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### ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE GENDER RELATED PROVERBS OF PASHTO ON THE LIFE OF WOMAN: AN ANALYSIS IN THE LIGHT OF FOUCAULT'S CONCEPT OF POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Proverbs are a discourse which has an important role in our daily life. Through proverbs we interpret the social reality around us as it is through language that we define ourselves and the world around us. Pashtuns follow the code of Pashtunwali, which has provided them a guideline in all aspects of life. Pashto proverbs as a social discourse have also evolved from the same code. Pashto proverbs exclude the social world for women as it belongs to men, and similarly, their economic role has been annihilated in this social discourse. The current study is an effort to explore the strong connections which exist between the way the economic role and status of Pashtun women have been portrayed by the Pashto sexist proverbs. The paper investigates how through the social discourses, injustice and inequality is maintained through gender stereotypes. There are a large number of proverbs with misogynistic views in Pashto that are used in patriarchal structures to sustain gender ideologies and stereotyping in order to create superior masculinity and inferior femininity, thus depriving woman of her due social and specifically economic status. The economic impact of sexist proverbs of Pashto on the life of woman has been analyzed in the light of Michele Foucault's concept of power and knowledge. As the study is interpretive qualitative research, the tool of thematic analysis has been applied to it.

## INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are an important genre of folklore and social discourse. It drives the attitudes, norms and behaviors of the people and are regarded as an indispensable component of any language. Furthermore, proverbs are a valuable source of the accumulated cultural wisdom for people in any community (Ghafoori et al, 2022). Pashto proverbs have evolved in the Pashtun culture and are the carriers of the norms, behaviors and attitudes of the Pashtuns. According to Ginsburg (2011, 6), "The Pashtunwali has become an object of fascination for researchers from outside as it covers different aspects of life of the Pashtuns and can be called their social history." Proverbs are an important part of the different discourses of any language. Pashto proverbs are a significant genre of the folklore and is frequently cited in daily conversation (Tair, 1975; Akhtar, 1997). According to Khattak (2006, x), "a wiser man is considered the one who remembers a larger number of proverbs." Proverbs are about the various sides of life from customs, traditions, likes and dislikes, attitudes, to the moral aspects. In short, it can be said that Pashto proverbs cover the moral, social, cultural and religious life of the Pashtuns. According to Enevoldsen (2004), proverbs are a masculine genre as it is reflective of the wisdom of man. Strickland (2007) argues that Pashtuns strictly adhere to the norms of Pashtunwali from which the proverbs have evolved. The representation of women in Pashto proverbs speaks about how the Pashtun society treats its women through this deep-rooted discourse. These proverbs are considered as the carrier of traditional knowledge and wisdom and are supposed to be unquestionable and unchallengeable (Shinwari, 1999, pp. 31-32). Women in the Pashtun society have also accepted the role and status assigned to them through the discourse of Pashto proverbs. The collected data of Pashto proverbs signify the fact that a large number of them portray women in a negative manner. It also shows that the genre has remained in the hands of men, and being a social discourse of immense significance, has been utilized for the perpetuation of gendered roles so as to decide the status and position of the two genders based on the inferiority of women and the superiority of men. It is on the basis of the same roles that men and women are assigned social and economic responsibilities and power.

This study aims to examine how proverbs have been used to bring woman to subsidiary level and an inferior position in the patriarchal structure of Pashtuns. The paper will specifically look into the very manipulative ways in which Pashto proverbs as a discourse derogate woman and establish her secondary position, thereby stating her unfit for economic power and responsibilities.

## ANALYSIS OF PROVERBS IN THE LIGHT OF FOUCAULT'S CONCEPT OF POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

Proverbs which cover the economic aspect of women's life and how has it been affected by the sexist proverbs highlight the stereotyping of women, and restricting them to the domain of the household. Pashtuns, who reside in the mountains have a harder life due to the geographic location of their land. Compared to the fertile land of the plains, due to the availability of water there, life in the mountains has been very difficult. So, the larger number of them have adopted agriculture as a profession to fulfill the basic needs of their life, as the luxuries of life have remained unknown to them, due to very hard conditions of

life and the old system of agriculture, where they live in extreme poverty, from hand to mouth. So, many Pashtuns go to other far off lands and work there as laborers. In this land of sheer poverty and hard life, women's life has been the most miserable and they have remained the liability of male relatives for food and clothing. The economic aspect of Pashtun women's life, a glimpse of which has been provided by the sexist proverbs, one specimen of which is that "a daughter who asks for her share in the property of her father loses the right to be called a daughter," (چې کومه لور حصه وغواړي هغه لور نه شي) has basically evolved from Pashtunwali, or the Pashtun code of conduct. According to Pashtunwali (Khattak, 2008: 65), man considers it below his dignity and honor that his wife will talk about her rights in front of her husband, on the basis that Pashtun firmly believes that she is weaker than him. So, in the Pashtun code, the spring of which is the Pashtunwali, economic power and responsibilities are man's sphere of influence. Pashtunwali, according to Steul (1981, 309), and as has been cited by Ginsburg (2011, 6), fascinated as well disgusted many for the way it treats women. Women, according to this code, are given an inferior status and are put in a secondary position in the ranks of social hierarchy, but are also the center of man's honor. Their honor is protected and men are vigilant about the honor of the women of their families. Any dishonor to women becomes the cause of bigger conflicts. There is a positive side of Pashtunwali as well about women. During family feuds, disputes or even serious fights Pashtuns strictly follow the code of Pashtunwali, the aspect of it, which is about not dishonoring women of the enemies or the rival groups. Pashtuns consider it unbecoming of themselves if they bring dishonor to women, even if of the enemies.

Pashtuns are an intermingle of contradictions, the argument for which can be validated and strengthened by the Pashtun code of conduct, Pashtunwali. On the one hand, Pashtuns cannot tolerate any dishonor done to their women, or to the women of their enemies, on the other hand, they do not recognize the right of women, which is to independently make a decision about their life. Pashtuns do not recognize the right of women to inherit property in all relationships. Moreover, Pashtuns do not value the earnings of women and they have not been bestowed with any economic independence and rights in the Pashtun social set up. There are two sides to the economic aspect of her life; Pashtuns do not recognize the religious right of inheritance of women in property in all relationships, if she claims her right according to the religious law, all relations are broken with her. Pashtuns' way of life reflects that in their daily life, customs and approaches, they assign primary value to culture and secondary to religion. The second side of the economic aspect of women's life is that Pashtuns look at and also talk with contempt about the earnings of women. The way the social sphere does not exist for a Pashtun woman and she has reconciled herself with the non-existence of that sphere for herself, as has been expressed in a proverb, which says that "I remained covered all life and so shall I leave the world," (پټه وم او پټه به ځم) in the same manner, the economic sphere has no existence for her. A proverb under the theme says that "What will be a woman's earning?" (څه به بنځه وي او څه به يې گټه وي) The proverb as a discourse, which represents the collective social view about a woman's earning, says it in a tone which regards and also represents her of little worth. The idea of women's dependence on men in financial matters is not only a part of the Pashtun culture, but exists in other cultures as well. For instance, in their study of the Ghanian proverbs Gyan,

Abbey and Baffoe (2020,4) are of the view that in Ghanian society in all interactions between men and women their place and situation are decided in advance. In this connection, the authors of the study cite a Ghanian proverb which says that “If a woman purchases a firearm, it is kept in a man’s room.” The authors of the study about the proverbs of the Ghanian society have cited Dogbevi (2007) who elaborates the idea in the above mentioned proverb further that man is the stronger of the two genders, so, even if women are financially stronger than men and buys a firearm, but for its use they are still reliant on men, and it is he who can protect her with the help of this weapon. Even if women are economically independent, societies are still bent on proving her weak, or in other words thrusting weakness on her, do not appreciate her independence, or very skillfully, through the use of language, by linking her inferiority with her physical weakness, to prove her subordination and her dependence on man for protection. According to Kun (2022, 82) “After human societies entered the patriarchal form, men took control of the more resources as productivity shifted to them, as a result men have monopolized the dominant position in the economic affairs for themselves. In modern societies, social status is determined by the economic stability. The prejudice still exists against women for being physically weak and also less intelligent, and therefore, fit for the inferior jobs like nurses, babysitters and housewives. In so many places, even in the contemporary world, women are given lower wages compared to men. The ideas which have been expressed by Kun (2022), have a striking relevance with similar ideas expressed in Pashto proverbs like “What will be woman’s earning?” (څه به بنځه وي او څه به يې گڼه وي) and “What is the significance of woman’s earning and the burden carried by a mule (د خري کته به څه وي او د بنځي (گڼه به څه وي)“?

The way the social world belongs to man, similarly, Pashtuns annihilate the economic role of women, not only in practice but also in discourses, which also include sexist proverbs. Besides numberless proverbs on the economic aspect of women’s life, the proverb is a disparaging one in the sense which not only annihilates her economic role but expresses it in a demeaning manner by comparing women’s earning to the load carried by a mule: “What is the significance of the load carried by a mule and what to say about women’s earning?” This devaluation of women’s earning emphasizes upon women’s role as limited, and as the weaker gender, has to remain dependent on man and to take care of the household. Economic problems should remain in the hands of man, as according to this discourse, he is the wiser and possesses a rational approach. The discourse in the patriarchal structures has been strategically established so as to justify man’s claims to the social and economic domain as according to Foucault these goals are achieved through “mechanisms of repression” (1980,140) and by securing the subservience of the repressed groups unconsciously. This repression through submission, according to Foucault, enables power not to be taken in negative terms (1980, 139). Woman, in this way, through the relations of power, accepts the idea of her inferiority and her restricted role in the social arena and remains satisfied with it. She accepts man as her sole guide and protector. The same phenomenon has been discussed by Lomotey and Chachu (2020, 73) under “protective paternalism” which says that man is the protector of woman. The idea behind protective paternalism is that man is the stronger of the two genders, and woman is the weaker, so, she has to

depend on man about everything related to her life. This dependence of woman on man relates to the social aspect of her life, but social is not inextricable from the economic aspect, so, this reliance of woman on man can be applied to her financial control by him. Lomotey and Chachu (2020, 74) cite two proverbs which have a similarity in theme with the recently discussed proverb of Pashto: "Men are the breadwinners and women are homemakers." and that "Success for man, is to have earned more money than his wife could spend." There is a resemblance to the way women are treated and portrayed in different respects by cultures. Throughout different periods women have been treated as frail and with changing disposition and this view about them have given rise to the different stereotypes and ideologies about them and the same ideologies which project the negative traits of women have been manipulated in power relations thus shaping different negative discourses against gender (Lazar, 2007: 141). Pashto proverbs which discourage and depreciate woman's involvement in economic activities have also evolved under the strategy of stereotyping, misogynistic views and creating gender bias so as to naturalize her inferiority and justify man's superiority, which is evident from proverbs about her like "Feed woman well and keep her under strict control, even if through a slap" (بښځه په خپټه ډکه ساته او په څپیره یې لاندې ساته) and "Widow's life gets tough as she has to shoulder two-fold responsibilities" (چې کونډه شي نو په منډه شي).

The above mentioned proverbs under the theme say that women should be fed and clothed well but to be kept under control. The proverb says woman should be even slapped if necessary to bring her under control and the second proverb is about widow, the tougher life which she faces after the death of her husband, as man is the financial protector of woman. So, woman after the death of husband is surrounded by multiple responsibilities, including the financial widow has to shoulder. Both the proverbs accept the role of man in providing necessities to woman, and lay stress on her subordinate role in the social hierarchy. Man by providing necessities to woman and keeping her in control simultaneously is to deny her any role for taking economic dominance as according to Talbot (2003,472) and as has been cited by Lomotey and Chachu (2020,74) these proverbs sustain hegemonic masculine dominance and female subordination. The proverb which says that "the more sons a woman has, the more, the more favorite place she occupies in the eyes of her husband," has a dominant economic motive behind it, as it says that the more sons a woman has, the more valuable she becomes. Compared to sons, daughters are considered as a burden as they are to be married with dowry. Sons are considered as helping hands to the parents when they grow up. The superiority of son over daughter is a construct which even women have internalized to the extent that women also aspire for having sons. There is a Pashto proverb: "Better would be to give birth to a daughter than to sit idle." Oral traditions which mostly compose folk literature and proverbs, being a popular genre of folklore, have been utilized in patriarchal structures to perpetuate gender stereotypes which covers the inequality and injustices. The discrimination between son and daughter is a part of Pashtun culture, though religion does not recognize this discrimination, but Pashtuns are guided in their beliefs by culture and not religion. It is due to the economic factor that Pashtuns over-value sons over daughters. According to Foucault and as has been cited by Mills (2005,69) "where there are imbalances of power relations between groups of people, institutions or states, there will be

production of knowledge.” Mills further says that because of the institutionalized imbalance in power relations between men and women in western societies, more information is produced about women and more books are also written about them. In the similar way more information about marginalized groups in societies. The idea about the production of knowledge about groups who are of secondary significance rightly applies to the gender related proverbs of Pashto in the form of a strong social discourse. According to Foucault and as has been cited by Hewett (2004,23), “if truth is to be analyzed as a thing of this world, then it must be taken within the realms of discursive and the societal and it naturally play a role in the evolution of knowledge. To Foucault, it is that knowledge that historically evolves and is considered as traditional and societal truth and it involves power relation, whatever the nature of these power relations. These power relations, according to Foucault, exist in different forms, for instance, silent, subtle, violent and dominative. This is how, according to Foucault, knowledge and truth operate in discourse. If observed with a profound insight, power in the form of truth and knowledge, as has been elaborated by Foucault, has operated against gender in all these different forms, in different discourses and has also been practiced in cultures and this issue cannot be restricted to only one culture.

A proverb under the theme about the economic aspect of a woman's life holds significance, as it is about daughter's share in father's property. The proverb is about denial to a daughter the right to inherit her share in the father's property according to the law of religion, but Pashtuns about the rights of women are not guided by religion. Pashtuns follow the code of Pashtunwali as has been put forward by Strickland (2007,52): “Islamic law, or sharia, differs from the Pashtun norms in a number of areas, including the rights of women.” The proverb as a discourse is about the same aspect of a woman's economic position in Pashtun culture as it summarizes Pashtuns' view about women in general and with specific reference to daughter in it: “A daughter asks for her share in father's property is no more a daughter.” This proverb also proves the fact that proverbs as a social discourse have a negative impact on the economic aspect of Pashtun women's life. Pashtun culture makes woman dependent on man economically and any demand for her share in property is discouraged. If a father denies to a daughter share in property, so will do the brothers to the sister, who is the wife of someone and also a mother. This denial of property covers women in all relationships in economic terms. According to Kiyimba (2005), cited by Saidi(2010, 18), presents Bagandan proverbs which objectify women, where girls a source of social and material riches. Kiyimba cites a proverb as an instance which says that “He who produces beautiful ones will be visited by big ones.” The interpretation of this proverb could be that a beautiful daughter can become the source of wealth for the parents. There are more wealthy suitors for a beautiful daughter and if she is married to a rich man that also changes the lot of the family. If the birth of a daughter is welcomed, it is from the economic perspective that she will be a source of material wealth to the family, otherwise, her birth is not considered as a good omen for the family.

The discourses about injustice and oppression evolve in the social structures and are then perpetuated through practices which become habits and norms of behavior. According to Foucault, and as has been cited by Mills (2005, 72),

“rather than being knowledge as pure search for truth, power works to process information in the form of facts, but which is being consented to by those in position of authority.” In social systems, it is men who have remained in authority through relations of power, and it is they who have played a major role the construction of discourses. It is the gender biased proverbs as a social discourse which says that a daughter should not be talking about her right in the property of father, and if viewed in the Foucauldean perspective that discourses are consented to by those in position of authority, it is men are in authority and power, and it is they who give consent to what is true and what is false. The true statements adopt the form of discourses (Mills, 2005, pp. 53-54). These ideas of Foucault about power, truth and discourse can be aptly applied to the gender biased proverbs of Pashto which impact the economic aspect of women's life and can be viewed as the ones which have been discussed. Pashtun women are economically dependent on men for their needs but there are some who, according to the requirement of the relationship, are unable to fulfill their responsibility and their wives are not satisfied with them, as they are not worthy of the relationship. One proverb which is reflective of a woman's feelings, expresses a similar theme. A woman says that “It is better to be a widow than to be the wife of a worthless man,” (د موزيگي نه کونده بنه پم) in the sense that with him she is economically not secure. A Pashto proverb says that “Mother is restricted to the kitchen” (د ادې واک تر کتوي پوري دے) and that “The restricted power which mother enjoys is because she has been patronized by father” (ادې (چې زوروره ده نو د بابا د زوره ده). The proverb about mother's limited role is part of the patriarchal strategy to restrict her sphere of influence, and moreover, if she lives in a limited world, how can she be declared competent for the larger economic activities and responsibilities. In the Pashtun culture, man is the sole breadwinner for the family, and the proverb about the authority and power of woman due to man is linked with the economic aspect, as power is not separate from economic stability. As it is man who earns for the family and the power and authority, which he bestows on woman cannot be extricated from man, thus proving to establish the superiority of man, in the economic sphere, as these type of ideas in cultures are established through discourses by defining and compartmentalizing the roles of genders.

According to Lomotey and Chachu (2020,73), under the title of a theme of “Protective Paternalism” about gender, argue that for centuries women have been thought to be weak, faithless and delicate and under this impression of being weak and dependent have been ruled by man. Women as a weaker gender have been repeatedly told that they need man's protection, which they have accepted. They have accepted their weakness in comparison with man's physical strength, authority and power. Man, through these social strategies has been successful in depriving woman of her economic rights. Pashtuns are the followers of Islam but they do not recognize the right of woman to inherit in property and in this context they strictly adhere to culture. According to Hewett (2004,22), as he argues in his “Michele Foucault: Power/ Knowledge and epistemological prescriptions,” we can only begin to answer the question correctly only if truth is to be investigated as an effect and also as less than a universal phenomenon. If truth is not universal, then it can be taken as something which is developed in the course of history and which also changes, and at the same refraining from making any claims about the nature of truth. If

viewed in Foucault's context of truth as not a universal phenomenon and as something which develops in the course of history and also changes, it can be argued that the sexist proverbs of Pashto which restrict and exclude woman from the social life which has a profound effect on the economic aspect of her life, do not represent a universal phenomenon about woman, to be treated in this way for all times to come. These proverbs as a social discourse have developed strategically in the Pashtun patriarchal structure to maintain the authority, power and superiority of man. The second point about Foucault's concept of truth, as has been cited by Hewett, that it develops but also changes during the different epochs of history, can again be applied to the Pashto proverbs, which restrict and exclude woman from the social life and annihilates her role in the economic sphere, meaning that these proverbs are not a universal truth. There are proverbs like "A man even younger in age is the elder of the family," and "Once power belonged to father, but it is mother's turn now," Both the proverbs have a link with the economic aspect of woman's life. The social superiority of man over woman is not separate from his economic stability. That is why a man of younger age can lead the family. Man as a husband is in a powerful position as he is the financial supporter of the family. In the Pashtun culture men are usually very hard on women, they even beat wives over trivialities, wives have no other option but to remain silent. Once their sons have grown up and start supporting mothers, then women gain some power and authority as economic stability cannot be extricated from one's social influence and position in the hierarchy. Woman's financial position and dependence is linked with man, whichever the relationship in the web of power relations; father, brother, husband and son.

According to Foucault, where there are imbalances in relations of power between groups of people it leads to the production of knowledge, and as result more books are written about women compared to men and more information is about working classes (Mills, 2005, p. 69). According to Mills, the production of knowledge about the economically disadvantaged and the marginalized groups has been successful in maintaining them in the same position. The production of knowledge cannot always be negative, in the sense of oppressing the deprived groups. Foucault is far-sighted enough to perceive that the production of knowledge from the disadvantaged and marginalized, in the form of new discourses can alter the status quo about themselves. The statement by Mills (2005), according to her understanding of Foucault, is very encouraging, as it conveys a clear message about knowledge, the way it works through discourses in the social structure, to serve the interests of the powerful, should not be accepted as absolute truth. The production of knowledge by the weaker groups can question and challenge the established knowledge. In the light of this view it can be said that if the established negative and derogatory discourses, which are a hurdle in the way of woman towards development, have to be corrected, for that purpose will also have to play an effective role. According to Kun (2022, p.84), "Women, who possess awareness, can fight for their rights as well as the rights of other women and can do away with sexism from language. This can be done through substituting disparaging words and expressions by positive ones. Attaining complete and real gender equality is a long way to go, but an effort towards that end can be started to eradicate the disharmony and imbalance from society. A similar view has been propounded by Mills (2005,69) in her book on Foucault, where she says that discourses for



the elimination of gender inequality and discrimination should come from women and that is they who can break the status quo about gender stereotypes. Furthermore, everywhere in different cultures of the world they compose half the population of the societies, the overall development and progress of societies is not possible by marginalizing half population of the world. The issue of gender is a crucial one and all those traditional discourses which stand as an obstacle in the way of social development, need to be investigated through modern theoretical frameworks, so as to pave the way for latest approaches towards their handling and contribution towards society.

## CONCLUSION

The issue of gender has gained immense significance in different cultures and the analysis of those discourses which portray a negative image of gender has become a favorite field of research. Pashto proverbs as a social discourse portray a negative image of women, which has affected different aspects of their life, including the social and economic aspect. As the social aspect is inextricable from the economic aspect of life, because those who are economically powerful become the social hegemony. Pashto proverbs which have evolved under the influence of Pashtunwali, have restricted and excluded the social and economic role of women. The exclusion and restriction of women from the economic sphere has been a strategy of the patriarchal structure. The discourse of proverbs has been applied to make the patriarchal strategy a success through power and knowledge in Foucaultian term. The strategy of the power structure has been successful to perpetuate and maintain man's superiority. These proverbs have assigned traditional roles to both men and women. Women through the discourse have been proved as inferior of the two genders. Subsequently woman has been excluded from the social and economic responsibilities. The discourse of proverbs glorifies the traits of men. Men as a stronger of the two genders shoulder the social and economic responsibility. Gender relations are based on imbalance and inequality which has maintained the status quo. In the Pashtun social structure public and economic sphere does not exist for woman. Woman participates in different activities like working in the fields, bringing water from long distances and they also take care of the cattle. Despite her participation in different activities, she is not a sharer in economic power. Pashto proverbs as a social discourse, treat with derogation the earning of women and their right to inheritance is not recognized. Woman is portrayed as weak and inferior in potentials and capabilities, and so, is incapable for shouldering any economic responsibilities. The analysis of Pashto proverbs which are related to the economic aspect of women's aspect, reinforce the power and economic authority in the hands of man, and by depicting women as lower in faculties, provide a social justification for the economic power to remain in the hands of man. A significant amount of resilience is required to diminish negative ideas about gender from societies to bring a positive change towards the outlook of established discourses. The existence of gender ideologies in the form of gender biased proverbs have firm roots in cultures, and there is a high need for researches to explore those negative ideologies. The issue of gender needs serious attention from researchers as they can spread awareness about it. It has two-fold significance, one is for the cause of woman, and second is for the overall development of societies.

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