

Cultural Conceptualisation of Spinel in Persian Poetry

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ABSTRACT

Numerous research studies have explored the physical properties of gemstones, their socio-cultural significance, esoteric meanings, and remedial uses, yet their role in human life often extends beyond conventional perceptions. Gemstones not only serve as decorative elements but also possess dynamic qualities, symbolizing beauty as a living substance. In contemporary discourse, gemstones can be regarded as cultural elements, integral to global perceptions and multifaceted metaphors. In Persian poetry, which is characterised by its rich imagery and allusions, gemstones are frequently employed as descriptive motifs. To aid non-Iranian speakers in understanding Persian literature, this article seeks to uncover the cultural conceptualisation of gemstones, with a focus on spinel, through the lens of Cultural Linguistics. Using the analytical framework of Cultural Linguistics, the authors interpret 824 Persian lines (*mesrâ*) through qualitative analysis. This analysis reveals six cultural metaphors and schemas along with three distinct cultural categories. Furthermore, quantitative analysis demonstrates the distribution of cultural cognition among poets, illustrating how they project their thoughts and emotions through spinel, thereby creating a shared mental space. These identified conceptualisations of spinel transcend conventional perceptions, highlighting the culturally embodied nature of Persian poetry, in which poets, akin to jewellers, intricately weave pearls of thought and emotion into a cohesive thread of rhyme and meter.

Keywords: Cultural Linguistics; spinel; gemstones; conceptualisation; cultural cognition

INTRODUCTION

‘Persian poets found “signs in horizons” and indeed surveyed all of nature, from stones to the ocean, from plants to stars, from the lion to the tiniest insect, for images to use in ever-changing patterns’ (Schimmel, 1992, p. 156). This is why illustration in Persian poetry from ancient to modern times is based on rhetorical subtleties such as simile, metaphor, irony, and so on. In addition, ‘the image was used as decoration and to deliver the poet’s sensory knowledge and describe the experience’ (Badizadeh et al., 2021, p. 12). This tradition led to the abundance of figurative structures from nature illustrated by flowers, birds, and gemstones (Schimmel, 1992), which shaped the imaginative world of Persian poetry.

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Despite their prominence, gemstone images have received limited systematic attention in scholarship. References appear scattered across studies but are rarely central to analysis. Reisner (2020) noted their stylistic importance in the classical period, while Chalisova (2021), drawing on Sharaf ad-din Rami's treatise, mentioned gemstones as part of the poetic description of beauty. Osmanov (1974) also touched on them when reconstructing stylistic features of Persian-Tajik poetry based on Rudaki's works. These contributions recognise gemstone imagery but do not address its broader conceptual role.

Other research has approached the topic from historical or descriptive perspectives. Melikian (2001), an art historian, revealed the role of spinels in Iranian culture. In the first part of this work, Melikian briefly identified the origins of this word in lexicographic materials, as well as the symbolism of spinels in poetry and science. In the second part, the author described the usage of this stone in the palace of Iranian rulers. Despite its valuable content, the paper delivers a historical analysis only. Similarly, Mohammad-Reza (2005), Farmani (2009), Afshar (2016), and Mohammad (2021) discuss the peculiarities in usage of gemstones by a particular poet's style, in a specific period of history, or even the remedial appliance of gemstones and minerals in literary texts.

Lexicographic compilations represent another important strand. The *Dictionary of Gemstones and Minerals in Persian Literature* (Mohammadi & Anushe, 2013) gathered metaphors, idioms, and comparisons involving gemstones, while Gerami (2015) assembled a large corpus of similes and metaphors in *Precious Stones in a Thousand Years of Persian Poetry*. Though these works are invaluable reference tools, they function as catalogues and do not provide analysis of how gemstone imagery operates conceptually within the poetic imagination.

In Persian poetry, the imagery of gemstones is characterised by semantic richness and polysemy, which makes their interpretation and translation particularly challenging. A single gemstone may represent opposing meanings – sweetness and venom, solidity and fragility – rooted in physical properties and cultural traditions. In translation their layered cultural and cognitive meanings collapse into a mere lexical equivalent, leaving the reader with nothing more than the name of a stone, and thus the poetic depth of the image is lost. This is why the absence of systematic research on gemstones in cognitive and cultural linguistics can be regarded as a noticeable gap in the study of poetic tradition. By examining cultural schemas, categories, and metaphors, this paper seeks to uncover how gemstones are conceptualised and employed by Persian poets in constructing meaning. Such an inquiry highlights not only the literary function of gemstones, but also their role in understanding the diversity of the Persian worldview based on the process of conceptualisations.

For this purpose, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What kinds of cultural metaphors, schemas, and categories can be revealed through gemstones in Persian poetry?
2. Are gemstones conceptualised equally by Persian poets?

LITERATURE REVIEW

COGNITIVE APPROACHES TO POETRY

The study of poetry through the lens of cognitive linguistics has been gradually developing since the 1990s. One of the earliest systematic applications of cognitive linguistic theory to poetry was undertaken by Lakoff and Turner in *More Than Cool Reason* (1989), where the authors analysed metaphorical structures underlying poetic language. The book demonstrates how poets employ metaphors with great skill to illuminate human experience. In the study of Persian literature, cognitive approaches have been applied to various metaphorical patterns: emotion-related metaphors in English and Persian Literature (Mashak et al., 2012), colour metaphoric conceptualisations in poetical verses (Aliakbari et al., 2015), conceptual metaphors in Hafez Shirazi's Divan (Sabzalipour & Vaziri, 2018), and so on. There is a smooth shift towards the examination of cultural aspects in literary materials in the following studies. Jelebi (2015) aims to identify and analyse conceptual metaphors in Iranian Persian and British English, focusing on how cultural factors shape their construction in two short stories. Using MIP and Kövecses's framework, Jelebi's work examines how the emotions of anxiety and greed are metaphorically expressed, offering a cognitive linguistic perspective on the cultural imprints embedded in these literary texts. The findings of another paper (Hashemian et al., 2020) show that while the two languages share many predominant metaphors, significant variations arise due to cultural and linguistic influences, demonstrating how cognitive, social, and cultural factors shape metaphorical expression. Such studies therefore show the impact and influence of culture in formation of imagery in literary tools.

ON CULTURAL CONCEPTUALISATION

The concept of culture as a factor that contributes to cognitive processes such as conceptualisation originated earlier in the 18th century; however, this topic remains relevant to this day. Attempts to connect language and culture under the term *cultural linguistics*, which Gary Palmer identified as the synthesis that results when the emergent field of cognitive linguistics is tied into Boasian linguistics, ethnosemantics, and the ethnography of speaking (1996, pp. 4–5), present a generalised picture and have become as popular as ethnolinguistics. But given that language, separate from culture, has come to be viewed as 'a human-driven complex adaptive system' (Lui, 2018), there is a need to specify this field. Maslova (2018, p. 184) explained the reason for such changes by saying that:

... in the concept of language and culture, the interests of all human sciences converge ... this is a cross-cutting idea that destroys the boundaries between disciplines that study the human beings. Therefore, modern linguoculturology should explore not only the interaction of language and culture, but also solve the problem of the relationship and interconnection of language and personality, its consciousness, thinking.

New demands on the relationship between language and culture have evolved into a multidisciplinary area of research by Farzad Sharifian in the framework of Cultural Linguistics (2011). By capitalizing the name of the discipline, Sharifian developed it based on the relationship between language and cultural conceptualisation. According to Sharifian (2011), cultural conceptualisations are patterns of knowledge, shared across members of a cultural group. These

are not stored identically in each person's mind but are distributed representations that emerge from interaction, are negotiated across generations, and become embedded in cultural artefacts like language, rituals, and narratives. They reflect a community's worldview and guide thought, behaviour, and communication.

CULTURAL LINGUISTICS AND POETRY

Regarding the implementation of research in the field of Persian poetry from the perspective of Cultural Linguistics, a few works can be mentioned. One of the first such studies was done by Sepideh Hozhabrossadat (2018), who investigated the concept of death in 'Mathnavi' using the Cultural Linguistics framework, thereby revealing the cultural and religious aspects of this concept according to Rumi. In the article 'Cultural Linguistics and Poetry: The Case of Khayyam's Ruba'iyyat', Farzad Sharafian (2020), revealing the conceptualisations underlying a number of Omar Khayyam's quatrains, presents his work as the first attempt to apply Cultural Linguistics to poetry research. Here the author focuses on quatrains reflecting the themes of the brevity of life, life in the moment, predestination, and the mysteries of existence. The analysis presented in this article shows that the conceptualisations underlying these quatrains reflect both idiosyncratic and cultural conceptualisations that reflect Khayyam's environment. The conceptualisations identified highlight influences from a range of religious/cultural traditions. Similar studies have been done by Iranian scholars regarding the work of Moulana (Sadeghi et al., 2020). Here the authors, revealing the image schemas of 'water and fire', tried to provide a more accurate understanding of Moulana as an individual and social person. Whereas another study (Derakhshan et al., 2024) addresses a gap in Cultural Linguistics by analysing Rumi's conceptualisation of homeland, using corpus-based and inductive content analysis. The findings reveal Rumi's progression from cultural to mystical and idiosyncratic conceptualisations of homeland.

A few illustrative examples have been presented here regarding the functioning of cultural conceptualisations in poetic texts. This review highlights the growing scholarly interest in applying Cultural Linguistics to literary materials, demonstrating how poetic language can embody collective cultural knowledge and values. Yet the imagery of gemstones in Persian poetry has not been systematically explored within a cultural-cognitive perspective. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining how gemstones are conceptualised in the Persian poetic tradition. In doing so, it aims to enrich both the study of Persian literature and the broader development of Cultural Linguistics as a tool for understanding the cultural grounding of poetic expression.

METHOD

DATA

Among the various gemstones that appear in Persian poetry, this paper focuses on spinel for two main reasons. First, as Schimmel observes, 'in poetry *la'l* (from authors: spinel) seems to occur more often' (1992, p. 158), a point further corroborated by the dictionary of literary expressions (Shojaei, 2020), which contains 43 literary expressions of spinel; in contrast, other gemstones appear less frequently (diamond – 8, turquoise – 15, agate – 8, pearl – 18, emerald – 2, and ruby – 25). Secondly, in order to ensure the most precise analysis, the authors chose to demonstrate the process of conceptualisation through the example of a single gemstone, given the considerable amount of material available on it. Moreover, 10 Persian poets were chosen for the paper's focus,

including Rudaki, Ferdowsi, Omar Khayyam, Nezami, Attar, Moulana, Saadi, Hafez, Kermani, and Hakani, because these poets are representatives of the period of early and mature classics (9th–14th centuries), when canons of a special type of artistic text were created and formed, which led to the emergence of a large number of allegoric patterns.

The authors of this study collected 824 lines through the corpus of Persian poets (<https://ganjoor.net/>), where selected poets use literary expressions with spinel. By *literary expressions*, the authors refer to metaphors, epithets, and metonymy, which serve as key stylistic devices in shaping imagery and conveying layered meanings in poetry. It should be noted that the frequency of expressions involving spinel varies considerably among the selected Persian poets, as follows: Rudaki – 6, Ferdowsi – 45, Omar Khayyam – 8, Nezami – 175, Attar – 100, Moulana – 110, Saadi – 40, Hafez – 82, Kermani – 130, and Hakani – 128. The reasons for such uneven frequency can be explained by the fact that, although the poets are generally considered representatives of the classical period, they lived in different historical epochs (9th–14th centuries), each marked by the predominance of distinct literary styles and genres. It must also be recognised that the individual manner of writing and stylistic preferences of each poet played an important role in their usage of spinel.

THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

It has been mentioned that the theoretical framework of Cultural Linguistics is based on *cultural cognition*, which is a form of collective thinking that emerges from social interaction. According to Sharifian (2011), through cultural cognition we perceive cultural conceptualisations and their embodiment in language, as well as in various spheres of human life (cultural art, literature, cultural events, ritual, non-verbal behaviour, emotion). In other words, cultural cognition is manifested through cultural conceptualisations which include *cultural schema*, *cultural category*, and *cultural metaphor* as analytical tools of this discipline. Here, cultural schema capture beliefs, norms, rules, and expectations of behaviour as well as values relating to various aspects and components of experience and thereby covering similar cognitive terms such as *frame* or *script* (Wierzbicka, 2001). Different types of this analytical tool exist, such as event schemas, role schemas, image schemas, proposition schemas, and emotion schemas. Regarding categorisation, it is those culturally constructed conceptual categories (colours, emotions, kinship terms, etc.) that are primarily reflected in the lexicon of human languages, whereas cultural metaphor covers the ‘cross-domain conceptualisations grounded in cultural traditions such as folk medicine, worldview, or a spiritual belief system’ (Sharifian, 2017, p. 7).

This study employs the aforementioned analytical tools to address the first research question and considers the distributed nature of cognition at the cultural level. Accordingly, the cultural conceptualisations identified are viewed as being shared in a fragmented way within a particular group – in this case, the selected Persian poets (see Figure 1). This key characteristic of cultural conceptualisations is subsequently applied in interpreting the poets’ use of spinel, thereby addressing the second research question.

Distributed, Emergent Cultural Cognition



FIGURE 1. A distributed model of a cultural schema illustrated by Sharifian (2011)

DATA ANALYSIS AND PROCEDURE

Collected poetical lines containing references to spinel were organised by poet and manually entered into a table. The comprehensive approach proposed by Shamsudin and Aladdin (2024) in their study of the concept of love in the Qur'an was also adapted for this research. Their model suggests examining both literal and figurative manifestations of a concept in order to reach a more precise understanding. This framework was modified to suit the aims of the present study.

Each line was analysed with the help of explanatory Persian dictionaries available at *Abadis* (<https://abadis.ir/>), which include widely used sources such as Dekhoda, Amid, and Moin. Additional references included Heidar Shojaei's comparative dictionary of literary expressions and the compilations by Mohammadi and Anushe (2013) and Gerami (2015). These resources were used to distinguish fixed literal expressions and figurative usages such as metaphors and similes.

It should be noted that, in poetic language, even literal mentions of spinel often carry evaluative or conceptual weight. For instance, in one of Hafez's couplets – *gūyand sang la'al shavad dar maqām-e sabr* – a stone is said to become a spinel as the result of patience. Although spinel is named in its literal sense, the expression highlights the esteem attributed to patience.

Accordingly, the collected expressions were examined using the following steps:

1. Determine whether spinel is used literally or figuratively.
2. If used literally, identify the function or evaluative meaning attached to this usage.
3. If used figuratively, interpret the literary expression involving spinel.
4. In both cases, relate the usage to the physical and cultural features of spinel that make it an effective poetic image.

Through this qualitative analysis, the data were categorised using the specified analytical tools (cultural metaphor, cultural schema, cultural category), and the results for each Persian poet were calculated to determine the frequency (f) of usage. For instance, in the case of Hakani, there are 128 lines (n = total number) containing references to spinel, of which 45 lines (t = instances) employ spinel as a metaphor for lips. Applying the formula $t \times 100\% \div n = f\%$, the frequency of instances in which spinel is used to signify lips in Hakani's poetry is 35.15%.

RESULTS

According to Melikian (2001, p. 78), *la'al* has been the Arabised spelling of the Persian *lal* since the 10th century. *Lal* in Persian meant 'red', and *lale* – 'wild anemone' – is derived from it. It is worth noting that there are misleading translations of spinel (*la'al*) and ruby (*yâqut*). For instance, Schimmel (1992, p. 4) writes: 'the most precious stones were *yâqut* and *la'l*, both generally used in the meaning of "ruby"'. But in the *Dictionary of Gems and Gemology*, Manutchehr-Danai (2005, p. 707) described spinel as 'an isomorphous mineral of a wide range of colors and shade of gemstone. Some specimen with prefix or suffix are erroneously named as ruby or sapphire such as fine red as ruby spinel'. Pardieu and Hugles (2008) wrote that 'the main problem spinel faced during the past two centuries was the lack of name recognition . . . Centuries of promotion and marketing all went to ruby . . . fine large rubies suddenly became even rarer, but public recognition of the ruby name was great' (p. 11). Despite the confusion in translation of *spinel* and *ruby*, we should understand that they are not synonyms and that each stone has its own unique chemical and physical properties. 'Spinel is infusible before the blowpipe, but heating it will cause it to undergo several changes of colour, ultimately returning to its original hue, so that it might be termed the chameleon of gem minerals . . . spinel has its own deserved value, and its beauty and intrinsic worth' (Wodiska, 1909, p. 89). In this paper we intend to use 'spinel' in our translation of lines containing the word *la'al*, whereas 'ruby' is used as a translation for *yâqut* in Persian. All illustrated examples are numbered in brackets. Moreover, Persian couplets have been translated to convey their meaning, but the name of the gemstone spinel is given literally, and its figurative meaning is provided in brackets where relevant.

CULTURAL METAPHOR OF SPINEL IN PERSIAN POETRY

1. The praise and glorification of wine is one of the central themes of Persian classical poetry. According to Chalisova (2011), despite the fact that almost all the main motifs of the Persian wine cycle have Arabic prototypes, there is a hypothesis that this genre has its origins in the old Iranian lyrical tradition. The author, referring to Zoroastrian texts and citing the first literary sources in the New Persian language, tries to reconstruct the connection between the libation tradition and the beginning of Iranian statehood, where not a single important event was complete without drinking wine. Thus, libations in Persian poetry acquired a sacred status, and this was reflected in the fact that kings and heroes rest, gather for battle, celebrate a victory, or mourn the dead with a cup of wine in their hand. And the image of wine as a mystical substance was transmitted through a gemstone, because wine is as transparent, clear, and sparkling as a spinel (Chalisova, 2011, p. 129). In the following couplets by Hafez and Moulana, spinel metaphorically represents the meaning of wine:

(1) *âyâ por la'al karde jâm-e zerrin*
bebaxshâ bar kasi ke-ash zar nabâshad
Have you filled the golden cup with spinel (wine)?
Give it to someone who is not obsessed by gold
(Hafez)

(2) *pish âr jâm-e la'al, to ey jan-e jan-e mâ*
mâ az koja hekâyat besiâr az koja
Put next to me a spinel (wine) glass, you, oh, my soul
Where are we from, there are many stories
(Moulana)

2. Spinel is an intense red-to-pink stone, and in poetry it is also widely used to convey the different spectrum of red colours. It should be noted that *spinel*, when used as an adjective, gives its object not only a certain colour, but also makes its object shine, stand out from the crowd, fascinate, and attract, which is characteristic of gemstones. The example couplets below highlight spinel's red colour, a motif frequently used in Persian poetry:

(3) *dar ân havas ke be masti bebusam ân lab-e la'al*
che xun ke dar delam oftâd hamcho jâm o nashod
In that desire to kiss drunk, those spinel lips
My heart is bleeding because I could not (reach that aim)
(Hafez)

(4) *mey-ye la'al pish âr o pish-e man ey*
be yek dast jâm o be yek dast chang
Give me a spinel wine and come near me
In one hand the cup and in the other hand the harp
(Rudaki)

3. Describing the object of love from head to toe (*sar tâ pâ*) is an integral part of Persian poetry (Chalisova, 2021). Researchers of the style and visual imagery of this poetry provide lists of stylistic figures that are used to enhance the imagery of the language. Among them, one can highlight the use of spinel as a metaphor for the Persian word 'lips of a lover'.

(5) *dar qeymat-e la'al -e to che arzad*
mâ arche hezâr kân ferestim
What can be as valued as your spinel (lips)?
Even if we send thousands of mines (of gems)
(Hakani)

(6) *kuh-e badaxshân agar ma'dan-e la'al âmade*
maxzan-e gowhar bud la'al -e badaxshân-e o
If Badakhshan Mountain is the mine of spinels
Her Badakhshan spinel (lips) is the storage of gems (teeth)
(Rudaki)

(7) *biyâ buse be chand ast az ân la'al mosmen*
agar buse be jâni ast farize ast xaridan
Come on, how much is a kiss from that precious spinel (lips)
If a kiss is for a life, it is a duty to buy it
(Moulana)

4. Persian poets skilfully used spinel as a metaphor when describing battles and battlefields to add colour to the picture. The frequency of use of this cultural metaphor is significantly high in the epic poems of Ferdowsi (see Table 6). We can associate this turn of phrase with one of the archetypes of wine, where wine represents the blood of victims who died in battle (Chalisova, 2011).

(8) *miyân-e sepah did Sohrâb râ*
zamin la'al karde be xunâb râ
Between the army he saw the Sohrab
He made the field spinel (bloody) full of bitter tears

(9) *bekoshtand chandân ze jangâvarân*
ke shod xak-e la'al az kerân tâ kerân
They killed many warriors
That the field became spinel (bloody) from border to border
(Ferdowsi)

5. Gemstones, due to their sparkle and brilliance, have always symbolised beauty. Pardieu and Hugles (2008, p. 12) described the red spinel in natural light as a gorgeous stone. This cultural schema is also reflected in the Persian couplets, where Nezami and Kermani use spinel to describe the beauty of the rays of the sun and the bud of a flower:

(10) *chenân dân ke az qonche-ye la'al o dor*
shekufe konad har che ân gasht por
Know that the spinel and pearl bud
Bloom with what they are filled with
(Nezami)

(11) *chun la'al-e âftab bar âmad ze kân-e charx*
beforuxt sham-e mashraqi az shame'dan-e charx
Like the spinels (rays) of the sun rising from the centre of the earth
The candle of the East lit up on the candlestick of the earth
(Kermani)

6. Likening the shape and shine of a teardrop to a spinel, Persian poets metaphorically described the bitter tears of sadness through this gemstone. It should also be noted that the use of this cultural metaphor can be associated with the expressions *ashk xunin* (literally: 'bloody tear') and *ashk sorkh* (literally: 'red tear'), meaning 'bitter tears', where the word 'tear' is altered by spinel:

(12) *ze cheshmam la'al -e rommâni cho mi xandand mi bârand*
ze ruyam raz-e penhâni cho mi binand mi xânand
From my eyes, *pomegranate spinel* (tears) as they laugh, they are rolling down
As they see the secret from my face, they are reading
(Hafez)

SUMMARY

Analysis of Persian couplets that reference spinel present the metaphorical equivalence only with unanimated entities (see Table 1). The frequency of usage of cultural metaphors is summarised in Table 2.

TABLE 1. Cultural metaphors of spinel in Persian poetry

Spinel is compared with . . .	
Unanimated entities	Wine
	Red
	Lips
	Blood
	Ray
	Tear
Animated entities	---

TABLE 2. Frequency of usage of cultural metaphors by Persian poets

Poets compared the spinel with . . .	Wine	Red	Lips	Blood	Ray	Tear
Omar Khayyam	25%	62.5%	12.5%	-	-	-
Ferdowsi	-	42.22%	-	51.11%	2.22%	-
Rudaki	-	66.67%	16.67%	-	-	-
Hafez	7.32%	42.68%	29.27%	-	-	3.66%
Saadi	-	40%	22.5%	-	5%	-
Nezami	5.71%	10.86%	16.57%	2.29%	11.43%	-
Hakani	9.38%	10.94%	35.15%	-	11.72 %	6.25%
Kermani	7.69%	34.62%	33.08%	-	-	2.31%
Attar	2%	19%	67%	-	-	1%
Moulana	-	44.55%	32.73%	-	-	0.91%

According to the illustrated Table 2, we can conclude that spinel is mostly metaphorically used to convey the idea of wine [(1), (2)], red [(3), (4)], and lips [(5), (6), (7)]. Other revealed cultural metaphors were not used by all Persian poets. In other words, some poets showed the idiosyncratic feature of accepting spinel, just not as an ordinary gemstone. For instance, Ferdowsi was the first who frequently used spinel to mean ‘blood’ in a metaphorical way in his poems, whereas Nezami had few examples in this regard. Regarding the cultural metaphors of spinel to mean ‘ray’ and ‘tear’, we can say that this conceptualisation was shared by almost half of the chosen poets. This phenomenon can be explained by the figure illustrated by F. Sharafian on the distributed model of cultural cognition (Figure 1). But to achieve a more detailed understanding of the spinel in the mental space of Iranian poets, the theme of the cultural schema should be discussed, too.

CULTURAL SCHEMAS OF SPINEL IN PERSIAN POETRY

SPINEL AS A PHYSICIAN

Spinel, like other types of gemstones, has healing properties, and there is a belief that this stone improves well-being and mood. This property of spinel was described by the orientalist Schimmel (1994, p. 14), where she states: ‘From ancient times, it was believed that the ruby could avert illness – and indeed, in medical tradition, pulverised ruby was an ingredient of mufarriḥ, “something that cheers you up”’. The same feature of spinel is discussed by Gerami (2015) and Chalisova (2021) too. Thus, the ruby (which should be understood as spinel because of reasons mentioned earlier), acting as a healer of mental illness, forms a cultural schema in the minds of the Persian poets, who skilfully used it to convey wine. Indeed, according to the story of the mythical king Jamshide, which is described by Chalisova (2011, pp. 128–129), wine is a medicine for raising the spirit.

Below, Kermani, within the cultural schema of the spinel as a healer, conveys the value of wine for relieving mental turmoil:

(13) *yek sharbat az ân la'al mofarrah be man âvar*
ke az fard harârat del-e man dar xafaqân ast
Bring me a beverage from mufarriḥ spinel that gives fun
Because my heart is suffocating
(Kermani)

Also in the Persian couplets, spinel that signifies the lips of the beloved acts as a kind of tranquilliser to lift the spirits of the lover. On the other hand, making a correlation between drunkenness and love, where the former was metaphorically used to alter the latter, was a traditional approach among Persian poets (Pourjavady, 2012, p. 126). Further, Hafez uses the literary expression *la'al-e ravân baxsh* (literally: soothing spinel), and Attar, through the phrase *la'al-e jân fazâyat* (literally: ‘spirit-lifting spinel’) conveys the meaning of the mouth of a beloved person:

(14) *xun shod delam az hasrat-e ân la'al -e ravân baxsh*
ey darj-e mohebbat be hamân mehr o neshan bâsh
My heart bleeds because of that grief for the soothing spinel (lips of the beloved with a kiss)
Oh, amulet of hardships, be the sign of this
(Hafez)

(15) *ze do la'al-e jan fazâyat do jahân por az gahar shod*
cho to gowhari nadânam ze kodâm kân barâyard
The two worlds were filled with gems because of your two spirit-lifting spinels (lips)
Because you are a gem, I don't know from where it comes
(Attar)

SPINEL AS A LIQUID

Persian poets masterfully tried to convey the word *wine* by turning spinel into a kind of liquid substance through metaphors: *la'al-e mozâb* (literally: 'molten spinel'); *la'al-e ravân* (literally: 'flowing spinel'); *la'al-e sayyâl* (literally: 'flowing spinel'); *la'al-e pâlude* (literally: 'refined, filtered spinel'), thereby endowing it with the properties of wine as fluidity. Examples of these metaphors can be found in Omar Khayyam, Kermani, and Nezami.

(16) *mey la'al-e mozâb ast o sarrâhi kân ast*
jesm ast piyâle o sharâb-ash jân ast
Wine is the molten spinel in the ewer
The body of it is the cup and beverage is its soul
(Omar Khayyam)

(17) *benush la'al-e ravân chun zomred-e sabzat*
negin xâtem-e yâqut-e ahmar âmade ast
Drink the running spinel (wine) because green emerald (hope)
(Who has) the ring with a red ruby gem has arrived
(Kermani)

(18) *biya saqi ke la'al-e palude râ*
biyâvar beshuyi in qam-e âlude râ
Come on, cupbearer, pour that refined (pure) spinel (wine)
In order to wash this contaminated sorrow
(Nezami)

SPINEL AS A HUMAN BEING

Persian poets paint an image where the spinel has the qualities of a person who is silent, smiling, and thirsty. Below, Attar and Hafez, within the framework of the cultural schema 'spinel as a human being', write the following couplets:

(19) *'âsheq geriyân xod râ mi koshad*
xunbahâ ze ân la'al -e xandân mi dehad
The lover kills himself by crying
The cost of it is (her) smiling spinel (lips)
(Attar)

(20) *xodâ râ ey raqib emshab zamâni died bar ham na*
ke man bâ la'al-e xâmushesh nehâni
Do not sleep tonight, oh the slave of the God
Because I have many words to say with His silent spinel (lips)
(Hafez)

SPINEL AS AN EDIBLE ITEM

In the minds of Persian poets, spinel also has a sweet taste, thereby forming a cultural schema of an edible item. Hakani, Attar, and Moulana give examples of this schema:

(21) *ân la'al-e shekar xande gar az ham bokshayi*
haqâ ke be yek xande do 'âlem bokshayi
If those sweet smiling spinels (lips) are open
Truly, (it is possible) to open the two worlds with one laugh
(Hakani)

(22) *ze ân do la'al-e âtshin-e âbdar*
âtesh andar âb-e heyvân mi zani
With your two fiery and juicy spinels (lips)
You put fire under water
(Attar)

(23) *yeki buse qazagardân jânat*
az ân do la'al-e shekarbâr az in su
One kiss can change the destiny
From those two sweet spinels (lips) from this side
(Moulana)

SPINEL AS A DANGEROUS OBJECT

Despite the above examples where spinel appears in a positive light, there are negative connotations of the gem, as well. Here, spinel can be interpreted as a burning and destructive object.

(24) *zinhâr az dehân-e xandânash*
va âtesh-e la'al o âb dandânash
Be careful of her smiling mouth
And fire of spinel (lips) and shining teeth
(Saadi)

(25) *qolâm-e narges mast-e to tâjdarânand*
xarâb-e bade-ye la'al-e to hushiarânand
Crown princes are slaves of your drunken eyes
(Whereas) wise men are ruined by your spinel (lips)
(Hafez)

(26) *jânam az bade-ye la'al-e to xarâb oftâde ast*
delam az âtesh hajar-e to kebâb oftâde ast
My life is destroyed by your spinel (lips)
My heart became *kebab* (fried meat) because of the fire of separation from you
(Kermani)

SPINEL AS A VALUABLE ITEM

Considering that spinel is a gemstone that is rare, mined by force and then hidden from others, these properties are reflected in poetry to describe the secrets of the heart and soul, to highlight the advantage in comparisons of objects, and to convey the meaning of wise speech and instruction. Below, Saadi and Nezami try to emphasise the value of the spinel by showing that it is not a simple stone or crystal, but something that is obtained by force and can become an ornament to the poet's speech.

(27) *âbgine-ye hame-ye jâ yâbi az ân qadrash nist
la'al-e doshxâr be dast âyad az ân ast 'aziz*

Glass is common that is why it does not have a value
Spinel can be obtained with difficulty that is why it is valuable
(Saadi)

(28) *sang-e basi dar taraf 'âlem ast
ânche az o la'al shaved ân kam ast*

The stone is enough in world
But the spinel is a few between them
(Nezami)

Within the cultural schema of spinel as a valuable item, there is a belief mentioned by Schimmel (1994) and Gerami (2015) in their works:

A beautiful myth tells that ordinary pebbles, when touched by the sun, can turn into rubies after patiently waiting in the depth of the mines – an idea that came to symbolise the transformation of the human heart which, touched by the sun of grace, can mature during long periods of patience and, by 'shedding its blood' in suffering, may be transformed into a priceless jewel.

(Schimmel, 1994, p. 11)

This cultural schema is glorified as follows:

(29) *sâlha bâyad ke andar âftâb
la'al bâyad rang o raxshâni tâb*

It must be passed years under the sun
Until spinel finds its colour and brightness
(Moulana)

There is a story that the prophet Solomon had a ring, and that when he wore it, the whole world and all creatures submitted to his power (Gerami, 2015). An example of this schema can be found in Hafez in the following lines:

(30) *dehân-e tang shirinat magar molk-e Soleyman ast
ke naqsh-e xatem-e la'alash jahân zir negin dârad*

Is your narrow sweet mouth the wealth of Solomon?
That had the whole world under his spinel ring
(Hafez)

SUMMARY

Revealed cultural schemas of spinel are shown in Table 3. According to these, we can summarise that spinel in the minds of Persian poets is animated and used as a unique poetic tool.

TABLE 3. Cultural schemas of spinel in Persian poetry

Spinel as a(n) . . .	
Unanimated	Liquid Edible item Dangerous object Valuable item
Animated	Physician Human being

TABLE 4. Distribution of cultural schemas between Persian poets

Poets	Spinel as a physician	Spinel as a liquid	Spinel as a human being	Spinel as an edible item	Spinel as a dangerous object	Spinel as a valuable item
Omar Khayyam	-	25%	-	-	-	-
Ferdowsi	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rudaki	-	-	-	-	-	16.67%
Hafez	1.22%	7.32%	2.44%	4.88 %	3.66%	18.29%
Saadi	2.5%	-	-	7.5%	-	30%
Nezami	1.14%	5.71%	0.57%	2.86%	0.57%	47.43%
Hakani	3.13%	9.38%	2.34%	6.25%	1.56%	-
Kermani	1.54%	7.69%	-	10%	1.54%	19.23%
Attar	12%	2%	13%	19%	1%	10%
Moulana	1.82%	-	1.82%	10.91%	0.91%	22.73%

Table 4 illustrates the distribution of revealed cultural schemas among chosen Persian poets. Here, we can highlight that the cultural schemas including ‘spinel as a physician’ [(13), (14), (15)], ‘spinel as an edible item’ [(21), (22), (23)] and ‘spinel as a valuable item’ [(27), (28), (29), (30)] are the most embedded schemas in the poetical cognition of Persian poets, while other revealed cultural schemas are also popular. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Nezami, Hafez, and Attar are the poets who could masterfully deliver all distinguished schemas via couplets.

CULTURAL CATEGORISATION OF SPINEL IN PERSIAN POETRY

The concept of categorisation is one of the most fundamental concepts of human activity and one of the key concepts of the cognitive approach. After all, while perceiving the world, a person identifies elements that are relevant to him, divides them into certain parts, and then thinks of reality in these parts. In other words, the ability to classify phenomena and distribute them into different classes and categories indicates that a person, in the process of perceiving the world, compares the identity of some objects with others, determining their similarities or, conversely, their differences. Using the example of Persian couplets, we were able to identify three main

categories (see Table 5) and, using quantitative analysis, indicate the percentage relationship between them (see Table 6).

Persian poets categorised spinel according to the location of mines. The phrase *la'al-e badakhshân* (Badakhshan spinel) is often found, where Badakhshan is the name of a spinel mining area located in Afghanistan. But Melikian provides evidence that 'Badakhshan . . . is the place where the spinels are cut and polished . . . mines are located in a village called Varazqanj, three days away from Badakhshan' (2001, p. 84). Nevertheless, it can be argued that this name is, in one way or another, associated with spinel deposits. Furthermore, Moulana adeptly portrays the lips of his beloved as a repository of gemstones, specifically referencing the Badakhshan spinel:

(31) *cheshmân-e xammâr o ruye raxshân dâri*
kân-e gowhar o la'al-e badakhshân dâri
Your eyes are half-drunk and your face is shining
You have a mine of gems and Badakhshan spinel

In Persian couplets, one can find phrases such as *la'al-e piyazi* or *piyazaki*, which literally mean 'oniony spinel', that is, a spinel with the colour of the skin of a red onion, or reddish-brown. There is, however, another version of the word *piyazaki* that has nothing to do with onions, since it is the name of the area where this type of spinel was found. The Dehkhoda Dictionary says that this place is called 'Piazak' (January 2022). It should be noted that this phrase is only found in Hakani in one couplet:

(32) *daryâ-ye gandanâ rang az tiq-e shah-e golgun*
la'al-e piyazi az xun yek yek pashiz vâlash
The leek-like ocean from pink blade of the Shah
Oniony (pink) spinel blood (drops) (like) scales of whale

Persian poets called the rare and valuable type of spinel *la'al-e kâni*, that is, the purest natural mineral. Below, Nezami conveys her lover's lips through this combination:

(33) *ze la'al o ze dor gardan o gush por*
lab az la'al-e kâni o dandân ze dor
Her neck and ears are full of spinel and pearl
Her lips from pure spinel and teeth from pearl

Persian poets, when describing their beloved, adhered to certain canons of beauty (Osmanov, 1974; Chalisova, 2021), where the eyelashes of a beauty pierce the heart of a lover like an arrow. This process is described by the poet Kermani, where the tears of a wounded lover turn into spear-shaped rubies. Here, you can see that the poet likens his tears to a spinel, which on the one hand resembles a spear in its shape due to its sharp points. On the other hand, given that in Persian poetics tears are conveyed through the colour red, Kermani categorises this stone in the mind according to shape and colour.

(34) *marâ ke nâvak-e mojjânash az jegar begozâsht*
‘ajab madâr ke ashkam cho la’al-e peykânist
 I was impaled by her eyelashes
 Do not wonder that my tears are spear-like spinel

Kermani further categorises the spinel by colour and shape and uses it in the phrase *la’al-e rommâni* (literally: ‘pomegranate spinel’), conveying the meaning ‘drops of tears’:

(35) *cheshm-e xâju chun shaved dur az raxt-e gowhar feshân*
oftad xun dar del har la’al-e rommâni ke hast
 Khoja’s eyes are far away from shined clothes with gems
 Blood fell in the heart of every pomegranate spinel (tear)

SUMMARY

It was found that spinel as a cultural category in the minds of Persian poets is categorised according to three parameters: origin, form, and colour (Table 5). Categories such as ‘Badakshan spinel’ (31), ‘pure spinel’ (33), and ‘spear-like spinel’ (34) can be distinguished, which are often found in Persian couplets.

TABLE 5. Cultural categories of spinel in Persian poetry

Spinel is categorised according to the . . .	
Origin	Badakshan Piyazak Pure mineral
Form	spear-like pomegranate-like
Colour	onion-like pomegranate-like

TABLE 6. Usage of spinel as cultural categories in percentages

Poets	spear-like spinel	pomegranate-like spinel	pure spinel	onion-like spinel	Badakshan Spinel
Hafez	1.2%	3.6%	-	-	-
Saadi	-	-	-	-	5 %
Nezami	0.6%	-	1.1%	-	-
Hakani	0.8%	-	-	0.8%	0.8%
Kermani	2.3%	0.7%	3%	-	10%
Attar	-	-	2%	-	3%
Moulana	-	-	0.9%	-	8.2%

However, according to Table 6, we can conclude that not all Persian poets shared the identified categories, and this is another illustration of distributed cognition phenomena.

CONCLUSION

The cultural conceptualisation of spinel in Persian poetry has been extensively illustrated through various examples within the framework of Cultural Linguistics. By employing analytical tools such as cultural category, schema, and metaphor, it has been demonstrated that spinel transcends its role as a mere inanimate gemstone, acquiring life and significance through its portrayal in Persian couplets. It is important to note that each couplet can be interpreted in multiple ways, given its diverse functions (e.g., panegyric, mystical, romantic) and the poet's individual worldview. According to the distributed model of cognition within Cultural Linguistics, cultural conceptualisations are not equally imprinted in the minds of all members of a cultural group. This principle is supported by the prominence of specific conceptualisations of spinel in Persian couplets. For instance, the cultural schema of 'spinel as a physician' is prevalent in the works of Attar, while Ferdowsi introduces the metaphor of 'spinel as blood' in his epic poems. Additionally, quantitative analysis reveals that poets such as Hafez, Nezami, Hakani, and Kermani employed distinct conceptual frameworks for representing spinel. Among the most popular schemas are those depicting spinel as a physician, as an edible and valuable items, with the metaphorical comparison of spinel to the lips of a beloved or to the colour red being particularly common. Notably, according to the identified cultural schemas, spinel can possess various dynamic qualities: it can flow like wine, be as sweet as the lips of a beloved, or uplift the spirit of one overcome by sorrow. As a cultural category, spinel is uniquely interpreted by Persian poets. This suggests that poets aim to provide detailed depictions of the object using simple language that can be easily understood by a broad audience, or more accurately, to ground their imagery by categorising it based on its origin, form, and colour. In other words, spinel is not conceptualised equally by Persian poets, which illustrates the aforementioned distributed nature of cultural cognition.

As to the limitations of the present study, the analysis was confined to a selected corpus of Persian poetry, restricted to particular historical periods, and focused on a single gemstone. Accordingly, the findings cannot be regarded as fully representative of the entire Persian literary tradition. Future research may address these limitations by including other gemstones, extending the temporal scope, and examining additional genres and literary styles. Comparative analyses of this kind would shed light on how the conceptualisation of gemstones shifts across contexts and traditions, thereby enriching our understanding of Persian poetics and its cultural foundations.

Despite these limitations, this study illustrates the cultural conceptualisation of spinel in Persian poetry and demonstrates the potential of Cultural Linguistics as a framework for literary analysis. By showing how one gemstone acquires diverse cultural meanings across poets and genres, the research offers insights that are especially relevant to translation studies and the poetics of imagery, where cultural depth can easily be lost if reduced to literal equivalence. More broadly, it highlights literature as a vital source of cultural conceptualisations, providing both a methodological model and a foundation for future comparative work within Persian and across other literary traditions.

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APPENDIX

(from the book ‘Cultural Linguistics’ (2017) by F.Sharifian)

Persian transliteration symbol	Closest IPA sound symbol	Closest sound and example (from English), or technical label
u	/u:/	“oo” as in <i>pool</i>
â	/a:/	“a” as in <i>father</i>
a	/æ/	“a” as in <i>cat</i>
e (including word final)	/ɛ/	“e” as in <i>set</i>
x	/x/	Voiceless velar fricative
q	/q/	Voiceless uvular stop
’	/ɾ/	Glottal stop
sh	/ʃ/	“sh” as in <i>shy</i>
zh	/ʒ/	“s” as in <i>pleasure</i>
ch	/tʃ/	“ch” as in <i>church</i>

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