



Conceptual metaphors of death in Hindi

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Abstract: *This article examines the concept of “death” in Hindi. The aim of this article is to analyze conceptual metaphors of “death” in Hindi from a cognitive perspective. Metaphors have become a much-discussed topic in recent years. Since the times of Aristotle tropes like metaphor, simile, metonymy, hyperbole etc. were considered as an integral part of poetic language. Classical theorists believe that metaphor, simile, metonymy, hyperbole, and other tropes can only be used in the figurative language. They opined that a trope or a figure of speech is used to beautify the language and the tropes only have ornamental and rhetorical function. Metaphor as the most discussed trope has been studied by many philosophers and linguists. A significant contribution to the understanding of metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon was made by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their work *Metaphors We Live By*. They showed that metaphor permeates not only language but also thought and human activity. The concepts of “life” and “death” have multiple meanings and connotations across different cultures and languages worldwide. Various cultural beliefs related to life and death demonstrate how people understand these concepts and how they are reflected in philosophies, cultures, traditions, and rituals. In this study, we will examine how the concept of “death” is understood in Hindi and analyze the conceptual metaphors used to express the concept of “death”.*

Keywords: *Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Structural metaphor, metaphorical models*

Life and death are fundamental concepts that have long engaged philosophers, linguists, and scholars. These concepts are deeply embedded in language, literature, philosophy, culture, religion etc. From the moment a person is born, they are confronted with fundamental questions: What is the meaning of life? Why was I born? Is death the end of existence? What happens after death? Throughout history, countless thinkers have reflected on these questions in search of understanding.

The concept of death occupies a central place in our understanding of the world. Since ancient times, humanity has pondered the mystery of existence and its inevitable end. Death has always been interpreted through the prism of different cultures and interpretations of death vary significantly across different linguistic communities. In some cultures, death is perceived as the end of life. In other traditions, death is understood as its final destination. In some cultures, death carries a negative connotation and is associated

with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. In others, however, it is not viewed as a definitive end. Many believe that after death, a person is reborn or reincarnated, continuing the cycle of existence in another form.

The concept of death is also reflected in languages and become particularly visible through metaphorical conceptualization. Metaphor is a very important cognitive tool for understanding the relation between language and thought. According to classical theory, metaphor was only seen as a literary trope. However, according to cognitive theory, metaphor is present not just in language but in our thought. Cognitive linguists believe that metaphors are not only used in literature, in newspapers or in poetics, but they are also an integral part of everyday communication. The cognitive study of conceptual metaphors of death helps us to understand cultural aspects and worldview of different linguistic communities. “The use of metaphors in everyday communication is closely related to our conceptual system. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. The way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.”¹

The cognitive study of metaphor enables us to better understand how our conceptual system operates — the system through which we think and act. Conceptual metaphors are not only connected with human experience or the perception of the world but are also shaped by the culture and traditions of a given linguistic community.

Metaphors, euphemisms, personification etc. are often used to express death. These expressions are closely related to the cultures, traditions and beliefs of the people. Such expressions not only help us to understand cultural differences but also the worldview of different linguistic communities. In our study we shall focus on how the concept of death is understood in Hindi through conceptual metaphors. Some of the conceptual metaphor models through which death is conceptualized are examined below:

Death is darkness.

- नदी में नहाने की ज़िद में देवधारी साह के घर का इकलौता चिराग बुझ गया ।
nadī mēm nahānē kī jida mēm dēvadhārī sāha kē ghara kā ikalautā cirāga bujha gayā.
- 12 दिसम्बर 1964 को दिल का दौरा पड़ा और साहित्य का जगमगाता तारा अस्त हो गया

¹ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago press, 2008.

12 disambara 1964 kō dila kā daurā parā aura sāhitya kā **jagamagātā tārā asta hō gayā**

- आज प्रदेश की राजनीति का एक और **सूर्य अस्त हो गया** ।

āja pradēśa kī rājanīti kā ēka aura sūrya asta hō gayā.

- क्षमा की मौत के साथ 2 **जिंदगियां बुझ गई** । एक क्षमा की दूसरी उनके अजन्मे बच्चे की ।

kṣamā kī mauta kē sātha 2 **jindagiyaṁ bujha gaī**. ēka kṣamā kī dūsarī unakē ajanmē baccē kī.

- और इस तरह वह दीप सदा के लिए बुझ गया जिसने अपनी जीवन की बत्ती को कण-कण जलाकर भारतीयों का पथ आलोकित किया ।

aura isa taraha vaha dīpa sadā kē liē bujha gayā jisanē apanī jīvana kī battī kō kaṇa-kaṇa jalākara bhāratīyōṁ kī patha ālōkita kiyā.

In Hindi, death is expressed through examples such as dīpa bujh gayā (the oil lamp went out), jyoti bujh gayā (the sacred flame was extinguished), and ghar kā ujālā bujh gayā (the light of the house went out). In Hindi, death is thus described by means of concrete, culturally embedded ritual symbols, including dīpa (oil lamp), jyoti (sacred flame), lau (flame), ghar kā ujālā (the light of the house), sitārā (star), and sūrya (sun).

Death is freedom / peace

- **जीवन से मुक्ति** के लिए आत्महत्या करना तो महापाप है ।

jīvana sē mukti kē liē ātmahatyā karanā tō mahāpāpa hais.

- एक मित्र के पास वीणा वादन की कुशलता थी तो दूसरे के पास सुनने की अद्-भूत कर्ण शक्ति । एक दिन सुनने वाला मित्र बीमार पड़ा और जल्दी **ही देह से मुक्त हो गया** ।

ēka mitra kē pāsa vīṇā vādana kī kuśalatā thī tō dūsarē kē pāsa sunanē kī ad-bhūta karṇa śakti . ēka dina sunanē vālā mitra bīmāra parā aura jaldī hī **dēha sē mukta hō gayā**

- इस तरह 21 सितंबर 1983 को भारत माता के इस महान पुत्र को **महानिर्वाण प्राप्त हुआ** ।

isa taraha 21 sitambara 1983 kō bhārata mātā kē isa mahāna putra kō **mahānirvāṇa prāpta huā**.

- हमारे समाज में मान्यता है कि मरने के बाद इस नर्क रूपी **जीवन से छुटकारा** मिल जाता है ।

hamārē samāja mēm mānyatā hai ki maranē kē bāda isa narka rūpī **jīvana sē chuṭakārā** mila jātā hai.

To conceptualise death as rest or liberation, Hindi employs expressions such as mahānirvāṇa huā (attained mahānirvāṇa, the state of ultimate liberation) and maut kī gōd mēm ārām kare (found rest in the lap or embrace of death).

Death is loss.

- 8 साल की उम्र में उन्होंने अपने पिता को खो दिया ।

8 sāla kī umra mēm unhōmñē apanē pitā kō khō diyā.

- कितनी सुहागनों की माँग सूनी हो गयीं, कितनी बूढ़ी आँखों के सपने छीन गए, ना जाने कितने मासूम बच्चों के सिर पर से पिता का साया छिन गया.

kitanī suhāganōm kī māṁga sūnī hō gayīm, kitanī būṛhī āṁkhōm kē sapanē chīna gaē, nā jānē kitanē māsūma baccōm kē sira para sē pitā kā sāyā china gayā.

- असली त्रासदी यह नहीं कि गजेंद्र नाम का एक और किसान अब इस दुनिया में नहीं रहा, उसके मां-बाप ने अपने बुढ़ापे का सहारा खो दिया और बच्चों ने अपना पिता.

asalī trāsadī yaha nahīm ki gajēndra nāma kā ēka aura kisāna aba isa duniyā mēm nahīm rahā, usakē mām-bāpa nē apanē buṛhāpē kā sahārā khō diyā aura baccōm nē apanā pitā.

- अरुण जी का असमय जाना हिन्दी साहित्य संसार की गहरी क्षति है ।

aruṇa jī kā asamaya jānā hindī sāhitya saṁsāra kī gaharī kṣati hai.

- मैं उनकी कमी महसूस करता हूँ ।

māim unakī kamī mahasūsa karatā hūm.

To conceptualize death as loss, Hindi employs expressions such as pitā kā sāyā chīnanā (“the father’s shadow was taken away / the loss of paternal protection”), mām kā āñcal sūnā hōnā (the mother’s lap or the edge of her sari became empty / the disappearance of maternal care), and buṛhāpē kā sahārā chīnanā (the support of old age was taken away / the loss of support in old age). These expressions are deeply rooted in the Indian family system, in which parents are conceptualised as protectors (sāyā ‘shadow’), while mothers are viewed as a source of refuge and emotional security (āñcal ‘protective lap/veil’).

Death is end.

- धार के अमझेरा में रहने वाली एक महिला ने जहर पीकर अपनी जीवन लीला समाप्त कर ली ।

dhāra kē amajhērā mēm rahanē vālī ēka mahilā nē jahara pīkara apanī jīvana līlā samāpta kara lī.

- मीरां बच्ची ही थीं कि उनकी माँ का **देहांत** हो गया ।

mīrām baccī hī thīm ki unakī māṁ kā dēhānta hō gayā.

- उसने एक बार किसी को बताया कि कई मौकों पर तो मुझे लगा कि मैं पकड़ा जाऊंगा और मेरे **जीवन का अंत** हो जाएगा

usanē ēka bāra kisī kō batāyā ki kaī maukōm para tō mujhē lagā ki mainṁ pakarā jāūngā aura mērē jīvana kā anta hō jāēgā

- यहाँ पर 28 फ़रवरी 1963 में उनके **जीवन की कहानी समाप्त हुई** ।

yahām para 28 faravarī 1963 mēm unakē jīvana kī kahānī samāpta huī.

- ख्वाब सजाने वाली इस दुनिया में सपनों का संतुलन बेहद जरूरी है वरना **जीवन की डोर टूट जाती है** ।

khvāba sajānē vālī isa duniyā mēm sapanōm kā santulana bēhada jarūrī hai varanā jīvana kī ḍōra ṭūṭa jāī hai.

In Hindi, such expressions denote the end of earthly life rather than existence itself, for example sāmsārika yātrā pūrī karnā (to complete the earthly journey), dehānta (the end of the body), and jīvana līlā samāpta honā (“the life-play has come to an end”). According to Indian cultural beliefs, the body is mortal, whereas the soul is immortal. Death, therefore, is understood merely as the end of the body.

Death is departure.

- उन्हें इस **संसार से विदा लिए हुए** करीब 13 सावन बीत चुके हैं.

unhēm isa **sāmsāra sē vidā liē huē** karība 13 sāvana bīta cukē haiṁ.

- सोमवार सुबह मष्तिष्क घात के बाद कविता **दुनिया छोड़ गई** ।

sōmavāra subaha maṣṭiṣka ghāta kē bāda kavitā **duniyā chōṛa gaī**.

- हिंदी साहित्य के एक वरिष्ठ स्तंभ बच्चन ने शनिवार रात को इस दुनिया को **अलविदा कह दिया** था.

hindī sāhitya kē ēka variṣṭha stambha baccana nē śanivāra rāta kō isa **duniyā kō alavidā kaha diyā** thā.

- अरुण जी का **असमय जाना** हिन्दी साहित्य संसार की गहरी क्षति है ।

aruṇa jī kā **asamaya jānā** hindī sāhitya sāmsāra kī gaharī kṣati hai.

- जरीन की जुबानी, मैं अट्ठारह साल की थी जब पापा हमें छोड़कर चले गए ।

jarīna kī jubānī, main aṭṭhāraha sāla kī thī jaba pāpā hamēm **chōṛakara calē gaē**.

In Hindi, the expression antim yātrā (the final journey) denotes the funeral ceremony as a real, physical journey. Expressions such as duniyā / saṁsār chhoṇā (to leave the world) and vidā lenā / alvidā kahanā (to take leave / to say farewell) conceptualise the world as a temporary dwelling and indicate that death represents a moment of farewell. The expression mṛtyu-dvār (“the gate of death”) depicts death as a boundary that must be crossed. Similarly, expressions such as saṁsāra-sāgara se pāra honā (to cross the ocean of worldly existence) and kināre lag jānā (to reach the shore) are typical in Hindi and reinforce the conceptualisation of death as a transition or passage.

Each linguistic community perceives the surrounding world in its own way, since every culture possesses a distinct worldview, that is, a particular mode of relating to reality and the environment. This worldview is shaped by traditions, living conditions, beliefs, and customs. Consequently, the concept of death is interpreted differently across languages.

The analysis of conceptual metaphors of life and death provides a clear understanding of how these concepts are perceived. It also helps to understand the worldview of a particular linguistic community, which is shaped by traditions, culture, customs, and shared collective knowledge. Cognitive analysis of these expressions deepens our understanding of the human cognitive system, which is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. Overall, this analysis confirms that language, cognition, and culture are deeply interconnected through metaphor.

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