EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS AND PSYCHE OF PEOPLE ABOUT WOMEN: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PROVERBS FROM THREE DISTINCT CULTURES

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the perceptions and attitudes of people regarding women as reflected in linguistic resources, such as proverbs and sayings from three different societies around the world. The focus is on the representation, rights, and status of women as expressed in proverbs collected from the United States (English proverbs), Pakistan (Urdu proverbs), and China (Chinese proverbs). The objective is to analyze these proverbs about women from these diverse cultures and assess the status of women, their rights, and how they are perceived and treated in those societies through language. Using the critical discourse analysis approach proposed by Fairclough (1995), this study finds that women are negatively perceived and represented in the proverbs of these societies, showing that they are typically expected to perform domestic duties rather than demand rights. The findings reveal a collective psyche reflected in the proverbs of three cultures that strongly values patriarchal structures and practices. The study emphasizes the need to reduce and ultimately eliminate the use of such language and proverbs, in order to change the misogynistic mindset for a positive, gender equal and healthier society.

Keywords: proverbs about women, critical discourse analysis, collective psyche, rights and representation, gender equality.

INTRODUCTION

Human history is witness to the fact that women have been marginalized and subjected to systemic victimization across various cultures and societies of the world. Even in the ancient civilized societies such as Greece, the earliest Greek women, mainly in Athens around 1050-700 BCE, faced strict limitations and were often regarded as inferior to men (Asmanidar, 2015). Their position was comparable to that of slaves, with restricted rights and roles primarily limited to household duties (Brulé, 2003; Khan et al., 2021). Among other practices, one important tool was language that helped control and belittle womenfolk, and praised or idolized men.

Studies throughout various cultures disclose that proverbs often undervalue and demean women. Analysis of Hindi, Igbo, Setswana, and Persian sayings consistently reveals negative portrayals of women as irrational, morally deteriorated, diabolical, and pathetic (Oha, 1998; K. Theledi, 2021; Nakhavaly & Sharifi, 2013). These proverbs serve as tools for social regulation and reveal deeply ingrained gender differences in society (Theledi, 2021).

One way to gain insight into different societies and their treatment of women is by examining their oral traditions. Oral traditions significantly influence a community's thoughts, perceptions, and emotions (Dominguez, 2010). Proverbs, in particular, serve as valuable linguistic resources, crafted by individuals either intentionally or unintentionally (Mieder, 2008). These proverbs offer important glimpses into how societies perceive and treat women. Kerschen (2012) argues that proverbs, despite their brevity, function as powerful indicators of attitudes and beliefs,

making them an ideal subject for exploring the historical portrayal of women in oral traditions. Interestingly, these proverbs continue to perpetuate the historical image of women and maintain their influence in present times. Mammadova (2024) highlighted their role in raising intercultural consciousness and pragmatic ability. But what is a proverb?

 A proverb is defined as "a well-known phrase or sentence that gives advice or says something that is generally true" by the Oxford Dictionary (2023) while The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy (3rd Ed., 2002) defines proverbs as "short, pithy sayings that reflect the accumulated wisdom, prejudices, and superstitions of the human race". Eruygur (2023) states that proverbs are a reflection of a people's ways of living, belief systems, perspectives on the world, societal and ethical standards, and evaluations of values. Seitel (1976) states that proverbs are the plainest genre of folklore that expressly meets some social objective. According to Hertzler (1933), proverbs are not concerned with religion or ethics but with people's ideals, principles, or preferences, and they are not just fun rejoinders, but also a means of learning and instruction. They reflect a collective psyche which is maintained over decades and is transferred to next generations. The proverbs or sayings are terse linguistic expressions that reflect deep psychological and emotional embeddedness of people into long-standing patriarchal structures that applause men and control women. Ghilzai et al. (2022) contend that gendered proverbs often serves as moral instruction, prescribing behavior and reinforcing patriarchal structures.

Proverbs, as powerful tools, have always remained popular and have been consistently handed over to the next generations through social practices (Lauhakangas, 2019: Mpungose, 2010). Besides, proverbs are a means to communicate the point of view in an easy manner and to tackle any difficult situation. It is noticeable that a significant part of proverbs in all languages has always centered on womenfolk, reflecting societal outlook on women, their appearance, behaviors, and what they are expected to do. The proverbs have also served as propaganda to perpetuate and fortify the patriarchal legacies through the ages. Thus, from one generation to the next, proverbs have transmitted a tarnished image of women. Research across diverse cultures, which includes Kazakh (Mustagaliyeva et al., 2024), English, Russian, Uzbek (Abdullaeva, 2024), Nepalese (Bishwakarma, 2020), and Mewati (Rubab et al., 2022), determine how these sayings reflect and preserve gender roles and dissimilarities. These language artefacts repeatedly depict men positively while portraying women destructively or negatively (Rubab et al., 2022; Bishwakarma, 2020), and only a little acknowledgement of all her sacrifices, endeavors, roles, and duties has been observed in various societies. The discourse practices of societies reflect the intertwining of power and psyche that disfavor women. Traditionally, women's position was low universally, but the religion of Islam enhanced their roles (Sultana & Shah, 2018).

It is common observation that day-to-day societal discussions around men or boys usually emphasize their physical strength and size, expecting them to be assertive, competitive, and physically capable. In contrast, women or girls are frequently associated with sweet foodstuffs, symbolising notions of delicacy and fragility (Dundes, 1980). This association reinforces the stereotype that femininity is connected to being small and dainty. Additionally, girls are often meant to be objectified or treated as toys for amusement. Women have historically been assigned roles related to domestic servitude, such as homemaking and housekeeping. Women mostly meet a double load, working both home chores and agricultural work (Paul et al., 2017; Salamah et al., 2023). Social concepts and stereotypes emphasize the idea that women are accountable for household errands, while men are wage earners (Salamah et al., 2023). This dividing of labour is deeply rooted, with females commonly going to sleep later and waking earlier to run household duties, even during pregnancy (Chhabra, 2015). The dictatorial arrangement preserves this imbalance, deprives females and views them as minor (Sulistyowati, 2021). Despite females' excellent contributions to both household and agricultural activities, their characters commonly remain anonymous (Paul et al., 2017). This societal expectation can limit women's opportunities for pursuing careers or other aspirations outside the domestic sphere.

 There is a fixed stereotype in the psyche or minds of the public that women are passive beings. It is a common perception that they are submissive, meek, and lacking agency. Saxena (2015) stated that traditional beliefs view females as inferior to men in intelligence and competence, despite genetic differences, which do not justify such behavior. Another societal expectation imposed on women is the pressure to marry. Marriage has traditionally been regarded as a significant milestone in a woman's life, often linked to social validation, security, and fulfillment. Chai (2007) in his research reveals that in Chinese society, marriage is seen as crucial for women's social status and future security. This expectation can create societal pressure on women to focus on finding a partner and settling down, potentially overshadowing other personal and professional aspirations they may have.

Studies on proverbs in different cultures have examined the representation of women and identified recurring themes such as mediocrity, frailty, stupidity, infirmity, incompetency and uncertainty, etc. For instance, Fati-Rabat (2013) stated that the majority of Moroccan proverbs' depictions of women are negative. Kerschen (2012) compiles and analyzes over 800 American proverbs about women from historical and regional perspectives. Rasool (2015) also makes the case that women have been represented as weak, frail, unattractive, disloyal, and cunning in proverbs of both the Urdu and English languages. Schipper comments that "A woman's tongue is more than seven meters long" (Schipper, 2010, p. 47).

 Hussein (2009) investigated proverbs from Ethiopia, Sudan, and Kenya, while Kiyimba (2005) focused on Baganda proverbs. Zhang (2002) explored Chinese proverbs, Storm (1992) analysed Japanese proverbs, and Shivtiel (1996) studied Yemeni proverbs, among others. These studies demonstrate that women have been represented stereotypically in proverbs in almost all societies. Various other studies have attested that women's rights were never emphasized and that they were not shown favorably in those societies. Bunch (1990) is of the view that women have suffered abuse based on their gender and their rights are often infringed. In order to examine the perceptions and a collective psyche of people regarding women, this study has selected proverbs from both Eastern and Western societies, and examined the rights, status, and image of women in those proverbs. From the Western context, American proverbs in English language have been selected, and from the Eastern context, Chinese and Pakistani proverbs have been selected. Thus, the study provides a comparative analysis of the proverbs of three different societies where three important languages of the world are spoken, i.e., English, Urdu, and Chinese. The rationale behind choosing these three nations is that their languages have the largest number of speakers, and these nations have rich social and cultural heritage, and exercise great political influence on the stage of the world. This study will unfold the perceptions and mindset of people reflected in the selected proverbs of these societies, and will examine the rights, status and representation of women to portray a complete picture of the three societies and their language use.

METHODOLOGY

Many gender-related proverbs are found in the selected three languages i.e. English, Urdu and Chinese; for this study, those that explicitly reference women are selected. Although numerous proverbs explicitly mentioning females are available, this study cannot cover all of them and therefore has a limited scope, focusing on 30 proverbs each that represent a sample. For examining rights, representation and status of women in proverbs, data is collected from different sources. American proverbs are sampled from, Dictionary of Authentic American Proverbs by Wolfgang Mieder (2021) that presents 1500 proverbs, and some are taken from "American Proverbs about women" Lois Kerschen (1998, 2012). Kerschen collected more than 800 American proverbs presenting a rich treasure that refers to women. Urdu Proverbs are collected from "Dili ki khawateen ki kahawatain aur Muhawary'' by Shaista Suharwardi Ikram-ullah (2005), and some from Muhawarat-e-Niswaan by Wazir Begum Zia (1944) and a few have been taken from "Urdu Mohawrat ka Tehzibi Mutalea" by Dr. Ishrat Jahan (2006). Chinese proverbs are collected from the works, "The Twenty-Four Filial Exemplars" (Èrshí Sì Xiao), "Analysis of the female image in Chinese proverbs: A cognitive study", by Lyu, X. (2022) and some from "Ancient Chinese Wisdom: Chinese idioms and their stories," by Zhang, C., & Li, C. (2020).
Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis framework (CDA) guides the data investigation for this study. According to Fairclough (2003), critical discourse analysis focuses on exposing and analyzing issues such as injustice, inequality, racism, prejudice, suffering, and other social harms. The three stages of CDA are, textual analysis, discourse practice analysis and social practice analysis. This methodological scaffolding will help unpack people's shared perceptions, beliefs and attitudes that constitute the collective psyche. This term is derived from Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious that comprises some archetypes and universal symbols inherited by humanity (Jung, 1968). In social and discourse studies, the collective psyche is seen as the underlying mindset that shapes ideologies and discursive practices within a society (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following discussion examines the selected proverbs and the ways discursive practices build an image of women and the kind of social practices that have deepened in the three cultures/societies under study.

American Proverbs about Women

Let's first analyze English proverbs from America. A few selected American proverbs are given in Table 1. The rest are available on the link: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16891258

Table 1: American proverbs about Women

American proverbs
1.   The way to a man's heart is through his stomach.
2.   A widow is a boat without a rudder.
3.   The wife who has a grievance will be sure to make it known.
4.   A whistling woman and a crowing hen are neither fit for God nor men.
5.   A deaf husband and a blind wife are always a happy couple.

1. Textual Analysis (Description)

A rich use of metaphors, omissions, parallelism, negative modals, irony, sarcasm and other grammatical structures in the language of these proverbs is not just casual speech, but way more than that. These embed and strengthen gender bias, even when the grammar itself seems neutral or normal. Metaphors like "a widow is a boat without a rudder" and "A fair wife without a fortune is a fine house without furniture", and "Women are the root of all evil" and "He who has a wife has a master" belittle women as dependent, evil, worthless and unstable, or unfit when they swerve from set social standards or roles. These metaphors subtly conceal direct criticism and pass evaluative and ideological remarks about women in an elusive way that supports gender bias and patriarchal systems. In the proverb, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach", the technique of omission or grammatical ellipsis has been observed that erases the female subject and agency in the sentence, thus making her role a natural duty. It also puts emphasis on domestic duties of women and not autonomy or any personal accomplishments. The proverb, "When you choose a wife shut your eyes and commend your soul to God", has dramatized marriage in such a way that marrying has become a spiritual risk for the husband.

Some proverbs have demonstrated the use of negative modals and absolutes for reinforcing gendered ideology, social and moral duties. Modality and evaluative language are key tools for encoding ideology (Fairclough, 1995). The sayings, "The wife who has a grievance will be sure to make it known", "A whistling woman and a crowing hen are neither fit for God nor men", and "a deaf husband and a blind wife are always a happy couple" reveal the use of these techniques and stress women's nagging and fickle nature, women's lack of knowledge, and silence as a way to accomplish peace in a marriage, equate women with birds and supporting the notion that women should not strive for change and tolerate everything going around her. Moreover, irony and satire can be seen in "two good days for a man in his life: when he weds, and when he buries his wife" and "it's a sweet sorrow to bury a nagging wife", belittling women's life, deeming her as a burden throughout a man's life, and her death as a source of relief. Sarcasm is evident in the proverb, "When a man takes a wife, he ceases to dread hell" equating marriage with religious punishment of hell. A rhetorical question like "All are good girls, but where do the bad wives come from?" subtly refers to the inherent deceptive nature of women. "A wife is a young man's slave and an old man's darling", presents two extremes, slavery and affection (darling), which are indicative of different uses of women in different phases of a man's life.

Simple declarative sentence structures are also seen e.g. "All married women are not wives", "The most fascinating women never make the best marriages", "The calmest husbands make the stormiest wives", "It's a sweet sorrow to bury a nagging wife", "Women are the root of all evil", but in these simple sentence structures, essentially ironic and even misogynistic viewpoints are expressed. The oxymoron 'sweet sorrow' reflects that for men death of a wife is a sad event, but sweet and pleasing too as his burden is gone, and it will open the path to new opportunities of love. The expression 'nagging wife' is also a fixed and negative collocation emphasizing the presence of negative vocabulary for women. A proverb, 'Wife, make thine own candle, spare penny to handle,' has an imperative sentence structure and demonstrates a commanding and moralizing tone. The proverb stresses the economic and domestic chores and duties of a wife. Similarly in this proverb having complex structure with a relative clause, "He knows little who tells his wife all he knows", men are being instructed to beware of the untrustworthy nature of women. In the proverb, "A man is as old as he feels, and a woman as old as she looks", parallel structure of sentence clearly juxtaposes two opposing attitudes and natures. Men maintain vitality till last age, while women's vitality consists of only apparent looks. There is hollowness behind all the gorgeous looks of women. The proverb, "A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them, the better they be" demonstrates an even harsher tone towards women, normalizing the physical punishment of women, even describing it as very beneficial. There is the use of tricolon or three-phrase structure of sentence, and rhythm and rhyme scheme have been used for enhancing memorability and impressing misogynistic viewpoints in the minds of listeners. Moreover, women have been grouped with objects and animals, which is very demeaning and dehumanizing. The proverb, "The more women look in their glass the less they look to their house," presents a comparison (the more..the less) of women's beauty with their domestic responsibilities, suggesting that women's vanity leads to negligence towards their home.

In short, the vocabulary and structure of all proverbs exhibit that women are perceived as very problematic and complicated, while men are very simple, capable of everything, and the victims in bad marriages. The outer linguistic layer manifests the emotional and psychological structure of American society that sustains control over women through the use of language.

2. Discursive Practice (Interpretation)

In American society, proverbs are used most often in domestic, social, or literary settings, and work as cultural objects that are passed down through discourse. They reveal and narrate traditional stories about marriage, women's lives, attitudes, behavior, domestic life, and duties. A universal perception about woman has been created that women are the root cause of all problems and harms. Proverbs like "a good maid sometimes makes a bad wife" talk about the societal expectation that women should continue servitude after marriage. These sayings are often passed down through generations with humour or in the form of knowledge from elders, making their ideas seem non-threatening and understandable. The discursive production includes patriarchal power dynamics where men's understandings and

expertise dominate, while women's power of speech is ignored in humour (Sanauddin, 2015 & Khan et al., 2024). These proverbs depict the patriarchal nature of American society and a mindset that comforts itself by controlling women and maintaining their hegemony through language.

3. Social Practice (Explanation)

The American proverbs discussed above categorically present a society that normalizes and perpetuates gendered control over women. They emphasize the perception that women are naturally problematic, troublesome, and men have to tolerate his wife for a happy life. The universal notion that a wife should be obedient, patient and modest reflects a collective psyche of men for male dominance. Proverbs such as "lots of men get women, but few get wives" and "all married women are not wives" uncover this notion that a successful marriage is solely a responsibility of a woman, which confirms the idealised conventional roles. Moreover, Phrases like "when a man takes a wife, he ceases to dread hell" place all the expectations on a wife and suggest that women can do both if they want to make a successful marriage or an unsuccessful marriage. Overall, these proverbs work within a larger society that defines women by their relationships to men, often diminishing their individuality and character. By implanting these notions or perceptions into everyday language use, society emphasizes the gender inequality through linguistic practices. The following table shows how women's image, status, rights and duties are depicted in selected American proverbs:

Table 2: American proverbs about women

S. No.	Proverbs	Women's Image	Women's status	Women's Rights	Women's duties
1.	American	➢ Just a housewife, ➢ mostly negative image, ➢ dangerous being, ➢ untrustworthy, ➢ equal to animal or bird, ➢ equal to objects e.g. house, and fruits like melon, walnut ➢ fickle, irrational ➢ worthless ➢ evil, manipulative ➢ disobedient ➢ nagging, troublesome ➢ emotional and unstable ➢ difficult	➢ Economically low status, ➢ poor, ➢ slave ➢ burden on men, ➢ low moral status, ➢ Low social status ➢ Low status as a wife ➢ Conditional status	➢ No mention of her rights	➢ Domestic duties, ➢ specially cooking, ➢ home-making ➢ caring and ➢ satisfying husband, ➢ being quiet, ➢ being blind to husband's flaws/ wrongs ➢ Domestic thrift

The above table shows the negative perceptions and myths about women which have gripped the collective psyche of male gender in American society for the past many decades.

Urdu Proverbs about Women

Some Urdu proverbs are mentioned in Table 3, while the rest can be accessed through the link: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16891258

Table 3: Urdu proverbs about Women

Urdu proverbs	Translations
1. Burhi ghori laal lagaam.	1. An old woman dressing up/styling like girls.
2. Oont ki pakar or aurat kay maker se Allah bachay	2. One cannot escape from a camel's grip and a woman's snare.
3. Jisay piya chahay wahi suhaagan.	3. The one desired by the lover/husband is the fortunate bride/wife.
4. Biwi bay daamon ki londi.	4. Wife is an unpaid servant/slave.
5. Beti k janam se na daro, uske karam se daro.	5. Don't fear the daughter's birth; fear her deeds.

1. Textual Analysis (Description)

The above Urdu proverbs reflect the use of metaphors, contrast, humor, sarcasm, rhyme, and rhythm, as well as generalized views about women that reveal deeply rooted gender notions. In metaphors, women have been compared to animals or birds, e.g., an old mare, monkey, horse, camel, and old pigeon. She has been criticized from head to toe with sarcastic and contrasting structures, e.g. a proverb says that her intelligence lies in her knees, her face is ugly like witches, her tongue is sharp like a sword, although blind, but her name is 'eyes comfort'. She has been portrayed as weak, slack, incapable, dependent, a hypocrite, and cunning. She is a source of conflict and trouble according to other proverbs. In some sayings, no verb is used, e.g. "Aankh na naak, bunno chaand si" but reference to a girl's looks and attitude is completed with negative phrases. Thus every negativity is attached to women. The phrases such as "Burhi ghori laal lagaam" (Old woman dressing up like girls) and "Burhy mun mahaasa, log dekhein tamasha" (An old face is a source of amusement) mock older women for displaying glimpses of femininity or beauty, reflecting an idea of ageism and sexism. Elliptical structures exclude unnecessary words (subjects or verbs) making proverb brief, punchy and memorable for quick recall and delivery, e.g. the proverbs, Burhi ghori laal lagaam, Kos na chali, babul piyasi, Aankh na naak, bunno chaand si. Another proverb, e.g., "Biwi bay daamon ki londi" (Wife, a slave/unpaid servant) is a verb-less expression, which suggests that a woman's life is worthless, actionless, and penniless. It clearly explains that a wife's role in marriage is just like an unpaid servant. Parallel structures are also used in some proverbs, e.g. Bhul gai chwani, bhul gai taat, khanay lagi ghiyon ki roti sonay lagi khat , Ayee bee aaqila, sub kamo mein dakhla and some demonstrate rhyme and rhythm to enhance memorability e.g. Jhagry ki hein batain teen, zan, zar or zameen, Saas meri gher nahi, mujhay kisi ka darr nahi, Ayee bee aaqila, sub kamo mein dakhla.

Thus, these language features and colloquial vocabulary used in these proverbs not only make them pithy, catchy, and memorable but also resonate with local societal context, reinforce stereotypical ideologies about women, and transmit cultural messages in a light, humorous, cautionary way to next generations. The proverbs signify a psychological dimension of Pakistani society that is characterized by negativity, insult and abuse.

2. Discursive Practice (Interpretation)

In Pakistani society, these proverbs were originally spread through oral discourse, which is used in our daily life conversations, storytelling at homes, guestrooms (mehmaankhaney, baithak), in village gossip etc. The proverbs as a form of knowledge are passed through generations informally, which is why they are used as an important cultural and educational tool. They are often used in households to control women, whether they are in the role of a daughter, sister, a daughter-in-law, a wife or any other female relative. These often-used discourses reinforce the domestic responsibilities of a woman, confirming her status as a lowly creature and never hinting on their rights.

3. Social Practice (Explanation)

By analyzing these Urdu proverbs at the level of social practice, it becomes evident that in Pakistani society, these proverbs work as universal and didactic instruments that maintain gendered power and reinforce conventional gender norms. Gender inequality is mitigated and normalized through language features like humorous tone and irony embedded in words and metaphors. The proverbs depict women as having low moral and social status, lacking basic rights and perceived as burden on male family members. Therefore, her status at home has been reduced to an unpaid servant bound to serve the family silently without asserting her rights. Ageism, sexism, and classism are all reflected in these sayings, showing that older women are mocked, married girls are objectified and the autonomy of women is ignored and feared. Identifying these structures through critical discourse analysis allows the deconstruction of these toxic ideologies and paves the way for gender equality. The following table of Urdu proverbs shows the image and status of women in Pakistani society.

Table 4: Urdu proverbs about women

S. No.	Proverbs	Women's Image	Women's status	Women's Rights	Women's duties
1.	URDU	➤ As a source of conflict and distress ➤ Worthless ➤ dangerous being, ➤ cunning, intriguing, and malicious ➤ work-shirker, slacker ➤ untrustworthy and fickle ➤ Her tongue like a sharp sword ➤ equal to objects, e.g.	➤ Economically low status, ➤ Unpaid servant or slave ➤ burden on husband, ➤ Homeless being ➤ low moral status, ➤ Less valuable ➤ low social standing	➤ No mention of her rights	➤ Domestic duties, service at home ➤ home-making ➤ following the orders of her husband's mother ➤ Following the orders of husband or male family members

		➤ equal to birds like a bald pigeon, and animals like a camel and a monkey	➤ Low status as a wife, Cushion Countess		

The above table reflects a common mindset in Pakistan that sees women as animals or mindless creatures.

Chinese Proverbs about Women
Some Chinese proverbs about Women are mentioned in Table 5. Others can be accessed from the link: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16891258
Table: 5 Chinese proverbs about Women

Chinese proverbs	Translations
1. 十个美女九个祸 shí gè měi nǚ jiǔ gè huò	1. Out of ten beautiful women, nine are disasters.
2. 男人三十一枝花，女人三十豆腐渣	2. A man at thirty is a blooming flower; a woman at thirty is bean dregs (tofu residue).
3. 凤凰靠羽毛，姑娘靠衣裳	3. A phoenix relies on its feathers; a young woman relies on her clothes.
4. 三十如狼，四十如虎	4. At thirty, like a wolf; at forty, like a tiger
5. 女人心，海底针	5. A woman's heart is like a needle at the bottom of the sea

1. Textual Analysis (Description)
In the above Chinese proverbs, figurative devices have been used to describe women. For example, the first implied metaphor equates women's beauty with disaster, and it has been claimed by giving an exaggerated number of 9 out of 10 women, which is a numerical hyperbole. In other proverb man's age at 30 is described with a flowery metaphor, while women are described as left-overs or residue. These reflect gender bias even in the case of age description. Some proverbs metaphorically depict women as valueless as scattered rapeseeds, and (woman's tongue) as a sword; and a woman's heart even more poisonous than a wasp or green snake. The figurative device, simile, is also used in some proverbs e.g. a proverb describes woman's heart as difficult to obtain like needle in the bottom of sea, and other describe women as emotionally unstable, and inconsistent as clouds or as water and willow catkins, and brothers as limbs, while women are described as (disposable) clothes.

Parallelism is used in many proverbs, to emphasize comparison e.g. women's looks with a phoenix, her sexuality with ferocious animals like wolf and tigers, and her motherly care with rice farming, thus dehumanizing her essential womanhood and its beauty and qualities. In others, women's actions, roles, and personality have been compared or contrasted, e.g. scholars build cities, but women destroy; man is a home-runner while woman, a flower-decorator; good behavior is connected with men while bad with women; wife has to follow her husbands, even if their husband is a rooster or a dog. Though the proverb, '嫁鸡随鸡，嫁狗随狗, (If you marry a rooster, follow the rooster; if you marry a dog, follow the dog), reduces men to the status of animals, yet absolute submission is essentially demanded from women. In another parallel structure, Some Chinese proverbs pass harsh judgments on morality and character of women, for example, one proverb compares women with Moon Goddess Chang'e who always had a crush on young men, which means that women are of loose morality and character and keep sexual affairs with young men. The proverb 买来的马，娶来的妻，愿打就打，愿骑就骑 ("A bought horse and a married wife—beat or ride as you wish.") depicts women as having low moral and social status; therefore husbands can treat them as horses and beat or ride them as they wish.

At the lexical level, mostly the words or terms used for women in these proverbs show violence, exaggeration and utter negativity e.g thieves, poison, wolf, beat, sword, needle, disaster and rapeseeds. Verbs used in proverbs reflect oppression of women e.g., beat, ride, give up, replace, running away, knocks down, bowing down, follow, obey. The choice of words reflects the deep-rooted hateful perceptions about women that have prevailed for decades in Chinese society.

2. Discursive Practice (Interpretation)
These proverbs depict Chinese society as a patriarchal system in which women do not possess a high moral or social status. These proverbs are usually used in close family and social circles of men where they (especially older ones) warn others (younger ones) about women's malice, instability, and lowly status. Besides, these messages are also circulated through folk wisdom, education, art and literature, where the mentality regarding the genders is shaped gently and constantly. The discourse at family gatherings, conversations, meetings etc., all are breeding grounds for perpetuating the misogynistic mentality about women.

3. Social Practice (Explanation)

At the level of social practice, these Chinese proverbs, reflect traditional gender ideologies, and reinforce gender bias against women at all levels and in all respects. Women are objectified and dehumanized with no regard to her essential humanity and womanhood. They are taught and expected to follow traditional gender roles embedded in Confucian moral frameworks. They are positioned as a caregiver and worker or an object (of pleasure for the husband) in the household, with no mention of her rights as a human. They must obey their father when single, obey their husband after marriage, and their son if their husband dies. They can be used, abused, and controlled in any way that male members of the family deem suitable, and still, they are a moral threat to male members of the family.

Thus, Chinese proverbs portray women in a stereotypical light with low moral and social status. They are commonly negatively portrayed and expected to follow traditional values and societal norms. The following table 6 shows how women are portrayed in Chinese proverbs.

Table 6: Chinese proverbs about women

S. No.	Proverbs	Women's Image	Women's status	Women's Rights	Women's duties
1.	Chinese	➤ As a disaster, ➤ Worthless ➤ dangerous being, ➤ lustful ➤ difficult ➤ as a thief ➤ untrustworthy, ➤ fickle, unpredictable ➤ Disposable object like clothes, coat, decoration article, and scattered seeds ➤ Her tongue compared to sharp sword ➤ poisonous ➤ equal to objects e.g. house, and cereal like rice ➤ equal to animals like a horse, snake, wasp, wolf and tiger	➤ Economically low status, ➤ Follower, slave ➤ burden on husband, ➤ low moral status, ➤ Less valuable than a horse ➤ low social status ➤ Low status as a wife	➤ No mention of her rights	➤ Domestic duties, ➤ especially cooking, ➤ Following the orders of male family members ➤ home-making ➤ decorating flowers ➤ bearing and raising children ➤ assisting husband ➤ can be used and (even beaten by husband as he likes)

The above table testifies to the malicious mindset towards women reflected in the language of proverbs and traditional sayings in Chinese society

Comparing the Representation of Women in the Proverbs of three cultures

Examining proverbs from three different cultures—American, Pakistani (Urdu), and Chinese—provides a charming perspective on female representation and dominant gender dynamics in these societies. Despite cultural differences in proverbial wisdom, most of the proverbs echo similar notes of gender bias and hypocrisy, mirroring the disparaging image of women embedded in the social consciousness.

Proverbs from American, Pakistani and Chinese cultures usually portray women negatively, feeding prejudice and preconceptions. Women are frequently stereotyped as being evil, malicious, dangerous, verbose, fickle, unstable, and unthinking beings. They are portrayed as being men's property or livestock, to whom they should remain subservient. These disparaging depictions are clear in proverbs like "A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them, the better they be", and 买来的马，娶来的妻，愿打就打，愿骑就骑 ("A bought horse and a married wife—beat or ride as you wish."), and Aurat aur Gorha raan talay hon tab tak qabu mein hain, (As long as woman and horse are under your loin, they are controllable). These sayings not only serve to legitimize gender inequality but also to devalue, dehumanize and objectify women.

Additionally, American, Chinese, and Pakistani proverbs display a double standard as far as loyalty in marriage is concerned. While wives are expected to be faithful, husbands are not bound and can replace women like coats or clothes, e.g. Chinese proverb states, 女人好比身上衣，旧的去了换新的 (A woman is like a coat on the body; when

the old one is gone, the new one replaces it). Even a wife's death is deemed as relief for the husband, e.g. this American proverb says, "A wife is seen with pleasure only at the wedding and in the winding sheet".

CONCLUSION

The examination of American (English), Pakistani (Urdu), and Chinese proverbs reveals many similarities and a few differences in focus. American, Chinese and Pakistani proverbs all have reinforced gender stereotyping, double standards, and negative notions about women without even slightly hinting about their rights. All negativity in the world has been dumped in the lap of women by these proverbs, making men appear completely neat and clean. American proverbs disparage girls and wives by portraying them as valueless, dangerous and evil, while Urdu proverbs mostly deride women about their looks, wearing make-up, slackness, maliciousness and talkativeness. On the other hand, Chinese proverbs depict women as poisonous, worthless, and a disposable commodity. All three societies demand from wives absolute servitude to husbands and families. Additionally, they all compare women with animals and warrant their treatment as animals. Though it is not possible to collect all proverbs or sayings about women from these societies and tell about women's depiction in them, however, it can be asserted, based on this study, that a vast majority of proverbs present a negative and misogynistic image of women. The findings have revealed that despite cultural variations, almost similar social psychology echoes in the selected proverbs. Thus, there is a need to critically analyze and challenge such negative attitudes, practices, and discourses that perpetuate gender inequality. By recreating and developing new proverbs that challenge stereotypes and encourage gender equality, we may aid in the establishment of a cultural change that values and empowers women.

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