

[https://doi.org/ 10.29162/pv.40.1.352](https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.40.1.352)

Original scientific paper

Received on 31 January 2023

Accepted for publication on 22 May 2023

MUNEJAH KHAN

THE DISCOURSE OF POWER/THE POWER OF DISCOURSE: ANALYSING FOLKLORE THROUGH SELECT KASHMIRI PROVERBS

Abstract: The Valley of Kashmir has rich Folklore, and folk literature is integral to Kashmiri Culture. Folkloristics maintains that the message conveyed through folklore may appear simple but is intertwined with complexities. This paper attempts to study the folklore of Kashmir through an analysis of twenty-eight Kashmiri proverbs to uncover the complex/straightforward message transmitted through proverbs. The endeavour is to highlight how folklore is informed by Power relations and how the concept of Power interlaces the content, milieu, and purpose of folklore. Michel Foucault traces the role of discourse underlying the seemingly neutral context of speech, representation, and knowledge.

Along with Foucault's concept of discourse, insights from the feminist theory have also been employed to expose the discourse of patriarchy, religion, and authority in Kashmiri folk literature. The study investigates the power structure inherent in the proverbs of Kashmir and attempts to unravel how discourse constructs unequal power relations. The attempt is to illustrate how power abuse is enacted, reproduced, and legitimised.

Keywords: Kashmir, folklore, proverbs, discourse, gender, religion, feudalism

1. Introduction

In the contemporary scenario, critical attention has shifted from Canonical works to the study of folk and contemporary indigenous literature. Folkloristics as a discipline has contributed to revisiting the folklore of varied cultures. The erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir was divided into three prominent geographical regions, the Valley of Kashmir, the Plains of Jammu, and the Plateau of Ladakh. The geographical diversity of these three regions blessed the State with equally diverse folklore.

1.1. Folklore Collections of Kashmir and the Place of Folklore in Kashmiri Society

The Valley of Kashmir has a vibrant folklore. Folklore occupies a significant place in Kashmiri society; proverbial sayings and folktales are part of the collective inheritance of all community members. Folklore envelops all facets of human life worldwide, which also holds for Kashmir. Not only does folklore “refer to a particular psycho-social impulse of the given human society; instead, carries in its fold the entire make-up of society” (Fayaz 2008: 10). Any attempt to research the socio-cultural traits of a people would require taking into account the group behaviour, rituals and practices. All these dimensions are exemplified in folklore, and “social history abounds in references about legendary tales, operational in a particular linguistic area or cultural region” (Fayaz 2008:13). The folktales include historical truths in some form or the other. Deliberating on the interdisciplinary nature of folklore Richard Dorson writes that a “cluster of skills involves the folklorist with other disciplines. He needs sufficient familiarity with literature to investigate *literary use of folklore*, with anthropology to explore the *relationship of folklore to culture*, and with history to comprehend the *historical validity of oral tradition*” (1972: 7).

Kashmiri society abounds with folklore, and there are innumerable examples that show how daily life activities are part of folklore and how folklore influences everyday life. Archer Taylor writes, “Folklore is the material handed [down by one generation to another], either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folk songs, folk tales, riddles, proverbs

or other materials preserved in words..." (1965: 34). Kashmiri folklore also is a repository of tales, proverbs, anecdotes, ballads, songs, rituals, etc.

The earliest Kashmiri folk literature compilations available were by amateurs. The collections were made either by British officials or by European missionaries "in the course of their administrative and professional duties for the government and religious missions" (Islam 1970: 29). These officers and missionaries were generally drawn towards folklore because they wanted to acquaint themselves with the language and culture of the natives.

Mazharul Islam notes that the work of Hinton Knowles is notable of all the folklore collections by missionaries. Knowles believed that the rich folklore available in Kashmir could not be "surpassed in fertility by any other country in the world" (qtd. in Islam 1970: 57). Knowles's collection of the Kashmiri proverbs is a repository of almost all the proverbs used by the people and additionally "it contains ninety-one fables, anecdotes and legends illustrating proverbs" (Islam 1970:58). Knowles purpose of collecting proverbs was to get an idea of the actual speech expressions used by people. He learnt the language and, as a missionary, had access to people from all walks of life.

Notable works in the field of Kashmiri folklore compilation are J. Hinton Knowles' *A Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs and Sayings* (1885), J. Hinton Knowles' *Folk Tales of Kashmir* (1888), Sir Auriel Stein's *Hatim's Tales: Kashmiri Stories and Songs* (1923), Omkar N Koul's *A Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs* first published in 1992, S.L. Sadhu's *Folk Tales from Kashmir* (2002) and the latest addition is Oniza Drabu's *The Legend of Himal and Nagrai* (2019).

2. Background of the Study

In Kashmir, feudalism, religious, and patriarchal discourse pervades the masses' life. This study attempts to understand the implications of the amalgamation of these discourses as exemplified in folklore. Critics note that there are instances where folklore has given voice to the oppressed. Alan Dundes writes that for the theorists of Marxism, "folklore is the weapon of class protest. It cannot be denied that some folklore does ex-

press protest—numerous folksongs, ...articulate discontent with social ills, racism, and other issues. But there is also right-wing folklore expressing the ideology of groups of a conservative political philosophy” (1978: 8). This paper endeavours to answer the following questions by a threadbare analysis of the Kashmiri proverbs.

- Is Folk Literature imaginative, or does reality colour it?
- Is the language of proverbs neutral, or are there biases involved?
- Do proverbs act as a tool for socialisation, propagating the acceptable/unacceptable categories?
- Are proverbs used to influence and subjugate?

2.1. Research Methodology

The paper investigates the power structure inherent in the folk literature of Kashmir and has attempted to unravel how discourses have constructed unequal power relations through the analysis of twenty-eight well-known Kashmiri proverbs. Attempts have been made to illustrate how power abuse is enacted, reproduced, and legitimised. This study has analysed Kashmiri proverbs informed by Foucault’s concept of discourse and highlights how the creation of knowledge and power relations is intertwined. Emphasising that power is central to the human condition, he argues “that human relations, science, institutions are all caught up in a power struggle, and discourse is a terrain on which this struggle is carried out. The person/institution that controls discourse also controls the subjects in those discourses” (qtd. in Nayar 2010: 35). Along with Foucault’s concept of discourse, insights from feminist theory have also been employed to expose the discourse of patriarchy, religion and authority in folk literature. Using Foucault’s concept, feminists argue how the discourse of patriarchy has marginalised women and pushed them to peripheral spaces. The discourses of patriarchy categorise/represent women as “pure woman, the seductive woman, the hysterical woman, the vulnerable woman” and “have been institutionalized in the uneven structures of marriage, education, religion, the law, history, literature, science and politics” (Nayar 2010: 36). Discourses legitimize disproportionate power dynamics and all discourses have an object, a language and a central

figure; an authority who employs language to categorise the object. Therefore, the authority figure (men) employs the discourse of patriarchy to subjugate the object (women) by categorising them as 'pure women', 'seductive women', etc., to propagate the acceptable/non-acceptable category of females.

Alternatively, the discourse of religion has also been employed to propagate and legitimise unequal power equations. Unequal power relations are also present in feudal societies.

3. The Purpose of Folklore

Not only does folklore validate and justify acceptable behavioural patterns, but it also exercises considerable pressure and control on individuals to act according to societal dictates. Folklore plays a crucial role in order "to express social approval of those who conform.... In many [communities] folklore is [used] to control, influence, or direct the activities" and actions of others (Bascom 1954: 346). Parallels can be drawn between culturally accepted behaviour and its reinforcement through folklore genres. According to HONKO, folklore "is a group-oriented and tradition-based creation of groups or individuals controlled by the expectations of the community as an adequate expression of its [socio-cultural] identity" (qtd. in Das 1993: 2). Therefore, specific rules govern the practice of folklore and it acts as a tool for the socialisation of the young and inculcates community values and customs. Folklore is an essential tool for children's education, especially for the members of non-literate societies, because it appears to be the principal feature through which animal fables teach moral lessons, also riddles sharpen the abilities to critical thinking.

3.1 The Politics of Folklore

Folklore also has been used manipulatively by the powerful, and examples of folklore being exploited by the dominant can be seen in Germany & Russia. Folklore is said to have

proved to be a formidable and diabolic weapon of propaganda ...Nazi Germany harnessed folklorists to buttress the ideology of a master race united through mystical bonds of blood and culture, including folk culture. Soviet Russia has laid down a party line for folklore, con-

veniently finding in workers' songs and legends the communist spirit of social and revolutionary protest. (Dorson 1963: 96)

Hitler used folklore for his political purpose, and the same was done by the government in Russia when folklore was woven around Marxist concerns.

4. Proverbs

“Wisdom in a nutshell” would not be an inappropriate expression to describe a proverb. Proverbs are succinct of the varied folklore genres, but terseness does not imply minimalism. Proverbs are the undoubted wisdom of the past generations transmitted through the ages. Folklore scholars, linguists and historians have long been occupied with the origin and meaning of proverbs and their variants, if any. They say that every proverb tells a tale. It is usually a sizable task to deal with just one text in “this diachronic and Semantic fashion” (Mieder 2005: 96). People have been drawn to proverbs for ages. The interest in proverbs can “be traced back to the earliest Sumerian Cuneiform tablets. Then philosophical writings of Aristotle” (Mieder 2005: 80). Critics have attempted to define proverbs in the proverbial style of short and crisp definitions, and some scholars have laboured to give detailed definitions. Lord John Russell’s definition has taken on a proverbial status of sorts: “A proverb is the wit of one and the wisdom of many” (qtd. in Mieder 2004: 9). Proverbs are an amalgamation of experiences and observations summarised and depict a message to which all the members of the community can relate.

4.1. Characteristics of Proverbs

A proverb serves as an organ for transferring ethical values from older generations to posterity using the minimal possible words. The proverbial stock sometimes refers to terms unknown to modern man. Archaic words render the interpretation and understanding difficult, and scholars across the disciplines of folklore, history and linguistics come together to resolve such difficulties. Scholars pay attention to the history of individual proverbs and are concerned with the specific use of proverbs through different historical periods. This helps build scholarship about the

socio-cultural circumstances. The critic Milner mentions that a proverb has the following characteristics:

(a) it is pithy, concise and easily remembered by the use of rhyme, rhythm, repetition, or alliteration; (b) it is vivid, homely, sometimes coarse, deals with people's primary interests; (c) it singles out something abstract and universal based on experience and observation which might be stated literally or figuratively; (d) it sums up a situation by appealing to humour; (e) it is often linked to another saying which appears to give it the life; and (f) its effect is to raise a statement from the ordinary to emphatic level in order to urge, teach, praise or convince, or alternatively, to warn, blame, restrain or discourage. (1969: 199)

To gain the stature of a proverb, expressions and observations expressed in terse language have to be handed down from generation to generation. For emphasis, proverbs are usually prefixed with words/phrases like 'they say', 'Elders say' etc. Proverbs are preferred because they can be used figuratively and are usually "based on indirection, and much can indeed be said or implied by the opportune use of such proverbs as "Don't look a *gift horse* in the mouth," "Don't count your *chickens* before they [hatch]," "Every *cloud* has a silver lining," "you cannot teach an old *dog* with new tricks," or "All that *glitters* is not gold" (Mieder 2004: 8).

4.2. Importance of Proverbs

Proverbs interest all strata of society; on the surface, they seem very simple. But paremiology uncovers the didactic, the moral and the social message that proverbs hold together. The study of proverbs requires that the paremiologist "get to the bottom of that "incommunicable quality" of what may be called proverbiality" (Mieder 2004: 4). The didactic function of proverbs has been recognised since times immemorial. Alongside proverbs, the other folklore genre used for education is the riddle. Religious scholars, parents and teachers have used proverbs for indoctrination, orientation, and education. Thereby proverbs "continue to play a [pivotal part] as a pedagogical tool in modern societies, especially among family members and at school. They deserve to be taught as part of general education, and since they belong to the common knowledge" (Mieder 2005: 98). Since

proverbs have no authors, the whole community is recognised as the curator of proverbs. All the members are bearers of the message communicated through them. Proverbs are the cultural legacy inherited by all members of society.

4.3. Are Proverbs Biased?

But does the ‘wisdom’ symbolised by a proverb give a biased reality? Do proverbs advance the viewpoint of those in authoritarian positions? Is truth compromised and ‘acceptable’ and ‘not acceptable’ attitudes defined according to those with the prerogative to determine? If controlled by the dominant, the discourse created through proverbs can be distorted and compromised.

The study of proverbs should accommodate all aspects, including the context, which refers to the social situation in which it is used. Seitel states that proverb studies bring to light the relevance of proverbs:

[B]y pushing around these small and apparently simply constructed items, one can discover principles which give order to a wider range of phenomena. Proverbs are the simplest of the metaphorical genres of folklore – songs, folktales, folk play, etc. – a genre which clearly and directly is used to serve a social purpose. [Scrutinising] the relatively simple use of metaphorical reasoning for social ends in proverbs, one can gain insight into the social use of other, more complex metaphorical genres. (1976: 141)

4.4. Context of Proverbs

Proverbs are deeply rooted in specific cultures, and their meaning cannot be separated from the context. Devoid of the context, “the proverb loses its force of appeal and relevance. Akin to the proverbs are the wise sayings which reflect and transmit the collective wisdom of the group in concise and condensed forms and are easy to remember” (Egonu 1987: 115). The purpose and sense of proverbs are realised with reference to the social situation in which they are used.

To uncover the meaning of proverbs in specific contexts, it is essential to remember that proverbs are generally “employed to disambiguate complex situations and events. Yet they are par-

adoxically inherently ambiguous because their meaning depends on analogy” (Mieder 2004: 133). At times, uncovering a simple proverb’s meaning is very complex. Kwesi Yankah, in his article, “Do Proverbs Contradict?” (1984), also emphasises that “the meaning of any proverb is actually evident only after it has been contextualized” (qtd. in Mieder 2005: 93-94) because they serve as tools for communication.

5. Proverbs in Kashmir

The Kashmiri term for proverbs is “Zarb – Ul – Misl”; alternatively, “Kahvat” is also used to denote a proverb (Fayaz 2008: 31). Kashmiri society also thrives on the use of proverbs and all facets of Kashmiri life are coloured by these wise sayings. Proverbs are the beacon lights of wisdom, but they also serve as tools to propagate the norms of society. Proverbs “pass judgement, recommend a course of action, or serve as secular past precedents for present actions” and play a vital role in the culture of a society (Arewa and Dundes 1966: 52). Society validates the ‘acceptable’ and ‘not acceptable’ attitude through proverbs. They are also used to exercise social control. The Proverbs are instrumental in setting up moral and ethical standards, as praise and censure come from witty remarks. Laced with humour, irony and satire, they aptly convey the approval or disapproval of the community to its members.

About the proverbs in Knowles’ collection, Mazharul Islam writes that the proverbs “are classified and arranged according to their subject matter and translated into English with notes, illustrating the social customs, popular superstition and everyday life of people” (Islam 1970: 61). Knowles in the preface to *Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs and Sayings* gives an anecdotal account of the genesis of his compilation. He writes:

I have now spent two long quiet winters [in Kashmir] and this “Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs and Sayings” is the result of many hours of labour, study, and anxiety during these leisurable months. As a missionary, on arriving in [Kashmir], I at once devoted my attention to the study of the language; and believing that Proverbs taught “the real people’s speech,” discovered “the genius, wit and spirit of a nation,” and embodied its “current and practical

philosophy,” I quickly began to make a collection of them. This book, I believe, contains nearly all the Proverbs and Proverbial sayings now extant among the Kashmiri people. They have been gathered from various sources. Sometimes the great and learned Pandit instinctively uttered a proverb in my hearing; sometimes ... the barber [told me] me a thing or two, as he polled my head; and sometimes, the poor coolie said something worth knowing, as carrying my load he tramped along before me. A few learned Muhammadan and Hindu friends also, ... helped me in this collection and its arrangement, and here I again heartily acknowledge their kind and ready service. (1885: iii-iv)

Knowles also writes about his apprehension about the reception of the book. He says, “What will the little world say, ...? How will the philologist, the ethnologist, the antiquarian, the student of folklore, and the general reader regard this which has cost some considerable time and study” (1885: iv). The hard work put in by Knowles is commendable since several problems surmounted him. He reports that there was no notable Kashmiri dictionary and Grammar around his compilation, and he tried to translate the proverbs into Roman characters.

O. N. Koul, in his *A Dictionary of Kashmir Proverbs*, credits the work done by Knowles. Koul defines a proverb “as a statement that may contain a piece of advice, a warning, a prediction or [just] an observation” (2005: 3). He divides proverbs into three categories- proverbs wherein the “meaning is quite prominent”, proverbs dealing with the “great mysteries and complexities of life” and metaphorical proverbs wherein “the literal meaning is merely redundant” (2005: 3). According to Koul varied opinions exist about the ‘wisdom’ content of proverbs. Notable among these are:

- A good proverb is never out of season.
- Hold fast to the words of ancestors.
- Proverbs are the condensed good sense of nations.
- Wise men make proverbs, and [others] repeat them.
- A proverb is the wit of one and the wisdom of many.
- Time passes away, but sayings remain.
- Proverbs are like butterflies; some are caught others fly away. (2005: 4)

‘Proverbs’ are culture realised in words and bind together people from all strata of society. The social, political and cultural conditions have influenced the folklore of Kashmir. The discourse of folklore expresses the ideology of the powerful, and there are pieces of evidence that proverbs are used to indoctrinate and persuade. In many instances, proverbs have also been used to voice discontentment under the garb of folklore.

6. Power Discourse in Kashmiri Proverbs: Analysis

The proverbs analysed in this paper have been primarily selected from the *Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs and Sayings* (1885) compiled by J. Hinton Knowles and *A Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs* (1992) compiled by Omkar N. Koul. Additionally, some of the analysed proverbs have been selected from discussions held with friends and family members, and a few proverbs have been selected from the ones quoted by Farooq Fayaz in his book *Kashmir Folklore: A Study in Historical Perspective* (2008)

6.1. Proverbs about Rulers and Atrocities on the Masses

The political history of Kashmir is witness that during the Sikh and Dogra rule, the government adopted “the apparatus of coercion” (Fayaz 2008: 48). Under both regimes, the rulers followed the policy whereby they created-

a group from both Hindu and Muslim communities, who in turn, received rich incentives and acted as custodians of the alien rule. This privileged section of Kashmiri would seldom miss an opportunity to fleece the people, even of their meagre belongings and possessions. These collaborators, in turn, to appease the greed of ... masters resorted to every kind of mean device to command” complete submission before the government. (Fayaz 2008: 48)

The masses were mortally afraid of these officials and seldom raised their voices for fear of punishment. The condition of the Kashmiris presented a gory picture under the Sikh and the Dogra rule. The Sikhs levied heavy taxes, and the Dogras introduced the inhumane practice of ‘begar’ or ‘forced labour’.

The victimised Kashmiris, unable to fight against the oppressive regimes, suffered in silence. Folklore was not untouched by the plight of Kashmiris, and many tales and proverbs gave voice to the discontentment of the public. The proverb that follows shows the displeasure of Kashmiris due to alien rule:

1. *Kashir che par-dwarac.*

The exploitation of Kashmir by non-natives (Source Friends)

The proverbs mentioned below aptly attack the “collaborators” who made a profit while their fellow Kashmiris suffered. The corrupt Kashmiri officials supported the ruthless rulers.

2. *Baidh kani chu lokchev kanyev seeth rozit hykan*

The big stone can consolidate its position only because of the support of the small stones (source family members)

3. *Ekis dazaan deer to byaakh vushnaavaan athe*

One’s bread is on fire, the other warming his cold hand over it (qtd in Fayaz 2008: 50)

The atrocities committed did not go unnoticed, but ordinary Kashmiris thought confrontation and rebellion would enhance their miseries. The following two proverbs indicate how silence was preferred to revolution and escaping the situation was a better alternative.

4. *Tul palav te voth tsalav*

Pickup your clothes and let us runaway (qtd in Fayaz 2008: 51)

5. *Tshopt chey ropt stnz, karakh tay sontstnz*

Silence is silver, but if you keep silent, it is golden (qtd in Fayaz 2008: 51)

Kashmiris were betrayed by their own people; otherwise, foreign rulers could not consolidate their position. These ‘privileged few’ were rewarded with “*Jagirs* (fiefs)” and “*Dharmath* (religious fief)”, “besides declaring a host of influential supporters as *Arziwalias* (land owners)” (Fayaz 2008: 53). The Dogra rule replaced the Sikh rule in 1846. Still, this replacement further deteriorated the socio-political conditions. The practice of ‘*begar*’ forced many to migrate to far-off lands to avoid becoming forced

labourers. The comparison of the atrocities faced by people under the Sikh rule and Dogra rule and the Dogra rule being far more ruthless is brought out vividly in the following proverb:

6. *Koli khog kol che sardy*"

Every new stream is icier than the old one (qtd in Fayaz 2008: 51)

6.2. *Proverbs about the victimisation of the Common man by Feudal Lords and Religious Leaders*

The ordinary Kashmiri was oppressed under feudalism while the feudal lords reaped the benefits of the labour they put in. However, feudal lords were not the only ones who occupied a privileged position in society. The *Pandits* and the *Pirzadas* were "collectively known as the *Safedposh* and also privileged and "being respectable sections, the state favoured these *Pandits* and *Pirzadas* by lightly taxing their land". The burden of the taxes was "exclusively borne by the common peasantry. Besides *Pirzadas* and *Pandits*, the privileged class comprised *Lambadars*, *Patwari* and *Wadadars*" (Fayaz 2008: 246). Each of these classes fully exploited its position and oppressed the masses. Innumerable examples from folklore narrate the harsh attitude adopted by these classes towards ordinary people. The Hindu and Muslim religious priests also took full advantage of the reverence of ordinary people for their authority. The following proverb shows how the priests were always in a comfortable position:

7. *Gora senzi kotshi sowri na zanh*

The priests make profit irrespective of whether the event is pleasurable or painful (source family members)

The displeasure of common Kashmiris towards *Pirzadas* and *Pandits* can be exemplified through the following proverbs:

8. *Bate go grate*

Kashmiri Pandit is just like a stone grinder (qtd in Fayaz 2008: 246)

9. *Pirs che Ponsech Zir*

The Pir knows nothing but to earn money (qtd in Fayaz 2008: 247)

10. *Gora senzi kotshi sowri na zanh*

The priests make profit irrespective of whether the event is pleasurable or painful.

6.3. Proverbs about how wealth determines Ones' Position on the Social Ladder

Wealth is associated with respect, and poverty makes you ignoble. The following proverbs imply that if you are rich, you are considered noble. Economic position determines one's worth in society and penury is associated with embarrassment. One of the greatest misfortunes is an empty stomach, and relatives avoid poor relations.

11. *ašraph gav suy yas ašraph ia: san*

The man with gold is a gentleman.

12. *The rich person is considered noble. Money is power*

The rich can do no wrong (Koul 2005:28)

13. *a: sun chu hechina: va: n, na a: sun chu mandicha: va: n*

Prosperity teaches one, and poverty puts one to shame.

Prosperity improves one's personality; adversity cripples it (Koul 2005: 33)

14. *y əd dag cha bəd dag*

The stomach pain is a great pain. The pain of hunger is most severe (Koul 2005: 170)

15. *vušin' beni:, yu:r' val i; t ir in' beni:, u:r' gatsh*

O warm (affectionate or rich) sister, come over here. O cold (unaffectionate or poor) sister, go over there. Rich or affectionate relations are always welcome, and poor or unaffectionate ones are repelled (Koul 2005: 203)

The following proverb shows that even the heavens detest the poor:

16. *a: sma: n i vətsh bala: y ti kha: ni gəri: b kujast*

Misfortune descended from the heavens and sought a poor man's hut. Poor people suffer even in natural calamities (Koul 2005: 33)

6.4. *Women in Proverbs*

As stated earlier, folklore is shaped by socio-cultural factors. But does folklore present a biased reality? This question is relevant to feminist folklorists who examine women's lives in varied cultural milieus to seek answers to questions such as: Is 'gender construction' at work in folktales? Do folktales stereotypically represent women? Focusing on women's experiences, female folklorists have unveiled genres previously disregarded. They believe that "traditionally, knowledge, truth, and reality have been constructed as if men's experiences were normative as if being human meant being male" (qtd. in Kousaleos 1999: 19). Folklore is no exception, and the female experience was not acknowledged and valued in the production of knowledge. A critic notes, "Patriarchy is a social system that promotes hierarchies and awards economic, political and social power to one group over others. Patriarchy is essentially androcentric and hierarchical by nature" (Huffel 2011: 260).

Moreover, folklore as a whole has been used to advance the agenda of patriarchy. Countless proverbs can be cited as indoctrinating gender lessons. Women, through proverbs, are educated about legitimate female ambitions and aspirations.

The analysis of select Kashmiri proverbs endeavours to showcase how everyday proverbs exemplify the unequal power distribution in Kashmiri society. Gender relations are articulated through the use of Kashmiri proverbs. The proverbs selected for analysis show how gender roles are advanced and validated through folklore, and the study unravels the marginalised position of women. Nyla Ali Khan questions:

...the victimization and subjugation of women selectively enshrined in the social practices and folklore of Kashmiri culture, ... the kudos given to the hapless wife who agrees to live in a polygamous relationship; the bounden duty of the woman to bear heirs; the unquestioned right of a husband to divorce his barren wife; ... the hallowed status of the woman who conforms to such cultural dogmas; the social marginalization of the woman who defies them. (2007: 23)

6.5. Gender Bias in Proverbs

A few proverbs are analysed to bring out gender discrimination inbuilt in these sayings. The purpose is also to focus on the stereotypical representation of men and women in the proverbs and unearth how the passive representation of women is strategic and beneficial to the patriarchal enterprise.

The birth of a girl child in Kashmiri society is not considered auspicious, and the community reminds time and again what a curse the female offspring is to her parents. Folklore, especially tales and proverbs, reminds females that they are inferior and cause worry and shame for their parents. The following proverbs showcase that right from birth, the girl child is thought of as a burden:

17. *Kúr chhēh khúr*

A daughter is as a heel (i.e., a great hindrance. (Knowles 1885: 119)

The girl child is not only a cause of embarrassment to her parents, but she is also responsible for the economic burden on her parents. This economic dimension is again aptly expressed in the following proverbs:

18. *ku:r cha a:snas chenira:va:n ti na a:snas mandicha:va:n*

A daughter decreases the wealth of the rich, and is a cause of shame to the poor

(Koul 2005: 46)

The expenditure incurred on the wedding of the daughter impoverishes the family. The parents wish to unburden themselves as soon as possible, as is evident from the following saying:

19. *hə:zas gɔbe:yi l ɔli, dits in də:rith kɔli*

The boatman felt the weight (of his daughter) in his lap, and threw her into the river. To marry off one's daughter at a very young age (Koul 2005: 222)

Proverbs educate women about legitimate feminine aspirations and the importance of following patriarchal norms. The females in folklore are controlled and judged by societal precepts. Any move on the part of the female which disturbs the patriarchal

cosmos is severely dealt with. Women in Kashmiri society are often compared to insignificant objects compared to men. The fidelity of women is also a matter of debate in proverbs. The following proverb draws a parallel between an animal, a woman and an inanimate object:

20. *gur, zana:n tī šamši:r, yim tren ivay chi bevapha:*

A horse, a woman, and a sword, all the three are not loyal (Koul 2005: 67)

A famous proverb discusses the shortcomings of a man's wife by comparing her to the stone placed on the doorstep of the house:

21. *Chāni barāndah kani chhai nah sēz*

Your doorstep is not straight. Something wrong with the wife (Knowles 1885: 39)

6.6. Gender Indoctrination through Proverbs

Proverbs encourage men to be tough and resolute; women, conversely, are indoctrinated into submissive and passive roles. The proverb that follows propagates the gender roles through the comparison between the siblings:

22. *bo:y gav kən', beni gəyi thən'*

A brother is (as hard as) a stone, and a sister is (as soft as) butter. A brother is considered a stone hearted person, and a sister is considered very compassionate (Koul 2005:153)

Patriarchy tries to control women's lives in totality, and folklore plays a vital role in instructing women to exhibit moral values tailored by patriarchy. Proverbs are also stuffed with issues concerning the chastity, decency and modesty of women:

23. *vachas hay kuluph a:si, lachas paki daki dith*

If a woman is strong in character, she can brush aside lakhs of men without being harmed (Koul 2005: 198)

Proper moral conduct is encouraged through such proverbs. Another quality desired in a woman is the ability to refrain from expressing her opinion. A female is thought of as an epitome of

modesty if she has no say in matters concerning her marriage alliance:

24. *baji ko:ri hinz tsh opay cha ã:ka:r*
A grown-up girl's silence means her willingness (Koul 2005: 138)

The females are expected to be homely, accommodating, submissive and docile. The patience exhibited by Lal Ded becomes the measuring rod, and all women are expected to be patient. The following proverb censures women who are ill-tempered as women are expected to be accommodating:

25. *adal ti vadal zana:n cha pašas zadal tshey*
A snobbish and ill-tempered woman is like badly thatched grass on the roof. (The badly thatched grass on a roof does not prevent rain from pouring through it). A snobbish and ill-tempered woman is a curse in the family (Koul 2005: 23)

A woman is expected to be an 'ideal wife', and if she cannot come up to the expectations of the husband, the reproach is swift, as is seen through the proverb:

26. *'a:s im kəl iya: mo:su:m cham*
I have a wife but she is innocent (incapable, delicate) (Koul 2005:16)

Here the 'innocence' of the wife is a term of censure and has no positive connotation. Another proverb cautions against pampering the girl child:

27. *kha: ni ma:jen ta:ni ba:gay*
A pampered girl (who is brought up with a lot of care and affection) may not get a husband of her choice (Koul 2005: 54)

The caution probably indicates that a pampered girl may be unable to adjust at her husband's place. Another proverb discusses the treatment meted out to a woman by her in-laws:

28. *Nosh gayih rēti zan ās yeti*

The daughter-in-law went for a month (to her father's house) and it was as if she had not been away at all (time passed so quickly because they were so much happier during her absence).

"Daughters-in-law are a continual stumbling-block to the other inhabitants of the house." (Knowles 1885: 157)

7. Conclusion

The seemingly neutral proverbs showcase how power discourse works through folklore. The analysed proverbs highlight that the concerns of caste, class and gender colour the meaning and interpretation of the proverbs. Proverbs do not only transmit wisdom but are also used to indoctrinate socio-cultural norms. The proverbs tell the stories of atrocities at the hands of the powerful; proverbs recount the socio-political circumstances, and gender roles are also propagated through proverbs. Through a hand full of words, proverbs map the socio-cultural history of communities and people.

References

- Arewa, E. Ojo. & Dundes, "A Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore". *American Anthropologist*, vol. 66, 1966, pp. 70–85.
- Bascom, William R. "Four Functions of Folklore." *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 67, no. 266, 1954, pp. 333-349. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/536411>, retrieved on 10 September 2022.
- Das, Chitta Ranjan, editor. *Folklores of Mankind*. Institute of Oriental and Orissan Studies, 1993.
- Dorson, Richard M. *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*. University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- Dorson, Richard M. "Current Folklore Theories." *Current Anthropology*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1963, pp. 93-112. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2739820, retrieved on 10 November 2022.
- Dundes, Alan. *The Study of Folklore*. Edited by Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall Inc, 1965.
- Dundes, Alan. "North American Indian Folklore Studies." *Journal de la Societe des americanistes*, vol. 56, no. 1, 1967, pp. 53-79. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24604120, retrieved on 19 November 2022.

- Dundes, Alan. "On the structure of the proverb." *Proverbium*, vol. 25, 1975, pp. 961-973.
- Dundes, Alan. *Essays In Folkloristic*. Ved Prakash Vatuk, 1978.
- Dundes, Alan. *Interpreting Folklore*. Indiana University Press, 1980.
- Dundes, Alan. *Folklore Matters*. The University of Tennessee Press, 1989.
- Dundes, Alan. editor. *Folklore Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. vol. IV, Routledge, 2005.
- Egonu, Iheanachor. "The Nature and Scope of Traditional Folk Literature." *Presence Africaine*, no. 144, 1987, pp. 109-117. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2435156, retrieved on 26 September 2022.
- Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*. vol 2. Sahitya Akademi, 1988.
- Fayaz, Farooq. *Kashmir Folklore: A Study in Historical Perspective*. Gulshan Books, 2008.
- Huffel, Mary-Anne. "Patriarchy as Empire: A Theological Reflection". *Studia Historiæ Ecclesiasticæ*, vol. 37, 2011, pp. 259 – 270, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267199922_Patriarchy_as_empire_A_theological_reflection, retrieved on 11 September 2022.
- Islam, Mazharul Dr. *A History of Folktale Collections in India, Bangladesh And Pakistan*. 2nd ed., Panchali Prakasan, 1970.
- Khan, Nyla Ali. "The Land of Lalla-Ded: Politicization of Kashmir and Construction of the Kashmiri Woman." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 9, no.1, 2007, pp. 22-41, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol9/iss1/2>, retrieved on 16 October 2022.
- Knowles, J Hinton. *A Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs and Sayings*. Trubner, 1885.
- Knowles, J Hinton. *Folk Tales of Kashmir*. Trubner, 1888.
- Koul, Omkar Nath. *A Dictionary of Kashmiri Proverbs*. 2nd ed., Indian Institute of Language Studies, 2005.
- Leach, Maria editor. *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*. (SDFML). Harper and Row Publishers Inc., 1996.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. "Proverbs as cultural units or items of folklore." *Phraseology. An international handbook of contemporary research*, edited by H. Burger, D. Dobrovolskij, P. Kühn & N. R. Norrick. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007., pp. 394-414.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. *Proverbs A Handbook*. Greenwood Press, 2004.
- Mieder, Wolfgang. *Proverbs are Never Out of Season: Popular Wisdom in the Modern Age*. Oxford Press, 1993.

- Mieder, Wolfgang. "Proverbs Bring it to Light": Modern Paremiology in Retrospect and Prospect." *Folklore Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, edited by Alan Dundes. vol. III, Routledge, 2005, pp. 80-106.
- Milner, George. B. "What is a Proverb?" *New Society*, vol. 332, 1969, pp. 199-202.
- Nayar, Promod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*. Pearson, 2010.
- Sadhu, Shyam Lal. *Folk Tales from Kashmir*. Asia Publishing House, 2009.
- Sen, Soumen, editor. *Folklore in North-East India*. Omsons Publicaions, 1985.
- Seitel, Peter. "Proverbs: A Social Use of Metaphor." *Folk Genre*, edited by Ben-Amos. University of Texas Press, 1976, pp. 125-143.
- Stein, Sir Aural. *Hatim's Tales: Kashmiri Stories and Songs*. Gyan Publishing House, 1987.
- Taylor, Archer. "Folklore and the Student of Literature." *The Study of Folklore*, edited by Alan Dundes. Prentice Hall Inc, 1965, pp. 34-42.

Munejah Khan
Department of English Language & Literature
Islamic University of Science & Technology
Kashmir
munejahk@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2023 Proverbium and author
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

