adopts a qualitative, text-centered approach grounded in New Criticism and Ecocriticism. Through close reading and formal analysis, the poem is examined in terms of its stylistic features and how they serve both aesthetic and environmental purposes. **Findings:** The analysis reveals that Adhikari employs a deceptively simple yet emotionally resonant style. His use of organic imagery, personification, metaphor, and free verse structure intensifies the poem's themes of rural labor, cultural inheritance, and the sacredness of soil. The stylistic elements serve not only as poetic devices but as cultural and ecological signifiers. **Conclusion:** *Love Labour* exemplifies how style can shape and elevate poetic meaning. The poem's stylistic economy supports a deeper reading of environmental and socio-cultural realities in rural Nepal, reinforcing the power of poetry to preserve identity and inspire ecological thought. **Novelty:** This paper is one of the first academic studies to focus specifically on the stylistic analysis of *Love Labour*, applying both formalist and ecological lenses to a modern Nepali rural poem.

Keywords: Nepali poetry, stylistic analysis, Sita Ram Adhikari, *Love Labour*, diction, ecocriticism, rural identity, literary style, ecological literature



I. Introduction

Poetry is a vibrant and ageless literary art form that utilizes the aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language—meter, sound devices, metaphor, and imagery, for instance—to evoke feeling, communicate meaning, and capture the dynamics of the human experience (Akramova, 2025; Mahat, Karki, Neupane, & Shrestha, 2024; Neupane & Lourdusamy, 2024). Its origin dates back to the prehistoric oral traditions whereby early societies used rhythmic and repetitive speech to aid in memorizing myths, histories, and cultural values, for instance, in the ancient epics of the Epic of Gilgamesh and Homer's Odyssey (Wisnom, 2023). Over centuries, poetry evolved through various civilizations, from the lyrical poetry of Sappho in ancient Greece and devotional hymns of the Rigveda in India to the formal structures of classical Chinese poetry and the sonnets of the European Renaissance (Reshamwala, 2021). (Ramadani & Shishko, 2024). The value of poetry lies in the fact that it can travel through time and culture, bearing with it the potential of storytelling, political commentary, religious inquiry, and personal reflection. Poetry distills large truths into compact, suggestive language, offering both solace and challenge to its readers while also preserving the linguistic and emotional history of humanity. Whether through traditional forms like haiku and sonnets or contemporary free verse and slam poetry, it remains a powerful means of artistic expression, cultural preservation, and human communication (Sulianta, 2024). Nepali poetry has long been a rich field for the articulation of cultural, spiritual, and social identity.

From Bhanubhakta Acharya's classical devotional poems to experimental and progressive poetries of poets post-1950s, the evolution of style in Nepali poetry reflects the linguistic diversity and historical transitions in the country. Nepali poems have stylistically moved from rigidly metrical forms to open and free verse forms, reflecting not only literary theory but also transitions in life. Particularly, the development of free verse and symbolic language has granted poets more freedom to express personal, political, and ecological content in a way that is understandable and attractive to contemporary audiences (Orr, 2002). Stylistic choices—diction, syntax, tone, and figurative language—are at the forefront of the creation and transmission of meaning in poetry. Among contemporary Nepali poets, Sita Ram Adhikari stands out for his deep obsession with rural identity, agrarian labor, and cultural memory.

His poetry often gives voice to the voiceless—particularly farmers and villagers—whose relationship with land is not just economic but spiritual. In the poem *Love Labour*, Adhikari creates a tapestry of ancestral tradition and environmental consciousness through stylistic simplicity and lyricism (Neupane P. , 2024). His language is simple yet powerful, drawing attention to the cultural and environmental significance of soil, sweat, and survival. The poem illustrates the manner in which stylistic economy can attain profound emotional and thematic resonance, especially when based on cultural realism. The aim of this paper is to analyze the poem *Love Labour* stylistically, exploring how Adhikari's utilization of diction, tone, imagery, structure, and figurative language works to reinforce its thematic concerns.



A style-focused critical practice, as advocated in this book, operates with the basic presumption that form is not a vacuum to contain content but is actually constitutive thereof. To "foreground the stylistic elements" is to insist that poetic sense is not something which can be neatly coaxed out and paraphrased; rather, it is created as a function of the intricate relationship between technique and subject matter. This method, drawing on the theoretical achievements of critics like Wellek and Warren, avoids the outdated notion of style as ornament—agreeable but ultimately superfluous embellishment to the "authentic" meaning of the poem (Oyedeji, 2021). Instead, it proposes that the poet's choice of diction, syntax, meter, imagery, and sound patterning (the poem's very substance) is the primary means by which thought is conveyed and received. So, the chaotic, enjambed lines of a poem of tumult or the formal, strict meter of a sonnet about limited love aren't accidental; the form is the argument. By slowly unpacking these entwined layers, the reading demonstrates that how something is uttered cannot be divorced from what is being uttered, because the means informs, tints, and shades the abstract idea, making it concrete and effective.

The justification for such stringent examination thus extends far beyond a desire for "formal neatness" or academics' trickery. It is an essential endeavor to an understanding of the entire richness of the interaction of a literary work with the world. Through attention to the very stylistic touches of a play like *Love's Labour's Lost*, the analysis indicates how literary craftsmanship actually directs the reader's experience and forms interpretation. The play's linguistic profusion—its puns, its Latinity and profuseness of words, its ornate sonnets and speeches—is not simply a show of Shakespeare's skill. It is the very process that constructs the play's primary themes: the folly of attempting to lead a life of detached intellectualism independent of human emotion and the physical world. The mode is charged with the cultural narrative of Renaissance art/nature polemics, and the eventual shift in tone grounds those themes in a pretty grim, ecological narrative of seasonal transition and human mortality. Therefore, to appreciate the poem or drama in all its fulness, one has to appreciate its form, for it is in the "flesh and blood" of its formal decision that its most trenchant cultural, philosophical, and ecological criticisms are embedded and communicated to the reader.

II. Theoretical Framework

Style in literary criticism is how a writer selects to convey himself or herself through language. It entails an array of linguistic and formal qualities, including diction (word choice), syntax (sentence structure), tone, imagery, sound devices, and figurative language such as metaphor, personification, and symbolism. All these elements culminate into a unique voice or style in a text. Style, according to M.H. Abrams, is "the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse—it is how a speaker or writer says whatever it is that he says (Abrahm et al, 1999). Interpreting the style of a poem is not only necessary to determine its aesthetic value, but also to uncover its underlying emotional and thematic connotations. To guide the analysis of *Love Labour*, this study draws upon two critical theories: New Criticism and Ecocriticism.



New Criticism, established in the mid-20th century, demands close reading and is attentive to the intrinsic qualities of a literary work, viewing the poem as a self-sufficient artefact. For this approach, style is not an accessory quality but an essential transmitter of meaning. Literary critics such as Cleanth Brooks and T.S. Eliot upheld the unity of form and content as being at the center of a poem's success (Intext-Citation). Ecocriticism, on the other hand, provides an environmental approach in which literature is analyzed in relation to nature and ecological concerns. For Glotfelty, ecocriticism "examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Intext-Citation). In *Love Labour*, land, soil, and sweat are not just images—they are metaphors of identity, survival, and ecological integrity, which stylistic analysis can foreground. Employing a stylistic approach in *Love Labour* is thus relevant and insightful.

The affective resonance and thematic complexity of the poem are deeply embedded in how the poet chooses and arranges words, evokes natural imagery, and constructs voice. Adhikari's use of simple yet evocative diction, organic structure, and symbolic language reveals a nuanced understanding of rural life and environmental consciousness. By combining the principles of New Criticism (focusing on internal stylistic features) with Ecocriticism (highlighting the poem's environmental themes), this paper uncovers how style operates as both artistic form and cultural expression. This composite model enables a more subtle interpretation of the poem's message, illustrating that the elements of style, far from being merely technical, are also moral and ecological pointers.

Love Labour

The fertile field needs seeds,
My forefathers' sweat is still alive,
I love it more than anything else,
My parental prestige makes me proud.

They loved the soil,
The soil loved sweat,
Their sweat was sweet,
A child was unknown to it?

They taught me:
We get freedom if we love the soil.
The soil feeds us and gives energy,
But the evil waves may wash it away,
In the absence of it, no existence of life.

By: Sita Ram Adhikari (2080 BS)



III. Love Labour's Elements of Style

1. Diction

In *Love Labour*, Sita Ram Adhikari employs a radically simple yet emotionally rich diction that allows the poem to communicate profound cultural and ecological messages effortlessly. The vocabulary consists largely of concrete and rural/agricultural words such as "soil," "sweat," "seeds," and "freedom" that are deeply embedded in the day-to-day life of Nepal's farming communities. These words are chosen not just for their denotative value but for what they represent—for instance, "soil" means both the physical land and the cultural identity of agrarian life, and "sweat" becomes a metaphor for generations of sacrifice and labor. This twofold function of words—being literal and symbolic—contributes to the poem's ability to engage emotional resonance while embedding the reader in a specific socio-ecological state. This preference for concrete nouns over abstractions also contributes to the emotive power of the poem, as the reader can feel the land and the history of labor. Through this careful selection of words, Adhikari achieves a poetic diction that is simple but dense with meaning.

2. Syntax

The syntax in *Love Labour* is marked by short, direct lines that echo natural speech rhythms, rendering the poem conversational and intimate in tone.

Sita Ram Adhikari maintains deceptively simple sentences that allow every line to stand on its own with clarity and emotion. The conscious use of line breaks induces pauses and stresses, encouraging the reader to slow down and reflect upon significant phrases, e.g., "My forefathers' sweat is still alive" or "The soil loved sweat." These breaks are not merely grammatical but rhythmic and strategic, regulating the emotional tempo of the poem. Also, the asymmetrical stanza shape—with lines of varying lengths and no recurrent pattern—mirrors an organic thought process, mimicking the randomness and directness of country life experience. This open-form syntax works to increase the poem's truth value, equating both the form and content of the poem with the earthy, ground-level content of its focus.

3. Tone and Voice

In *Love Labour*, the tone shifts seamlessly between reverence, nostalgia, pride, and admonishment, reflecting the poet's intense emotional involvement with the land and his concern for its destiny.

The opening lines are respectful and proud in tone, as in "My forefathers' sweat is still alive," which glorifies ancestral labor and generates a sense of pride in agricultural life. Throughout the poem, a nostalgic strain is mixed with intimacy, particularly in the way the poet summons parentage and soil affection. The voice of the poem is both intimate and collective—the speaker inhabits his own experience while voicing the voices of generations gone by, constructing a shared rural identity. Towards the end of the poem, the tone turns cautionary, with the line "But



the evil waves may wash it away," suggesting that there is a danger to the soil and the culture it sustains. The change in tone from one of praise to warning creates emotional complexity for the poem and underscores the urgency of the necessity to save land and heritage.

4. Figurative Language

Love Labour by Sita Ram Adhikari is full of figurative language that adds to the poem's emotional and thematic complexity.

A very interesting metaphor is used in the line "Sweat was sweet," wherein sweat, which is generally equated with drudgery and difficulty, is turned into an emblem of pride, dignity, and the fruits of good labor. The poet also uses personification, as in "The soil loved sweat," to establish a sense of two-way, almost sacramental connection between humans and the earth, with nature responding to care and labor. Symbolism is rampant in the poem: soil is a symbol of identity, nourishment, and cultural heritage; sweat is a symbol of toil, sacrifice, and continuity from one generation to the next; and the "evil waves" are a symbol of external threats—perhaps modernization, migration, or environmental degradation—that imperil traditional ways of life. These figurative elements allow the poem to express complex cultural and ecological messages in a brief and poetic manner, making the abstract intimate and the intimate universal.

5. Imagery

Love Labour is full of rich sensory imagery that plunges the reader into the physical and emotional terrain of rural existence.

Through visual images such as "fertile field" and "seeds," Sita Ram Adhikari evokes the life-giving landscape of rural Nepal, and through tactile images such as "sweat" and "soil," he evokes the physical labor and intimacy that goes into farming. These images not only appeal to the senses but also symbolize the cycle of labor and inheritance through generations, suggesting that the land is tilled through constant human effort and dedication. The recurrence of earth imagery grounds the poem in ecological fact, recalling the reader that the interconnectedness of human life and nature is not metaphysical but squarely grounded in daily survival and spiritual belonging. This sensory detail heightens the poem's emotional impact and reinforces its themes of continuity, pride, and ecological awareness.

6. Structure and Form

Love Labour is a free verse poem, characterized by the absence of a regular rhyme scheme or metrical pattern, which provides the poet with greater thematic and expressive freedom.

The poem consists of three stanzas of varying length, an organization that reflects an organic unfolding of thought over formal constraints. This unconventional stanzaic form approximates the natural rhythms of rural life and labor, contributing to the realism and earthiness of the



poem. In addition, the lack of punctuation in the poem increases its fluidity, allowing ideas and images to blend undetectably and implying multiple meanings simultaneously. Such formal openness encourages readers to become more actively engaged with the poem's meaning, making the reading experience more intimate and meditative.

7. Sound Devices

Adhikari's use of sound devices in *Love Labour* subtly enriches the poem's musicality without overpowering its thematic focus.

The alliteration in phrases like "Sweat was sweet" creates a gentle, soothing musical quality that echoes the sweetness and dignity of labor. Through consonance and assonance, the poem employs subtle repetitions of consonant and vowel sounds, which generate an internal rhythm that supports the natural, flowing tone of the work. Unlike traditional rhymed poetry, *Love Labour* avoids patent rhyme, thereby drawing the reader's attention away from melody and onto the meaning and emotional impact of the words. This careful use of sound devices is in keeping with the serious and contemplative mood of the poem.

8. Repetition

Repetition plays a key role in reinforcing the poem's significant themes of *Love Labour*. Imagery like "soil," "sweat," and "freedom" is refrain-like throughout the poem, serving as thematic touchstones that underscore the inseparable links between land, labor, and identity. The repetition is a subtle poetic device that unifies, bringing disparate images and ideas together into an integrated whole. By doubling back to these basic concepts, the poem increases the reader's appreciation for the worth of agricultural heritage and the continuing struggle for autonomy and survival. This deliberate repetition of words also echoes the repetitive, cyclical rhythms of farm life, drawing the content of the poem further into its form.

IV. Synthesis of Style and Theme

Love Labour's stylistic devices strongly support and augment the poem's chief themes of agrarian pride, intergenerational identity, and ecological dependence.

Through simple yet evocative vocabulary and descriptive imagery, Adhikari evokes the pride of rural labor and the deep affective bond between people and their land. Figurative language—personification and metaphor, for instance—supports the introduction of soil and sweat as living symbols of survival and heritage. The free verse form and organic syntax capture the natural rhythms of rural spirituality and farm life, creating style as an echo of cultural continuity. Together, these elements create a cohesive poetic statement that honors ancestors and chides environmental degradation, illustrating how style and theme are inseparable in conveying the poem's message.



V. Conclusion

In *Love Labour*, Sita Ram Adhikari's deliberate and thoughtful use of stylistic elements elevates the poem beyond simple description to a profound meditation on identity, labor, and ecology. The interplay of diction, imagery, sound devices, and form not only enhances the poem's emotional impact but also serves as a vehicle for preserving cultural memory and promoting environmental awareness. This stylistic analysis demonstrates that a sensitivity to poetry's formal elements is central to a complete appreciation of its thematic richness. One would be able to expand on this foundation in future studies by analyzing other rural Nepali poets' stylistic nuances, thereby deepening the appreciation of Nepal's literary heritage and its ongoing negotiation with land and culture.



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