

## Unveiling Femininity: Exploring Women's Representation in Selected *Khowar* Language Proverbs from District Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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### Abstract

Proverbs, referred to as linguistic nuggets, phrases, or pearls of wisdom, are brief and memorable utterances that communicate a small fragment of insight, truth, or counsel derived from the shared human experience. Proverbs have historically served as a means of comprehending a specific cultural community's practices, traditions, values, goals, beliefs, and other aspects. This study explores the profound Chitrali culture by critically analysing several *Khowar* sayings to uncover their portrayal of women. This research provides a qualitative and textual analysis of 42 proverbs, using a purposeful sampling technique to select proverbs focusing on feminine themes. The sayings have been derived from *Matalan Gurzain*, a compilation of *Khowar* Proverbs authored by *Afsar Ali Khan*, and from a compilation by Degener (2022) and various oral sources. This study uses Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) as a novel approach to examine the representation of femininity. The findings indicate that the majority of proverbs portray women in a negative light.

**Key Words:** Chitral, *Khowar* Language, Proverbs, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, Women, Femininity, Gender Studies

### Introduction

Within our cultural environment, various aspects such as the conduct of our fellow culture members, community celebrations, principles, standards, traditions, legislation, stigmas, stereotypes, and more may seem customary and permissible. Given our longstanding membership in the community, it is highly probable that we possess a comprehensive understanding and acceptance of all aspects of our indigenous culture. Consequently, we can answer questions about what, why, how, and if. However, if we encounter individuals who hold entirely different beliefs and have significant disparities from our own, how would we approach understanding their way of life? How can we assess their values and behaviour in specific situations? What is their perception of themselves? What is the treatment of individuals from foreign or external cultures? Numerous methodologies exist to obtain responses to inquiries of this nature. We can commence cohabiting with them, closely scrutinising their everyday regimens. Engaging in activities such as reading local literature and internet sources, attending community festivals and events, and visiting museums and cultural centres can significantly contribute to developing cultural or community awareness.

Language is essential for immersing ourselves in a foreign culture or community and comprehending its way of life. This is the focus of sociolinguistics, which acknowledges the

inseparability of language and society. Language is a fundamental means of communication that effectively represents and shapes a particular culture's values, conventions, and dynamics. Our language consistently mirrors the views we have and the values we uphold, as evidenced by widely recognised idioms, vocabulary, semantics, oral traditions, and conversations. (Dominguez, 2010). Sapir (1921) asserts that language has a specific context in his book. People who speak it belong to a particular racial or multiracial group, set apart from other groups by their physical characteristics. Culture, defined as the socially transmitted collection of customs and convictions that shape the fabric of human existence, inherently intertwines with language.

When individuals acquire proficiency in the language of a specific community and develop a comprehensive understanding of its development, lexicon, phonetics, terminology, grammar, sentence construction, naming conventions, linguistic taboos and euphemisms, historical and cultural allusions, and dialects, they acquire a potent instrument for comprehending the target community. This is due to the close association between language and individuals' cognitive processes, communication patterns, and self-expression within a particular cultural milieu. Consequently, language is a valuable resource for fostering cross-cultural comprehension and communication.

There is a commonly acknowledged connection between language, culture, and gender. The role and portrayal of women can be better understood through the lens of language, which serves as a medium for conveying cultural norms, values, individual viewpoints, and attitudes. It demonstrates unique mental attitudes towards them (Wang, 2012). It elucidates the intricate relationship between culture and gender dynamics, revealing society's perception of genders and the underlying reasons behind them. Within the realm of language, paremiology exists, which focuses on examining proverbs. This study offers significant insights into specific individuals' beliefs, norms, and social structures and order, including their attitudes and practices related to prejudice. Proverbs are a repository of accumulated knowledge and the intricate interplay of social, cultural, psychological, religious, and gender dynamics endured during an extensive historical period. Proverbs serve as a reflection of societal wisdom, and their utilisation concerning gender might provide insights into the prevailing attitude of women (Jawed et al., 2022).

While numerous studies have been conducted on proverbs in various languages in Pakistan, there is a scarcity of studies specifically focused on northern languages, particularly concerning gender. This study seeks to uncover the societal perspective of women in Chitrali by examining specific *Khowar* proverbs using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) to uncover gender biases, stereotypes, and prejudice. The objective is to scrutinise the portrayal of women in different sayings of the *Khowar* language, assess society's viewpoints regarding them, and demonstrate the correlation between language, gender, and culture.

Northern Pakistan is renowned for its abundant languages, making it an ideal destination for language researchers. Chitral, a rough terrain in the northern part of the country, is home to 12 distinct languages, which is particularly noteworthy given its physical location. However, the region's dominant language is *Khowar*. Chitral, Gilgit, and Swat are home to the language, with a relatively small population of approximately 6 to 7 lakh speakers. During Chitral's independence, it was the official language alongside Farsi, resulting in extensive documentation, development, and a wealth of literature. The origin of the language is a subject

of debate, but some academics suggest it contains Indo-Aryan roots. It is believed that the development of *Khovar* occurred when the *Khovar* population arrived and resided in Northern Chitral, where the local languages impacted them (Akhunzada, 2023).

Similar to the prevailing Pakistani society, the social domain in Chitral is predominantly controlled by males who occupy positions of authority, status, and authority in decision-making, thus directing the community (Shah 2015). Feudal structures in society lead to male dominance, but awareness and social movements can improve the status of women. As a result of the peasants' movement, we saw a remarkable change in women's status in district Charsadda (Nawab et al., 2023).

Women encounter restricted socioeconomic prospects and are expected to adhere to conventional gender norms, which dictate their responsibilities as homemakers, carers, submissive, gentle, and reliant on males, among other expectations. Nevertheless, throughout the past several decades, there has been a gradual decline in this patriarchal mindset. Numerous women actively dismantle barriers to establishing their authority, question their supremacy, assume leadership roles, and drive social transformation. There is a growing presence of women in several fields, such as education, civil service, academia, research, sports, politics, entrepreneurship, and social work, which challenges traditional gender norms. This transition has occurred due to educational efforts, media influence, technological advancements, and actions undertaken by both governmental and non-governmental entities. Despite the significant importance of women's empowerment in fostering social, economic, and political advancement within the Chitrali community, the prevailing perception continues to portray women as feeble, susceptible, irrational, and subordinate to males. Therefore, it is theoretically natural that the prevailing perspective on gender roles in Chitral's history should be evident in all forms of cultural expression, such as literature, music, the arts, language, etc. Therefore, it is worthwhile to research proverbs as linguistic utterances to examine how they represent societal perceptions regarding gender.

## Literature Review

Proverbs also referred to as linguistic nuggets, phrases, or pearls of wisdom, are concise and memorable utterances that communicate a small fragment of insight, truth, or counsel derived from the shared human experience. These assertions are well-founded and widely accepted by the public, and they are commonly used in ordinary conversations, speeches, publications, and other forms of communication. Different paremiologists have provided their definitions for proverbs. According to Meider (2004), proverbs can be defined as concise and well-recognized sentences that convey wisdom, truth, moral principles, and traditional beliefs metaphorically and quickly memorably. These sayings are typically transmitted from one generation to the next. Speech entities are versatile tools employed in various contexts, including poetry, sagacity, reflective debates, and everyday conversations across different cultures, to address multiple situations or engage in casual conversations (Dabaghi, Pishbin, & Niknasab 2010).

Researchers have conducted extensive research on proverbs from various languages, examining and interpreting them through a feminist lens to uncover gender biases and sex-based prejudice. In their study, Alihe and Zhang (2018) identified nine sayings in the English language that exhibit sexist objectives and perpetuate the degradation of women. The phrases

“A man of straw is worth a woman of gold,” “If the husband is not at home, there is nobody,” and “Man, woman, and devil are three degrees of comparison” indicate the subordinate status of women concerning men. The lyrics ‘A woman’s advice is never to seek,’ ‘A woman and a glass are ever in danger,’ and ‘Women are wavering as the wind’ demonstrate their feeble character and superficial wisdom. Based on the results of their research, English idioms are similarly susceptible to sexism.

Schipper (2010) found that in most proverbs from many cultures, males are associated with intelligence, while females are associated with beauty. For example, a Mongolian proverb states, “The intelligence of a block of wood is more beautiful than a peacock.” According to a Polish proverb, a doll’s head is characterised by an empty brain. As per an American proverb, ‘Women are eccentric; women are insincere; they choose physical attractiveness over intellectual prowess.’ As per an Arabic proverb, ‘Women possess only a partial brain.’

Within the Pakistani context, the findings of a study by Jawed et al. (2022) are very unusual when they discover that Urdu proverbs depict women positively and negatively. However, the positive representations surpass the negative ones. Sayings like ‘*Shakal churailo si, mizaaj pariyo kay*’ and ‘*Haseen biwi or sarhadi qilla larai jhagray ki jar hain*’ label women as negatively beautiful and troublesome. ‘*Jab nachnay lagi to ghonghat kaisa*’ and ‘*Awrat or sharab insan ke hosh wa hawas ghum kar dete he*’ debased women as objects of gratification and fulfilment. They cannot live independently and always need male counterparts, as highlighted in ‘*Jise piyan chahe wohi suhagan*’ and ‘*Chamaar ki joru tooti jooti.*’

The study conducted by Jawed et al. (2022) in the Pakistani setting presents atypical findings about portraying women in Urdu proverbs, revealing both favourable and unfavourable depictions. Nevertheless, the favourable depictions outweigh the unfavourable ones. The proverbs ‘*Shakal churailo si, mizaaj pariyo kay*’ and ‘*Haseen biwi or sarhadi qilla larai jhagray ki jar hain*’ serve to categorise women in a negative light, portraying them as both attractive and bothersome. The phrases “*Jab nachnay lagi to ghonghat kaisa*” and “*Awrat or sharab insan ke hosh wa hawas ghum kar dete he*” served to diminish the status of women, reducing them to mere objects of satisfaction and contentment. Individuals are unable to exist autonomously and consistently require a male counterpart, as exemplified in the literary works ‘*Jise piyan chahe wohi suhagan*’ and ‘*Chamaar ki joru tooti jooti.*’

Khan, Sultana, and Naz (2005) explored the patriarchal Pashtu culture. They scrutinised its proverbs and found that gender strongly influences them, reinforcing the male-dominated social structure. A selection of typical proverbs about gender or sex was made from a collection of 3000, concluding that these proverbs exhibit male intent and content, aligning with the principles of *Pashtunwali*. Several proverbs with similar themes are mentioned, such as ‘A solitary son from Pakhtun is equivalent to an army,’ ‘A courageous son is recognised by how he weeps in his birth,’ ‘When Tora places the cooking pot on the hearth, she submerges all her concerns,’ and so on.

Sayings of a specific language have been analysed not just from a feminist perspective but also through comparative studies. Pervaz et al. (2021) conducted a comparative analysis of feminine identity in the proverbs of four languages, namely Urdu, Sindhi, Saraiki, and Punjabi. These proverbs depict women as troublesome, unwise, difficult to control, and dangerous as wives; daughters as face-threatening and bothersome to the family; brides and daughters-in-

law, particularly the mother-in-law, consistently disrupt their laws; and occasionally, they are treated as objects or inanimate entities lacking intelligence, rights, and emotions. The proverbs only portray the identity of motherhood positively, portraying it as a way to maintain one's dignity and show genuineness.

Similarly, Degener (2022) studied the sayings of various languages spoken in northern Pakistan, including Balti, Burushaski, *Khowar*, Shina, and Wakhi. The researcher examined the familial dynamics portrayed in these sayings. The study emphasises the division of labour between genders, where males are assigned chores, such as collecting firewood while women are responsible for bringing water. The study finds that there will be a scarcity of water in a household with many women, while wood will be scarce in a household with many men. The life expectancy of women is comparatively short, and there exists a prevailing emphasis on the significance of men as custodians of wisdom. Perception of women's remarks as stubborn, unintelligent, and unreliable often carries less weight. Moreover, it is unrealistic to anticipate their autonomy from their spouses or male family members, and they are susceptible to the impact of negative social circles, giving rise to ethical considerations within the societal context.

Although there has been extensive research on proverbs, there has been limited focus on *Khowar* proverbs. In his study, Degener (2022) examines several *Khowar* proverbs to provide insight into gender dynamics and the language subjugation experienced by women. Ali (2020) conducted a significant research study on the subject matter. The author conducted a comparative analysis of *Kalasha* and *Khowar's* proverbs, revealing the latter to exhibit a higher degree of prejudice than the former. However, the author's research does not explicitly focus on the representation of women's gender.

Furthermore, the author restricts the analysis of gender representations in *Khowar* proverbs to only five specific proverbs. This research aims to expand upon the previous study by comprehensively analysing 42 proverbs from the *Khowar* language. The objective is to shed light on the status of women and the gender stereotypes associated with them.

## Research Methodology

This study provides a qualitative analysis of the forty-two *Khowar* proverbs. This study has chosen the qualitative methodology for its appropriateness in analysing, interpreting, examining, and critiquing textual data. As mentioned, the approach addresses the underlying reasons and mechanisms behind human behaviour, opinions, and experiential information (Ullah, 2020).

The data about *Khowar* proverbs was gathered from the publication "*Khowar Matalan Gurzain*," published by *Afsar Ali Khan* in 2016 and compiled by *Degener* in 2022. The study utilised the purposive sampling method to select proverbs from the former source that implicitly or explicitly depict women's identities. These proverbs were then translated into English while preserving their content and theme. However, it is worth noting that only a few sayings were directly extracted from the latter source. Furthermore, specific oral sources also furnished pertinent proverbs for the investigation.

## Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the theoretical framework of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) and aims to examine the representation of femininity in *Khowar* proverbs. Feminism, as an overarching concept, advocates for the equitable treatment of both men and women in various domains, such as politics, decision-making processes, professional pursuits, and reproductive rights (Mohajan, 2022). The movement tries to establish an inclusive environment for women throughout social, political, and economic spheres, ensuring their equitable access to freedom and opportunities on par with their male counterparts. Feminist critique examines how literary texts and cultural productions either support or challenge women's economic, political, social, and psychological subjugation (Tyson 2014). The development of the FCDA, a subset of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), stemmed from the recognition that language significantly influences the establishment and perpetuation of gender disparities and power dynamics in society. FCDA aims to reveal how language mirrors, strengthens, or questions established gender norms, stereotypes, and power dynamics.

The text critiques the social inequalities associated with gender as they manifest in language. The primary objective is to scrutinise narratives that endorse a patriarchal societal norm, which refers to power dynamics that overwhelmingly benefit males as a social collective while simultaneously marginalising, excluding, and disempowering women as a social group (Lazar, 2007). Proverbs play a crucial role in the language since they convey collective thoughts, wisdom, wit, humour, stereotypes, stigmas, and other aspects of society. The interpretation of gender from the standpoint of the FCDA can offer valuable insights into societal perceptions of gender.

## Data Analysis and Discussion

The sayings that have been chosen have been analysed, taking into account the cultural context, norms, values, and gender dynamics that influence the collective mindset of society. Following their study, a total of seven distinct motifs have been identified.

### Women as Dependent on Men

The first table contains seven instances of *Khowar* proverbs that depict women as vulnerable and dependent on men.

S.No	<i>Khowar</i> Proverb	<i>Khowar</i> Proverb in Roman English	Translation in English
1	برارو لوڑی اسپرارو الوس	<i>Braro loli kai o alos</i>	See the brother and marry his sister.
2	رینی کی شوم ہوئیے لو استانی گوئیے	<i>Reni ki shum hoi lau istani goi</i>	When the dog is bad, the fox will come on the roof
3	کھونگیر دیاک ژاوو سار ورنگوشٹی موش جم	<i>Khonger dyak xawo sar warangushti mosh jam</i>	An idle husband is better than a warrior son
4	ویسوروتے دودور دی سور ٹوکھیر	<i>Wesorote dodor d sor tokher</i>	Even a lizard may court a widow.
5	موش بوکانتے تونگ چھانا ژاغا ہوئیے	<i>Mosh bokante tongo chana xagha boi</i>	A pearl leaf is enough of a place for a husband and wife.

6	تا موش ما موش بول	<i>Ta mosh ma mosh bol</i>	Your husband and mine create an army.
7	خوش نواستا دُنیا نو اوشیا	<i>Khosh no asitai dunya no oshoya</i>	The world can exist without a beloved.

In a society that prioritises male dominance, women are consistently regarded as lacking competence and rationality. They are perceived as lacking the intellectual capacity, decision-making authority, and resilience necessary to navigate the challenges and uncertainties of life. Consequently, women rely on male figures to provide guidance and protection in their lives. The proverbs presented in the table above prove this prevailing mindset. The phrase “see the brother and marry his sister” implies a correlation between a woman’s value and character and her brother, implying that her worth is contingent upon familial ties rather than her intellectual understanding, abilities, or achievements. The protagonist’s marriageability is contingent upon her brother’s identification and persona, thus diminishing her to a mere commodity. This underscores the issue of objectification, wherein her worth can be assessed and traded depending on the societal esteem accorded to her male relatives, specifically her brother in this instance. Likewise, the phrase ‘When the dog is bad, the fox will come on the roof’ does not explicitly address gender, but it suggests that the house’s protection is exclusively the male’s duty. If the male fails to act as a guardian or protector, it leaves the family members (implicitly referring to the women of the house) susceptible to invaders or foreign intrusions. Women’s autonomy is intricately linked to the institution of marriage and the presence of a husband or residing under male support, as exemplified in the saying, ‘An idle husband is better than a warrior son’. This implies that even if marriage leads to a feeble husband, it can still ensure autonomy and attain life’s purpose. While a son is highly esteemed in a society that prioritises males, it cannot serve as a substitute for a husband in a woman’s life. In the absence of male support and safeguarding, such as in the situation of a widow, she is susceptible to various difficulties, as exemplified in the phrase ‘Even a lizard may court a widow.’ Although the lizard is a benign and diminutive reptile, it might pose a problem to a bereaved spouse. One other adage, “A pearl leaf is sufficient for a husband and wife,” posits that the presence of worldly belongings and opulent lifestyles is not a prerequisite for a prosperous marriage. Despite the absence of financial belongings, both husband and wife can lead contented lives with limited resources, suggesting that women can only experience happiness with a male spouse. The responsibility for safeguarding both the household and the state lies with men. At the same time, women are just regarded as objects to be protected, as exemplified in the biblical passage, ‘Your husband and mine build an army.’ It signifies that when males unite to form a formidable force and collective power, ensuring the safety of both women and the state, This statement underscores the significance of authority as a catalyst for solidarity and togetherness among men, highlighting women’s dependence on male guardianship.

While the sayings confirm the dominance of males over women, another adage highlights the duplication of the latter: “The world can exist without a beloved.” This means that existence can persist without a lover or romantic partner. However, it is essential to note that “beloved” can encompass individuals of either gender. However, when examining the various instances and settings in which this proverb is employed within society, literature, and art, it becomes evident that its intended meaning is specifically related to women.

### Daughters as Less Valuable in Comparison to Sons

S.No	Khowar Proverb	Khowar Proverb in Roman English	Translation in English
1	ژاوو اڑیکو انوس زور	<i>Xawo axiko anus zor</i>	Stern is the birth of a son.
2	تا اوسناتری بیکار مت کیا فاندہ مه ژاو اوغو بغائے	<i>Ta usnatri bikar mate kya faida ma xaw ugho bghai</i>	Your being a swimmer is of no use, as my son drowned.
3	ای ادینہ کی گوئے تان ژاوو خدایی دوم	<i>E adina ki goi tan xawo khodayi dom</i>	If there were only one Friday, I would be ready to sacrifice my son.
4	ژور دیتی ژاو کرینے	<i>Xur diti xaw krene</i>	Give a daughter and get a son.
5	نو استونیرو ژاو ژاو نو، نو کرینیرو خانہ زاد خانہ زاد نو	<i>No istoniru xaw no, no kreniru khanazad no</i>	A son born after painless labour will be disobedient, and a servant bought free will be disloyal.
6	شوم ژاووئے کیا براغ شوم ژوروتے کیا زیور	<i>Shum xawote kya yaragh shum zhurote kya zewar</i>	No need to arm an unruly son; and no need to adorn an unruly daughter.

Throughout history, numerous gender stereotypes have perpetuated the belief that girls are inferior to men. This profoundly ingrained and detrimental gender bias has been prevalent in countless communities. A mother who bears multiple daughters while the family anticipates a male child is subjected to disdain. The FCDA expresses its disapproval of this perspective and promotes the equitable value of individuals of all genders. Our research on the proverbs reveals numerous examples confirming this gender bias. The phrase “Hard is the birth of a son” is self-explanatory, as it explicitly commemorates the arrival of a male offspring inside the familial unit. Upon his arrival, his ascent becomes unstoppable; he assumes the role of the family’s future guardian, provider, and household guardian. It can be deduced that the birth of a girl does not deserve appreciation and, therefore, is not worthy of mention.

Similarly, the statement “Your being a swimmer is of no use, as my son drowned” alludes to the profound grief of losing one’s son while neglecting to acknowledge the absence of any mention of the daughter. Sons hold significant value and are held in great esteem due to their responsibility for upholding the family’s heritage, safeguarding its reputation, and offering assistance and security. The significance of their role is once again emphasised in the phrase ‘If there was only one Friday, I would be ready to sacrifice my son’, suggesting that if one were to undertake a specific assignment, they would be willing to give up their most prized possession—their son. The daughter’s family perceives the marriage as a mutually beneficial agreement wherein she is exchanged for a son-in-law, as implied in the phrase ‘Give a daughter and get a son.’ Consequently, the actual value of a daughter is only achieved when she enters into matrimony and her family acquires a male offspring in the form of a son-in-law. The acquisition of something by diligent labour and perseverance holds substantial value, whereas the acquisition of something effortlessly becomes inconsequential. A son, a valuable asset for the family, must undergo arduous labour and exertion to be obedient. This implies that a son born without pain will be disobedient, and a servant purchased without cost will be disloyal. Another stereotype is exemplified in the phrase ‘No need to arm an unruly son; and no need to adorn an unruly daughter’, where weapons, which represent authority and safeguarding, are linked to boys, while jewellery, a symbol of attractiveness and embellishment, is ascribed to



daughters. This implies that allocating resources towards producing skilled men through weaponry is more advantageous than allocating resources to daughters through jewels. This proverb subtly suggests and strengthens the notion that males are more desirable and worth investing in, as they can safeguard or contribute to the family’s welfare. At the same time, daughters are considered less deserving because their primary role is regarded as ornamental or less practical.

### Women Having Weak Character and Wisdom

S.No	Khovar Proverb	Khovar Proverb in Roman English	Translation in English
1	ہوساک کیمیریو سار وفا نکی ژینگاک دارو سار	<i>Hosak kimerio sar wafa niki lengak daro sar</i>	Trust not in a giggling lady nor a quivering wood.
2	روشت دنیو سار ژینگاک دارو سار وا اوساک کیمیریو سار وفا نکی	<i>Rosht dunyo sar lengak daro sar wa osak kimerio sar wafa niki</i>	Do not trust a bright day, shaking wood, and laughing women.
3	دورتیک رویو سار بیرئ نیسیرو گوردوغ جم	<i>Durtek royo sar beri boghdu gordogh jam</i>	A travelling donkey is better than a home bird man.
4	ای اوشپوژو سم غیچ نکی ای ژورو سوم	<i>Ei ooxhpurosum ghech niki e xuro sum</i>	Both a tumor and daughter have no eyes.
5	پشاورار اوا گوم لوان ما بوک دوئے	<i>Peshawar awa gom luan ma bok doi</i>	From Peshawar, I have returned, but the story my wife narrates.
6	کیمیریو بیچو کوتیر	<i>Kimeriyo bicho kutair</i>	Woman (is) the knife of the bosom.
7	عورتو شونین دیت سوگونو پھیرین	<i>Orato shunen det sogonu pheren</i>	Win women’s favour through flattery and a (specific) plant through ashes.

The aforementioned incidents indicate that women are often perceived as illogical, complex, and possessing weak character and knowledge. The phrase ‘Trust not in a giggling lady nor a quivering wood’ establishes an analogy between giggling ladies and shaking wood, asserting that both entities are untrustworthy and, therefore, improbable to exhibit faithfulness. It implies that women who exhibit joy or cheerfulness are less inclined to demonstrate faithfulness. This portrayal unjustly associates a woman’s emotional manifestation, such as displaying cheerfulness or delight, with her loyalty. By comparing her to an inanimate item, her persona is objectified and degraded. An analogous rendition of this adage states, ‘Do not place confidence in a sunny day, trembling timber, or jovial women.’ Conventional gender norms dictate that women are expected to stay confined to the household and perform household tasks, while men are expected to engage in employment outside of the home. He possesses the ability to engage in unrestricted travel and gain exposure to many locations and circumstances.

Consequently, the individual encounters a diverse array of experiences, viewpoints, ideas, and knowledge, thereby fostering the development of their intellectual capacity. Conversely, restricting women’s autonomy and access to diverse experiences can undeniably influence their individual and cognitive development. In the present context, it is necessary to

acknowledge the adage that ‘A travelling donkey is superior to a house bird man’, implying that an individual who has seen several locations and circumstances possesses greater worth or expertise compared to someone who has confined themselves to the confines of their residence. The well-travelled donkey symbolises men, whereas the homebird represents women. There are other instances where women’s informal knowledge and identity are reflected. The example ‘Both a tumour and daughter have no eyes’ illustrates that both a tumour, a physical ailment, and a daughter cannot see or sense. Similar to how the former might manifest in any anatomical region, a daughter likewise tends to make demands or decisions without adequately thinking about or seeing the actual circumstances. The passage titled “From Peshawar, I have returned, but the story my wife narrates” presents an intriguing scenario wherein the husband has arrived back from Peshawar, a distant city 365 kilometres away from Chitral. However, it is noteworthy that his wife assumes a more prominent or vocal role in the conversation and interaction. The husband should communicate more verbally, providing detailed accounts of his journey and experiences during his absence from home.

Conversely, the wife exhibits communicative and forceful behaviour, which leads to her being characterised as talkative, unreasonable, and condescending. Furthermore, the adage ‘Woman is the knife of the bosom’ serves as a representation of women’s perceived lack of trustworthiness and indiscretion. Their favour and acceptance can be readily obtained through the use of flattery, as exemplified by the phrase, “Win women’s favour through flattery and a vegetable through ashes.” This perpetuates the misconception that women are susceptible to being persuaded or affected by flattery or compliments, thus diminishing their autonomy or agency. The act of comparing women to vegetables can be seen as an objectification and a reduction of women to mere objects to be influenced by flattery. This perspective contradicts feminist principles that promote acknowledging women as independent individuals with their own preferences and aspirations.

### Women are Readily and Unquestionably Accessible

S.No	Khwar Proverb	Khwar Proverb in Roman English	Translation in English
1	ای روپیہ سوت استری	<i>Ei rupaya sot istri</i>	Seven wives for one coin.
2	گون نیکیا وا مه ژاووت باردوخوتے بوک نو بوئے	<i>Bardokhote gon nikia wa ma xawo te bok nboi</i>	Finding a wife for my son is as easy as finding a handle for an axe.
3	ای ژور جوش جمار	<i>Ei xur josh jamar</i>	One daughter and ten sons-in-law.

In addition to their intellectual inferiority, patriarchy perpetuates the portrayal of women as easily accessible, developing detrimental attitudes that objectify and diminish the significance of women’s existence. This portrayal diminishes them as objects of longing, undermining their uniqueness, autonomy, and voluntary agreement. The adage ‘Seven wives for one coin’ delineates a scenario wherein the provision of companionship and services by multiple women can be obtained for a nominal monetary sum. It is commonly employed in regular conversation to alleviate the concerns of a prospective groom seeking a suitable partner for marriage. Consequently, it dehumanises women by reducing them to commodities that can be purchased with currency, thereby portraying them as individuals who are readily available and reasonably priced.

Similarly, another adage states, “Finding a wife for my son is as easy as finding a handle for an axe.” This adage suggests that finding a suitable spouse for a son is a relatively uncomplicated endeavour akin to acquiring a handle for an axe. The central motif at hand is the seamless accessibility and cost-effectiveness of women. Once again, the analogy to an axe handle serves as a clear example of the objectification of women.

Nevertheless, the phrase ‘One daughter and ten sons-in-law’ presents an atypical juxtaposition that exemplifies a situation characterised by an imbalance in the number of daughters and sons-in-law. One could interpret this as a rise in the number of male partners seeking to marry a single daughter, implying that the latter is difficult to obtain.

### Beauty Ideals for Women

S.No	Khovar Proverb	Khovar Proverb in Roman English	Translation in English
1	کوس چوست بوک بوئے وا کوس ٹون چھونجیر	<i>Kos chust bok boi wa kos tun chonjer</i>	Some men are blessed with charming wives, while others are armed with tightened slingshots.
2	خورو بوک گیچا شیلی	<i>Khuro bok ghecha sheli</i>	Another man’s wife looks beautiful in one’s eye.
3	کا تان ایستوران سوم خو شان کا تان چوڑان سوم	<i>Ka tan istoran sum khoshan ka tan chulan sum</i>	Some people find joy in their horses, while others in their plaits.
4	شوم ژاووٹے کیا یراغ شوم ژوروتے کیا زیور	<i>Shum xawote kya yaragh shum zhurote kya zewar</i>	No need to arm an unruly son; and no need to adorn an unruly daughter.
5	چھانی کی نیسایے بسیرو وایے کام بوئے	<i>Chani ki nisar basiro wai kam boi</i>	When the kid comes out, the goat’s value will decrease.
6	چستی بیر گلائی بیہچور	<i>Chusti beer gilayi behchur</i>	Beauty fades, but grievance persists.
7	چماچہ چوستی نکے ٹھاشٹا نخرہ	<i>Chamacha chusti niki thashta nakhra</i>	Meagre beauty but a lot of attitudes

In a society that is predominantly male-oriented, specific beauty standards are imposed on women. In this context, several prevalent trends and ideals encompass a young look, a slender physique, a fair complexion, lengthy hair, a little nose, gentle facial characteristics, plump lips, and modest and conservative attire. If a female individual exhibits all of these attributes, she is held in high regard and is motivated to uphold her physical attractiveness regardless of the consequences. In the Chitrali setting, an illustration of this phenomenon may be observed in the phrase, ‘Some men are blessed with charming wives, while others are armed with tightened slingshots’, implying that circumstances may bestow a captivating and appealing spouse upon specific individuals. In contrast, others are endowed with a formidable slingshot. This statement underscores the notion that beauty and attractiveness have significant worth in women, with the primary value of a wife being derived from her charm.

Moreover, it reinforces conventional beauty ideals and perpetuates the objectification of women through their physical attributes. Drawing comparisons between the concept of

“enchancing wives” and the notion of “long-range slingshots” once again diminishes women to mere objects that provide pleasure, utility, and contentment to their husbands. Furthermore, men are unsatisfied with their wives, even if they possess a pleasing physical appearance. Instead, they persistently pursue feminine beauty in many manifestations, as exemplified in the phrase, ‘Another man’s wife seems attractive to one’s sight.’ It signifies that the enduring attractiveness of one’s spouse diminishes over time, prompting the husband to seek out other women to satisfy his visual preferences. The patriarchal system imposes a societal expectation on women to uphold a favourable physical appearance to attract the attention of men.

Consequently, women experience significant concern regarding their physical appearance. This sentiment is conveyed in the phrase ‘Some people find joy in their horses, while others in their plaits’, which suggests that specific individuals (likely men) derive pleasure from their material possessions, such as horses. In contrast, others (women) derive joy from their appearance, grooming, or beauty, such as braids and hairstyling. According to the principle of “no need to arm an unruly son and no need to adorn an unruly daughter,” if one wants to discipline their clumsy daughter, they should refrain from giving her jewellery, as it is linked to decoration and physical beauty. This exemplifies the significance of physical beauty for women.

Nevertheless, individuals should not constantly hold their beauty in high regard, as it is not eternal and might deteriorate over time, as indicated in the statement, ‘When the child has emerged, the goat’s worth will decrease.’ This phenomenon might reflect a societal mindset that diminishes the worth of women who experience a decline in their elegance after becoming mothers, emphasising their devaluation upon assuming their maternal responsibilities. The concept of beauty’s impermanence is once again alluded to in the phrase, ‘Beauty fades, but grievance lingers.’ This phrase typically applies when an individual’s beloved, who possesses a beautiful physical appearance, displays apathy and fails to reciprocate the lover’s emotions. The latter employs this strategy to persuade the former by asserting that her physical attractiveness is transitory, existing presently but destined to diminish shortly. However, the enduring emotions of resentment and disillusionment that stem from her indifferent demeanour will endure indefinitely. An individual’s conduct towards others should align with their physical appearance. It is acceptable for an individual with an attractive appearance to display an attitude or take pride in it. The concept of “meagre beauty but a lot of attitudes” suggests that individuals lacking exceptional physical attractiveness should adopt a humble and unassuming demeanour devoid of any pronounced attitude. However, gender is not explicitly mentioned in this context, yet it can equally apply to both females and males.

### Women as Homemakers and Caregivers

S.No	Khovar Proverb	Khovar Proverb in Roman English	Translation in English
1	عورت پھیروانوں بچیں موش میدانوں بچیں	<i>Awrat Pherwano bache mosh maidano bache</i>	Man for the field and woman for the hearth.
2	عورتو شونگہ ژانگ کولانو ژانگہ	<i>Orato shunga xang kulanu xanga</i>	A woman fights on the labour-bed; a man does on the battlefield.
3	لوؤ لوٹ کوریکو سار دونو لوٹ کو	<i>Luwo lot koriko sar dono lot kore</i>	Better to make the butter big than talk big.

4	چبق کی کیڑیناے نان تو دایئر	<i>Cheq ki kelitai nan to dayir</i>	Mother feeds her child when he/she weeps.
5	غوٹو لوان غوٹو نان ہوش کوئے	<i>Ghoto luan ghoto nan hush koi</i>	Only a mother can decipher her dumb son's words.
6	جم عورتو غاریہ پتہ بوئے، جم کولانو موسافریہ	<i>Jam orato gharia pata boi jam kulano musaferia</i>	A woman's competence can be tested in a pasture, while a man may face similar challenges while away from home.
7	ناقابلو شوشپوتے رائے، قابلو بوئے پوشپوتے	<i>Naqabilo shoshpote rai qabilo boi poshpote</i>	The incompetent like eating, and the competent like spinning (working).
8	ناقابلو درونگ پیتین	<i>Naqabilo Drung piteen</i>	An unskilled woman will use a long thread string.

Conventional gender norms stigmatise women as homemakers, leading to the segregation of tasks, with men mainly employed outside the household and women primarily tasked with domestic and caregiving responsibilities. The division of work is frequently firmly embedded within cultural and societal conventions, as evidenced by our examination of *Khowar* proverbs. For example, the phrase ‘Man for the field and woman for the hearth’ reinforces the gender role distinction, where males are linked to the ‘field’, which signifies agricultural labour or outdoor responsibilities. In contrast, women are responsible for household tasks, as represented by the hearth. Another proverb that conveys a comparable message is, “A woman fights on the labour bed; a man does it on the battlefield.” This adage highlights the distinct roles assigned to individuals based on their gender. Women are typically expected to assume the responsibilities associated with child-rearing and domestic work. In contrast, men are generally expected to engage in activities related to conflict or warfare, both occurring outdoors.

Similarly, the phrase ‘Better to make the butter big than talk big’ mocks women who only participate in superficial conversations and hollow language and instead encourages them to take practical action and achieve tangible outcomes, such as increasing the production of ghee (clarified butter) from milk, which entails focusing on household responsibilities. This is connected to her job as a nurturer and carer, as indicated in the phrases ‘mother feeds her child when they weep’ and ‘Only a mother can comprehend her dumb son's words.’ She encounters a significant obstacle upon departing from her abode within the confines of her residence. The adage “A woman's competence can be tested in a pasture, while a man may face similar challenges when he is away from home” suggests that when she finds herself in an open-air environment, specifically a pasture in this context, it serves as a genuine assessment of her resilience and capabilities. Given her entry into a male-dominated arena that necessitates power and muscle, she will likely encounter difficulties adapting to this setting.

Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that her ascent to a pasture does not contradict her anticipated position as a homemaker, as she does it to carry out domestic responsibilities. In the customary village life of Chitral, individuals bring animals to pastures for grazing or to gather herbs, flora, and trees. Patriarchy characterises an incompetent woman based on her inability to adapt to her gender role as a homemaker and carer, among other dimensions and perspectives. As an illustration, the phrase ‘The incompetent likes to eat, and

the competent likes to spin (work)’ suggests that a diligent and capable woman gravitates towards knitting wool into thread (as part of her domestic responsibilities), but an inept woman consistently prioritises food. Similarly, the statement “An unskilled woman will use a long thread” seems to evaluate the several justifications provided by an incompetent woman.

### Feminine Tenderness

S.No	Khowar Proverb	Khowar Proverb in Roman English	Translation in English
1	نانو ہر دی پھستنیو کین تنو ہر دی شایوزو کین	<i>Nano hardi phastio ken tato hardi shayozo ken</i>	Mother’s heart is the treasure, while Father’s is a glacier.
2	غوٹو لوان غوٹو نان ہوش کوئس	<i>Ghoto luan ghoto nan hush koi</i>	Only a mother can decipher her dumb son’s words.
3	شگوغو تان نانو غیچا شیلی	<i>Shagoghu tan nano ghecha sheli</i>	The black insect looks handsome in the eyes of its mother.
4	تنو بیرو تونجیار روادار، نانو بیرو بیہیا	<i>Tato biru tonjiar rawadar nano biru behiyar</i>	Paternal kins seek your doom, while maternal kins seek your groom.

The male-centric social fabric defines feminine qualities such as tenderness, nurturing, empathy, softness, sensitivity, and submissiveness. The *Khowar* proverbs serve to strengthen these characteristics of women in various ways. Tenderness is typically the defining characteristic of a mother, as exemplified in the phrase, ‘Mother’s heart is a treasure, whereas father’s heart is a glacier.’ This phrase emphasises the caring, gentle, and emotionally supportive nature of mothers, while men are often perceived as harsh, severe, or emotionally detached. Furthermore, the text underscores the mother’s compassionate and empathetic disposition in the phrase ‘Only a mother can read her dumb son’s words’, highlighting the distinctive connection that frequently exists between a mother and her child, particularly in difficult situations such as speech impediments. The expression “The black insect appears attractive to its mother” suggests that the mother’s affection and evaluation of a child can be unwavering but influenced by a preference for the child, irrespective of their outward appearance. In this context, the term “black insect” refers to an individual who may be perceived as unappealing or less desirable by others but is regarded as beautiful by their mother. Not just the maternal figure but also others who possess a common lineage exhibit similar inclinations. The disparity in attitude between relatives from father-and-mother households is evident in the phrase, ‘Paternal kins desire your doom, while maternal kins seek your groom’. The former exhibits aggression, disturbance, or exerts detrimental effects, whereas the latter consistently strives for reconciliation, positivism, and constructive results.

### Some Positive Depictions

S.No	Khowar Proverb	Khowar Proverb in Roman English	Translation in English
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1	نانو پونگو مولا جنت شیر	<i>Nano pongo mula Jannat sher</i>	Heaven lies under the feet of the mother.
2	ویسورو اسمان کشیر	<i>Wesoru asmaan kisheer</i>	A widow is very hardworking.

In examining the chosen sayings, we have identified two specific occurrences that juxtapose the broader portrayal of women. Urdu commonly states, “Heaven lies under the feet of the mother.” The term pertains to the conventional (also Islamic) belief that motherhood is highly esteemed, and by serving and showing respect towards one’s mother, individuals might achieve a state of contentment and spiritual gratification, commonly referred to as “Heaven.” Similarly, the other individual asserts that a widow has a strong work ethic. This implies that women often become diligent and industrious after losing their husbands, enabling them to defy and exceed traditional gender norms.

### Findings and Conclusion

In our study of the selected forty-two *Khovar* proverbs, we concluded that they are profoundly gendered and biased. These biases are manifested in the form of negative representations of women. When the sayings were studied through the FCDA lens to discover how women are represented through them, we found that some proverbs depict them as someone who is overly emotional, frail, and irrational and thus cannot exist independently and always needs male patronage. Others provide us with enough input to infer that daughters are considered burdens and less worthy than sons. The latter’s birth is always cherished and sought-after.

Moreover, comparing women with a shaking bridge, tumour, and knife reveals that they are objectified and stereotyped as having frail characters and shallow wisdom who cannot make logical decisions. Additionally, they are shown as objects by likening them to the handle of an axe and money, which can be easily accessible and affordable, underscoring their objectification. There is also a mention of feminine beauty, as they are the ones who are valued just because of their charm and beauty, and if it fades, so is their worth. That is why they should be cautious in maintaining a proper physical appearance and remaining on the radar of the male gaze. There is also a brief reference to their fleeting nature of beauty. Likewise, our interpretation of the eight sayings brings out the conformation to the traditional gender role of women as homemakers, nurturers, and carers, with a particular focus on the identity of motherhood. Feminine tenderness in the form of being soft, submissive, an angel in the house, etc., was echoed in the characters of women, which the feminist school of thought always condemns because such qualities are exploited and dictated by patriarchal men. Lastly, two instances were discussed in which we can find positive portrayals of women in the identity of a mother and a widow.

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