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## A Comparative Study of Lexical Density and Stylistic Deviation in the Poems of Jayanta Mahapatra and Kamala Das

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**Abstract.** Poets like Jayanta Mahapatra and Kamala Das are social critics who try to showcase societal issues through their poems. They take refuge in poetry's ambiguous, abstract and complex nature to express the life intricacies. Furthermore, the terminology and lexicon of their language serve as the primary tool for producing the desired impact. This paper attempts to study and compare the poetic styles of Jayanta Mahapatra and Kamala Das applied in "Hunger" and "Forest Fire" respectively. It also explores the different modes and techniques of presenting hunger in their respective poems. Additionally, it examines the lexical density, symbolism, and imagery employed in their poetic worlds and how these techniques are successfully employed in their work. Moreover, it will study how English is Indianized in these poems.

**Keywords:** lexical density, Indianisation, symbols, imagery, style.

Research area: theory and history of culture, art.

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## Сравнительное исследование лексической плотности и стилистической девиации в произведениях Джаянты Махапатра и Камалы Дас

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**Аннотация.** Предпринята попытка изучения и сравнения поэтических стилей индийского поэта Джаянты Махапатра и индийской поэтессы Камалы Дас в произведениях «Голод» и «Лесной пожар». Рассматриваются различные способы и особенности изображения голода в соответствующих стихах. Кроме того, исследуется лексическая плотность, стилистические девиации, символика и образность поэтических миров поэтов, а также особенности применения семантико-стилистических приемов в их творчестве. Отдельное внимание уделяется особенностям индианизации английского языка в исследуемых произведениях. Джаянта Махапатра и Камала Дас выступают социальными критиками, которые демонстрируют социальные проблемы в своей лирике и находят убежище в неоднозначной, абстрактной и сложной природе поэзии. Семантико-стилистические особенности их языка служат основным инструментом для достижения желаемого эффекта.

**Ключевые слова:** лексическая плотность, индианизация, символы, образность, стиль.

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### Introduction

Poetry is an expressive form of literature that has been adopted over the years for its ambiguity, meaning, tone and rhythm in order to elicit a certain imaginative knowledge of reality or emotional response. A poet can depict complex human emotions using a variety of mouldable lexemes. Additionally, a language's lexicon is its primary tool for generating meaning. Lexicon is the keyword that adds context to the poem. Consequently, these lexicons result in producing symbols and images in a poem. Cummings and Simmons highlight this relationship between the context and the language even further. They emphasize the special function each lexical item

plays in a piece of work for generating meaning in poetry:

“Every lexical item contributes to producing images in poetry, either directly or in an oblique manner. Once an image has been established in a poem, all lexical items in the poem may probably be applied to it by extending their meaning metaphorically. Even those lexical items which seems apparently unrelated to the established images can be attributed the role of creating more images for the purpose of making the experience of the poem more complex. In this regard, strings of related lexis in a poem can help the reader to understand how the poem creates and co-ordinates different levels of imagery,

in order to convey the sense of an experience.” (Cummings & Simmons, 1983).

### Theoretical Framework

In retrospect, the ratio of linguistic / lexical to functional elements determines whether a work has a conventional or colloquial tone. In order to create the appropriate message, mood, and atmosphere in a poem as well as to capture readers' attention in the poetry, writers rely on syntax and diction. This paper makes an effort to analyse and evaluate the lexical density in the poems *Forest Fire* and *Hunger*, respectively, by Kamala Das (Das, 1981) and Jayanta Mahapatra (Mahapatra, 1976). It also examines the varied symbolisms that the poets employed in their particular works to represent different forms of 'hunger' for instance, physical hunger, which is the hunger for food or concupiscent hunger, or mental hunger like an artist's creative hunger.

Furthermore, lexical density is the ratio of lexical elements – those that add substance such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs – to total number of words including functional elements, that convey very less meaning. Functional items include articles, auxiliaries, some adverbs, interjections, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, and determiners. The tone of a sentence is correlated with lexical density. A text is classified as spoken, casual, pragmatic, textual, technical, or academic depending on the percentage of lexical elements in it. As Halliday observes: “Written language tends to be lexically dense, but grammatically simple; spoken language tends to be grammatically intricate, but lexically sparse.” (Halliday, 2005).

### Statement of the problem

An integral component of a poet's creative process is lexicalization or the search for suitable words to encode the poet's nuanced experiences. Many poets have created poems that celebrate their ongoing struggle to find the right words to describe their mysterious life experiences. The focus of this paper is to study the lexical density of the poems *Forest Fire* by Kamala Das and *Hunger* by Jayanta Mahapatra.

### Discussion

Kamala Das is a poet who writes introspective poetry. Her confessional writing style focuses on the development of a poetic self that conceals the poet's private life and conveys a universal message. She has a tremendous appetite for creativity, which on the other hand leads to a broad variety of experiences that are directed toward the creation of her poems. She is recognized as a “confessional” poet because of her open admission of self. Additionally, her English is considered the pinnacle of Indianized English.

Kamala Das's *Forest Fire* is an ultimate example of a poem with balanced lexical density. The 216 words long poem is representative of the poet's human consciousness. The reference to 'forest fire' in the poem can be depicted as the poet's creative frenzy. In this poem, Das portrays her creative 'hunger'. She 'Consumes' and 'licks' the 'sights' resulting in achieving a 'Brighter charm'. She compares her 'hunger' with the 'forest fire' which engulfs everything around it. In this poem, Kamala Das reflects on her own journey toward becoming a poet.

The poet, like the 'flames', devours and destroys all that comes her way, including all of the human experiences, and then she creates her poetry from those experiences. Furthermore, the poet goes beyond herself. She liberates herself from her sufferings and produced this work by observing and absorbing her surroundings. The free verse writing style is symbolic of the poem's free-spiritedness. Hence, for this poem, Das has used a lexical density that is neither sparse nor dense.

Among the parts of speech, the noun has the highest density with 23.61 %. The 51 nouns are clustered around people, nature, body parts, sentiments, expressions, senses, and places (see Table 1).

The 32 verbs make the 14.81 % of the words. Interestingly, the poet uses verbs like 'Consumes', 'killing', 'finish', 'swirl', and 'glimmer' which can be associated with fire (see Table 2).

Out of the overall 216 words, the lexical items make up 51 nouns, 32 verbs, 13 adjectives, and 12 adverbs, totalling 108 words. This calculation results in a lexical density of 50 %.

Table 1. Noun Classes in 'Forest Fire'

Noun Class	Nouns	Total
People	child, lovers, man, baby, old, girls, eunuchs, mother	08
Nature	forest fire, tree, sunlight, flames, sun	06
Body Parts	hand, hair, eyes, nerves, arms	05
Sentiments/Expressions	hunger, greed, charm, smile, love, moan	06
Sense	sights, smells, sounds, touch	04
Things	pram, paper, park bench, ash, drums, street-lamps, skirts	08
Others	way, heaps, cabaret, wedding, songs, towns	06

Table 2. The Lexical-Functional Elements Ratio in Kamala Das's 'Forest Fire'

Part of Speech	Count	Density	Range
Noun	51	23.61	43
Adjective	13	6.02	13
Verb	32	14.81	30
Adverb	12	5.56	09
Preposition	36	16.67	12
Auxiliary Verb	07	3.24	02
Pronoun	18	8.34	06
Conjunction	21	9.72	03
Articles/Determiners	26	12.03	06
Total	216	100	124

This density rises to 76.61 % when the span of lexicon is taken into account and repetitive lexemes are excluded.

Kamala Das uses a highly diverse lexical density to play with the innermost parts of her own self while internalizing experiences from the outside world. She employs a variety of lexemes with words like 'fire' and 'flames', 'child', and 'baby' as synonyms. She blends various words together to form a coherent whole.

More than three-fourths of the terms in the vocabulary are lexical items. They account for 95 of the 124 lexical kinds (Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives and Adverbs) (see Table 3).

Parallel to Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra is a social commentator who has contributed to the advancement of Indian English. Through his conversational tone, free verse, and uncon-

ventional stanza structure, he examines the ambiguities of life. Mahapatra is a skilled user of the montage method, and his images are precise, expressive, and unnerving. Nevertheless, his poetry is constrained and realistic. There are no superfluous or unnecessary phrases in his poems.

Jayanta Mahapatra's *Hunger* has a higher lexical density than *Forest Fire* by Kamala Das. *Hunger* is a 200 words long poem with poverty, hunger, malnutrition, starvation being the prominent issues that are highlighted in it. It illustrates the dilemma of a struggling fisherman. Hunger necessitates tragic compulsion which makes the scenario all the more poignant. The destitute father kills his conscience in order to attract potential customers for his daughter. Interestingly, it's not just the father who is constantly fighting his conscience, but

the narrator as well. Despite being severely burdened by his guilt, the narrator is driven by his concupiscent 'hunger'. The bitter irony is that in addition to satisfying the narrator's urge, the encounter also provides the fisherman with a source of sustenance.

Similar to *Forest Fire*, nouns in *Hunger* have the highest density at 24.5 %. The 49 nouns can be categorized under people, time, nature, body parts, places, objects, and feelings. The poet uses the word 'Silence' as a concrete noun. It is portrayed clutching the poet's 'sleeves'. He was being prevented from committing the act by his conscience. The poet wonders if his concupiscent urges had accumulated nothing but sin. Moreover, this poem too has 32 verbs which the poet has skilfully employed to convey the various underlying moods of the poem. Verbs like 'flickering', 'turning', 'burning', 'thumbing', and 'slithering' captures the unease, tension, and restlessness present in the poem. While words like 'clawed', 'gripped', 'followed', 'dragged', and 'bunched' encapsu-

late the expression of a human driven by the urge and need. Out of the 200 words altogether, 104 words (49 nouns, 32 verbs, 15 adjectives, and 8 adverbs) are lexical components (see Table 4). Accordingly, 52 % is the computed lexical density (see Table 5).

This density equals 71.13 % once the recurring lexemes are subtracted and the spectrum of the unique words is taken into consideration. It is lower in comparison to the lexical range density of Das's *Forest Fire*. The lexical elements of the poem *Hunger* constitute almost one-third of the total number of words. They include 101 of the 142 lexical types (Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives and Adverbs) in total (see Table 6).

'Hunger' becomes a prominent symbol in both *Forest Fire* and *Hunger*. Although the poems emphasize the multiple facets of 'hunger'. In *Forest Fire*, Das uses words like 'licks', 'consumes', 'finish' and 'spit out' to show the different stages of consumption. Like fire, she is consuming her surroundings. Instead of

Table 3. Lexical Density in Kamala Das's 'Forest Fire'

Part of Speech	Count	Density	Range
Noun	51	23.61	43
Adjective	13	6.02	13
Verb	32	14.81	30
Adverb	12	5.56	09
Total	108	50	95
Lexical Density: $108/216 = 50\%$ Lexical Range Density: $95/124 = 76.61\%$			

Table 4. Noun Classes in 'Hunger'

Noun Class	Noun	Total
People	fisherman, daughter, father's	03
Nature	sands, seas, wind, space, sky, fish	06
Time	days, nights, hours, years	04
Body and its parts	flesh, back, nerves, bone, eyes, mind, body, flesh's sling, wound, skin, legs	12
Things	nets, froth, palm fronds, oil lamp, walls, soot, bus, rubber, sleeves, words	12
Others	purpose, wile, hope, hut, house, silence, shack, inside, dark, hunger	10

Table 5. The Lexical-Functional Elements Ratio in Mahapatra's 'Hunger'

Part of Speech	Count	Density	Range
Noun	49	24.5	47
Adjective	15	7.5	15
Verb	32	16.0	31
Adverb	08	4.0	08
Preposition	20	10.0	13
Auxiliary Verb	08	4.0	05
Pronoun	23	11.5	12
Conjunction	08	4.0	03
Articles/Determiners	37	18.5	08
Total	200	100	142

Table 6. Lexical Density in Jayanta Mahapatra's 'Hunger'

Part of Speech	Count	Density	Range
Noun	49	24.5	47
Adjective	15	7.5	15
Verb	32	16.0	31
Adverb	08	4.0	08
Total	104	52	101
Lexical Density: $104/200 = 52\%$ Lexical Range Density: $101/142 = 71.13\%$			

showing the destructive power of fire in this illustration, Das emphasizes its 'charm' that consumes everything just to recreate. Das too absorbs her surroundings to reproduce her poetry. The poet expresses how having new experiences feeds her creative appetite and has a positive perspective on life as a consuming process.

In *Hunger*, on the other hand, Mahapatra portrays the fisherman's daughter as being devoid of feeling and individuality. She is presented by her father to the poet as a food item to satisfy the poet's 'hunger'. Furthermore, "I felt the hunger there, / the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside." are the last lines of the poem which shows that the poem *Hunger* is about the concept of hunger, which at the poem's beginning is about thirst for desire but ultimately changes into the hunger of stomach that drives a person to take dire actions. The

"fish slithering, turning inside" is a metaphor for the way stomachs churn of hunger.

We see contrasting images in the respective poems. The words 'dark' and 'soot' in the poem *Hunger* reflect the bleak reality and are intended to unmask life in red-light districts. This is also depicted by the 'oil-lamp' burning in the fisherman's cabin because such regions typically have little to no light. Dim lighting also symbolizes the absence of 'Hope' in these areas. While in *Forest Fire* phrases like 'Brighter charm' and 'street-lamps/ Shall glimmer' paint a more endearing image. The imagery drawn in this poem is brighter and more colourful. The Indianness in the poem is evident because of the poet's diverse palette. The images in the lines "the cabaret girls cavort, the/ Wedding drums resound, the eunuchs swirl coloured/ Skirts..." show visuals that are hue and vibrant.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that Kamala Das and Jayanta Mahapatra employ lexical density as an effective stylistic device. In their respective works, the two poets have modified the English language to sound more Indian. Nevertheless, there has been a stylistic deviation in the artistic expression of the subjects. In *Forest Fire*, the poet describes her desire for creation in 7 long, vivid sentences. The sensitive nature of the topic in *Hunger* makes the poet reticent to express them openly. Hence, Mahapatra employs 17 concise and crisp sentences to describe the scenario.

Despite the fact that both poems have a universal subject. Mahapatra's writing seems objective and distant while Das's writing is more subjective and has an intimate feel to it. In terms of lexical density, both *Hunger* and *Forest Fire* are quite balanced. They are artistically deviant as their lexicon is neither scant nor excessive. The poets have developed the background by providing a substantial amount of details, conveying the concepts to the readers through their lexemes and symbols while leaving room between the lines for interpretation.

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