

Gender Representation through Animal Metaphors: An Analysis of Urdu Proverbs

Abstract

Proverbs are words of wisdom and wit presented in short phrases or sentences, they represent culture, myths, folklore narrative, societal norms and gender distribution in different societies. Gender specific proverbs using animals as metaphor to equate human qualities is an intriguing area and the present study unfolds the representation of males and females through animals in Urdu proverbs. Forty Urdu proverbs (having animal metaphor) have been collected and studied by adapting Fati-Rabat's (2013) categories of analysis through gender perspective. The analysis shows that out of forty proverbs, there are 8 animals related to male gender while 10 are related to female gender. Twenty one times male animals have been found to be represented as negative and 18 times females have been represented in negative by using animal metaphor. Frequency of negative male representation is higher than that of female representation. This reflects that although society generally approves devaluation of females and praise of males (Ncube & Moyo, 2011) but this particular study shows that when it comes to using animal representation, male gender can also be presented as negative image or ridiculed.

Key Words: Proverbs, Gender, Animal metaphor, Urdu Proverbs

INTRODUCTION

People often use proverbs in their daily communication in both speech and writing. These short meaningful statements connect them to their heritage and ancestral knowledge. Proverbs are wise sayings that are rooted in culture and traditions and loaded with meanings. Proverbs express some implicit or explicit message about general truth or common practices (Profantova, 1998:306-307). The elements that constitute these sayings are simple, short and relevant to common understanding.

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A person belonging to a particular culture or setting can easily relate to the entities in proverbs and decipher their meanings. These wise sayings have a general truth and applicability principle and if relevant can be applied in any situation. Only the context and actors need to be appropriate for their usage. Proverbs transmit and transfer cultural knowledge, opinions, wisdom and experience, worldview and reality and are apt in reflecting norms and behavioral patterns of the people (Malinauskienė, 2004:4). These sayings have strong bonds with the culture, philosophy, general observations, practical truth and other aspects of human life (Dell, 2006). Since proverbs are applied and used every day and their scope is quite broad, it is very important to first understand and explore the term ‘proverb.’ There is no single definition of the term ‘proverbs’. ‘There is no generally accepted definition which covers all specifics of the proverbial genre’ (Grzybek, 1994, p.227). One thing noticeable about proverbs is that they have their roots in oral traditions and for centuries they were not documented. Proverbs have got the element of word play and arrangement of ideas that people could easily remember them and pass them on to their next generations. In the words of Dominguez (2010), ‘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’.

Sociologists, anthropologists, ethnographers and historians have worked upon proverbs from different perspectives in order to find out that how these sayings are deep rooted in our society and cultures and how they impact our daily discourse. Folklorists like Granbom-Herranen (2010) has worked upon male and female representation and found that proverbs are seen as part of masculine patriarchal speech while women have been reflected as subjugated and objectified entities. These explanations are substrata for the researchers of 20th Century. To unfold male chauvinism, scholars like Kerschen (2012:3) have tapped various cultures focusing on the myths, traditional practices, norms, rituals, songs, rhymes and legends. They are of the view that proverbs are the best source to look in to the cultural practices, belief systems, distribution of gender and representational systems. It is significant that these areas should be studied because they represent societal beliefs and their evolution through times.

Objective

To explore male and female genders represented through animals in selected Urdu proverbs

Research Question

How have male and female genders been represented through animals in selected Urdu Proverbs?

Proverbs reflect cultures of a society and its attitudes and behavior towards genders. They are product of social thinking and are sensitive to people, surroundings and even flora and fauna i.e. about means of representing flowers and animals. The current research explores gender representation in Urdu proverbs through fauna i.e. animals. This will help future researchers who want to work on proverbs having the references of plants and animals. It also helps in understanding symbolism through animals, anthropomorphism and animal metaphors for future researchers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The word 'proverb' has its roots in 'Middle English: from Old French *proverbe*, from Latin *proverbium*, from *pro-* '(put) forth' + *verbum* 'word' The English Dictionary 3.0 defines proverbs as, 'A phrase expressing a basic truth which may be applied to common situations'. The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs gives the definition as, 'A proverb is a traditional saying which offers advice or presents a moral in a short and pithy manner.' As these sayings have their roots in culture so it is significant to take a look at this aspect. 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'. These definitions show that proverbs are multi-faceted and have layers of meanings. These are condensed with the extensive usage of imagery, metaphor and symbolism and the nature of proverbs can be realized through the saying *Proverbs are like butterflies, some are caught, some fly away* (see www.deproverbio.com). This proves that proverbs not only have multiple meanings but the meaning undergoes changes along with the changing context and situation. It is possible that certain proverbs disappear with the time while others hold to be universally true across cultures. There are proverbs which carry the same meaning but their manifestation/ presentation is different in different cultures. For example, the proverb 'Near the church farther from God' goes like '*Charagh talay andhera*' in Urdu.

The usage of metaphor and imagery does not change the meaning rather it gives a different color and flavor to the saying. We find cultural, social and religious elements in the proverbs but one interesting aspect that needs attentions is the metaphor of animals i.e. representation of message through animals. For example, we can see the presence of such items in the following proverbs:

Ants in one's pants
Bats in the belfry
Barking dogs seldom bite

Since proverbs originated from oral tradition and have folklore background, the usage of such concepts as animals is significant as humans began civilization by domesticating animals and using them in their routine life and activities. Proverbs use

personification and anthropomorphism through animal characters in proverbs. Maddox (n.d.) has given difference between two terms. She believes that both are used to attribute human characteristics to inhuman things. Personification is to present an abstraction as a person or an embodiment of some trait. She has given example of a proverb, ‘wisdom has built her house, she has set up its seven pillars’, where wisdom is personified as feminine feature. She has also given examples of ancient Gods that were personification of natural and intellectual phenomena. On the other hand, anthropomorphism is an ascription of human quality to a Deity or to anything impersonal. It is popular story telling trope. Inanimate objects can also be anthropomorphized like vegetables in *Vigge Tales*. She concluded that the difference is that personification is treated as synonym of an embodiment while anthropomorphism is used in general contexts.

Gray (1990) has observed that proverbial cats are more distinguished and numerous than as beasts. He has given examples of cat and lion proverbs and emphasized that the lion is portrayed as noble and brave while cat’s image is bolstered by her proverbs. Many other bestial species like dove, eagle, leopard, goat, owl and elephant have fewer references in proverbs as compare to cats. While animals from medieval life like the dog, the horse, the cow, the fox, the ass, the cock, the crow, etc. are more frequently represented in proverbs. Fox is presented in proverbs as swindler or thief, horse as well disciplined and dutiful servant while dogs are seen between horse and fox. Dogs are presented as abject and lowly personalities that are necessary servants whose loyalty is important. Tartu (2001) opines that the pet question for authors working on proverbs is frequency of occurring of these animals. He observes that domestic animals like cat, dog, horse and ox dominates the rest of the species as far as frequency results suggest. Thus proverbs are rich source of animal presentation as types, symbols, stand-ins and metaphors.

Nakhavaly & Sharif (2013) worked on semantic derogation of women in Persian proverbs. They believe that proverbs reflect vision and culture of people living in a society. The discrimination and derogation is reflected from proverbs because it shows attitude of social system towards women. Persian is not a gender language but their data shows proverbs having elements of oppression and violence. They have given statistical figures. 179 out of 12,000 Persian proverbs have semantic derogation of both sexes. However frequencies for both genders are different. Eighty four percent include semantic derogation against females and 16% includes discrimination against men. It is reflected through female portrayal as evil, inferior, worthless and capricious beings as opposite to men who are presented as avaricious and cruel. Rasul (2015) has studied gender and power relationships in Urdu and English proverbs and concluded that women in both English and Urdu proverbs have been mentioned as weak, stupid, unintelligent and talkative. Schipper (2010) concluded

that in proverbs women are associated with beauty and men with intelligence. Noor (2015) in his extensive study on Pashto proverbs found that people use proverbs for different means for example to assert, to establish power, to highlight weakness of the opposite gender especially women. Bhattacharya (2014) is of the view that women in proverbs like *zar, zan aur zameen* (woman, money and land) are equated with commodities and are source of all evil. These studies have looked at the portrayal of females as human beings or societal/ familial beings but there is scope to explore both the genders from some other angle and animal representation can be a fertile area for this purpose.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the present study, forty Urdu proverbs (having animals as subject) have randomly been selected from and divided into two major categories i.e. male and female. The category ‘male’ contains those proverbs where male animal is the subject and vice versa. For in-depth linguistic and gender exploration in the selected proverbs, Fati-Rabat’s (2013) categories have been modified and expanded. Rabat (2013) has given categories like *Inferiority, weakness, stupidity, ill-nature, sex object, ugliness, positive*, and *shrewd* in her analysis of Moroccan proverbs while exploring female representation. To keep the analysis neutral, counter categories for the above listed items have been devised and the collected proverbs have further been divided and analyzed. Following are the categories adapted from Fati-Rabat (2013):

1. Inferiority versus Superiority
2. Weakness versus Strength
3. Stupidity versus wisdom
4. Ill nature versus Good nature
5. Sex Object versus Authority
6. Ugliness versus beauty
7. Positive versus Negative
8. Shrewd versus Foolish/ Innocent

These categories show representation of both the genders using metaphor of animals for positive as well as negative characteristics. Under these categories, proverbs are classified and analyzed and gender representation is explored through animals. The collected proverbs have been coded by using alpha-numeric coding. The number represents the category starting from the first category up till the eighth category, while the alphabets separate each proverb from the other. The proverbs are further divided into sub-sections ‘male’ and ‘female’. The coding is used to organize the data and this method further facilitates the analysis where these proverbs are referred by mentioning alpha-numeric coding.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section provides detailed analysis of the collected proverbs. The proverbs have been categorized by using adapted categories from Fati Rabat (2013). The categories are eight in number and each section has been discussed under separate headings.

Table No 1. Inferiority versus Superiority

Male	Female
1A. Apni gali me Kutta b sher hota hai.	1F. Bili ne sher parhaya bili ko he khany aya.
1B. Dhobi ka kutta ghar ka na ghaat ka.	1G. Bili ke galy me ghanti kon bandhy ga.
1C. Kutta bhonky chand ko kia.	1H. Murghi ki bang kaun sunta hai.
1D. Gadha kia jany zafraan ka bhao.	1I. Ghar ki murghi daal braber.
1E. Bander kia jany adrak ka sawad.	1J. Mari hue makhi se shehad nae nikalta.

This category judges animals in proverbs as superior or inferior. Three proverbs on male animals in this category are about dog. Dog is considered an inferior being in Urdu culture as opposed to West where it is admired. Thus inferiority of dog is emphasized in these proverbs. For example in 1A there is double negative used for the animal. Dog is brave in only his area and he is powerless outside the domains of his area. His bark has no effect on the surrounding world as he means nothing to anyone. It is interesting thing that a washer man's dog is worthless and has no place whether at home or *ghaat*. There is an element of 'faithfulness' in 1B because washer man's dog stays and follows his master but has no permanent place because he has to run back and forth which puts this animal as inferior helpless creature. Donkey is portrayed as innocent animal who does not know price of saffron. Monkey does not know taste of ginger. Both monkey and donkey are present as inferior beings that have nothing to do with others job.

All the proverbs reflect the inferior nature of both male and females represented in them. Cat is a domestic animal but there it is presented as a powerless tutor who can be easily predated by powerful student and the students in this proverb is lion which generally has positive portrayal. Thus she should not tutor the powerful animals and should stick to status of domestic animal. In other proverb, she is presented as metaphor for impossible task. Hen, also a domestic animal and she cannot voice herself like cock as nobody listens to her. Hen is considered as luxurious food but the domestic hen is considered as lowly as common '*daal*' or pulses/ lentils. Bee is precious as it makes honey but a dead bee is worthless as it can no longer make honey. Thus, she is worthy as long as she labors and worthless as she dies.

Table No 2. Weakness versus Strength

Male	Female
2A. Kuttay ka kutta beri.	3D. Bakray ki ma kb tk khair manaye gi.
2B. Kambakhti jab ae oont chory to kutta katay.	3E. Dubli billi chohon se kaan katati hai.
3C. Oont key munh me zeera.	3F. Jis ki laathi us ki bhains.

Male animals are presented as symbol of strength. Camel symbolizes physical strength. The cumin seed is mentioned in contrast to camel and it is translated in English as a drop in ocean. The strength of camel is also reflected in comparison to dog as it is bad luck that one had to face dog after being spared by camel. This proverb 2B can be related to a famous Urdu proverb *Oont ki pakar aur aurat kay maker se Allah bachaye*, which means that one should be saved from the grip of camel (being envious and strong animal) and deception of woman. Dog is dangerous but less dangerous as compared to camel. The other proverb about dog in this category depicts that a dog can have only dog as enemy. Thus, dog needs equal strong partner for fight. Buffalo has been represented as weak creature that can be tamed by stick as in 2F. This proverb points towards enormous size of buffalo which can be overpowered only by someone who has the power to control her through stick. A weak cat (in 2E) fears mouse despite fact that she is stronger than mouse. Goat is presented as a mother (of male goat/ billy goat) who has to face hardship or slaughter (in Pakistani and Muslim context) one day and she would not be spared that day.

Table No 3. Stupidity versus Wisdom

Male	Female
3A. Bawaqt e zarurat gadahy ko bhi baap banana parta hai.	3C. Bhains ke agay been bajana
3B. Na kutta daikhay, na kutta bhonky.	3D. Aqal bari k bhains.

Donkey is portrayed as good natured, slow and blockish creature in European and ancient Mesopotamian proverbs (Broyle, 2005). Donkey is loyal and obedient servant of master. His good nature is ironically manipulated by others. He is so slow and stupid that he can be manipulated by anyone for benefit. Donkey is foolish but those who manipulate him are wise (3A). In 3B, dog is portrayed as intellectual being who does not bark without seeing. Its English translation is what eyes cannot see, mind does not accept. Dog is domestic animal who barks only when he sees something unfamiliar. Otherwise he keeps quite. Buffalo also a domestic animal, has been presented as stupid being. Samian, Ismail and Muslim (2016) have explored cow as symbol of stupidity in Malay proverbs and same is the case with Urdu proverbs. Her huge size is compared to abstract intellect. Her size is nothing as compared to human intellect that is non-tangible and is controlled by small brain. Thus a huge animal can be controlled through brain.

Table No 4. Nature versus Good Nature

Male	Female
4A. Tanhai pasand dewta ho ga ya janwer.	4F. Bhirron ke chattay ko mat chairro
4B. Jab tak taryak ae ga saanp ka dassa mar jae ga.	
4C. Saanp se dassa rassi se b darta hai.	
4D. Saanp nikal gya ab lakir peet ke kia faida.	
4E. Saanp ka bacha sampolia.	

Just like man, animals too are both good and ill natured. Ill nature can be understood as bad tempered, manipulative, aggressive or evil. A contrast between god and animals is presented through man that a lonely being can either be a god or an animal. Man is social so he cannot live alone but animals and gods do live alone. Snake has been considered ill-natured throughout human history not only for its poison but for his devil nature that led to condemnation of Adam and Eve. ‘Taryak’ (in 4B) is recommended medicine for snake poison if given on time. The sooner the better, the later the useless. Once a person becomes victim, he dreads even rope (in 4C) that looks like snake. It is no use to trace snake after he has left as he has displayed his evil nature. The child of an ill-natured/ evil animal i.e. snake (in 4E) will be evil like the parent. ‘Bhir’ or wasp is a flying insect having sting and is presented as female in Urdu proverbs. She makes hive for living and can be enraged if someone disturbs the hive. Thus, she is embodiment of danger and anger that can be invoked through disturbing her home. In this proverb the aggressive nature of female animals/ insects.

Table No 5. Sex Object versus Authority

Male	Female
	5A. Maindki ko zukam hona.

Females are represented as sex objects in proverbs as personification of beauty and delicacy. The counter word for this quality is authority which is characteristic of male gender and is often depicted in proverbs. There is no proverb in category of authority from selected proverbs. Animals are not presented as sex objects like women but their characteristics can be compared to respective genders. The delicateness of a woman is represented by mentioning a female frog that she is so sensitive that cannot even bear common cold.

Table No 6. Ugliness versus Beauty

Male	Female
6A. <i>Kahin gadha b ghora ban sakta hai.</i>	6C. <i>Naak pe makhi na baithne dena.</i>
6B. <i>Bander si shakal or khawab shahzadi se shadi kerne ke.</i>	6D. <i>Boorhi ghori laal lagam.</i>

Beauty of animals is criteria for their price and job they do. Horse is a beautiful animal while donkey is a lowly and ugly creature. Though both are used for riding but a donkey can never takes place of a horse. The monkey is presented as embodiment of ugliness. An ugly man is like monkey and must never dream to marry a princess. Housefly is an ugly creature and no one likes its presence. While ‘ghori’ or mare should not dress as young as it does not enhance beauty and reduces grace instead. It emphasizes that females with time and age lose their youth as well as beauty.

Table No 7. Positive versus Negative

Male	Female
7A. <i>Kuttay ko kheer hazam nae hoti</i>	7C. <i>Aik machli sary talaab ko ganda ker deti hy.</i>
7B. <i>Kuttay ki pooch teri rehti hai.</i>	7D. <i>Jahan gur, wahan Makhian.</i>
	7E. <i>Do mulaon me murghi haram.</i>
	7F. <i>Ghar ki rookhi sookhi pardes ki murghi se behter hy.</i>
	7G. <i>Khisayani bili Khamba nochy.</i>

Dog is portrayed in negative light in 7A and 7B. He cannot digest anything good. It can be inferred that he should not be given any respect or honor because he is not habitual of good treatment. His steadfastness is targeted in other proverb through his tail. Like his tail can never be straight, he cannot change his habits. All female animals are presented in negative light. Fish is an aquatic creature and her character is center of focus here. A fish can destroy all pond water or other fish in pond if her character is not good. This proverb points towards negative influence of a person but there is no sufficient evidence that why fish (female) is the symbol of contamination and negativity. Houseflies are attracted by sweet things thus wherever there will be sweets, the bees will come there. One hen cannot be shared by two ‘mulaas’ (religious priests). This is equivalent to ‘too many cooks spoil the broth’. Hen is represented as a precious or valuable entity thus represents positive portrayal of females. Thus she is reason of fight and prohibited for two persons and permissible to only one. The dry bread at home is better than meat in a foreign land. Cat has negative representation in the proverb (7G). CAT as female animal has been presented as mad creature. Embarrassment is a positive attribute and a person is only embarrassed after realizing his/her wrongdoing. Cat’s embarrassment is presented as

negativity here because she does not know how to deal with it and she does stupid acts.

Table No 8. Shrewd versus Innocent/Foolish

Male	Female
8A. <i>Daikhen oont kis karwat baithta hai.</i>	8B. <i>No so choohay kha k billi haj ko chali.</i>

The adjective shrewd refers to artful, cunning or tricky nature and innocent can be taken as its antonym. Camel is presented as shrewd creature as it is difficult to predict in which direction it will sit. The cat is also presented as shrewd creature that preyed nine hundred mice and is now going to pilgrimage. Even this act of pilgrimage cannot make her innocent in eyes of society. God can forgive her but society will never forget her dark past. This proverb can be included in Positive versus Negative but the meaning of this saying has the element of cunning acts (performed by cats) that is why it is placed in this category. To have an overall distribution of animal metaphors to represent genders, there are 8 male animals mentioned in the sample. Male gender has been portrayed 21 times as negative and 4 times as positive. Following table shows the distribution of metaphors along with their positive and negative portrayal:

Male Representation	Dog (8)	Monkey (2)	Camel (3)	Donkey (3)	Horse (1)	Lion (2)	Snake (4)	Rat (2)
Positive	-	-	1	-	1	1	-	1
Negative	8	2	2	3	-	1	4	1

For female gender, 10 animals have been represented 18 times as negative and 2 times as positive beings. Consider the table below:

Female Representation	Cat (5)	Honey bee (1)	Fish (1)	Hen (4)	Frog (1)	Buffalo (3)	Housefly (2)	Goat (1)	Wasp (1)	Mare (1)
Positive	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Negative	4	-	1	4	1	3	2	1	1	1

Although these animal metaphors mean to emphasize negativity (for both the genders as shown by their frequencies) but negative male representation (21 times) is greater than negative female representation (18 times). Although the difference is less and positive female representation is also very low i.e. 2 times, the numeric findings go against the general notion that females are negatively represented in proverbs. When it comes to animal metaphor female gender is represented less negative than the male

gender. While male positive representation is greater than positive female representation.

CONCLUSION

The research focuses on animal representation in proverbs in terms of gender. These qualities of animals can be anthropomorphized to portray genders. The diversity of animal attributes has similarities with human behavior and character. Animals are presented as metaphors for mankind reflecting their attributes and nature. Proverbs are saying that hence strong bonds with culture. Thus, gender representations of animals have correspondence with roles of men and women in society. The frequency of occurrence of domestic animals is greater than other species. Fati-Rabat (2013) has devised eight categories for female representation in proverbs and this research adapted those categories having a pair of opposite adjectives in each categories. The animal proverbs are categorized in them. Thus human categories are applicable to animals. The findings of animal proverbs can be applicable to humans. Dog is presented as inferior being in these proverbs. Men are considered superior and in Pakistani society it is considered abusive to compare a man with a dog but interestingly in the sample dog has been associated with male gender and represented as negative. Monkey is symbol of ugliness and inferiority and is used as abusive expression. On the other hand, cat's domesticity can be taken at par with traditional domestic role of females. Like cat should not tutor lion, woman cannot tame man. Also woman is considered something impossible to understand easily thus like cat is presented in proverb as an enigma. Just like pilgrimage of a cat is unacceptable to this society, it never forgives and forgets wrongdoing by a female and her acts become mark of her identity.

Cow/ buffalo, also a domestic animal, has been often metaphor for females. The traditional society wants females to be like cow that is slow, stupid, dumb and obedient. Males are powerful in patriarchal society and they own women as might is right. Camel is presented as symbol of strength. His masculinity represents dominance of men in Pakistani society. He sets the standards of society. Hen can also be taken as metaphor for woman. The proverbs put both in same shoe and portray them as weak and inferior in comparison to their male-counterparts. No one listens to hen like women. The society accepts voice of men, their rules and dominant roles. The character of female gender is reflected through these proverbs. Like a fish is capable of contaminating pond, a single evil woman can destroy whole society as women perform the role of mothers. Snake is a dangerous animal and is symbol of evil. He has always negative connotation, He is dangerous for both his poison and evil nature. Ironically, it is associated with males more frequently thus emphasize negative representation of males. To discuss future implications, this topic can be

expanded to full-fledged thesis with more proverbs as data to be analyzed. This research explores fauna in proverbs and in future flora can be explored. A study on anthropomorphism in animal proverbs may be conducted. There is broader scope for comparative study where Urdu proverbs can be compared to English, Malay, Persian or other proverbs and this research will reflect cultural differences through proverbs. Researches can be conducted by drawing comparative studies between Urdu proverbs and proverbs of our indigenous languages for example, Pahto, Saraiki, Punjabi and Balochi etc. -These proverbs can also be studied with a prospect of cross-cultural analysis of languages, customs and world views. These analyses have their pedagogical value and can be used as teaching and learning resources in order to study translation, cultural studies and linguistics. Proverbs appeal to logic and reason. They are deeply embedded in ideologies, norms and culture of society.

They are fruit of wisdom of people as they are based on experiences and are transmitted from generation to generation. They are short, simple, make use of familiar vocabulary, classify the idea and legitimize the thoughts of society. This research explored gender ideologies in animal proverbs. The animal characteristics described in them have similarities with humans. Thus, animals are anthropomorphized in proverbs. The frequency of negative portrayal of female animals is less than that of male animals. Although society approves the devaluation of women and praise of man but when it comes to mentioning of genders as animals, male gender is also portrayed as negative. According to Hussain (2004:129), 'Proverbs are used to ignore, trivialize and distort the image of women'. This is crystal clear in data and its analysis.

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