

# A Stylistic Analysis of Kamala Das' Poem "A Losing Battle"

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**Abstract:** *The present paper is an attempt to analyze Kamala Das' poem "A Losing Battle" from the viewpoint of stylistic analysis. This analysis is made under the aspects of phonological, morphological, lexical, semantic, and presentational patterns. The analysis is useful in understanding the content, form, and inner meaning of the poem. This article also aims to find out the stylistic devices to boost the message of the poem. It concludes the stylistic devices which play a very significant role in helping the readers seize the meanings and messages that the poem conveys.*

**Keywords:** Kamala Das, Style, Stylistics, Stylistic Analysis

## 1. Introduction

Poetry is defined as a form of literature is also known as expressive music as it maintains both expressive and musical qualities. Poetry retains an artistic collection of different sounds and senses which create particular feelings, emotions, and moods to the readers and audiences. Poetry a genre of the literature reveals the mystery, beauty, emotion, feelings, sentiment, etc, through an artistic language decorated with imagination. Poetry is a composition in verse or metrical language. It can also be defined as an expression of eminent thought, imagination, and feeling in the rhythmic language of metrical composition. It is rich in the use of figures of speech. It is different from other genres because it is more emotional, more musical, and more imagination.

Style is a unique way of using language to convey the planned meaning in an ample manner and stylistics is the study of the distinctive expression of language.

Kamala Das (1934-2009) is one of the most outstanding Indian poetesses writes in English. She has established a remarkable technique in writing poetry. Fifty years of creative writing in two languages, first her mother tongue Malayalam and English. she has made a name for herself, in style, imagination, and romanticism. Generations enjoy her style of writing, and each group enjoys the concepts and style in their way. And that shows Kamala Das' writing is not felt for a particular time but meant for generations.

"A Losing Battle" is one of Kamala Das' shortest English poems. This poem can be considered as a metaphorical poem. Probably the poem reminds a reader of the famous line of Shakespeare's tragedy "Hamlet" –'Frailty, thy name is a woman', where Shakespeare points towards the weakness in the character and moral worthiness of a woman. Kamala Das creates such an attempt in "A Losing Battle" that men are also morally corrupt and worthless. They can be easily lured into a trap. The poem creates a theme which is the image of the failure of love due to the power of lust and how inferiority can dominate superiority.

This article tries to extract the style and stylistic devices that the poet has subjugated to boost her message that lust can dominate love because men are corrupt and worthless. The

poem is analyzed by examining its morphological, lexical, and semantic, graphological, or presentation levels.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature review in this article maintains definitions of style, stylistics, and levels of stylistics analysis, and some notable studies on her works.

### 2.1 Style

Style refers to the perceived distinctive manner of expression in writing or speaking, just as there is a perceived manner of doing things, like playing a character or portraying a role or a painting. Style is the fundamental element in composition as well as literary works. It exposes the ways that the author applies words, sentence structure, figurative language, and sentence arrangement. (Katie Wales.1990)

If we closely observe each author clearly draws upon the general stock of the language in any given period; what makes styles distinctive is the choice of items, and their distribution and patterning. A definition of style in terms of choice is very popular, and has been since the Renaissance: the selection of features partly determined by the demands of genre, form, theme, addressee, etc. So Patrick Studer (2008) defines style as 'motivated choice'.

Work can be observed linguistically which creates a theme, mood, setting, and meaning by the text. Wales (2001) believes the style refers to "the perceived distinctive manner of expression in writing or speaking". Harmon (2006) views that style merges two elements: "the idea to be expressed and the individuality of the author". According Cuddon to (1998) style is the characteristic manner of expression in prose or verse; "how a particular writer says things". These definitions articulate that style is a distinctive way of applying language for expressing feelings, emotions, thoughts, and messages in particular situations. The style differs from person to person as well as the personalities of persons.

## 2.2. Stylistics

Stylistics concerns with study style in-text more often than not literary text. Raj Sharma believes that Widdowson (1975) claims stylistics as the study of literary discourse from a "linguistic orientation". Candling (1989), stylistics is a linguistic approach to "the study of the literary texts". Stylistics focuses on the figures of speech, tropes, and other rhetorical devices used to present diversity and distinctness to someone writing. It concerns with the style, and consequent meaning of literary works to analyze the text and eventually to build up the interpretation of the literary text.

Stylistics is sometimes called confusingly literary stylistics/linguistics or linguistic stylistics: literary because it tends to focus on literary texts; linguistic because its models or tools are drawn from linguistics. However, linguistic stylistics has also referred to a kind of stylistics whose focus of interest is not primarily literary texts, but the refinement of a linguistic model which has the potential for further linguistic or stylistic analysis:

## 2.3. Levels of Stylistic Analysis

The following are the levels of text stylistics according to these levels.

### 2.3.1. Graphological Level

Graphology is a linguistic level of analysis that embodies the study of graphic features of the language. According to Crystal and Davy (1969), graphology is the equivalent study of a language writing system or orthography as seen in a variety of kinds of handwriting to topography. These are "the formalized rules of writing". Leech (1969) asserts that graphology goes beyond orthography. It refers to the full writing system: "punctuation and paragraphing as well as spacing".

### 2.3.2. Phonological Level

Phonology is the study of the patterns of sounds in a language, it concerns with the phonetic resources as they are used in a specified language. Lodge (2009) outlooks phonology to be the study of linguistic systems, specifically how "sounds represents differences of meaning in a language".

### 2.3.3. Morphological Level

Mark and Kirsten (2005) acclaim that morphology is the mental system implicated in word-formation or to the zone of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed.

### 2.3.4. Lexical Level

Lexical level speaks about the level of "Lexis". Lexis is the vocabulary items that design a language or the body of words group together to create phrases and sentences.

### 2.3.5. Semantic Level

Semantic level deals with the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. It contains a metaphor, simile, symbol, mood, imagery, and other literary devices.

Let us see the epigram "the losing battle".

*How can my love hold him when the other  
Flaunts a gaudy lust and is lioness  
To his beast? Men are worthless, to trap them  
Use the cheapest bait of all, but never  
Love, which in a woman must mean tears  
And a silence in the blood.*

## 3. Purpose of the Study

- To explore the stylistic devices exploited in the poem.
- To discover the message and meaning of the poem.

## 4. Methodology

The researcher has followed graphological, morphological, phonological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic levels of analysis to form the basis for stylistic analysis of this poem "A losing battle" of Kamala Das.

## 5. Stylistic Analysis of the Poem

### 5.1. Graphological Level

The poem "A Losing Battle" consists of one stanza contain six lines. It sounds to be two long sentences in six lines. The first sentence ends up with a question mark in the middle of the third line and before it, there is no punctuation mark. The second sentence finishes up with one period in the last stanza. There are three commas in the second sentence that separate four sentences that build the second sentence totally within the third last line. As modern writer Kamala das breaks the rules of punctuation, line arrangements and she is making use of graphological deviation. She avoids applying conventional grammar rules. She avoided either the regular way of punctuation or inventing her style of punctuation. It conveys a sense that Kamala das breaks the rules of the male society through her poem and portrays men weakly in this poem. As the sentence "men are worthless" is in the center of the third line and the whole of the poem as well, it is a sign that the poet emphasis the theme of her poem.

### 5.2. Lexical Level

The major words used in this poem are nouns such as lust, lioness, beast, bait, tears, silence, and blood. The nouns figure out a battle between men and women and establish the situation of battle in the setting as well. The verbs indicate the action of the relation between men and women such as hold, flaunts, trap, use, love, mean. There are three adjectives gaudy, worthless, and cheapest. The first one 'other' is not related to whom exactly men or women, or might be both, while the second two adjectives are related to the men and describe them perceptively. There is not any adverb in the poem. The minor words employ in this poem are him, the, his, them, a, of, but, never, which, and, in. Parts of speech used in the poem are given below:

Parts of speech	Words
Nouns	love, lust, lioness, beast, men, bait, women, tears, silence, blood
Main verbs	hold, flaunts, trap, use, love, mean
Adjectives	gaudy, worthless, cheapest
Adverbs	(nil).....

Auxiliary verbs	can, is, never, must, are
Pronouns	him, his, them
Prepositions	to, of, in
Conjunctions	but, and
Articles	the, a

### 5.3. Morphological Level

The poem consists of free morphemes and bound morphemes.

Free morphemes involve lexical and functional morphemes. Lexical morphemes employed in this poem are: "love" "hold" "flaunts" "gaudy" "lust" "lioness" "beast" "men" "worthless" "trap" "use" "cheapest" "bait" "woman" "means" "tears" "silence" "blood".

Functional morphemes are:

"a" "and" "but" "of" "the" "to" "in".

The bound morphemes are:

how, him, a, and, to, his, them, of, but, never, which, in, must.

The bound morphemes are classified in the inflectional and derivational morphemes. The inflectional morphemes are: plural "-s" in "flaunts" & "tears", "-ness" in "lioness", "-less" in worthless, "-est" in cheapest.

The derivational morphemes are not used in this poem.

The abundant use of free morphemes might be freedom of the poetry from chains and rules and the poet as well.

### 5.4. Semantic Level

In "A losing battle", Das portrays the conflict between 'love' and 'lust', 'men' and 'women' as well. The poetess observes how 'lust' can defeat 'love' because it is 'gaudy' and powerful as a lion. In the poet's view, men are worthless as the beast that women can trap them with cheapest baits like some womanish acts as tear and the silence easily. Kamala Das believes men don't understand love, therefore, love loses. The poet has employed the following rhetorical devices:

#### 5.4.1 Metaphor

Metaphor is a figure of speech in which two, unlike objects, are implicitly compared without the use of like or as. Speaker employs metaphor "lioness" to mean readers that woman is as lioness to portray the power of women and lust as well. The title "the losing battle" can be a metaphorical poem. It compares love and lust, man and woman and finally, lust defeats love.

#### 5.4.2 Symbol

Symbol is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or "stands for something else". The losing battle by Kamala Das could be a symbolic poem in which she considers lust as a symbol of power that can lose love. An alike lion is a symbol of power; the writer uses a lioness to represent the power of a woman to arouse the lust in men. The speaker considers men who are deceived by lust worthless.

#### 5.4.3 Imagery

Imagery is a general term that conveys the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas in mind, and any sensory experience. In "A Losing Battle", the poet illustrates abstract images that can't be seen, just felt. She makes sense in the reader the men are beast who can trap them easily or lust as gaudy, flashy, and deceivable. She also illustrates the image of women as lioness which makes a sense of power and haunting power as well. Kamala Das shows the reader that loves is separate from lust and never finds in men's hands.

#### 5.4.4 Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a common figure popularly known as exaggeration or overstatement, often used for emphasis as great emotion or passion or importance. In "A Losing Battle", the poet asserts the men are worthless to trap them with the cheapest baits which in a woman must mean tears and silence in the blood or anger. Kamala Das exaggerates to emphasize important issue which is the lust and how it able to destroy love simply.

#### 5.4.5. Mood

Mood is the feeling created in the reader by a piece of writing. This title "A Losing Battle" creates a dark and absurd feeling in the reader. A battle will result in defeat to reflect into reader futility, inanity.

## 6. Conclusion

"A Losing Battle" by Kamala Das is a metaphoric brief poem that explained, interpreted, and analyzed from diverse fields. This analysis is made under the aspects of phonological, morphological, lexical, semantic, and presentational patterns. The analysis is useful in understanding the content, form, and inner meaning of the poem. This also gives the stylistic devices used in this short poem which boosts the message of the poem. It can be concluded by stating that the stylistic devices play a very momentous role in helping the readers seize the meanings and message that the poem conveys.

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