

Women in Proverbs: A Comparative Study in French and Sinhala

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Abstract

Women are a subject on which a number of proverbs are found in various languages. The present study examines the representation of women in two cultures. Most proverbs in Sinhala and French languages focus on traditional roles such as the mother, or the daughter. Certain characteristics such as beauty, chastity and intelligence or the lack of them are highlighted and often criticized. A feature that stands out in both languages is the comparison of the woman with men, species of animals and other objects. These objects or animals used in comparisons differ in the two languages. Cultural elements add uniqueness to proverbs even when the moral expressed remain the same. It is clearly seen in Sinhala and French proverbs that the traditional wisdom scrutinizes every aspect of a woman's life and the sexist view of the patriarchy continues to humiliate the woman.

Keywords: proverbs, women, oral tradition, culture

"Never marry a woman with big feet" advises a Sena proverb from Malawi and Mozambique. In English, we hear proverbs like "a woman and a ship ever want mending" or "a woman, a dog and a walnut tree, the more you beat them the better they be." Proverbs on woman are heard over and over in many languages. The Sena proverb is the chosen title of a proverb collection compiled by Mineke Schipper. As the title suggests, the book contains proverbs on women collected from different languages across the world. Proverbs are known for their wisdom. It is the wisdom of earlier generations brought to the present through the oral tradition. Proverbs are generally described as witty but, traditional: "a proverb is a short (...) sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form..." (Mieder, 1993, p.24). Proverbs refer not just to humans, and animals, but to various other subjects, nature, weather, time, money to name a few. Proverbs on women are not rare and they examine almost every aspect of their lives. Her place in the family as a wife or a daughter, or qualities such as beauty, or intelligence or the lack of these becomes a source of a proverb. These proverbs are most often noted for their harsh critical tone as seen in the examples given above. Some evoke humour. Some compare with men or other species of animals.

Traditional wisdom on women seen in proverbs makes an interesting study. Allan Ray explains, proverbs are words of men, the husband and the patriarchy. (1989, p. xii) Proverbs such as "never marry a woman with big feet" is a case in point. In this particular proverb, a physical characteristic, big feet are interpreted as a negative omen or a possible threat to the man; hence the advice, not to marry a woman with big feet. The present paper examines proverbs on women in two languages, Sinhala, spoken by the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka and French proverbs from France. In these two languages, a number of proverbs on women are found. The study focuses on the women's "image" created by highlighting negative and positive aspects or strengths and weaknesses of women as seen in proverbs. By comparing proverbs of the two cultures, the study will bring to light similarities and differences in the representation of women in Sinhala and French proverbs.

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French and Sinhala proverbs cited in the paper are translated into English by the researcher to facilitate the comparative study. A literal translation is provided in parenthesis. The moral, the metaphors and other relevant aspects are discussed in detail in the analysis. Over hundred proverbs in both Sinhala and French are chosen from selected proverb collections. These are given in the reference list. Proverbs are divided into several categories. In most proverbs the woman is presented as a mother, a daughter or a wife, focusing on the roles she plays in the family. These are examined in the first category titled “women and family”. The second category looks at comparisons, an interesting aspect of the study. Under the heading “women and men” comparisons between women and men and also other species of flora and fauna are analyzed. The third category examines personality and physical traits of women seen in proverbs. These are grouped as “vices and virtues”. In this third category too, a number of comparisons are found. As these are comparisons with inanimate objects, like wine and fire, they are not included in the second category.

1. Women and family

1.1 Mother

The woman's role in the family as the mother takes precedence. A woman is defined first and foremost as a mother. Simon de Beauvoir commences her phenomenal study on women *The Second Sex* defining the woman as a womb. “Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary: she is a female.” (1993, p. 3) In Sinhala proverbs, women as mothers are much appreciated. In several proverbs the bond between the mother and child is brought to attention. The mother that breast feeds her child is an image that stands out.

- wusud fmjQ rka lsβu;la fjkak we:s (one remembers the golden milk fed by the mother)
- lsβ ri okafkda uō w=kkafkda (one who knows the taste of milk, knows the mother)
- rka lsβ lg .E ujj;a kskaojls (it is an insult to the mother who fed golden milk)
- orejd wevQ fldg” ujj lsβ trkafka (it's when the child cries that the mother gets milk)
- uek,o mqf;a lsβ ykafka ux kqUg@ (did I measure the milk that I gave to you?)

In two of the above examples, the mother's milk is called rka which means gold. This particular term could have been chosen to indicate the value of the mother's milk that is precious and priceless. Another proverb associates the taste of milk with the image of the mother. A child that has been breast fed by the mother grows to be a better person. The proverbs also refer to the popular belief that the mother's blood turns in to milk when she hears the cries of her infant. (Alawattage, 1995, p.106) These proverbs emphasize the importance of breast feeding in a child's life and how it strengthens the relationship between the mother and the child.

Further, the absence of the mother is seen as a great cause of pain and misery. Particularly the hunger or the ability to satisfy it depends largely on the mother. In the family, it is seen in these proverbs that only the mother possesses the ability to satisfy the hunger of her children. It is interesting to note that the loss of the mother explains as the cause of all pain, comparable to none.

- wusud ke:s wmg nv.sks fokak tmd (for us who don't have a mother, don't give hunger)
- ylg uq, ;uhs je¥ uj ke:s üu (the reason for pain is the loss of birth mother)
- wkqka o'mq n;a nv fkdmsfrhs wusfus lsjsj” (mother, rice given by others don't satisfy hunger)

Not all proverbs praise the mother. It is accepted in the society that the mother carries the responsibility of raising the children to be good citizens than the father. Therefore, it is the mother who is held accountable for the mistakes made by her children. (Alawattage, 1995, p.106) Her situation is compared to that of the sky. A variant of the same proverb compares the mother to the earth. The sky is blamed for any form of weather. Similarly, the mother too is never free from accusations, condemnations or criticism. Another proverb, popular and often used, describes how a prediction is asked about how to catch the thief from the thief's mother. The sarcasm in the proverb is well noted. The mother portrayed as the most loyal person to the thief, would not betray her own child, though the child has become a thief.

- wyig;a je¥ ujj;a ksoyila ke:s” (the sky and the mother who gave birth, are not free)
- je¥ ujj;a uy fmd<djj;a ksjkla kE (the birth mother and the earth have no peace)
- fmak weyqfō fydrdf.a wiudf.kao? (did you ask for a prediction from the thief's mother?)

In the following proverb, it is explained that the one who hurts his or her own mother is considered ruthless and monstrous. The image of biting the mother's breast, the breast that feeds the child is used to show the gravity of a crime which is unforgivable. It is not expected from the same person to show mercy.

- wusudf.a ;kh IE tld w,a,mq j;af;a l=l=,a megjqka b;=re lrhs o?(the one who bit the mother's breast, would he spare the neighbor's chicks?)

The close relationship between the mother and the child, or in particular the mother that breast feeds her child portrayed in the Sinhala proverbs does not reflect in French proverbs to the same extent. French proverbs offer different views. For example, the following proverb compares the mother's love to the spring which indicates that it remains eternal.

- L'amour d'une mère est toujours dans son printemps (the mother's love is always in its spring)
- Le cœur d'une mère est le chef d'œuvre de l'amour (the heart of a mother is the masterpiece of love)
- Tendresse maternelle toujours se renouvelle (maternal tenderness always renews)

Though the present study examines the role of the mother in proverbs, it will be interesting to discover what proverbs say about the father. Two following Sinhala proverbs describe the father's affection or the lack of it. In one proverb it is compared to an occasional rain fall indicating inconsistency and in another compared to a mother, a father is seen less affectionate towards his children. The French proverb points to a different aspect which is the father as the provider. It could be concluded that a mother remains tender and forgiving while a father, stern but provides financial stability for the family.

- mshdf.a fifkfya wl,g jysk jeys jdf.a" (a father's affection is like occasional rain fall)
- mshkaf.a <hg jvd ujqkaf.a <h fudf,dla " (mothers' heart is more soft than fathers' heart)
- Un père est un banquier donné par la nature (a father is a bank given by nature)

1.2 Daughter

A daughter in a family is likely to be a burden than a blessing. The woman as a daughter depends on her family and the family must provide for her more than for a son. These are some of the issues pointed out in the proverbs bellow.

- Aux gars on promet, aux filles on donne (to the boys we promise, to the daughters we give)
- Qui a des filles est toujours berger (who has daughters is always a shepherd)
- La fille n'est que pour enrichir les étrangères (the daughter is only to make strangers rich)
- Si tu maries bien ta fille, tu gagnes un fils ; si tu maries mal, tu perds ta fille (if you marry your daughter well, you earn a son; if you marry her bad, you lose your daughter)
- Marie ton fils quand tu voudras et ta fille quand tu pourras (marry your son when you want and your daughter when you can)

These proverbs point to negative aspects of having a daughter including financial difficulties. A family with a daughter must provide for her whereas the family the daughter marries into, benefits financially. A daughter's life revolves around a single event which is the marriage. Proverbs, in which daughters are compared with sons, highlight several differences. A daughter's marriage is seen as an opportunity to earn a son. Another difference concerning the marriage of a son and a daughter is, that it is considered wise to marry a daughter when the family can, again referring to financial situation. A son must be married when the family wants. It is understood that for a son the age or the money does not matter as much.

A Sinhala proverb that makes a comparison between the son and the daughter points out attributes each must possess. For a daughter, it is the physical appearance, beauty. The proverb describes that the son must have a 'mouth' (lg), meaning skills and intelligence, an apparent contrast in the qualities expected from them; skilled in speech favoring a career achievement for a son and a daughter's beauty leading to the ultimate goal, securing an eligible life partner.

– lg we;s mq;aa rej we;s yj;a ,nkaak TskE " (one must have a daughter with beauty and a son with eloquent speech)

As far as the destiny of young girls are concerned, the following French proverb explains, their choices are limited to either marriage or convent. In both Sinhala and French proverbs, marriage is highlighted as the primary concern for young girls.

– Il faut aux filles des hommes ou des murailles (Girls must be given men or walls)

1.3 Mother-in-law

Apart from the mother and the daughter, the mother-in-law is a role that attracts attention. Again, compared to the father-in-law, the mother-in-law is presented as a less amiable person. Unlike the father-in-law, she does not love both the son-in-law or the daughter-in-law. The animosity between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law surpasses time and geographical barriers.

– Un beau-père aime son gendre, aime sa bru ; une belle mère aime son gendre, n'aime pas sa bru (a father-in-law loves his son-in-law, loves his daughter-in-law; a mother-in-law loves her son-in-law, doesn't love her daughter-in-law)

Most of the Sinhala proverbs that focus on the role of the mother-in-law, criticize her as seen in the following examples. The mother-in-law's love or affection, particularly towards her in-laws is used as a comparison to show that it is doubtful and unreal. This proverb is usually said in a scornful way. Further the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law are represented as two quarrelsome people. On the contrary, her relationship with the son-in-law appears more favorable. He is treated like a prince, but only for a short time. In brief, her role as the mother-in-law is regarded as cruel and unforgiving.

- kekaousdf.a wдорh jf.ahs (like the love of the mother-in-law)
- kekaousdf.a f.or wjPkus" (the home of the mother-in-law is dangerous)
- kekaousuhs f,a,shs jf.hs (like the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law)
- w;a msg kekaodg nEkd iqr l=ufrla" (when the son-in-law is new, he is like a prince to the mother-in-law)

1.4 Stepmother

Another role that presents the woman in a negative manner is that of the stepmother. Both proverbs given below criticize her miserliness. For example she is unwilling to give away porridge even when it's in abundance and she makes smaller oilcakes to increase the quantity. As the second wife of the father, and step mother to the children her place or her role in the family is complicated and she is often treated with contempt as reflected in proverbs.

- yekao l=viud wf;a ki uQo le| jqk;a m,la ke;s" (if the stepmother has the spoon, and the sea becomes porridge, it doesn't matter)
- l+viu;a wú,a,d lejqus fmdä l<d jf.hs (the stepmother comes and makes the oilcakes smaller)

1.5 Barren women

The proverbs examined above praise the women who give birth to children and become mothers. However, there are those who are sterile and unable to have children. The society believes, particularly in the old days, in a childless marriage, the wife as the person to blame and a barren woman is held in disdain. (Munasinghe, 2004, p. 161) As the Sinhala proverbs below explain, a sterile woman is not expected to know the pain of child birth nor is she capable of caring for children. The fact that a woman is biologically unable to give birth is taken as proof of her inability to care for children.

- j| .EKsf.a orefifka jf.hs (like the sterile woman's affection for children)
- j| .EKs m%ijfha fjsokdj oks;ao (does a sterile woman know the labor pain?)

As seen in the proverbs above, certain roles such as the mother are given more consideration. This is evident especially in the Sinhala proverbs. It could be argued that in the Asian cultures, where the society still upholds traditional values, the role of the mother is respected to a greater extent. However it is the motherhood that is praised. The society looks down on the woman who is unable to fulfill her obligation. In French proverbs, it is surprising to find out a daughter represented as a burden more than in Sinhala proverbs. The fact that a daughter has to be protected and provided for more than a son is concept accepted in the western culture as well.

2. Women and men

In the proverbs selected for the present study, comparisons between men and women are found. However it must be mentioned that the terms 'woman' and 'man' in proverbs are used differently. 'Man' speaks for the humans in general whereas the 'woman' only for the female gender. Similar examples are found in French and also in Sinhala.

- Sous la peau de l'homme plusieurs bêtes ont ombre (under the skin of the man several beasts take shelter)
- L'homme ne vit pas seulement de pain (the man does not live only on bread)
- .fyka jegqk ñksyg f.dkd wekakd jf.hs (like the bull hitting the man who fell from a tree)

Proverbs in which women and men are compared, it is the male superiority that dominates. This is displayed through animal imagery. Two examples, one in French and another in Sinhala show that the female is expected to obey the male. The French proverb uses the animal image of a hen and a cock while in Sinhala a female and a male bat.

- Le ménage va mal quand la poule chante plus haut que le coq (when the hen sings higher than the cock, there are problems in the household)
 - jjq,df.a f.g wdmq jeú,sh;a t,a,' isákak `kÆ (the female bat that came to the bat's house must stay suspended)
- Another French proverb highlights a significant difference between the man and the woman exploiting word and fact.
- Les paroles sont femelles et les faits mâles (speech is female and facts are male)

In French, as the speakers of the language learn, all objects animate and inanimate are divided in to the two genders, masculine and feminine. The French word 'parole' (from 'parler' to speak) is feminine while the word for facts 'faits' (coming from the verb 'faire' to do) masculine. The grammatical rule exploited to the man's advantage, significantly undermines the woman's ability limiting it to words. It's the man who accomplishes acts or deeds.

As explained in *Dictionnaire de Proverbes et Dictions*, the following proverb is an extreme case of misogyny. (1989, p.45) A woman is never admitted as an equal of the man; the man always worth more.

- L'homme de paille vaut une femme d'or (a man of hay merits a woman of gold)

2.1 Animal comparisons

Apart from comparisons made with men, similarities are outlined between animal behavior and that of the woman. In the following French proverbs, the dog, the horse, and the cow are taken as examples. Proverbs in which the woman is compared with other elements, such as wine and fire will be examined under, virtues and vices. The present category includes comparisons mainly with animals.

- A toute heure chien pisse et femme pleure (a dog pees and a woman cries all the time)
- Femme qui gagne et poule qui pond, ce n'est que bruit dans la maison (a woman who earns and a hen that lays eggs only means noise in the house)

It is explained that the woman cries all the time just like a dog that pees. Her crying is viewed as an undesirable and repulsive trait. Another French proverb points to the similarity between a woman that earns and a hen that lays eggs; they both make a lot of noise in the house. A woman that earns is more independent therefore, likely to disregard the man of the house, leading to conflicts and arguments. The proverb does not complement the woman on her achievement rather it presents the working woman as a source of difficulty.

- Des femmes et des chevaux il n'y en a point sans défaut (women and horses, there isn't one without faults)
- Belle femme, mauvaise tête, bonne mule, mauvaise bête (pretty woman, bad head, good mule, bad animal)
- Ne prends jamais femme chez un cafetier, Ni une vache un meunier (never take a woman to a cafe, and a cow to a mill)

A comparison drawn between horses and women point out that they are not without faults. Though compared to an elegant and powerful animal, the proverb stresses on a negative aspect. Another comparison, a mule and a woman describes the rapport between 'bad head' and the 'bad animal.' A beautiful woman does not possess intelligence or a "good head" and intelligence makes her "bad animal". In other words, to be a "good animal" a "bad head" is required. Another point highlighted in these proverbs is the extravagant spending nature of the woman compared to a cow taken to a mill.

Animals aside, fruits such as pear and melon are used in comparison. It is understood that a woman free of rumor is held in esteem. The similarity between a melon and a woman could be explained by the fact that from outward appearance they are barely understood. A melon till its cut open, the quality of fruit is difficult to judge. A woman too till she is acquainted with, her character cannot be determined. The comparison between omelets and eggs brings to attention the physical abuse aimed at women. The proverbial wisdom condones a crime which is punishable by the law today.

- Paires et femmes sans rumeur, sont en prix et grand honneur (pears and women without rumors are in demand and a great honor)
- Femme et melon à peine les connaît-on (women and melons, we hardly know them)
- Les femmes sont comme les omelettes, elles ne sont jamais assez battues (women are like omelets, they are never beaten enough)

In Sinhala proverbs too, comparisons between women and other animals are found. However, they emphasize on different animals and different qualities as seen in the examples below. It is advised not to trust a woman of short height and a small termite mound. Even in a small termite mound, a dangerous reptile could take refuge. Therefore, though it appears harmless, it could be dangerous. As far as a woman is concerned, the proverb reminds that appearances could be deceptive. The comparison between the tiger and the woman though humorous, portrays the woman as dangerous and the man is pitied as a victim caught between two predators. One similarity seen between the French and the Sinhala proverbs is the image of a hen that lays eggs. In the Sinhala proverb, the hen that screams could be interpreted as a woman who boasts loudly about her achievements.

- fldg .Ekshs ña yqUyhs úYajdi lrkak tmd (never trust a short woman and a small termite mound)
- me,g .shdu fldáhg nh" f.orwdju .Eksg nh" (when the man goes to the house he is scared of the wife, when he goes to the field, scared of the tiger)
- i;a;r Þmq lsls<shla jf.a fudr.dkjd (screaming like a hen that laid eggs)

These comparisons evoke humor in most proverbs. However, they don't flatter the women for each comparison attacks a quality considered unworthy. What the study brings to attention is the fact that in French and in Sinhala, proverbs are based on different characteristics such as crying, fear, intelligence and physical traits such as height. Whatever the object or the animal compared to, it's the negative aspect that is given prominence. Though compared to a horse, an elegant and powerful animal the moral lies on the fact that no creature is not without fault, including the woman. In comparison to men, as seen in both French and Sinhala, it's the man that conquers over the woman. However, in certain proverbs, positives qualities are found. These are discussed in the following category.

3. Virtues and vices

What virtues are talked about in the proverbs? In the case of the mother, her love and affection, her especial bond with her children are highly regarded and they have already been examined. Under this heading, virtues and vices noted in women in general are selected.

3.1 Beauty and chastity

The positive qualities found in proverbs include beauty, honesty and intelligence. However, as seen before, though a positive quality is acknowledged, it is compromised by associating it with another for example, beauty and chastity.

- Il y a peu de femmes dont le mérite dure plus de la beauté (there are a few women whose virtue lasts more than the beauty)

- Une femme honnête et jolie est deux fois honnête (a woman honest and pretty is two times honest)
- Belle femme a peine à rester chaste (beautiful woman scarcely stay chaste)
- La chasteté est le lys des vertus (chastity is the lily of virtues)

Though beauty remains a definite virtue, it alone does not amount to much appreciation. French proverbs associate beauty with honesty and chastity. A woman whose honesty matches her beauty earns more praise. However, beauty and chastity are opposing forces. In French, it is said that a beautiful woman scarcely stay chaste. Similarly in the Sinhala proverbs, a woman without beauty is ironically taken as a model for chastity. Without physical beauty she is unable to seduce a man. Further, among virtues chastity holds the foremost place. In Sinhala proverbs, the woman's conduct is judged her best jewel. A distinct feature of the Sinhala culture is brought to attention in these proverbs, the caste. In this particular proverb, a woman from a lower caste benefits if blessed with beauty. On account of her looks, it will be possible for her to marry well, very likely in to a higher caste.

- rej ke:s ia:s%hf.A m:s j; jf.hs (like the chastity of the woman without beauty)
- ia:S%kaf.a wdNrKh l,alsβhdj (jewel of a woman is her conduct)
- wvq l=f,a jqK:a rej we:aki fyd|'' (even from a lower caste, it's better to be beautiful)

3.2 Trust/distrust and honesty/dishonesty

Among other virtues, trust is also talked about in the Sinhala proverbs but mostly distrust as a vice. The only woman to be trusted, as advised in the proverbs, is the unborn woman. On the subject of trust, the woman is compared to the sky to emphasize her unpredictability. In a previous comparison, where the mother was compared to the sky, they were both presented as victims, as they are constantly accused, in the case of the mother, of her children's behavior and as for the sky, weather changes. Using the same comparison, in the present proverb, the woman and the sky are criticized for their unpredictably and untrustworthiness.

- kQmka .eyeKsh úYajdi lrkak mq¿jka'' (the unborn woman can be trusted)
- wyi;a .eyeksh;a .ek úiajdih :shkak tmd (don't trust the woman and the sky)

Among vices talked about in French, several proverbs are found in which the woman's ability or rather her inability to give advice is criticized. As seen in the proverbs bellow, women always offer advice, though the advice is not reliable or credible: hence the comparisons with a Sunday without sun and a red morning.

- Le rouge matin et le conseil féminin ne sont pas à croire (the red morning and female advice are not to be believed)
- Pas de samedi sans soleil, ni de femme sans conseil (no Sunday without sun, neither a woman without advice)

In another French proverb, it is said that the wise choice is to take the first advice of a woman. In *Dictionnaire de Proverbes et Diction*, this particular proverb is described as "éloge ironique de l'intuition féminine", an ironical complement that mocks the feminine intuition. (1989, p.45)

- Prends le premier conseil de la femme non le second (take the first advice of the woman, not the second)

Vices are more dominant in the proverbs, as they point to more negative aspects. Among them, woman is portrayed as difficult, easily tempted and with ulterior motives.

- Femme tentée et femme vaincue, c'est tout un (woman tempted and woman vanquished, it's the same)
- Les femmes ont toujours quelques arrière-pensées (women always have a few ulterior motives)
- La femme est un certain animal difficile à connaître (the woman is a certain animal difficult to know)

Among other proverbs categorized under this heading, a few more are added here though they are compared with other elements. These proverbs similar to the ones compared to animals, focus mostly on negative characteristics. A woman is compared to wine with the object of exposing the fact that as in the previous case of the horse, everything has its drawbacks. Woman is also included among five evils alongside fire, mass, wind and the sea, as a destructive force. Moreover, a woman without reason is looked at as disastrous as rain or fire.

- Femme et vin ont leur venin (women and wine have their setbacks)
- Femme, feu, messe, vent et mer, font cinq maux de grand amer (woman, fire, mass, wind and sea make the five great bitter evils)

- Fumée, pluie et femme sans raison, chassent l'homme de sa maison (smoke, rain and woman without reason chase the man from his house)

3.3 Intelligence

Among virtues intelligence is not a quality sought after in a woman. As indicated in the French proverbs, a woman speaking Latin, a sign of education in the old days, is not expected to live well similar to a child given wine. In Sinhala as well, woman is portrayed as a person of low intelligence. The Sinhala proverb compares the woman's brain to that of a spoon's handle to ridicule her power of intelligence.

- *Enfant nourri de vin, femme parle latin, rarement font bonne fin* (child fed on wine, woman speaking Latin rarely makes a happy ending)
- *La femme ne doit pas apporter de tête en ménage* (the woman must not bring her head to the marriage)
- *.Ekq fudf<a ye|s ñg os.* (the length of the woman's brain is equal to that of spoon's handle)

Another way to emphasize low female intelligence is by highlighting another fault of which the woman is constantly accused, gossiping. The following proverbs have in common the image of woman talking incessantly. Therefore men are advised to choose a woman by listening to her rather than looking at her physical beauty. In the Sinhala proverb, it is explained that when the rural women go to the well to get water, they gather in number and gossip. The pots remain dry for they have not been filled with water.

- *Qui femme a, noise a* (where the woman is, there isn't silence)
- *Choisissez votre femme par l'oreille bien plus que par les yeux* (chooses your woman by ear rather than your eyes)
- *.eyeKqka fndafjs l< f.ä fjsf,a* (women gather around the well, the pots become dry)

3.4 Traitor

Woman as a traitor is another negative quality attributed to her. Examples are found in both languages. The Sinhala proverb refers to the story of the king Maname in which the wife betrays her husband eventually leading to his death (Dhammabandu, 1959, p.230).

- *si la traîtresse que soit la mer, plus traîtresses les femmes* (if the traitor is the sea, women are more traitorous)
- *ug;a jeäh wkqjK li ifida l<d* (the queen has done more foolish deeds than I have)

3.5 Superstition

In the Sinhala culture, 'evil mouth' (also evil eye) is a superstitious concept though believed by many. An individual or in this case a woman with an evil mouth is said to be capable of producing harmful effect on others simply by saying words. "Those generally considered to be endowed with the sinister faculty of possessing the evil-eye or mouth could by one glance or one word of mouth 'create' *vas*." (Rathnapala, 1991, p, 93) *Vas* or *baha* (ny) is interpreted as evil. In the following proverb, when the woman with evil mouth raises a hen, it crows. The irony is that it's the cock that crows. A hen that crows is considered a bad omen.

- *Ig ny we;s .Eks we;s lrk lsls<s;a y~,kjd* (the hen raised by a woman with evil mouth, crows)

One positive aspect is the female personification of fortune *Ys%hd ldk;dj*, similar to lady luck in English. The proverb uses this personification to show the opposite qualities are not matched.

- *ld,lKaKshdg Ys%hd ldk;dj flfia .e,fmao* (how to match a lazy person with a fortunate person)

The comparative study of Sinhala and French proverbs brings to attention several interesting facts. The analysis on the representation on women apart, proverbs reveals how different cultural elements are exploited to convey a message. In Sinhala proverbs, references are made to specific cultural aspects. For example, a woman in villages going to the well to bring water is still seen today. Reference to the caste system is a noticeable feature in Sinhala proverbs. "South Asia is a region of caste-ridden societies, and caste as well as other kinds of ethnic slurs are innumerable." (Eds. Mills, Clause and Diamond, 2003, p.491) The caste system in Sri Lanka has been firmly established for a very long period of time. Unlike in India where it is associated with religion, in Sri Lanka it is based mainly on professions. (Vitharana, 2014, p.104-5) Though in the proverbs chosen for the study, a particular caste has not been named, in certain proverbs it is clearly stated. "The *Rodiya*, the lowest caste, takes precedence by the numerical strength of references made to them". (Rathnapala, 1991, p.136-37). For example, in the proverb *frdähf.a mef,a n,a,ka ysÖ kE* (in the hut of the *radi*, there are plenty of dogs), *radi* or *radiya* refers to the lowest caste in the system.

For a long period of time, those who belong to this caste were segregated from the rest of the society. (Vitharana, 2014, p.103-4). Among other images, the proverb that derives from the story of King Maname and superstitious elements such as the concept of evil mouth require knowledge of the Sinhala culture to understand the wisdom expressed in them.

As far as French proverbs are concerned, repeated references to wine, animals such as the horse, fruits (pears), and Latin language stand out. These are more specific to the French culture. With regard to animal imagery, proverbs of the two languages capitalize on different animals. The only exception seen in this study focuses on the hen laying eggs. Though different animal images were used, as in the case of the bat in the Sinhala proverb and the cock/hen in the French, the message conveyed remains the same; the dominance of the male animal compared to the female. In the comparisons made in the proverbs, various geographical and cultural elements are brought out. The Russian linguist G. L. Permyakov explains "whatever differences there is between these proverbs, resides in the ethnic, geographical and other specific features, in their imagery, in local realia and concepts". (1979, p. 166) These elements give proverbs of a certain culture or a country its uniqueness.

Proverb definitions often include the terms wisdom, and tradition. To become a proverb, age and currency, two aspects of traditionality must be tested, "piece of created wisdom would have to be taken over by others and be used over a period of time to be considered a bona fide proverb." (Mieder, 2004, p.5) Proverbs are the wisdom of the patriarchy. Alan Rey states that the society that produces proverbs is rural, pre-capitalist and sedentary, a society that cultivates, raises cattle, hates the rich and criticizes women. (1989, p. xvii) The same applies to the Sinhala culture; it's the villagers who have created proverbs. (Karunaratne, 1960, p. xi) In the African culture, proverbs are a privilege of old men and part of the male conversations from which women are excluded (Ugochukwu, 1994, p. 594) The wisdom of the proverb, prescribed and repeated closely connected to the mentality of its creator and first users. (Suzzoni, 1989, p.3)

The wisdom offered by these proverbs is conservative, harshly judging every aspect of a woman's life according to the popular norms set by the patriarchy. A majority of proverbs examined in the paper in both languages can be called misogynous or sexist. Women restricted to family and children, are deprived of profession, education and interests outside the home. (...) if women are being defined, for example as wives and mothers to the exclusion of their work outside the home; if they are being judged by their sexual attractiveness to the exclusion of their moral and intellectual qualities; if they are being defined as inferior to men; then they are not receiving fair representation in society. (Marshment, 1997, p.126)

A similarity seen in both Sinhala and French proverbs is that though the physical attractiveness is appreciated and considered essential for a woman, it is contested in the name of chastity. It appears that the combination of beauty and chastity are an opposing pair of qualities, rarely found in women. In ancient Sinhala literature, nourished by Buddhist doctrine, women who were brought up according to "Buddhist virtues such as women such as piety, chastity, benevolence, modesty, fidelity, economy, diligence, tenderness, discipline, sagacity and courage, were glorified (...)" (Munasighe, 2004, p.130). As seen in Sinhala and French proverbs, intelligence in a woman is often ridiculed. Intelligence for a woman is of little consequence as she is expected to obey.

French and Sinhala proverbs resemble in their criticism on vices and their appreciation on virtues. As highlighted in the study, the criticism on negative qualities dominates. The similarities found in the proverbs of two different and distant cultures, one in the Western Europe and the other in South Asia are surprising. The traditional wisdom in proverbs reinforces the superiority of the man established in the society and, it doesn't help in the women's struggle against discrimination and harassment. Proverbs are a formidable tool exploited in oral speech. If used to manipulate people, it can be a "dangerous weapon as expression of stereotypical invectives or unfounded generalizations." (Mieder, 1993, p. x)

As the proverbs say "women are a necessary evil". The fact that there are many proverbs found on women proves that they are "necessary", though discredited and disregarded. Mieder writes "every proverb touches on women contains a severe negation of the value in society." (1993, p. 65) As he further explains, wisdom expressed and venerated in these proverbs will not disappear overnight. It will take a very long time to change the traditional antifeminist views found in proverbs.

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