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A Research Compendium

# Women and Conceptual Metaphors in the Poetry of Humayrā Nakhat Dast-gīr'zādah

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## 1. Introduction

Half of human society is composed of women; however, the patriarchal structure of the world has historically provided them with fewer opportunities and limited access to the tools necessary for demonstrating their abilities. As a result, prior to the last century, only a small number of women in the history of Persian literature succeeded in preserving their poems for posterity. When analyzing women's mental representations of themselves, one often encounters vague or artificially constructed identities. In the past century, following various social transformations, women poets began to recognize that their identities differed from those of men. This recognition led to the increased self-expression in their literary works. This began in Persian poetry with Furūgh Farrukh'zād.

As victims of a patriarchal society, Afghan women may be considered among the most disadvantaged women globally. For the greater part of the last century, they have been deprived of basic human rights. This deprivation and sustained oppression have contributed to a state of passivity, which has, in turn, limited understanding of their self-perceptions and inner worlds. Poetry is a powerful medium for expressing human emotions, experiences, and thoughts which are shaped by the social, cultural, and identity-based conditions of different societies. Poets have long used poetry as a means to reflect their understanding and

experience of the world and various phenomena. Humayrā Nakhat Dastgīr'zādah is one of the Afghan women poets of the last century who has succeeded in articulating her vision of women and their identities using conceptual metaphors.

As linguistic devices, conceptual metaphors play a significant role in shaping attitudes and knowledge about the world. These metaphors not only make abstract ideas more tangible but also help to facilitate the understanding of various social and cultural phenomena, including gender. The theory of conceptual metaphor, introduced by Lakoff and Johnson, was quickly embraced by researchers in the field of semantics.<sup>1</sup> However, due to the relative novelty of this theoretical framework, few studies have applied it to Afghan literature.

The theory of conceptual metaphor provides a valuable framework for understanding poets' perspectives on different phenomena. Accordingly, this article analyzes metaphors related to women in the poetry of Humayrā Nakhat Dastgīr'zādah, a contemporary Afghan poet. Using this theory, the study aims to explore how women are conceptualized in her poetry and to identify the source domains through which these conceptualizations are expressed. The focus is on the discussion of source and target domains, as defined in Lakoff and Johnson's theory, and metaphors will be extracted in accordance with this framework. The aim is to determine which source domains are used in representing the concept of woman in the poetic world constructed by Dastgīr'zādah's experiences. Given the crucial role of context in the construction of conceptual metaphors, the analysis will also consider the contexts of memory and history, as well as the social, cultural, and physical contexts. The primary source for this study is Dastgīr'zādah's *Dīvān*, which includes her fourteen poetry collections.

## 2. Review of Literature

Among the existing research conducted on Humayrā Nakhat

<sup>1</sup>Some scholars in this area later expanded on it. Zoltán Kövecses, one of the most well-known cognitive semanticists, discussed the role of context in the formation of metaphor in his books. Kövecses Zoltán, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and *Where Metaphors Come From: Reconsidering Context in Metaphor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Raymond W. Gibbs Jr., an expert in cognitive semantics and linguistics, focused on the embodied and experience-based nature of metaphors in *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Mark Turner introduced the concept of conceptual blending, which explains the combination of meaning in conceptual metaphor, in *The Literary Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and, with Gilles Fauconnier, in *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Gilles Fauconnier's work, especially in collaboration with Turner, focused on how mental spaces combine to produce metaphorical meaning.

<sup>2</sup>Ikrām Basīm. “Chashm-i sitārah” [Eye of the star], *Shamīrah* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1399/2020).

<sup>3</sup>Afsānah Vāhid'yār, *Parsah dar dīgarī, Vākāvī-i shī'r-i Hirāt az 1380 tā 1400* [Wandering in the other: Examining the poetry of Herat from 2001 to 2021] (Herat: Ān va Anjuman-i Adabā-yi Hirāt, 1400/2021).

<sup>4</sup>Partaw Nādirī, *Murvārīd'hā-yi rangīn* [Colorful pearls] (Kabol: Maqsūdī, 1401/2022).

<sup>5</sup>Muhammad Shu'ayb Mujaddidī, *Rāz-i āfarīnīsh* [The secret of creation] (Herat: Farhang'sarā-yi Bahrah, 1402/2023).

<sup>6</sup>Muhammad Nāsir Rah'yāb, *Naqd-i adabī*, 3rd vol. (Kabol: Amīrī, 1402/2023).

<sup>7</sup>Afsānah Habīb'zādah Vāhid'yār and Sayyid Mahdī Zarqānī, “Isti'ārah'hā-yi mafhūmī darbarah-'i zanān dar shī'r-i sih-zan-i shā'ir-i Afghānistānī: Mutālī'ah-'i murīdī: Mahjūbah Hiravī, Humayrā Nakhat Dastgīr'zādah and Bārān Sajjādī” [Conceptual metaphors about women in the poems in the poetry of three Afghan women poets, Case study: Humayrā Nakhat Dastgīr'zādah and Bārān Sajjādī], *Naqd va Nazariyah-'i Adabī* 9., no 1 (Spring and Summer 1403/2024): 151–77.

Dastgīr'zādah, several notable works can be identified: Basīm discusses the stylistic and semantic characteristics of Dastgīr'zādah's ghazals.<sup>2</sup> Afsānah Vāhid'yār, in *Parsah dar dīgarī, Vākāvī-i shī'r-i Hirāt az 1380 tā 1400* (Wandering in the other: Examining the poetry of Herat from 2001 to 2021), examines Dastgīr'zādah's collection *Alif'bā-yi sultah* (The alphabet of domination) through the lens of mythological criticism.<sup>3</sup> Partaw Nādirī, in a section of *Murvārīd'hā-yi rangīn* (Colorful pearls) provides a general overview of the development of Dastgīr'zādah's poetry and presents examples from her work to show an initial influence of Mawlānā, followed by a later influence of Furūgh Farrukh'zād.<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Shu'ayb Mujaddidī offers a descriptive analysis of various themes in Dastgīr'zādah's poetry, including romantic sensibilities, patriotism, colloquial words, life, and death.<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Nāsir Rah'yāb, in *Naqd-i adabī* (Literary criticism, 1402/2023), applies a feminist critique of Dastgīr'zādah's poetry, analyzing concepts such as womanhood, love, motherhood, and the nation.<sup>6</sup>

Vāhid'yār and Zarqānī investigate conceptual metaphors relating to women in the poetry of Mahjūbah Hiravī, Dastgīr'zādah, and Bārān Sajjādī.<sup>7</sup> Their study concludes that Dastgīr'zādah emerges from a deeply rooted traditional context but gradually shifts her perspective and endeavors to reform the social and cultural norms of a patriarchal society. Although their work briefly mentions conceptual metaphors concerning women in Dastgīr'zādah's poems, it does not present a systematic classification nor consider the contextual factors that shape these metaphors. By contrast, the present article aims to classify the semantic domains and various representations of women in Dastgīr'zādah's poetry, as conveyed through conceptual metaphors. This analysis also considers the surrounding contexts to identify the underlying factors that influence the construction of each metaphor.

Several studies and theses have also been conducted in Afghanistan focusing on the theory of conceptual metaphor. Kushkakī,



in her thesis, analyzes conceptual metaphors of love in Akram Usmān's collection of stories, *Mardārah qawl as* (Real men keep their word).<sup>8</sup> This study identifies the dominant source domains and categorizes the types of metaphors according to Lakoff and Johnson's theoretical framework. The findings indicate that 138 source domains are utilized in conceptualizing love in this collection, with fire, pain and illness as the most frequently used. Ontological metaphors are also found to be the most prevalent.

'Abd al-Qayyūm Tayyib, in a separate article, examines the conceptual metaphors related to the Covid-19 virus in Afghani media, focusing on headlines published in the *Hasht-i subh* (Eight in the morning) newspaper.<sup>9</sup> The most common conceptual metaphor found is "Covid is the enemy," which is an example of a structural metaphor.

To date, no independent study has systematically examined of the conceptual metaphors relating to women in *Dastgīr'zādah's* poetry. Consequently, there remains a gap in the literature regarding this poet's conceptualization of women.

## 2.1. Theoretical Framework of the Research

### Conceptual metaphor

Traditional rhetoric has regarded metaphor primarily as a decorative linguistic device. Accordingly, metaphor was believed to have no relation to the nature of language, but rather to possess an a posteriori aspect, manifesting only through the substitution of one word for another.<sup>10</sup> This substitution was seen merely as a means to enhance the aesthetic quality of speech. From this perspective, metaphor held a secondary role in language.

However, the rise of cognitive linguistics drew scholarly attention to metaphor as a central cognitive mechanism. The theory of conceptual metaphor, also known as the contemporary theory of metaphor, was first introduced and explained by Lakoff

<sup>8</sup>Mīnah Kushkakī, "Barrasī-i isti'ārah-'i mafhūmī-i 'ishq dar majmū'ah-'i dāstān'hā-yi *Mardārah qawl as*" (Master's thesis, Kabul University of Ta'lim va Tarbiyah, 1401/2022).

<sup>9</sup>'Abd al-Qayyūm Tayyib, "Barrasī-i bāz'namayī-i isti'ārah-'i mafhūmī-i kurunā dar rasāna'hā-yi Afghānistān" [A study of the representation of the conceptual metaphor of Covid in Afghani media], *Majalah-'i Bayn al-Millālī-i Pazhūhish-i Milāl* 7, no. 74 (Farvardīn 1401/April 2022): 123, 140.

<sup>10</sup>Kūrush Safavī, *Dar'āmadī bar ma'na'shināsī* [An introduction to semantics] (Tehran: Sūrah Mihr, 1379/2000).

<sup>11</sup>George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup>George Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. by Andrew Ortony (2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 203.

<sup>13</sup>Zoltán Kövecses, *Muqaddamah-'i kārburdī bar isti'ārah* [Metaphor: A practical introduction], trans. by Shīrīn Pūr'Ibrāhīm (Tehran: Samt, 1393/2014), 11, 12.

and Johnson (1980).<sup>11</sup> Within this cognitive framework, metaphor is no longer viewed as a rhetorical ornament limited to stylistic embellishment. Instead, metaphor is recognized as a crucial tool for rendering abstract and mental concepts tangible and comprehensible. In this sense, metaphor is closely linked to cognition and understanding. As Lakoff and Johnson assert, "the locus of metaphor is thought, not language, that metaphor is a major and indispensable part of our ordinary, conventional way of conceptualizing the world, and that our everyday behavior reflects our metaphorical understanding of experience."<sup>12</sup> As Kövecses argues,

In the cognitive linguistic view, metaphor is defined as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain.... The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain.... A conceptual domain is any coherent organization of experience. The source domains include concrete and tangible concepts by the use of which the target domains, which are often abstract concepts, are understood.<sup>13</sup>

Based on the writer's perspective and understanding of the target domain, an appropriate source domain is selected. This source domain shares specific characteristics with the target domain, thereby enabling the writer to express and reflect their mental framework through language. Analyzing the chosen source domain enables the identification of the experiential factors that have shaped the writer's conceptualization.

## 2.2. Context and Conceptual Metaphor

Zoltán Kövecses emphasizes the roles of physicality, homogeneity, and context in the formation of metaphor. He argues that the metaphoric meaning in a conceptual metaphor is not just the result of conceptual metaphors (or images) or metaphoric



inductions; rather, the structure of a conceptual metaphor is significantly shaped by context.<sup>14</sup> He identifies two dimensions of context, which are examined from two different perspectives: one from the perspective of the individual interpreting the metaphor in the context (conceptualizer 2), and the other from the perspective of the individual producing or constructing the metaphor (conceptualizer 1). Kövecses emphasizes Van Dijk's definition of context, characterizing it as being inherently tied to the social situations of the participants.

<sup>14</sup>Kövecses, Muqaddamah-'i kārburdī bar isti'ārah, 22.

<sup>15</sup>Kövecses, Muqaddamah-'i kārburdī bar isti'ārah, 13.

<sup>16</sup>Kövecses, Muqaddamah-'i kārburdī bar isti'ārah, 302.

The conceptual system is formed in accordance with context and is manifested through linguistic expressions. Kövecses identifies two principal factors influencing the formation of metaphors:

Global context: Factors that exert a general influence on all members of a linguistic community, contributing to metaphoric conceptualization. These factors include physical, social, and cultural environments, as well as collective memory.

Local context: Factors that specifically influence individual participants engaged in metaphorical conceptualization. These include the immediate physical surroundings, the immediate cultural context, the immediate social context, general knowledge relevant to the discourse, and the linguistic environment in which the metaphor functions.<sup>15</sup>

These contextual factors may also be categorized as follows:

Situational context, which encompasses the physical, social, and cultural circumstances in which metaphorical conceptualization occurs;

Physical context (physicality);

Conceptual-cognitive context.

Together, these contextual elements influence both the formation and the usage of metaphor.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Introducing Humayrā Nakhat Dastgīr'zādah

Humayrā Nakhat Dastgīr'zādah (born in Urdībihisht 1339/ May 1960) is regarded as one of the most prominent poets of contemporary Afghanistan. She completed her secondary education at Zarghūnah High School in Kabul and subsequently earned a bachelor's degree in law and political science from Kabul University in 1361/1982. Later, she obtained a Ph.D. in literary studies from Sofia University in Bulgaria. Dastgīr'zādah contributed to several literary magazines, including *Zhvandūn* (Life, in Pashto) and *Āvāz* (Song).<sup>17</sup> Her collaboration with Afghanistan Radio and the Writers' Guild of Afghanistan began around 1362/1983. During the turbulent years in Afghanistan, she received a scholarship and moved to Bulgaria in 1364/1985. After completing her studies, she emigrated to the Netherlands, where she resided until the end of her life.

Dastgīr'zādah's first collection of poetry, *Shatt-i ābī-i rahā'ī* (The blue river of freedom), was published in Kabul in 1369/1990. The dates inscribed beneath the poems in this collection indicated that they were written during her twenties. This early work primarily consists of romantic poetry. However, the poet's conceptualization of love evolves over time, reaching maturity in later works that explore love for humanity, freedom, and homeland. The central themes of her poetry include love, nostalgia, the diverse dimensions of women's lives, and critiques of gender inequality and social injustice. Dastgīr'zādah composed poetry in a variety of forms, including ghazal (a lyrical poetic form consisting of rhyming couplets and a refrain, typically expressing themes of love, loss, and mysticism in classical Persian poetry), masnavī (a narrative poem composed in rhymed couplets, often used for epic, didactic, or romantic themes in Persian literature), rubā'ī (a quatrain with a specific meter, often used for philosophical or reflective content), dū'bayī (a type of Persian folk quatrain composed in two distichs, often reflecting themes of love, hardship, or nature), Nīmā'ī (a modernist Persian poetic form pioneered by Nīmā Yūshīj, characterized



by flexible meter and free verse, marking a departure from classical structures), and free poetry. Among these, ghazal is the most frequently used form in her oeuvre. Her ghazals adhere to classical Persian poetic conventions. Like many traditional poets, she demonstrates a marked inclination toward the creation of imagery through elements drawn from nature. She was widely recognized as a well-known woman poet of Afghanistan in the past century, and her poems received critical acclaim. Throughout her career, Dastgīr'zādah maintained intellectual and literary engagement with prominent poets from both Iran and Afghanistan.

The publication of fifteen collections of poetry between 1369/1990–1398/2019 reflects her commitment to poetic expression. In the final years of her life, Dastgīr'zādah battled cancer. She passed away on Shahrīvar 14, 1399/September 4, 2020. Following her death, a comprehensive 800-page volume of her poetry was published.



Figure 1: Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār [Collection of poems] of Humayrā Nakhat Dastgīr'zādah.

#### **4. Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors of Women in Dastgīr'zādah's Poems**

In this article, drawing on the theory of conceptual metaphor

<sup>18</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 421.

<sup>19</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 421.

<sup>20</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i-'i ash'ār, 422.

proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, source domains have been identified for the target domain of “women.” These metaphors have been classified according to their origins. Furthermore, the contextual factors that influence the creation of these metaphors have been examined through the lens of Kövecses’s theory of context.

#### 4.1. Religious Ideology

##### “Woman Is Imperfect”

In “Rāz-i āfarīnīsh” (The secret of creation), Humayrā Nakhat Dastgīr'zādah critiques the beliefs held by men who, through mythmaking, elevate themselves and portray women as imperfect based on religious ideology. She offers an alternative reading of the metaphor “woman is imperfect,” contrasting sharply with the reading perpetuated by patriarchal culture. Adopting a critical approach, Dastgīr'zādah writes,

I was meant to be carved from your rib,  
So I could stand before you like a mirror. <sup>18</sup>

Dastgīr'zādah interprets the story of Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib as signifying a shared origin and existence, asserting that woman, like a mirror, is equal to man, neither inferior nor superior. However, she argues that this foundation understanding was neglected or “the initial pledge was forgotten,”<sup>19</sup> and the culture of inequality and discrimination took root:

The One who drew me from your left rib  
Did not decree that I remain your inferior,  
Did not declare my mind to be flawed,  
Did not command that I serve at your door. <sup>20</sup>

##### “Woman Is a Sinner”

In a pointed critique of patriarchal views toward women, Dast-



gīr'zādah uses the source domain of “sinner” to describe the target domain of “woman,” challenging the notion that women “sing the flames of hell” merely for revealing their hair. This metaphor reflects the traditional societal perception of women as inherently sinful, yet the poet simultaneously acknowledges that such a conception is a constructed imposed by men:

My existence forever teeters on the edge of hell  
I am a woman whose hair sings the flames of hell<sup>21</sup>

The metaphor's origin lies in religious context. The Quranic verse, “and do not display yourselves as women did in the days of pre-Islamic ignorance”<sup>22</sup> is interpreted as evidence that hijab was not customary before Islam. Zamakhsharī notes that during jāhiliyyah (the pre-Islamic period of ignorance), women's clothing was open, leaving their necks, chests, and surrounding areas uncovered.<sup>23</sup> After the advent Islam, the practice of hijab and the covering of women's hair became widely accepted. This shift ingrained in the consciousness of women the belief that revealing their hair constitutes a sin, punishable by the fires of hell.

### “Woman Is a Captive”

The social context of the patriarchal society plays a significant role in the creation of this metaphor, as the structure of a male-dominated system positions women as inferior and subject to male authority. In addition, the religious context is equally influential. The Quranic verse, “settle in your homes,”<sup>24</sup> is interpreted by some faqīh (sg. Islamic jurist) as a directive that prohibits women from leaving their houses.<sup>25</sup>

Another Quranic verse, “Men are the caretakers of women,”<sup>26</sup> has similarly been interpreted by some faqīh to mean that men have guardianship (vilāyah) over women and have the authority to instruct them in proper conduct.<sup>27</sup> As a result of such interpretations, both religious and traditional mentalities have

<sup>21</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, 726.

<sup>22</sup>Qur'an 33:33. All Qur'anic translations are taken from <https://quran.com>.

<sup>23</sup>Mahmūd bin 'Umar Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, AH 1407/1986), 3:231.

<sup>24</sup>Qur'an 33:33.

<sup>25</sup>Alī Mishkīnī, *Izdivāj dar Islam* [Marriage in Islam], trans. by Ahmad Jannafī (Qum: Dār al-Hadīth Scientific and Cultural Institute, 1393/2014), 168.

<sup>26</sup>Qur'an 4:34.

<sup>27</sup>Fāzil Miqdād al-Siyūrī, *Kanz al-'irfān fī al-fiqh al-Qur'ān*, trans. 'Aqīq Bakshāyishī (Qum: Maktab-i Navīd-i Islam, 1385/2006), 2:211.

<sup>28</sup>“I’m captive to the hope of meeting you,” in Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 41.

<sup>29</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 39.

<sup>30</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 50.

<sup>31</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 95.

<sup>32</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 156.

conceived of and represented women as captives, chained by others.

The metaphor “woman is a captive” appears used 41 times Dastgīr’zādah’s poetic collections. In *Shatt-i ābī-i rahāyī*, Dastgīr’zādah’s first collection of poetry, her view of women is not yet shaped by an intellectual understanding of their historical subjugation. Rather, her perspective is primarily emotional. She depicts women as captives of love, specifically as captives of the hope of reunion with the beloved.<sup>28</sup> She also sees herself as imprisoned by the beloved; yet even if freed, she suggests that she has no destination. Such imagery emerges from the poet’s lyrical sensibility:

You are the truth of the earth; you are the land of the last  
If I am freed from you, where should I travel to?<sup>29</sup>

In this early collection, the poet’s position fluctuates between tradition and modernity. As a result, she does not yet fully believe in her own potential and remains dependent on others. She portrays herself as a captive lost in darkness and illusion, yet lacks the strength to liberate herself from these constraints. She longs for the other, the male beloved, whose “shoulders are strong fences,” to rescue her.<sup>30</sup>

In the collection *Ghazal-i gharīb-i ghurbat* (The strange ghazal of exile), Dastgīr’zādah achieves the awareness that she can overcome the barriers and rise above them.<sup>31</sup>

By her sixth collection, published in 1392/2003, Dastgīr’zādah continues to use the metaphor “woman is a captive” from an emotional perspective, linking it to her inner self, as if she were a captive of love or words.<sup>32</sup> However, beginning with the collection *Az sipīdah labrīz* (Replete with dawn), a shift in her outlook becomes evident. Her poetry begins to reflect greater maturity, and she no longer applies the metaphor to herself. Instead, she uses it critically to highlight the condition of



women's captivity in the patriarchal society of Afghanistan. In the poem "Zan" (Woman), she critiques sharī'at (Islamic legal code) that renders women "slaves" to the rules imposed by men, turning them, even in paradise, into "rewards for men who have seen them as the mistake of creation."<sup>33</sup> In her later collections, Dastgīr'zādah comes to the conclusion that "others have woven the loops and tied the hands."<sup>34</sup> Women, through passive submission, have played a role in shaping their own captivity. They have retreated into self-imposed prisons, to the point that they have become "houses of chains" and the "chain-maker uncle."<sup>35</sup> The metaphor of the "chain-maker uncle" is one of the most powerful in Dastgīr'zādah's work, representing women who, by accepting their captivity, actively contribute to the production of the very chains that confine them, thereby upholding and reinforcing the power of the patriarchal figures who create and sustain these chains.

In summary, the metaphor "woman is a captive" reflects the evolution of Dastgīr'zādah's perspective from Shatt-i ābī-rahāyī to Khvāhar'khāndah-'i marjān'hā (The step-sister of the corals), corresponding to a growing awareness of women's condition. Her later poetry not only conveys this heightened consciousness, but articulates a desire to liberate women from oppression, discrimination, and the constraints imposed by social and religious systems. The transformation of her poetic voice is deeply influenced by the broader social and cultural contexts in which she writes.

### **"Woman Is God's Representative (khalīfah Allāh)"**

In the collection *Bih dawr-i ātash va darīgh* (Around fire and regret, 1387/2008), Dastgīr'zādah includes a thought-provoking poem titled "Rāz-i āfarīnīsh" (The secret of creation). This poem announces the birth of a poet determined to critically examine the male-dominated philosophical narratives surrounding creation. Dastgīr'zādah arrives at the understanding that the essence of existence lies in the soul, which is shared by both

<sup>33</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 325, 326.

<sup>34</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 775.

<sup>35</sup>Āmū zanjīr'bāf (chain-maker uncle) is the name of a traditional children's game, played in the form of a question-and-answer exchange. Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 775

<sup>36</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 423.

<sup>37</sup>Qur'an 2:233.

<sup>38</sup>Muhammad Sādiqī, "Nafaqah dar mazhab-i Hanafi" [Nafaqah in the Hanafi School], *Fasl'nāmah-'i mutāla'āt-i fiqhī va falsafī* [Quarterly Journal of Jurisprudential and Philosophical Studies] 2, no. 7 (1390/2011): 94–95.

<sup>39</sup>Qur'an 4:34.

man and woman, while the body, whether male or female, is merely an instrument. Accordingly, what prompted the angels prostrate before the first man was the status of being human, not gender, which is associated with the body and represents the most superficial aspect of human identity. Dastgīr'zādah challenges the belief in male superiority and draws on the Quranic concept of "God's representative" or *khalīfah-'i Allāh* to advocate for the spiritual role of men and women. She writes:

Let us return to our origin,  
And be companions to one another in being a *khalīfah*.<sup>36</sup>

### **"Woman Is a Servant"**

Men are assigned the responsibility of providing food, clothing, and shelter. The Qur'an, prophetic tradition (*sunnah*), scholarly consensus (*ijmā'*), and analogy (*qiyās*) are cited to support the husband's obligation to pay his wife's alimony. The Quranic verse, "The child's father will provide reasonable maintenance and clothing for the mother during that period,"<sup>37</sup> is interpreted to affirm that the provision of alimony is a duty of the husband. From tradition, the following prophetic account (*hadīs*) is often referenced: "They should provide reasonable maintenance and clothing."<sup>38</sup> Since the time of the Prophet, Islamic jurists have reached a consensus that the husband is legally obligated to support his wife financially. If the wife demands alimony through legal channels, the judge will mandate its payment. Another Quranic verse, "Men are the caretakers of women,"<sup>39</sup> introduces men as caretakers, which has been interpreted as implying their guardianship over women. Assigning the financial responsibility of women to men has contributed to a division of labor in which that domestic tasks are designated to women, while societal responsibilities and public affairs are allocated to men. This division has contributed to the formation of the conceptual metaphor "woman is a servant" is in the collective social mentality.



Dastgīr'zādah uses the conceptual domain of “servant” to represent women. In *Shatt-i ābī-i rahāyī*, she portrays herself as a servant who wishes to wipe the mist from the beloved’s eyes so that he may see her true face and come to understand her.<sup>40</sup> However, in the final decade of her life, Dastgīr'zādah demonstrates a more mature perspective. She uses this source domain to show that she no longer associates herself with darkness, but rather, has aligned herself with sunlight. She has washed the attire of the night, symbolizing darkness, despair, and tyranny, and has swept the carpet of the day’s sorrows:

She was gently cleaning the sorrows of the days  
From the carpet of her life.<sup>41</sup>

I have washed the attire of the night, let me hang it  
On a rope of sunlight to dry.<sup>42</sup>

In summary, this metaphor reflects the poet’s intellectual and linguistic growth. The woman in her poetry no longer assumes the role of a servant confined to domestic spaces such as the house and the kitchen. Instead, she dedicates her time and abilities to more significant and meaningful pursuits. This woman has cleansed herself of despair<sup>43</sup> and bid farewell to hopelessness. She has rolled up the carpet of sorrow and swept away grief from the carpet of her life to create a more beautiful world for herself and for others.

## 4.2. Similarity to Nature

The macro-metaphor “woman is nature” appears 108 times in Dastgīr'zādah’s poems. This overarching metaphor can be further categorized into the following micro-metaphors.

### “Woman Is the Earth”

The creation of this metaphor is influenced by both physical and religious contexts. The Qur’an compares woman to agri-

<sup>40</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 98.

<sup>41</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 338.

<sup>42</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 446.

<sup>43</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 373.

<sup>44</sup>Qur'an 2:223.

<sup>45</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, 405.

<sup>46</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, 40.

<sup>47</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, 77.

cultural land due to her life-giving and fruit-bearing qualities: “Your wives are like farmland for you.”<sup>44</sup> Dastgīr'zādah also conceptualizes woman through the image of the earth in the collection *Parvār'hā-yi pindār* (Imagination fertilities), which carries a lyrical theme. In the tradition of romantic poetry, it is common to depict the lover's eyes and body as dry land, awaiting irrigation by the memory of the beloved. Dastgīr'zādah similarly portrays herself as arid land, nourished by the recollections of the beloved:

In the dark night of my mind, a memory began to glow.  
The dry land of my eyes was moistened by your memory.<sup>45</sup>

### “Woman Is a Plant”

Forty-three examples of the micro-metaphor “woman is a plant” have been identified in Dastgīr'zādah's poems. In *Shatt-i ābī-i rahāyī*, Dastgīr'zādah's thoughts continue to wrestle with the dichotomy of tradition and modernity. Embedded within the hemistich “I'm happy only with you; without you I will not bloom”<sup>46</sup> is the conceptual metaphor “woman is a plant.” It reflects her understanding that a woman can grow and evolve; however, it also implies a dependence on men for that growth.

In *Ghazal-i gharīb-i ghurbat*, the metaphor “woman is a plant” reappears with a notable shift: the woman is now “free in the fever of growth” and “full of roots.” “The green invasion of the words” transforms her into the spring itself, and the buds that have sprouted upon her cause a sense of restlessness. She is no longer passive or dependent but has emerged “from the margins to the center of events” in order to “grow.” Nevertheless, a trace of traditional influence still lingers deep within her consciousness, as she remains expectant for “someone else” to rain and “make her green.”<sup>47</sup>

This dependence is also observable in *Az pūst tā pūstir* (From skin to poster). The poet recognizes in herself the potential for



growth, yet she suggests that only others can activate that potential and cause it to flourish:

Grow me from the earth.<sup>48</sup>

Dastgīr'zādah perceives a distance between herself and the Afghan women who remain imprisoned by rigid social norms. This distance becomes apparent through the analysis of the conceptual metaphors she uses to depict herself to the Afghan women. When Dastgīr'zādah shifts her focus from self-reflection to the condition of the Afghan women, their passivity, oppression, and vulnerability are brought into sharp relief. She portrays the Afghan women as saplings that have fallen from the eyes of autumn-stricken thoughts:

Your body is a sapling fallen from the autumn of thought.<sup>49</sup>

The study of the conceptual metaphor “woman is a plant” clearly illustrates the evolution of Dastgīr'zādah's perspective on her inner self. As previously noted, in her earliest poetry, she expresses a reliance on others for growth and self-actualization. This perspective stems from a traditional worldview and a lack of self-awareness. However, in her later collections, the woman she portrays is not only autonomous, but also exerts influence over the lives of others. In *Alif'bā-yi sultah* (The alphabet of domination), it is no longer the earth that gives life to the woman-plant; rather, it is the woman-plant that revitalizes the earth:

I grew in spring, and the earth was renewed through me.<sup>50</sup>

Dastgīr'zādah continues to use this metaphor to critique other women, questioning who has silenced their voices and caused them to surrender to injustices and the inequalities of the patriarchal world.<sup>51</sup>

Dastgīr'zādah's use of the metaphor “woman is a plant” in this critical and reflective manner reveals her heightened awareness

<sup>48</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, 265.

<sup>49</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, 513.

<sup>50</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, 687.

<sup>51</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, 769.

<sup>52</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 370.

<sup>53</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 530.

<sup>54</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 574.

<sup>55</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 588.

of her identity, of womanhood, and of the cultural constraints imposed on women. This awareness is not sudden, but rather the produce of a gradual process shaped by life experience. The development of her consciousness is evident across all elements of the conceptual domain of nature in her work.

### “Woman Is the Sky”

The metaphor “woman is the sky” appears twenty times in Dastgīr'zādah's poems and represents the dual concepts of beauty and grandeur. The poet expresses a new awareness of her status and adopts a confident and elevated perception of herself. She senses the presence of the sun within her and refers to herself as the “east of moments.”<sup>52</sup> In *Dar mafsal-i durūgh va du'ā* (At the juncture of lie and prayer), the night dances within her, and the stars rejoice.<sup>53</sup> In *Khvāhar'khāndah-'i marjān'hā*, as observed in the analysis of other conceptual metaphors, the poet's mindset is transformed, revealing self-belief and a positive, elevated view of her inner woman. She envisions the beloved as a presence that wanders through the sky of her being. Encountering and embracing this greatness leads to a renewed understanding of God and of her power.<sup>54</sup> In another poem from the same collection, the poet experiences such a sense of fullness and grandeur, characteristic of the most beautiful phenomena of existence, that she asks the beloved to dwell within the brightest part of her being, namely, the sun. In literature and even in life, women have frequently symbolized beauty. Drawing on this tradition, Dastgīr'zādah envisions and represents herself through one of the most magnificent elements of existence: the sky. Thus, both her lived experience and literary tradition contribute to the formation of this conceptual metaphor. Moreover, years of living in Europe nurtured in Dastgīr'zādah a sense of self-confidence and a positive view of herself, further motivating her choice to use this metaphor as a representation of her identity:

Come and make home in my sun.<sup>55</sup>



## “Woman Is a Mountain”

The conceptual metaphor “woman is a mountain” signifies value, endurance, patience and grandeur. Dastgīr’zādah identifies with and internalizes these qualities, expressing them through the metaphor of the mountain. In Ghazal-i gharīb-i ghurbat, she presents her resilience and strength as intrinsic, qualities as enduring as those of a mountain.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, she acknowledges the mountain’s capacity for fragility, which she too has experienced, and reflects this nuance through related metaphors. In Az pūst tā pūstir, using a lyrical approach and evoking the beloved’s eyes, she imagines her chest as a mountain capable of producing emeralds:

What emeralds the mountain of my chest will grow.<sup>57</sup>

Dastgīr’zādah also envisions herself as Mount Sinai, illuminated by the utterance of the beloved’s desires:

Light up my Sinai with a word,  
Stay in the memory of the ancient tale.<sup>58</sup>

### 4.3. Feminist Tendency

Women poets, as intellectual and conscientious individuals, endeavor to challenge the ideas and the cultural constructs that depict women as weak and inferior. They strive to eliminate discrimination and inequality in society and to help women attain a dignified life with equal opportunities. These efforts toward transformation are evident in the metaphors they use to represent women in their poetry. Dastgīr’zādah is among the poets whose work reflects the fundamental principles of feminist thought. Her poetry calls for a transformation of the values and clichés that have constrained women.

<sup>56</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār, 80.

<sup>57</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār, 266.

<sup>58</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār, 555.

<sup>59</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 310.

<sup>60</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 470.

<sup>61</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 95, 97.

## Woman Is a Fighter

Having reached middle age and become familiar with feminist thought, Dastgīr'zādah attains a deeper understanding of herself, which intensifies her determination to resist imposed limitations. Consequently, she confronts anything that conflicts with her will. She refuses to allow the “grandeur of the green leaf” to be trivialized:

I fight with the wind  
With the rain  
That play with the grandeur of the green leaf.<sup>59</sup>

She also nurtures the “innocence of adoration”<sup>60</sup> and, with this maternal innocence, resists the oppression directed at women in her country. In this manner, she presents herself as both a fighter and a compassionate figure.

## Woman Is a Leader

In the context of task distribution and gender roles, traditional mentalities typically associate leadership, particularly in the crucial sectors of society, with men. In Afghanistan, it is rare to encounter women among political leaders. However, throughout Dastgīr'zādah's collections of poetry, there is a consistent belief in the emergence of a woman will liberate her fellow women from oppression. The poet expresses disillusionment with male leaders and conveys the belief that only women, through their own resolve, can resist the constraints of a patriarchal society and bring meaningful change to their monotonous and marginalized existence. The poem “Savār-i nūr” (The rider of light) portrays an ideal woman adorned with a crown of love, traversing the darkness by riding on the sun to bring light and end the historical silence of women.<sup>61</sup> This poem conveys a form of hope that transcends conventional expectations. The poet has come to recognize that Afghan men are unlikely to take initiative in improving women's lives. Thus, a woman must en-



ter the field of struggle and actively pursue transformation for herself and her companions. The poem illustrates the poet's belief in the capabilities and potential of women. It encapsulates the conceptual metaphors "woman is a leader" and "woman is the savior."

### Woman Is the Sun

This metaphor reflects the poet's positive and optimistic perspective on women. She envisions herself as a sun that shines in the darkness of the night,<sup>62</sup> is "full of today's sun," and embodies "the intimate growth of the sun."<sup>63</sup> This metaphor is grounded in her heightened self-awareness. She also imagines her mother as a sun that has set with her death.<sup>64</sup>

The female character in *Āftāb-i āvārah* (The displaced sun) has attained such existential independence that "to her body are tied the mirrors of the day," and while she "brings news about the breaking of the night," she is on the verge of carrying "the grief-stricken city" through "the plight of the accidents."<sup>65</sup>

This collection also presents a belief in the arrival of a savior woman who can guide other women and bring about changes in their world. The poet conveys the message that, through love, women can tame "the men of the battleground of violence" and "become sunny," enabling them to "open all the gates and windows toward kindness." Such women will illuminate both their own lives and the lives of others.<sup>66</sup>

In *Āftāb-i āvārah*, the woman is surrounded by a halo of light. This renewed vision stems from the maturation of *Dastgīr'zādah's* thought over time. She compares the truth of love, discovered within her own heart, to the fire on Mount Sinai,<sup>67</sup> and she rejects the notion of kindness as a taboo. She considers it her duty, as an intellectual woman, to express her emotions openly.

<sup>62</sup>*Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash 'ār, 460.*

<sup>63</sup>*Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash 'ār, 468.*

<sup>64</sup>*Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash 'ār, 16.*

<sup>65</sup>*Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash 'ār, 164-65.*

<sup>66</sup>*Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash 'ār, 162, 164.*

<sup>67</sup>*Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash 'ār, 137.*

<sup>68</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 463.

<sup>69</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 637.

<sup>70</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 772.

<sup>71</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 735.

Dastgīr'zādah recognizes that, historically, women have played a limited role in shaping the domains of science and art. She attributes this to the patriarchal system's antagonism, which has hindered women's development and realization of their potential. She urges women to claim the light through solidarity:

Come

To illuminate the city lights on the rooftops of night.

Women are granted less right to the light.

But

Women have not signed the decree of darkness.

Come

To reclaim the light from the hands of shining pearls.<sup>68</sup>

In the collection *Az rīshah'hā-yi hamīshah* (From the permanent roots), Dastgīr'zādah uses the metaphor "woman is the sun" to depict herself as a sun that has fallen "in the valleys of night," with no eclipse capable of matching her "continuous pain."<sup>69</sup> The poet refuses to allow death to extinguish her spirit before her natural passing.

In *Khvāhar'khāndah-'i marjān'hā*, Dastgīr'zādah portrays women as those who give birth to the East and the bringer of light into existence. In creating this metaphor, the context of physicality has been used.

Woman

All easts are born from you.<sup>70</sup>

In Dastgīr'zādah's poetry, there is a consistent reverence for love. She identifies her heart with Mount Sinai, illuminated by the manifestation of love. In the metaphor "woman is light," a profound unity between love and woman emerges; both are radiant and radiate illumination, especially when another metaphor is introduced: "woman is the Mount Sinai."<sup>71</sup> The image of the proud, loving, and light-bearing woman likened to Mount Sinai bears no resemblance to the image of the loving woman in



Dastgīr'zādah's earlier poetic expressions.

<sup>72</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash 'ār*, 356.

#### 4.4. Lyrical Mindset

<sup>73</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash 'ār*, 296.

##### “Woman is Rain/Light”

In the collection *Talkh dar ātash* (Bitter in the fire), Dastgīr'zādah has reached the stage of intellectual and emotional maturity, emerging as a capable and resilient fighter. In her poetry, she not only appears as an intellectual guide for other women but also presents herself as a strong and sublime lover in her romantic compositions. She has relinquished fears, darkness, and lamentation, and instead becomes intoxicated by the sun, descending from the eye of dawn, and radiating with the fullness of the unobscured sun:

I rain in the eyes of dawn, intoxicated by the sun.  
I shine with the full presence of the unmasked sun.<sup>72</sup>

##### “Woman Is a Window”

Although she has entered middle age, the poet continues to feel love burning in her heart like the sun, and romantic expression remains an inseparable component of her poetic voice. Having attained intellectual maturity, she confronts the challenges of a patriarchal society, illness, and homesickness. Nevertheless, she remains a woman deeply affected by emotion, to the extent that the memory of the beloved has the power to overwhelm her:

The drizzle of your memory breaks on the windows  
It is an event that constantly breaks me down.<sup>73</sup>

##### “Woman Is a Bird”

The metaphor “woman is a bird” is one of the most frequently occurring conceptual metaphors in Dastgīr'zādah's poetry. It is

<sup>74</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, 126.

<sup>75</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-i ash'ār*, 254.

used to represent both her internal experience and the external image of women in Afghan society. In this patriarchal society, where strict gender divisions have excluded women from public participation and confined them to domestic spaces, women often identify with birds. As a result, expressions such as “tied wings,” “broken wings,” and “flight,” appear with notable regularity.

In *Āftāb-i āvārah*, the tension between dependence on a male figure and the pursuit of personal maturity is conveyed through this metaphor. In a romantic poem, Dastgīr'zādah recalls a person who opened her wings, rested within her, and without whom she would be destroyed.<sup>74</sup>

In the collection *Az pūst tā pūstir*, this oscillation between dependence and autonomy persists. The poet envisions herself as full of wings, birds, and flights, yet the blue sky in which she longs to fly belongs to another. This metaphor conveys her emotional dependence on another individual:

I am full of wings,  
Full of birds,  
Full of flights,  
In the inevitable blue of you.<sup>75</sup>

The selection of this source domain for the target domain of “woman” is situated within the aesthetic framework of lyrical poetry, in which the lover often imagined as a bird longing to fly in the sky of the beloved. The context of the poet’s life in exile has influenced the choice and use of this metaphor.

#### **4.5. Norm and Tradition**

##### **Woman Is an Object**

The norms of traditional life and the structure of patriarchal society have led to the objectification of women. In literature,



objectification refers to the process by which relationships between human beings are replaced with relationships between objects. This concept was first introduced in North America in the field of social psychology. Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts are among the major theoreticians and researchers in this field.<sup>76</sup>

In a state of objectification, women are deprived of perspective and agency. Lacking individuality and autonomy, they are reduced to dolls or instruments manipulated by others. The consequence of objectification is passivity and absence of will.

One of the conceptual domains of Dastgīr'zādah's poetry is that of objectification. In the following lines, the woman is depicted as an object that falls and is trampled upon. These images emphasize her weakness and powerlessness:

A woman called out within me all the time  
She would fall into my hands all the time  
She would slip from my grasp all the time  
Alas, she would be trampled upon all the time.<sup>77</sup>

### **Woman Is Glass**

In "Hijā-yi dardnāk-i darrah'hā" (The painful syllable of valleys), in the conceptual domain of objectification, woman is imagined as glass, a metaphor that primarily implies fragility. Dastgīr'zādah portrays woman as a delicate entity whose very nature leads to her own breaking.<sup>78</sup> In another poem, she writes of herself falling from another person's hands like an object:

When I fell from your hand, didn't your heart tremble?<sup>79</sup>

### **Woman Is Clothing**

Another concrete metaphor used Dastgīr'zādah to conceptualize woman is that of clothing. In *Āftāb-i āvārah*, she implores the

<sup>76</sup>Mansūrah Sajjādī and Sayyidah Yāsamin Sajjādī, "Mutālī'ah-'i tatbīqī-i vaz'iyat-i shay'-vārigī dar shakhsīyat'hā-yi zan dar rumān-i Sūvashūn, asar-i Sīmīn Dānishvar va Digargūnī, asar-i Mīsil Būtur" [A comparative analysis of objectification of the female characters in Sīmīn Dānishvar's Sūvashūn and Michel Butor's La Modification], *Pazhūhish'hā-yi Adabiyāt-i Tatbīqī* [Comparative Literature Research] 8, no. 1 (Spring 1399/2020), 92.

<sup>77</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 389.

<sup>78</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 573.

<sup>79</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 616.

<sup>80</sup>“You wanted to wear my hands,” in Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār*, 168.

<sup>81</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār*, 325.

<sup>82</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār*, 372.

<sup>83</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār*, 477.

<sup>84</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār*, 787.

man to wear her hands—symbols of power—in order to preserve his beauty, protect his masculine world, and maintain his historical dominance by stripping the woman of her power.<sup>80</sup> However, the woman in Dastgīr’zādah’s poetry has reached a level of awareness that prevents her from being exploited by others.

In *Az sipīdah labrīz*, reflecting a shift in her perspective on the condition of women, Dastgīr’zādah concludes that in traditional societies, women face cultural and social restrictions akin to limited framework imposed by clothing. Dastgīr’zādah situates herself above the performative expectations of the patriarchal order.<sup>81</sup>

In the collection *Talkh dar ātash*, Dastgīr’zādah revisits this metaphor with greater nuance. She envisions herself as washed clothing, suspended on a line and constrained by masculine culture. Yet, she remains indifferent, failing to recognize these restrictive boundaries in order to liberate herself. She also represents herself as washed clothing drying in the sun, destined to be reused:

Yesterday, when sorrow called your name,  
I hung from my rope of weariness,  
Drying out.<sup>82</sup>

In her subsequent collection, Dastgīr’zādah conceptualizes dawn as a form clothing.<sup>83</sup> In *Khvāhar’khandah-’i marjān’hā*, she critically examines women’s clothing as a symbol of the oppression and restrictions imposed by a patriarchal society. She depicts a city devoid of women’s chador (full-body veils) as a hollow in a well.<sup>84</sup>

As previously noted, the metaphor “woman is clothing” conveys qualities such as beauty, concealment and protection, support and restriction, as well as oppression in Dastgīr’zādah’s poems. This metaphor emerges from the surrounding social,



cultural, and religious contexts, and reflects Dastgīr'zādah's egalitarian perspective.

<sup>85</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash 'ār*, 758.

<sup>86</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash 'ār*, 70.

## Woman Is a Building

Dastgīr'zādah conceptualizes woman as a building with multiple dimensions. The measuring tools of patriarchal laws are embedded deep within the recesses of the woman's mind. Having attained awareness, the speaker now urges the removal of these tools, rejecting standards imposed by external authorities.

Take the ruler out from the base of the building of my mind.<sup>85</sup>

## 4.6. Other metaphors

### Woman Is a Place

Dastgīr'zādah's perception of and commitment to women informs her use of the metaphor of place to represent women. The metaphor "woman is a place" appears seventy-four times in her poems. Across the conceptual metaphors used for women in the collection *Shatt-i ābī-i rahāyī*, there is a recurring theme of woman's reliance on another. On one hand, Dastgīr'zādah presents herself as land, burdened by a mass that rests on her like a mountain, and on the other hand, she wants the beloved to rebuild her:

This lump, for years,  
Like a mighty mountain,  
Has sat within me.

...

I am becoming a ruin—rebuild me.<sup>86</sup>

In *Ghazal-i gharīb-i ghurbat*, Dastgīr'zādah identifies herself as a site for the other's nesting, a place devoid of peace and tranquility. This restlessness stems from deprivation caused by societal norms rooted in injustice and inequality. Nevertheless,

<sup>87</sup>“Nest in the anxiety of my being,” in *Dastgīr’zādah*, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 76.

<sup>88</sup>*Dastgīr’zādah*, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 405.

<sup>89</sup>*Dastgīr’zādah*, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 441.

<sup>90</sup>*Dastgīr’zādah*, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 441.

<sup>91</sup>*Dastgīr’zādah*, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 433.

<sup>92</sup>*Dastgīr’zādah*, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 730.

<sup>93</sup>*Dastgīr’zādah*, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 758.

<sup>94</sup>*Dastgīr’zādah*, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 769.

<sup>95</sup>*Dastgīr’zādah*, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 798.

driven by feminine compassion and empathy, she gently invites the other to choose her as a nesting place.<sup>87</sup>

In the collection *Bih dawr-i ātash va darīgh*, the metaphor of place as a representation of woman recurs with greater frequency. The poet envisions herself as a site that can serve a refuge for memories and as land in need of watering.<sup>88</sup> She also imagines herself as the sound of a green leaf suitable for a canary’s nesting. At times, she conceives of herself so expansive that time itself could “put up its nest”<sup>89</sup> in her, or that others might seek refuge in her presence. This transformation reflects her transformation from an ordinary and passive individual to a savior capable of altering the monotonous existence of women with her awakening action.<sup>90</sup> In another poem, the mother is portrayed as a place made of love, which has the capacity to grow.<sup>91</sup>

All elements associated with this metaphor carry positive connotations, reflecting the poet’s confidence in both her own and other women’s abilities. *Dastgīr’zādah* is depicted as becoming an active and conscious woman. This shift in perspective may be attributed to factors such as personal maturation, residence in a liberal country such as the Netherlands, and changes in the social fabric of Afghanistan. Many poems in the collection *Khvāhar’khandah-i marjān’hā* are romantic in nature. The elevated status of love in *Dastgīr’zādah*’s poetic vision is evident throughout. In patriarchal contexts, it is common for women to fear expressing love. To articulate this reality, the poet uses the metaphor “woman is the sky,” and critiques the fearful woman from whose sky fear falls.<sup>92</sup>

*Dastgīr’zādah* does not want to conform to the standards and norms imposed upon her by others, and she asserts this decisively: “Take the ruler out from the base of the building of my mind.”<sup>93</sup> She also experiences this sense of place in the absence of the beloved, as she becomes an empty space full of darkness.<sup>94</sup> Yet, even then, the intimacy of her hands remains a place of joy.<sup>95</sup>



## Woman Is Dead

The metaphor “woman is dead” occupies the imagination of many women poets and is reflected in their work. The social seclusion and limited participation of women in political, economic, and public life contribute significantly to the emergence of this metaphor. Women remain marginalized and are not recognized as competent decision-makers in the crucial spheres of life. In the collection *Khvāhar’khandah-’i marjān’hā*, Dastgīr’zādah does not depict women as entirely lifeless, as they still exhibit signs of vitality and, more importantly, have discovered the voice and courage to resist being buried alive.

My corpse still breathes  
Don’t put me in the ground.<sup>96</sup>

## Woman Is a Bird

In *Kūchah’hā-yi rawshan-i māh* (Moonlit alleys), Dastgīr’zādah reflects on the condition of women in her country, expressing recognition that a woman, like a bird, can fly and be free. However, her wings are tied by social norms, and she has never taken a step toward freeing herself:

I don’t know why the woman is always weary,  
And remains broken within herself.  
Her gaze is the frame of a high flight,  
But her wings remain closed in her gaze.<sup>97</sup>

As Dastgīr’zādah approaches middle age, her perspective becomes more introspective and perceptive, and she identifies the constraints that have caused women’s suffering and confinement. This awareness is reflected in the elements she chooses in the conceptual metaphor of the bird. In the collection *Dar mafsal-i durūgh va du’ā*, she presents an image of the inner woman as full of potential flight,<sup>98</sup> with two fully extended wings.<sup>99</sup> The figure is no longer captive or broken-winged.

<sup>96</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār*, 780.

<sup>97</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār*, 397.

<sup>98</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār*, 511.

<sup>99</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-’i ash’ār*, 522, 525.

<sup>100</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 628.

<sup>101</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 718.

<sup>102</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 728.

<sup>103</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār, 470.

In Az rīshah'hā-yi hamīshah, the metaphor “woman is a bird” continues to reflect resilience. Despite facing a life-threatening illness, the poet maintains hope and a strong will to soar. In fact, her flight becomes even more powerful, “with the wings of the sun and drunkenness,” even though the sound of her flight remains unheard.<sup>100</sup>

In Alifbā-yi sultah, the bird metaphor signifies Dastgīr'zādah's clear and assertive perception of herself. The earlier dependence and sense of belonging to others are absent; instead, autonomy and independence prevail. She has unfurled her wings and taken flight and now speaks of her sun-like nests.<sup>101</sup> This portrayal contrasts with earlier depictions of the bird as caged and awaiting release.

In Khvāhar'khandah-'i marjān'hā, Dastgīr'zādah refers to women who have not achieved awareness as “the generation of the cold.” This generation is characterized by a lack of vision for the future and a sun constrained by chains. Nevertheless, she asserts that even in such a closed and suffocating situation, women can fly and conquer heights if they are determined to do so. She affirms that “you and I” have two open wings, and that progress and the conquest of horizons and peaks require only the will to act.<sup>102</sup>

### **Woman Is a Mother**

The experience of motherhood is inherently linked to the female condition. Dastgīr'zādah, the mother of two children, draws upon this experience in constructing conceptual metaphors. This personal context shapes her poetic identity as a mother who nourishes the “innocence of adoration.”<sup>103</sup> It is through the lens of this maternal innocence that she confronts the oppression endured by women in her country. She cultivates love in a world where expressions of love by woman are taboo and carry grave consequences. Therefore, both physical and mnemonic contexts contribute significantly to the formation of this metaphor.



In the poem “Savār-i naw,” from the collection *Ghazal-i gharīb-i ghurbat*, an idealized woman is portrayed as a savior. This figure is conceptualized through the same metaphorical framework as that of the mother. She, therefore, serves as a nurturing presence for “the new words,” “the clean moments of revelation,” and “earth and cloud.”<sup>104</sup> The woman in this poem is not portrayed using war-related words like commander, soldier, or fighter. Instead, she is depicted through the delicate mindset and the poet’s experience, using the metaphor of the mother as caregiver and nurturer.

<sup>104</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 95, 96.

<sup>105</sup>Dastgīr’zādah, *Majmū’ah-i ash’ār*, 24.

<sup>106</sup>Siyāhsar, meaning “black-headed,” signifies a bad omen in Afghan culture. The term is commonly used to refer to women among the general population in Afghanistan.

In the collection *Alif’bā-yi sultah*, the concept of “woman is a mother” inspires the metaphor of Farānak, a mythic heroine who gives birth to Farīydūn, the liberator of his people from the tyranny of Zahhāk’s and his serpents. Farānak embodies the ideal savior woman previously described in more abstract terms in Dastgīr’zādah’s earlier work. In *Alif’bā-yi sultah*, this idealized woman takes shape through mythological imagery:

For long, we have been the food of the snakes on Zahhāk’s shoulders.

But

In a distant lake, a woman is growing,  
And a sun is beginning to rise in its forests.  
Still, Kāvah’s hands are made of iron,  
And he believes  
Farānak is promising us a resurrection.<sup>105</sup>

### **Woman is Siyāh’sar (“Black-Headed”)**

Traditional Afghan society, shaped by religious and tribal structures, contains numerous sexualized clichés. One such term *siyāh’sar* (black-headed),<sup>106</sup> which carries patriarchal and misogynistic connotations. Dastgīr’zādah critically interrogates of the usage of this term by men to refer to women, viewing it as a sign of women’s inferiority. She rejects its implication of subjugation:

<sup>107</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 422.

<sup>108</sup>Muhammad Muhiq, "Hijāb, az āsān'gīrī-i Qur'ān tā sakht'gīrī-i faqīhān" [Hijab, from the lenience of the Qur'an to the strictness of the jurists], *Hasht-i subh, Urdūbihisht* 17, 1401 [May 7, 2022].  
<https://8am.media/fa/hijab-from-the-simplification-of-the-quran-to-the-strictness-of-the-jurists/>

<sup>109</sup>Dastgīr'zādah, *Majmū'ah-'i ash'ār*, 277.

Was my name supposed to be changed,  
And after that I be your black-headed with frailty?<sup>107</sup>

### Woman Is Burnable/Hell

In Dastgīr'zādah's poetic vision, woman is imagined as a burnable entity, subjected to perpetual suffering under unjust societal norms. Simultaneously, within the framework of religious jurisprudence, she is also identified as a source of temptation, and thus a cause of both her own and men's descent into hell. This culminates in Dastgīr'zādah's darkest metaphor: "woman is hell." The origins of this metaphor lie not in the essence of religion itself, but rather in the prevailing social conditions and interpretations of religious law. For example, the belief that viewing a woman's hair is forbidden is not explicitly stated in the Qur'an and remains a matter of debate among Islamic jurists. While some jurists uphold such restrictions, others do not.<sup>108</sup> Dastgīr'zādah addresses this issue with a critical voice:

The fire of hell  
Passes only through your braided hair.  
Little girl, wake up  
My voice seems to turn to smoke in the air.  
Your flowery dress is the fire of hell  
... My voice becomes flame,  
And the little girl turns to smoke in my words.<sup>109</sup>

### Conclusion

Humayrā Nakhat Dastgīr'zādah is a poet who has written in both classical and modern poetic forms. Over the course of her life, her perspective has gradually moved away from tradition, and her outlook toward women has transformed. This shift can be observed through an analysis of the conceptual metaphors she uses in representing women.

The findings of this research, conducted within the framework



of the conceptual metaphor theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson, indicate the presence of three distinct representations of woman in Dastgīr'zādah's conceptual system: 1) The poet's inner woman, who takes the path of growth and self-development, represented through conceptual metaphors with positive connotations and a superior attitude toward women; 2) The woman situated with the social-cultural context of Afghanistan, conceptualized by the poet as passive, oppressed, weak, and lacking awareness; 3) An idealized woman envisioned in Dastgīr'zādah's mind, who appears as a savior, bringing transformations and new possibilities to the lives of women in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the analysis of the contextual foundations of these metaphors reveals that the selection of source domains is related to prevailing social, political, and gendered conditions. In a poetic discourse that reflects the lived experiences of a woman in a patriarchal society, metaphors function not merely as stylistic devices but as cognitive and critical instruments. Through metaphor, the poet redefines the identity of women, critiques-imposed roles, and challenges dominant ideological structures.