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## Analyzing Conceptual Metaphors in Sultan Bahu's Sufi Poetry

<sup>a</sup> Tamsila Naeem, <sup>b</sup> Ayesha Zafar

<sup>a</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics and Communication, University of Management and Technology  
Email: tamsila.naeem@umt.edu.pk

<sup>b</sup> Instructor Linguistics & Coordinator Languages, University of Management & Technology, Pakistan  
Email: ayes hazafarsultan@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The study aims to examine the use of different natural objects in Sufi poetry by an eminent Sufi poet of the subcontinent, Sultan Bahu applying Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor (1980).

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Highly relevant excerpts from Bahu's poetry are selected and then interpreted by using a purposive sampling technique.

**Findings:** The analysis shows that the poet has not only created beauty in his mystic verses with the help of different symbols taken from his environment, but he tried to make it easier for his people to understand their relationship with their Creator.

**Implications/Originality/Value:** So, it is concluded that Bahu spread the divine message of God with the help of his poetic verses to mankind in the Punjabi language. He made his poetry influential as well as powerful by using different metaphors taken from his surrounding nature. His poetry is full of symbolic expressions of different kinds.



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**Corresponding Author's email address:** ayes hazafarsultan@gmail.com

### 1. Introduction

The current research attempts to examine metaphorical representations of different natural objects in Sultan Bahu's poetry through the lens of conceptual metaphor theory presented by Lakoff and Johnson in their renowned book, *Metaphors We Live By*, published in 1980, Lakoff and Johnson proposed that metaphors are deeply rooted in human mind. A conceptual metaphor can be described as an organized set of correspondence between two different dominions of experience. This can be termed as understanding one dominion leads to understanding of the other one. Another term used in this regard is "mapping", since different entities and the relationship among them is termed as mapped from the "source dominion" onto the "target dominion" (Kövecses, 2008). Kövecses, in 2010 further described that the foundations of metaphors do not exist in language, rather they are used in a way how people perceive one conception in terms of another. In this regard, it can be assumed that metaphors are produced by "cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system" (Lakoff, 2006), and "an organized mapping of different objects and their relationships from a sensorimotor basis domain to an abstract target domain". Lakoff (2006) further extends his notion by arguing describing "love as a journey" and the lovers continue to travel to reach their common destination. In the same manner, there can be other goals and destinations in different people's lives such

as journey of knowledge, business, and career, etc.

Metaphorical representations of natural objects in art and literature, and most clearly their portrayals through language, signs, and pictures have been sources of great interest for many sufi poets. Semiotic portrayals of various elements assume a critical part in creating various implications. The theory explores metaphorical expressions that prevail in human cognition and language. (Safarnejad et al, 2014) express the way to convey both conceptual metaphors and metaphorical expressions: "The metaphorical expressions at the linguistic level are manifestations of conceptual metaphors at the cognitive level". Sultan Bahu has multiple analogies to build comparison with elements of nature to represent the qualities of the Glorified Lord.

Sufism has been prompting the holiness of human beings for a very long time. The foundations of Sufism go back to the prophet of Islam, Muhammad (PBUH) and even to the previous mystics of diverse religious convictions (Conway, 2006). Sufism primarily replicates a path that creates a man free from self-pride that leads to the tribulations of the prevailing world. Sufism, correspondingly guides an individual on a path to realize a higher level of piety (Soltani, 2018). According to Sufi poets, our bodies enjoy secondary importance, since they are considered merely as vessels of our souls; henceforth spirituality is of the primary apprehension for all Sufis. They put emphasis more on spiritual improvement as compared to any other developments of mankind. It is a pursuit for discovering the ultimate truth that is God and His blessings in this world as well as Divine love.

In Islamic perspective, Sufism is viewed as one of the most comprehensive ways to turn into a wonderful person in terms of Islamic principles (Salleh, 2014). Sufism has been a very favourite domain of study for a long span of time. The Islamic practice of Sufism includes "power, moral discipline, self-reflection, music, poetry and otherworldly encounters" (Bruinessen and Julia, 2007). Divine love is the main subject of every Sufi along with other themes such as purification of soul, self-recognition and love with humanity at large, etc. Absolute submission of a man to God's will is one of the significant features of Sufi poetry (Saifullah, K. (2016). Sufi' Imam Al-Ghazali, comments, "Sufism is about the advancement to incredible limits of self-acknowledgment or God acknowledgment" (Edson, 2012, 73). Self-acknowledgment is viewed as the most remarkable feature of Sufi's excursion. When the first step is taken firmly with poise and reliability, the way to God's greeting turns out to be quite simple and clear. Sufism is the code of heart, cleaning of soul and the limit sensation of God's presence. In Ali Al-Hujweri's viewpoint (990 - 1077 Promotion), as discussed by (Levesque, J. 2016), Sufism is about "self-negation and presence with God".

Hadrat Sultan Bahu (1630 – 1691) is a distinguished sufi poet of the Subcontinent. He tried to preach the common masses the message of Divine love through his poetry in language of common people. He wrote 140 books in Persian and Punjabi, but only some of them have been recovered. His works are being translated in different other languages. Like a true mystic poet, he saw homogeneity in all objects of Nature (Garcia, 2017). Bahu's mystical experiences are revealed in the ambiance of sublimation of human soul with Divine love. He didn't confine his poetry within the vivid representations of the sights of the surrounding objects of nature rather he aimed at attaining a higher aim to illuminate people's mind and to fragrant their souls on the paths of eternal bliss. The melody of "hoo" in his poetic verses is an expression of Divine love, which he found everywhere.

(Kress, 2012) has expounded the way sermons cultivate 'meaning about the world from an institutional position' and are 'meaning-resources available in society to make sense of the world, social and natural'. He intends to include all institutions that prove services to abstract ones like "the family." Framing is a story that is the way of composing a frame in a discourse to interpret a certain part of life. Thus, both framing and metaphors are two concepts that are used simultaneously. In such case, metaphors are treated as source domain that is rather a concrete part of life, and framing as a target domain, which is rather an abstract part of life. Framing follows the same notion, and works as a verb (Mudge et al, 2021).

Bahu's sufism is significant for its pensive spirit and pantheistic notions of nature. It is nature, through which a man comes into a direct contact with God. Bahu maintains that we can see a divine spirit pervading all over in the world. His poetry is fully loaded with mystic considerations of spiritual bliss and elevated thoughts. His poetry upholds that there is a pre-established harmony between human mind and the divine spirit of nature. Henceforth; it is this cordial as well as cognitive junction between mankind and nature that facilitated him to share his thoughts that nature has a power to educate people. The poet contemplates nature as a bountiful source of love and knowledge. Nature not only teaches mankind but it has a power to heal tormented minds and to purify souls of people.

In Bahu's mystic poetry, the conceptual metaphor, "چنبے دی بوٹی" (jasmine plant) has been frequently used to illustrate a quest for Divine love to purify one's soul. The plantation of this fragrant plant in one's body metaphorically represents the essence of Divine love in a man's soul. The mapping between implantation of jasmine plant in one's body as imbedding of Divine love have a systematic relationship with each other in Bahu's mind, since a jasmine flower spreads its sweet fragrance everywhere in the environment, in the same manner Divine love fascinates mankind with its holy possessions. This set of mapping is systematic because it apprehends a coherent view of "Divine love". This is a representation of a specific "source dominion" in order to perceive another "target dominion".

On grounds of metaphorically used sets of different elements, it is possible to derive further meanings about these elements, and can be mapped the additional knowledge on the target dominions. This additional knowledge can also be interpreted as "metaphorical inference" and "metaphorical entailments" in the field of semantics. Conceptual Metaphor Theory offers a stylish description of such instances of encompassing metaphors.

The worldly life of materialism become so stark and excruciating that people lose their aspiration for life. In such tormenting situations, the affectionate relationship with nature can drive away the darkness of skepticism from people's mind. Like a true mystic, Bahu sees the colours of divine love in all objects of nature. He strongly believes that an unseen chain is there to bind all natural objects in outward world, and that a man's soul can interact with Allah through surrounding nature. In this regard, every human, every flower, every stream, every plant, every star, every bird and every mountain, etc. are harmonized with each other. Bahu's thoughts of mysticism can be studied in the light of a famous mystic poet, William Wordsworth, who was used to take spiritual inspirations from the "meanest flower":

"To me the meanest flower that blows  
Can give thoughts too deep for tears."

Moore's (2006) comments that Wordsworth has attributed great love to Nature, which rears mankind in its lap like a mother. Bahu's doctrine that nature is a dwelling house of God's love has designed the foundations of his mysticism.

Karimi-Hakkak (1997) discusses the most popular Persian mystic poet. He elucidates the world of love with the use of his poetic art. He sheds light on the mind of the lover by employing strong metaphors. In other words, he has used mystic metaphors that narrate the mystery of Divine love to the readers. According to Lewisohn (2010) Hafiz's poetry displays an urge for the tavern. He has put the latter at high esteem in his poetry. All this seems to indicate that Hafiz's soul is dehydrated and by visiting the tavern, he can quench the thirst. For this reason, Hafiz's metaphor stands by its own, unique and unexpected in its style. It is appreciated as well a condemned for its eccentricity.

The theory of Conceptual Metaphors is primarily based upon our thoughts and then it emerges in our expressions. For instance, a metaphor, "Life is a journey", reflects our perceptions about life, where we make plans, preparations and different choices to select our paths, etc. In lines with the similar idea, we continue to use other terms related with journey and so on. According to Kövecses, "the set of mapping is always systematic, since it holds a coherent

tie between the source and the target domains. Representation of anger as “fire”, “insanity”, “addiction”, “explosion”, “disease” and “bomb”, etc. is studied by Constantinou (2014). Similarly, Kövecses comments that the knowledge of source domain is also termed as “metaphorical inference” or “metaphorical entailment” (2017). Furthermore, the mystical symbolic convention of language in poetry traditions designates the use of wine as a metaphor to express mystic love in varied situations, though wine is forbidden in Islamic convention. The poet under study, Sultan Bahu, has used the metaphor of wine to exhibit the intensity of his love for the Creator and as it cannot be flourished in a material way so the notion of wine and its unmixed intoxication helps gain spiritual jubilation (Garcia, 2014).

## 2. Research Method

As described earlier the aim of this study is to interpret conceptual metaphors used in Sultan Bahu’s selected verses through the lens of Lakoff and Johnson’s Theory of Conceptual Metaphors (1980). The methodology used in this study is a mixed method approach; descriptive as well as analytical. Under purposive sampling approach, the most relevant texts from Sultan Bahu’s poetry are selected to study the use of different natural objects as conceptual metaphors to convey the message of Divine love. The texts are then translated into English and then the metaphors are interpreted by the researcher.

## 3. Data Analysis

Following are the excerpts and their analysis:

### Excerpt 1

الف الله چنبے دی بوٹی مرشد من وچ لائی ہو

(My spiritual guider has planted Jasmine plant in my soul)

نفی اثبات دا پانی ملیا ہر رگے ہر جائی ہو

(Which will be flourished with the practices of piety in every aspect of my life)

اندر بوٹی مشک مچایا جان پہلن تے آئی ہو

(My spiritual world is completely fragranced now)

جیوے مرشد کامل بابو چنبے ایہ بوٹی لائی ہو

(May my spiritual guide be blessed forever, who has illuminated my mind with Divine knowledge)

This couplet is fully embedded with conceptual metaphors. The phrase, “الف الله” refers to teaching mankind about message of God to recognize his existence in this world as well as his relationship with his Creator. Another expression, “چنبے دی بوٹی” also refers to the source of Divine love, which has given him self-recognition, which will ultimately bring transitions to him in all his practices and conventions according to will of God. The poet is so overwhelmed by Divine love that he has got fed up with his life in this mortal world and wants to escape in the spiritual world. Asian mystic poetry is full of such lessons in which the poets try to teach their people to devote their lives in service of humanity to please their Creator. They further teach mankind to pay less heed to this world, since their real life will start in the eternal world, where they will be rewarded or punished according to their deeds in this world of materialism. The poet is thankful to his spiritual guide, who followed him to the Divine path of religion. According to Mayer (1967), there is a variety of other terms used in place of “مرشد” such as “sheikh”, “pir” and “wali” and all these terms mean a spiritual guide. This term has also been used by other sufi poets of the subcontinent such as by Bulle Shah, Shah Hussain and Khawja Gulam.

### Excerpt 2

کلمے نال میں نہاتی دھوتی کلمے نال و بابی ہو

(I read spiritual hymn to purify myself and I am in a wedlock with it)

کلمہ میرا پڑھے جنازہ کلمے گور سو بائی ہو

(This spiritual hymn will illuminate my grave after my death)

کلمے نال بہشتیں جانا کلمہ کرے صفائی ہو

(This spiritual hymn will help me on my way to heaven)

مرہن حال تنہا نو جنہاں صاحب آپ بلائیں ہو

(The selected people by Allah can never turn their back from the Divine path)

The poets has used a string of conceptual metaphors in order to explain that salvation of mankind in the eternal world is only possible by leading their life according to the principles of “کلمہ”, the spiritual hymn. If people desire for blessings of God in this world and in the world, hereafter, they have to devote themselves according to the religious principles. The metaphor of “نہاتی دھوتی” (Showered with hymn) and then “کلمے نال ویابی” (wedded with this spiritual hymn) are unique. The mapping between two domains; purification of soul for eternal bliss and taking bath with “کلمہ” is on grounds of a strong belief that only our religious practices will lead us to heaven. The people, who are selected by God, do not get back to the darkness of ignorance again. According to (Chishti, Aslam & Qadeer, 2016) ‘Conjugal love and Divine love’ are two different social dimensions which are reinforced by Ruzbihan Baqli’s words: ‘The true conjugal love in most of the cases may lead to Spiritual love because in both types, there is self-negation. This notion has been celebrated by many sufi poets. Another concept associated with the terms of “نہاتی دھوتی” and “کلمے نال ویابی” is a bride’s bath after his wedding night. In many cultures, wedding is a symbol of beginning of a new life. The poet uses these terms to convey the message that when he started his life according to the religious doctrines that only his strong beliefs will bring him bliss in this world and after death.

### Excerpt 3

عشق دی بازی بار جا کر دے شاہ، گدا سلطانان ہو

(Kings and beggars are equally ruined on the path of true love)

عالم فاضل عقل دان کردہ چاہ حیرانان ہو

(Many sages and great scholars could not apply their intellect to win this game)

تمبو کھوٹ لٹھا وچ دل دے لائس خلوت خانان ہو

(Love has penetrated my heart very secretly and deeply)

عشق امیر فقیر منیندیں کی جانے بے گانا ہو

(Only the people, who experience the strong passion of love are able to feel its pain unlike those, who are strangers to it)

In this text, Bahu uses the conceptual metaphor of love for spiritual aspirations. The mapping indicates a systematic arrangement between the concepts of “conjugal love” and ‘Divine love’. The common concept between the source domain and the target domain is that in both types of love, one has to self-negate for one’s beloved. Love or “عشق” is the most celebrated concept in Bahu’s mystic verses. The poet claims that everyone has enacted the game of love “Ishq dee baazee har jaa khedee,” from monarchs to the indigent. It astonishes even the knowledgeable, the learned and enlightened ones. It is, thus, evident that the human mind composes mental associations between conceptual features that are present in both source and target domain, in order to activate the means to conceptualization. All such cognitive correlations are termed as cross-domain mapping or metaphorical mapping (Lakoff, 2008).

John Keats, a renowned poet of English literature the term “fever” almost three times in *Hyperion*. In book<sub>1</sub>, the term “fever” has been devised to project the mental state of Saturn. The latter has been illustrated as being melancholic at the loss of his empire that has been displaced by Jupiter. He wakes up, in order to realize the cause of such occurrence so that he could resume hostility against Jupiter. Thus, in the following quotation, the speaker has used images from medical line to elucidate the defeated God:

“This passion lifted him upon his feet,  
And made his hands to struggle in the air,  
His Druid locks to shake and ooze with sweat,  
His eyes to fever out, his voice to cease.

He stood, and heard not Thea's sobbing deep;  
A little time, and then again he snatch'd  
Utterance thus.—“But cannot I create?  
“Cannot I form? Cannot I fashion forth”

In the aforementioned excerpt there are many analogically devised lexical items. While focusing on “fever” here, it has metaphorical connotations, while primarily it refers to physical aches. Accordingly, the aforestated text contains both physical as well non-physical symptoms with respect to “fever” that were known to Keats as a medical learner. So the indicators for fever that have been highlighted from the text were struggling hand, shaking head, high temperature, low voice and impaired hearing and loss of concentration that were used in those times. Thus, Saturn's state is more mentally affected than any other physical suffering as its justification is further produced in the poem that was by Thea, Hyperion's wife. To end it up, in such conceptualizations fever produces physical suffering to the victim while negative mental affairs lead to mental agony (Al-Jumaili, 2020).

#### **4. Discussion**

This study is based upon interpretation of conceptual metaphors of natural objects used in Sultan Bahu's sufi poetry. Accordingly, different metaphors are interpreted from the extracted couplets by Sultan Bahu. The main metaphorical expressions that are studied in different couplets are: the river of oneness, the nector kalima, ocean of love, game of love and the last one is titled as extended metaphor as the entire couplet is the elucidation of allegory. The first one highlights the main message of sufism, “Wahadat de dariaa” i.e., the river of oneness which compares the Oneness and vastness of the Creator with the river. This enables the readers to visualise the concept of divinity and enact accordingly. “Kalima” has also been the important part of sufi ideology as it reinforces the concept of tauheed, Oneness of God. Ecolinguistic dimension to this philosophy, by relating it with a sugar-rich fluid (nector) has helped to intensify the sweetness of the taste of religion if incorporated and evaluated. Thus, reading an already mesmerising sufi poetry with an ecolinguistic mindset helps to further shape our thoughts and make them more thought provoking.

Moreover, the other two metaphors are commonly knitted in sufi poetry: Ocean of love and Game of love. There have been “Jitthe paun ghazab deean laiharaan,” used which adds ecolinguistic dimension to the love of God, describing it as the turbulent waves that are completely death stricken. Later, stating the concept of love of God as “Ishq dee baazee har jaa khedee,” as being the sole game that is played by every kind, be it rich or poor. As the analysis of metaphor proceeds, the sufi saint has further stated words like “Seenaa shaihar daseendaa hoo,” which have an ecolinguistic dimension too, for it compares the human body with a magnificent city. As the sufi ideology suggests that God resides in human body, it has been praised and idealized by comparing it with a glorious city. Thus, ecolinguistic dimension renders beauty to the city and makes it appealing.

#### **5. Conclusion**

It can be concluded that there will be research and debates around the empirical and hypothetical works correlated with Conceptual Metaphor Theory. This study suggests that Conceptual Metaphor Theory implies great empirical merit; and even if it does not essentially describe for characteristics of metaphoric beliefs and language use, this theory has great expounding power, and it must be measured to be basic for any other inclusive theory of metaphors, as well as for wider concepts of human perception. Though the study has examined Bahu's work and given a new outlook to his approach, it is undoubtedly, a change in the orthodox approach used by the Sufi poets, to add touch contemporary touch to the genre. It enables the readers to read beyond the text and construct meanings with nature to some extent. This will broaden their horizons and help them relate the text with works of modern times. Poetry and nature have a long association as the study revealed, readers can cherish this concept and draw closer to nature.

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