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Proverbs and Hadiths: Comparative Study of Gender Discourse in Pakistan

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Abstract

Proverbs are short and simple statements that encapsulate the local wisdom and common experiences of a speech community. These statements are passed down to future generations through the socialization process, thereby perpetuating a specific mindset. Hadiths, on the other hand, are based on Divine Revelations, and Muslims are bound to lead their lives according to these commands. Studies on proverbs as well as Hadiths, in different languages, abound, but the comparative works on proverbs versus Hadiths are limited. Therefore, the present research is a step in this direction; it is a qualitative research using the methodology of discourse for analyzing a sample of purposefully selected proverbs and Hadiths. The proverbs were culled from different sources, including personal knowledge of the native speakers, published articles, and dictionaries, whereas the English translations of Hadiths were taken and/or verified from the Sunnah.com website, which is considered authentic by Islamic organizations. The objective was to see whether the two language discourses, i.e., proverbial and religious, converge or diverge in shaping the women-related socio-cultural practices of the citizens of Pakistan. The findings revealed that the two were moving in the opposite direction; proverbial discourse was biased towards women, while Hadith messages offered more gender fair spaces.

Keywords: Proverbs and Hadiths, Women Related Socio-Cultural Practices, Divine Revelations, Cultural Heritage, Gender Discourse in Pakistan.

Introduction

Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country with a rich cultural heritage dating back to 3300 BCE to 1300 BCE. Starting with the Indus valley (circa 3300 to 1700 BCE), and Gandhara civilizations (circa 1st millennium BCE to the 2nd millennium CE), was followed by different empires, including Mughals (1525–1857), Sikhs (1799-1849), and British (1858-1947). Hence, the region became a mosaic of diverse cultures and linguistic traditions. According to Mariam (2025), "…language is an intricate part of culture, often serving as a repository of a society's values, beliefs and tradition" (P.5). The multiplicity of languages also meant a myriad of proverbs as part of everyday language. As part of a language, proverbs have a "… communicative task…to preserve and transfer to future generations the centuries-old experience of the people" (Utebaev & Sarsenbaeva, 2021).

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The proverbs of all speech communities of Pakistan are more in tune with the local culture and are embedded strongly in local practices. This makes proverbial discourse; "…very important in maintaining and upholding cultural norms and values of people" (Mariam, 2025). However, norms and values are also gender specific, and proverbial discourse can clearly manifest the extent of intergroup variations of status and the power associated with it. It is essential to dissect the proverbial discourse of a community for its representation of women to know the essence of the values and cultural norms that are maintained and upheld for generations to follow. During the 7th Century, another addition was made to the tapestry of the sub-continent. With the advent of Islam came Arab culture and language. The first Muslim rule in Sindh in 712 CE was followed by other Muslim independent kingdoms. Even though the religious beliefs, practices, and rituals of Islam bound these Muslim kingdoms together, the plethora of local languages acted as a marker of differentiation, and the Arabic language remained largely confined to Madrasas and mosques.

In Pakistan, even today, Arabic has not entered into everyday speech. It is rarely utilized in daily interactions by common people. It is venerated as a linguistic expression of Islam, but its use is limited, usually, to religious ceremonies and rituals as a 'language of religion' like the Christian parables, which are recognized as a 'church language' limited to church-related activities (Nattier, 1990). The implications of the absence or limited use of the Arabic language in the mainstream culture of Pakistan also limits the understanding of the Holy Quran and the application of Hadiths to the socio-cultural practices of Muslims in Pakistan. Hadiths are direct quotes associated with the last prophet of Islam and are part of the Sunnah.

> The Sunnah derived its place from the authority of revelation. The Sunnah is a part of the revelation and preserved to explain the Quran and to guide Muslims (Alfarisi et al., 2023, p.664).

Hadiths also contain codes of moral and ethical rules, but unlike proverbs, hadiths are rooted in religious moral order, which makes them sacred and infallible. Despite the Hadiths' translations into languages spoken in Pakistan, many of the guiding principles of daily interactions contained therein do not reach the ordinary masses; instead, their routine activities are shaped by the proverbial discourse, which may contain messages contrary to the larger Islamic values. Given that the proverbial language is not just a linguistic expression of a speech community, it also distinguishes religious communities over and above their socio-cultural identity. Such a situation has serious ramifications for believers who are required to follow the codes given by the Qur'an and live through the Sunnah.

There is a large body of research on gendered proverbs of languages around the world. Similarly, works on Hadiths also abound, but how the two corpuses speak to the same

issue is rarely dealt with. Being a Muslim, this was the main motivating factor for conducting this research because a comparative discourse analysis of the two languages, i.e., proverbial and religious (Hadith-based), is not only needed but is justified on many accounts.

1. Academically speaking, these kinds of comparative studies are needed for the awareness of our future generations in times of increasing secular tendencies on one hand and Islamophobia on the other.

2. Today's youth is exposed to volumes of conflicting information and contentious debates. Through research studies using Hadith-based discourse analyses, many of the misrepresentations of Islamic human rights, particularly for women, within the framework of Western feminism, could be rectified.

3. Understanding of Hadith-based discourse is also important for our local speech communities, whose daily interaction contains more of proverbial discourse than the moral and ethical guidelines contained in the religious discourse.

4. By using this as a point of reference, the purpose of this comparative research study was to explore the following;

Research Questions

1. How do local proverbs reflect the socio-cultural status of women in Pakistan?

2. How far is the Islamic teaching rooted in the proverbial discourse of Pakistan, with reference to gender fairness?

The research questions are addressed by juxtaposing the messages of local proverbs vis-à-vis the Qur'an and Hadith about the status of women. These sources present legitimate expressions of proverbial and Hadith-based gender discourse, respectively, and provide suitable data for the current study.

Acknowledgement

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Limitations of the Study

Given the dearth of research on the socio-lingual-cultural language discourse of religion, specifically in Pakistan and generally in other contexts, the author was constrained to limit the comparison. Few studies, available from other contexts on this topic include Alghamdi (2019) from Al-Bahah province, Saudi Arabia; Batyrzhan et al. (2014) on Kazakh proverbs, while Piela (2013) has generally reviewed women's position in the reading of Hadith. Given that Arabic is the vernacular as well as the language of religion in Al-Baha province, Alghamdi concludes, "… in specific contexts of situations …these proverbs correspond either in their semantic content or the speech act they communicate to Qur'anic verse or prophetic Hadith." Batyrzhan et al. (2014) also came to a similar conclusion about the Kazakh proverbs taking,"…their roots from the Hadiths" (p.2903), even though the vernacular languages of Kazakhstan do not include Arabic.

Review of the Literature

Pakistan has a fairly large and diverse linguistic landscape that facilitates growing volumes of research internally in the form of Journal articles, theses, magazine articles, and conference presentations in national and provincial languages. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan, besides being the local language of a fairly large community residing in Karachi, the commercial hub of Pakistan. Khan et al. (2024) compared the proverbs of Urdu and American English. The authors were focused on the use of specific language tools to make a point ("rhetorical devices", p.474) in the proverbs of these languages. A sample of 28 proverbs was analyzed, with 14 from each language. They showed the power of men over women or made women feel inferior compared to men. The analysis revealed contempt and disdain for women; "…both English and Urdu portray women as subordinate, weak and inferior…" (Khan, 2014; Ekpang et al., 2020). Other comparisons with foreign languages include Khan (2014), Khan et al. (2024), and Rasul (2015), while comparisons with other Pakistani languages have been conducted by Naseem et al. (2025) and Shamim et al. (2020). Additionally, Khan et al. (2017) have focused specifically on Urdu as a single language.

Punjabi is another speech community with considerably larger research on its proverbs. The findings of Nasir et al. (2024) are a mix of negative and positive thoughts in Punjabi proverbs in these words: "…while many proverbs reinforce traditional views that depict women as inferior or subordinate, they also highlight the importance of maternal figures and the wisdom inherent in female experiences" (p.14). A similar conclusion is reported by Khan et al. (2021), "Most of the proverbs targeting females portray them in a face-threatening manner, while those targeting males are mostly face saving….proverbs targeting mothers are mostly face saving". Other research studies have also reported similar patterns of negativity towards women (Khan et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2021; Saima, 2018; Sagheer & Zubair, 2020).

Pushto is the native language of Pashtuns, their proverbs have been analyzed (Bartlotti, 2001; Khan et al., 2015; Sanauddin, 2015; Aziz et al., 2022, 2025).The focus of Aziz et al.'s (2025) research was on the "linguistic marginalization of women in Pashto proverbs" (p.53). The authors used feminist discourse analysis with a purposive sample of proverbs. They searched for gender related themes and how these were linked to the prevalent attitude of the society towards women and concluded that the Pashto proverbs not only portray women negatively, but they also contribute towards perpetuating a cycle of discrimination and subordination" (p.54).

Sanauddin (2015), in his Ph.D. thesis stated,"…that Pashto proverbs encode and promote a patriarchal view and sexist ideology, demonstrating this with the help of proverbs as text as well as proverbs' performance in context by Pashto speakers". With the combination of three theoretical frameworks, the author has analyzed more than 500 proverbs in addition to 40 interviews of men and women of varied age groups. The author further categorized the gathered proverbs into two groups: proverbs as "wisdom texts" and "texts". The former, according to him, "is sexist and misogynist", and the latter is "performance in the context"(p.1). Proverbs in the former group are about the rules of conduct being right and wrong, as pre-social acceptability or otherwise. These proverbs may indicate a traditional outlook, whereas the second group of proverbs takes into account contextual realities and demographic variations in usage and users. However, the number of proverbs speaking positively about women is far below that of men in either category. It also endorses the finding by Aziz et al. (2025), "…the linguistic marginalization of women in Pashto proverb… undermines women's credibility and agency" (p.14).

Balochi is one of the main languages; that is spoken in the province of Balochistan. Mirza et al. (2024) analyzed a purposive sample of 30 Balochi proverbs for gender representation. The findings showed "…power imbalance and systemic gender inequality…suppression of female and male dominance…established through …factors such as double standard of male, discrimination… dependency of female …and norms and values of Baloch society" (p.404). Similarly, Degener (2022) and Ali (2020) examined five languages from

northern areas, two languages from Chitral, Pakistan, respectively. All the authors cited above pointed out that the majority of the proverbs portrayed women negatively.

To sum up, the recurring themes across these studies endorse the linguistic marginalization of women. “Linguistic marginalization occurs when language is used to reinforce societal hierarchies, excluding or devaluing certain groups” (Aziz et al., 2022, p.54). Unfortunately, women, particularly in Pakistan, have been experiencing this phenomenon in all its forms. Despite having the numeric strength in Pakistan, the social exclusion of females makes them an invisible minority that should remain silent. Being silent is considered a positive trait for women, while the "metaphor of 'hen' has been used to refer to women's talk in derogatory terms" (Khan et al., 2021, p.57).

Pakistan houses the second-largest majority of Muslims after Indonesia. However, in comparison to the multiplicity of local languages, Arabic, which is the original language of Islamic teaching, has not become entrenched among the masses. A similar situation exists in the field of research where the Arabic language is mostly explored in relation to its acquisition as a second or foreign language in the field of teaching and learning (Masood, 2014; Abbas et al., 2010; Versteegh, 2001).

In comparison to the research on proverbs as a social language tool that reflects socio-cultural realities of Pakistani culture, research on Hadiths is mostly focused on their content, authenticity, and prophetic traditions. Some of the recent studies have tried to focus on the socio-linguistic comparison and analysis in various settings, such as official meetings (Ali et al., 2024), Advertisements (Ghulam & Nusrat, 2023), and Fashion Journalism (Saira et al., 2020). Unfortunately, the socio-cultural linguistic discourse analysis of Hadiths in socio-cultural settings of daily interaction is an under-explored area. The present research was carried out in the backdrop of these limitations.

Research Methodology

Various definitions of discourse are found in the literature on discourse analysis. According to Taylor (2013), discourse, “…can refer to the use of language as a practice, and especially to talk” (p.16). Whereas, Nielsen and Nørreklit (2009), who have used Fairclough's three-dimensional model in their own research, interpret discourse as a social practice which constructs social identities, social relations and the knowledge and meaning systems of the social world...." (p.204). In an agreement with the above-stated views of discourse, the current research looks at discourse as “…a formal or informal spoken interaction or written text that is connected with social structures, practices, and social change” (Bezar et al., 2023, p.223). This view of discourse encompasses the use of both proverbs and Hadiths in the wider context of Pakistan.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis, as a qualitative research tool, "…focuses on interaction, looking beyond the literal meaning of language..., it is the study of social life, understood through analysis of language in its widest sense…" (Shaw & Balley, 2009, p.414). This definition of a language discourse is useful for catching the multilingual and multi-cultural context of the study, as well as the comparative discourse analysis of two languages: the vernacular and the language of religion. Former is "… the local dialect, spoken at home and informal work and social situations" (Nattier, 1990, p.196), and the latter is also," … a part of discourse because it represents text and spoken discourse" (Uhunmwangho & Oghiator, 2022, p.32) which Nattier (1990) refers to as 'church language as well.

Material-1: Proverbs

The amount of research on proverbs is enormous, but the consolidated collections of proverbs in print or e-form are few and far between. Hence, the majority of researchers refers to the same existing source or creates their own collections from personal repertoires. The findings of these studies were also reinforced by discussions with university students, classroom assignments, and personal conversations with friends and families, in addition to the author's personal knowledge of some of the regional and official languages.

For Urdu proverbs, two collections were consulted: Dehli Kay Muhawaray (Proverbs of Dehli) by Hasan (2008), and Ikramullah (2005) for Dilli ki Khawateen key Kahawatain aur Muhawaray (Women of Dehli, their sayings and Proverbs). Similarly, a collection by Bajwa (2011) for Punjabi proverbs and Barlotti & Khattak (2006) for Pushto proverbs, whereas proverbs for other languages were drawn from sources acknowledged through in-text citations.

Material II-Qur'an/Hadiths

> Hadiths are "… the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and tradition…" (El-Sharif, 2011, p.30).

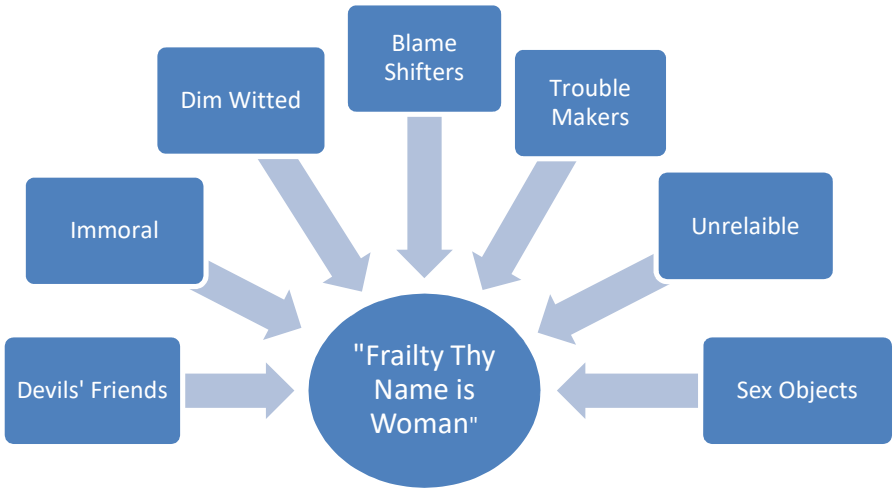
English translation of the Tafheem-ul- Qur'an (understanding of the Qur'an) by Syed Abo-ul-Ala Maududi was used while relevant Hadiths, with English translations, were culled from Sunnah.com website, which is considered authentic by Islamic organizations. Hadiths were selected purposefully to correspond to the subject of proverbs and were divided into four categories; women in general, daughters/sisters, wives and mothers. The final list consisted of 7 Quotations (Ayats) from the Qur'an and 21 Hadiths. Every quotation and Hadith was verified by an Islamic Scholar for authenticity of the source, content, and accuracy of the religious language.

Findings

Q1 (a): Proverbial Discourse-Vernacular Language

An extensive review of the journal articles, theses, and dissertations was carried out with a focus on gender proverbs to build a profile of women from vernacular language (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Proverbial Profile of Women in Pakistan
Note: Author's Own Work



The Shakespearean phrase, "frailty thy name is woman," aptly captures the negative image of women emerging from proverbial analysis. Although the word 'frailty' in the Oxford Dictionary does not connote negativity per se, the phrase itself does; when Hamlet was lamenting the lack of moral character of his mother (a woman), Shakespeare was making a proverbial claim of his time, i.e., women are amoral and weaker than men. Given the ancient patriarchal societal norms, this dichotomous 'standard' not only exists almost universally, but it is also perpetuated through oral speech like proverbs; the proverbial discourse in Pakistan almost follows the same path by dwelling more on the weaknesses of women, even in their traditional roles of homemakers; *inexperienced wives will destroy a man's home (*Punjabi). *When it is time to milk the cow, the disorganized woman starts grinding grain (Pushto).*

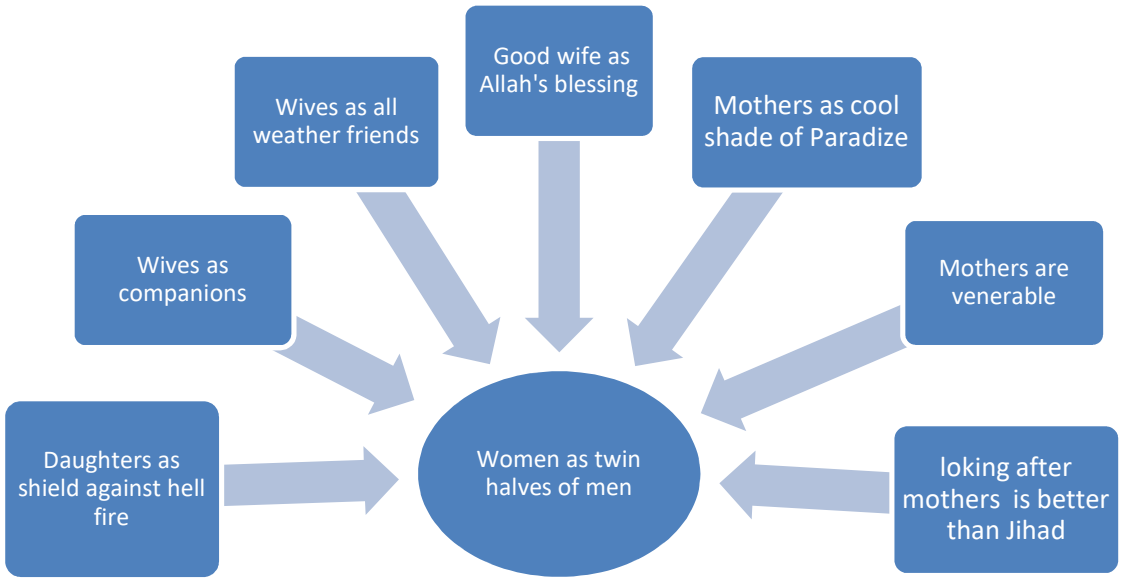
Following sample proverbs refer to women's habit of back biting, cunning and hypocrisy respectively; w*hen two women sit together, they have in their hand the hair of a third woman (Pashto); where the devil himself cannot go, there he sends an old woman (Punjabi); a lady is the devil's comrade (Balochi), a woman's weapon is her tongue and tears* and *a woman's tongue is a double-edged sword (Urdu).*

Pushto proverbs are even more insulting; *had women no noses, they would have fed on filth* (Lashkari, 2009, p.85), or *a bad woman lives for a hundred years.* Women are further humiliated for lack of morals and greed; *when there is money* [wealthy man], *the woman will come* [to marry him] *even from Kalabat* [a remote area of KP]. A Balochi proverb is no different; *a woman is betrayed by the colors of gold and saffron*. Many proverbs also contain obscene language and explicit sexual innuendos (Sanauddin, 2015). Pashto proverbs also present women's existence in a very pessimistic frame; i.e., *a woman is born with sorrow, married with sorrow, and dies with sorrow;* the other one is, *there are two days of rejoicing for a woman: the first when she gives birth to a male child, the second when she brings him a wife.*

Q1 (b): Hadith-Based Discourse-Religious Language

The Holy Qur'an reminds people that they are created from a single source; "O mankind! Fear your Lord, who created you of a single soul, and of the same created his mate, and from that pair spread countless men and women over the earth" (Tufheem-ul-Quran) (The Qur'an, 4:1; Maududi, Trans., 1988). This verse alone sends a loud message against gender bias to those who consciously or unconsciously, promote it. The emergent profile of women is markedly different in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Hadith-Based Profile of Women
Note: Author's Own Work



Women as Human Beings (General)

The Qur'an establishes the equality of men and women as human beings.

> **…**and of His signs is this that He has created for you wives from your own species, mates that you may find peace with them; and created love and mercy between you, surely in this there are many signs for those who reflect" (Tufheem-ul-Quran) (The Qur'an, 4:1; Maududi, Trans., 1988:30:21).

One of the Prophet's sayings is; [1]"Women are the twin halves of men" (Sunan Abu Dawud). These verses and Hadiths should be pondered upon by the daily users of the sayings like, *Woman is the friend of evil* (Balochi), *Women are incomplete species* (Pushto), *women have limited wisdom* (Urdu), *a woman's wisdom is as small as her nape* (Punjabi) and, *Girls and rabbits lack brains and depend on others strength* (Balochi). Men do not even realize that these insults also take in them.

The treatment of women is generally harsh in proverbs.

(1) *Keep a woman's stomach filled, and her face under a slap*" (Pashto)
(2) *To beat mother, there is father, but there is none to beat father* (Shina).

In contrast, Hadiths teach men to be kind to women in all relationships.

(1) **"**The most complete of the believers in faith is the one with the best character; and the best of you are those who are best to their women" (Al-Tirmidhi: 1162).

(2) "Treat women kindly" (Muslim: 1468).

(3). "…Refrain from giving her a slap on the face or abusing her" (Sunan Abi Dawud: 2142). Hadiths (Ahmad, 1984)

Women as Daughters

The regional culture of South Asia is patriarchal, and gender discourse is against women (Karmakar, 2022; Akhtar & Yousaf, 2020; Daniel, 2009; Fatima et al., 2025). There is a strong preference for sons, especially by women themselves (Asadullah et al., 2021; Zaidi et al., 2023), because "…being a mother of a son is the only channel which is a source of her uplifted status in the patriarchal setup" (Butt & Asad, 2017, p.208).

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[1] To differentiate between Hadith and proverb, the former is put within quotes, and the latter is italicized throughout the document.

Proverbial discourse perpetuates the negative images of daughters; *a daughter should die instantly after birth so that it may not give her parents much pain* (Punjabi); whereas Hadiths describe 'rewards' for fathers/ parents, who raise their daughters with kindness and care: "Whoever is put to trial by these daughters and he treats them kindly, they will be a shield for him from the Hell Fire." [Bukhari, Muslim]; when a Pushto proverb proclaims; *a daughter is a basket full of shame; the earlier you put this basket on the shoulders of another man, the better (*Pashto*)*, Hadith refutes it; "Whoever supports two girls until they reach maturity, he and I will come on the Day of Resurrection like this," and he interlaced his fingers (indicating closeness). [Muslim, Bukhari with slightly different wording].

The comparison of proverbs with Hadiths is striking; the messages from the former are antithetical as they evoke the images of anti-women pre-Islamic culture of the Arabian Peninsula. In that antagonistic context where female children were buried alive, Hadiths advocated love and mercy for females and female children by saying out loud that daughters are a blessing, not a burden; The Prophet's own behavior towards his daughter was a living proof of that. Contrary to the glad tidings of Hadiths, the proverbial discourse is unsympathetic towards daughters and their parents; *the birth of daughters brings disgrace to the parents*, the other one is, *those giving birth to daughters are likely to have a miserable life;* while the third says, *the home of a daughter's parents is like a place of mourning.*"

Punjabi proverbs are not only demoralizing but also dispiriting, like *a cursed goat bears a male, while a woman gives birth to a female.* The collection of Hadiths about daughters is fairly large; given the limited space, the selected few will suffice for the comparison.

Proverbs vs. Hadiths

1. Two Punjabi proverbs on the futility of raising daughters vs. sons; *Daughters are thorny trees and sons are mango ones*; and *Feeding daughters is like watering the sand while feeding sons is like watering the fertile fields* (Khan et al. 2019, p.129); whereas the earlier quoted Hadith gives fathers good tidings of safety from hell fire and the company of the Prophet himself.
2. *If a son commits a mistake, it's better to advise and counsel him calmly, but if a daughter does the same, throw her (to die) into the river (Pushto);* in contrast Hadith commands Muslims not to discriminate one from the other; "If anyone has a female child, and does not bury her alive, or slight her, or prefer his male children to her, Allah will bring him into Paradise" (Abu Dawud: 5146).
3. *God did not include girls' food in the food of the family*, but the message of love and care in a Hadith directly negates it; "Whoever is put to trial by these daughters and he treats them kindly, they will be a shield for him from the Hell Fire." (Al-Bukhari, 1997).

Women as Wives

Islam places great importance on the family of procreation and marital relations.

(1) "O you who believe! You should not treat them (women in general and wives in particular) with harshness …live with them on a footing of kindness and equity". (Tufheem-ul-Quran) (The Qur'an, 4:1; Maududi, Trans., 1988:4:19).

> "…and for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women, but men have a degree (of responsibility) over them" (Tufheem-ul-Quran) (The Qur'an, 4:1; Maududi, Trans., 1988:2:228)

(2) "Women cover men (like a dress), and they cover women in the same way" (Tufheem-ul-Quran) (The Qur'an, 4:1; Maududi, Trans., 1988:24:31).

Needless to say, a dress not only beautifies a person but also protects him/her from the vagaries of weather in all seasons of life.

Proverbs vs. Hadiths

1. *If you care about your wife, she will turn you mad (Pushto);* Hadith is: "the world is but a (quick passing) enjoyment; and the best enjoyment of the world is a pious and virtuous woman" (Muslim: 280).

2. Another Hadith is: **"**The best among you is the best towards his wife, and I am the best of you to my wives" (Ibn Maja, Hadith: 1977). Proverbs belittle husband's kindness as ZunMureed *in Punjabi* (uxorious); *Joru Ka Ghulam in Urdu* (servile spouse), and *"man under the authority of his wife, sees nothing but attrition*" (Balochi).

3. *Feeding a wife is like feeding an elephant (Pushto);* Hadiths about the rights of wives are: (1) "their rights over you are that you treat them well in clothing them and feeding them" (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith: 1851); (2). You should give her food when you eat, clothe her when you clothe yourself, do not strike her on the face, and do not revile her." (Sunan Abi Dawud, Hadith: 2142).

4. *A woman is like a pair of shoes; if it fits, good, else discard her and get another (Pushto); new wife and new shoe; both irritate (Punjabi);* while Hadith directs Muslim men to avoid such attitude; "a believer must not hate a believing woman (i.e., his wife); if he dislikes one of her traits he will be pleased with another" (Sahih Muslim; 1468b). While divorce is allowed in Islam, it is not by replacing or rejecting a wife whimsically, like a shoe; and divorce is the last resort.

Women as Mothers

The Qur'an commands Muslims to respect and care for their parents, particularly their mothers. There are many Hadiths where mothers are praised, respected, and revered. The most quoted is when a man was seeking advice to take part in the Jihad. When the Prophet came to know that only his mother was alive, the man was advised to stay back to look after her because "…Paradise is beneath her feet" (Sunan an-Nasa'I, Hadith: 3104). Similarly, in a Hadith about the most deserving people of one's care and kindness, it is repeated three times, "Your mother, then your father…."(Sahih Muslim Hadith: 2548a). Another Hadith says: "Allah has forbidden you to be undutiful to your mothers" (Al-Bukhārī, Hadith: 5975).

Proverbs Related to Mothers

Proverbial discourse is generally in line with the Qur'anic teachings and Hadiths. They shine a positive light on mothers; Balochi proverbs praise mothers for their valor and perseverance; "*brave mothers give birth to daring sons",* and *"father's death leads to poverty; mother's death leads to nothingness"* (Shah et al., 2018). The Hadith about 'paradise under the feet of mothers' is frequently used as a proverb too.

Discussion

The daily observance of the gender discourse shows the actual implementation of the proverbial discourse; maybe because proverbs encapsulate local wisdom and lived experiences. Proverbs are also most commonly used tools of communication at all levels of daily interaction. Hadiths, on the other hand, are doctrinal communications of 'dos' and 'don'ts'; while they are revered and respected, their common usage is limited. While the data items for the present study belonged to different genera, they corresponded to two different languages for discourse analysis, i.e., the vernacular/proverbial and religious language, respectively. The proverbial discourse was aligned with 'frailty thy name is woman' and tarred women accordingly without any deference to age and family role (a few exceptions for mothers).

The Qur'an and Hadith present women as "twin halves of men." According to Islamic belief, Eve was created from the rib of Prophet Adam. Since the rib is the most fragile part of the human body, Hadiths repeatedly advise men to 'treat women with love and care' instead of stamping them with a weak personality, character, and morals. The challenge here is that the majority of proverbs not only carry negative imagery but also resonate strongly with local cultural beliefs and practices; the socialization of generations through proverbial discourse, which is generally devoid of dignity and respect for women in almost all roles. It makes it easier to think of women as weak physically, mentally, and morally as well.

The main findings showed that the proverbial discourse was more hostile toward women, and the socio-cultural environment has a very limited space, if at all, for gender fairness. These findings corroborate the results of earlier research studies conducted on gender proverbs of Pakistan. The findings also resonate with research from other contexts on a similar topic. Madani et al. (2023) compared the animal-related Jordanian vs. Algerian proverbs to connote the nature of humans by gender. The women, "…were predominantly associated with derogatory connotations in both languages,… weakness, stupidity, inferiority, cunningness, and trickery"(n.p). Similarly, Jendeya (2023) explored Arabic proverbs from Palestine, Oman, Yemen, and Sudan and concluded, "…women continue to be portrayed as less valuable, helpless and dependent…" (p.7). Other studies with similar results include Budhathoki (2024), Hamamra (2020), and Schipper & Schipper (2003). The vernacular language was also contrary to the language of religion. The findings clearly show that the two discourses were not even on the same chapter, let alone the same page. Despite having far greater room for gender fairness, religious language was not widely understood nor deeply internalized.

The findings above raise serious questions about the speech community that claims Islam as a core identity but does not abide by the divine guidelines that the members are obligated to live by. Arabic, being the language of religion, is respected and venerated, but it is not the language of daily informal conversations, nor is it the medium of instruction for the general education of the masses. While selected portions of the readings of Qur'an and Hadith are part of the general curricula in both public and private formal educational institutions, Arabic, as one of the mainstream languages, is not taught at these institutions; instead, its formal use is restricted to religious ceremonies, practices, and rituals. Although extensive research exists on proverbial gender discourse in Pakistan, the same cannot be said about the language discourse of religion in the country. While research on Qur'an and Hadith proliferates, these studies mostly analyze the linguistic discourse and are more concerned with technical aspects of the liturgical language of these sources (Berglund, 2019; Dror, 2022; Eslamieh & Mokhtari, 2021; Hatab, 2022; Ortiqova, 2024). The language discourse of the Qur'an and Hadith from an Islamic socio-cultural perspective remains an underexplored area in Pakistan.

Conclusion

"A reading of the Qur'an and the Hadiths indicates that space for gender equality exists and has a foundation in Islamic jurisprudence…the application of these texts within the Indonesian socio-cultural context has laid fertile ground for the seeds of inequality" (Aziz et al., 2020a, p.245). The above quote is part of the concluding section of a research by Aziz et al. (2020) on the status of women in Indonesia. It is also reinforced by Mahbubati & Rochmawati (2023), "…the depiction of women as deficient in

intellect and religion is shown to reflect the socio-cultural limitations of the time, particularly in terms of women's access to public and spiritual domains" (p.215). Unfortunately, a similar conclusion may also be drawn for Pakistan, where the gulf between Islamic teachings and the daily practices of predominantly Muslim citizens of a Muslim country is vast. In order to bridge the gap between the two, it is important to increase efforts to integrate the discourse of religious language in the mainstream education of the masses at each level of learning. Efforts should be made to promote the Arabic language in daily conversations rather than limiting it to mosques, madrassas, or religious rituals.

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