

## The Thematic Analysis of Children at Lesson by Alamgir Hashmi

Muhammad Ajmal<sup>a</sup>, Shazia Rajab<sup>b</sup>, Abrar Ajmal<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Associate Professor of English, Department of Linguistics & Literature, Qurtuba. University of Science and Information Technology, D.I. Khan, KP, Pakistan.

<sup>b</sup>Lecturer, Department of English, University of Wah, Wah Cantt, Pakistan.

<sup>c</sup>Assistant Professor, Minhaj University Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

**Corresponding author's email:** [dr.muhammad.ajmal@qurtuba.edu.pk](mailto:dr.muhammad.ajmal@qurtuba.edu.pk)

**Received:** 08 October 2022, **Published:** 17 December 2022

### Abstract

Literary works are rich in themes due to their intense language. Alamgir Hashmi is a contemporary Pakistani poet whose themes are akin to mundane life. It is challenging to grasp the deep and true meaning of his poems because he talks about nature and everyday elements to tackle with highly complex themes like happiness and life. Therefore, it is important and essential to identify the most common themes in Alamgir Hashmi's poem: *Children at Lesson* in order to understand his poetry better. This research article tries to interpret the poem on the basis of thematic analysis (TA) that is a comprehensive and qualitative method for analysis of a literary text. From educational perspective, this poem is very rich as it delineates the studying norms of children. Selection of this poem, *Children at Lesson* has been made for multiple reasons: it certainly manifests the Pakistani culture but its structure also speaks of its complex narrative beauty, thematic meaningfulness and unique diction. All these elements combine to augment the artistic beauty of this narrative piece of writing.

### Keywords

Children at Lesson, Hard Sums, Pakistani Culture, Themes of Life, Pakistani Literature.

### DOI Number:

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## **Background of the Study**

Style is the manner and pattern of doing things. It is the way we interpret our thoughts to the world in written or oral form. According to Leech and Short (2007), 'style is the way in which language is used in the given context, by a given person, for a given person and so on'.

Style is also defined as the 'linguistic characteristic of a given text' (Leech and Short, 2007).

Thomas S. Kane in his book 'writing prose' defines style as "a pattern of linguistic features that distinguishes one work from another. It means style is the writer's way of presenting his point of view in any piece of writing whether it is poetry or prose. Style is also elaborated as 'dress of thoughts' (Leech and Short, 2007).

Basically, style is the representation of language in different forms. The term stylistics is composed of two words i.e. style and linguistics. So, it is the study of different styles used in the composition of a text. Stylistics is the branch of linguistics that deals with the study of style of any literary text. 'It meekly analyzes the use of words or sentences of a language in a written text. Stylistic analysis is basically an objective case of study. The methods of analysis and investigation in stylistics are basically derived from the theories of language which are developed to analyze any literary text' (Kumar, 1987). Stylistics shows how a literary text and language used in it are related as the choice of specific words and language gives the specific effect to a literary text which the reader feels while reading it.

With the advent of the British and the introduction of English language as a medium of education, many Indians both Hindus and Muslims started expressing themselves in the language which was once associated with and considered as a symbol of colonization. After decolonization, the trend remained continued and many writers kept writing in English language as well as in their mother tongues. However, the trend of exploring these writers through scholarly research is not as much in momentum in Pakistan as it ought to be and still many English language works and writers remain there to be explored and further expanded in the light of the emerging trends and theories both in literature and linguistics. Among such writers and poets is Alamgir Hashmi who remains neglected in many aspects despite being a writer and a poet who not only conveys the feelings and concerns of the local people but also deals with international themes.

## **Introduction of the Poet**

Alamgir Hashmi (15 November, 1951) is considered avant-garde in Pakistani literature in English. He won acclaim and popularity around the globe. By profession, he was a professor of English and a scholar-critic. Now his work spans over four decades across nearly all continents, and he lives wherever his work lives. He considers life as a gift. His poetry has been widely published throughout English-speaking world. His tenth volume of poetry, *A Choice of Hashmi's Verse*, published by Oxford University Press in 1997, was followed by another selection published in England.

## **The Poem as a Whole**

*Children at Lesson* is a poem about children. These children daily go to seek knowledge "as if to drink from a fountain". These children learn from the sister of speaker of the poem. The

children are there because “Their parents have them” to find answers to various perplexing questions. They are making their mind and thinking great by working hard. They know how to plus or minus mathematically. These children are asked to “judge figures” both literally and metaphorically. By literally, we mean that they have to identify a given figure, however metaphorically it requires the children to be cognizant of the people and situations around themselves. During the learning session, the children are advised to get rid of negative legacy of bad deeds, as bequeathed by their ancestors, for the sake of their own peace and prosperity. The poet advises them to work hard to enjoy for the rest of their life. And he also wishes them better luck. And at the end, the speaker says that this life is always full of sufferings and it is quite challenging and difficult to survive here. One needs great patience and calmness to satisfactorily survive here. And in the last stanza, the poet advises the children that they would have to hide themselves from this cruel world for the sake of their happiness.

### **Research Questions**

This is a thematic analysis (TA) of a poem by Alamgir Hashmi. His poetry is included in Pakistani English Literature and this is being taught to graduate and post graduate students. This paper endeavors to address the following research questions:

- What are the major themes portrayed in the selected poem?
- How do the themes in the selected poem combine to make a textual thread?

### **Literature Review**

Style refers to the way writer chooses and values certain forms of expressions and words in his depiction of an event, while ignoring other words and expressions. There are certain unique qualities which each speaker or writers possess and the distinctive modes of expressions through which they influence their readers and audiences. So, style being the representation of ones’ attitude and aptitude is a way of showing writer’s areas of interest. Leech defines style as technique in which something is spoken, written, portrayed or performed. Moreover, Leech and Short state that style has no distinct meaning, rather it shows the way in which a language is worked on by a writer or speaker in a certain work, for a given reason and so on. To understand, comprehend and to put up certain standards for writing style in literature, we have established the field of Stylistics. The eminent contribution of stylistics is to propose or provide an objective analysis of a literary work.

In doing stylistic analysis of a literary text, the researcher debates a multiplicity of features with its significance and role of style while analyzing a written text. The stylistic methodology improves our capability to comprehend a text; moreover, it also highlights the importance of a language-based approach to outsiders by enabling stylistician and readers to understand the target language. By studying and analyzing style, we can trace the meaning and message the author is trying to express to his readers. The up to date advancement of language research into an autonomous discipline, and its contribution to literary research opened the door to new forms of literary criticism.

The beauty of stylistics is that it bridges gap between texts and languages. In stylistic analysis, we use key concepts and linguistic devices to interpret literary texts. Stylistic features or kinds comprise of synonyms (repetition of the same consonantal sounds),

onomatopoeic words (sound words), rhyme scheme (repetition of the same sound words at the end of lines), metaphor (paraphrase transmission based on resemblance) to mention only a few. These stylistics tools make the author's work d-familiarized and distinguished as they are used mainly for fixed notions generally corresponding to the creator's work.

Barry (1995) claims that Stylistics is an approach applied to identify language working scientifically in literary texts. By 'linguistics' he meant the scientific study of language and its structures. To yield overall meaning, there are certain things which are counted: such as the grammatical arrangement of its sentences.

Stylistics is also one of the elusive approaches in examining and understanding the style and significance of the text. It is usually explained as the study of different styles which include not only the way words are used in a text, but it also studies the grammatical makeup of the language. It is very productive to know how human beings express their emotions and desires through a range of styles in a written text. Style of the text has words, phrases and clauses knitted together to the formation of the sentences: grammatical units of a language. Therefore, stylistics is the study of a series of sentence patterns or arrangements and the use of words in a text. It tries to find why a writer has used particular words, and how such chosen words make an impact on the reader that they like or dislike the given text. Stylistics not only helps in understanding the masked meanings or intended thought expressed by writer and speaker, but it also urges readers to review the situational and factual meaning of writer's style. Wales clarifies Stylistics as the study of style that has been playing vital role in the study of language. Stylistic analysis has widely been examined and explored; it is also linked with endless number of explanations and elaboration. Hence, the diction, grammatical construction, figurative language, figures of speech, and other sound patterns contribute to uniqueness of one's style.

Widdowson (1975) views the role of Stylistic analysis as a way for a learner to gauge the standard of literary texts. He highly values the literary works and the experiences it invokes in its readers. He is also concerned in exploring the real life experiences with the process of reading. Investigating the features of language and its style is basic to Stylistics which provides the way to explore unmarked and unsaid things in any text. The reader gauges the strength of style and the attitude of a writer through the text which is separated into small bits for precise details. Diller has captured the interest of his readers through his remarkable surveys. He is of the opinion that stylistic analysis is in fact suitable thing because it makes least references to linguistics theory. Each unit of utterances is limited and well-formed when stylistics is applied. It elevates and supports the recognition of theory.

Despite being a very valuable and significant instrument for the analysis of text, Stylistics has certain limitations too. Wetherill identifies two troubles with stylistic analysis of poetry. First is that there might be too much preoccupation with one specific features of poetic text. Secondly, any effort to see a text from stylistics view point would be simply a collection of Stylistic elements. This may alter or change our focus towards other ways of interpretations and meanings. It is time and again seen in the poems that the readers, for most of the times are presented with only one major part of a poem which is mostly relevant to their point of view, whereas the rest of the elements are considered superfluous or irrelevant, and hence

neglected by the readers. Although idiosyncrasies of Stylistic features are jointly creative and important, yet there is inclination that they would be ignored

Simpson (2004) elaborates such concerns of stylisticians by highlighting imaginary structures. There are various ways of using the means of language system to enjoy the same event in different textual demonstration. The form of using the same theoretical structure for the same purpose in language system can be applied in different ways for the same objectives. If a writer uses the particular theory according to a particular theoretical structure and purpose, the reader should mainly conceptualize its unique aspects. For doing so, language could perhaps enable the reader, with his broader view and deep understanding, to grasp the intended message coded by the writer. Each person can develop a similar structure with diverse inferences because after all, it is the real and likely to demonstrate what a text should mean.

Bradford (1997) claims that during analysis of a poem stylistically, one has to keep some important features or terms in mind like Foregrounding, Deviation and parallelism etc. These are the major tools and some fundamental concepts which are used in the stylistic examination of a given poem. The deviation present in a text can be lexical, semantic, phonological, morphological, or grammatical. It is not necessary that all these deviations should be there in a poem at a given time and place. The primary objective of study, for a stylistician, is the text of a given piece of writing, which conveys all the meanings concerning a particular situation. It always needs to be bore in mind that the style of a writer is basically an imitation and reflection of their thought as well. It also exhibits the approach, mental aptitude, and taste of the writer. Each individual has unique taste for the things and that's why a single style of a person can have different meanings for different readers according to their own though paradigms and perceptions. In other words, interpretive variations change from person to person and place to place.

Kumar (1987) is of the view that style more usually hints at the scrutiny of a text on linguistic levels. For him, there are specific levels of linguistic analysis, and because of these levels it can be carefully asserted that each text, whether oral or written, is different from the other one. Besides, every type has its distinctive uniqueness, such uniqueness stems from uniqueness of spaces, aptitudes and conscious and unconscious inclinations.

Haynes (1989) propounds that the effort to study the style of a text is critically the study of peculiarities of writer's personality reflected through a piece of writing. It means that we examine what has been declared on paper and talked about the proposed meaning, or what could have been written or conveyed. Therefore, style varies from person to person, and it is fairly diverse in nature. Diverse contexts need unique and different ways to state the processes and scenarios, and this is the rationale behind the fact that we have such a great diversity and variety in style. Stylistics sustains its confidence in receiving information by first and foremost experimental examination, and by exploring external reality conducted by neutral investigation. The similar things can be noted in expository writing style applied for political speeches and all types of advertisements.

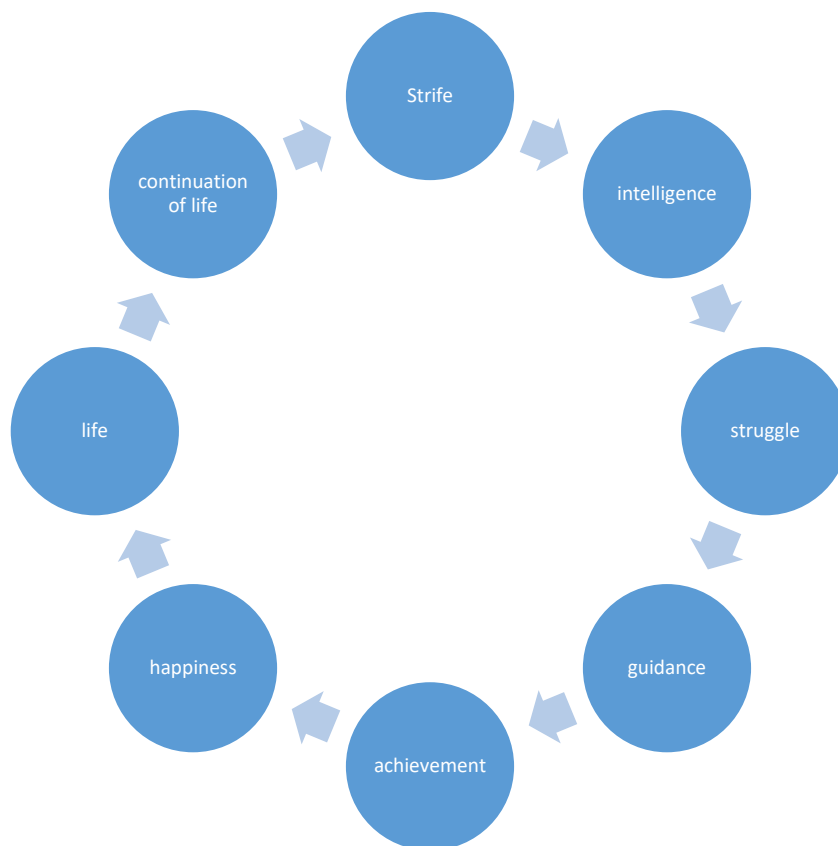
## Research Methodology

This study is carried out with qualitative research method. The focus of this research article is on the analysis of a poem Children at Lesson authored by Pakistani poet, Alamgir Hashmi. The poem has been analyzed from stylistic point of view. This research is analytical in nature. This study employs qualitative research method as an instrument with the aim of analyzing the selected poem of Hashmi stylistically, especially keeping in view the themes in the poem. Since the data essential for this study is all about the specific text content, the present research has been carried out with intensive and concentrated reading of the selected poem.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

Qualitative analysis has several types and Thematic Analysis is one of them which identifies themes i.e. patterns which combine to make a thread in a literary text. It is, actually, one way of interpreting and focusing a literary text which has various subject matters in it. This is a qualitative analytic method for the dissection and analysis of themes and makes a narrative thread. Widdowson (1975) asserts that the individual can only respond to literature as a result of guidance. The figure given below indicates the themes present in the poem very dexterously.

**Figure 1**



## Strife

While having a thematic analysis of “Children at Lesson” by AlamgirHashmi the first theme that comes to our mind is strife for survival in society. Children are striving for education. They are running for their success and the first stanza sheds light on this effort of human beings. Following lines from the text present the propounded concept.

*These children come to our house  
Each day, as if to drink from a  
Fountain we know is there. At  
Eight, they know how to look  
Thirsty. My sister teaches them.*

## Intelligence

The next theme that attracts our mind is “Intelligence”. Intelligence of children makes them excited to solve the problems, and seek answers to boggling questions. It also motivates and inspires them to seek knowledge. They want to learn new, exciting and intriguing things. They make their work adventurous; following lines from the text prove all the assertions true.

*Their parents have sent them here  
To find answers to the hard sums  
That even boggle the adult mind.  
They know only children can find  
Without knowing, and they have*

## Struggle

Struggle is part of every one’s life; nobody’s success story is complete without struggle. Theme of struggle is also highlighted in the “Children at Lesson”, where children struggle by wringing and wrenching their brains to make themselves great and tough, and vigorous and invincible. Following extracts from the poem highlight the discussed concept.

*Sent them here to find out before  
The stems of their brains have  
Greatened and toughened on the  
Stalks. And ready as pollen, and  
As useless. Before time,*

## Guidance

The next theme of poem is guidance. Here, the guidance can also be taken as a piece of advice for young and fledgling learners who have yet to explore the world and its wonders. The speaker advises the boys to wash their hand off the evils of their ancestors. These evils are burden for the coming generations, and weigh down their potential and competence for progress. Following lines from the text reflect on the themes afore-mentioned.

*Connive with a Nile of alphabets  
Or some other, Phoenician ravine.  
Dear one boy, you, by the corporation’s  
Tap washing from your hands*

### **Achievement**

The very next theme the poem throws light upon is that of achievement or goal. Goal is defined as targets we focus all our energies to achieve. Only continuous effort and indomitable will can lead to the path of success. The kids are expected to arrive at their destinies by going through various processes of plus, minus, multiplication and division. At literal level, the kids perform these mathematical procedures in actuality in their school; but metaphorically, these mathematical activities stand for the universal phenomenon of trial and error guiding all human beings to success. Plus-minus activities also indicate that where we have to learn and adopt many things in our life, at the same point we get to forget and abandon a few others. So, it is also preparation for the life as well. Following lines from the text prove all the assertions true.

*These children will find how  
To divide and multiply, or plus  
And minus. They will all solve  
The sums, judge figures,  
Play the sitar, and*

### **Happiness**

The poem dwells on the theme of happiness or pleasure as well. Concept of happiness is an umbrella term covering the passion acquired through materialistic achievement to selfless serving of humanity. In the poem, the theme is presented by children's celebrations when a cocksure monkey cracks coconut. Their level of happiness is very fundamental and innocent. Following are the line that shed light on the way happiness is experienced and celebrated by the kids.

*Perhaps listen to me without knowing  
I wished to wish you better luck  
Than the cocksure monkey  
Who can always crack a coconut  
And celebrate the skill.*

### **Life**

Life is the most beautiful and precious gift by Almighty. All happiness and celebrations are just part of a life. A life very close to nature is not only the reason of happiness, also but it is a key to have a bond with oneself and the purest form of life. Despite being a very beautiful present by almighty, yet life has sufferings too. One needs to realize that life is a continuous struggle, so all time should be used carefully and efficiently. These trials make life challenging and difficult. One needs to be very careful in making decisions and choices. Time elapses but the impacts of choices stay forever. The boy, in the poem, is advised to carry out all his activities very carefully, because once the life will move on, he will never get an opportunity to rectify his mistakes. The man can celebrate his success when he is close to nature and life. Life demands for hard work. We have to suffer a lot in our lives. Following lines from the text are the reflection the such assertions presented in the poem.



*Out in the jungle, the clarity of land  
Bites the eye. It is a different story  
Where the houses begin, Alas!  
It is too simple.  
Don't you wish it had not happened?  
Soon what you felt whistling by  
Would be air,  
Or, perhaps stronger, wind.  
And what  
You drank from the nearby stream on Sunday*

### **Continuation of Life**

The other important theme of the poem is continuity of life as it never ceases to exist. In the journey of life, we meet both happiness and sadness. Certainly, there come the times when one feels great repentance for their bad deeds which one commits in early part of their life. To get rid of the feelings of repentance and shame, one needs to fight shy of bad deeds, sins and criminalities. Only positive contribution can ensure spiritual enlightenment and happiness. The boy, the poem, is advised to strive and aspire for kindness and goodness for the sake of his spiritual well-being. The boy is also told that there are many lives one after another. To seek solutions to problems in all those lives, intellect and other mental faculties must be used appropriately and timely with optimistic outlook on life. Optimism and determination are the great passions that make life sanguine, happy and cheerful, even for the ones who are already depressed. Following extracts from the text highlight all the points discussed above.

*would be water forever  
The meeting of lips would be a kiss,  
as two and two make what they do.  
You will know that as well as I: You would  
run about hiding your aleph with a noun.*

### **Conclusion**

This masterpiece of Aligarh Hashmi stands unique in its treatment of theme: the very ordinary and common phenomenon of life are presented in very artistic way, this poem is pregnant with thematic beauty and the poet has made an excellent attempt to portray a common and ordinary event happening in our day to day life. He has made the very event thought provoking and a torch leading to the destination of intellectual and spiritual satisfaction. It also provides insight into Pakistani English Literature and its role in elevating morale and confidence and enthusiasm of coming generations. Alamgir Hashmi has been successful in articulating his observation of life in an artistic style. This poem gives a moral lesson of hard work and hope in life.

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