



DIGITAL CONFLICT NARRATIVES: A CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR AND MULTIMODAL STUDY OF MISSION SINDOOR & JANG-E-BANYAN-UL- MARSOOS MEMES

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Abstract

Today, in the age of the internet, memes have become very strong tools for influencing public opinion, particularly in times of political crisis. Through this research, an investigation has been conducted into how conceptual metaphors and visual symbols within memes function as ideological resources during the May 2025 India–Pakistan crisis. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Multimodal Metaphor Theory (Forceville, 2008) were employed to examine how both nations used culturally infused metaphors, including sacrifice, Sindoor, nature, and solidity, to conceptualize confrontation, revenge, and national identity. The research conducted a qualitative analysis of a few memes, examining how national ideologies, moral arguments, and emotional arguments are inscribed in the digital text, shedding light on how national ideologies and political discourse are constructed and contested in cyberspace.

Key Words: *Visual analysis, India-Pakistan, memes, warfare, multimodality, national identification, cognitive metaphor.*

Introduction

In contemporary online media, memes have emerged as increasingly prominent forms of cultural expression, serving as arbiters of humor, critique, and common identity. The term "meme" was originally coined by Dawkins (1976) to describe a cultural replicator referring to the copying and transmission of ideas. During 2025, the crisis in India and Pakistan, memes became a popular medium for commenting on politics, pop culture, and national memory. Some memes function purely for amusement, while others are richer in meaning and purpose. It evolved over time as a major means of digital expression (Miltner, 2018). Modern internet memes generally use text and images to convey social meaning. They represent cultural and technological developments (Shifman, 2013). Modern memes are an effective form of communication that not only amuses but also constructs public discourse (Ramzan et al., 2025, 2023, 2020; Ramzan & Alahmadi, 2024). They often employ humor and symbolism to reflect and, at times, influence sociopolitical narratives (Shifman, 2019; Wiggins, 2019). Researchers have described how memes have



evolved from mere image-text opposition to becoming multilayered, multimodal signs. Studies have explored how memes construct meaning from diverse multimodal resources and portray trends informed by active digital community engagement (Mukhtar et. al., 2025). Contemporary studies highlight the ideological power of visual online culture, illustrating how multimodal texts are increasingly providing complex narratives (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009; Chen & Ramzan, 2024; Ramzan & Khan, 2024a, 2024b). This paper contributes to the contemporary moment in metaphor studies, new media discourse, and South Asian cultural communication by highlighting the attention given to how metaphor and multimodality converge in constructing narratives of digital conflict. In April 2025, pressure between India and Pakistan intensified after an attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir killed 26 Hindu pilgrims. Immediately after blaming Pakistan for the Kashmir attack, India took a very provocative step by suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, a rare, historic agreement that guaranteed equitable water distribution between the two countries since 1960. To Pakistan, it was not merely a diplomatic barb; it was an attack on the basic rights of its people (Deccan Herald, 2025). Hostilities escalated when India launched airstrikes within the Line of Control on April 28, claiming it targeted militant camps inside Pakistani territory. However, no credible evidence could be provided to support the idea that these strikes were motivated more by political motives for Indian elections than by genuine security concerns (Mehmood, 2025). In response, Pakistan's reaction was swift and strategic. Its air force intercepted the intruders, leading to a dramatic mid-air confrontation that changed the tone of the crisis. Shooting down India's Rafale jet, a symbol of its new military strength, was a major setback for India's narrative. This time, international media and defense experts supported Pakistan's version, exposing India's exaggeration (Carnegie Endowment, 2025).

With increasing pressure from the international community, a ceasefire was established on May 10 (U.S. Department of State, 2025). However, most issues remained unresolved. In Pakistan's view, this was another instance of India using war as a political tool during election time, and ordinary people on both sides bore the consequences of this carefully calculated tension (Mehmood, 2025). On May 7, 2025, India conducted "Operation Sindoor", a massive military aerial strike against suspected terrorist camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and mainland Pakistan. The operation was launched as retaliation for the terrorist attack on Hindu pilgrims in Baisaran Valley, for which India held Pakistan-based militant organizations responsible (Wikipedia, 2025). Major targets affected included Kotli, Muzaffarabad, Bahawalpur, and even locations close to Rawalpindi. India claimed that the attacks were targeted and only against terrorist infrastructure (The Times of India, 2025) but were deplored by Pakistan as an act of sovereignty. Pakistani reports indicated civilian deaths and destruction in major areas, though figures were not confirmed (Mehmood, 2025). The action heightened tensions dramatically, pushing the two countries to the brink of direct war. Lt Gen Chaudhry, representing Pakistan's armed forces, candidly remarked, "We will give a befitting response to Indian aggression. That response will come at a time, place, and through methods of our own choosing. And when we hit back, the entire world will know; it won't be something you'll need the Indian media to tell you" (Pakistan Armed Forces, 2025). The international community, including the UN and major global powers, stepped in to de-escalate the crisis (U.S. Department of State, 2025). While a



ceasefire was achieved by May 10, the campaign left lasting scars, fostered suspicion, and left regional peace fragile.

Problem Statement

Memes have also become strategic tools in cyber warfare, used to build national identity, counter aggression, and shape public narratives. Recent research on Ukraine has shown that memes have been effective propaganda tools, combining symbolism, ideology, and humor to rally national pride and influence international opinion (Bouchard & Antsybor, 2025; Rossi & Bondarenko, 2024). Events like Mission Sindoor and Jung-e-Operation Banyan-ul-Marsoos in the South Asian context sparked a wave of culturally rooted memes that redefined armed conflict through metaphor and multimodal discourse. The research examines how Indian and Pakistani memes use conceptual metaphors and visual strategies to influence digital conflict, adopt ideological positions, and emotionally engage viewers.

Research Questions

1. How do conceptual metaphors about Operation Banyan-ul-Marsoos and Mission Sindoor construct ideological meanings?
2. How do the visual and multimodal resources in these memes contribute to the construction of digital confrontation narratives?

Significance of the Study

This research provides a critical perspective on how digital memes serve as ideological tools in conflict zones, particularly in the India–Pakistan conflict. It expands the ongoing discussion on how visual-verbal texts shape public perceptions, nationalism, and online military actions. This research would help us understand why and how memes related to strikes in the military emerge and circulate, as they are linked to cultural conceptions of revenge and honor (Coker, 2008). Finding how memes of military strikes propagate the culture of conflict, Identity, and emotional mobilization as inscribed in digital culture, lends vitality to the research. Such studies may develop new languages on how the new media integrate or disintegrate geopolitics in culturally specific terms.

Literature Review

1-Multimodal Discourse in Memes

Memes are multimodal texts that combine language and image to create layered meanings. Peopsel et al. (2024) researchers showed, for example, how Ukraine used memes during the war to achieve both political and emotional resonance as well. The Ukraine memes suggested solidarity with Western democracy, internal unity, and determination to continue the fight. Another study acknowledges how Muslims respond to these memes and how far they are reproduced, using critical discourse analysis, i.e., it showed that islamophobia memes are doing more than providing humor. They provided intense social critique and affective expression. This research is undoubtedly limited in various ways (Putra, 2022).

Yus (2019) tested the cyber-pragmatic way, where the relationship and sequences of image display and text affect how we cognitively represent and the relative meanings we generate, i.e., Pragmatics has also developed in the modern era, as the internet is continually changing in our lives (Akram et al., 2022, 2021a, 2021b; Javid et al., 2024), and especially our means of communication (Abdelrady, et al., 2025; Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025), and interaction (Al-



Adwan et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2024). Ntouvlis and Geenen (2025) also argue that even ironic or seemingly absurd memes contain semiotic structures to create group identity and ways to strengthen and confirm digital literacy. Digital literacies can be central to the creation of (group) identities, through digital text-making and text-sharing (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024).

2-Regional Studies and Sociopolitical Contexts

At the regional level, studies demonstrate how memes reflect sociocultural power relations, ideological positionings, and communicative practices. The work by Abbas et al. (2024) provides a Comparative study of Pakistani and Indian memes through Content Analysis, elucidating cultural forms, linguistic choices, and themes, as they show how humor, language, and imagery are reflected in their work. The analysis illustrates the political views, cultural practices, and social values in the countries. The sociological dimensions and linguistic aspects of memes, as assessed by Mukhtar et al. (2024), are examined in terms of their role as social critique indicators, visible social trends, and intergenerational differences, with a focus on their status as online communications (Ramzan and Javaid, 2025)

3-Memes Function as Multimodal and Ideological Expression:

Memes can also be viewed as multimodal metaphors that have an ideological dimension through the interrelationship of the visual and verbal elements within memes. Scott (2021) explains how verbal metaphor relies on Deirdre Wilson's research on lexical pragmatics to illustrate how this plays out in a multimodal digital text. It operates across modes in a way that situates people's interpretations and constrains contextual possibilities. Memes enable political engagement and awareness and disrupt democratic discourse by creating polarization, i.e, are utilized on Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. Al Afnan (2025) reiterates the extent to which memes can be implicated in ideological polarization, mobilizing power, and evoking an emotional response within political echo chambers.

Memes propose a functionalist-structuralist taxonomy for documenting how memes continue and convey ideas that support ideological stability and in-group identity, while contrasting them with the normative rhetoric used in polarized discourse (Anderau & Barbarrusa, 2024). Wagener (2024) similarly describes the symbolic and affective power of memes in activist situations, utilizing pragmatic discourse analysis. His work portrays memes as emotionally charged devices, offering insight into how political engagement operates.

4. Visual/Semiotic Approaches

Oman was expressing political discord, promoting divine agendas, expressing frustration, and issuing public notices, while also constructing counter-discourse. The research by Al Zidjaly (2022) illustrates that Omani WhatsApp stickers employed a visual semiotics and geosemiotics approach, memes are tools of public opposition and criticism during the COVID-19 period. Bashir et al. (2025) identify memes and emojis as ideological maintenance tools through visual semiotics. Mihăilescu (2024) explains how Romanian political memes make power critical and create narratives. The following findings confirm memes' communicative and semiotic richness in all contexts and deepen the work of the South Asian context. Memes are powerful multimodal texts that influence ideological stances. Studies by Majdzińska-Koczorowicz and Ostanina-Olszewska (2024) demonstrate how image macros integrate verbal metaphors and visual facts,



utilizing Conceptual Blending Theory. Ali and Moussa (2022) discovered that Instagram influencers employed visual discourse in the formation of cultural identity.

Johnson (2024) asserted that meme production reflects larger cultural and ideological cognitive patterns, forming a framework for a cognitive sociolinguistic typology of memes, particularly well-suited for examining nationalist language that reinforces events like Jung-e-Banyan-ul-Marsoos. Schreiber et al. (2024) go further in typological analysis by categorizing Instagram depictions of historical actors, defining memes as but one of several forms of expression in digital memory work. Together, these valuable frameworks for sorting out memes based on function, content, and socio-political impact.

Whereas existing research has analyzed memes from cultural, semiotic, political, and cognitive perspectives, few have considered how conceptual metaphors, and visual techniques collectively build ideology, particularly within South Asian online conflicts. This study fills that gap by utilizing Conceptual Metaphor Theory and visual semiotic analysis to demonstrate how verbal and pictorial elements collaborate to organize nationalist narratives in memes, such as Mission Sindoor and Jung-e-Banyan-ul-Marsoos.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research acknowledges the humanistic, naturalistic, and holistic nature of complex social realities (Muzari et al., 2022). The 2025 India-Pak Crisis study employed a qualitative research design suitable for examining how memes produce ideological meaning through multimodal and Metaphor Analysis. Unlike approaches that deal with the frequency of quantity counts, the methodology involves close readings and interpretations. Qualitative research is also sensitive to the metaphors used and the contexts in which they appear - a concern with digital texts like memes (Joshi et al., 2024).

Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to understand in depth how visual and textual elements interact in particular sociopolitical contexts to produce complex narratives (Silverman & Patterson, 2021).

Data Source and Time Frame

Digital platforms remain a challenging subject of research because they are dispersed and embedded in a unique relationship with multiple institutions, markets, and technologies. The data for this research were collected from two very large social media platforms, Twitter and Instagram, which are well-known online sites of discussion and meme dissemination (Arisha Ghazal et al., 2025). They were selected due to their open access, crowdsourced content, and contribution to the creation of viral political memes during unfolding events. The collection period lasted from May 7 to May 12, 2025. A period characterized by heightened political and military tensions between Pakistan and India. Twitter and Instagram were chosen for their unique yet complementary communicative features. Twitter, a rapidly growing microblogging service, has been described as having great potential as a new medium of information exchange (Smith & Copland, 2021). Instagram, alternatively, represents a new dimension of communication. The service enables users to easily share and adjust information using filters, with a strong emphasis on visual presentation (Skjulstad, 2020). Therefore, it represents a useful site for the study of metaphor, symbolism, and cultural tastes. (Skjulstad, 2020). These two social media platforms



were chosen for study not just because they are widely used but for their discursive richness and emotional connections to national identity (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Sheikh et al., 2022).

Ethical Considerations

Internet memes have changed a lot and evolved over the years, even in the early days when they never really had a name. All memes were taken from public profiles, and no usernames or identification details were shared in compliance with ethical obligations involving user-generated content. The work is important, as it examines how memes function ideologically in relation to any political point, being a cultural product found on various social media platforms (Stockley & Wright, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) created a major shift in metaphor research thirty years ago. CMT is employed in this study to examine how ideological meaning is constructed in memes, within the context of digital conflict discourse. The theory itself is quite old and based on centuries of research that has described metaphor not just as a rhetorical tool in language but also as an instrument for structuring, restructuring, and even constructing reality. Grounded in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work, CMT describes the way cultural, embodied metaphors shape the way we frame our abstract ideas. CMT theory has been expanded to include visual and multimodal aspects, as seen in Forceville's (2008) analysis, which delineates how language/image in memes circulate within sociopolitical contexts and shape public perception.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory, developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), suggests that metaphors are not a rhetorical ornament but fundamental to human thought. Under CMT, abstract domains (e.g., war, identity, or nationhood) are conceptualized in terms of more tangible, bodily, or cultural experience (e.g., marriage, family, or rituals). These metaphorical mappings enable the public and the community to structure intricate reality in terms of well-known, emotive structures- source-to-target domain transfers (Kövecses, 2010). In the political and war-related discourse era, conceptual metaphors frequently serve to reaffirm ideology by making a particular world perspective seem intrinsic or justifiable (Charteris-Black, 2011).

For example, honor or sacrifice, highlighting purity metaphors might produce cultural narratives that normalize conflict or place it within shared values. From this perspective, memes are not merely entertaining or presenting humor but also convey ideological communication and serve as a means of framing national identity, ferocity, and resistance in powerful metaphorical terms (McClure, 2020).

CMT is especially applicable to this research since it leads to the identification and explanation of verbal metaphors within meme texts through captions, slogans, or inserted phrases. The metaphors often utilize culturally specific schemas and reveal latent tensions, hopes, or nationalist sentiments, particularly during politically charged events such as cross-border military conflicts (Forceville, 2021). While the study also draws on CMT's verbal mode of analysis based on Forceville's (1996, 2008) Multimodal Metaphor Theory. This theory expands metaphor study into picture and multimodal messages to acknowledge that meaning in digital texts frequently emerges from the interaction between different semiotic modes—such as imagery, arrangement, gesture, and color, together with text. Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (2009)

contend that visual metaphors such as those presented in memes are equally potent in their ideological effects as verbal metaphors. Memes, being multimodal, combine image and text to present layered sociopolitical significations. This method highlights how well-known symbols function as semiotic triggers, evoking collective emotions and ideologies. From this perspective, the research decodes the persuasive visual metaphors of memes.

Ideology and Sociopolitical Meaning-Making

This approach allows for a close examination of how memes function as ideological narratives in the 2025 India–Pakistan conflict. Conceptual metaphors, grounded in visibility, constitute armed confrontation not just as geopolitical action but as culturally symbolic conflict bound up with gender, sacrifice, and national honor. The multimodal integration of metaphor facilitates an understanding of how memes shape public emotions, express sociopolitical differences, and reinforce or challenge prevailing ideologies in online communities (Highfield, 2017).

Data Analysis / Findings

India Meme Title: “Sindoor for the Fallen Bride”



Meme Text:

“Sindoor is the symbol of our life partner—just served for the lady who lost her sindoor in the Pahalgam attack”.

This meme reassesses India's military airstrike, Mission Sindoor, as an act of patriotic devotion to emotional justice after the May 6, 2025, Pahalgam attack by alleged Pakistan-based camps without verification. By matching the color symbolism of the red powder (sindoor) with the caption “served for the lady who lost her sindoor,” it transcends the act of military action into that of a ritual sacrifice of national dignity. The meme alludes to the metaphorical schema “National Warfare is a Ritual Sacrifice”, mapping marriage, bereavement, and cultural fall onto vengeance and symbolic redress in accordance with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The nation is feminized as a bride left a widow, whose honor must be redeemed through sacred obligation rather than strategic logic. Visually, the meme elaborates on a sindoor container pouring red powder onto white fabric, evoking both personal sorrow and ceremonial solemnity. Through Multimodal Metaphor Theory (Forceville, 2008), this pictorial narrative reinterprets sindoor as a dual symbol of blood and love, rendering the military attack a socio-



religious offering rather than an act of state aggression. The lack of human figures makes the agony common and the metaphor shared. Ideologically, the meme does cultural and emotional labor: it moralizes violence. The decorative sindoor box pouring red powder over white fabric invokes religious ritual, bloody sacrifice, and bereavement, converting individual loss to a representation of national loss and honor through combining femininity, ritual, and sacrifice, mobilizing gendered nationalism (Abu-Laban, 2008), casting the state's hostility as defense of the desecrated female body politic. This confrontation devoted guarantees mass resonance through the identification of national defense with spiritual symbolism and collective mourning. Through this, the meme serves as an effective narrative weapon—enabling revenge as justice and mythologizing sorrow as a unifying nationalist ritual.

Table: Conceptual and Visual Metaphor Mapping- “Sin door for the Fallen Bride”

Source Domain	Target Domain	Visual Cue	Interpretation
Hindu Marriage Ritual	National Military Response	Ornate sindoor box	Ritual reframed as a national act of revenge
Sindoor (Vermilion Powder)	Symbolic Justice / Sacrifice	Spilled red powder on white ceremonial cloth	Connotes both marital love and blood-like loss
Widowhood / Feminine Loss	National Humiliation / Grief	Sindoor present, but no wearer	Nation as a grieving widow whose honor must be restored
Ritual Offering	Retaliatory Airstrike	Box placement and visual solemnity	Airstrike framed as a sacred tribute, not just military aggression

India Meme Title 2: “Do You Need More Water?”

This meme influenced India's threat to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) to assert geopolitical superiority through symbolic power. Presenting a serene, smiling photo of Indian Prime Minister Modi scooping water from a transparent river, accompanied by the pointedly courteous caption “Do you need more water?”, the meme metaphorically and literally re-frames water from a natural resource into a shield of soft coercion (Wirsing & Jasparro, 2006). The metaphorical frame used here is “Control Over Resources Is Sovereign Power”. Water is used as a metaphor for strategic advantage, while Pakistan is indirectly positioned as doughty and reliant. The meme contrasts peaceful imagery- a tranquil river, green hills, and an unflappable leader— with intensely sarcastic rhetorical questions. The smile, cupped hands, and gesture of offering water convey a superior tone, yet the underlying message is cuttingly humiliating. According to Multimodal Metaphor Theory, the juxtaposition of aesthetic serenity and threatened implication heightens the satire: eco-diplomacy is enacted as passive-aggressive conflict (Forceville, 2008). The semiotic composition layout, featuring a peaceful river, cupped hands of Modi, and a peaceful face, creates a symbolic opposition wherein natural innocence conceals geopolitical danger, transforming water into a visual symbol of mockery and power. Ideologically, the meme conveys three principal messages: India is not just responding- it is taking on the role of life-giving power, able to bestow or withdraw survival. Second, it reverses historical power relationships by ridiculing Pakistan's reliance, employing control of the environment as a psychological tool. Thirdly, the 2025 military crisis illustrates how emotional domination and absurdism serve as nationalist functions in digital culture. The digital management beyond bombs creates a diplomatic deadlock and leads to symbolic dominance over needs, in conjunction with India's overarching diplomatic representation.

Table: Conceptual and Visual Metaphor Mapping- “Do You Need more Water?”

Source Domain	Target Domain	Visual Cue	Interpretation
Water (natural resource)	Political control	Modi cupping water	India positioned as sovereign over life-essential resources
Offering gesture	Dominance / mockery	Calm smile, open hands	Threat is disguised as benevolence
Thirst / need	Dependence / submission	Direct rhetorical question	Implies Pakistan's reliance and weakness
Peaceful nature	Weaponized diplomacy	Serene river and mountain backdrop	Conflict framed in a calm, authoritative aesthetic

India meme title 3: Operation Sindoor: Every Indian’s Life Matters”



Meme Text: Operation Sindoor: Every Indian’s Life Matters”

India embodies "Mission Sindoor," using venerability, the armed might, and national security, with the motto "Every Indian Life Matters". India represents diplomacy connected to international justice movements to construct revenge in terms of protection for others. At the center is a red outline of a woman (representing sindoor, sacrifice, and desecrated female body) flanked by Indian soldiers in fighting poses, under the Indian tricolor. The organization maps sacred femininity onto collective nationhood, implying that India's airstrikes are not only revenge but acts of moral obligation, protection, and ritual restoration. The semiotics composition emphasizes that the red female outline represents sindoor, martyrdom, and desecrated womanhood, while soldiers and the flag represent patriotic obligation, gendered protection, and state authority. The metaphorical structure is: “PROTECTING WOMANHOOD IS



PROTECTING THE NATION” based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The red female icon represents the idealized Indian woman or nation-as-widow, and the soldiers' surrounds positions visually enact a sacred defense circle. Sindoor, once more, is representative of life as well as loss—and its evocation becomes a call to battle. Multimodal Metaphor Theory (Forceville, 2008) states that the symbolic layering of visual signs (soldiers + woman + flag) builds a moralized war narrative. The national flag at the top like a heavenly shield invokes godly legitimacy. The look is formal and iconic—a digital propaganda poster, not a meme, to inspire awe and solidarity rather than revelry. Ideologically, the meme combines nationalism with gendered martyrdom, depicting the Indian army as both avengers and defenders of feminine honor. It intersects personal sorrow (a woman's sindoor) with national security, inviting affective solidarity with state action. Through its appropriation of “Every Indian Life Matters,” it domesticates a transnational moral idiom to justify military action—transferring revenge into a humanitarian duty within nationalist digital culture.

Table: Conceptual and Visual Metaphor Mapping- “Operation Sin door: Every Indian Life Matters”

Source Domain	Target Domain	Visual Cue	Interpretation
Sindoor / Womanhood	National dignity / sacred life	Red silhouette of a woman	Feminine figure stands for sacrifice and emotional core of the nation
Protection of woman	Justification for warfare	Soldiers encircling female figure	Military as guardian of symbolic womanhood
Flag / canopy	Divine authority / legitimacy	Indian flag hovering over the scene	Nationalism visually framed as moral high ground
Life (emotionally framed)	Strategic retaliation	“Every Indian Life Matters” caption	Emotional humanitarianism used to justify military aggression

Pak Meme Title 1: India ne film shuru ki... Pakistan ne ending likh di”



Translation: (“India started the film... Pakistan wrote the ending”),

In response to India's Mission Sindoor assault on May 7, 2025, Pakistan had retaliated with Operation Jung-e-Banyan-ul-Marsoos on May 8. The meme metaphorically places this as Pakistan "writing the ending" through real retaliation and global recognition. This meme constructs the India–Pakistan tension a visual narrative, utilizing familiar media conventions to place Pakistan from reactive responder to final narrator. In the beginning, "India ne film shuru ki... Pakistan ne ending likh di" ("India starts the film, Pakistan has written the ending"), places India's "Mission Sindoor" in melodramatic theater and sums up Pakistan's military action in such a way that is authoritative ending. The semiotic arrangement prioritizes juxtaposition: on one side India, linked to cinematic propensity and abstract assertions; on the other, Pakistan performing a real act and, visible result. The film camera signifies, proof, apprehension, invention- in relation to visual primacy. The fire trails, missile trajectories and human outlines enhance Pakistan's status, not merely as a participant in conflict, but as the (re) animator of resolution. This favours Multimodal Metaphor Theory (Forceville, 2008), where text and image simultaneously enact supplementary and composite- meaning making principals. The Metaphorically representation “WAR IS A FILM” and “WRITING IS POWER”, is visually divided: the left side, which has the Indian flag with massive lettering “WAR NS”-looks like a stylized film poster. While the right side shows missiles being fired and explosions filmed on a digital video camera-meaning-in this one-sided narrative, India performs. Pakistan performs with action and realism. The meme performs symbolic inversion where performance is vilified and authorship becomes synonymous with success. Split-screen composition, filmic icons, and literal frame camera India's action as spectacle and Pakistan's response as strategic authorship. The metaphorical framework here is: "WAR IS A STORY; CONTROL IS AUTHORSHIP" according to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). To begin with, it delegitimizes Indian military intervention as merely emotional, media-induced drama. Secondly,

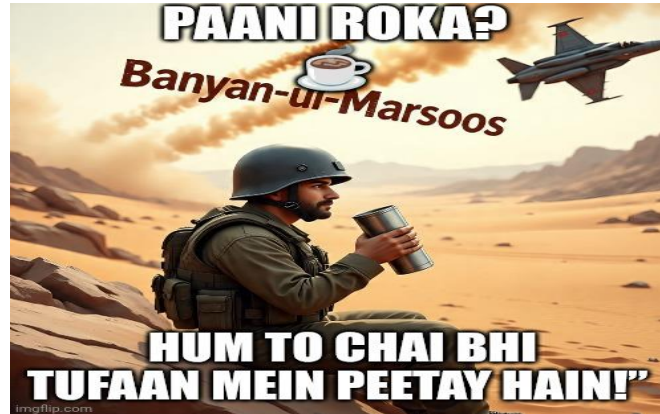


it makes a statement about narrativity claiming authorship and sovereignty over the confrontation, claiming that it was Pakistan—not India—that controlled the outcome. Ideologically, the meme plays a number of functions. Kövecses (2010) affirms this interpretation, highlighting how metaphors enact power narratives—here redescribing who commands the memory and meaning of the conflict. .

Table 1: Conceptual and Visual Metaphor Mappings (Pak memes analysis)

Source Domain	Target Domain	Visual Cue	Interpretation
Film / Movie narrative	Military conflict	“WAR NS” movie-style poster	War framed as cinematic spectacle
Scriptwriting / Ending	Strategic control / victory	“Pakistan wrote the ending” (text)	Authorship = narrative closure = dominance
Camera / recording	Reality documentation	Camera capturing missile strike	Pakistan framed as factual narrator, not performer
Special effects	Symbolic posturing	Explosions, fire trails	India portrayed as dramatic, performative, not tactical
Split-Screen design	Dual perspectives	India’s poster vs. Pakistan’s action frame	Visual contrast between performance (India) and resolution (Pakistan)

Pak Meme Title 2: The line “Paani roka? Hum to chai bhi tufaan mein peetay hain!”



Translation: (“You blocked our water? We drink tea even in the middle of storms!”)

The meme employs cultural and humour symbolism to counter India's threat in the post-Pahalgam era of withdrawing the Indus Waters Treaty. “Paani roka? Hum to chai bhi tufaan mein peetay hain!” (“You blocked our water? We drink tea even in the middle of storms!”) metaphorically repositions India's weaponization of water as inefficient. The meme also refers to the 2019 viral episode where Indian pilot "Abhinandan Varthaman" in Pakistani captivity, raved over the "fantastic tea" he was served during captivity. The phrase was used as a meme for Pakistan's calm and hospitality during the ordeal. The 2025 variant extends that cyber memory, reinforcing consistency in Pakistan's rhetorical stance: resolve through peace, not chaos (BBC News, 2019). Borrowing from Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the meme is based on the frame: “CRISIS IS A STORM; RESILIENCE IS A RITUAL”. The drinking of tea—a familiar, pragmatic action—is reconceived as a metaphor for national calm and psychic resilience. The meme visually represented a serene Pakistani soldier in combat attire drinking tea among a desert battlefield littered with missile trails and air attacks, with a jet passing overhead and the words “Banyan-ul-Marsoos” curving through the air—evoking the Quranic metaphor of unity and unbreakable ranks. The juxtaposition of chaos (missile trails, aerial power) and tranquility (tea) represents control under siege. The semiotic composition stages stoicism: the cup is placed in the center, the soldier at ease, implying that conflict itself cannot interfere with ritual and control. Following Multimodal Metaphor Theory (Forceville, 2008), ordinary practices here act as national symbols, rendering tea a strong ideological counter-gesture. The tea cup represents daily resistance, and the jet and explosions represent pressure—imagining strength together through ritual and defiant calm. The meme ironically mocks Indian aggression by downplaying it. Indian assertion of control over the water is established as an ineffective threat before the cultural resiliency of Pakistan. It reverses the power dynamics with its assertion that peacefulness—instead of revenge claims sovereignty. The tea metaphor is integrated into the Banyan ul-Marsoos military operation and makes a quietly assertive statement that Pakistan's response is anchored in restraint and religion—and not just firepower—while also promoting Islam as the frame for resistance. India threatened to militarize water following the Pahalgam attack, triggering Pakistan's military reaction and innovative



meme counter-narrative. Pakistan's memes recast India's pressure as ineffective against Pakistan's cultural and spiritual endurance.

Table 2: Conceptual and Visual Metaphor Mappings (Pak memes analysis)

Source Domain	Target Domain	Visual Cue	Interpretation
Tea drinking	Calm under pressure	Soldier sipping tea mid-battle	Symbolizes self-control in the face of aggression
Storm / Tufaan	Indian threats / war tension	Jet, explosions in background	Frames India's actions as turbulence Pakistan endures
Ritual / habit	National character	Centered tea cup	Resistance framed as everyday discipline
Water control	Psychological warfare	"Paani roka?" question	Suggests India's weaponization of water is ineffectual
Cultural memory	Digital pride / continuity	Echo of "Fantastic Tea" (2019 Abhinandan)	Builds on existing meme heritage of composed resistance

Pak Meme Title 3: Tum sindoor le kar aaye thy... Hum Marsos le kar aaye hain”



Translation (“You came with sindoor... We came with Marsos”)

India responded to the Pahalgam attack with Mission Sindoor to represent cultural retaliation. Pakistan's Operation Jung-e-Banyan-ul-Marsoos borrowed Qur'anic imagery in order to present its attack as ideologically unified. This meme represents that ideological tension in unadorned metaphor. This meme symbolically represents India's Mission Sindoor and Pakistan's Operation Jung-e-Banyan-ul-Marsoos, contrasting two metaphoric pillars of the May 2025 military strike. The phrase “Tum sindoor le kar aaye thy. India's "Sindoor" (vermilion) evokes the Hindu culture and sentimentalized nationalism linked to honor, grief, and femininity. Conversely, the Pakistanis call on "Marsos", a Qur'anic term from Surah As-Saff (61:4), invoking spiritual unity and Godly self-discipline in battle. "Hum Marsos le kar aaye hain" ("You came with sindoor, We came with Marsos") frames confrontation no longer as a confrontation between armies, but as a confrontation between ideological metaphors. In this Visual illustration we see in one corner a soldier in uniform, helmet with a red marking across his forehead, indicating India's Mission Sindoor. Modi's militarized nationalism as allegory to a human figure, that accentuates the human and emotional factor of India's nationalism. Polysemy contrasts Pakistan's although the Marsos allegorically, a fighter aircraft sweeps over the head of the soldier showing Pakistan's militarized and technological angle. Visually, the meme puts the words at center stage using clean bold fonts, giving symbolic value to language as power. The background with abstract battlefield imagery, hinting at groundedness and sacred land. The fighter jet is associated with Marsos, a symbol of military power and technological ability. In comparison, sindoor is sensually depicted by the red mark on the soldier, further establishing its relationship with human feeling and individual sacrifice. The research utilized Multimodal Metaphor Theory (Forceville, 2008), meaning is produced out of conflict between these semiotic resources. The semiotics mentioned here stress the opposition: Marsos invokes military power, ordered divine

authority, and technological development, whereas sindoor represents individual sacrifice, cultural mourning, and emotional nationalism. Ideologically, this meme claims symbolic authority. India's metaphor is made emotional and feminized, whereas Pakistan's one is spiritual, collective, and militarized. Instead of demonstrating explicit armed power, the meme gains power through symbolic economy-allowing Qur'anic power and military strength to speak more forcefully than dynamite. It retakes the war not only as bodily but as metaphysical-a battle between holy discipline and emotional ritualist (Barthes, 1977, p. 146).

Table 3: Conceptual and Visual Metaphor Mappings- “Sin door vs Marsos”

Source Domain	Target Domain	Visual Cue	Interpretation
Sindoor (Hindu marital symbol)	Indian military response	Red mark on soldier's forehead	Evokes emotional nationalism, cultural grief, and feminized sacrifice
Marsos (Qur'anic metaphor)	Pakistani military ideology	Fighter jet + bold text “Marsos”	Symbolizes divine unity, military strength, and sacred discipline
Sacred language	Ideological legitimacy	Clear contrast in bold textual framing	Language itself is weaponized as symbolic terrain of war
Battlefield / terrain imagery	Moral and national grounding	Sepia-toned desert background	Reflects spiritual rootedness and national stability
Jet as divine strength	Technological power	Jet aligned with “Marsos”	Marsos extended from scripture to modern defense capability
Symbolic framing	Ideological superiority	“You... We...” binary in meme text	Repositions Pakistan's symbolism as higher, disciplined, and morally consistent

Discussion and Conclusion

May 2025 India and Pakistan military tension, the symbolic rivalry shows characteristic narrative techniques. Indian memes such as "Operation Sindoor: When Honor Meets Fire", and "When nature unleashed its fury, our soldiers stepped with courage ", airstrikes depicted as sacred obligation and courage. Memes made war ritualized heroism and gallantry. The sindoor (vermilion) imagery represents military clash as virtuous moral act of vengeance and loss and desecration and devastation. Ideologically polar, the Pakistani meme "Sindoor? Hum Ne Tu Saaf Kar Diya" ("That sindoor? We wiped it off") mocks the symbolic foundation of India's emotional frame. Removing the sindoor takes away Indian's claim of holy retaliation. It reduces the act of performance. The second meme, "The whole world should know", shows Pakistan using controlled and opened diplomacy. It contrasts Indian's symbolism with narrative control and



moral clarity. Legitimacy comes from credibility, not ritual symbolism. These memes show a clash between India's emotional-sacred militarism and Pakistan's ironic-strategies resistance. India ritualized military action. Pakistan counters by mocking these symbols and turning defense into discursive subversion (Yoon, 2016).

The research highlights that memes work as strategic texts that shape ideology in online conflict. Using CMT and Visual Analysis, this study shows memes are not just amusement. It turns complex political tension into simplification, by connecting symbols with emotion and culture. Memes can legitimize or challenged national stories. They shape how people see politics and acts as tool of digital nationalism (Das, 2025).

The study shows that memes are central to today's political talk. They work like symbolic weapons for building group Identity and opinion. Future research should look at comprehensive dataset and longer conflicts to see how meme narratives change over time. Comparing regions, like Palestine and Ukraine, could reveal global patterns in digital propaganda. It's also key to study how audiences receive memes and how platform algorithms affect their spread. Looking at humor, religion, nationalism, and gender can give deeper insight into how culture shapes meme warfare.

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