

SEMANTIC EXPLORATION OF DEATH: A  
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF KAMAL'S 'ODE  
TO DEATH' THROUGH LEECH'S SEVEN  
TYPES OF MEANING

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## ABSTRACT

This research presents a semantic analysis of the poem “An Ode to Death” by Pakistani writer Kamal. By employing Leech’s framework of seven types of meaning—denotative, connotative, collocative, affective, stylistic, thematic, and reflective—the study examines the linguistic, cultural, historical, and religious layers of the poem. Kamal’s poem reflects a unique perspective on death, influenced by his identity as a Muslim and Pakistani. The poem explores the inevitability of death, human helplessness before it, and the equality it enforces across social divides. Through detailed semantic exploration, the paper reveals the poet’s reflections on life, death, the grave, and the Day of Judgment, capturing the transient nature of human existence and the eternal peace of the afterlife. The study provides an in-depth interpretation of Kamal’s poetic message, connecting his religious beliefs to universal themes of mortality, offering a comprehensive understanding of the poet’s attitude towards life and death. This research is an analytical contribution to the study of poetry through the lens of semantics, with a particular emphasis on the Islamic perspective on death.

Semantic Analysis is the best way to understand any poetic work. Therefore, the present research has as well been analyzed the poem semantically. Semantics does not only discuss meaning, but it also discusses the nature of poem and poet's attitude to it. Semantic analysis here presents the different meanings separately and highlights the points inside poem "An Ode to Death" written by Pakistani writer Kamal. The poem is a blend of cultural, historical and religious imagery. Being the Pakistani and Muslim writer Kamal's linguistics approach, religious bent of mind, outlook on personal life and attitude to death are different from the other regional poets to an eminent degree. This research discusses each point of the poem that reveals writer's attitude to life, death, grave and the Day of Judgment.

The poem "Ode to Death" is written on one page so that anyone can read it at a glance. Therefore, writer says that his ode to death is in the lifting of a single eyebrow. Nobody can deny the certainty of death. On regular basis many people we see leaving this world forever. Some die by natural death, some die by drowning, some die in accident, some die of heart attack, some die from incurable disease. Many people are swallowed by flood or earthquake. Many people die in bomb blast. Many people become the target of killers. But world does not learn any lesson from such casualties. If anyone from house or close relatives passes away, for time being people fear of their own turn of death; otherwise world's way of life and its too much absorption in worldly affairs show that they are immortal. They have been sent here forever. And they won't ever die. Poet turns our attention to the importance of creation. From mountain to pebble, ocean to drop, king to subject every creation of God has its function and importance. Apparently carbon has no value but its particles are useful in making diamond. Poet makes us clear that in world wealth, power, posts, and knowledge create difference but in the eyes of death king and subject, employer and employee, rich and poor, mayor and beggar everyone is equal. Man is helpless before death. We cannot prevent either death not take soul of beloved one's or dying person from leaving his family. After death with the passage of time every part of body will dissolve. Graveyard is a place where silence governs. This is one of the peaceful places in the world where no

grief of poverty and joblessness is heard. This is the only place in the world where peace and contentment govern. Poet, after death of his beloved, wanders in search of the reality of life. In absence of his beloved he is clutched by the memories of his past when he was in the arms of hers. Poet convinces himself by saying “let bygones be bygones” because he has realized that death is inevitable and everyone later or sooner has to say farewell to this world.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The present research has suggested seven types of meaning introduced by Leec (1967). Those seven sorts of meanings named as Denotative, Connotative, Collocative, Affective, Stylistic, Thematic and Reflective. Leech’s seven types of meaning is the best tool to analyze any writer’s mental and linguistics approach to his work. To study meaning of the poem separately in the light of Leech seven types of meaning help readers out to reach the maximum level of writers message.

1. Denotative Meaning	Conceptual or logical meaning Dictionary meaning Universal Meaning
2. Connotative Meaning	Contextual Meaning This meaning tells the things behind the curtain. This shows another side of mirror. This meaning reveals the purpose of writing, and conveys writer’s message.
3. Collocative Meaning	A collocation is a familiar grouping of words, especially words that habitually appear together and thereby convey meaning by association. Collocational range refers to the set of items that typically accompany a word.
4. Affective Meaning	Affective meaning is more directly a reflection of the speaker’s personal attitude or feelings towards the listener or the target of the utterance.
5. Stylistic Meaning	Social meaning refers to the use of language to establish and regulate social relations and to maintain social roles.

	Social relations
6. Thematic Meaning	The meaning arising out of the way in which the writer or speaker organizes his message is called thematic meaning.
7. Reflexive Meaning	Reflective meaning is the meaning which arises in cases of multiple conceptual meanings, when one sense of a word forms part of our response to another sense. It is the product of people's recognition and imagination.

### **3. Analysis of an ode to death**

The poem "An ode to death" is about the poet's attitude to ultimate reality of death, uncertainty of life and eternal life after death. This paper semantically analyzes the poem with all seven meanings. Semantics involves several types of meaning; most importantly are Denotative, Connotative, Collocative, Affective, Stylistic, Thematic and Reflective. The poem discusses reality of life and death and men's attitude to it. The poem is basically an ode that draws writer's inner feeling attitude to death. Usages of the literary term and simplicity of language make the poem sublime.

#### **3.1 Denotative meaning**

First hand meaning of the poem tells that life in this world is temporary and everyone has to go from here. Every soul shall have a taste of death, but the way of lives of people show that they won't ever die. It seems as if they have been sent here forever. Everyone will soon be buried and the time will come when all parts of body will mix into dust. God has created everything purposefully and everything has its function, nothing should be avoided. In eyes of God everyone is equal; prince and the pauper, owner and worker or mayor and beggar are all alike in front of God. Death cannot be influenced by any means, because it only follows the order of God. Whose life over he has to go from this world. In grave every part of will dissolve with the passage of time. Graveyard is the most peaceful place in the world where only peace and contentment prevail. There is no tension of earning and no need to struggle fulfilling desires. Poet realizes indispensability of death and convinces himself that every one going to meet his maker in his turn. And death is the last source that can join him to his deceased beloved.

### 3.2 Connotative meaning

Contextual meaning of the poem opens many doors of religious as well as worldly knowledge. Microscopic study of the poem makes us aware of the encyclopedic knowledge of the writer's worldly objects. Poet's comparison of clocks ticking with monotonous life is marvelous. He says:

Death is more than certain  
But the clocks go on ticking as before

God has created everything with some purpose. Even diamond is extracted from carbon. In poets view nothing should be avoided or looked down upon. Everything has its value. Everyman has some talent. No one should be neglected. We shouldn't laugh at poor, jobless and homeless people. Poet says, though we are living luxurious life, yet we are after more riches and blindly running after worldly success. We are giving more preference this world to the world after here. We have forgotten that one day we have to go from here leaving all belongings behind us. Only our actions that we have performed will go with us.

Poet says:  
And in every particle of carbon dust  
There lives a diamond dream  
How many galaxies yet to be explored-  
How many seeds in the pomegranate of time?

Above last two lines show that man can never be satisfied in this world. We are restlessly working leaps and bounds to become billionaire from millionaire. In poets' eyes, whether we live hundred years or thousand but one day we have to say farewell to this world. In the line of "many seeds of pomegranate of time" pomegranate is the world and seeds are its luxuries. If you become the richest man of the world and make the whole world your slave, yet you cannot cross the boundary of this world. Seeds are the wealth, land, bank-balance and positions and pomegranate is world which will itself finish.

At poet's glance people have become mentally blind, because they get no lesson from others' death. Life is too short to fulfill all desires. We have so many dreams in our eyes, we have long-term planning, and we after achieving one goal start to find another. We have forgotten death that can separate our soul from body in single jerk of its power. In the eyes of death rich and poor are alike. Death has no mercy for anyone, whether you are owner or worker. Death will come and must take your soul. He says:

*The pine tree blasted by last year's Thunderbolt  
And the burn out match sticks in my ashtray  
Look so terribly alike*

With the help of pen Kamal makes picture of grave. He says that nothing will remain safe in grave. Even our hair and bones will destroy with the passage of time. In grave our hands separate from wrists, knees from calves and calves from feet. When a person comes inside it, it tears his shroud, tears his body into pieces and eats his flesh. In grave the virtuous' face was turned towards the Qiblah whereas the sinner's face is turned in the opposite direction. It hugs pious man like a mother hugs her lost child with affection, holding him to her chest, whereas it violently squeezes sinners in such a way that their ribs smash and intertwine with each other. Poet says:

*Are the hair and bones  
really indestructible and how long  
does it take for the eyes  
to dissolve in the grave?*

Moreover, he says that grave is the place where silence governs. In graveyard many people are asleep since long and waiting for the Day of Judgment. Now, there is no tension of worldly life, no need to earn or struggle to become rich and famous. After death all activities of life suddenly stop. All relations from world disconnect. Deceased is laid down in grave empty handed as he came into the world. Kamal says:

There is an archipelago of naked rocks  
Only sleep and silence there,  
No anchorage for grief

Now, Kamal compares graveyard with archipelago, means naked rocks. There is lesson in the above lines for misguided people. Duration of worldly life is too short as compare to the life after here. Whoever came in this world once must leave later or sooner. To forget the actual place after death that is grave is the foolishness of eminent degree. That is why kamal presents the condition of grave where there is a silence, and endless sleep in the group of islands, is the symbol of danger in literature point of view. Actually Kamal here presents the Islamic point of view about the eternal life after death. He says that this is a place of barrel naked rocks, and there is no space of grief, it is free from all trails, troubles and sorrows of life.



At the end of the ode poet shows his maturity that he has realized what life actually is. After death of his beloved he wanders in search of reality of death and purpose of life. He has understood that one by one all will have to go from here.

But let by-gones be by-gones  
Who was the deceiver and who the deceived  
Was I on a floating island?  
And were you on the shore?  
Which one of us moved away?

After death of his beloved the poet is broken-hearted. Death has separated them forever and taken his beloved where there poet cannot reach unless he tastes the taste of death. In her absence he looks for her arms as dying people asks for life or a traveler finds out water in burning desert. Poet is confused with whether he has deceived her or she has deceived him. Whether he should have died with her or she should have not left him alone. After death he is in much pain or she is in more trouble than him. Poet wants to forget all those things which hurt him and memorize him bygone days when they were together.

Poet did not find any substitute shelter of his beloved arms after her death. Her death was a blow from which he never recovered unless he realized reality of death. He was shocked and mentally upset because there was no ointment to heal his wound which her death carved in his heart. He, leaving all worldly affairs behind, looked for consolation in forest. He observed life in forest, stars in the sky in darkest night, silence in graveyard where thousands of people were sleeping in their graves. He, nowhere, found satisfaction what he used to feel in the arms of his beloved. He started observation of men journey from world to grave and grave to heaven. Soon he understands the purpose of life and reality of death.

### 3.3 Collocative meaning

Intelligent pairing of words makes the poem outstanding and show poet's mastery on language and encyclopedic Knowledge of the world and world after here. Collocation of the poem is more convincing that arrests our thought and spell us bound. Collocation such as diamond-dream naked rocks match stick, carbon dust, and floating island furnish language and knowledge.

### **3.4 Affective Meaning**

Poet's feelings reach peak when his beloved takes last breath and he feels pulse slowing down. Poet remembers the time he spent with his beloved. He feels absence of his beloved arms and becomes disconsolate and heartbroken. Kamal goes deep down and reveals condition of grave after death. He says to his beloved that he has heard hair and bones take time to dissolve, but will he be alive till that to see whether his beloved's bones are safe and sound?

Moreover, poet feels his life is moving away from him. For him death is a tyrant monster that is muffling him up. He is enchained by death. He feels clutches of death but finds himself helpless before mighty and shadowing hands of death. Poet is confused with either life is deceiver or death, or both of them have schemed to defeat him in the fight of life.

### **3.5 Stylistic Meaning**

Poem's central role is to convey the writer's message to awake the society from deep sleep of unawareness of sudden death. Poet wants to beware the people of death's sudden arrival. Though the time of death is fixed, but no one knows his last day of life. Death is cruel creature that does not differentiate between rich and poor. Though if anyone is mayor of the city or street beggar it will treat him same in taking soul out of his body. Everyone has to say farewell to this world leaving his position, bungalow, bank-balance, vehicle, business, trade, near and dears, parents, wife, children and relatives. Beyond need absorption in making money is destructive. Whoever loves the world, it must deceive him. To love this world is foolishness of high degree. We have been sent here for a limited time period. So, for us this world is a stage and we are characters of it. We have to perform our characters as per given talent by our creator.

### **3.6 Thematic Meaning**

The poem covers three major themes which are ultimate reality of death, uncertainty of life and eternal life after death. Death is that door through which everyone has to pass. Death is that drink which everyone has to take. Death is that flavor which everyone has to taste. Death is that cruel monster that puts you into the stomach of earth; there you live alone for an uncertain period of time. Death is that deceiver from whose deceive no one could escape.

### 3.7 Reflective Meaning

According to poet's religious bent of mind life is uncertain and grave is a place where soul and body will reunite once again after death. In poet's view there is complete peace and contentment in graveyard. After death there is no tension of worldly life. There is no grief of failure and poverty. There is an unending journey waiting after death, but our attitude to life shows that we are unaware of temporality of life. Being Muslim, Kamal has firm belief in the Day of Judgment. His attitude to life is like the traveler who has stays somewhere temporarily.

### 4. Conclusion

On the topic of death poem in its nature is unique. Semantic analysis of the poem presents a microscopic study to comprehend the poem up to the mark. The journey from the world to the grave and from grave to the world after here has critically been discussed. This paper has tried to clarify all difficult words, metaphors, images and imagery. Present research has covered all seven meanings come under semantics. This paper will help you out comprehend the poem analytically. Moreover, the paper has opened new door for understanding death from the hand of a poet. Ode is written by a Muslim writer that is why paper has more emphasized on discussion of death in the light of Islam.

### Notes and Reference

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