

# The Negative Representation of Women in the Language of Awngi Proverbs

**Tsegaye Abie Gebeyehu**

Lecturer at Wachemo University, College of Social Science and Humanities,  
Department of English Language and Literature, Hosanna, Ethiopia.

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**ABSTRACT:** : This research recognizes the negative depiction of women in the cultural, economic, social and political aspects in Awngi proverbs; it shows gender related messages, power relations and social control embedded in them. Proverbs were collected by using focus group discussion and documents analysis. The proverbs collected from documents were triangulated with the information about the meanings and implications of the proverbs from focus group discussions. Purposive sampling technique was applied. Data was analyzed qualitatively after which inferences and conclusions were arrived at. The result of this study shows that proverbs depict the negative representation of women as incapable in household activities and poor home management, inferior in holding power and authority, stubborn, destructive and dangerous and unintelligent, passive, talkative and lazy creatures. Women are also depicted as they have greedy and selfish behavior.

**Key Words:**

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the study

Proverbs, in Africa, are repositories of social and cultural wisdom and in many African cultures a feeling for language, imagery and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly from proverbs (Finnegan, 1970). This shows that proverbs are special in expressing the images of a society. Proverbs show the identity of its people and equally reflect the strong and weak sides of any society (Buchanan (1965) as cited in Sena, 2008).

Schipper (2010) asserts that the basic themes of proverbs are derived from elementary human experience and activities. Through the body human beings express how we feel and who we are at least who we are allowed to be in the midst of the social pressure we all suffer to a larger or smaller extent in the cultural context we live in. He further argues, however, even in reference to body how gender identity comes in, and how patriarchy plays its role can be clearly observed in the Dutch proverb: *"A good woman goes without head"* (Schipper, 2010). What this Dutch proverb conveys is to have a head implies to have brains, to be intelligent, to have one's own will; but a woman is not expected to be a rational creature.

Balogun, (2005) as cited in TaringaB, (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).

The Awi society like other ethnic groups of Ethiopia has different traditions, values, socio-cultural realities, etc which are described in the language of proverbs. In the same manner, *Berhanu (1995)* puts that oral literature in the Awi community serves to keep their values, beliefs and cultural continuity, to describe their environment and world views and to know their historical background, etc. Women in Awi society like other women in the world have both positive and negative outlooks in the eyes of their counterparts and the society as a whole. Therefore, the researcher investigates and analyzes the negative representation of women in the language of Awngi proverbs.

### 1.2. Statement of the problem

There are a number of proverbs dealing with different aspects of the lives of the people in different languages of different nations in Ethiopia. The Awi societies as part and parcel of Ethiopian societies have their own folk literatures. Proverbs, which are prominent among them, are employed to reflect different life lessons of the society. Among those, they address the social, political, cultural, economic and other aspects of

women. The Awi society has its own proverbs by which it reflects its positive and negative views about women. Proverbs that deal with the positive images of women are not the concern of this study.

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).

Many Studies, which focused on gender related issues, have been done in different areas of the country on oral literature in general and proverbs in particular. In other words, different researchers conducted researches on the negative representations of women in different languages of proverbs and in different social contexts. For instance, Endalew Assefa (n.d) studied on '*Linguistic Violence against Women as Manifested in Sexist Amharic Proverbs*'. His study focused on sexist Amharic proverbs. On the other hand, Meshesha Make (2015) has done a study on '*The Prejudiced Negative Images of Femininity in Wolaita Proverbs*'. Meshesha has focused on Wolaita proverbs reflecting women's negative images. Moreover, Sena Gonfa (2008) her MA thesis '*The Images of Women in the Proverbs and Sayings of the Oromo: the case of West Arsi Zone*' focuses on both positive and negative images of women in West Arsi. Furthermore, I conducted a study entitled as '*Women in Awngi proverbs: Positive images in focus*' which merely focused on the positive images of women in the Awi society. All in all, the researcher understood that the above researchers focused on images of women in proverbs of different languages in different socio-cultural contexts. However, in the milieu of patriarchy the current study explores the gender and power relationships as anticipated through Awngi proverbs; discusses the prejudiced language used for women in Awngi proverbs, and examines how this depiction has socio-cultural ramifications. The researcher believes that it is very important to look at the rich oral traditions (in general) of the Awi people to know the social, cultural, political and economic atmospheres of the society in line with the language of proverbs related to women. Therefore, this study focused on the negative representations of women in Awngi proverbs in the target society.

### 1.3 Objectives of the study

#### 1.3.1. General objective of the study

This study mainly emphasizes on collecting, analyzing and interpreting the negative representations of women in the Awngi proverbs.

#### 1.3.2 Specific objectives

This study has specifically attempted:

- ✓ To collect and preserve Awngi proverbs reflecting negative representations of women.
- ✓ To investigate the negative portrayal of women in Awngi proverbs
- ✓ To examine patriarchal discourses and power relation in gendered Awngi proverbs.

### 1.4. Scope of the Study

This study mainly focused on proverbs dealing with negative representations of women in the Awi society. Hence, studying all genres of oral literature and every aspect of proverbs is very difficult.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

### 2.1. Concepts of Proverbs

Proverbs are interesting pieces of popular wisdom and tradition belonging to any culture, which help us to foreground the values and shared beliefs held by a speech community. The element of language that best encapsulates a society's values and beliefs is its proverbs. Most proverbs are moralistic and didactic in tone and touch upon all aspects of life and activities. Gender relations are among the most significant topics of proverbs, most of which are full of sexist connotations.

According to Hussein, (2009), proverbs, in Africa, help us make interpretations of our everyday existence through dialogue and individuals' collective wisdom providing insight into how people live and behave (Although proverbs recognize that women and men co-exist and also reflect that the relationship between men and women should be founded on equality, it is human nature to dominate one another. The feeling of feeling superior tends to encourage oppression by using proverbs where women are usually considered inferior to men. When women are oppressed, they may suffer from low self-worth. Hussein (2009), states that proverbs cannot be fully signs of wisdom. They have been used to maintain gendered life through conveying the African people's understanding of masculinity and femininity. Proverbs reinforce the superiority of males and the inferiority of females in the society. In short, women are portrayed as they are unproductive, inferior, dependent and powerless members of the society in the language of proverbs.

Chesaina (1997) as cited in Catherine N.M, (2005), notes that proverbs hire constructive or destructive statements to communicate their message. The destructive form adds to the effectiveness of these proverbs

by giving them a categorical tone and hence making them more persuasive. Similarly, Miruka(1994) as cited in Catherine N.M, (2005), pinpoints that proverbs belong to the realm of language. Language itself is part of the social culture. Oral language is used to effect communication. It is flavored with authority and axiom as it is stated as objective truths seeking to guide human conduct. Proverbs are communicated by word of mouth. They have survived yesterday, apply today and guide the pathway of tomorrow. It can be multi-contextual in application; an advisory proverb can also be used to caution as well as to warn or admonish (Ibid). This therefore means that in order to understand the meaning of a proverb s/he must study the life of that community. Hence, "proverbs emerge from specific settings within a given community. They function as a means of warning, advising, informing, educating etc.

## 2.2. Functions of proverbs

Miruka (1994); Akivaga (2003) 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. Proverbs are used to warn, caution, lampoon, console, and encourage. In addition, Kabira W. and Mutahi K. (1998) as cited in Catherine N.M, (2005) pinpoints that proverbs are usually used for serious businesses such as discussions on land, marriage, contracts, legal proceedings etc. In such situations, nobody interprets the proverbs. They aid people to appreciate nature, instruct in wisdom, teach morality, and serve to promote healing in individuals and communities.

Moreover, Mieder, (1993), on the other hand, stresses that proverbs play an active social role in the life of both speakers and listeners. By employing proverbs in their speech, people wish to strengthen their arguments, express generalizations, influence or manipulate other people, rationalize our own shortcomings, question certain behavioral patterns, satirize social ills, or poke fun at ridiculous situations. The following are basic functions of proverbs.

Firstly, proverbs promote social integration by validating culture, justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them (Bascom, 1965). When people express dissatisfaction with some accepted aspect of life, a wise proverb will work as explanation. Folklore in general and proverbs in particular help in social integration as folklore reinforces group feeling and satisfies the individual psychologically. Secondly, folklore functions as pedagogic devices, as pedagogical discourse and as a means of teaching morals and values to children (Bascom, 1965). It is precisely because of their pedagogical and moralist codes that proverbs are mostly associated with adults. Thirdly, proverbs fulfill the important but often overlooked function of maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behavior, a means of applying social pressure and exercising social control (Bascom, 1965). As such, proverbs are understood as instruments that create and establish certain social norms and behaviors. Some proverbs are means of applying social pressures on members of society in order to make them submit to societal norms. In other words, some proverbs are employed against individuals who attempt to deviate from social conventions with which they are fully familiar. Fourthly, proverbs reveal people's frustrations and attempts to escape in fantasy from repressions imposed on them by society (Bascom, 1965). They provide a way of expressing what people cannot express in their actual lives. The use of pithy proverbs enables people to hide their own thoughts and say something they would not dare to say in a direct manner. This is a paradox: while proverbs play a vital role in transmitting and maintaining the social norms and in forcing the individual to conform to them, at the same time it provides socially approved outlets for the repressions that these same institutions impose upon individuals. Finally, proverbs are rhetorical devices, the ornament of speech and weaponry in natural interaction (Dundes, 1964). They are used for some practical, pragmatically purposes in various circumstances of everyday communication. With the aid of a proverb, one can aim to provide an endorsement to his statements, express doubts, accuse someone of something, justify or excuse somebody, mock somebody. The rhetorical and didactic functions of proverbs are of central importance to many scholars.

Furthermore, Schipper (2010) asserts that the basic themes of proverbs are derived from elementary human experience and activities. Through the body human beings, express how we feel and who we are or at least who we are allowed to be in the midst of the social pressure we all suffer to a larger or smaller extent in the cultural context we live in. He further argues, however, even in reference to body how gender identity comes in, and how patriarchy plays its role can be clearly observed in the Dutch proverb: *A good woman goes without head*. What this Dutch proverb conveys is to have a head implies to have brains, to be intelligent, to have one's own will; but a woman is not expected to be a rational creature.

## 3. Research Methodology

The researcher employed qualitative research design. It aimed at investigating and describing the negative

representation of women in the language of Awngi proverbs.Miruka(1994) as cited in Catherine N.M, (2005), deals that men use proverbs with greater abandonment because men dominate public life and administration and therefore are more regularly in circumstances which demand speech making. However, in interpersonal conversation women may be just as adept or even more so at using proverbs men use. From this, we can understand that men still hold the key positions in leadership and therefore they use proverbs in public to entertain, to teach, to warn, or to encourage the community. However, when men use negative proverbs about women they damage women's image and cripple their capabilities. Consequently, women's active participation in society becomes docile (ibid).However, the researcher took both sexes of elders as the subjects of the study. Although oral literature is accessible for everyone, elders are considered more frequent in using proverbs in their day-to-daycommunications. On the other hand, Miruka(1994) as cited in Catherine N.M, (2005) notes that elders use more proverbs in their speech because they are more adept at the language and have longer experience in life. The researcher nominated 16informants purposively.

Both primary and secondary data collection tools were employed. Focus Group Discussion was taken as an important tool to get in-depth discussions with the samples selected. It was conducted within two groups in Gissa Keble in Dangila woreda of Awi zone. The researcher formed the discussion with men and women independently considering that women can freely express their emotions. The total informants in both sites were 12: 6 men and 6 women. Documents, which contain proverbs that were not analyzed, were collected from the Dangila Cultural and Tourism Office. Hence, proverbs were codified in Awngi language. The researcher identified proverbs dealing with the negative depiction of women in the Awi society and collected the proverbs by using tape recorder and notebooks.

Finally, the researcher analyzed the collected data qualitatively. Firstly, the researcher made transcription of proverbs from tape recorder. Secondly, the researcher conducted translation of the transcribed data and others from Awngi language in to English language. To do this, 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 translating the proverbs, the researcher coded them according to themes. Then, the researcher analyzed the themes and the negative representation of women. Finally, the researcher put conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the study.

**4. Data Analysis and Interpretation**

This part deals with the analysis and interpretation of Awngi proverbs that reflect the negative representation of women in the community.

**4.1. Proverbs that portray women’s incapability in household work and home management**

Incapability of women in household activities and home management are portrayed in the language of Awngi proverbs. Here below are proverbs that deal with this fact.

*a. እና ማሻፍፍሽ ታተኮኔ ን ፖሽምባ ቱሽታቲ*

*A woman who bakes unleavened bread till an oven becomes useless cannot build a good home.*

*b. ሌዋስ ኪብኩቡክስ ቱደ ንጌ ኻስ ኪ ቱሺ ማስ ስ ቱ*

*A woman works in her right hand and at the same times makes bread in her left hand.*

*c. እ ማድካ ደስዜ ርድካ ሽሽ ቱ*

*It is better a woman with a bad race than a woman who is incapable of preparing a good meal and beverage.*

*d. ደ ንግ ኻቶአ ቲቲ ኸፍ ማሪ ሳ ማይ እ ን ዜ ሻ ቱ*

*A vagrant woman does not work activities at her home properly, rather she wants to vagran village to village.*

*e. ሻ ወታቲ ቁስ ን ሽውሳ ዝን ሻስ ቱ*

*A woman who does not give care to her home gives care for the home of others.*

The above proverbs highlight the incapability of women in managing activities done at home. As the proverbs depicted, there are women who cannot carefully manage their home and activities accomplished at home. For instance, the first proverb portrays as a woman, who bakes unleavened bread till an oven becomes useless, cannot build a good home. The second proverb supports the poor quality of a woman in doing her works neatly. It reflects how much a woman is esurient or rapacious. She cooks in one hand and she eats with the remaining hand of her. Proverb (c) depicts the poor ability of a woman in preparing a meal. It is stressed that a women with a bad race is better than a woman who is not able to cook/prepare a meal. Proverb (d)pinpoints a woman who does not like to accomplish her tasks wants to chat with her

neighboring or she wants to move to different neighboring house. Proverb (e) shows that a woman who does not take care of her home gives a care to another home. This implies that she does not worry for her home. The last proverb depicts that a woman who bakes too much bread cannot built an interesting home. Baking bread unto the burning of the pan shows the carelessness of the woman who does not think about her home. She thinks only for her rapacious feeling. Generally, all the above proverbs reflect that some women are incapable in managing their home and activities properly.

**4.2. Proverbs that portray negative representation when giving birth to a daughter**

Proverbs portray the images of girls negatively when they are born. In the Awi community, giving birth to a daughter is considered as getting a problem; whereas giving birth to a boy is considered as a proud and a symbol of reputation. They are, in short, represented as problematic and causes of a problem. Following are proverbs that support the above fact.

a. እ ማጌታድሳ ብቻላ ኸና ካሚ ስቲ

*A horse which wants to die at its early age bears a female.*

b. ኸና ካሚ ኸስ ታቤርቤሮጊ ደ ኸኸላ ችፍእ ሱስ ዝኩኸዌ

*A person who bears a daughter and trades a pepper lives by tearing tears.*

c. ኸና ማይ ካሚኸና ካሚ ኒ ዋዲኮጊ ደ

*If you bear a daughter marrying a woman, it is not profitable.*

d. ኸና ካሚ ኸስ ታል ኸኸሾጊ ምኽእ ምጥሊያ ኸ

*A person who gives birth to a daughter and a person who walks to a devil are alike.*

A keen analysis of the data above shows that all the proverbs reflect the negative representations of girls if they are born in the Awi community. **Proverb (a)**, for example, reflects that giving birth to a girl is like giving birth to a problem. The proverb by its nature is metaphorical which implies that a mule/horse that wants to be disappeared gives birth to a female mule/mule. In other words, a person who wants to have a problem bears a daughter at early age. Therefore, if the person wants to live for a long time, he needs not to give a birth to a girl. Similarly, proverbs **(b) and (d)** reflect that a person who gives birth to a girl suffers a miserable situation. In proverb **(b)**, giving birth to a daughter is compared with that of trading a pepper. Though both are important, they create a problematic condition; for instance, pepper weeps the trader. The same is true for a person who gives birth to a girl in which he or she suffers a problem that a daughter created. Moreover, proverbs **(c) and (e)** present that giving birth to a daughter is seen as a source of problem for the family members. It is presented in proverb **(c)** that giving birth to a girl by marrying a woman is loss making; in sense, it shows the negative attitude of the society to daughters. In the same manner, a man who is the father of daughters is considered as a person with no neck, meaning he suffers a problem. This, in short, implies the fact that giving birth to a boy is morally encouraged whereas the vice versa is true for daughters.

According to the elders' point of view, in the Awi community, giving birth to a girl is taken as a source of getting a problem; whereas, giving birth to a boy is considered as a reputation and morally accepted. The first reason is related to their adolescence stage. In the Awi community, the process of traditional marriage (*emphasis is mine*) is allowed by parents. However, some (if any) arrogant girls may galvanize erotic relationship with males with no official steps/relationship. As a result, they may become pregnant so that the family members suffer this problem. This, in turn, creates a psychological impact on the social life of the family and the community. The family members also lack their usual dignity and morality in the community. In other words, they are going to be laughing stock in the society they belong to. Additionally, a girl, most of the time, does not help her father when he is in conflict with someone. However, boys are the regarded ones. With such issues, daughters are considered as causes for a problematic situation.

**4.3. Proverbs that portray the power and authority of women**

As women are half members of a society, it is assumed that they take part in the political aspects performed in the society. Following are Awgni proverbs reflecting this fact in the society.

a. ኸና እ ዜ ዝቱ ኸሻን ስታድኸርጋ ደ ኸእ ብጀል ኪሻላ

*A home which is ruled by a wife and a garden which is grassed by a donkey cannot be improved.*

b. ኸና ካሚ ኸሚድኸርጋ ደ ደያ ኸ

*A village governed by a woman serves for a place where a donkey grasses.*

c. ኸና ጀራውን ቤርዳእ ን ጃካላ እ ን ጃኪኒ ካላ ጊሊ ኸርጊ ኢጊላ

*A woman cannot hold a power. Though she holds it, she cannot lead accurately.*

d. ኸና ማእ ጊሮክ ምታተ ብተክ ማወላ ደ ጋራል ምታተ

*A woman cannot rule a country because she fears when an evening becomes*

- e. ክራስኮኩስ ምር ክታታኸና ኸዮ ኸባር ከታታ  
*It is improper if a woman eats before her husband starts to eat.*
- f. ኸና ምክሊጉእ ምድወጃን በእ ምእ  
*A woman never holds a stick rather she holds a spoon.*
- g. ኸና ስታብቕላ ክፃ ንቲቲያ ኸ  
*Both a woman and a horse are like their trainer.*
- h. ኸና ስታታይካ እ ሸሸስ ቲወስ ካሳና  
*Both a woman and a sheep moves in what someone allows them to move.*
- i. ኸና ስታብቲካላ ቲቲእ ላ  
*Women and earth survive whatever a burden is overloaded on them.*

Proverbs (a), (b), and (c) reflect the power and authority of women in the family and the society. Proverb (a) reflects or reinforces the gender stereotype of the inability of women for leading a village or a family. In the Awi community, it is culturally unknown that a woman takes part in societal or public affairs to compromise or negotiate people who are in conflict with; however, males are the regarded ones. Therefore, this proverb exactly reflects the inferior position of women in terms of decision making in the family and in the public or societal affairs. Similarly, Proverb (b) depicts the powerlessness of women in leading a village. As the proverb reflects, a village which a woman ruled serves as a place where a donkey grasses. In proverb (c), women are depicted as they are powerless to lead even a village. According to the responses of the elders, women cannot lead a village appropriately even power is given to them to lead it. The reasons behind as they said are culture and overload or burden of work. As reflected in the last proverb, women in this area are loaded or burdened with different works done inside and outside home. It is also reflected in proverb (d) that a woman cannot lead a country since she fears the consequence occurs. In this proverb, women themselves believe as they cannot hold power and they cannot obey this power in the correct way.

Proverbs also reflect gender related messages existing in the Awi community. Proverb (e) deals with women's subordination to their husbands. In the Awi ethnic group as the elders' explanation, it is culturally and religiously sanctioned for women to start eating before her husband begins. Similarly, proverb (f) portrays the gender stereotype which appears in the Awi community. In this proverb, it is better to see the functions of both terms 'stick' and 'spoon' in the social context of Awi society. According to the elders' point of view, the term stick is given to a man for an indication of maleness; whereas, the term spoon is given to a woman for an indication of her role at kitchen. In short, women in this proverb are portrayed as their purpose is preparing a meal, caring children and so on. The last proverbs (g) and (h) reflect that women are subordinate to their counterparts. In proverb (g), women behave like the one who trains them. In other words, women do what their counter parts allow to do. Proverb (h) portrays similar idea that a woman goes where a man allows to go, or women are considered as they do not go alone or do something independently. Generally, women are considered as they are powerless and incapable of leading or ruling a country or even a village as reflected in the proverbs. They are portrayed as dependent and subordinate members of the community. Though they hold power and try to rule a village or something else, they are assumed as weak and the village which they ruled is considered as it shows no change. Proverb (a), (e) and (f) answers research question two in which all these proverbs portray issues which are socially constrained or reflect messages related to an issue of gender. In other words, these all proverbs addressed the prejudiced negative representations of femininity.

In the culture of Awi community, there are certain actions that portray the negative images of women. Below are proverbs that reflect this issue.

- a. ኸና ጃወግራኦ ቲሬኦ ካላይወብዳ  
*A girl who is grown only by a mother is considered as a rude girl.*
- b. ሸሸና ጃክታጋ ቲታቢቲዳ ኸቸኔ ቲ  
*A daughter who grows by a divorced woman does not respect the value of the society.*
- c. ኸና ኸን ቶባ ት ኸፅ ክራላ ጅን ቲኦ ምፁ  
*The right womanhood was the previous one.*
- d. ሴኔ ፍኸና ጅማን ታኸሸጋ ትእ ሉዋኪያ ንታ  
*A lazy woman is considered as singer; as a cow which is not milked is considered as a shouter.*

All the above proverbs reflect the negative representation of women in the Awi culture. For instance, proverb (a) reflects that a daughter who grows only by her mother is considered as a rude girl. It is considered as she does not respect people. It is also reflected in proverb (b) that a girl who is born and grown from a divorced woman is seen as careless enough. On the other hand, this proverb implies that girls

who struggle for their equality and rights are seen as rude enough by their counterparts and women themselves. It indirectly reflects the respect of the previous women who once perceived their inferior position. In line with this, proverb (c) reflects as the previous women were the right women compared to the present ones. As the explanation of female elders, this is because the previous women had perceived their inferior position, and they did not struggle for their rights and equality like the present women who give a due attention for their rights and equalities. As it is reflected in proverbs (d) in the culture of Awi people a girl is not allowed to sing a song in places where number of people exist such as marriage ceremonies, festivals, birthdays and so on. If a girl does this, she is seen as an arrogant member of the community. In short, in the Awi community, women are sanctioned not to do culturally prohibited actions. If they do this, they are considered as rude and arrogant ones.

The inferiority of women is also reflected in the Awgni proverbs. Below are proverbs which show the inferior position of women.

- a. ኸሩ ኸሩ ኸን ጉደስ ፍያላ  
*A woman never escapes from being of a woman.*
- b. ኸሩ ኸን ከ ንቴ ታቴሮ እ ማላ  
*A girl who learns never goes so far*
- c. ሻያ ኸሩ ደስ እ ምናል ጃር ጃክሽ  
*It is better a single man than thousands of women.*

All proverbs stated above in general reflect the inferior position of women in the Awi community. In other words, all proverbs reflect the superior position of men. For example, proverb (a) depicts that women are always seen inferior to their counterparts though they perform an activity which values a good value. In other words, if women work similarly with men, they are not seen as equally as men. Similarly, proverb (b) presents the fact those women, most of the time, are not allowed for education rather males are allowed for education. The reality here is that women are considered as they are powerless or incapable of reaching to their goal, but male are considered as they are powerful and they can do and reach for what they propose. Though this image of women was portrayed before, it is also applicable in the present time especially in the rural areas of Awi Zone. Women in proverb (c) are also represented as they are powerless compared to their counterparts. It reflects that though number of women work together, a single man who works a similar work is the better one. In other words, a strong man can do what number of women work together. The female elders dislike this proverb by thinking that women are equal to men in every aspect. However, it is in use now since it comes from their ancestors.

From the elders' point of view, since women are once perceived as inferior to men, they accept proverbs which show their inferiority though they dislike it. This is because women themselves assumed that such realities cannot be eradicated in the patriarchal society since they pass from generation to generation through word of mouth. The reality that elders explained is that though women can do better than men, they are assumed as powerless and incapable of doing better and it is socialized in the social life of the community. Proverbs support this reality.

#### **4.4. Proverbs that portray women as stubborn, destructive and dangerous**

Women are portrayed as they are stubborn, destructive and dangerous creatures in the language of proverbs in general. In the Awi community, the stubborn, destructive and dangerous images of women are portrayed in their proverbs too. Below are proverbs which depict the stubborn, destructive and dangerous images of women in the social context of the Awi community respectively.

- a. ፍክሮስ ኸሬ ታጋ ወስ ሺሮቴ  
*A woman becomes pregnant when she is in conflict with her husband without consulting him.*
- b. ዲሻታሩ ኸሩ ዳዳ ኸሬ  
*A woman who wants to initiate a fight sleeps on the street*
- c. ኸሩ ሴኪሮ ታኒ አረ ፍአ ዋኔ ታዋሽ ጃቴ  
*An arrogant woman never tells the truth.*

All proverbs stated above reflect the stubborn behavior of women. In the Awi community, some women have rigid or arrogant behavior in which they activate a useless activity. In the first proverb above, it is reflected that a woman becomes pregnant when she sleeps with her husband when she is in conflict with him. In other words, a woman who is in conflict with her husband wants to be pregnant during this time without knowing the will of her husband and consulting him. In proverb (b) and(c), women are portrayed as

stubborn creatures. It is reflected that a quarrelsome woman wants to fight without any reason. This emerges from her arrogant behavior. In the following proverbs, women are portrayed as they are destructive creatures.

a. ካሳ ካኒ ትኸፍ አረወዳ

*A woman who proposes for divorcing does not use resources properly in her home.*

b. ካሳ ካኒ ትኸፍ ስታፅ ካረጃፍፍሻላ

*A woman who thinks for divorce and a bee which thinks to leave out its hive never built their home nicely.*

c. ኸፍ ኸፍ ኸፍ ኒ ጉል ገ ቲፈፈሴ

*A belly woman collapses the granary of crops.*

d. ኸፍ ጉዝጊ ስታደስ እ ምጥል አ ሜቱ ካ ኪኸሼ

*It is better a year of ice than a bellied woman.*

e. ኸፍ ሲፍፅ ኸስ ታደኸር ዋቻኑ ኸአ ሴብኸዳታምገላ

*A person who is followed by a woman and who loads a donkey never reaches for what he proposed.*

f. ኸፍ ስታብተጃር ጂወድፅ ጊያ ኸ

*Both a woman and an earth are causes for the destruction of man.*

From the above proverbs, one can easily understand that some women are destructive creatures especially in the rural areas of Awi community. For example, proverb (a) reflects that a woman who wants to divorce changes the good atmosphere of her home to a bad mood by extravagance their wealth. Similarly, proverb (b) reflects that a woman who proposes for divorcing never thinks her home and never gives a due attention to her families. Proverbs (c) and (d) show as a belly woman or a woman who eats much is considered as she cannot build her home in a good manner. It is considered as the granary of crop collapses if a woman eats much. According to the elders' points of view a woman who eats much is perceived or described as she cannot build a good home, rather she is considered as destructor. In the last proverbs women in the Awi community are depicted as obstacles for the success and achievement of others.

Women are also portrayed as dangerous creatures in which they create problematic situations for their counterparts and the community. Let us see the following proverbs to know this fact in the context of Awi community.

a. አ ገቻጂረወቤድላድኸር ካላ ቲወቤድላያ ኸ

*A burden that a woman creates is very difficult to leave out (A problem created by a girl is difficult to manage it.)*

b. ኸፍ ታጉ ኸጊ ዊእ ምቤታሙአ ሻላ

*A fire lit by a woman cannot quench easily.*

c. እ ሉድጃ ታእ ገ ክርቴ

*An arrogant woman creates a smoother relationship after damaging a person.*

d. ባከፍፍያ ኒ እ ሉጃ ቤና ደባያ

*While the better one is divorced, the bad one is married.*

e. ኸፍ ጉቻጃቻኸስ ታአ ፍወቻጃእ ምጥሊያ ኸ

*A trouble maker woman and a mud on the gate of the door are alike. They create a problem to people.*

In the proverbs stated above, proverbs presented women as dangerous and obstacles for the success and achievement of others. For example, proverb (a) and (b) reflect that a problem which a girl or a woman created causes a problem which cannot be easily managed. In these proverbs, women are depicted as they cannot realize things rather they are sensible for issues that take to a conflict. From the elders' explanation, women are portrayed as such because they work overloaded works and they bleed much blood when they give birth to a child so that they become sensible enough for issues. This conflict touches every members of the family; it never stops to the initiators only. Proverbs(c) and (d) reflected the arrogant nature of women. The last proverb reflects that the worst behavior if wives in which they argue with their husbands in home. In short women (not all) are portrayed in Awngi proverbs as dangerous members of the community.

**4.5. Proverbs that portray the unintelligence, passive, talkative and laziness nature of women**

Proverbs reflect the unintelligent, passive, talkative and lazy nature of women. Women in the Awi society are seen as they are not intelligent and confident through proverbs. Below are proverbs which reveal this fact.

- a. ከና ሼዌና ስታድኸር ጂን ጃስታእ ላ  
*There is no a wise woman and a donkey with a horn.*
- b. ከና እቃን ቴካ ማታ ቱጃን ለቃላ  
*A woman who gives birth to a wise child knows nothing about herself.*
- c. ከና እሴቱን ለ ማታ ማታ ጃን ለሴቱን ለ ለ ስ  
*Men finish their tasks quickly; whereas, women take a long period of time to achieve the goal they proposed.*

The proverbs above present women as unintelligent creatures that cannot generate an idea to solve a problem. For instance, **proverb (a)** depicts women as they do not know what they did. In other words, the proverb denies the wise and intelligent ability of women in the society. This is because the proverb compares women with donkey. In fact, this proverb has more than one meaning. At the first glance, it reflects the innocence or generous behavior of women stressing their nature of ignoring evil thoughts in their heart for a long period of time. On the other hand, it portrays the inability of women in remembering issues that have been done. It also reflects the disloyal behavior of women in which they can be easily cheated by somebody else. Similarly, **proverb (b)** reflects the incapability of women in doing a worth mentioning work. It meant that women bear a wise and intelligent child, but they are not wise and intelligent. Moreover, in **proverb (c)**, women are portrayed as they are not intelligent and wise compared to their counterparts in whom males dispose or finish effectively what females propose or try to do. In short, not all women, but some are portrayed as they cannot generate ideas to solve problems and incapable of remembering what they have done. However, some proverbs reflect the intelligent, prudent and wise nature of women in generating ideas for solving problems. For example, proverbs (a) *ዝክ ቲደስ ቱት ስ ማታ ደሳ ላ* (A woman who prepared tasteless local beer does not lack an idea to make it tasteful); (b) *ከና ትሼ-ከሰ ማታ ደስ ላ ትስ* (Wisdom is for a woman as file is for filing purpose) and (c) *ከና ስ ማታ እ ጅ ስ ጋ ኒ ደሳ ላ* (A woman never lacks an idea as the home/hole of ants appears as it is) reflect as women can generate ideas to solve problems. For instance, **proverb (a) and (c)** depict the capacity of women in generating ideas when something is gone wrong on their work. For instance, a woman who prepares tasteless local beer generates an idea to make it tasteful as **proverb (a)** reflects. Similarly, proverb (b) depicts the nature of women as wise and prudent. Women are full of wisdom in which they create ideas how to treat and control their families and how to activate household works and in general, how to manage their home in a good manner. From the elders' point of view, women can work intelligently like their counterparts. They can generate ideas to solve any problem though they are overloaded with productive and reproductive works.

Awgni proverbs reveal women (not all) as lazy creatures that cannot perform household works appropriately in the appropriate time. Below is a keen analysis of it.

- a. ቱጃን ማታ ደስ ላ ስታን ስ ስ ስ ስ ስ  
*Unhealthy woman works better than a normal idle woman.*
- b. ንርካቦዜና ከራእ ንፃ ክስ ስ  
*An idle woman who spent the day time freely works at night.*
- c. ታፋፍራ ቲትዜ ከቴወሳ ለኮ ፍራ ቲ ቲ ደጅት ክ  
*A lazy woman consumes what a hard worker woman prepared.*
- d. ሴኔ ፋ ከና ጅማን ታክሽ ጋት እ ለዋኪያን ታ  
*A lazy woman is considered as singer; as a cow which is not milked is considered as a shouter.*
- e. ሴኔ ፍ ከና ካን ስ ካኔ እ ንፃ ክስ ስ  
*A lazy woman performs her household works carelessly.*
- f. ለኮ-ዋሴሴና ዳ ክቴ  
*A vagrant woman becomes poor.*
- g. ጅራሱሳ እ ማታ ታጃን ለ ላ ጅ ቲ ሻና ዙር ስ  
*A woman who knows her behavior moves from village to village.*
- h. እ ማታ ለደካ እ ር ማታ ዳ ክ  
*A woman who cannot weed very well will suffer another work again.*
- i. ከና ስ ታኤሌጉ ስ ስ ስ ስ ስ ስ ስ ስ  
*An activity done by a woman and a tortoise never ends/ reaches quickly.*

All the above proverbs replicate the laziness of women in the Awi community. It is reflected in proverb (a) as a woman with abnormal condition performs her household activities better than an idle woman with a normal condition. This in short implies that a lazy woman does not perform her household activities

properly rather she spends being idle. Proverb (b), on the other way, reflects as an idle woman does not work her household works properly in the appropriate time. As the elders explained, an idle woman spends all the daytime freely without doing anything; rather she works her household activities in the improper time that is at evening or night. As they said, such women do not give an appropriate treatment and feeding for their family members. Similarly, they teach a bad life lesson for their children and they do not worry for the well-being of their children and the family members as a whole. Similarly, proverb (c) depicts that a lazy woman consumes what a hard worker woman prepared. In other words, a lazy woman in the Awi community, most of the time, spends her time moving to a village to another village and consumes what people provide to them. As a result, she does not worry for the well-being of her families. As it is reflected in proverb (d) in the Awi community women who sing songs in whatever occasions, for instance, during marriage ceremonies, festivals, birth days and so on are seen as lazy women who do not give due attention to their works. Moreover, proverb (e) portrays that lazy women works their household works without giving a due concentration. Proverb (f) depicts that a vagrant woman becomes poor since she spends her time moving village to village. Similarly, it is reflected in proverb (g) the vagrant behavior of a lazy woman in the Awi community. A woman who knows her behavior moves a place where she wants to move. This shows the laziness of women who do not want to perform their household works properly in the appropriate time. Proverb (h) depicts the laziness of women in the farming works. A woman who does not properly work agricultural works suffers again with a work. The last proverb reflects the passivity of women in the Awi community. Women are portrayed as they cannot perform any activity in the time planned. In other words, women are seen as powerless who cannot perform an activity immediately. In short, Awngi proverbs reflect the negative images of women (not all women) as they are lazy creatures. Lazy women as depicted in the Awngi proverbs do not perform their household works properly in the appropriate time by giving a due attention. They also do not treat and control their family members in a good manner; rather they are considered as they teach a bad life lesson for their children. They spend their times moving to village to village.

Women are signified as they are talkative enough in the language of Awngiproverbs. Below are proverbs which represent the talkative behavior of women in the Awi society.

- a. አለካንአላካያሉትስጊሉታግቤኸ  
*Women reach to market by talking against someone.*
- b. ኸሩስታፍያላፃኛፃኝስታካኸ  
*Both women and goats are talkative.*
- c. ኸንጭቻዳዲሺብሬ  
*When there are number of women, an issue becomes hot enough.*
- d. ኸንጭቻዳሹጫእንቻላ  
*A group of women cannot make something quickly; rather they talk much talk.*
- e. ኸንጭቻዳድስኸአግስታላ  
*In lots of women, you cannot get easily what you lost.*
- f. ኸንጭቻዳኛንብሰቲቹ  
*A door gets open all the night if mass women are together.*
- g. ኸሩኸንጭቻዳእንፀኸአጫ  
*If mass women are together, an activity cannot be accomplished properly.*

All these proverbs expose the talkative behavior of women. It is reflected in proverb (a) that women talk much against someone when they are on journey to somewhere such as to market. In this proverb, women are depicted as they are backbiters. They cannot arrive the place where they are going to without talking about other persons. Similarly, proverb (b) shows that women are talkative enough. They are compared with goats. Moreover, proverb (c) and (d) reflect that a group of women make an issue very hot through their talk rather than doing their work properly. When women sit together, they spend the day through talks. Both proverb (e), (f) and (g) deals the problems happened when mass women are together. They depict that a door may remain open at night, a lost thing cannot be got easily and a work cannot be accomplished properly when there are lots of women together. Generally, in the language of Awngi proverbs, if women are in mass, it is considered as they cannot perform worthy things. They are considered as they cannot perform things in the right way rather, they may spend their time talking each other.

Proverbs also reflect the greedy and selfish behavior of women in the Awi community. Let us see the following proverbs.

- a. አንኪሩሳጊግግኸኔታቆላቆሊውሳዝጉቴኸ  
*She lost her own while trying to grasp others'*

- b. **ኸላ እንከናን ታዋጊ ቢላ ፍሸዮን**  
*A woman who wishes everything should not allowed buying something.*
- c. **እሸራኸፍ ጂወጣባ ታታትሽወጣካን ቴ**  
*An egoist woman wishes somebody else's than using her own.*
- d. **ካራደስዮራ ኸክሺሸሮጉሸፅ**  
*My husband is better than yours so that borrow me something eaten.*

The aboveproverbsrevealedwomen as greedy and selfish members of the Awi community. It is reflected in proverb (a) that a greedy woman wishes the wealth of others. It implies that women who wish the wealth of others do not use their wealth properly, or they may lose it. Similarly, proverb (b) depicts that a woman who wishes to buy numbers of things from market is not allowed to go to there. It shows her greediness to have number of things. It is used as an advice to advise a woman who wishes lots of things. It is reflected in proverb (c) as a greedy woman wants the wealth of others. The last proverb reflects the selfish behavior of women in the Awi community. It implies that an egoist woman prefers for herself and for her family members only. In other words, a selfish woman does not think for others rather she thinks over for herself. In short, women in the Awi community are portrayed as greedy and selfish members of the community.

However, it is not for all women in the society.

The following Awngi proverbs depict as girls need advice at their early age.

- a. **ጉረጅስሌኪምቲትሰፅንፃዋጉኸካፃላ**  
*A fly which gets everything in the very morning cannot be taken by an eagle*
- b. **ዳራኮያስጊረስቴብቲቻኒዋይስቴ**  
*A girl who grows with a good control and treatment has a due value.*
- c. **ናክባቸኸታኒቹዋታኸ**  
*Through time, a girl becomes a mother.*

In these proverbs, we can understand how much an advice is very important to control and treat girls at their early age. As the response of both sexes’ elders in the focus group discussion, it is better giving a good treatment and control to a girl at her early stage to grow having a good behavior. Daughters who grew with a good treatment and control become intelligent and prudent enough. For example, proverb (a) reflects that a girl who grew with a good treatment never cheated by someone else since she come up with a good life experience. Similarly, in proverb (b) it is reflected that a girl who grew with a good treatment and control has a due value in the community members and the family members are too proud by their daughter. In the Awi community, a girl who grew with such treatment is highly needed to be married by assuming as she is prudent and ethical enough. Moreover, in proverb(c) the positive image of a girl is portrayed in which it reflects that a girl substitutes the place of mothers. In other words, girls can be mothers and wives when they reach on that stage so that it is better to give an appropriate treatment and control at their early age.

From the points of view of elders, it is reflected that giving an appropriate treatment, advice and control to girls at their early age allow them to come up with an ethical behavior and to be intelligent and prudent. A girl who grows with such treatment never cheated for useless activities such as having sexual intercourse before marriage and the like. Additionally, if girls at their early age know the customs and values of their people, they live with good relationships. Therefore, girls should be treated, advised and controlled at their early age to learn life lessons which shape their life to the right way from their parents as well as from the community members.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusions

Women, in the language of Awngi proverbs in the social context of Awi society are represented negatively. The keen analysis of the Awngi proverbs has come with different negative representations of women. The following are the result of this study.

- The study shows that Awngi proverbs depict the negative representation of women as incapable in household activities and poor home management. It is reflected in different proverbs as women are careless in managing household activities and their home properly.
- The inferiority of women in holding power and authority in the Awi society is also depicted in the language of proverbs. Men are taken as superior and powerful in holding power and authority. This shows that women are discouraged and men on the other hand are encouraged in holding power and authority and meeting with the positions as depicted in the proverbs.

- In Awngi proverbs, women are depicted as they are persistent/stubborn, vicious/destructive and perilous/dangerous creatures in comparison to men. Similarly, they are seen as unintelligent, passive, talkative and lazy creatures. Women are also depicted as they have greedy and selfish behavior.

## 5.2. Recommendations

Based on the critical analysis and findings of the language of proverbs on negative depiction of women, the following recommendations are given.

- Appropriate experts should give awareness creation trainings to people of Awi to dishearten the use of proverbs having negative descriptions of womanliness. In addition, the experts should document proverbs related to women in general and proverbs that deal with the positive portrayal of women in the society in particular. It helps to preserve the images of women for the upcoming generations.
- Awngi speaking families should inspire their children to practice the proverbs that reveal gender equality. The society, at large, should totally avoid the old-fashioned deleterious discernment of womanliness in their overall walks of life. They should use proverbs towards the positive portrayal of women as it helps them to know how to live by keeping the cultures, values, beliefs, and customs of their community.
- Other researchers should conduct further studies on other genres of folklore or oral literature such as funeral dirges, oral poetry and the like to know more about Awi community in general and women in particular and researches should be conducted on the other aspects of proverbs.

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