

## Gender and Power Relationships in the Language of Proverbs: Image of a Woman

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Proverbs are précised and condensed sayings frequently used that express general truths or practical precepts. They have their origins in oral tradition and tend to change little from generation to generation. Being transmitters and reflectors of accumulated wisdom, they are generally accepted blindly; and are a manifestation of the traditional values of a society. In the context of gender and language relationships, proverbs acquire great significance because they mirror the traditional power relationships between genders. The present research is a socio-linguistic and critical discourse analysis of proverbs of English and Urdu to examine how power relationships of different genders are determined through linguistic choices in different languages/societies. Data for the present research is taken from one English and one Urdu dictionary of proverbs. Data has been categorized and analyzed to examine how a woman is perceived, symbolized and portrayed through Urdu and English proverbs. It is also examined whether the stereotypical image of the woman is same in English and Urdu proverbs. It is expected that the paper would help in a better understanding of the image of women as presented through the accumulated wisdom of English and Urdu proverbs.

### Introduction and literature review

This section provides a background of the research, introduces the topic and throws light on the literature relevant to the current research.

### What is a proverb?

Online Oxford Dictionaries define a proverb as “A short, well-known pithy saying, stating a general truth or piece of advice”; whereas Collins English Dictionary defines it as “a short, memorable, and often highly condensed saying embodying, esp. with bold imagery, some commonplace fact or experience”. As far as the origin of the word ‘proverb’ is concerned it is from “Middle English: from Old French *proverbe*, from Latin *proverbium*, from *pro-* '(put) forth' + *verbum* 'word' .

Since proverbs are very closely associated with cultures, it would be appropriate here to see how proverbs are defined in the cultural context. The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy (Third Edition, 2002) defines proverbs as “short, pithy sayings that reflect the accumulated wisdom, prejudices, and superstitions of the human race”. In this definition use of the words ‘prejudices’ and “superstitions’ is crucially important; and later on the analysis of the data of the current research will show human prejudices and superstitions are reflected in the proverbs of different languages.

Different scholars have extended a variety of definitions of proverbs but no single definition has been agreed upon. In an effort to look for an all- encompassing definition of proverbs, (Mieder, 2008, p.10) cites the American paremiologist Bartlett Jere Whiting’s (1994) definition:

*A proverb is an expression which, owing its birth to the people, testifies to its origin in form and phrase. It expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth – that is, a truism, – in homely language, often adorned, however, with alliteration and rhyme. It is usually short, but need not be; it is usually true, but need not be. Some proverbs have both literal and figurative meaning, either of which makes perfect sense; but more often they have but one of the two. A proverb must be venerable; it must bear the sign of antiquity, and since such signs may be counterfeited by a clever literary man, it should be attested in different places at different times. This last requirement we must often waive in dealing with every literature, where the material at our disposal is complete. (p.80)*

### **Important characteristics and common features of proverbs**

"There is no generally accepted definition which covers all specifics of the proverbial genre" (Grzybek, 1994, p.227). However, based on various definitions of proverbs one can derive some important characteristics and common features of proverbs. A very important common feature of proverbs is that they are originated in oral tradition. Since they come from an oral tradition, and for centuries they are not recorded in the written form, they are designed or worded in such a way that a layman can remember or memorize them easily. Interestingly for centuries they are carried from heart to heart and generation to generation without even changing a single word. It is due to this characteristic that they are generally considered a prestigious genre that is the custodian of common man's wisdom. Proverbs often have such grammatical features and rhetorical devices that make them easy to remember that is why the use of alliteration, rhyme, repetition and use of parallel structures are found as common features of proverbs across the globe.

### **Gender, power and proverbs: relationship of the terms**

Gender parity entails equality between men and women, especially when it comes to rights and power positioning. As far as the definitions of a 'proverb' are concerned, they are based on precision, origin in human experience, social phenomena, folklore and general truth. If one keenly look at all the 'definitional components', truthfulness is quite challenging of all because it is not the absolute truth rather it is the societal interpretation of the truth.

As already mentioned, proverbs provide a general view on life and serve as indicators of general perception or folk wisdom. Since proverbs reflect the wisdom of masses, they mirror the cultural norms, beliefs and values of life of the culture or society they come from. It is interesting to note that the ideas or notions presented in proverbs across the globe are the same. It is only the choice of language, use of rhetoric devices and application of imagery that varies from language to language and culture to culture. These choices of language have a significant impact. Language plays a vital role in shaping the material reality; and the relation of language with power can also not be denied. Especially when it comes to gender issues, stereotypical language choices and the use of masculine generic create a negative psychological impact (Roya, 2011) and these choices lead to negative real-world consequences (Frank & Treichler, 1989).

### **Sources of the spread of proverbs**

Mieder (2008, p. 14) asserts, "Proverbs, like riddles, jokes or fairy tales, do not fall out of the sky and neither are they products of a mythical soul of the folk. Instead they are always coined by an individual either intentionally or unintentionally ...". Mieder (2008) has identified four sources that played a vital role in the distribution and spread of European proverbs, and that can be generalized to other cultures of the world such as Asian and African. According to him the first source is Greek and Roman antiquity whose wisdom spread through proverb mainly in Latin language. He asserts that the study of proverbs started with Aristotle, and mentions the Bible as the second source, Medieval Latin as lingua franca the third, and modern texts as the fourth source. Thus, proverbs spread in different cultures through antiquity, classical languages, religious text sources, modern texts etc.

### **Representation of women in different societies: proverbs in different languages**

"Values and beliefs are codified and manifested in all aspects of linguistic communication, such as popular expressions, shared vocabulary, oral traditions, conversational rules and modes of interaction, and even linguistic modes of creativity" (Dominguez, 2010, p.50). Thus, proverbs also reflect social beliefs regarding gender; and by looking at the proverbs in a particular language or in a particular culture one can understand how gender is perceived in that culture. For example a Rajasthani proverb asserts "When a girl is born, don't take care of her, she will grow like a cactus; when a boy is born, take good care of him, as you would with a rose tree" (Schipper, 2010, p31).

Since "oral traditions influence the way members of any given community think, thus, how they perceive and feel about the world around them" (Dominguez, 2010, p.54), oral tradition of proverbs provide insights into how different societies think about women differently or in the same way. In many patriarchal societies a woman is expected to be obedient to the male members of the family such as her father, her husband, her brother and her son. This submissiveness is valued in many African societies as well, and a family tries to inculcate this trait in a young girl as she is

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prepared for marriage. Husband is to be obeyed and his orders are to be followed. The following African proverb clearly demonstrates the value of this submissiveness:

- *Omukazi birenge bya ddiba; bw'otabikunya tebigonda* (A woman is (like) extremities of a hide; they need rubbing to soften).

Schipper (2010, p. 31) asserts, "The basic themes of proverbs are derived from elementary human experience and activities. Through the body human beings express how we feel and who we are- or at least who we are allowed to be in the midst of the social pressure we all suffer to a larger or smaller extent- in the cultural context we live in". He further argues, "However, even in reference to body how gender identity comes in, and how patriarchy plays its role can be clearly observed in the Dutch proverb: A good woman goes without head" (Schipper, 2010, p. 37). What this Dutch proverb conveys is to have a head implies to have brains, to be intelligent, to have one's own will; but a woman is not expected to be a rational creature. According to (Schipper, 2010, p. 37) "Tvambo in Angola and Namibia refer more explicitly to the consequences for girls of this type: 'A girl of a will of her own will not get married'".

In proverbs "Women are mostly associated with beauty, and men with intelligence" (Schipper, 2010, p. 41). The notion that women have no brains is presented in the proverbs of many languages and cultures across the globe as he gives the examples: "'More beauty than a peacock, but the intelligence of a block of wood' (Mangolian); 'A doll's head and an empty brain' (Polish)" (p 41) and "Women are wacky, women are vain; they'd rather be pretty than have a good brain (English, USA)" (p.79). He also refers to an Arabic saying that "Women have only half a brain" (p41). As far as Urdu is concerned it too has the same idea presented in proverbs for example "*aurat naqis- ul- aqal hoti hai*" (A woman has flawed wisdom).

### **Research methodology**

This sections presents statement of problem, nature of data and process of data collection for the current research, theoretical framework and research design, and system of data categorization for the current research.

### **Statement of problem and background of the research**

Linguists, cultural historian, anthropologists, folklorists and philologists have for some time tried to mark and map out the origin, history and nature of proverbs. Many studies have been conducted to explore the processes of dissemination of proverbs and to compare variants of proverbs across cultures and languages. As mentioned earlier research from diverse perspectives has been carried out in this regard. For instance Schipper (2010) and Mieder (1993) have respectively examined proverbs from round the world and proverbs in the modern Age. Fati – Rabat (2013) has worked on the representation of women in Moroccan proverb; Brunvand (1986) has studied proverbs in the context of American folklore; whereas Dominguez (2010) has examined the function of proverbs in Mexican discourse.

However, in relation to the Urdu proverbs not much work is found. Urdu proverbs are also not examined in relation to proverbs of any other language. In the backdrop of patriarchy the current study explores the gender and power relationships as projected through English and Urdu proverbs; discusses the discriminatory language used for women in English and Urdu proverbs, and examines how this representation is more than a linguistic phenomenon, and has socio-cultural repercussions.

### **Nature of data and process of data collection for the current research**

Data for the current research is taken from two sources. As far as the data of English proverbs is concerned it was taken from 'The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs', third Edition 1970, reprinted in 1990. Since no formal standard dictionary of Urdu proverbs is available, the data was taken from '*Dili ki khwatin ki kahawatain aur Muhawary*' that is a collection of Urdu proverbs written by Shaista Suharwardi Ikram-ullah, 2005. This is the latest possible collection of Urdu proverbs available.

From both the sources English and Urdu proverbs concerning females were collected. While there is a possibility of having a number of proverbs in each of these sources that may refer to

female gender implicitly or explicitly, for the current research sample was restricted to only those proverbs that explicitly referred to females. Thus, from the English source all the proverbs about a female/ females in which words such as girl, lass, lady, maid, maiden, woman (etc.) or the plural forms of these words are used were taken as a sample for the current research. The proverbs that have the pronouns 'she' and 'her' as a reference to a female are also included. In the same way from the Urdu data all the proverbs with the Urdu equivalents of these nouns and pronouns were taken as a sample. Thus, in total the sample for the current research consisted of 57 English and 25 Urdu proverbs.

### Theoretical framework and research design

A research has to be based on certain philosophical and intellectual perspectives. Depending upon the nature of the current research it is based on more than one paradigms. The current research mainly takes on an interpretivist paradigm based on the notion that reality is socially constructed. Interpretive paradigm is underpinned by observation and interpretation and focuses on the need to put analysis in (socio-cultural) context (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003). For the current research critical discourse analysis provides the second paradigm as it provides the opportunity to see the power positioning of feminine gender in terms of social roles assigned to them and attributes associated with them. Fairclough (1993) states that the "critical" element of discourse analysis can reveal hidden connections and causes within texts and can provide opportunities and resources to those who may be disadvantaged. Critical discourse analysts identify and examine areas of injustice, inequality, racism, danger, suffering, prejudice, and other similar issues (Fairclough 2003, 2010). Some work on proverbs has also been taken into consideration while designing the framework for the current research and making categories of data. For example Fati-Rabat (2013)'s categories of analysis of Moroccan proverbs were found relevant. She devised data under categories: *Inferiority, weakness, stupidity, ill-nature, sex object, ugliness, positive, and shrewd*. In her devised categories only one category 'positive' creates positive connotations. However, a closer look at the only three proverbs given under this category again show the restricted sphere of a female's life who is limited to be a candle at home if not a star at sky, who inherits beauty from family and can solve 'some problems'. Thus, despite being titled as 'positive' ultimately the data discussed under this category invokes negative representation of women, while titles of other categories explicitly present women in Moroccan proverbs with negative attributes. Since in the current data only one instance of positive representation of women is found in the Urdu data, whereas no such example is found in the English data, no particular category is devised for it rather it is mentioned in the concluding discussion. Rest of the data is categorized under various categories designed to accommodate all the instances found in the data.

### Categorization of data for analysis

Since the current research was to investigate how power dimensions were associated with gender in English and Urdu proverbs, and how women are presented, to facilitate the analysis of data the following categories were developed:

1. Women as negatively beautiful, fragile and incapable
2. Women as unintelligent and talkative
3. Women as degraded and immoral objects of satisfaction
4. Women as troublesome, untrustworthy, deceitful and wilful

### Results and discussion

#### Category 1: Women as negatively beautiful, fragile and incapable

Under this category, findings from both the English and the Urdu data are presented respectively. For the English proverbs 12 instances were found that presented women as beautiful (with a negative connotation) or as weak, fragile, incapable and powerless. Table 1 presents the data of English proverbs under this category:

**Table 1**

*Presentation of the data of category 1 English proverbs: Women as negatively beautiful and fragile*

Serial no.	English proverbs under category 1	Page no.
1	Beauty draws more than oxen.	37
2	A man is as old as he feels, and a woman as old as she looks.	505

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3	The son full and tattered, the daughter empty and fine.	751
4	Woman and a cherry are painted for their own harm.	907
5	A woman and a glass are ever in danger.	907
6	A woman is flax, man is fire, the devil comes and blows the bellows.	908
7	A woman is the weaker vessel.	908
8	A woman kissed is half won.	908
9	Let no woman's painting breed thy stomach's fainting.	909
10	A woman's work is never at an end (never done).	909
11	Women and music should never be dated.	910
12	The more women look in their glass the less they look to their house	911

A close analysis of the data of this category shows that in English proverbs the beauty and looks of women are referred to in a derogatory way. Whether the claim is that "beauty draws more than oxen" or the other extreme "Woman and a cherry are painted for their own harm" perspective remains the same: beauty and looks of women have an unpleasant if not negative connotation attached to them. Women are not only presented as objects of beauty, they also are projected as weak and fragile. This fragility is shown to be of different dimensions such as a woman being a "weaker vessel"; she is weak to the extent that she is half won with a single kiss. It is also interesting that in the relationship of a man and a woman if there is something that goes wrong (if the devil plays its role) it is the weak woman who is 'flax' that can melt easy or catch fire whereas man is 'fire' who exercises his power over the powerless woman. Another dimension of the fragility of women is incapability. The English proverbs in the data state that a woman is so incapable that her work is never done, and a woman who takes care of her looks does not pay attention to her house.

In comparison with the English proverbs the Urdu proverbs found under this category include the following 14 proverbs as presented in table 2:

**Table 2**

*Presentation of the data of category 1 Urdu proverbs: Women as negatively beautiful and fragile*

Serial No.	Urdu proverbs under category 1	Page no.
1	<i>budhi ghorī laal lagam</i>	57
2	<i>buorhay munh mahaasa , log daykhain tamaasha</i>	57
3	<i>taang brabaer ki larki</i>	62
4	<i>jisay pia chahay wohi suhagan</i>	62
5	<i>larki ki jaay doli niklay khat</i>	62
6	<i>maan baap janam kay sath hain karam kay nuhin</i>	82
7	<i>bayti kay janam saey na daro us kay karam saey daro</i>	58
8	<i>biwi baydamon ki londi</i>	60
9	<i>jo daykhay gi baap ghar wohi karay gi aap ghar</i>	64
10	<i>kani mujhay bhay nuhin kani bin sahay nuhin</i>	76
11	<i>larki janam mein thukwaay</i>	79
12	<i>aytmad biwi muqana mein ghar sajaun apna</i>	52
13	<i>bahu hazar baras ki niv hoti hai</i>	34
14	<i>charag mein bati pari lado mayri takht charhi</i>	65

It is significant that the beauty of a woman is referred to in a derogatory way in the Urdu proverbs as well and she is presented as weak and incapable; however, due to the socio-cultural context most of the times her fragility or incapability is presented with reference to her status and position in her husband's house or in relation to her in-laws. So, the Urdu proverbs state that "*bayti kay janam saey na daro us kay karam saey daro*" which implies that the birth of a girl brings the apprehensions regarding her fate and future (especially regarding her marital life). A wife is considered to be nothing more than a slave: "*biwi baydamon ki londi*" and with a tone of finality it is asserted that a girl brings bad name to her family "*larki janam mein thukwaay*".

In Urdu proverbs when a reference is made to the beauty of a woman it is very derogatory; and her desire to look beautiful is mocked at especially with reference to her age for example "*budhi*

*ghori laal lagam*" and "*buorhay munh mahaasa , log daykhain tamaasha*". Both the examples reflect upon the social behavior towards women where respect for them increases with age, consequently an older woman who does not act her age is not approved of, rather she is disliked. Whereas in the social context from where these Urdu proverbs have sprung, women in general are not much appreciated for paying (too much) attention to themselves, putting on make and using accessories; and older women are criticized even more for doing all this. Older women, who are concerned about their looks, are a source of ridicule in the society, and proverbs also reflect that.

### Category 2: Women as unintelligent and talkative

Under category 2 data from both the English and the Urdu sources is presented respectively. Fourteen English proverbs are found that present them as unintelligent and talkative. Table 3 presents the data of English proverbs under this category:

**Table 3**

*Presentation of the data of category 2 English proverbs: Women as unintelligent and talkative*

Serial no.	English proverbs under category 2	Page no.
1	Because is a woman's reason.	37
2	She will like a horse shoe, the longer the brighter.	874
3	A woman conceals what she knows not.	908
4	A woman needs but look on her own apron string to find an excuse.	908
5	Tell a woman she is fair, and she will soon turn fool.	909
6	A woman's advice is best at a dead lift.	909
7	A woman's answer is never to seek.	909
8	A woman's mind and winter wind change oft.	909
9	He has a woman's tongue in his head.	909
10	A woman's tongue wags like a lamb's tale.	909
11	Where there are women and geese there wants no noise.	910
12	Women are great talkers.	910
13	Women in state affairs are like monkeys in glass-shops.	911
14	Women will say anything.	911

A keen analysis of the data shows that women are presented as unintelligent and uselessly talkative. A woman is insufficiently wise to seek answers from. Further, by asserting "where there are women and geese there wants no noise" women are downgraded to the level of birds, and their talk to the level of meaningless noise of birds. The criticism becomes very crude when it is claimed "A woman's tongue wags like a lamb's tale". Since proverbs are based on human experience and activities, frequent references to body are found in the language of proverbs (see Literature review); and here reference to a woman's tongue is made by establishing negative connotations.

Women are not only presented as talkative but also they are projected as fools. Not only they are "great talkers" and "say anything" but also they are brainless to the extent that they are compared with "monkeys in glass-shops" when it comes to politics and state affairs.

In comparison with the English proverbs, the Urdu proverbs found under this category are only 3. These are presented in table 4:

**Table 4**

*Presentation of the data of category 2 Urdu proverbs: Women as unintelligent and talkative*

Serial no.	Urdu proverbs under category 2	Page no.
1	<i>nou ki mein dus ki daadi.</i>	44
2	<i>(larki ki ) zuban ka taanka tut gia.</i>	72
3	<i>(larki ki) gazbhar ki zuban.</i>	79

The two ideas that are presented in these proverbs are that a young girl would think of herself as very intelligent, and a girl speaks non-stop. Thus, the ideas presented in these proverbs are the same as that in the English data of this category. According to Schipper, (2010, p. 47), "In proverbs, a woman's tongue is often warned against as a powerful and dangerous part of her body.

The dimensions and dangers of a woman's tongue and talking are sometimes expressed in exaggerated terms." In this regard, Schipper (2010) gives the Creole example from Saint Lucia that states "A woman's tongue is more than seven meters long" (Schipper, 2010, p. 47). Interestingly the same proverb exists in Urdu with "(*larki ki gazbhar ki zuban*)" (a girl's meter long tongue), as is found in the current data. These Urdu proverbs again provide insights into the social practices and accepted cultural wisdom of the part of the world where Urdu is spoken. In the traditional patriarchal society of users of Urdu in Pakistan and India (the sub-continent) women in general are perceived as unintelligent.

### Category 3: Women as degraded and immoral objects of satisfaction

As far as English proverbs under this category are concerned, 10 instances are found that present women as degraded and immoral objects of satisfaction. Table 5 presents the data of English proverbs under this category:

**Table 5**

*Presentation of the data of category 3 English proverbs: Women as degraded and immoral objects of satisfaction*

Serial no.	English proverbs under category 3	Page no.
1	When the belly is full the mind is among the maids.	45
2	Better a portion in a wife than with a wife.	50
3	Marry a widow before she leaves mourning and a maid before she can see her own nose.	515
4	He that speaks ill of the mare would buy her.	762
5	A woman that loves to be at the window, is like a bunch of grapes on the highway.	909
6	A woman that paints puts up a bill that she is to be let.	909
7	Women and hens are lost by gadding.	910
8	Women have no souls.	910
9	All women may be won.	911
10	Three wonders of England, the churches, the women, the wool.	912

Gender is a salient social category in the English speaking societies also. As the instances given in the table show, women are immoral objects of satisfaction all of whom "may be won". They are not given more importance than available and purchasable commodities. A woman "is like a bunch of grapes on the highway" that anybody can have access to; and especially if a woman wears makeup the purpose is to announce "that she is to be let". In a very derogatory way she is brought down to the level of objects when she is equated with churches and wool. The degradation goes to the extent of claiming, "Women have no souls". The history of the claim can be traced back to the much controversial religious and philosophical assertions and discussions by renowned members of the church and intelligentsia on the topic.

In comparison with the English proverbs, the Urdu proverbs are almost of the same number in the data that is 8 instances under this category which are presented in table 6:

**Table 6**

*Presentation of the data of category 3 Urdu proverbs: Women as degraded and immoral objects of satisfaction*

Serial no.	Urdu proverbs under category 3	Page no.
1	<i>jub naachnay lagi to ghungat kaysa</i>	57
2	<i>garib ki joro sab ki bhabi</i>	37
3	<i>jis ki bandria wohi nachaay</i>	37
4	<i>bayhaya ki bala dur, maro juti barsay nor</i>	35
5	<i>shakal churaylon ki, mizaj paryon ka</i>	42
6	<i>ganji kabutri, mehlon mein dayra</i>	43
7	<i>bhul gai chwani bhul gai taat, khanay lagi ghiyon ki roti sonay lagi khat</i>	35
8	<i>biwi ki mout aur kohni ki chot braber hoti hai</i>	58

As the instances given in the table show, in Urdu proverbs also women are presented as degraded and immoral objects of satisfaction. However, it is important to notice that cultural aspects of a society play a vital role in determining the linguistic choices used in a society, so the Urdu proverbs, too, reflect the cultural underpinnings. Since the sub-continent (and Pakistani) culture is more family oriented, most of the proverbs in Urdu have references to familial relationships. Women are seen and commented in the context of their married status and lives. For example the improvement in their economic and financial status after marriage is criticized as *"bhul gai chwani bhul gai taat, khanay lagi ghyon ki roti sonay lagi khat"* or *"ganji kabutri, mehlon mein dayra"*. Death of wife is equated with a small injury that is soon forgotten. It is important to notice that derogatory comparisons and references are frequently used for women such as *churayl* (witch).

In the Urdu data of the previous category it was noticed that women are characterized at a level of objects and in the Urdu data of this category it is found that women are also considered as animals. For example in the proverb *"jis ki bandria wohi nachaay"* not only a woman is brought down to the level of a female monkey but also the proverb implicates that she is mastered and controlled by a man much in the same way as a master would make a female monkey dance at the movement of his whip. Thus, gender power positions are quite explicitly projected.

Another example found in the data is *"jub naachnay lagi to ghungat kaysa"* which is used to refer to a context that when somebody starts doing something bad one should not expect good from him/her. However, the language of the proverb gathers meanings in the Muslim socio-cultural context where dance is seen differently and in a derogatory way. Since a dancing woman is not given any social respect, the proverb literally means that once a woman starts dancing one should not expect her to observe 'pardah' (veil). Thus, a woman is exemplified in a negative and derogatory way by using a gender specific literal meaning to convey the implied meaning which is not gender specific.

#### Category 4: Women as troublesome, untrustworthy, deceitful and wilful

This category presents women as troublesome, untrustworthy, deceitful and wilful. For the English proverbs 21 instances were found that presented women as troublesome and untrustworthy. Table 7 presents the data of English proverbs under this category:

**Table 7**

*Presentation of the data of category 4 English proverbs: Women as troublesome, untrustworthy, deceitful and wilful*

Serial no.	Proverb Text	Page no.
1	Marry your daughters betimes, lest they marry themselves.	516
2	Marry your son when you will, your daughter when you can.	516
3	The mother of mischief is no bigger than a midge's wing.	546
4	Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are a tempest and a hailstorm.	547
5	Weal and women cannot pan, but woe and women can.	873
6	A wicked woman and an evil is three halfpence worse than the devil.	887
7	Rutting wives make rammish husbands.	905
8	A woman is a weather cock.	908
9	Who has a woman has an eel by the tail.	908
9	Woman is the confusion (woe) of man.	908
10	If a woman were as little as she is good a pea's cod would make her a gown and a hood.	909
11	Women are like wasps in their anger.	910
12	Women (wives and wind) are necessary evils.	910
13	Women are the devil's nets.	910
14	Women are as wavering (changeable) as the wind.	910
15	Women in mischief are wiser than men.	911
16	Women laugh when they can, and weep when they will.	911
17	Women naturally deceive, weep and spin.	911



18	Women priests and poultry have never enough.	911
19	Women will have the last word.	911
20	Women will have their wills.	911
21	Women's counsel is cold.	912

A woman is equated to evil and she is worse than devil (see proverb 6 in this category). It is advised to marry them as soon as you can, lest they marry themselves (see proverb 1 and 2); thus, they are denied the right to marry as per their accord. Even after marriage they are terrible and disastrous: "Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are a tempest and a hailstorm" (4). A sweeping claim is made that women do not harmonize with weal (happiness, prosperity and welfare); they only harmonize with woe and suffering: "Weal and women cannot pan, but woe and women can" (5).

If proverbs are folk wisdom, this wisdom makes a generalized claim that 'a woman is a weather cock (8)' implying that women fickle, are inconsistent, and have a tendency to veer in the direction of the wind like a weather cock. If women are ever admitted to be wiser than men it is in mischief (see proverb 15 in this category). Women are presented as wilful, stubborn and obstinate, for instance: "Women laugh when they can, and weep when they will" (16), "Women will have the last word" (19), and "Women will have their wills" (20).

Some proverbs do not explicitly present women in a negative light, they do not even explicitly 'talk' about them; however, implicitly, through the imagery that they use and the metaphor that they depend upon, women are placed in a negative association. See for instance: "The mother of mischief is no bigger than a midge's wing" (3). Whereas the proverb on one level is about 'mischief' and the claim is made that the 'origin' of 'mischief' is often small like a *midge* that is a gnat-like flying insect; on the other level the associative positioning of 'mother' as a semantic field for the source domain 'origin' puts a woman in a vulnerable position because the semantic truth condition of 'mother' is only positive for a female not a male.

As far as the Urdu proverbs, zero instance of presentation of women as troublesome, untrustworthy, deceitful and wilful was located.

### Conclusion

During the last few decades gender has undoubtedly emerged as one of the significant themes in the area of social research. Linguists, cultural historian, anthropologists, folklorists and philologists have been exploring gender issues from the perspectives of their disciplines. The current study is on the construction of gender stereotypes in English and Urdu proverbs. As a linguistic and socio-cultural phenomenon proverbs have served to support and advocate patriarchy in many societies. Proverbs, as folk wisdom, present the way SHE is expected to be, not the way SHE actually is. Findings of the research show that both the English and Urdu proverbs depict women as weak, inferior and subsidiary. However, Urdu proverbs depict this weakness more in the marital perspective. A woman is typically expected to be completely docile, submissive and subservient to her husband in specific and to her in-laws in general. Hardly any evidence of courage and assertiveness of women is found. In all the proverbs of both English and Urdu women are presented as negatively beautiful, fragile, unintelligent and talkative. They are considered troublesome and untrustworthy and are projected as degraded and immoral objects of satisfaction. There is only one exception in the data of Urdu proverbs where women are referred to with a positive connotation: *janat makani maryam zamani* (Ikram-ullah, 2005: p. 64) which refers to a woman who is so pious that her place in paradise is confirmed and she can be called Mary of her times.

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