

Proverbs as Ideological Weapon for Relegating Women: The Case of East Gojam

Daniel Belay Wubie^{1*}, Yitayew Shebabeie Mekonen², Yibeltal Degwale Tegegne¹

¹University of Gondar, Ethiopia; ²Arbaminch University, Ethiopia

*Email: daniebelay144@gmail.com

Received for publication: 20 November 2021.

Accepted for publication: 20 January 2022.

Abstract

Because of the long-lived traditional patriarchal ideology, women in many countries particularly in developing ones like Ethiopia have been relegated in to the margins of society, culture, and history in male-dominated environment. Women have been marginalized in the socio-cultural, economic and political spheres. As part of the world, women in East Gojam are naturally considered inferior to men. Hence, the primary aim of this study was to examine how proverbs function as ideological weapon for relegating women in east Gojam. Interview, focus group discussion and document analysis were used as instruments to gather proverbs from informants obtained through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The ethnographic design or interpretative approach was used to conduct this study. The result revealed that proverbs in east Gojam are used to relegate women drawing different negative images. Such images include women as hussy beings, unreliable and unpredictable, infirm, captious, deserving ill-treatments, source of danger and problems.

Keywords: women, proverbs, relegation, east Gojam, ideological weapon

Introduction

Background of the study

Oral literature is a vehicle or a medium through which the basic societal morals, concepts, beliefs, values and attitudes are transmitted (Finnegan, 1970). In view of this inseparable relationship between oral literature and society, it is hardly possible to study and analyze oral literature meaningfully outside the socio-cultural forces of the society that created it. This is because like other vehicles of culture, oral literature holds culture and history of people. It represents the perception and actual lives of women in a community.

Among these oral literature, proverbs have been very important vehicle through which one can study the perceptions of a society towards women. Proverbs are genres of oral literature that clearly show the positive or negative, strong or weak sides of its nation; they are a medium through which the important cultural images and perceptions of women are transmitted. Moreover, proverbs have been and remain most powerful and effective instruments for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to another (Dabaghi, 2010).

Balogun, (2005) as cited in Taringa B, (2014) points out though the use of proverbs may differ from society to society; their common thing everywhere is that they touch a wide-ranging assortment of human apprehensions and activities. It is highly regarded in the thinking and communication process of Africans as a whole. He also noted that the debate is no longer on whether or not African women are oppressed, nor is it on whether or not there is gender balance in the African cultural milieu, instead proverbs have served a major avenue for continued perpetration of gender discrimination among Africans (Ibid). East Gojam, which is among the thirteen zones in Amhara Re-

gional state, is no exception; as part of Africa in general and part of Ethiopia in particular, the community of east Gojam has its own traditions, beliefs, philosophies, values, perceptions expressed through folk literature particularly proverbs. People in east Gojam use a large number of proverbs as ideological weapon for relegating women. Gender polarity or the socially created stereotyped picture of femininity has been reflected in east Gojam proverbs when people interact in different social gatherings.

Statement of the problem

With the announcement of the National Policy of Women in 1993, and the issuance of the current Constitution, the Federal Government of Ethiopia declared its unequivocal commitment to the equitable development of women and to the institutionalization of the social, economic and political rights of women. Accordingly, much emphasis has been put to integrating women in development through increased participation so as to effect changes in women's education, economic situation, social status and political participation. In spite of all this, the status of Ethiopian women was reported to have been fundamentally unchanged. This was due to various factors, of which the influence of the age-old socio-cultural values and norms that perpetuate gender inequality and injustice are the most daunting ones. (Almaz 1991,12; Fellner 2000,202; Rao and Kelleher 2002).

In east Gojam zone, women are considered as naturally defective and inferior to men in mind, function and status. This assumption is witnessed in various aspects of life and in verbal expressions. Among others, proverbs play a vital role in justifying, legitimizing and transmitting the inferior nature and subordinate status of women from generation to generation. Proverbs are used to socialize women to men's dominance, and to make them subservient to men. Similarly, the men are socialized to exercise power over women through proverbs.

Thus, one way of alleviating women's subordination in all aspects of their life, is studying the oral literature in general and proverbs in particular of a particular community. This is because women's subordination is a cultural attribute, which is deep-rooted in socially sanctioned beliefs and norms that devalue women and feminine attributes, and positively value men and masculine attributes.

Many Studies, which focused on gender related issues, have been conducted in different areas of the country on oral literature in general and proverbs in particular. For instance, Abraham Alemu (2007) studied on '*Oral Narratives as an Ideological weapon for subordinating women: The Case of Jimma Oromo.*' He has tried to show that many of the narratives define Jimma Oromo women as naturally incomplete, defective, irrational, cruel, inferior creatures, which should be kept under control and subordinate to men. On the other hand, Meshesha Make (2015) has done a study on '*The Prejudiced Negative Images of Femininity in Wolaita Proverbs.*' He indicated that, Wolaita proverbs draw negatively prejudiced images of femininity in overall system of human communication. Such prejudiced and negatively drawn images of femininity include femininity as a symbol of incapability, lack of power to protect self, and sources of danger and problems. Moreover, Tsegaye Abie studied on '*The Negative Representation of Women in the Language of Awngi Proverbs.*' Tsegaye indicated that proverbs in Awngi language negatively depict women as incapable in household activities and poor home management, inferior in holding power and authority, stubborn, destructive and dangerous and unintelligent.

However, no study has been carried out on east Goojm proverbs for their vital role as ideological weapon for relegating women. The present researcher, therefore, believes that the relegation of women through east Gojam proverbs needs a deeper study. This is because, the images created through proverbs can tell us the ideology and attitude of the society towards women. Such tempting

issue, thus, instigated the researcher to engage himself to this study. Accordingly, this study tries to answer the following basic questions:

1. How are women depicted in the proverbs of east Gojam community?
2. How does the portrayal of women through east Gojam proverbs reflect the soci-Cultural attitudes of the community?
3. What are gender related ideologies, norms, and stereotypes underlying women relegation in the cultural settings?

Objective of the study

This study is basically intended to investigate and analyze how proverbs serve as ideological tools for the existence of women's subordination among east Gojam community. In tandem with this general objective, this research also tries:

- To identify how women are portrayed through east Gojam proverbs;
- Examine the attitudes of east Gojam community towards women as reflected in the proverbs;
- To show the gender related ideologies, norms, and stereotypes underlying women relegation in the cultural settings.

Scope of the study

The scope of this study was delimited to analyze how proverbs of east Gojam function as an ideological weapon for relegating women though it is obvious that the people in the aforementioned zone may have other genres of oral literature too like any other society in Ethiopia.

Literature Review

The concept of proverb

Proverbs have been defined as the nut shell or kernel of a society's wisdom, culture, values, philosophy and worldview As Mieder (1993) recons a proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation. Proverbs are very important because they are used to inculcate the attitudes, cultural values, philosophies, or the whole spectrum of the people's social life.

Proverbs of a certain community are used to form various images in the community. From the images contained in these proverbs, we learn a great deal about the values and attitudes of people within a given setting. The messages expressed through proverbs give an insight in to people's attitude towards women. The community of east Gojam is no exception that several images of women can be drawn from proverbs.

Proverbs as a genre of oral literature are reflections of the societal attitudes, philosophies and values. They serve as mirrors of the societal life. They serve as a reflection of what the society nurtures their values, joys, sorrows and concerns. They reflect cultural beliefs and attitudes of a certain community towards a particular group. Akivaga (1982): Miruka (1994) as cited in Catherine N.M, (2005), state that proverbs give an insightful sense of probabilities. They act as mirrors through which we glance at the society, its attitudes and thought process.

Negative Cultural Elements and Attitudes towards Women

Proverbs institutionalize negative cultural attitudes towards women. Although in the contemporary world proverbs may not be an everyday occurrence in certain social *milieu*, the attitudes these proverbs ingrain are nonetheless projected. In Africa we have proverbs that convey very nega-

tive attitudes towards women. Women are projected as unintelligent, undependable, dishonest, callous, cowardly, weak, and bad tempered emotional and so on.

It is true that there are proverbs that convey positive qualities of women, but these are qualities that are exploited by society. The West African proverb “mother is gold” is a good example. This proverb underlines African women’s endowment with excellent nurturing qualities as mothers. However, as Buchi Emecheta (1987) creatively documents in her novel *Joys of Motherhood*, society takes advantage of these qualities and exploits a mother dry of her human self, ignoring that she is a woman with human feelings. Proverbs which portray women negatively are prevalent and are given heavier weight in African societies.

One Gikuyu proverb states that: “*Whoever steals with a boy is happy when he is circumcised. However, whoever steals with a woman is only happy when she dies.*”

This implies that women are not dependable and women cannot keep secrets. We might mention here that attitudes ingrained in such a proverb have been used to discriminate against women attaining jobs in sensitive governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

Women are portrayed as having loose tongues in the Moroccan proverb, “*Tie up a woman’s tongue and a Mule’s legs*”. The comparison to mules implies that women are stubborn and need to be subdued just as a mule needs to be beaten to submit to its owner. It is obvious that comparison to an animal brings in the dehumanization that is the plight of African women.

This dehumanization of women is echoed by the Senegalese (Fulani) proverb, “*woman is like a winnowing basket; whenever it goes it winnows.*” The proverb has deep implications about the worthlessness that is associated with women. It means that whatever the circumstances or whatever the situation a woman is exposed, to she will still maintain the inferior position the society accords her. Even if she gets highly educated, she remains that inferior creature in the eyes of the society.

Theoretical Framework

Although several schools of thought and approaches have been developed in the field of folklore, the functionalist, feminist and contextual approaches were adopted for the present study to analyze the functional and thematic significance of proverbs in justifying and maintaining the relegation of women in east Gojam community.

The functionalist or anthropological folklorist is fundamentally concerned with the utilitarian aspect of folklore. For the proponents of this school, the important question is: “What does a particular folkloric form do for the people?” Among the various functions oral literature in general and proverbs in particular fulfils in a given society, its function of validating and maintaining institutions of culture is of importance to functionalists. This interest is based on the assumption that any form of oral literature is an embodiment and manifestation of the beliefs, worldview, wishes, and fears of the people in which it occurs.

In line with this, feminist folklorists strongly argue that analysis of oral literature should be carried out from a gender point of view, and with a focus on the representation of the power relationship between men and women. In addition, feminist folklorists emphasize the importance of examining how a genre of oral literature operates within a society to ensure conformity and continuity to the accepted cultural values and norms underlying a gender system (Yong and Turner 1993, 135).

The contextual approach, on the other hand, is more concerned with understanding the social and cultural contexts of folklore than just the texts. Here, much attention is paid to the socio-cultural features of a given folkloric form.

Besides, sociologists provided another framework helpful in analyzing a maintenance mechanism of gender inequality which is maintained on a coercive and volutaristic bases. The coercive bases of gender inequality concern the various mechanisms men use to maintain their patriarchal

power over women. On the other hand, the voluntaristic bases refer to aspects of gender subordination in which women contribute to their own disadvantage and devaluation. In her analysis of legitimizing and maintenance mechanism of gender inequality, Chafetz (1990, 34) proposes an integrated theoretical approach which comprises three major variables: systems of gender stratification, gender division of labor and gender social definitions. Among these, the last one has much more relevance for the present study.

Social definitions are beliefs, values, stereotypes and norms that are widely shared by societal members. There are three kinds of social definitions of importance to understanding gender system maintenance: gender ideology, gender norms, and gender stereotypes.

Gender ideologies are “belief systems that explain how and why males and females differ; specify, on these bases, different (inevitably unequal) rights, responsibilities, restrictions, and rewards to each gender; and justify negative reactions to nonconformist (Jameson 1981 as cited by Salivar 1991,13; Chafetz 1990,35; Bakhtin 1994; Diefenbach 2002).

Gender ideology plays an effective role in legitimizing inequality and perpetuating the unjust power structure of patriarchy that has constructed culture-specific justifications for the subordination of women. By co-opting women and making them instruments of their own subordination, patriarchy has penetrated virtually every society, and survived largely unchallenged for thousands of years (Diefenbach 2002).

Social norms are widely shared expectations of proper behavior for people who occupy given roles or statuses.

Gender stereotypes, on the other hand, refer to collectively shared beliefs or perceptions that concerning the difference between men and women, including value systems, instill an image of women as weak, dependent, subordinate, indecisive, emotional and submissive. Men, on the other hand, are defined as strong, independent, powerful, dominant, decisive and logical. such social definitions, ideologies and norms underlying gender inequality are expressed, justified, and perpetuated mainly through verbal arts particularly proverbs.

Hence, such kind of verbal arts that are used as ideological weapons for relegating women in east Gojam is the focus of this study.

Methodology

Design

In analyzing the data, the ethnographic design or interpretative approach which employs qualitative descriptions of a certain community’s culture’s characteristics and specific situation(s) was used. Moreover, this type of research design is used to describe in-depth the experience and attitudes of a person, family, group, community or society. As (Finnegan 1992) the interpretative approach in folklore studies presupposes the need for analyzing verbal arts within the prevailing socio-cultural context in which they operate. It also encourages researchers to consider local interpretations and values attached to oral forms. Hence, proverbs were presented and interpreted mainly based on their thematic and ideological roles vis-à-vis gender inequality in east Gojam.

Samples and Sampling Techniques

The researcher collected a total of 120 proverbs reflecting femininity (both positively and negatively). From these corpuses, however, the sample of 30 proverbs was drawn having gender polarity for the manageability and thematic relevance of the current study.

The researcher used purposive sampling technique to come up with the 30 sample proverbs having thematic reflection of being an ideological weapon for relegating women. In addition, the

researcher used snowball sampling technique to obtain informants from various members of east Gojam community based on their skills of preserving socio cultural life of the community.

Data collection instruments

For this study, the major data collection instruments were semi structured interview, focus group discussion and document analysis. The researcher collected the 120 proverbs through all the three data gathering instruments.

Interview

Ten informants (elders) from five districts were interviewed to say/write proverbs describing women. They were also asked to explain both their own and their community' perception towards women. While interviewing, the researcher has taken notes, and used a voice recorder asking the willingness of the respondents to get the data verbatim.

Focus group discussion

Focus group discussions were also carried out with key informants. They included men and women, elders and other informants locally known for their knowledge of the culture area. The discussion was held in five different districts for five different days. Each discussion consisted of five individuals. This technique helped to obtain information on widely shared norms, beliefs, practices and assumptions towards women. Discussions were also conducted to learn about local reflections on and interpretations of gender-centered verbal expressions. On top of this, this technique helped the researcher to strengthen and verify the data collected from interview sessions.

Document Analysis

To examine how proverbs in east Gojam zone serve as an ideological weapon for relegating women, the researcher went to zone's Culture and Tourism Office as well as Women's Affair Office and tried to collect the documented proverbs portraying women. After reading and observing these documents in the above two offices, the researcher analyzed the documents thematically by triangulating with other instruments.

Data collection procedure and method of Data Analysis

The first step in collecting the proverbs was taping them from the informants using tape recorder and taking notes. Secondly, the researcher transcribed proverbs from tape recorder. Third, as the data was transcribed in Amharic language, it was translated in to English language. In doing so, the researcher used communicative translation approach as it gives the chance to modify, to reproduce, to re-correct and to smooth the meanings of proverbs (Newmark, 1982). After this, the proverbs were divided into groups according to their thematic relevance. Then, the researcher analyzed and interpreted them using qualitative method of data analysis. Finally, the researcher drew conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the study.

Results and Discussion

This section of the study presents the interpretations and discussion of proverbs that were selected, categorized and coded thematically. Thus, the content of proverbs incorporated in the analysis has six major themes.

Proverbs Portraying Women as Hussy Beings

Women in this community are portrayed as hussy and nonentity creatures through oral literatures particularly proverbs. Their roles are also considered as grotty and insignificant through this genre of oral literature.

1— ሴት አግብተውሴት ቢወልዱ የት አለ ንግዳ (If you marry a woman and have a daughter from her, then where is her role?)

- 2- ሴት የእለቱን ወንድ የአመቱን (While women think for today, men think for a year)
- 3. የሴት ምክር የሾላ አጥር (Women’s advice has no place)
- 4. ሴት በዛ ጎመን ጠኔ ዛ (Too many of women spoil the cabbage)
- 5. ሴት ለሴት ወፍሬሳ ዳቄት (Women are for houses, a mill is for flour)
- 6. ሴት ከመላድ ይሻላል ማዘረድ (Aborting is better than having a female child)

As it is vividly observed above, all proverbs mentioned above, in one way or another represent women as null creatures. They have nothing to contribute to the community in general and to the family in particular. For example, proverb (1) highlights that there is nothing obtained from wives if they give birth for a female child. By contrast, men are fully prized. To substantiate this, there is another proverb saying, “women are clothes, but men are gold.” Proverb (2) has also the same implication that women do not think for long lasting and they do not have the habit of saving for tomorrow. As to proverb (3), the advice and information obtained from women is invalid and insignificant. Similarly, proverb (4) metaphorically implies that the more the women are, the less they perform activities. It states that if there are many women working together, they become causes for defacement and damage. Proverb (5) depicts that women’s role should be limited for household routines rather than participating in socio-economic and political issues outside their houses. Similarly, proverb (6) reflects the insignificance of women. It asserts aborting is better than bearing a female child.

In general, the above proverbs portray women as hussy and their roles as insignificant as compared to men. The proverbs institutionalize the position, identity, and roles of women in traditional east Gojam community. This shows that the community has drawn a negative attitude towards women.

Moreover, in this community, women are considered as glutton, rapacious, and big eaters. This backward and hastily generalized picture of women can best be illustrated through proverbs like: ሴትና ፈረስ ያቀረቡሉትን ይቀምስ (Women and horses eat everything they are given). As one of the interviewed informants reported, ‘we do not expect anything relevant from women; they are ornaments, incapable, insecure, incomplete, ineffective and inefficient without males’.

Proverbs Revealing Women as Unreliable and Unpredictable

Like other societies in Ethiopia, the community of east Gojam is under the influence of the traditional patriarchy ideology, and in fact the community has still negative attitude towards women.

Proverbs are among others through which women’s relegation could be expressed in the

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- [- ሴት ያመኑ ጉምዩ ዘገነ (He, who trusts/relies a woman, takes a handful of fog.)
- [- ማህጥርህን ከሴት ገላህን ከእሳት ጠባቂ (Women have no upright words, only crooked ones. Women conceal all they know not.)
- [- ሴትና ዶሮ ዳር ከሄዱ ቤታቸውን ይክዱ (A woman and a hen betray their home when they go to a forest)

10. ሴትና የአየር ንብረት አይታወቅም (Women and weather cannot be predicted)

11. ሴትና አወሎን ፋስ አይታወቅም (Women’s behavior is just like the behavior of a whirlwind)

As clearly seen above, the proverbs grouped under this theme depicted women as unreliable and unpredictable. For example, proverb (7) implies that women cannot be trusted not only in secrets, but also in all affairs of life in the community. In this proverb, the woman is metaphorically compared with a fog which cannot be caught in hands. Similarly, proverb (8) is used to state that women never keep secrets and they seldom tell the truth. It metaphorically compares women’s unreliability trait with fire that burns our body. The attitude about women expressed in this proverb is used by the society to keep important matters of society from women. Since women cannot keep secrets or tell the truth, they are not to be trusted. Moreover, there is a saying, ‘women are never confided to,’ to imply that women are incompetent to men, especially where important matters are concerned for they cannot keep secrets. In proverb (9), women are metaphorically compared with a hen, which can stay anywhere even if evening comes. It reflects that women do not return back to their home if they feel comfort out of their houses. They are represented as people who can easily be tamed. It gives women the trait of traitor. In proverb (10) and (11) women’s behavior is compared to the weather condition which changes within two three minutes. As weather may be hot, chilly, dry, foggy, rainy, windy, so is women’s behavior. They erode the promises they vowed; they unexpectedly become angry.

Moreover, the young part of this community relegate women saying ሴትና ጆተኒ ካለሳንቲ አይሰሩን (A woman and joteny don’t function without a coin), ሴት ገንዘብ ካየች ባለአን ትከዳለች (a woman will betray her husband with no hesitation if she receives money).

As the above two proverbs obviously reveal, the young part of the community dehumanize women giving them courtesan and mercenary trait. These proverbs are primarily used as a negative emotional reflection of male counter parts as they observe females married for financially rich and old merchants.

Proverbs conveying Women as Inferior and Infirm

In east Gojam community, women are portrayed as inferior to men with the presupposed ideology that women are weaker creatures while men are stronger creatures. Men (fathers, husbands, boys, brothers) had been practicing to be the head of the family, winners in arguments, advanced in knowledge, controllers and physically beaters over women. This ideology has ended up in social beliefs, attitudes and culture by which people believe that men are dominants and women are submissive. This in turn resulted in the creation of several proverbs portraying women’s subordination. This subordination causes otherness in the minds of women; as men deny them recognition for what they have done successfully (Gee, 2005). The perception of the community women as weakling and infirm is perpetuated through proverbs like:

12. ነፍስ በፈጣሪ ሴት በአሳዳሪዋ (A soul in God, a woman in her husband)

13. የሴት አገሯ ባሉ ማሪያዋ አመላ (A woman’s country is her husband, and her temperament is her survival)

14. ሴት ብታወቅ በወነ ድያልቅ (Whatever a woman knows a man superior)

15. ሴት ብትሚ ዳሌዋ እንጅ ጭቅላቷ አይበፋም (Learning does not broaden a woman's brain, but her posterior)
16. ከሴት ልብ የሚድ ሳንባ ይሻላል — a man's lung is better than a woman's heart)
17. ከሴት ሚድ ከጭሮ ግንድ (A man is stronger than a woman, a trunk than twig is too)
18. ሴት ብትወፍር አቆምዳ አታስር (However fat a woman is, she could not tie up a sack of cereal)
19. የሴት ጉልበቷ ምላሷ (A woman's power is her tongue)

In all of the above proverbs (12-19), Women in one way or another, received lower status in accomplishing tasks, quality, dependency, strength, intelligence and so on as compared to their men counterparts. They are portrayed as inferior to men, weakling and incapable of doing something. For example, in proverb 12 and 13, the woman is depicted as dependant on her husband even for her survival. She can only live through the good will of her husband. By contrast, in these two proverbs, the husband is compared with the Almighty God (12) and with a country (13) to show that he has all the power to determine the entire life of his wife.

Similarly, in proverb 14 and 15, the woman is represented as inferior being in her decision-making ability (14). As to this proverb (14), whatever right decisions a woman made, it is a man who verifies it. Similar to this, *Tonga* people of Zambia do not give any chance women to make decision as reflected in their proverb, “he who listens to women suffers from famine at harvest time”, to mean decisions made by women are always wrong. In proverb (15), the woman is described as creature whose mind couldn't be advanced through education and women's (girls') education does nothing on her. It depicted the woman as unintelligent as compared to her men counterpart. Proverb (16) on the other hand delineates that women are forgetful and absent minded creatures as compared to their men counterparts. This proverb also metaphorically reflects that women are weak in their psychological makeup, faint hearted, easily deceivable and dishonest.

In the rest proverbs (17, 18, 19), the woman is depicted as physically weakling creature. She is portrayed as incapable of performing tasks on time and in quality.

All the proverbs above, clearly indicate the social picture of weakness on femininity to defend and protect them from the expected danger; whatever they do, their work is useless. The proverbs above devalue women, but value men as indispensable and hosts creatures for women. From this, one can recapitulate that proverbs in east Gojam community are used as an ideological tool to perpetuate women's personalities as inferior and weakest. The people have drawn a prejudiced negative image of women, as they are inferior to men, insignificance and dependant on men in every aspect and the like. This also indicates that the community is highly affected by the traditional patriarchal ideology.

Proverbs Depicting women as Captious, Source of Danger and Problems

20. ሴት የወለደ በአመቱ ተሰደደ (Having a female child is having a danger)
21. ሴት የላከውጅብ አይፈራም (One who is sent by a woman never fears for his life.)
22. ሴት ነገር ወሻ አጥነት ያመጣኑ ከሰፈር (A dog brings bones, women troubles)
23. ሴት ያመጣውን ገር አይበርድም (A fire lit by women cannot be turned off)

In all of the above proverbs (20-23), women are portrayed as trouble makers and the cause of any kind of troubles among men or their husbands. For instance, proverb (20) describes women as cause for troubles that result in migration. Similarly, proverb (21) depicts women as major sources of conflicts in the community saying that any one sent by a woman never fears anything. Proverb (22) also draws a clear social picture of maliciousness on women comparing them with a dog which brings leftover bones and so do women of bringing gossips that lead to conflicts among the community. According to an interviewed informant, a woman is the root cause for all dangers and problems to her parents. As he asserted, first, at her puberty stage, a girl may have many boyfriends who will create conflict to avoid the intrusion of one by another in the same girl. Second, she will be pregnant for an unofficial boyfriend and he can deny accepting it; which is a serious moral, social, and economic burden to her family, as reported by another interviewed elder. Thirdly, she will be out of control by her parents and become exposed to HIV/AIDS

In general, the proverbs above describe women as being shrew and bad-natured. It is women who go to where there is trouble, who dispose to do evil, and it is women who act as evils do in catalyses as evils do. The proverbs go to the extent of comparing women with kids who knows nothing and with dogs that have no thinking ability at all.

Proverbs Representing Women as Cowardice

24. የ ሴት ሞት በሞጅቷ (A woman dies in her house)

25. ሴትና ዶሮ አታመሻ በጓሮ (A female and a hen should not stay out-door during night)

26. ሴት ደብ ትፈራለች አጥር ትዘላለች (A woman is afraid of a hyena, but jumps a fence)

In all the above proverbs, women are portrayed as cowardice beings. They are depicted as timorous, timid and faint- hearted. Proverb (24) for example, indicates that women cannot go outside of their houses due to their cowardliness. In the same analogy, proverb (25) shows that women cannot go out even around their in view of their lack of power to protect self. To show their fear, women are compared with a hen, which usually gets home at 11:00 o'clock. This proverb draws the clear social picture of timorous and weakness on women to defend and protect them from the expected danger that they might encounter if they stay outdoor. Those women who stay outdoor deviating such the practical social situations are considered as prostitutes or adulterous. Because of their long lived traditional practice and their biased orientation of gender polarity, people in east Gojam do not allow their female children or their wives to go outside at night or the male ones accompany them (thinking that the males are safe guards to females even the latter are younger than the former).

Proverb (26), on the other hand, states that women are faint- hearted on the fierce animals, but there is nothing to block them to scam/escape from those fierce animals.

This indicated that east Gojam community has developed a long-lived backward perception that women cowardice and craven creatures. However, the fact is that there are factual evidences, which give lessons how women defended for their country as bravely as men did. The best memorial is the active involvement of women when Italy invaded their country Ethiopia. Both sexes have equal biological organ that stimulates either fear or audacity.

Proverbs Portraying Women as people deserving ill-treatments

Among negative images that emerge from east Gojam proverbs is that of women as people who deserve ill- treatments and kicking. In this community, women especially wives, are portrayed as people who always need to be beaten by their husbands. Women are beaten as a matter of course

for mistakes in their work or apparent flirtations with other men. As the proverb says: ‘Women and Donkeys need the stick’ (Levine, 1965:79). This image of women is verified by the proverbs below:

27. ሴትና አህያ በዳላ (Women and donkeys deserve ill-treatment through kicking)

28. ሴትና በቅሎ ቢያጠፍም ባያጠፍም አርብ አርብ መግረፍ አለባቸው (a wife and a femoral mule should be flagellated every Friday)

29. ሴትና ካሴት ጥፊ ይወዳሉ (Women and cassettes deserve smack)

30. ሴትና በቅሎ አንደገሪዋ ነው (Women and mules are as to their persecutors)

In the above proverbs, women (wives) are clearly depicted as people who have desires to be beaten by men (husbands). Proverb (27) tells us wives need to be beaten. Surprisingly, women (wives) are made similar with donkeys to show that both women and donkeys do not work unless they are beaten. It states that women do not properly perform their tasks unless they are beaten. As to one of the interviewee, wives in this community do not consider their husbands as males unless they are kicked. Proverb (28) reflects that a wife has to be punished whether or not she does faults. This proverb draws a clear social picture on women of being persons who always need to receive men’s (husbands) pressure through kicking. Proverb (29) also highlights the same analogy. (Proverb 30) on the other hand, reflects that women should be mould or shaped through beating as mules are kicked by its owner to behave accordingly.

This delineates that the society has drawn a negative image on women that they deserve ill-treatment. Women (wives) are depicted as people who cannot work properly unless they are beaten. This is another effect of long-lived traditional patriarchal ideology.

Conclusion

Societies in various corners of the world marginalized females by totally vesting socio-political and economic power to masculinity (Bruyn and France (2001). Thus, through examining the proverbs of a community, it is possible to show the attitude of the society towards women, the gender related ideologies, norms, and stereotypes underlying women’ relegation. East Gojam community is no exception.

The findings of the study therefore reveal that proverbs in east Gojam serve as ideological weapon to relegate women drawing different negative pictures. In the analyzed sample proverbs, women are portrayed as hussy beings, unreliable and unpredictable, infirm, captious, deserving ill-treatments, source of danger and problems.

The implication is that the community has given men power to control the socio-cultural and economic structures of its members. This power has been used in the image formation among the community members. Women’s images seem to emanate from the socio-cultural roles and their position in the community. The images associated with women are a reflection of established societal patterns of behaviors expected of women. This shows that the influences of patriarchal ideology on women are still highly prevalent in the community.

Therefore, these genres of oral literature emerge as an ideological tool, which the community uses to regulate roles and behaviors of its members, and they are used to make gender inequalities and look natural and acceptable to the entire member and to perpetuate them look unchangeable throughout the life of the community.

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