

Rhetorical and Metaphorical Devices in Punjabi Folk Songs: A Cultural and Linguistic Analysis

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This study examines the intricate utilization of rhetorical elements in Punjabi folk songs, asserting their pivotal role as conduits for cultural expression and identity. Through a textual analysis approach, the research meticulously scrutinizes rhetorical patterns and tropes within two iconic Punjabi folk songs, specifically "Jugni", "Chitta Kukkar", and "Paar Chanaa De", obtained from online repositories. Situated within the framework of Symbolic Interactionism theory, the study contextualizes rhetorical craftsmanship within the broader spectrum of Punjabi cultural identity and oral tradition. The findings indicate that rhetorical devices not only augment the aesthetic appeal of the songs but also convey profound layers of significance, facilitating the transmission of cultural values and communal identity. Consequently, this study underscores the enduring importance of Punjabi folklore as a dynamic reservoir of cultural expression and collective memory.

1. Introduction

The folk are portrayed as humble villagers, living near nature and managing their challenges with their life's resources (Pradhan & Kumar, 2023). They draw upon the wisdom their ancestors passed down while innovating new solutions (Sumardi & Wahyudiati, 2021). This cultural output, known as folklore, has posed challenges in its definition. According to the Centre of Folklore Studies at Ohio State University, folklore is integral to traditional culture, often associated with historical periods or popular traditions. Coined by English scholar William J. Thoms in 1846, the term "folklore" was embraced by contemporary scholars as an appropriate label for researching vernacular tales, customs, and beliefs that are at risk of disappearing. Thoms has described folklore as usually being:

'Understood to be a spectrum of human expressions and ways of living--the artistic ways of interacting with other people and generating creative forms in language, work, food, play, dance, song, gestures, beliefs, and so forth (Villanueva & O'Sullivan, 2024). Folklore may be seen as the products of human work and thought that have developed within a limited community and are communicated directly from generation to generation, usually orally, with the author/creator unknown (Centre of Folklore Studies, The Ohio State University, USA).

The Institute of Folk Heritage, established in Islamabad, views folklore as age-old traditions passed down through generations, including orally transmitted literature and reflecting the collective sentiments of the community (Mir, 2024). It is deemed an essential aspect of collective consciousness, shaping group identity and encompassing various aspects of life (Wilf et al., 2023). Often unwritten, and even if documented, it remains widespread and deeply ingrained in commoners' hearts, showcasing people's inherent creativity and evolving gradually over time. Additionally, folklore is regarded not only as a component of a people's history but also as a reflection of their responses to historical events, featuring stories of communal heroes.

Features of folklore also involve a powerful message of resistance since folklore 'has been used as a tool of consciousness-raising and consensus-building in a wide range of social movements and anti-colonial struggles' (Aziz, 1983; Hasnain Kazmi, 2020). The folklore of Pakistan, particularly that of Punjab, is deeply influenced by its extensive history of interactions and resistance against British colonialism. Punjab's narrative is marked by invasions and internal conflicts, fostering a collective and individual resilience against oppressive authority. Consequently, Punjab's folklore serves as a reservoir for memories of these struggles and the reactions of its people, safeguarding both collective and individual responses to historical events.

A folklorist of Pakistan says regarding Punjab: "Punjab is like an extended long melody, having diverse moods, and Sufi mood is hanging above all, which is composed of dwelling in deserts, tenacious labour and the humming sound of the spinning wheel. It has the warmth of the breaths of Baba Farid Shakarganj and echoes of utterances by Bulhe Shah, Waris Shah, Ghulam Farid, Sachal and Bahu. All these are ingrained in its construction and temperament" (Islam, 1977; Hasnain Kazmi, 2020).

Folk music, as discussed by Damodaran (2017), reflects the social dynamics and personal experiences within communities. Folksongs, considered valuable cultural artefacts, provide insights into historical and anthropological contexts while also reflecting the evolving social processes that influence musical traditions. For instance, numerous dance elements found in Punjabi folk dances, such as Bhangra and Jhummar, have roots in agricultural practices like farming and harvesting. Furthermore, it is argued that communication through folk media channels such as songs, theatre, and dance enables effective message dissemination due to a shared cultural heritage and a common knowledge repository among participants (Prasad, 2013; Meenakshy et al., 2024). Folk media is a conduit for conveying cultural messages derived from the collective knowledge embedded in everyday practices. Thus, the analysis of folksongs reveals an inherent connection between musical and sociological dimensions.

The folksongs originating from Punjab exemplify a genre of traditional artistic expressions known for their intense melodies and emotionally resonant themes (Narula, 2001; Duggal & Kapuria, 2025). Prima facie Punjabi folk songs are “characterized by the balance of syllables and placement of stress and caesura. Internal rhymes and alliterations add to the music of words. However, of far more value in them are the immediacy and spontaneity of utterance, which, at times, may verge upon flippancy” (Narula, 2001; Coffey, 2023). Even though they are structured as octosyllabic couplets or concise single-line expressions, known as Bollie, these songs maintain their emotional depth and suggestive power. Punjabi folk songs are spontaneous emotional responses to specific situations, moods, or events. “It is the forthright and effortless utterance of what can be called raw emotion” (Narula, 2001; Coffey, 2023). Punjabi folk songs’ immediate appeal and profound depth are derived from their lively and energetic rhythm.

Within both oral and written literature, the strategic use of rhetorical devices plays a critical role in maximizing communication effectiveness, enabling the conveyance of ideas, thoughts, and emotions with utmost impact. Rhetorical expressions like metaphors, similes, and symbols hold considerable significance in this context, serving as imaginative tools commonly employed in spoken and written literature forms to facilitate effective communication. The Collins English Dictionary (2006) defines *rhetorical expressions* as “An expression such as a simile, in which words do not have their literal meaning but are categorized as multi-word expressions that act in the text as units.” This sort of language is termed figurative language.

This study explores the rhetorical expressions, metaphors, and symbols used in three selected Punjabi folk songs: “Jugni,” “Chitta Kukkar,” and “Paar Chanaa De.” The songs were selected for their richness in rhetorical and metaphorical devices and their ability to communicate strong cultural messages through their verses.

This research explores how rhetorical devices and metaphors within Punjabi folk songs highlight cultural expression and communal identity, augmenting our comprehension of Punjabi cultural heritage.

This study fills a significant gap in the existing literature by supplying the first comprehensive analysis of Punjabi folk songs’ rhetorical and metaphorical dimensions. Thus, it

addresses a marked dearth of scholarly discourse, especially within Pakistan, where the emphasis on folk songs has been comparatively limited.

Rhetorical devices in Punjabi folk songs surpass mere ornamental language. These devices are essential to the songs' power to convey profound emotions, prompt vivid imagery, and operate as vital conduits for transmitting cultural values and communal identity.

This study concentrates explicitly on investigating rhetorical devices in Punjabi folk songs, namely "Jugni," "Chitta Kukkar," and "Paar Chanaa De." While these songs provide rich material for analysis, the findings may not directly apply to folk songs from other cultural contexts. Moreover, the analysis is limited to three selected folk songs due to time constraints for their cultural significance. While these songs present valuable insights, a larger sample size could supply a more comprehensive understanding of rhetorical devices in Punjabi folk music.

1.1 Significance

This study is significant as it delves deep into the cultural fabric of Punjabi society by exposing the layers of meaning ingrained within its folk songs. By meticulously examining the rhetorical devices employed in these songs, the research demonstrates how they profoundly mirror cultural values, sentiments, and collective identity. This investigation enhances our comprehension of Punjabi heritage and underlines the enduring significance of folk music as a vessel for cultural expression and preservation.

1.2 Research Objectives:

1. Identify and scrutinize the use of rhetorical schemes and tropes in "Jugni," "Chitta Kukkar," and "Paar Chanaa De" to comprehend how they convey emotions and evoke imagery.
2. Explore how rhetorical expressions in these songs mirror and communicate Punjabi cultural values and communal identity.

1.3 Research Questions:

1. In what ways do Punjabi folk songs employ rhetorical devices to convey emotions and evoke imagery?
2. How do rhetorical devices in Punjabi folk songs facilitate the transmission of cultural values and communal identity?

2. Literature Review

Folktales and oral traditions significantly shape the cultural essence of any locality (Shinwari, 2013). Sims and Stephen (2005) argue that folklore encompasses the informal knowledge about societal customs, traditions, beliefs, norms, taboos, and rituals communicated through various mediums such as language, music, dance, symbols, maxims, and signs. Essentially, folklore encapsulates the shared experiences of a community. Nonetheless, the study of folklore has often been sidelined, mainly due to the influence of colonization and capitalism

(Daimai & Parhi, 2021), underscoring the growing importance of its exploration. Wilson (1988) suggests that delving into folklore often emerges as an inquiry into the fundamental aspects of human existence, positioning folklore at the core of humanistic exploration. In essence, folklore mirrors the quintessence of humanity.

Understanding the identities and ideologies inherent to a specific locale can be achieved by studying folktales, offering insights into societies' genealogical, cultural, and social evolutions (Baan, 2021). As unwritten and orally transmitted traditions, folktales serve as a sturdy framework for navigating the uncertainties and ambiguities encountered within a society. Hufford (1991) emphasizes the significance of folklife, expressed through many forms, in nurturing the development and enrichment of a nation, owing to its universal, diverse, and socially embraced nature. Folklife stems from the preservation and dissemination of folklore.

Toelken (1996) highlights that folklore is dynamic and static, bridging a group's past and present. The term "folklore" was first coined by English scholar William John Thoms, who applied it in the study of the Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales (Oring, 1986). Germans pioneered a nationalistic approach to studying folklore, aiming to forge a shared identity among Germans and preserve their cultural heritage (Sim & Stephen, 2005). By the late 19th century, American intellectuals had also gathered data on unwritten stories and songs, initially termed "popular antiquities." Eventually, more formal explorations and studies emerged to understand the significance and meanings of these stories for society (Newman, 2020). Once it was recognized that folklore directly influenced people's daily lives, the term "folklore" was used correctly in academic and educational settings (Bronner, 1986).

Pakistan has immense cultural diversity, with each province presenting its distinct heritage and languages. Sindh province, for instance, is home to the ancient Indus Valley Civilization and has been a cultural melting pot, combining local and foreign influences to create a rich folk heritage (Hanaway & Heston, 1996). The historical trajectory of present-day Pakistan reveals that this land, abundant in resources, has experienced invasions, colonization, and economic engagements with Aryans, Persians, Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Afghans, Mongols, and the British. Consequently, the folklore of this region has incorporated elements from these various cultures, continuously evolving (Kazmi, 2020). This cultural blend is reflected in folktales shared across regions, such as "Shirin and Farhad," known in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and the Middle East; "Yusuf and Zulaikha," prevalent in all Muslim countries; and "The Tale of Four Dervishes," familiar in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Despite these shared stories, Hussain and Asif (2020) have highlighted the distinctive antiquity of Pakistani cultural heritage through motifs in their native folklore. Language is central to this cultural expression as a conduit for identities and ideologies. Constructing identity involves defining oneself with others, with language playing a crucial role in this process (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). "Identity is found in the language in clear mention of identity categories, describing the position of the self and the others, evaluating the current issues of identities, and using different linguistic tools and approaches" (Ammar, 2014, p. 36).

Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, particularly its diverse folklore. Many of these stories have been documented in written form, often in the poetic tradition. These tales have gained widespread recognition through the dispersion of Punjabi communities worldwide. Legendary narratives like Heer Ranjha, Laila Majnu, Mirza Sahiban, Sassi Punhun, Sucha Singh Soorma, Puran Bhagat, Dulla Bhatti, Manu Guggu, Dhol Sammi, and Jutt Parmz, authored by revered figures like Waris Shah, Peelu, Hashim Shah, Shah Hussain, Bulleh Shah, Ghulam Farid, and Gobind Singh, deeply resonate with audiences. These stories, frequently depicting tragic romances, feature protagonists who challenge societal norms and endure significant trials. However, they ultimately find solace and unity in the afterlife, as depicted in the writings of Mir (2006).

There has not been significant scholarly work on Punjabi folklore in Pakistan, but in India, Singh and Gill (2004) conducted a noteworthy study titled “Folk Songs of Punjab.” Their research delved into Punjabi folk songs’ various types, genres, and themes. These songs act as repositories of local culture, beliefs, social structures, and responses to historical changes. Distinguished from the compositions of bards and recorded literature, Punjabi folk songs cover a broad spectrum of experiences, ranging from the mundane to the extraordinary, material to mystical, and from disparaging to joyful, encapsulating all aspects of life from birth to death (Singh & Gill, 2004).

The songs inherited today stem from anonymous and fluid oral traditions, resisting precise historical contextualization, geographical classification, or neat categorization. While English-language literature is scarce on folk songs from the region (Singh & Gill, 2004), the authors’ work seeks to grasp the themes of Punjabi songs, outline their genres, identify their major thematic elements, and utilize them to examine the complexities of Punjabi culture, particularly in the context of the life cycle (Singh & Gill, 2004).

In Punjabi folk music, there exists a wide array of song types, each characterized by its unique style, context, social setting, and purpose, deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of Punjab. One prominent form is the *tapa*, consisting of succinct couplets that encapsulate specific emotions, moods, ideas, or situations. Due to their simplicity, *tapas* lend themselves well to various performance settings, solo or group, with or without accompanying dance, thus preserving a diverse range of Punjabi sentiments within this format. On the other hand, *Bolian* is comprised of a series of *tapas* sung individually, each verse increasing in tempo until the final line, which is repeated collectively. Another notable genre is the *lambe gaunh*, which involves a dialogue between two pairs of singers, each representing different characters within the song. Ritualistic songs, such as those sung during mourning ceremonies (known as *kirne* and *alauhnian*), are typically performed by a collective group. While *Bolian*, *tapas*, and proverbs are shared across genders, specific genres—particularly those associated with weddings, mourning, and specific festivals like *Tian*—are exclusively performed by women in Punjabi culture.

Punjabi folk songs are often performed without specialized musical instruments (Singh & Gill, 2004). Women’s songs typically feature accompaniment from everyday household items like clay pots or the *dholak* drum, primarily played by professional musicians such as *mirasans*.

Livelier, dance-oriented songs may include choruses, hand claps, and the sounds of bangles and bells. The article suggests further exploration of Punjabi folk songs, considering their cultural heritage value and potential for academic study.

Punjabi folk songs are embedded within the complex cultural fabric of a society where the remote village acts as the foundational social institution. These songs show diverse skilled and unskilled workers carrying out essential functions. Despite distinct kinship patterns enforcing rigid tribal, social (caste), and economic (class) distinctions, Punjabi folk culture reveals that individuals from all levels of village society engage in daily interactions, illustrating their mutual codependency. The shared cultural institutions within the village and the typical lifestyles encompassing eating habits, rituals, and dress codes transcend class and caste barriers.

Satyarthi (1927) extensively traversed various regions of India to compile folk songs. Satyarthi observed that Indian folk songs cover various subjects, reflecting every aspect of life. These songs portray religious rituals, marital festivities, and ceremonial occasions, offering insights into the lives of both men and women.

In Sonam's study, "The Attributes and Values of Folk and Popular Songs," two primary purposes of folk songs are outlined: entertainment and celebration. Sonam contends these songs also serve as repositories of social and historical knowledge. Professor Lavender (2009) further delves into the intricate layers of folk songs, identifying several dimensions of information embedded within them. These dimensions encompass the source material, lyrical content, melody, performance style, methods of dissemination, and audience reception of the songs.

The literature examines folk songs' diverse and intricate nature within various cultural contexts. Shinwari highlights the essential role of folklore in shaping cultural identities, while Sims and Stephen (2005) emphasize the extensive social and historical content in folk songs. Wilson (1988) stresses the importance of folk culture in understanding human existence, echoed by Hufford's (1991) assertion regarding the significance of folklife in national development. Singh and Gill (2004) provide insight into Punjabi folk songs' different types and genres, demonstrating their relevance in cultural heritage preservation and academic inquiry. Additionally, Devendra Satyarthi (1927) and Kingra Sonam discuss the entertaining and celebratory aspects of folk songs and their role as repositories of social and historical knowledge. Overall, these studies collectively highlight the profound impact of folk songs in reflecting and preserving cultural traditions, offering insights into societal values, and fostering a sense of community identity.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This research explores how Punjabi folk songs employ rhetorical and metaphorical devices to convey emotions, evoke imagery, and facilitate the transmission of cultural values and communal identity. To achieve a comprehensive analysis, this study employs symbolic interactionism to analyze three Punjabi folk songs: "Jugni," "Paar Channa De," and "Chitta Kukkar." Each song serves as a cultural artifact filled with symbolic meaning, reflecting and forming the social and cultural dynamics of Punjabi society.

2.1.1 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interaction theory provides insight into how language is employed to construct meaning (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1900). Mead suggested that meaning arises from learned conversations, social interactions involving both verbal and nonverbal cues, and prior experiences. This creation and evolution of meaning occur within interpersonal and societal realms. As highlighted by Charron (2004),

“The human being must be understood as a social person. It is the constant search for social interaction that leads us to do what we do. Instead of focusing on the individual and his or her personality, or on how the society or social situation causes human behavior, symbolic interactionism focuses on the activities that take place between actors. Interaction is the basic unit of study. Individuals are created through interaction; society too is created through social interaction. What we do depends on interaction with others earlier in our lifetimes, and it depends on our interaction right now. Social interaction is central to what we do.” (p. 31)

Symbolic interaction is intricately connected with the unique American philosophical perspective known as pragmatism (Denzin, 1992; Lewis, 1976; Perry, 2001) and was pivotal in the development of communication studies in the 20th century, particularly in understanding how individuals shape their identities within communities (Johnston, 2011, p. 5). Through the sharing of these meanings, individuals engage in social interactions and construct their perception of the world. As Holstein and Grubman (2000) summarize:

Symbolic interactionism orients to the principle that individuals respond to the meanings they construct as they interact with one another. Individuals are active agents in the social worlds, influenced, to be sure, by culture and social organization, but also instrumental in producing the culture, society, and meaningful conduct that influences them (p. 32).

According to symbolic interactionists, meanings are not inherent but are instead formed through social processes during communicative exchanges. Thus, society is socially constructed, and individuals engage in interactions guided by their interpretations of this constructed reality. These interactions are driven by individuals' efforts to construct meanings within their social context.

The theory of symbolic interactionism postulates that symbols and their interpretations are essential to the generation of cultural identities and social values. Rhetorical devices are pivotal symbols in this context. By conducting a textual analysis of the lyrics of selected folk songs, this study pinpoints and interprets the rhetorical devices such as metaphors and personification in the lyrics. By comprehending the emotional and imagistic influence of these devices, the research links how these components depict emotions and invoke imagery within Punjabi society.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses textual analysis as its methodological approach to explore the detailed use of rhetorical devices in Punjabi folk songs and their depiction of cultural expression and identity. Textual analysis, widely recognized in qualitative research, is particularly significant in cultural studies. It involves examining elements such as originality, creativity, inspiration, historical context, and the cultures we live or study (McKee, 2003). This qualitative method aims to uncover a text's ideological and cultural assumptions.

Smith highlights that textual analysis is heavily utilized in communications and interdisciplinary across various social sciences and humanities. It can incorporate more specific techniques like content analysis, semiotics, interactional analysis, and rhetorical criticism.

Giles A. Hindle links the origins of textual analysis to the Greek myth of Hermes, who was responsible for interpreting and conveying the messages of the gods to humans (Hindle, 2007). This method involves analyzing the language and symbols in texts to understand how people interpret them. The goal is to extract meaning from the text. As McKee points out,

“Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. It is a methodology- a data-gathering process – for researchers who want to understand how members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are and how they fit into the world they live in” (McKee, 2003, p. 1).

McKee explains that textual analysis involves hypothesizing about the possible interpretations of a text (McKee, 2003).

Smith (2017) describes textual analysis as a method researchers use to study messages conveyed through various media forms. This approach analyzes data from documents, films, newspapers, paintings, and web pages, treating these sources as “texts” to evaluate their meaning, value, and conveyed messages. Additionally, Unsworth (2004), in “Textual Analysis: A Companion to Digital Humanities,” notes that this method is valuable in literary studies, helping to answer questions, bring new ones to light, and open up further inquiries.

Creswell (2013) discusses that qualitative research focuses on understanding the process, meaning, and interpretation of words or images. He emphasizes that qualitative researchers must engage with people, settings, sites, or institutions to observe and document actions in their natural contexts. Creswell also describes qualitative research as a method for exploring and understanding the significance of individuals and communities regarding social and humanitarian issues. This approach allows researchers to interpret, assign meaning, and represent findings from natural settings and specific social phenomena.

Textual analysis incorporates various theoretical traditions within an interpretive framework. In communication studies, the foundational theories include symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, critical theory (such as race and feminist theories), and ethnography (Smith, 2017). Thus, this research conducts the textual analysis under symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework. Despite the diversity in theoretical approaches, qualitative textual analysis

shares common characteristics. According to Alan McKee (2003), qualitative textual analysis aims to understand how individuals in specific contexts make sense of the world around them, recognizing how a text can be interpreted and used by its audience.

Quantitative methods involve counting the occurrences of themes or keywords, examining their relationships through semantic structures, and mapping their positions within a broader network of themes and connections (Roberts, 2000).

The research conducts the textual analysis of three iconic Punjabi folk songs, “Jugni”, “Chitta Kukkar”, and “Paar Chanaa De”. The selection of songs was done based on their popularity and views on YouTube. Jugni, published on Coke Studio’s official YouTube channel, has 97M views, while Paar Chanaa De, also published on Coke Studio’s official YouTube channel, has 28M views. Chitta Kukkar has 9.3M views on one of the unregistered channels on YouTube while another 11M views on another channel.

” Jugni” is a pivotal Punjabi folk song filled with rich metaphors and vivid imagery. It is an ideal subject for studying how Punjabi folk songs employ rhetorical devices to convey emotions and evoke imagery. Alam Lohar initially sang it around the pre-partition era (1947). Later, in 2010, his son, Arif Lohar, sang this song alongside Meesha Shafi for Coke Studio Season 3.

“Chitta Kukkar Banere Te” is a quintessential Punjabi folk song that provides an excellent case for exploring how rhetorical devices are employed to convey emotions and evoke imagery connected to the bride’s departure from her family home. Chitta Kukkar was initially sung by Musarrat Nazir in 1988. However, many Indian remakes of the song emerged later on.

“Paar Chanaa De” is a Punjabi folk song that provides rich material for analyzing rhetorical and metaphorical devices through the tragic love story of Sohni and Mahiwal. It was officially recorded in 2016 for Coke Studio Season 9 and sung by Shilpa Rao and Noori, a Pakistani rock band.

The textual analysis of the selected songs was done based on three types of metaphors.

3.1 Types of Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have distinguished other types of metaphor in James R. Hurford’s book *Semantics* (1983). They grouped them into three sub-types of metaphors.

In James R. Hurford’s book “*Semantics*” (1983), Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identified different types of metaphors and categorized them into three primary subtypes:

3.1.1 Structural Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe structural metaphors as instances where another metaphorically organizes one concept. These metaphors are grounded in systematic associations from everyday experiences. An example of this is the phrase, “Argument is war.”

3.1.2 Orientational Metaphor

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), orientational metaphors are not structured but instead organize an entire system of related concepts. These metaphors are linked to physical experiences and include spatial orientations such as up-down, in-out, on-off, deep-shallow, and front-back. For instance, “Happy is up, sad is down.”

3.1.3 Ontological Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also explain ontological metaphors, which arise when we view events, actions, emotions, and ideas. These metaphors allow us to conceptualize and discuss abstract experiences and processes as if they had physical properties. Ontological metaphors help us understand and manage concepts based on our experiences. For example, the metaphor “The mind is a machine” is illustrated by the phrase “My mind just is not operating today,” which suggests that the brain is not functioning well or is unwilling to engage in thinking.

4. Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, the researcher shares the background of the selected folk songs under study and then conducts a textual analysis of the songs in the light of symbolic interactionism theory. The research findings present the types of metaphors found in the lyrics of selected folk songs and also the interpretation of their metaphorical meaning.

4.1 Research Findings

The data used in this research is lyrics of Punjabi folk songs. The data were taken from song verses containing metaphors taken from selected songs, namely: Jugni, Chitta Kukkar and Paar Chanaa De. All selected song lyrics were analyzed and classified according to Lakoff's metaphorical categories; structural metaphor, orientation metaphor, and ontological metaphor as well as Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of symbolic metaphor.

4.1.1 Jugni - Folk Song

An article published in Dawn (2010) recounts that according to the research conducted by Devander Satiarthhi, Ram Saran Das and Snawar Chadharr, it is established that “Jugni” is an old form of folk song, which existed in early 20th century, though its root is old but is not traceable. In the beginning of 20th century it was quite famous, as proof was given in research by people who:

‘... had heard Jugni in the first decade of the last century when the Golden Jubilee of the Queen was celebrated throughout India. There were two singer-poets Mahnda of Hasanpur in Amritsar district and his partner Bishna also from Majha area. They were folk singers and on the Jubilee they staged their show wherever in Punjab the Jubilee Torch traveled’ (Dawn, 2010).

When Bishna and Majha opposed the British, they changed Jubilee's name to Jugni and likely sang songs of resistance, leading to their eventual deaths at the hands of the police. Despite

this, the Jugni style gained popularity due to their artistic contributions (Dawn, 2010). According to Afzal Parvez's book *Bann Phulwari*, Jugni may have originated as a character from folklore, possibly the heroine of Jugni-Rawa. This suggests that Jugni is a well-established genre of folk song that allows for creative expansion (Parvez, 1973). This indicates that Jugni has a history spanning over a century and embodies elements of both resistance and a love story. The character Jugni is female and is thus grammatically treated as such.

The historical and conceptual significance of Jugni is profound. Mazhar ul Islam (1978) describes Jugni as a multi-layered metaphor guiding seekers to its spiritual essence. It represents the spirit of Sufism, or all Sufis who have passed away, continuing to inspire others towards divine love and enlightenment. In the local language, Jugni refers to a female firefly, symbolizing light, guidance, power, and life. A true Jugni embodies the spiritual legacy of holy men of Allah and serves as a symbol of social reform, reflecting the mission of the Sufis. This concept is essential for understanding the cultural ethos of Punjab (Islam, 1978).

This study will examine the various metaphors in the Punjabi folk song Jugni and interpret its lyrics. The song utilizes diverse rhyming styles to create a musical appeal, often employing repetition to heighten its impact.

Table No 1: Stanza 1

Punjabi Lyrics	English Translation
Alif Allah chambay di booti	The first letter (Alif) of God's name is flower of love,
Tey meray murshid mann vich lai hoo	And my guide has planted it in my heart
Ho nafi uss baat da paani dey kay	Watering with the negation and affirmation (no God, but God)
Har ragaay harjai hoo	(Watering) Each vein and each pore
Ho joog joog jeevay mera murshid sohna	May my beautiful guide live forever
Hatay jiss ay booti lai ho	Whose hand planted this flower

The lyrics in the first stanza of the song "Jugni," are extremely symbolic and saturated with spiritual and religious references. In line 1, "The first letter (Alif) of God's name is flower of love," the structural metaphor, "Alif," which is the first letter in the Arabic alphabet, is described as a "flower of love" that is beautiful, fragile yet flourishing. Since "Alif" is also the first letter of God's name, this line symbolizes "Alif" as the beginning of divine love, an abstract concept. Thus, divine love is described as blooming like a beautiful and fragrant flower.

In line 2, the phrase, "And my guide has planted it in my heart", employs an ontological metaphor which regards the divine love, from the previous line, as a physical substance or seed which can be planted like a flower in the earth of a "heart". Over here, the heart is seen as a fertile ground where divine love can be nurtured and grown. This metaphor highlights divine love's transformative and nourishing ability within the human soul. "Heart" could also be seen as an

orientational metaphor here as it acts like a vessel capable of acquiring and upholding spiritual nourishment. Moreover, using an ontological metaphor, the spiritual guide is metaphorically labelled as a gardener who sows the flower of divine love in the heart. The guide's role in his/her disciple's life is mapped using very tangible means as someone responsible for cultivating spiritual development, making the abstract idea of spiritual guidance more relatable and evocative.

In lines 3 and 4, “Watering with the negation and affirmation (no God, but God)” and “(Watering) Each vein and each pore” we see an orientational metaphor at work where the act of nourishing divine love is done through persistence of belief in Oneness of God. This belief acts as a source of nourishment.

Overall, this stanza is filled with rich metaphors used to explain the process of spiritual growth and the profound relationship between the guide and his/her disciples. The depiction of the guide as a nurturing gardener supports the esteemed role of spiritual leaders in Punjabi society. A guide (Pir/Murshid) is revered as a ‘holy man’ who possesses abilities of performing minor miracles and may help his disciples (Murid) through his spiritual powers in times of need. One can become a disciple of a guide through the formal process of Bayat (Taking Oath to Pir). Moreover, one must not ask questions or question the guide and he must be obeyed blindly (Aziz, 2001). Pinto (1995) has given various definitions of spiritual guides (Pir/Murshid). According to him, “The Pir is a guide, helper, and a teacher who takes one to God” (p.125). “The Pir is the guide who brings the Murid on the way of the Quran in such a way that the Murid begins to live according to its injunctions” (p.126). Whereas, he defined disciple (Murid) as, “The Murid is one who seeks to die to himself. He is one who obeys the Pir. The Pir may order the Murid to do anything. Murid has no right to say that he will not obey” (p. 206).

Moreover, we see vivid imagery in this stanza through the concept of planting and watering a flower in the heart. Since Punjab is mainly an agricultural land and practice of agriculture is ingrained in Punjabi culture, this concept of planting is positioned very well as it strengthens communal identity by connecting spiritual practices with nature and daily life .

Finally, this stanza is an epitome of symbolic interactionism as it features rich symbolism to convey spiritual concepts. By integrating these symbols within familiar cultural environments and practices, the stanza makes abstract spiritual ideas easy to understand and meaningful, encouraging a shared feeling of identity and principles among listeners, aligning with the philosophy of symbolic interactionism.

Table No 2: Stanza 3

Punjabi Lyrics	English Translation
Dum gutkoon, dum gutkoon... karay Saeen	With every breath, my heart echoes God's name like a dove's call
Parhay tay kalma nabi da Parhay saeein pir merya	My guide remembers the Lord and says the kalma of the Prophet

In line 1, “With every breath” acts as an orientational metaphor where breathing is linked with the spiritual practice of remembering God. It shows the depth of devotion the author feels for his Lord so much that it becomes an integral part of his life, just like breathing. The line ends with a structural metaphor, “My heart echoes God’s name like a dove’s call,” where the idea of devotion and remembrance of God is connected with the dove’s calling. Doves hold great symbolic significance in various cultures. They have been seen as a symbol of hope and peace for over 3000 years due to their ability to produce a song (Khan, 2022). By building this connection with the dove’s call, the metaphor maps the recurring and soothing character of a dove’s call onto the heart’s constant invocation of God’s name, proposing an intrinsic purity and serenity in the act of devotion. Moreover, in this line the heart is viewed as an entity which can make sound, particularly the sound of God’s name.

Table No 3: Stanza 9

Punjabi Lyrics	English Translation
Ho wanga charha lo kuriyon	Girls, put on your bangles
Meray daata dey darbaar dian	From the court of my Benefactor (Data Ganj Baksh)

In line 1, “Girls, put on your bangles,” “bangles” symbolize femininity and marital status in Punjabi culture. According to Choudhary (2010), all the famous Sufi poets of Punjab, including Bulle Shah, Shah Hussain and Baba Farid, used phrases and symbols associated with females, like spinning wheels, bangles or water pots, in their poetry to describe their relation with God. Since the Sufis associated themselves with the bride who left her family to be with her husband, in this case, they saw themselves betrothed to God (Choudhary, 2010). Moreover, during the urs (death anniversary of the Sufi Saint), the colourful bazaars outside shrines sell various jewels for adornment including bangles.

4.2 Chitta Kukkar - Folk Song

"Chitta Kukkar" stands as a celebrated traditional Punjabi folk song often performed at joyous occasions like weddings. Its lively tune and cheerful lyrics portray various elements of rural life and festive moments, passed down orally through generations, reflecting the cultural heritage of Punjab. Though the precise origins of the song remain unclear due to limited written records, its enduring popularity highlights its cultural importance. Sung with enthusiasm, it celebrates the camaraderie among the companions of the bride and groom, occasionally adopting a more serious tone during prayers for the bride's future happiness. The lyrics, marked by playful exchanges in the local couplet style, are a defining characteristic of Punjabi folk music, emphasizing rhyming patterns and enhancing the song's allure.

Table No 3: Stanza 1

Punjabi Lyrics	English Translation
Chitta kukkar banayray tey	A white rooster is on the parapet
Kasni dupattay waliyey munda sadqey tere tey	O' girl with a violet scarf, the lad is in love with you

In line 1, “A white rooster is on the parapet”, “white rooster” is symbolic of “purity, village life and hustle bustle in life” (Hussain, Z. et al., 2014, p. 36). In most cases, structurally, the first line in wedding folk songs is added to complete the structure of the couplet, and for the rhyming scheme and musicality; however, it is not devoid of semantic connotations (Hussain, Z. et al., 2014). Moreover, the phrase “on the parapet” could be considered as an orientational metaphor, giving a notion of the rooster standing at a high position, which can suggest a sense of surveillance and protection as well as a symbol for the beginning of an event, i.e., a wedding in this case. In the Tale of the Golden Cockerel by A.S. Pushkin (1835), a rooster is projected as a watchman on weathervanes, rotating in the direction from which evil threatens.

In line 2, “O girl with a violet scarf, the lad is in love with you”, the colour “violet” is symbolic of “an attractive colour, the romantic colour and the damsel who has scarf of this colour is considered a loving one” (Hussain, Z. et al., 2014, p. 36). Moreover, in the cultural context, a scarf (dupatta) may be depicted as a symbol of modesty and grace. In South Asian cultures, the bride drapes a dupatta on her head on her wedding day.

Table No 4: Stanza 2

Punjabi Lyrics	English Translation
Sari khed lakeeran di	It's all the game of lines on our hands
Gaddi aaye station te akh pich gai weeran di	The train reached the station, bringing tears to the eyes of the bride's brothers

In line 1, “It is all the game of lines on our hands”, the word “game” acts like a structural metaphor where the notion of fate is projected as a “game” determined by the “lines on our hands” (palmistry). It maps the unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of the course of a game, similar to one's fate.

In line 2, both ‘train’ and ‘station’ have dual symbolism. They are ‘symbols of hope, meeting and union’, but they also symbolize ‘separation and departure’ (Hussain, Z. et al., 2014). In the song's context, these words symbolize the bride's departure from her family home to be with her husband, a pivotal moment reflecting her transition into a new life.

Table No 5: Stanza 3

Punjabi Lyrics	English Translation
Pipli dian chawan ni	The shade of the Sacred Bo tree
Aape hatti doli tor ke ma pay karan duawan ni	The parents after sending the wedding palanquin, pray for the good life of their daughter

In line 1, “the shade of the Sacred Bo tree” the “shade” of a tree acts as a structural metaphor structuring the notion of protection and refuge by juxtaposing it to the shade provided by the Sacred Bo tree. The Sacred Bo tree, a symbol of enlightenment and gratitude in Buddhism, holds significant value in various religions and cultural traditions. In Buddhism, the bodhi tree is seen as a symbol of enlightenment and as a pronouncement of gratitude (De Silva, 1993). Tracing the significance of the Bodhi Tree in the life of Sri Lankans, J. B Disanayaka shares that, “Bodhi-pujas, offering of vows to the bodhi has become today extremely popular. The bodhi tree which makes rains fall, crops grow and blesses women with offspring is, thus, tended with care and veneration by the Sri Lankan Buddhists.” Thus, in the context of this song the sacred nature of Bo tree is used to represent the sacredness of a bride’s departure from her family home. Since no literature was found on the reason for using the Bo tree to represent the bride’s departure from her family home, the researcher decided to ask her grandmother, an old Punjabi woman, about the source of it. Upon their discussion, it was concluded that the use of the Bo tree in the song is to represent the protection and safety a bride feels in her family home which is like the shade of a Bo tree and it is used to witness that once she leaves her father’s home, she may lose this shade of protection (Gulzar, 2024).

In line 2, the word “wedding palanquin” is very symbolic. In Punjabi and most of South Asian cultures, the bride rides on a wedding palanquin to go to her husband’s home. According to Woolford (2023), this act is metaphorically seen as the soul’s departure from the body. In various wedding folk songs, the bride in her wedding palanquin inhabits the same literal space and the same vocabulary, as a dead body taken to the cremation ground as both are carried on a bamboo palanquin, a *ḍolī* (Woolford, 2023). Moreover, the “wedding palanquin” symbolises the bride’s honour and chastity (Hussain, Z. et al., 2014, p. 36).

Table No 6: Stanza 5

Punjabi Lyrics	English Translation
Heera lakh sawa lakh da ay	The diamond is worth a lac or a lac and quarter
Theeya walian dian Rab iztan rakh da ay	God protects the honor of the parents of girls

In line 2, “God protects the honour of the parents of girls”, the phrase “God protects” uses an orientational metaphor by positioning protection and divine intervention as a towering force. It directs the listener to believe in divine protection as a force offering safety from above, hoisting the sense of protection given by God. Moreover, according to Hussain Z. et al. (2014), using

“‘God’ in the Punjabi folk songs is the religious symbol, and it is the symbol of an omnipotent protector and helper who always saves daughters’ chastity. Punjabi community is the male-dominant community where the honour of the family is associated with the chastity of daughters.”

4.3 Paar Chanaa De - Folk Song

The traditional tale of "Paar Chanaa De" recounts the tragic romance between Sohni and Mahiwal. Similarly, another well-known folktale from Punjab and Sindh, "Sohni Mahiwal" or "Sohni Mehar," authored by various poets, notably Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai of Sindh, tells a poignant story that ends with the lovers' demise and their eventual reunion with the Divine (Ammar, A. et al., 2021).

According to Markel, S. (1988) the legend, the romance of Sohni and Mahiwal was as follows: Mahiwal, also known as Mirza Izzat Beg, comes from a wealthy merchant family in Turkestan. Driven by a quest for beauty and pleasure, he embarks on a journey to India, where he encounters the enchanting land. After visiting the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan and presenting him with extravagant gifts, Izzat Beg, accompanied by his caravan, begins the journey back home. Passing through Punjab after Lahore, they camp by the Chenab River near Gujrat. Seeking diversion, Izzat Beg and his companions explore the town, stumbling upon a potter's shop owned by Tulla, renowned for his craftsmanship. Among Tulla's creations, Izzat Beg is captivated by the radiant beauty of his daughter, Sohni, whose name signifies "She who is beautiful." Despite warnings from his companions about the allure and dangers of Punjab's women, Izzat Beg's infatuation with Sohni deepens with each encounter. His heart captured by her beauty, Izzat Beg decides to stay in Gujrat, abandoning his caravan and settling near Sohni.

In the following days, Izzat Beg frequents Sohni's shop, purchasing pots as an excuse to be close to her. Eventually, he sets up his own pottery shop nearby, though his focus remains on Sohni rather than business. As their bond grows, Izzat Beg, now called Mahinwal, meaning "He who tends buffaloes," is tasked with herding buffaloes across the river, separating him from Sohni. Despite the distance, their love endures until Sohni's mother discovers their secret relationship. Faced with her father's anger, Sohni is forced to marry another potter, and Mahinwal withdraws to a hermit's cave by the river, consumed by despair.

Weeks later, Sohni encounters Mahinwal during a visit to the holy men by the river, reigniting their love. They secretly arrange clandestine meetings, with Sohni crossing the river on a clay pot to meet Mahinwal. Their secret encounters continue until one fateful night when Sohni's sister-in-law discovers their affair and replaces Sohni's pot with an unfired one. Despite the stormy weather and the perilous pot, Sohni ventures into the river, only for the clay vessel to dissolve midstream. Hearing her cries, Mahinwal leaps into the river to save her, but both lovers meet a tragic end, their bodies found locked in a final embrace at dawn.

Table No 7: Stanza 1

Punjabi Lyrics	English Translation
Paar channa de disse kulli yaar di	Across the Chenab I see the Beloved's hut
Ghadeya ghadeya, aa ve ghadeya	O clay-pot, dear clay pot, come, let's keep going

In line 1, the metaphor “I see the Beloved’s hut” is a structural metaphor structuring the voyage of love and longing by depicting it as the physical voyage across a river. Over here, “the Beloved’s hut” indicates the destination of this voyage, symbolizing the aim or fulfilment of love. The river, Chenab, projects the hurdles or challenges one must face to reach this destination. Moreover, one can also interpret this as an ontological metaphor, giving the notion of love and longing a physical form as a hut, making the abstract concept of a lover’s presence more concrete. Another essential facet in this line is the river Chenab. Many Punjabi folktales have been connected to the river Chenab, including Heer Ranjha, Mirza, and Sahiban. According to Sajjad (2021), “The river Chenab has been famous for its romance from the very beginning, so in the Vedic period it was called Chandrabhaga, meaning Chand Bhag, meaning the moon, because, in ancient Greece, the moon goddess [Diana] was a symbol of beauty and romance.”

Moreover, the “clay pot,” an ontological metaphor, is represented in this song as Sohni’s companion as she journeys across the river. This personification makes her determination more tangible by tending to the inanimate entity as a companion in the journey, highlighting its emotional significance.

Table No 8: Stanza 2

Punjabi Lyrics	English Translation
Raat haneri nadi thathaana maardi	The night is deathly dark and waves of the river surge high around us
Adiye adiye, haan ni adiye	Listen girl...Listen girl, dear girl, be not stubborn

In line 1, the metaphor “The night is deathly dark” is a structural metaphor that conveys the notion of peril and apprehension. It does so by juxtaposing the night with death, a powerful and universal symbol of danger. The metaphor “waves of the river surge high around us” is another form of structural metaphor. It compares the formidable challenges faced by the lovers to high surging waves, a symbol of the unpredictable and uncontrollable forces of nature. These challenges, which involve emotional turbulence and hurdles, are a central theme in the forbidden bond between Sohni and Mahiwal. The phrase also uses an orientational metaphor to specify strength and escalation. The word “high” about the waves suggests an upward motion, indicating the rise in danger and challenges, directing the listener to sense the increasing threat in the narrative.

In line 2, ““Listen girl...Listen, girl, dear girl, be not stubborn,” is an exclamation by Sohni as she associates the unbaked pot with a girl companion on her way to Mahiwal across the river Chenab. This line symbolises Sohni’s desperation as she pleads with the clay pot not to be stubborn and melt away in the river despite knowing it is a futile resistance against fate.

Table No 9: Stanza 4

Punjabi Lyrics	English Translation
Kachhi meri mitti kachha mera naam ni	One of form unsound, name unsound. A pot of unbaked clay I am.
Haan main na-kaam ni	Worthless, bound to melt away in the river...
Kachhiyaan da hunda kachha anjaam ni	That is the destiny of one such as me I cannot but fail to carry you across The unsound always has an unsound end
Eh gal aam ni	A truth well known to all...

In line 1, the metaphor “One of form unsound, name unsound” is a key element in the unbaked clay pot’s response to Sohni’s plea in the last couplet. This metaphor, functioning as an ontological representation, ascribes the characteristics of physical and reputational unreliability to the unbaked pot. This metaphor significantly enhances our comprehension of the text by transforming the abstract concept of instability into a tangible aspect of the clay pot’s identity.

In line 3, “The unsound always has an unsound end” is a metaphor which treats the abstract notion of fate as a physical voyage with an endpoint. It makes the notion of unavoidable failure by expressing it as an “end” that is reached.

Table No 10: Stanza 12

Punjabi Lyrics	English Translation
Phad pallara... Phad pallara pakke murshad da	O, hold firm I say... Hold steadfast to the guide that is sound
Jehda tainu paar lagaave	Who will carry you safely across to the shore

In line 1, “Hold steadfast to the guide that is sound” is a structural metaphor structuring the notion of steadiness and faith by juxtaposing it to physically clutching a reliable guide. The reliable guide here is Mahiwal, whom Sohni sees as her spiritual guide who will carry her safely across the shore. This symbolism of the guide associated with Mahiwal depicts Sohni’s trust, faith and unconditional love for him, whom she sees as her spiritual guide. In Punjabi culture, spiritual guides are held at high stature, as discussed earlier in the song “Jugni” analysis.

4.4 Discussion

Symbolic interactionism, a sociological theory, asserts that people develop and communicate meanings through symbols and interactions. This framework is particularly relevant to Punjabi folk songs, which utilize metaphorical language and symbolism to convey intricate emotions, cultural values, and identities. It aids in understanding how listeners interpret these symbols and metaphors, fostering a shared cultural experience.

The metaphors in the analyzed stanzas from the three Punjabi folk songs illustrate the effectiveness of rhetorical devices in conveying emotions and imagery, addressing the research questions. Embedding these metaphors within familiar cultural contexts makes abstract spiritual and emotional concepts accessible and meaningful. This method aligns with symbolic interactionism, emphasizing the creation of shared meanings through symbols. Listeners interpret the metaphors based on their cultural knowledge and experiences, fostering a shared sense of identity and values. The metaphors in these songs convey cultural values such as resilience, spiritual guidance, and the enduring nature of love and sacrifice. They achieve this by creating vivid imagery and emotional resonance that listeners can relate to their own lives.

Additionally, by referencing well-known cultural narratives and symbols, the songs reinforce a sense of communal identity. Listeners connect their personal experiences with the collective memory and values represented in the songs, strengthening their cultural bonds. The analysis of metaphors in the three Punjabi folk songs demonstrates how rhetorical devices convey complex emotions and imagery, facilitating the transmission of cultural values and communal identity. The use of structural, orientational, ontological, and symbolic metaphors creates a rich tapestry of meaning that deeply resonates with listeners, illustrating the principles of symbolic interactionism. Through these songs, the Punjabi community continues to share and reinforce its cultural heritage, values, and collective identity.

5. Conclusion

Folklore plays a crucial role as an oral tradition, providing local and indigenous communities with a means to express and celebrate their cultural heritage across generations. As a reflection of society, folklore unveils the essence of community life. The present study reaffirms the wealth of Punjabi folk songs, rich in rhetorical expressions essential for creating captivating folk music. These songs add aesthetic value and effectively convey profound meanings to listeners. Unfortunately, in contemporary times, traditional indigenous customs face displacement by foreign influences within modern households. However, the analysis of selected folk songs done in the light of symbolic interactionism has proven how metaphors and rhetorical devices used in these folk songs reflect the essence of Punjabi cultural heritage and connect people through songs.

Preserving folk songs among contemporary Punjabis is regarded as a matter of cultural heritage, with a desire to retain the wisdom passed down through generations. There is a yearning to connect with the experiences of past inhabitants of Punjab despite the vast differences in their

circumstances. Nostalgia and curiosity drive the fascination with folk songs, which evoke unexpected emotions through melodies and themes.

Scholars, through their dedicated work, seek to utilize these folk texts to reconstruct Punjab's daily lives, yearly rituals, and life-cycle events, shedding light on the power dynamics within village communities. By delving into folk songs, we gain deeper insights into Punjabi literature, while literature itself offers new perspectives on these songs. Folk songs serve as the foundation from which literature and history emerge, capturing the essence of Punjabi culture and becoming ingrained in collective memory. The role of scholars in this process is crucial, as they are the ones who ensure that our cultural heritage is not lost in the sands of time.

The symbiotic relationship between oral and written traditions in Punjab has endured for centuries, with heritage preservationists and scholarly analysts mutually reinforcing each other's agendas. Through Punjabi folk songs, we gain a profound understanding of how individuals navigate the challenges posed by communal living, natural forces, and historical transitions. These songs demand our attention and appreciation, as they are not just a part of our past, but also a mirror to our present and a guide to our future.

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