



MAPPING CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN MASOOD'S *THE BAD MUSLIM DISCOUNT* (2021)

¹Maham Zaib, ²Ali Hassan, ³Eman Afridi

¹ MPhil English Scholar (Linguistics), Abasyn University, Peshawar, Pakistan

² MPhil English Scholar (Linguistics), Abasyn University, Peshawar, Pakistan

³ MPhil Scholar in English Linguistics, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Peshawar, Pakistan

Abstract

*This study explores the role of conceptual metaphors in constructing cognitive and cultural worldviews in *The Bad Muslim Discount* (2021). Drawing upon George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (1980), the study investigates how metaphorical expressions shape representations of religion, gender, identity, honor, politics, modernity, and migration in the novel. Using a qualitative textual analysis, metaphorical expressions were identified, categorized into source and target domains, and interpreted within their socio-cultural contexts. The findings reveal that the novel conceptualizes control as confinement, religion as exchange, honor as physical force, identity as clothing, politics as volatility, and memory as sensory experience. These metaphors construct a cognitive framework through which characters understand reality while simultaneously reflecting broader cultural ideologies and power structures. The study contributes to cognitive literary studies by demonstrating how conceptual metaphors encode cultural values and social beliefs in contemporary Muslim diasporic fiction.*

Keywords: *Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Cognitive Linguistics, Cultural Worldview, Cognitive Worldview, The Bad Muslim Discount, Syed M. Masood*

1. Background of the Study

Language is not merely a tool for communication but also a means through which people conceptualize reality. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), human thought is fundamentally metaphorical, and conceptual metaphors shape how individuals perceive abstract experiences. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) argues that people understand one conceptual domain in terms of another, creating cognitive structures that influence perception, behavior, and cultural understanding.

Contemporary literary texts often employ conceptual metaphors to represent social realities, cultural values, and ideological conflicts. In recent years, scholars have increasingly applied CMT to literary works to explore the relationship between language, cognition, and culture (Semino, 2008). Muslim diasporic fiction, in particular, provides a rich site for investigating how metaphors construct identities, religious beliefs, and cultural experiences.

Published in 2021, *The Bad Muslim Discount* by Syed M. Masood narrates the interconnected lives of Pakistani and Iraqi Muslim immigrants in the United States. The novel addresses issues of migration, identity formation, religious practice, gender relations, family expectations, and cultural belonging. Through its rich metaphorical language, the novel reflects tensions between tradition and modernity, faith and secularism, and individual freedom and social control.



Previous Studies

Recent scholarship on *The Bad Muslim Discount* (Masood, 2021) shows a growing academic interest in Muslim representation in contemporary fiction. Afzal and Saeed (2023) argue that the novel engages with neo-orientalist discourses that construct Muslims through binaries of “good” and “bad,” reinforcing essentialist stereotypes even within diasporic narratives. This aligns with broader critical work on Islamophobia in cultural texts, where Muslim identity is frequently framed through surveillance, suspicion, and moral judgment.

Belliel (2022) highlights that the novel’s title itself reflects an internal struggle over what constitutes a “good Muslim,” suggesting that identity is negotiated within dominant Western frameworks of acceptance and exclusion. Similarly, Topolski (2020) discusses the global pattern of “good Muslim/bad Muslim” categorization, showing how such binaries function as mechanisms of control and othering in European and Western discourse.

In parallel, studies on consumer behavior and Islamic economic contexts (e.g., Hasibuan et al., 2023; Safarida et al., 2024) show how the concept of “discount” operates metaphorically and materially as a form of valuation, inclusion, and exclusion in Muslim-majority societies. Although not literary studies, they indirectly support the idea that “discounting” can symbolize hierarchical valuation—useful for interpreting Masood’s symbolic use of the term.

The existing literature indicates that *The Bad Muslim Discount* is widely read through the lens of identity politics, Islamophobia, and binary constructions of Muslim subjectivity, but there is still limited focused linguistic-stylistic analysis of how neo-orientalist tropes are constructed at the discourse level in the novel.

Statement of the Problem

Although *The Bad Muslim Discount* has been examined from postcolonial, cultural, and diasporic perspectives, its conceptual metaphors have not received adequate scholarly attention. Consequently, the cognitive and cultural worldviews embedded in the novel remain underexplored. This study investigates how the metaphorical structures contribute to the construction of cognitive and cultural worldviews.

Overview of the Novel

The Bad Muslim Discount (2021) follows the lives of Anvar, a Pakistani immigrant, and Safwa, an Iraqi refugee, whose experiences intersect in the United States. The novel explores migration, cultural adaptation, religious identity, generational conflict, gender expectations, and the search for belonging. Through multiple perspectives and narrative strands, Masood portrays the complexities of Muslim life in contemporary America while challenging monolithic representations of Islam and Muslim communities.

Theoretical Framework: Conceptual Metaphor Theory

This study is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). According to CMT, metaphor is not merely a linguistic ornament but a cognitive process through which abstract concepts are understood in terms of more concrete experiences. In conceptual metaphors, a source domain provides the structure for understanding a target domain. Conceptual metaphors influence thought, behavior, and cultural perception by organizing human experiences into meaningful



cognitive patterns. The present study applies CMT to identify source-target mappings and interpret their cognitive and cultural implications within the novel.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employs a qualitative research design based on textual analysis.

Research Method

A descriptive and interpretive method is used to analyze metaphorical expressions in the selected text.

Data Collection Method

Metaphorical expressions were collected through close reading of *The Bad Muslim Discount*. Relevant passages containing conceptual metaphors were extracted and categorized according to source and target domains.

Data Source

The primary source of data is Masood's *The Bad Muslim Discount* (2021).

Data Analysis Method

The collected metaphors were analyzed using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The analysis involved:

1. Identifying metaphorical expressions.
2. Determining source and target domains.
3. Establishing conceptual mappings.
4. Interpreting cognitive and cultural implications.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Using George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980), the metaphorical expressions in *The Bad Muslim Discount* can be analyzed through three stages:

1. Identification of metaphorical expressions
2. Categorization into source and target domains
3. Interpretation of cognitive and cultural worldviews

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory, abstract concepts (target domains) are understood through more concrete experiences (source domains). The identified metaphors in the novel reveal how characters cognitively understand their world and how cultural beliefs and ideologies are embedded in language.

1. CONTROL / DISCIPLINE AS CONFINEMENT OR IMPRISONMENT

Textual Evidence

"He locked her in a room and didn't feed her for three days" (Masood, 2021, p. 259).

"Stay trapped here, with your legs closed..." (Masood, 2021, p. 146).

"I had been permitted to leave home..." (Masood, 2021, p. 131).

Conceptual Metaphors

CONTROL IS CONFINEMENT

OBEDIENCE IS IMPRISONMENT

FREEDOM IS MOVEMENT



Source Domain

Physical space, imprisonment, movement

Target Domain

Social control, discipline, autonomy

Cognitive Worldview

The characters conceptualize freedom through physical mobility and restriction through confinement. Human agency is understood spatially; being allowed to move signifies freedom, while restriction signifies loss of autonomy.

Cultural Worldview

These metaphors reflect patriarchal cultural structures where authority over women is exercised through surveillance, restriction, and control. Women's social roles are represented as regulated spaces rather than autonomous choices.

2. MORALITY / RELIGION AS A MECHANICAL OR TRANSACTIONAL SYSTEM

Textual Evidence

“Regain God's favor and return to the glory” (Masood, 2021, p. 20).

“What chemical formula could compete with such a divine endorsement?” (Masood, 2021, p. 20).

“Islam has a marketing problem” (Masood, 2021, p. 8).

Conceptual Metaphors

FAITH IS A TRANSACTION

MORALITY IS EXCHANGE

RELIGION IS SCIENTIFIC VALIDATION

RELIGION IS A PRODUCT

Source Domain

Commerce, science, marketing

Target Domain

Religion and faith

Cognitive Worldview

Religious commitment is understood through familiar experiences of exchange, calculation, and validation. Faith becomes something that can be gained, lost, restored, or promoted.

Cultural Worldview

The metaphors reveal the influence of globalization, capitalism, and modern rationalism on religious understanding. Traditional spirituality is interpreted through commercial and scientific discourse, reflecting contemporary Muslim experiences in modern societies.

3. HONOR AND AUTHORITY AS PHYSICAL FORCE

Textual Evidence

“Honor and misery comes from weakness” (Masood, 2021, p. 256).

“He shot them both in the head” (Masood, 2021, p. 307).

“Abu struck my right cheek” (Masood, 2021, p. 128).



Conceptual Metaphors

HONOR IS STRENGTH

AUTHORITY IS PHYSICAL DOMINATION

MORAL CONTROL IS VIOLENCE

Source Domain

Physical force, bodily power

Target Domain

Honor, morality, authority

Cognitive Worldview

Social respect is mentally associated with strength, while weakness signifies dishonor.

Physical power becomes a conceptual measure of moral authority.

Cultural Worldview

The metaphors expose honor-based cultural systems where authority is legitimized through force and social reputation. Violence appears as a mechanism for maintaining social order and family prestige.

4. IDENTITY / RELIGION AS CLOTHING

Textual Evidence

“She entered the prayer hall wearing a full niqab” (Masood, 2021, p. 184).

“Ditch the niqab” (Masood, 2021, p. 326).

“Commanded to wear it” (Masood, 2021, p. 131).

Conceptual Metaphors

IDENTITY IS CLOTHING

MODESTY IS COVERING

RELIGION IS EXTERNAL APPEARANCE

Source Domain

Clothing and bodily covering

Target Domain

Religious identity

Cognitive Worldview

Identity is understood as something visible and wearable. Religious affiliation becomes a tangible object that can be adopted, removed, or imposed.

Cultural Worldview

The metaphors reflect ongoing cultural debates regarding gender, modesty, religious freedom, and personal agency within Muslim communities.

5. MODERNITY / CITY AS A NATURAL DISASTER

Textual Evidence

“Karachi was screaming at its inhabitants” (Masood, 2021, p. 11).

“The city drowns a little” (Masood, 2021, p. 14).

“Under siege by its own climate” (Masood, 2021, p. 10).

Conceptual Metaphors

CITY IS A LIVING CREATURE

MODERNITY IS FLOOD

ENVIRONMENT IS WAR



Source Domain

Natural disasters, warfare, living organisms

Target Domain

Urban life and society

Cognitive Worldview

The city is perceived as an active force that shapes human experience. Individuals are conceptualized as vulnerable to larger social and environmental powers.

Cultural Worldview

The metaphors represent anxieties about urbanization, environmental crises, and social instability in contemporary South Asian societies.

6. TIME AND CULTURE AS CYCLICAL RETURN

Textual Evidence

“Return to the way things were” (Masood, 2021, p. 20).

Conceptual Metaphor

HISTORY IS A CIRCLE

CULTURE IS RETURN

Source Domain

Movement in a circle

Target Domain

History and culture

Cognitive Worldview

Progress is understood as returning to a previous state rather than moving forward. The past becomes a reference point for understanding the present.

Cultural Worldview

This metaphor reflects conservative cultural attitudes that idealize tradition and seek continuity with earlier social values.

7. MEMORY AND IDENTITY AS SMELL

Textual Evidence

“The smell of Pakistani home” (Masood, 2021, p. 231).

“Assault their noses with memories of old curry” (Masood, 2021, p. 231).

Conceptual Metaphors

MEMORY IS SCENT

CULTURAL IDENTITY IS SMELL

NOSTALGIA IS PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE

Source Domain

Smell and bodily sensation

Target Domain

Memory and identity

Cognitive Worldview

Abstract memories are understood through sensory experiences. Identity is embodied and emotionally experienced rather than merely remembered.



Cultural Worldview

The metaphors highlight the significance of homeland, migration, nostalgia, and diasporic belonging in shaping Muslim immigrant identities.

8. POLITICS AS A VOLATILE MACHINE OR CHEMICAL REACTION

Textual Evidence

“Politics had been unpredictable and volatile” (Masood, 2021, p. 249).

“Kalashnikov effect” (Masood, 2021, p. 19).

Conceptual Metaphors

POLITICS IS A CHEMICAL REACTION

SOCIETY IS A WEAPONIZED MACHINE

Source Domain

Chemistry, weapons, machinery

Target Domain

Politics and society

Cognitive Worldview

Political systems are conceptualized as unstable forces capable of sudden reactions and destruction.

Cultural Worldview

The metaphors reflect collective experiences of political instability, militarization, conflict, and insecurity in Pakistan and the broader Muslim world.

9. ORIENTALISM AND DIFFERENCE AS OTHERNESS

Textual Evidence

The novel repeatedly engages with Western perceptions of Muslims as culturally different, exotic, or backward.

Conceptual Metaphors

THE EAST IS AN EXOTIC SPACE

DIFFERENCE IS STRANGENESS

CULTURE IS A FIXED OBJECT

Source Domain

Distance, mystery, abnormality

Target Domain

Eastern cultures and Muslim identities

Cognitive Worldview

Cultural difference is understood through binaries such as East/West, modern/traditional, and civilized/backward.

Cultural Worldview

These metaphors expose Orientalist ideologies that stereotype Muslim societies while simultaneously showing how characters negotiate and resist such representations.

The conceptual metaphors in *The Bad Muslim Discount* show how people understand the world through simple mental patterns. At the cognitive level, the novel presents ideas such as freedom as movement, control as confinement, religion as exchange, honor as strength, identity as clothing, politics as instability, and memory as sensory experience. These metaphors shape how characters think about their experiences in



everyday life. At the cultural level, these metaphors reflect important social realities, including patriarchal control over women, honor-based social systems, the tension between tradition and modernity, experiences of migration and displacement, the influence of capitalism on religious thinking, political instability, and resistance to Western stereotypes about Muslim identities. Overall, these metaphors are not just decorative language; they are ways of thinking that help construct meaning in both individual cognition and wider culture. This supports Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) view that metaphor is a basic part of human thought and cultural understanding.

Construction of cognitive and cultural worldviews in the novel

Discussion

4.1 Control / Discipline as Confinement or Imprisonment

The novel frequently represents control through physical restriction and confinement. For example, "*He locked her in a room and didn't feed her for three days*" (Masood, 2021, p. 259) and "*Stay trapped here, with your legs closed*" (p. 146) show that discipline is expressed through imprisonment. Another statement, "*I had been permitted to leave home*" (p. 131), shows freedom as movement.

This indicates that abstract ideas like control and freedom are understood through physical space and motion. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), human beings understand abstract concepts through bodily experiences. Cognitively, freedom is movement, while control is restriction. Culturally, this metaphor reflects patriarchal structures where authority is exercised over women through surveillance, restriction, and obedience.

4.2 Morality / Religion as a Transactional System

The novel also presents religion as a system of exchange. For instance, "*Regain God's favor and return to the glory*" (Masood, 2021, p. 20) and "*Islam has a marketing problem*" (p. 8) show religious belief in commercial terms. Similarly, "*What chemical formula could compete with such a divine endorsement?*" (p. 20) connects religion with science.

These examples show that faith is understood through economic, scientific, and marketing frameworks. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain that abstract ideas are understood through familiar systems such as trade and exchange. Cognitively, religion becomes a system of gain, loss, and reward. Culturally, this reflects modern influences of capitalism and globalization on religious thinking, where spirituality is increasingly interpreted through rational and commercial language.

4.3 Honor and Authority as Physical Force

Honor in the novel is strongly linked with strength and violence. The statement "*Honor and misery comes from weakness*" (Masood, 2021, p. 256), along with violent actions such as "*He shot them both in the head*" (p. 307), shows that honor is associated with physical power.

This suggests that moral values are understood through bodily strength. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that abstract moral concepts are structured through physical experience. Cognitively, honor is strength, and weakness is dishonor. Culturally, this reflects honor-based societies where authority and social respect are maintained through force, violence, and dominance.



4.4 Identity / Religion as Clothing

Identity is frequently represented as clothing in the novel. For example, “*She entered the prayer hall wearing a full niqab*” (Masood, 2021, p. 184), “*Ditch the niqab*” (p. 326), and “*Commanded to wear it*” (p. 131) show that identity is something that can be worn, removed, or imposed.

This reflects a cognitive understanding of identity as external and visible. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), people understand identity through physical objects and everyday experiences. Culturally, this metaphor reflects debates about religious dress, gender identity, and personal freedom in Muslim societies, where identity is often socially controlled rather than individually defined.

4.5 Modern Society / City as a Natural Force

The novel portrays urban life as a powerful and destructive force. The lines “*Karachi was screaming at its inhabitants*” (Masood, 2021, p. 11) and “*The city drowns a little*” (p. 14) show the city as alive and overwhelming.

This means that society is not controlled by humans but acts as a force itself. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state that complex systems are often understood through natural experiences such as disasters or conflict. Cognitively, the city is a dangerous force. Culturally, this reflects anxiety about urbanization, environmental stress, and social instability in South Asian contexts.

4.5 Time and Culture as Cyclical Return

The idea “*Return to the way things were*” (Masood, 2021, p. 20) shows that time is understood as a return to the past rather than forward movement.

Cognitively, this reflects a circular understanding of time. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain that people often conceptualize abstract time through movement patterns. Culturally, this reflects conservative thinking that idealizes tradition and resists modern change, emphasizing continuity with the past.

4.6 Memory and Identity as Sensory Experience

Memory is strongly linked with smell and physical sensation. The phrases “*The smell of Pakistani home*” (Masood, 2021, p. 231) and “*assault their noses with memories of old curry*” (p. 231) show that memory is experienced through senses.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that human cognition is embodied, meaning thought is based on physical experience. Cognitively, memory is sensory and emotional. Culturally, this reflects diasporic identity where migrants maintain emotional connections with homeland through food, smell, and sensory memory.

4.7 Politics as Volatile System or Machine

Politics is described as unstable and dangerous. The phrase “*Politics had been unpredictable and volatile*” (Masood, 2021, p. 249) and “*Kalashnikov effect*” (p. 19) show political systems as explosive and weaponized.

Cognitively, politics is understood as chemical reaction or mechanical explosion. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain that abstract systems are understood through physical processes. Culturally, this reflects political instability, militarization, and insecurity in the region.

4.8 Orientalism and Cultural Otherness

The novel also reflects ideas of cultural difference and Orientalist representation. Western views often present Muslims as “different” or “exotic” (McLeod, 2000). This creates a binary between East and West.



Cognitively, this constructs a worldview of “us vs. them.” Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain that metaphors shape categorization and perception. Culturally, this reflects Orientalist ideology that stereotypes Eastern societies, although the novel also challenges these fixed representations.

The analysis shows that conceptual metaphors in *The Bad Muslim Discount* clearly structure how meaning is created in the novel. The main findings are that control is understood as confinement, religion as exchange and system, honor as physical strength, identity as clothing, society as a natural disaster, time as cyclical return, memory as sensory experience, politics as volatility, and cultural difference as otherness. These metaphors show that abstract ideas are understood through simple physical and everyday experiences. Overall, they shape both the cognitive worldview (how characters think and understand the world) and the cultural worldview (how society is represented and organized).

This chapter shows that conceptual metaphors play an important role in building meaning in *The Bad Muslim Discount*. Following Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphor is not just language decoration but a basic part of human thinking. The novel presents a world where ideas like freedom, religion, identity, and politics are understood through physical actions and cultural experiences. These metaphors help show how language shapes both human thought and social and cultural beliefs in contemporary Muslim diasporic fiction.

Findings

The study found that conceptual metaphors systematically structure the representation of social reality in *The Bad Muslim Discount*. Control is frequently conceptualized as confinement and restriction, while religion is represented through metaphors of exchange, validation, and commodification. Honor is closely associated with physical force and domination, and identity is understood through clothing and bodily representation. Similarly, politics and modern society are conceptualized as unstable and often destructive forces. Memory and cultural belonging are expressed through sensory experiences such as smell and feeling. Overall, the study shows that these metaphors construct both cognitive and cultural worldviews that reflect broader social ideologies present in the novel.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that conceptual metaphors play a significant role in shaping cognitive and cultural worldviews in *The Bad Muslim Discount*. Through metaphorical mappings, the novel constructs understandings of religion, identity, honor, politics, gender, and migration. These metaphors not only reflect individual cognitive processes but also reveal broader cultural assumptions and ideological structures. The findings confirm Lakoff and Johnson's argument that metaphor is central to human thought and cultural understanding. Consequently, conceptual metaphor analysis provides valuable insights into how literary texts encode social realities and cultural meanings.



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Authors' Contributions

Maham Zaib, Ali Hassan, and Eman Afridi contributed to the research and preparation of the manuscript as follows:

Maham Zaib (First Author): Conceived the study, developed the research objectives, conducted the literature review, collected and analyzed the data, and drafted the manuscript.

Ali Hassan (Second Author): Contributed to the theoretical framework, data analysis and interpretation, reviewed relevant literature, and critically revised the manuscript.

Eman Afridi (Third Author): Contributed to data validation, interpretation of findings, manuscript review and editing, and provided overall academic support during the study.

All authors contributed to the finalization of the manuscript, approved the final version, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.