
TRANSCENDENTAL SEMIOTICS IN THE POETRY OF MIAN MUHAMMAD BUKSH: A STUDY OF SUFI METAPHYSICS

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DOI: (<https://doi.org/10.71146/kjmrr916>)

Article Info



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Abstract

This study undertakes an existential semiotic analysis of Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry through its English translations, examining how linguistic structures, symbolic motifs, and allegorical forms convey metaphysical and transcendental meanings. Employing a qualitative and exploratory research design, the study draws on primary poetic texts alongside critical scholarly literature to interpret the interplay of signs, signifiers, and their existential signified. An integrated framework of semiotics and existential philosophy guides the analysis, enabling a systematic exploration of how the poetry mediates concepts such as unity, divine love, and the unseen while reflecting the cultural and linguistic contexts of Bakhsh's poetry. The findings reveal that Bakhsh's poetry is densely layered with symbolic and allegorical elements, which operate both as cultural markers and as conduits for spiritual and metaphysical reflection. Patterns in imagery, metaphor, and semiotic structures demonstrate a deliberate strategy through which the poet communicates existential ideas, engaging readers in contemplative and transformative experiences. The analysis further illustrates how the fusion of vernacular symbols with universal metaphysical themes allows the poetry to function on multiple planes enhancing interpretive richness and philosophical depth. The study concludes that applying an existential semiotic lens provides a robust framework for uncovering the multidimensional meanings embedded in Bakhsh's poetry. This approach illuminates the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and transcendence, offering nuanced insights into the poet's thematic concerns and stylistic choices. Beyond contributing to Bakhsh scholarship, the research demonstrates the value of combining semiotic and philosophical perspectives in literary studies, presenting a methodological model that can be applied to the analysis of other mystic or symbolically rich literatures. Overall, the study underscores the enduring relevance of Bakhsh's work as a medium for existential inquiry and highlights its capacity to bridge cultural specificity with universal human concerns.

Keywords:

Existential Semiotics; Mian Muhammad Bakhsh; Symbolism and Allegory; Metaphysical Poetry; English Translations

1. INTRODUCTION

Mian Muhammad Bukhsh (1830–1907) stands as one of the most revered Sufi poets of the Punjabi language, celebrated for his spiritually profound and metaphysically rich poetry. His magnum opus, *Saif-ul-Malook*, is not merely a literary masterpiece but a spiritual guide that transcends the boundaries of ordinary language to convey the deepest truths of Sufi metaphysics. Bukhsh's poetry is a tapestry of symbols, metaphors, and allegories that articulate the Sufi worldview, particularly the concepts of divine love (Ishq-e-Haqiqi), the unity of existence (Wahdat-ul-Wujud), and the soul's journey (Suluk) toward spiritual enlightenment. This study, titled "Transcendental Semiotics in the Poetry of Mian Muhammad Bukhsh: A Sufi's Metaphysics," will seek to explore how Bukhsh's poetry employs symbolic language to bridge the material and spiritual realms, offering readers a pathway to transcendental understanding. At its core, this research is an inquiry into the transcendental semiotics of Bukhsh's poetry. Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, provides a framework for analyzing how language conveys meaning. When applied to Sufi poetry, semiotics becomes transcendental, as it examines how symbols and metaphors express metaphysical truths that go beyond ordinary human experience. In Bukhsh's work, symbols such as the beloved, the wine, and the journey are not merely literary devices but profound representations of spiritual realities. For instance, the beloved often symbolizes the Divine, the wine represents spiritual intoxication, and the journey reflects the soul's quest for union with God. These symbols are deeply rooted in Sufi metaphysics, a branch of Sufi thought that deals with the nature of reality, existence, and the divine. Central to Sufi metaphysics are concepts such as the unity of existence (Wahdat-ul-Wujud), which posits that all creation is a manifestation of the Divine, and divine love (Ishq-e-Haqiqi), which is the ultimate purpose of human existence. Despite the spiritual and literary significance of Bukhsh's poetry, there is a lack of scholarly attention to the semiotic structures that underpin his metaphysical expressions. Existing studies often focus on the thematic or linguistic aspects of his work, overlooking the intricate interplay of signs, symbols, and metaphors that convey transcendental truths. This research will address this gap by employing transcendental semiotics which is a framework that examines how signs and symbols convey metaphysical truths, to analyze Bukhsh's poetry. By doing so, the study aims to uncover how his use of symbolic language bridges the material and spiritual realms, offering readers a glimpse into the Sufi metaphysical universe.

1.1. Background of the study

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, provides a valuable lens for understanding the multilayered meanings in literary texts. When applied to Sufi poetry, semiotics uncovers how metaphysical and transcendental ideas are encoded in symbolic language. Mian Muhammad Bukhsh's *Saif-ul-Malook* is a treasure trove of such semiotic richness, where the poet's metaphysical vision is interwoven with linguistic artistry. Sufism, as a spiritual tradition, emphasizes the transcendence of the soul, the oneness of existence (*wahdat-ul-wujood*), and the journey toward divine truth. These themes permeate Bukhsh's poetry, where he employs nature, myth, and allegory to articulate complex metaphysical concepts. His use of semiotics enables him to communicate these ideas effectively, transcending the limitations of language and cultural

specificity. Previous studies on Mian Muhammad Bukhsh's work have primarily focused on its thematic and philosophical dimensions, with limited attention to the semiotic structures that underpin his metaphysical ideas. This study bridges this gap by adopting a transcendental semiotic approach, providing a comprehensive analysis of how Bukhsh's metaphysical worldview is constructed and communicated through his poetic symbols.

Many of the previously conducted researches reflect a sustained engagement with semiotics and symbolism within Sufi poetry but shows a fragmented understanding of transcendental semiotics in the works of Mian Muhammad Bakhsh. Ahmed (2017) provided a valuable examination of semiotics in Sufi poetry by emphasizing symbolic language and interpretive codes. However, the study paid only marginal attention to Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, thereby leaving his unique use of transcendental symbols underexplored. Khan (2019) expanded the horizon by examining metaphysics in Punjabi literature and foregrounding metaphysical themes as a central element of Sufi poetics. Yet this work did not undertake a semiotic analysis, which limits the possibility of linking metaphysical concepts to linguistic and symbolic structures in Bakhsh's poetry. Similarly, Fatima (2021) concentrated on Sufi symbolism in poetry, analyzing allegorical symbols and their religious undertones. Nevertheless, this research largely avoided an in-depth discussion of transcendental aspects, thereby missing the potential to locate symbolic language within a broader semiotic framework of the unseen, which is highly relevant to Bakhsh. Malik (2020) made a significant contribution by focusing on nature imagery in Sufi texts and demonstrated how natural symbols convey spiritual states. However, the study overlooked the philosophical implications that transcend natural images and move toward metaphysical realities, a movement evident in Bakhsh's poetry.

Hussain (2018) introduced the concept of spiritual semiotics and offered a detailed account of semiotic structures in Sufi writings. Yet this work did not extend its analytical framework to regional texts such as Punjabi poetry, which limits its applicability to Bakhsh's corpus. Chaudhry (2022) pursued unity and love in Sufi philosophy and concentrated on metaphysical unity as an interpretive principle. However, this philosophical approach lacked the linguistic depth necessary to connect transcendental meaning with semiotic forms, a lacuna that Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry invites scholars to address. Furthermore, Zafar (2016) in his critical analysis of *Saif-ul-Malook* provided important thematic insights but offered only a limited semiotic exploration. Since *Saif-ul-Malook* is central to understanding Bakhsh, this gap underscores the need for a transcendental semiotic analysis that situates its symbols within both linguistic and metaphysical domains. Rizvi (2023) addressed allegory in Eastern poetics and illuminated allegorical techniques as a vital dimension of meaning-making. Nonetheless, this research did not engage deeply with cultural specificity, which is indispensable for analyzing Punjabi Sufi poetry in its own transcendental register.

In another study, Ahmed (2020) approached symbolism in Punjabi Sufi poetry and emphasized its cultural relevance, which is essential for contextualizing Bakhsh's work. However, this study remained within a single disciplinary lens and thus could not offer an interdisciplinary perspective that brings together linguistics, metaphysics, and semiotics. Finally, Patel (2021) examined linguistic structures in Sufi works and documented stylistic features but did not integrate transcendental semiotics into the analysis. This omission highlights how linguistic and stylistic studies of Sufi texts remain disconnected from the metaphysical aspects of their sign

systems. Taken together, these studies demonstrate a cumulative yet incomplete understanding of the semiotic processes underlying Sufi poetry. They reveal a gradual move from general semiotic and symbolic analyses toward more contextual and thematic approaches but consistently show gaps in integrating transcendental semiotics, particularly in the works of Mian Muhammad Bakhsh. A meta-synthesis of these findings indicates that a comprehensive exploration of transcendental semiotics in his poetry requires three moves. First, it must build upon the symbolic and allegorical analyses already offered. Second, it must integrate metaphysical and linguistic dimensions rather than treating them as separate domains. Third, it must situate Bakhsh's work within the Punjabi cultural and spiritual context while maintaining a comparative framework with other Sufi texts. Only such an approach can reveal the layered nature of transcendental semiotics in Bakhsh's poetry and address the limitations evident in the existing literature.

Table 1 Salient findings of the previous studies

No	Author/s	Year of Publication	Topic	Findings	Gaps (if any)
1	Ahmed, R.	2017	Semiotics in Sufi Poetry	Symbolic language.	Limited focus on Mian Muhammad Bukhsh.
2	Khan, A.	2019	Metaphysics in Punjabi Literature	Explored metaphysical themes.	Lacked semiotic analysis.
3	Fatima, N.	2021	Sufi Symbolism in Poetry	Studied allegorical symbols.	Limited focus on transcendental aspects.
4	Malik, T.	2020	Nature Imagery in Sufi Texts	Analyzed natural symbolism.	Ignored philosophical implications.
5	Hussain, F.	2018	Spiritual Semiotics	Semiotic structures.	Limited application to regional texts.
6	Chaudhry, H.	2022	Unity and Love in Sufi Philosophy	Focused on metaphysical unity.	Minimal linguistic analysis.
7	Zafar, A.	2016	Saif-ul-Malook: Critical Analysis	Provided thematic insights.	Limited semiotic exploration.
8	Rizvi, L.	2023	Allegory in Eastern Poetics	Studied allegorical techniques.	Limited cultural specificity.
9	Ahmed, F.	2020	Symbolism in Punjabi Sufi Poetry	Explored cultural relevance.	Lacked interdisciplinary perspective.
10	Patel, R.	2021	Linguistic Structures in Sufi Works	Focused on stylistic features.	Ignored transcendental semiotics.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

While Mian Muhammad Bukhsh's poetry is celebrated for its metaphysical depth and linguistic beauty, the semiotic structures underpinning his transcendental themes remain underexplored. Existing studies have largely focused on thematic and philosophical dimensions without analyzing how signs and symbols communicate his metaphysical ideas. This study addresses this gap by employing a transcendental semiotic framework to analyze the interplay between metaphysical concepts and poetic symbols in Bukhsh's work.

Sufi poetry in South Asia has always functioned as more than aesthetic expression; it is a living archive of spiritual, cultural, and linguistic traditions. Within this tradition, the works of Mian Muhammad Bakhsh stand out for their rich use of symbols, allegories, and metaphysical imagery that transcend literal meaning. Yet, despite decades of scholarship on Sufi symbolism, metaphysics, and allegory, there remains an uneven understanding of how transcendental meanings are produced through semiotic processes in his poetry. Existing studies either concentrate on symbolic language without addressing metaphysical depth, or engage metaphysics without a sustained linguistic or semiotic analysis. The purpose of the present study emerges from this very lacuna. It seeks to move beyond partial readings of Bakhsh's work by tracing how transcendental semiotics operates within his verses, particularly in *Saif-ul-Malook*. This approach does not treat symbolism, language, and metaphysics as isolated dimensions but as a dynamic system of meaning. By doing so, it brings together strands of scholarship on semiotics, Sufi metaphysics, and Punjabi cultural context that have remained fragmented in previous research.

The gap identified in earlier scholarship is twofold. First, researchers have either neglected Mian Muhammad Bakhsh or approached him only thematically, overlooking the deeper semiotic logic of his transcendental imagery. Second, even when symbolism has been discussed, the focus has been narrowly linguistic or purely philosophical, rarely integrating the two. This study addresses the gap by applying a transcendental semiotic framework that interprets symbols, metaphors, and allegories in their full metaphysical and cultural resonance. Such an approach honors Bakhsh as both a regional and a universal voice, showing how his poetry articulates the unseen through linguistic forms. By engaging with his poetry through this lens, the study not only fills an academic gap but also revives the human dimension of Sufi poetics. It shows how readers, scholars, and communities can find ethical and spiritual guidance encoded within the very signs and symbols of his verse. This humanized perspective ensures that the analysis does not remain an abstract exercise but connects with the lived experiences, aspirations, and spiritual yearnings of its audience.

1.3 Thesis Statement

This study argues that Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry, particularly *Saif-ul-Malook*, enacts a transcendental semiotics in which linguistic structures, cultural symbols, and metaphysical themes converge to produce meanings that surpass literal and allegorical interpretation. By applying an integrated framework of semiotic and metaphysical analysis, the thesis demonstrates that his poetry constitutes not only a cornerstone of Punjabi Sufi literature but also a model for understanding how language mediates the unseen.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1 What key symbols, metaphors, and allegorical forms appear in Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry, and how do they signify transcendental meanings beyond their literal or cultural contexts?
- 2 How do the linguistic and semiotic structures of Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry mediate metaphysical ideas such as unity, love, and the unseen, and what patterns emerge when these structures are systematically examined?
- 3 In what ways can an integrated framework of semiotics and metaphysics illuminate the interplay of culture, language, and transcendence in Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry, and how does this approach address the gaps left by previous studies?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two interconnected theoretical frameworks: Semiotic Theory and Sufi Hermeneutics. These frameworks provide the necessary tools to interpret the symbolic language in *Saif-ul-Malook* and reveal its spiritual and transcendental dimensions. **Semiotic** theory, developed by scholars like Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, examines how signs and symbols convey meaning (Saussure, 1916; Peirce, 1931-58). Saussure emphasized the relationship between the signifier (the form of a word or symbol) and the signified (the concept it represents), while Peirce introduced a triadic model including the representamen (sign), interpretant (meaning), and object (referent) (Chandler, 2007). In this study, semiotic theory will be applied to analyze how Mian Muhammad Bakhsh uses symbolic language such as the journey, the beloved, water, and light to articulate deeper spiritual meanings. This framework allows for a systematic exploration of how the poem's symbols function as vehicles for metaphysical and transcendental truths. This interpretive framework is rooted in the mystical tradition of Sufism and focuses on uncovering hidden, esoteric meanings in spiritual texts (Chittick, 1989; Nasr, 2007). Influenced by thinkers such as Ibn Arabi and Jalal ad-Din Rumi, Sufi hermeneutics emphasizes the multilayered nature of meaning, where apparent (zahir) interpretations reveal outward truths while hidden (batin) interpretations disclose deeper spiritual realities (Corbin, 1969).

Theoretical Lens



Transcendental Semiotics Framework
(integrating semiotics + metaphysics + culture)



Data Sources

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetry
Primary text: Saif-ul-Malook
Context: Punjabi Sufi tradition

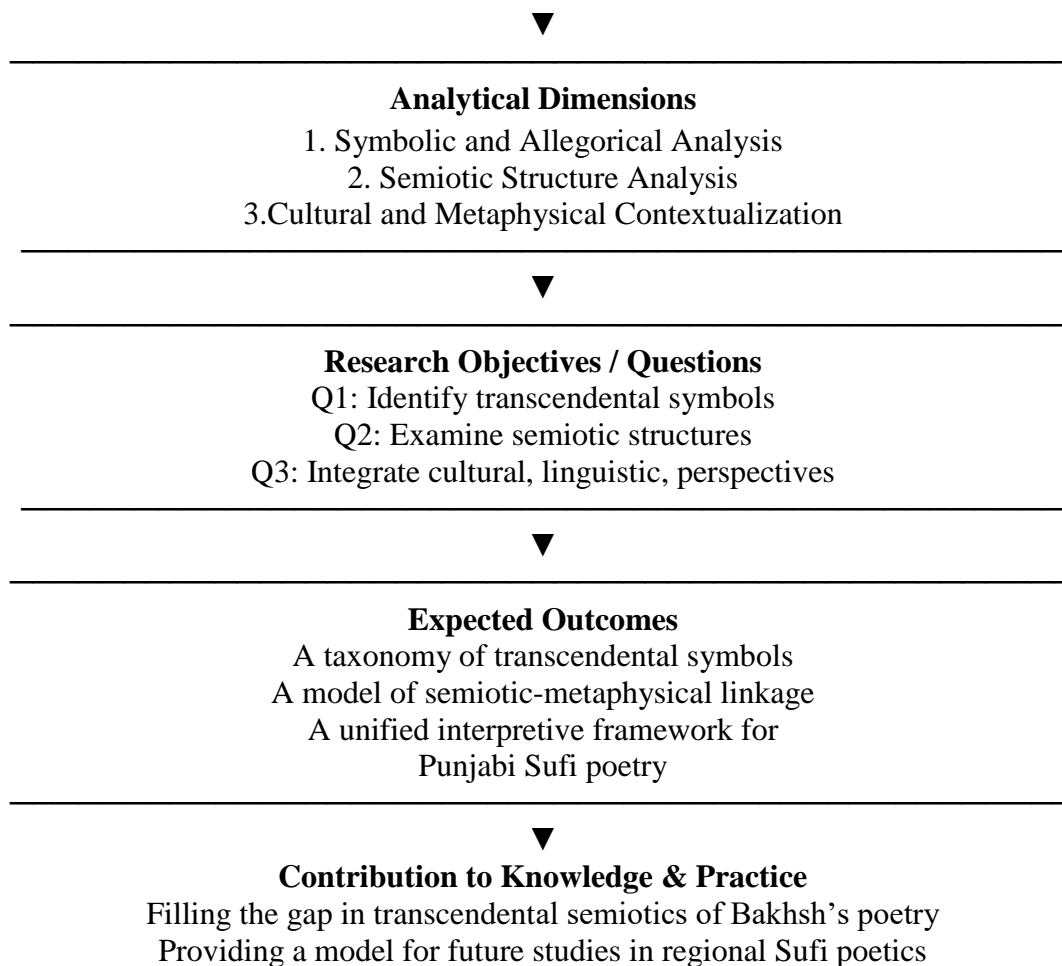


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Existential Semiotics

Existential semiotics is not merely an academic discipline that seeks to understand how human beings, as meaning making creatures, navigate a world often perceived as silent or indifferent. It represents a fusion of two powerful currents of thought: the structural analysis of signs from semiotics and the deep inquiry into human existence from existential philosophy. At its heart, it asks a fundamental question: how do we create and experience meaning (the semiotic) within the concrete, often ambiguous, and finite conditions of our existence (the existential)?

2.2 The Origin: Eero Tarasti and the Finnish Synthesis

The term "existential semiotics" was systematically developed and coined by the Finnish semiotician Eero Tarasti. While its philosophical roots stretch back centuries, its formalization as a distinct branch of semiotic theory is largely a late 20th century endeavor, crystallized in Tarasti's seminal work, *Existential Semiotics* (2000). Tarasti was deeply influenced by the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure and its subsequent development by the Paris School of semiotics, particularly Algirdas Julien Greimas. However, he found structuralist models, with

their emphasis on static systems and binary oppositions, insufficient to capture the dynamic, lived experience of meaning. Tarasti turned to existentialist philosophy, drawing primarily from Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Soren Kierkegaard, to inject a sense of agency, temporality, and moral weight into semiotic theory. He argued that signs are not just elements in a closed linguistic system but are instruments through which a human subject, a *Dasein* (Heidegger's term for "being-there"), engages with the world, makes choices, and constructs their identity. The origin of existential semiotics, therefore, lies in this deliberate and creative synthesis: it is the application of existentialism's concerns to the domain of semiotic analysis.

2.3 Core Characteristics: The Dynamics of Meaning

Existential semiotics is characterized by several key principles that distinguish it from more formalist approaches. First, it posits a subject-centered model. The human subject is not a passive decoder of pre-existing signs but an active, embodied agent who *produces* meaning. This subject is always situated in a specific historical, cultural, and personal context, and their understanding of signs is shaped by their "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1962). Second, it introduces a dynamic process of meaning formation, often conceptualized through a dialectic of the *Moi* and the *Soi*. Tarasti (2000) adapts these terms from Sartre. The *Moi* represents the pre-significant, authentic self, the demesne of pure potentiality, inner feelings, and choices not yet expressed in the social world. The *Soi* is the social self, the identity constructed through signs, roles, and language as we interact with others and institutions. Meaning arises from the constant tension and movement between the inner world of the *Moi* and the external, sign-mediated world of the *Soi*. Third, it emphasizes temporality and transcendence. Meaning is not static; it unfolds in time. The subject is projected towards a future, striving to transcend their current state. This process involves what Tarasti calls "transcendence," where the subject goes beyond the established systems of signs (the "Dasein") to create new meanings, challenging societal norms and affirming their freedom (Tarasti, 2000). This introduces an ethical dimension, as sign making becomes an act of responsibility.

2.4 Different Kinds of Existentialism

While existential semiotics is a cohesive theory, its application leads to different analytical emphases or "kinds" of inquiry. One primary application is in narrative analysis. Following Greimas but infusing his actantial model with existential concerns, Tarasti examines how stories reflect the fundamental struggles of human existence. Characters are not just functions in a plot but embody existential projects, choices, and the desire for transcendence. Analyzing a novel or a film becomes an exploration of how characters navigate the conflict between their authentic *Moi* and the demands of the social *Soi*. Another kind is the analysis of artistic and musical expression. Tarasti, a renowned musicologist, has extensively applied existential semiotics to music. He argues that a musical piece is not just a structure of notes but also a trace of the composers and performers existential journey. Musical themes can represent the *Moi*, while their development and variation within musical forms can signify the interaction with the social *Soi* (Tarasti, 1994). This approach humanizes art, seeing it as a testimony to the human condition. A further development can be seen in what might be called societal existential semiotics. This applies the *Moi/Soi* dialectic to collective entities. A community or culture can have an authentic spirit (*Moi*) that is in constant negotiation with its external representations, stereotypes, and

political structures (*Soi*). This provides a powerful tool for analyzing cultural identity, nationalism, and the dynamics of social change. Existential semiotics emerges as a deeply humanized theory. It refuses to see meaning as an abstract code and instead grounds it in the flesh-and-blood reality of human life with all its anxiety, freedom, and desire for authenticity. By bridging the analytical rigor of semiotics with the profound existential questions of philosophy, it offers a comprehensive framework for understanding that every act of communication, every story told, and every work of art created is, ultimately, part of the enduring human quest to find and make meaning in a world we did not choose. It reminds us that we are, in Sartre's famous words, "condemned to be free," and our use of signs is a primary expression of that condemned freedom

Table 2 Kinds of Existentialism

Kind of Existentialism	Central Focus	Key Concepts	Major Proponents & Citations
Christian Existentialism	This strand posits that a passionate, subjective relationship with God is the foundation for an authentic existence. It argues that faith is not a rational conclusion but a subjective "leap" in the face of objective uncertainty. The individual stands alone before God, and this relationship defines their freedom and responsibility.	<p>The Leap of Faith: A commitment to belief in God that transcends rational proof and is rooted in personal, passionate inwardness (Kierkegaard, 1846).</p> <p>Subjectivity is Truth: Truth is not an objective fact but is found in the manner and passion with which an individual relates themselves to it (Kierkegaard, 1846).</p> <p>Angst/Anxiety: A feeling of dread arising from the realization of one's radical freedom and the immense responsibility of choosing one's path, including the choice of faith.</p>	<p>Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855): Often called the "father of existentialism," his works like <i>Fear and Trembling</i> and <i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i> explore the individual's relationship with Christianity.</p> <p>Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973): A French philosopher who focused on concepts of hope, fidelity, and intersubjectivity (the "I-Thou" relationship) within a Christian context (Marcel, 1951).</p>
Atheistic Existentialism	This is perhaps the most well known form, which firmly rejects the existence of God. It takes the	Abandonment: The profound sense of being alone in the universe without a divine lawgiver to provide guidance or	Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980): His lecture <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i> and major work <i>Being and</i>

	<p>premise "existence precedes essence" to its logical conclusion: if there is no God to define human nature, then the individual is "condemned to be free," utterly responsible for creating their own values and meaning in a silent, indifferent universe.</p>	<p>justification for our choices (Sartre, 1946).</p> <p>Absurdity: The conflict between the human desire for meaning, clarity, and order and the mute, irrational randomness of the world (Camus, 1942).</p> <p>Authenticity/Bad Faith: The choice to embrace one's freedom and responsibility ("authenticity") versus the flight from it by hiding behind social roles or predetermined identities ("bad faith") (Sartre, 1943).</p>	<p><i>Nothingness</i> are foundational texts.</p> <p>Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986): Applied existentialist principles to ethics and feminism, arguing that one is not born a woman but becomes one, and that ethics arise from our obligation to foster the freedom of others (de Beauvoir, 1949).</p> <p>Albert Camus (1913-1960): While often rejecting the "existentialist" label, his philosophy of the "absurd" in <i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i> is a cornerstone of atheistic existential thought.</p>
<p>Phenomenological Existentialism</p>	<p>This approach grounds the analysis of human existence in the structures of lived experience, or "phenomena." It seeks to describe the world as it is directly experienced by a conscious being, rather than as an object of scientific inquiry. It focuses on the fundamental ways we are "in-the-world."</p>	<p>Being-in-the-World (Dasein): A unitary concept emphasizing that human existence is not a mind inside a body, but an active, engaged being already situated in a world of meaning and concern (Heidegger, 1927).</p> <p>Care (Sorge): The fundamental characteristic of human existence is that we <i>care</i> about our being and the world around us. Our existence is a project of concern.</p> <p>Thrownness: The fact that we find ourselves already thrown into a specific</p>	<p>Martin Heidegger (1889-1976): His monumental work <i>Being and Time</i> reoriented existential questions toward an analysis of the ontological structures of Dasein. His influence is immense, though his later work moved away from classic existentialism.</p> <p>Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961): Emphasized the role of the lived body as our primary way of being in the world, arguing that consciousness is always an embodied consciousness (Merleau-</p>

		historical, cultural, and familial context that shapes, but does not determine, our possibilities.	Ponty, 1945).
Existential Psychology	This kind applies existentialist themes to the understanding of the human mind and the practice of psychotherapy. It shifts the focus from pathological labels or deterministic drives to the client's confrontation with the universal "givens" of existence, such as death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness.	<p>The Four Ultimate Concerns: Death, freedom, existential isolation, and meaninglessness are identified as the primary sources of existential anxiety, which can manifest as psychological distress (Yalom, 1980).</p> <p>Will to Meaning: Viktor Frankl argued that the primary drive in human life is not pleasure but the discovery of meaning, even in the face of profound suffering (Frankl, 1946).</p> <p>Search for Authenticity: The therapeutic goal is often to help individuals live more authentically by confronting these concerns rather than avoiding them.</p>	<p>Viktor Frankl (1905-1997): Founder of Logotherapy, based on his experiences in Nazi concentration camps, detailed in <i>Man's Search for Meaning</i>.</p> <p>R.D. Laing (1927-1989): Interpreted mental illness, particularly schizophrenia, as a strategic response to an intolerable social and family situation.</p> <p>Irvin D. Yalom (b. 1931): A prominent contemporary psychiatrist who has systematized existential psychotherapy in works like <i>Existential Psychotherapy</i>.</p>

2.5 Kinds of Semiotics

Semiotics is the systematic study of signs, symbols, and signification (how meaning is created and communicated). It is based on the principle that meaning is not inherent in objects or words but is generated through relationships within a system of conventions. Semiotics provides an essential framework for understanding that meaning is constructed, not natural. By analyzing the components of signs, we can critically deconstruct cultural messages, ideologies, and power structures embedded in everything from language and advertising to social customs.

Table 3 Historical aspects of Semiotics

Aspect	Details & Key Figures	Explanation & Examples
1. Origin & Founders	Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)	A Swiss linguist who proposed Semiology (the study of signs within society). His work, published posthumously in <i>Course in General Linguistics</i> (1916), is the foundation of structuralism.
	Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914)	An American philosopher who developed a broader theory of Semiotic . His model is triadic (three-part) and emphasizes the process of interpretation.
2. Core Unit: The Sign	Saussure's Dyadic Model (2 Parts)	A sign is the combination of a form and a concept.
	<p>Signifier: The form the sign takes (sound, image, object). - <i>Example:</i> The word "T-R-E-E" or the sound of someone saying "tree."</p>	<p>- Signified: The mental concept the signifier evokes. - <i>Example:</i> The idea of a tree—a tall plant with a trunk and branches. - Key Concept: The link between signifier and signified is arbitrary (no natural connection; it's based on cultural convention).</p>
	Peirce's Triadic Model (3 Parts)	Meaning is a process of endless interpretation (semiosis).
	<p>Representamen: The form of the sign (equivalent to Signifier). Object: The thing to which the sign refers. Interpretant: The sense made of the sign in the interpreter's mind.</p>	- <i>Example:</i> Smoke (Representamen) points to fire (Object), which creates the understanding "there is a fire" (Interpretant). This Interpretant can become a new sign itself, continuing the chain.
3. Peirce's Typology of Signs	Based on the relationship between the Sign and its Object.	
	Icon	A sign that resembles its object. - <i>Examples:</i> A portrait, a map, a diagram, onomatopoeia like "boom."

	Index	A sign that has a direct, existential link to its object (causal or physical connection). - <i>Examples:</i> Smoke (index of fire), a thermometer (index of temperature), a knock on the door (index of a presence).
	Symbol	A sign whose relationship to its object is arbitrary and based purely on social convention or agreement (must be learned). - <i>Examples:</i> Language (the word "cat"), traffic lights (red=stop), national flags.
4. Layers of Meaning (Barthes)	Roland Barthes (1915-1980)	A French theorist who expanded semiotics into cultural myth and ideology.
	Denotation	The literal, descriptive, first-order meaning of a sign. It is the obvious, "common-sense" level. - <i>Example:</i> A photograph of a rose denotes a red flower with green stems and thorns.
	Connotation	The cultural, ideological, or emotional meanings associated with the sign. These are not fixed and can vary by culture and individual. - <i>Example:</i> The same rose connotes romance, passion, or love. In a different context, it could connote a political party (e.g., the Labour Party in the UK).
	Myth (Barthes's Concept)	When a connotation becomes so widespread and naturalized that it appears to be a denotation—a timeless, universal truth. Myths function to make cultural and historical values seem like nature itself. - <i>Example:</i> The myth of "French wine" being inherently the best naturalizes a cultural product as a superior, natural fact, obscuring its industrial and cultural construction.
5. Key Concepts	Arbitrariness (Saussure)	The principle that there is no necessary, intrinsic connection between a signifier and its signified. Meaning comes from difference within a system (e.g., "cat" is not "bat").

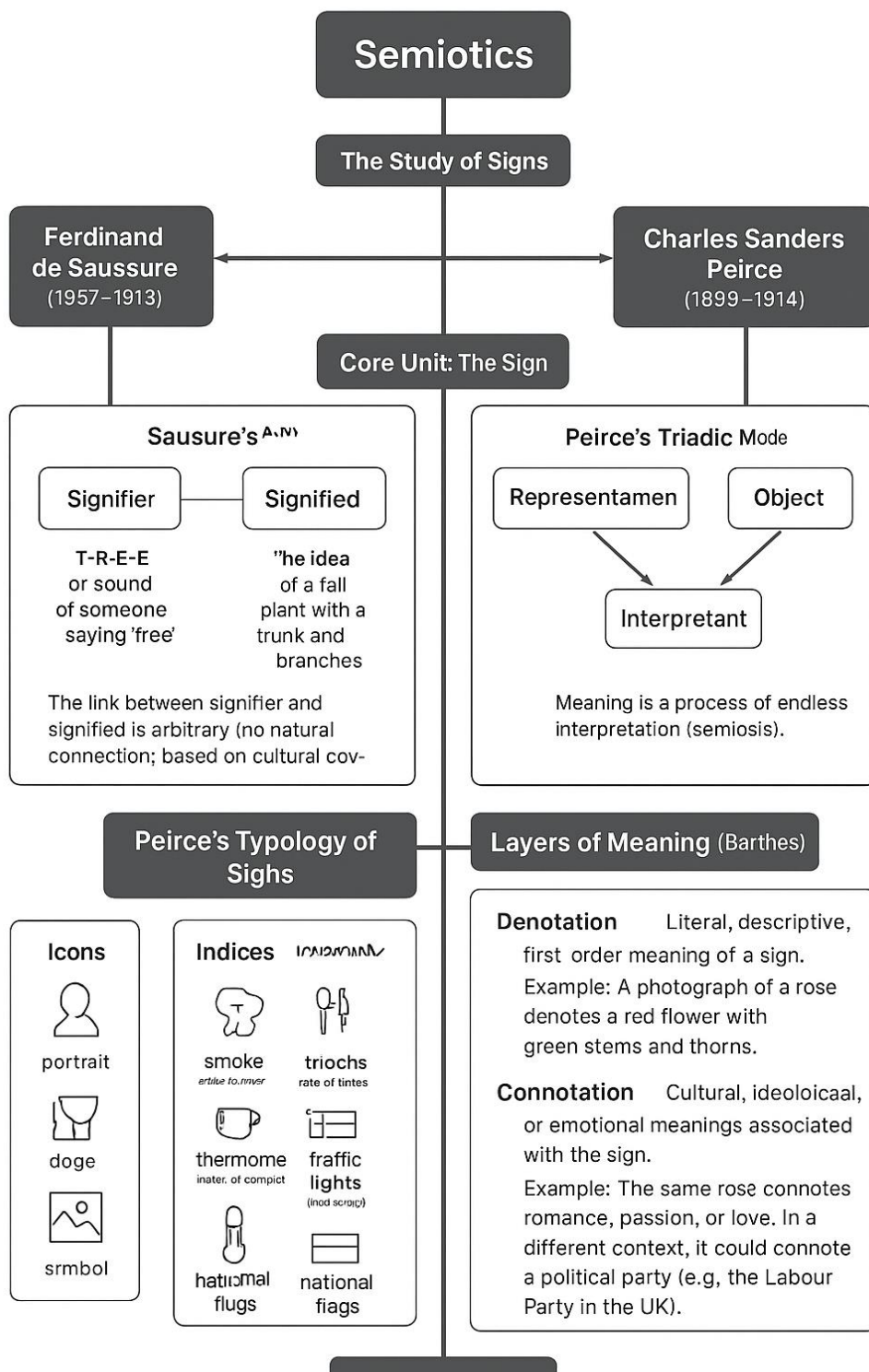


Figure 2 Semiotics and its typology

3. Theoretical Design

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh (1830–1907) was one of the most influential Punjabi Sufi poets. He composed poetry that bridged spirituality, folk narrative, and social instruction. According to available bibliographic sources, his corpus comprises about 18 books including masnavis, siharfis and qissas. Many of these were first circulated orally or in handwritten manuscripts before appearing in print in the late nineteenth century at various presses in Lahore, Jehlum and Sialkot. The table below compiles these works with the earliest documented printed editions (publisher and year) based on online resources such as APNA, Khoj (PU Lahore), and British Library/India Office catalogue entries. Following the table, a narrative section elaborates on the themes and significance of these works, presenting them in a humanized and contextualized manner.

Table 4 Description of primary data

No	Title	Earliest Known Printed Edition – Publisher (Year)
1	Saif-ul-Malook	Matba‘ Mustafai (Amir-ud-Din), Lahore — ca. 1865; India Office Library holds an 1869 copy
2	Mirza Sahiban	Persian Ghar (Lahore) — 1874
3	Sohni Mahiwal	Matbua Jehlum (date not given)
4	Shirin Farhad	Composition dated 1274 AH; modern Jehlum reprint 1978
5	Shah Mansur	India Office Library records 1868 edition
6	Sakhi Khavass Khan	Printed Lahore — 1875
7	Tuhfah-e-Miran	Matba‘ Mustafai (Amir-ud-Din), Lahore — 1296 AH (≈1879 AD)
8	Tuhfah-e-Rasuliyah	Printed in Lahore — 1288 AH (≈1871–72 AD)
9	Gulzar-e-Faqir / Fuqar-Nāma	Matba‘ Samdi, Sialkot — 1290 AH
10	Hidayat-ul-Muminin	Islamia Steam Press, Lahore — 1912 (later reprints in 1957 and 1980)
11	Panj Ganj	Taba (press), Jehlum — 1971 (modern printed edition)
12	Masnavi-e-Nirang-	Matba‘ Jehlum — (re)printed April 1964

	e-‘Ishq	
13	Si-Harfi / Sīharfī	Printed (Lahore) — 1872 (16-page pamphlet)
14	Bait Muhammad	Matba‘ Koh-e-Tor, Lahore — 25 Apr 1868 (16-page pamphlet)
15	Qissa Sheikh Sanaan	Matba‘ Islamia Press, Jehlum (date not shown online)
16	Heer Ranjha	Dept. of Auqaf AJK — 1980 (earlier edition untraced)
17	Yari (Persian)	No reliable printed edition found online
18	Commentary on Qasidah al-Burda	Mentioned in bibliographies; no printed edition located online

This compilation shows how Mian Muhammad Bakhsh’s works were deeply embedded in the printing culture of nineteenth-century Punjab. ‘Saif-ul-Malook,’ his most celebrated masnavi, appeared in Matba‘ Mustafai, Lahore around 1865 and reflects the mystical journey of the soul towards divine truth. ‘Mirza Sahiban,’ ‘Sohni Mahiwal,’ ‘Shirin Farhad,’ and ‘Heer Ranjha’ demonstrate his engagement with Punjabi and Persian folk romances, which he infused with spiritual lessons. Works such as ‘Tuhfah-e-Miran,’ ‘Tuhfah-e-Rasuliyah,’ ‘Gulzar-e-Faqir,’ and ‘Hidayat-ul-Muminīn’ emphasize moral guidance and Sufi ethics. His shorter pamphlets ‘Si-Harfi,’ ‘Bait Muhammad,’ and ‘Qissa Sheikh Sanaan’ show his versatility in experimenting with poetic forms, from siharfis to qissas, adapting each genre to the moral and metaphysical concerns of his audience. Because many of these texts circulated first in manuscript and oral form, their first printing dates vary and often appear decades after their composition. British colonial libraries, especially the India Office Library, played a major role in preserving early press copies, many of which were printed at small presses in Lahore, Sialkot, or Jehlum. Later, the Department of Auqaf (AJK) and other regional institutions issued edited collections in the late twentieth century, which still serve as standard references for students and scholars. The evidence taken from the available data regarding Mian Muhammad Bakhsh writings affirm that he simultaneously belonged to the classical Persianate Sufi tradition and to the Punjabi vernacular heritage. His texts connect high metaphysics with folk narrative, and their print history illustrates how vernacular Sufi poetry entered mass circulation in colonial Punjab. This list provides a baseline for further bibliographic research and for the development of a comprehensive literature review or historical analysis of his contribution to Punjabi and Sufi literature.

3.1 Sampling Strategy

Sample was taken from the English translated poetry of Mian Muhammad Bakhsh. Though, his poetry has been translated in many languages and by many authors, yet no specific or authentic versions in the shape of book is found that could address his overall poetry in general. After thoughtful consideration researcher came across the web forum (The world’s poetry archive) where compiled version of English translations of Muhammad Bakhsh poetry was found. Hence,

the whole translated book was taken as the sample of the study. A typical case and critical case sampling technique was utilized to regulate the sample selection.

Table 5 Sample of the study

Section	Description	Year	Page	Translated / Published
1	Firstly all praise to Allah, who is the owner ...	2012	05	www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
2	Remembering the beloved again again	2012	07	www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
3	I should stay close to the genuine ones	2012	09	www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
4	The pots of the nori, filled with tears,	2012	11	www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
5	If you do good to pious men,	2012	13	www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
6	Those who desert their own species to join an alien species	2012	15	www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
7	Be patient, patience will be rewarded,	2012	17	www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
8	What do we gain by back-biting?	2012	19	www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Sample of the study comprised 08 sections of the English translations of Muhammad Bakhsh poetry. The translations were carried through renowned web oriented literary platform i.e. 'The poem hunter'. Their poetry can be freely available for every customary reader at (www.poemhunter.com) .

4. Data Analysis

Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, the celebrated Punjabi Sufi poet, employs a unique blend of metaphors, semiotic expressions, and transcendental motifs that reflect both the temporality of human life and the eternity of divine love. His verses are not merely poetic expressions but semiotic signs that signify deeper spiritual realities. In the context of transcendental semiotics, his poetry provides a window into how signs (words, symbols, and images) transcend their immediate meaning and point towards ultimate truths about life, death, love, and divine union.

Table 6 Synthetic analysis

Punjabi	Roman Transliteration	English Translation
اک دن ایسا ہووے گا، نہ تو رہیں نہ میں رہساں	Ik dīn aisā hovēgā, na tū rahsīn na maiñ rahsāñ	One day it will be so, neither you nor I will remain.
خالی ہتھ دنیا توں جاواں، ناں کچھ میرے ناں تیریاں	Khālī hath duniyā tūñ jāvāñ, nāñ kuch merē nāñ teriyāñ	We shall leave this world empty- handed, with nothing ours.
دنیا ویلے وانگر اے، چھڈ جوانی دے نخرے	Duniyā vėlē vāngar ē, chaḍ jāwānī de nakhrē	This world is like a shadow; leave behind the pride of youth.
پھلاں وانگر مرجھا جانا، سبز پنہ رہندا نہیں	Phullāñ vāngar murjhā jānā, sabz pattā rahndā nahīñ	Like flowers that wither, even green leaves do not remain forever.
عشق بغیر نہیں کچھ حاصل، عشق بغیر نہیں کچھ پایا	Ishq baghair nahīñ kujh hāsīl, ishq baghair nahīñ kujh pāyā	Without love nothing is gained, without love nothing is achieved.
عشق بغیر جگر سوکھے، عشق بغیر دل وی ویراناں	Ishq baghair jigar sūkhē, ishq baghair dil vī vīrānāñ	Without love the soul dries up, without love the heart is barren.
ساچا یار لبھانیے، اوہدے نال نہانیے	Sāchā yār labhāiyē, ohdē nāl nibhāiyē	Find the true Beloved, and remain loyal to Him.
مرنیاں اے جگ سارے، مر کے ناں ویرانیے	Marniyāñ ē jag sārē, mar kē nāñ visarāiyē	Since the whole world must die, let us not forget Him in death.
دنیا دے لوکاں کولوں، اپنے حال نہ دسیں	Duniyā de lokāñ kolōñ, apnē hāl na dassāñ	Do not reveal your state to the people of the world.
کچھ یاراں دے نال رل کے، غماں اپنے وستیں	Kajhē yārāñ de nāl rall kē, ghamāñ apnē vassāñ	Sit with true friends, and entrust your sorrows to them.
موت نوں بھل بیٹھے آں، کھیل تماشا سمجھ کے	Mot nūñ bhul baiṭhē āñ, kheil tamāshā samajh kē	We have forgotten death, thinking life a play.
جیہڑا آیا اس جہاتاں، اس نے خالی جانا اے	Jihṛā āyā is jahānāñ, us nē khālī jānā ē	But whoever came to this world, had to leave it empty-handed.

The above verses demonstrate how Mian Muhammad Bakhsh engages with transcendental semiotics. Each couplet functions not only as a linguistic unit but as a symbolic signifier of metaphysical truths. For instance, the repeated emphasis on the temporality of life, 'One day neither you nor I will remain' is an indexical sign pointing towards the inevitability of death. This semiotic marker transcends mere poetry and becomes a universal truth, shared across cultures

and spiritual traditions. The motif of emptiness ('We shall leave this world empty-handed') serves as both a symbol and an icon. It symbolizes the futility of material attachment while iconically representing the human condition of mortality. In semiotic terms, this creates a transcendental sign where the signifier (empty-handedness) does not end at the literal level but expands into the signified realm of spiritual awakening. Furthermore, his insistence on love ('Without love nothing is gained') is not mere romanticism but a transcendental semiotic act. Love here is a symbol of divine connection, a sign that signifies the eternal bond between the seeker and the Creator. The absence of love is depicted as spiritual barrenness, demonstrating how the sign expands from a human emotion into a metaphysical necessity. The semiotic richness also lies in the imagery of withering flowers and fading youth. These metaphors serve as icons of impermanence. The physical sign (the flower, the green leaf) becomes a symbolic sign of human existence, which inevitably transitions towards death. In transcendental semiotics, such images remind readers that the seen world is but a signpost to the unseen reality. Collectively, the verses highlight a dialogic tension between the temporal and the eternal. The poet continually reminds us that worldly attachments, pride, and superficiality are transient. The semiotic function of his poetry thus lies in redirecting the reader from the material to the immaterial, from signs of decay to signs of eternity. This transcendental function elevates his poetry into a universal discourse where human mortality is not an end, but a sign pointing towards divine immortality. The analysis of *Saif-ul-Malook* and other verses of Mian Muhammad Bakhsh reveals a coherent symbolic universe where poetry is never mere ornament but a coded map of the soul's spiritual journey. Across motifs, metaphors, and signs, we see how ordinary language—drawn from folk idioms, nature, and everyday rural life to transforms into a vehicle for transcendental truths. What emerges is not just a literary romance, but a Sufi pedagogy encoded in verse. At the heart of Bakhsh's poetry lies the **journey motif**, where the path of love represents the arduous progression of the seeker. Prince Saif's travels across mountains and deserts dramatize not only narrative adventure but also the *suluk* of the soul. Obstacles, trials, and helpers in the story stand as externalized metaphors for inner struggles with ego, pride, and desire. The repeated emphasis on patience and perseverance reflects the Sufi conviction that love is both demanding and transformative. Alongside this, the imagery of the **heart as mirror** becomes central to Bakhsh's spiritual pedagogy. In his verses, the heart, once polished, reflects divine light, echoing a long Sufi tradition that equates purification of the self with readiness for revelation. The mirror here is more than a metaphor—it is a spiritual instrument, teaching readers that the Divine can only be glimpsed through inner cleansing. Similarly, the **veil** dramatizes concealment and distance, reminding seekers of the hiddenness of ultimate truth. Yet its lifting—*kashf*—is always possible, and thus the veil is not only a symbol of separation but also of potential revelation. The natural world in Bakhsh's imagery is never inert. **Water, gardens, mountains, night, and dawn** are transfigured into signs of divine realities. Drinking from a spring is not merely quenching thirst but a symbolic ablution of the spirit. Night and dawn function as a rhythm of longing and disclosure, structuring the seeker's inner emotional arc. The garden, with its fruits, becomes the teleological symbol of union, where longing is finally satisfied in nearness (*wusul*). Through these signs, Bakhsh encodes a theology of renewal and return, one that his rural audience could readily recognize in their own environment. Equally powerful are the metaphors of **pain, exile, and death**. Thorns and wounds index sincerity: love without suffering is no love at all. Blood becomes a sign of authenticity, turning pain into proof of devotion. Exile, dramatized through Saif's wandering in foreign lands, allegorizes the soul's estrangement from its Source, while homecoming becomes reunion with God. Pain here is not a curse but a pedagogy, a force that

trains yearning and intensifies desire for the Beloved. Death, far from finality, is re-signified as transition—a passage into eternity, a release of the bird-soul from its bodily cage. Life, called a “false pretext,” is unveiled as illusion, while dust teaches humility and impermanence. In this way, Bakhsh reworks existential anxieties into hopeful signposts, orienting seekers from fear toward anticipation of union. Data synthesizes that these symbols form a **semiotic chain**: pain authenticates the seeker, separation sustains longing, and death consummates reunion. The whole arc mirrors the Sufi pedagogy of *sabr* (patience in pain), *shawq* (yearning in separation), and *fana* (annihilation) leading to *baqa* (subsistence in God). What makes Bakhsh’s work distinct is his rootedness in Punjabi–Pahari culture. He speaks of kebabs, sugarcane crushers, tears washing gold, and drops dissolving into rivers i.e images from daily village life, yet through them encode universal mystical doctrines. This localization ensures accessibility without losing metaphysical depth. In sum, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh’s poetics emerge as a layered system where allegory, metaphor, and semiotics converge. Every image including thorn, mirror, river, cage, and bird carries more than its literal meaning. His genius lies in humanizing mystical doctrine, embedding it in familiar signs that resonate with collective memory, while simultaneously guiding the seeker toward transcendence. His poetry thus becomes both a cultural treasure and a manual for the mystical path: a narrative that entertains a language that instructs, and a semiotic system that transforms the ordinary into the eternal.

5. Findings and Discussions

The findings of this study demonstrate that Mian Muhammad Bakhsh’s *Saif-ul-Malook* operates on a richly layered semiotic and literary terrain. What appears at first as a folk romance between a prince and a fairy unfolds, under careful analysis, as a sophisticated allegorical map of the mystical journey. Symbols, metaphors, allegories, and semiotic structures coalesce into a unified system where the cultural idioms of Punjab are transformed into vehicles of transcendental truth. This chapter synthesizes the data presented in the previous section, highlighting the symbolic, allegorical, metaphorical, and semiotic dimensions of Bakhsh’s poetics.

5.1 Symbolism and Hermeneutics

The first finding of the study concerns the centrality of symbolism and Sufi hermeneutics in *Saif-ul-Malook*. Bakhsh relies on recurring images like journey, mirror, veil, water, night, dawn, beloved, and lover function simultaneously on literal, cultural, and metaphysical planes. Semiotics reveals how each motif is a **sign**, where the **signifier** is a familiar cultural image and the **signified** is a Sufi doctrine or metaphysical principle. For instance, the motif of the journey functions as both narrative and allegorical structure. On the surface, it narrates Prince Saif’s search for Badi Jamal. Yet hermeneutically, it maps onto the *suluk* of the seeker, the long and arduous path toward union with God. The “long road” and “distant destination” serve as signifiers for existential striving, a symbolic coding of perseverance and endurance. The findings of this study confirm that Mian Muhammad Bakhsh’s *Saif-ul-Malook* is not a simple romance but a layered semiotic system in which cultural images and vernacular idioms are recoded as vehicles of mystical truth. His use of gardens, rivers, journeys, fire, wine, tears, and bodily metaphors transforms the landscape of ordinary life into a symbolic theatre of Sufi pedagogy.

1. Garden, Spring, and Fruit: Creation as Divine Manifestation

Bakhsh frequently employs garden imagery to dramatize the world as a site of divine manifestation. In one verse he declares:

“In this wonderful garden He planted the plant of Adam, / With the fruits of His recognition, adorned it with wonderful fruits.”

Here the **garden** functions not as horticultural description but as a semiotic sign. The “plant of Adam” indexes humanity, while the “fruits of recognition” signify *ma‘rifa*, the spiritual knowledge attainable within creation. Semiologically, the garden is a symbol of the cosmos: a cultivated space in which divine presence is disclosed. This reading aligns with the Qur’anic topos of Paradise as garden, yet Bakhsh extends it by situating the garden as both earthly and cosmic theatre where humanity’s spiritual cultivation unfolds. The allegory reframes the world as didactic environment: a transient field where theophany can be perceived and nurtured.

2. Water, Rivers, and Bathing: Purification and Illumination

Water imagery is equally pervasive and polyvalent. Bakhsh writes:

“The water of truth, when one finds it, quenches the thirst of the heart. / Whoever bathes in the river of truth, becomes illumined with light.”

The **river** operates at three levels simultaneously: literal water sustaining agrarian Punjab, cultural lifeline for survival, and metaphysical water signifying *haqq* (truth) and *rahma* (divine mercy). The act of bathing indexes purification, not merely bodily but spiritual, echoing Islamic ritual ablution. Semiotics thus interprets the river as a code of renewal: to drink or immerse oneself in truth is to become illumined with divine light. Tears in Bakhsh’s idiom operate as a microcosmic river: they wash away inner rust and reveal the hidden gem of the soul. Scholars of Punjabi Sufism consistently note that such imagery functions as both hermeneutic device and ritual pedagogy, teaching seekers to interiorize purification through dhikr, weeping, and remembrance.

3. Journey, Path, and Gates: The Semiotics of Safar

Perhaps the most central motif in *Saif-ul-Malook* is the journey. Bakhsh insists:

“Patience opens the locks, Muhammad, from every difficult gate. / The path of the faqir is hard, yet by walking it one finds the abode of light.”

The narrative of Prince Saif’s quest allegorizes the Sufi *safar ila Allah*. The “locks” and “gates” index obstacles—ego, desire, worldly distractions—that block spiritual advancement. Patience and guidance become the keys that open these locks. Semiologically, the **path** functions as both narrative engine and spiritual method, with the destination identified as “abode of light,” a signifier of divine nearness and illumination (*tajalli*). The structure here is procedural: journey → trial → endurance → revelation. In this way, the masnavi becomes a step-by-step pedagogical map, dramatizing the Sufi path in accessible narrative form.

4. Fire, Burning, and Kebabs: The Paradox of Fana‘

Bakhsh often transfigures domestic and culinary imagery into mystical allegory. He writes:

“Burn yourself like kebabs or wine sprinkled on the kebabs for the delight of others.”

Here, the everyday act of cooking becomes a metaphor for annihilation. The lover, like the kebab, offers himself to the fire, consumed for the Beloved’s pleasure. Fire, therefore, is polyvalent: it indexes pain, purifies the self, and symbolizes sacrificial love. In semiotic terms, the kebab functions as a culturally familiar signifier whose signified is the mystical paradox of *fana‘*: the self must be consumed in order to be offered. This vernacular metaphor makes the abstract theology of annihilation culturally legible, embedding mystical doctrine in rural household imagery.

5. Wine, Poison, and Intoxication: Ecstasy and Paradox

Wine and poison are classical Sufi tropes, but Bakhsh re-inscribes them in his vernacular idiom. He observes:

“Like a fruit drink, from the hands of the beloved, they drink the cups of poison.”

The **cup of poison** is paradoxical: destructive in ordinary logic, sacramental in mystical logic. Poison becomes medicine; death of the ego becomes rebirth in divine life. The beloved’s hand, offering the poison, signifies divine agency: love wounds in order to heal. Semiotics here highlights the reversal of meaning: what seems annihilating is transfigured into life-giving. Wine intoxicates, poison kills, but in Sufi semiotics both signify ecstatic states of *tajalli* and *wajd*. By collapsing the categories of danger and gift, Bakhsh preserves the paradox of mystical ecstasy: annihilation is the very mode of subsistence.

6. Tears and the Revelation of Gold: Affective Epistemology

In another striking metaphor, Bakhsh writes:

“Gold is hidden in the sand like your body. Until and unless you don't wash the sand and clay with the water of your eyes, you cannot find the gold.”

Here, **tears** are not sentimental excess but epistemic instruments. To weep is to wash away the dust that conceals the inner treasure of the self. Gold is a signifier of divine gnosis, hidden beneath the clay of the body. Semiotics interprets tears as indexical signs: their visible flow points to invisible sincerity. This imagery fuses affect with epistemology, turning emotional labor into hermeneutic method. Crying becomes both proof and technique of gnosis, dramatizing how the seeker’s affective body participates in the unveiling of truth.

7. Crushing, Sugarcane, and Extraction: Pedagogy of Affliction

The agrarian imagery of sugarcane pressing is mobilized in verses such as:

“Soul is undergoing torture like a sugarcane in a crusher; / Now tell the sugarcane juice to stay in the sugarcane.”

Here, crushing functions as a metaphor of transformation. Just as sugarcane must be crushed to release sweetness, so too must the soul undergo affliction to yield its hidden essence. Semiologically, the crusher is an index of violence, while the juice signifies gnosis, sweetness, and *baqa*’. The metaphor grounds metaphysics in the manual labor of Punjabi peasant life, making the process of spiritual extraction tangible. Scholars read this as a vernacular pedagogy: mystical doctrine is localized in agrarian idioms that embody both pain and productivity.

8. Droplet and Bubble: Dissolution and Union

Union with the Divine is repeatedly expressed through dissolution imagery. Bakhsh remarks:

“When a droplet dissolves in the river, what will it be called? / It becomes that for whom it has lost itself.”

The droplet is the individual soul, the river the Divine Being. Dissolution signifies annihilation of separate identity (*fana*’) yet paradoxically confers ontological enlargement (*baqa*’). The semiotics of merging recodes loss as gain: by ceasing to exist independently, the droplet participates in infinite being. The metaphor thus makes abstruse mystical philosophy experientially accessible, translating ontology into the imagery of everyday water.

9. Thorns and Wounds: Proof of Love

Bakhsh turns bodily injury into a rite of passage:

“Don’t watch the thorns of roses fearfully from afar; / Unless you endure being pricked and bleeding you cannot fill your pouch with flowers.”

The thorn is an index of resistance; the wound is its visible trace. Yet in the semiotics of love, wounds are signs of authenticity. They prove that the seeker has endured pain to access fragrance. Pain is no longer accidental but constitutive of the journey: it is both initiation and proof. This echoes folk Sufi practices where weeping, scars, or renunciation serve as socially legible signs of spiritual legitimacy.

10. Cage and Bird: Death as Liberation

Finally, Bakhsh recodes death through the metaphor of cage and bird:

“The human body is the cage for the soul (Bird). / The wood-pecker was freed from this prison because the call came from Almighty.”

The body-as-cage is the signifier of mortality and limitation; the bird-soul, its immortal essence, yearns for release. Death, often feared as termination, is reframed as liberation: the soul takes flight toward its Source. Semiotics interprets this as a transformative sign system: death = cage opening, bird = liberated soul, flight = reunion. In this imagery, *fana*’ becomes not negation but threshold to eternal subsistence.

Across these motifs, several patterns emerge. First, Bakhsh's metaphors are **polyvalent**: a river is at once an agricultural lifeline, a Quranic symbol of mercy, and a signifier of divine truth. The poet exploits **indexicality**, using wounds, tears, and journeys as signs that point both to lived experience and to mystical states. Second, the metaphors are arranged in **procedural sequences**: suffering (thorns, burning, crushing) → affective work (tears) → revelation (gold) → dissolution (droplet) → subsistence (garden/abode of light). This sequence forms a semiotic rite of passage, teaching the stages of the mystical path. Third, the metaphors embody a **vernacular accessibility**. By drawing on kebabs, sugarcane, or crows, Bakhsh translates abstruse mystical doctrine into idioms graspable by rural audiences, democratizing Sufi teaching without sacrificing theological depth. Finally, the narrative allegory reframes social roles as **spiritual archetypes**: Prince Saif as seeker, Badi Jamal as Divine Beauty, jinns as ego, and guides as *murshid*. In this way, Bakhsh integrates his local cultural context into the intertextual Sufi tradition of Attar, Rumi, and Jami, but with distinctive Punjabi coloration.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study of transcendental semiotics in Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's Punjabi and English translated poetry demonstrates that his verses operate as a symbolic and hermeneutic system where language itself becomes a medium of mystical pedagogy. Through a semiotic lens, his poetry can be seen as transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary, where signifiers embedded in cultural life such as rivers, thorns, tears, gardens, or cages are re-coded as signifieds of spiritual struggle, purification, and divine union. In Saussurean terms, Bakhsh destabilizes the arbitrariness of the sign by allowing linguistic signs to carry layers of meaning that move from the literal to the transcendental, so that the same word evokes cultural familiarity and mystical depth simultaneously. In Peirce's triadic model, his images oscillate between icon, index, and symbol: the mirror functions iconically as reflection, indexically as proof of purification, and symbolically as a convention of Sufi hermeneutics. This movement across semiotic types enables his poetry to hold both narrative immediacy and metaphysical depth at once. From Barthes' perspective, his use of everyday idioms creates what can be described as a "second-order semiological system," where folk expressions like eating pain or crushing sugarcane transcend their literal register to become myths of mystical transformation, embodying the paradoxical logic of annihilation and subsistence. The English translations, while inevitably constrained by linguistic transfer, still preserve this layered semiotic field by retaining the dual play of signifiers that oscillate between the mundane and the transcendent. In essence, Bakhsh's poetry demonstrates that signs are not static but dynamic vehicles of transcendence: wounds become indices of authenticity, exile encodes ontological estrangement, and the bird's flight from the cage signifies liberation into divine eternity. His work confirms that transcendental semiotics is not an abstract theory but a lived hermeneutic practice, where language bridges the seen and the unseen, the temporal and the eternal. Ultimately, the conclusion is that Mian Muhammad Bakhsh's poetics constitutes a vernacular semiotic system of transcendence, one in which Saussure's structural dyads, Peirce's triads, and Barthes' mythologies converge to decode the soul's journey. His verses show how poetry can be at once a narrative romance, a cultural archive, and a metaphysical map guiding the reader from earthly metaphors to divine union, and proving that the sign, in its deepest capacity, can become a doorway to the infinite.

1. Future research could explore **comparative semiotics** by placing Bakhsh alongside Rumi, Attar, or Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, highlighting how regional idioms inflect shared Sufi semiotic structures.
2. A **translation-focused semiotic study** could examine how much of the transcendental depth survives or shifts when Bakhsh's Punjabi verses are rendered into English, and what cultural losses or gains occur in the process.
3. Interdisciplinary studies may apply **digital methods** (e.g., corpus-based semiotic mapping) to trace patterns of metaphor and imagery in Bakhsh's poetry, making his transcendental semiotics more systematically quantifiable.
4. A **reader-response semiotic approach** could investigate how contemporary Punjabi and diaspora audiences interpret Bakhsh's symbols today, bridging historical poetics with modern reception.
5. Finally, further research might situate Bakhsh in the **broader field of religious semiotics**, exploring how his poetry contributes to global discourses of mystical sign systems beyond South Asian Sufism.

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