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# THE ARTISTIC FUNCTIONS OF SIMILE AND METAPHOR IN CLASSICAL UZBEK GHAZAL POETRY

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**Abstract:** This article examines the artistic, semantic, and aesthetic functions of simile (tashbeh) and metaphor (isti'ora) in classical Uzbek ghazal poetry. Particular attention is devoted to the poetic traditions associated with Alisher Navoi, Lutfiy, Babur, and other representatives of classical Turkic literature. The research investigates how figurative comparisons and metaphorical expressions contribute to emotional intensity, symbolic interpretation, philosophical reflection, and the representation of spiritual experiences. The methodological framework combines descriptive literary analysis, comparative poetics, semantic interpretation, and historical-contextual approaches. The findings indicate that simile and metaphor constitute fundamental mechanisms of artistic expression in the ghazal tradition. Similes establish recognizable relationships between human emotions and natural phenomena, while metaphors transform conventional poetic images into complex representations of love, beauty, suffering, and mystical aspiration. The article also discusses the relationship between classical rhetorical conventions and individual poetic creativity. It concludes that the artistic functions of these devices extend beyond ornamentation and contribute significantly to the conceptual organization, emotional coherence, and aesthetic identity of classical Uzbek ghazal poetry.

**Keywords:** classical Uzbek literature, ghazal poetry, simile, metaphor, tashbeh, isti'ora, Alisher Navoi, poetic imagery, literary aesthetics, symbolism, figurative language.

## Introduction

Classical Uzbek literature represents an important component of the literary and intellectual heritage of Central Asia. Its development was closely connected with the broader traditions of Persian, Arabic, and Turkic literary culture. Among the poetic genres cultivated within this environment, the ghazal acquired particular significance because of its capacity to communicate emotional experiences, philosophical reflections, ethical values, and spiritual aspirations through concentrated artistic language.

The ghazal developed according to established principles of rhyme, rhythm, imagery, and thematic organization. Although individual couplets frequently possess a degree of semantic independence, recurring symbols and rhetorical patterns contribute to the overall artistic coherence of a poem. Comparative studies of classical lyric traditions demonstrate the importance of conventional images in establishing relationships between the poetic speaker, the beloved, and the surrounding cultural environment [1].

Two especially significant rhetorical devices within this tradition are simile and metaphor. In classical literary terminology, simile is commonly designated as tashbeh, while metaphor is associated with isti'ora. Both devices enable poets to express abstract emotions through concrete images and establish semantic connections between different areas of experience.

Simile involves an explicit or contextually recognizable comparison between two entities possessing a shared characteristic. Metaphor, by contrast, transfers meaning from one conceptual domain to another, often presenting an imaginative identification rather than a direct comparison [2].

The literary heritage of Alisher Navoi occupies a central position in the development of Chagatai Turkic poetry, which forms an essential historical foundation of classical Uzbek literature.

His poetic works demonstrate the expressive possibilities of Turkic literary language and its capacity to accommodate sophisticated rhetorical and philosophical structures [3].

The relevance of investigating simile and metaphor arises from the necessity of understanding not merely their formal characteristics but also their artistic functions. These figures participate in the construction of poetic meaning, the representation of psychological states, and the interpretation of spiritual and cultural values.

The purpose of this article is to examine the principal artistic functions of simile and metaphor in classical Uzbek ghazal poetry and to identify their contribution to poetic imagery, emotional expression, symbolic meaning, and aesthetic organization.

**Methodology**

The study employs a qualitative literary methodology based on historical poetics, comparative analysis, and semantic interpretation.

The primary analytical framework is informed by classical rhetorical theory and modern approaches to figurative language. Aristotle's discussion of metaphor provides an early theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between resemblance, linguistic creativity, and poetic expression [4]. Modern metaphor theory further demonstrates that figurative expressions can structure conceptual understanding rather than merely embellish language [5].

The descriptive method is used to identify the formal characteristics of simile and metaphor. Particular attention is given to comparative markers, figurative identification, semantic transfer, and conventional poetic imagery.

The comparative method examines similarities and differences between the artistic functions of simile and metaphor within the broader Persianate and Turkic ghazal traditions.

Historical-contextual analysis considers the literary conventions inherited by classical Uzbek poets and their adaptation within Chagatai poetic expression.

The interpretive method investigates the symbolic associations of recurring images, including the rose, nightingale, moon, sun, candle, moth, and wine.

The study is based on published literary scholarship and established theoretical works. It does not claim to present a newly compiled quantitative corpus or statistically measured frequencies of rhetorical devices. Consequently, its findings are interpretive rather than experimental.

**Results**

The analysis identifies several interconnected artistic functions of simile and metaphor in classical Uzbek ghazal poetry.

First, these devices contribute to the visualization of abstract emotions. Feelings such as love, separation, devotion, jealousy, and longing acquire perceptible forms through associations with natural phenomena and familiar objects.

Second, simile and metaphor intensify emotional expression. Comparisons involving fire, tears, darkness, and celestial bodies provide a means of representing psychological experiences through sensory imagery.

Third, figurative language supports the symbolic organization of ghazal poetry. Conventional images may communicate several meanings simultaneously, depending on their immediate textual context and broader literary associations.

Fourth, metaphorical expressions contribute to the philosophical and mystical dimensions of poetry. Images associated with light, wine, journeys, and spiritual longing may participate in discussions of knowledge, transformation, and the relationship between humanity and the divine.

Fifth, simile and metaphor facilitate the interaction between inherited poetic conventions and individual creativity. Poets employ recognizable symbolic structures while modifying their meanings through distinctive combinations, contextual relationships, and rhetorical arrangements.

These findings correspond with scholarship emphasizing the centrality of figurative language in classical Turkic lyric traditions [1] and research examining metaphorical and comparative imagery in Navoi's poetry [6].

**Analysis and Discussion**

**Simile as a Mechanism of Artistic Visualization**

Simile is among the most recognizable forms of figurative expression in classical Uzbek ghazal poetry. Its principal function is to establish a relationship of resemblance between two objects, experiences, or concepts.

In classical poetic discourse, the beloved's face may be compared to the moon, the cheeks to roses, the figure to a cypress, and the eyes to narcissus flowers. These comparisons belong to a wider literary vocabulary shared by Persianate poetic traditions.

Such imagery is not limited to physical description. The comparison of a face with the moon, for example, may communicate luminosity, beauty, distance, or unattainability.

The artistic effect depends on the context in which the comparison appears. A celestial image can emphasize admiration in one couplet and emotional separation in another.

The structural characteristics of simile are traditionally associated with the subject being compared, the comparative object, the shared quality, and the comparative expression. However, not every literary simile explicitly contains all these components.

Research on similes in Navoi's Farhad and Shirin demonstrates that comparative constructions may involve semantic, syntactic, sensory, and quantitative dimensions [7]. Although that work examines an epic rather than a ghazal, its observations illustrate the broader expressive resources of Navoi's poetic language.

In ghazal poetry, simile frequently performs an explanatory function. It makes an unfamiliar or psychologically complex experience accessible through an image that readers can recognize.

At the same time, comparison contributes to aesthetic intensification. The image selected by the poet often exceeds the literal characteristics of the object being described, thereby producing an idealized representation.

**Metaphor and the Transformation of Poetic Meaning**

Metaphor differs from simile primarily through its mode of semantic representation.

Where simile establishes a comparison, metaphor presents one phenomenon through the conceptual characteristics of another. This process enables poets to communicate meanings that cannot be adequately expressed through literal description alone.

In classical ghazal poetry, the rose may function as a metaphor for the beloved, while the nightingale may represent the lover. The relationship between these images is supported by an extensive literary tradition in which beauty, longing, distance, and suffering form interconnected thematic structures.

The metaphorical association between the candle and the moth similarly communicates attraction and self-sacrifice. The moth's movement toward the flame becomes a poetic representation of devotion capable of overcoming the instinct of self-preservation.

These symbols acquire additional significance when interpreted through mystical literary traditions.

Schimmel's research on Islamic mystical literature demonstrates the importance of symbolic imagery in expressing spiritual transformation, divine love, and the limitations of ordinary language [8].

Nevertheless, mystical interpretations should not be imposed automatically on every ghazal. The same image may function within secular love poetry, religious reflection, or a deliberately ambiguous combination of both.

The metaphorical vocabulary of classical poetry therefore requires contextual interpretation.

Modern conceptual metaphor theory provides another perspective on this process. Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphor is closely connected with patterns of human understanding [5].

Applied cautiously to classical ghazal poetry, this approach helps explain how images of burning, illumination, travel, and intoxication may organize representations of emotional and spiritual experience.

**Figurative Language in Alisher Navoi's Ghazals**

Alisher Navoi's literary heritage is particularly important for investigating the artistic possibilities of simile and metaphor in classical Uzbek poetry.

His Chagatai lyric works, including the collections associated with Khazoyin ul-ma'ani, demonstrate the richness of inherited poetic conventions and the expressive flexibility of Turkic literary language.

The literary significance of Navoi is also connected with his defense of Turkic as a language capable of sophisticated artistic expression, most explicitly articulated in Muhakamat al-lughatayn.

Studies of Navoi's poetic language indicate that figurative expressions operate at several interconnected levels, including lexical meaning, visual representation, and symbolic association.

Research examining particular letter-based images in Navoi's works identifies relationships between graphic form, comparison, and metaphorical interpretation [9].

This illustrates an important characteristic of classical literary aesthetics: the visual appearance of written language itself may become a source of poetic imagery.

For example, the shapes of Arabic-script letters can be associated with aspects of the beloved's appearance or the lover's emotional condition.

Such devices demonstrate that metaphorical creativity is not restricted to natural imagery. It may also emerge from writing systems, cultural knowledge, and the material characteristics of language.

Navoi's figurative expression should therefore be understood as an interaction between linguistic resources, rhetorical traditions, and artistic interpretation.

Recent scholarship on his Persian ghazals similarly emphasizes the relationship between imagery, metaphor, philosophical reflection, and emotional expression [10].

Although his Persian and Chagatai poetry belong to distinct linguistic contexts, their comparison helps illuminate the broader literary environment within which his artistic techniques developed.

**The Relationship Between Simile and Metaphor**

Simile and metaphor are closely related but should not be treated as interchangeable rhetorical categories.

Simile generally preserves an identifiable distinction between the objects being compared. Metaphor creates a stronger semantic identification by representing one phenomenon through another.

Their artistic functions nevertheless overlap.

Both contribute to emotional intensification, the formation of poetic imagery, and the communication of abstract concepts.

Both also depend on cultural knowledge. A reader unfamiliar with the conventional associations of the rose and nightingale may understand their literal meanings without recognizing their full poetic significance.

The distinction between these devices can be summarized as follows:

| Analytical dimension | Simile (tashbeh) | Metaphor (isti'ora) |
|---|---|---|
| Semantic mechanism | Establishes resemblance | Transfers or identifies meaning |
| Typical expression | Explicit or implied comparison | Figurative substitution or identification |
| Primary artistic effect | Visualization and clarification | Symbolic condensation and reinterpretation |
| Emotional function | Makes feelings perceptible | Deepens associative meaning |
| Interpretive character | Often relatively direct | Frequently context-dependent |

This comparison represents an analytical classification rather than a rigid division. Classical poetic expressions may combine comparison, metaphor, personification, and other rhetorical mechanisms within a single couplet.

**Emotional, Philosophical, and Cultural Functions**

The emotional effectiveness of classical ghazal poetry is closely associated with the interaction between figurative language and lyrical subjectivity.

Images of fire and burning frequently communicate the intensity of longing, while tears and flowing water may represent sorrow, separation, or emotional purification.

Light and darkness can establish contrasts between hope and despair, knowledge and ignorance, or presence and absence.

Such oppositions create recognizable semantic patterns that contribute to the internal organization of poetic discourse.

Metaphorical imagery also permits the expression of philosophical concepts through concrete representations.

In Sufi literary traditions, the language of love can become a vehicle for discussing spiritual aspiration and the transformation of the self.

Lewis's study of Rumi demonstrates the importance of literary and intellectual context when interpreting mystical imagery and poetic symbolism [11].

Although Rumi belongs to an earlier Persian literary environment, the wider symbolic traditions discussed in such scholarship are relevant to understanding the cultural background of later Central Asian poetry.

The artistic functions of simile and metaphor also extend to the preservation and transformation of cultural memory.

Recurring poetic images connect individual literary works with established traditions. Their recognition allows readers to interpret new poetic expressions through familiarity with earlier texts.

At the same time, originality may emerge from the modification of conventional associations rather than the invention of entirely new images.

This interaction between continuity and innovation is an important feature of classical literary development.

Studies of classical lyric poetry likewise demonstrate that the interpretation of poetic symbolism requires attention to genre, convention, and the interaction between literary expression and cultural meaning [12].

Consequently, simile and metaphor should be understood not merely as decorative features but as structural components of the ghazal's artistic and intellectual organization.

**Conclusion**

The investigation demonstrates that simile and metaphor perform essential artistic functions in classical Uzbek ghazal poetry.

Simile contributes primarily to the visualization and intensification of poetic meaning through relationships of resemblance. Metaphor enables more concentrated forms of symbolic representation by transferring meanings between different conceptual domains.

Both devices facilitate the expression of emotional experiences, philosophical reflections, and culturally established ideas.

The poetry of Alisher Navoi provides an especially important context for understanding the interaction between traditional rhetorical conventions and individual artistic creativity.

The analysis also indicates that figurative language contributes to the relationship between the emotional and intellectual dimensions of the ghazal. Images associated with beauty, separation, devotion, light, and suffering may operate simultaneously at literal, symbolic, and philosophical levels.

A significant methodological conclusion is that poetic imagery must be interpreted within its linguistic, historical, and literary context. Conventional symbols do not possess identical meanings in every poem, and their interpretation depends on the relationships established within individual texts.

Further research may develop a systematically annotated corpus of classical Uzbek ghazals to investigate the distribution, frequency, and contextual functions of simile and metaphor. Such research would provide a quantitative complement to the qualitative conclusions presented here.

Overall, simile and metaphor constitute fundamental mechanisms through which classical Uzbek ghazal poetry achieves artistic expressiveness, semantic richness, and enduring cultural significance.

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