



DEMEANING OF WOMEN IN PROVERBS; A STUDY IN AND THROUGH MALAYALAM PROVERBS

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Guest Lecture

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Abstract:- This study aims to highlight the misogynistic attitude towards women through proverbs. It tries to state that almost seventy percentage of proverbs are strongly prejudiced against women. And it should not forget that there are proverbs which support women as mother, wife, sister and daughter, but it is specified in this paper that most of the proverbs deal with oppressing and suppressing women. Almost all proverbs are constructed to justify male supremacy in the society. Proverbs which emerge as result of conflict which had happened in the history. So it is important to study such proverbs which derogate women in general. Proverbs which are orally transmitted from one generation to another, so it is important to note such proverbs with misogynistic attitude. Here this study tries to question the metafolklore about proverbs that 'there is no chaff in proverbs'

Methodology: primary secondary data have been collected. Samples of proverbs have been taken thoroughly.

Worldview

Worldview can be defined as "the way people characteristically look outward upon universe"¹ (Robert Redfield). And according to Kluckhohn "Generally it is assumed that worldview, in the sense of a cognitive set by means of which people perceive, consciously or unconsciously relationship between self, others, cosmos and the day today living of life is patterned"². Alan Dundes defines world view as "world view refers to the cognitive, existential aspects of the way the world is structured"³.

Key words- world view, proverb.

¹ Osman Taib Mohd, Malaysian World-View, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985, P.253.

² Dudes Alan, Interpreting Folklore, Bloomington, Indiana university Press, 1980, P.69.

³ Payyanadan Raghavan, Folklore oru padana padhathi, Thrissur, Kerala Sahithya Academi, 1998, P.72.

Introduction

Traditional knowledge and mentality of certain groups of people are mainly exchanged through proverbs. The study of proverbs will not help us to know about mental state of certain people, but it provides us their history. Proverbs emerges as a result of various conflicts which happened in the history. Every folk expresses their particular understanding and notion about anything in the world in different ways. So that there will be different perspectives of different things for folk. Here certain proverbs are subjected to be studied as they indicate misogynistic attitude.

Proverbs can be defined as, "They are didactic and contain a advice or state a generally accepted truth". It functions as common accepted ideology about how to act and live and showing in a condensed form the accumulated life experience of community and serving as conventional practical symbols for abstract ideas. Lord Russel "the wit of one and wisdom of many". According to Sir Francis Bacon, "The genius, wit and spirit of a nation are discovered in its proverbs". Aristotle says, "Fragments of an elder 'wisdom' where 'brevity' and 'aptness' had preserved them 'amidst wreck and ruin'⁴.

Maxmuller explains, " proverbs are indeed bit at ancient wisdom that bear the impress of the early days of mankind"⁵. Proverbs are generally content social situation existed and existing in our society. And these are generalised and bruted ideas or social situation containing certain rules, norms, restrictions at a particular society. Here samples of malayalam proverbs have been taken to conduct the study. More clearly proverbs that deals with 'women' have been analysed. The important point of the samples taken for study of proverbs are related with women, which contained misogynistic ideas or explanation of women could be found in the seventy percentage of proverbs.

When the proverbs are calculated and considered as the most 'intelligent perceptions' of great elders on the world, it has some negative assumptions also. Some of the findings of the paper have been listed below.

Justifying atrocities against women

There are some malayalam proverbs which might have originated in such a male dominated social system which justifies atrocities against women.

Eg: 1. Adikundu valarnna pennum adachu vevicha kashayavum

The decoction (distilled drug) made in closed pot and a girl brought up with spats/strokes/punishment

It explains that a girl brought up by getting strokes or punishments and the decoction prepared in a closed pot are said to be best ones

2. Urakke chirikunnavale ulakka kond adikkanam

A woman who laughs louder should be beaten with a pestle (pestle is an instrument used for pounding rice)

It shows the need of controlling and keeping down of women even by thrashing and beating. It not only suggest thrashing and paining women instead it argued as 'best thing'.

3. Injayum pennum chathaykkathidatholam nannakum

Acasia instia and women are getting better when they get pounded

⁴ Stone R Jon, The Routledge Book of World Proverbs, Newyork, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006, P.3

⁵ Stone R Jon, op.cit., P. 13.

-Anil M K & KEN, Pazhanchollil pathirund, Kozhikode, Progress publication, 2020

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Demeaning of woman

Most proverbs related to woman are demeaning and degrading the folk. There are number of proverbs does the job in different contexts.

Eg: 1. Nari thaduthalum karyam mudangum

Though the woman or rain prevent proceeding, it will clog/stick

2. Pennakunathilum bedam mannakunathanu

It is better to be land than a girl or woman

It indicates the pains and sufferings and sacrifices a woman has to experience only because taking birth as a woman

3. Pen budhi pin budhi :

Here the wisdom of 'woman' has been degraded and stating that it is unworthy. There are some other proverbs which contain the same meaning, 'Penchollu ketta perumale pole' (Like the perumal who heard the advice of woman)

-Pennu orumbettal brahmanum thadukilla (when a woman takes the plunge even lord brahma won't stop)

All these proverbs signifies the demeaning of female gender

-Pennu pennuthanne ponnalla (woman is woman not gold)

-Pennu nilkunidath pizha varum (Failure happens to the place where woman live)

Branding woman as squabble

Some proverbs are used to demean woman by branding them as quarrelsome. Fights between in-laws (especially woman counterparts), fights between woman themselves are subjected to origin of some proverbs.

Eg: 1- Kunjagalaye konnalum vendilla thathante thali azhipikkanam

Killing of brother for swatching the tears of sister in-law

- Nalu thala cherum nalu mula cherilla
Four heads unite but four breasts not

- When mother in-law breaks mud pot, daughter in-law breaks gold pot

These proverbs establish women as problem makers and as a person who fights with same gender. It not only stating them as problem makers but points out the jealousy among them.

Belittling power of woman

-Pennu kilachal mannu mariyumo

Woman can't dig the soil

-Penpada oru padayalla

Troops of women is not a troop

-Mannum Pennum kande kollavu

Land and woman should be acquired carefully

Restricting women to the limits of kitchen and home

Restrictions and taboos for a woman or a girl child in a society are reflected in proverbs. Restrictions on women in home doesn't mean freedom in home it indicates the limits.

Eg: - Beauty is not required for a women who works in kitchen

-A woman who laughs louder should be beaten with pestle

-Pen chirichal poyi, pukayila vidarthiyal poyi

A lady who laughs and expanding betel leafs are not good

-Adukkala pinakkam adakki vaykkanam

Kitchen quarrel must be kept down

It signifies that both the sorrow and happiness of woman must not be expressed and it should be a thing to be controlled and expressed.

If any woman who goes far than others(men), that woman and her efforts have been seen as under graded.

- Chemmeen chadiyal muttolam pinnem chadiyal chattiyl

If a prawn jumps it goes to mud pot

This same proverb is said in similar ways but different styles. Here woman is represented as 'prawn'

- Kulathil ninnu poyal valayil, valayil ninnu poyal kulathil

If it goes from stream, it will be caught in net and if it goes from net, it will be in stream

- Madodiya thodiyum nadodiya pennum aaka

The land where a cow runs and the woman who went many places are considered as bad

- Amma mathiluchadiyal makal gopuram chadum

When a mother jumps the compoundwall her daughter will jump the tower

-Azhinja penninu acharamilla

A dissipated woman has no manners

- Aanayal kanakkilakanm pennayal pattilakanam

When men must be good in maths and woman must be good in songs(Restricting or conditioning woman to particular situations)

- Vadakkini ponthiyal thekkini thazhum

Vadakini is a part of men's house where women used to live and it denotes that if it rises, thekini will be down. Thekini refers to the part where men belongs.

The society's male domination nature is reflected in many proverbs

Eg: Aanullappol pennu barichal thoonullappol pura thazhe

If a woman rules in the presence of a man it is like a broken house with pillar

- Nari barichidum narakam natyidam mudiyum

Place where woman rules and the place where orange plant planted will be ruined

- Vettilykk othungatha pakkumilla aaninu othungatha pennum illa

There is no areca nut ungovernable to betel

leaf and like there is no women ungovernable to man

- Sun will rise west and the world will be ruined on the day when woman rises to power

This proverbs exist among the muslim community and they justify it by taking support of holy quran

Conclusion

There are some metafolklores in the discourse of folks of kerala like 'pazhanchollil pathirilla' which means, 'There is no chaff in proverbs'. And if there is chaff in proverb cow milk will be turned sour. These are considered as the justifications for the accepted and common proverbs used in daily life. Alan Dundes, famous folklorist referred about the use of proverbs in giving and in the judging in Nigeria cases; and there are many aboriginal communities and fishermen communities who use proverbs in the judgement of cases of their own communities. In this case it will reverse the progressive society. Point which has to be remembered that all proverbs are not against the freedom of women, there are many proverbs which protects womanhood but here it is to be noted that most of the proverbs related to women are 'misogynistic' rather than supporting womanhood.

ENDNOTE

Osman Taib Mohd, Malaysian World-view, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985, p.253

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