



Title	IRANIAN WOMEN AS MIRRORED IN PROVERBS
Author(s)	Rajabzadeh, Hashem
Citation	大阪外国語大学論集. 2001, 24, p. 119-150
Version Type	VoR
URL	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/11094/79848">https://hdl.handle.net/11094/79848</a>
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## IRANIAN WOMEN AS MIRRORED IN PROVERBS

RAJABZADEH Hashem

### 諺に見るイラン女性

ハーシェム・ラジャブザーデ

#### 【要旨】

ペルシア語の諺は、ペルシア文学の宝庫であり、その訪問者は、悠久の歴史を持つイラン人の文化と思想に触れることになる。古代イランの思想とイスラーム文明という、イラン文化の二つの源泉から湧き出た諺を知ることなしに、今日のイラン人の思考法やイランの社会、言語、思想のより深い理解は得られないはずである。

諺は、人に意図を伝える手段として非常に有用である。そのため、古来、文筆家や詩人は、作品中に多くの諺をちりばめている。私たちが現在、サアディーやモウラヴィーのような大詩人たちの作品中に見る諺の中には、当時既に広く知られていた諺をそのまま用いた場合もあった。だが、その一方で、彼らが編み出した機知に溢れた表現や、物語の終わりに加えられた結論・教訓を示す一文が、以後新たに諺として伝えられるということも少なくなかった。このようにして、時を経るに従い、ペルシア語には、想定可能なあらゆるテーマにびたりと当てはまる諺が見出せるようになっていった。

本稿では、そのようなテーマの一つとして、「女性」を取り上げた。女性の言動を様々な角度から捉えた諺には、他者、とくに男性の視点が反映されている場合も多く、これを考察することによって、イランという男性中心主義社会の中の女性の地位と、今も残存する伝統的な女性観を明らかにする一助となり得ると考えるからである。

（藤元 優子・訳）

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to review the image of women as reflected in Persian proverbs. A rich source of Persian literature and folklor, proverbs are widely used by Iranians of all social strata and different educational backgrounds. A great number of these sayings have been beautifully versified by celebrated Persian poets like Sa'di and Mowlavi, making them easier to memorize and more suitable to decorate one's statement with.

Proverbs originate from man's common sense. As S. Haïm puts it: "A proper proverb or saying should contain a universal truth originating from a particular instance, often based in a fable. However, a great variety of sayings and quotations, even maxims, mottos and idioms, has developed into proverbs". Indeed, in many cases it is too difficult to clearly separate proverbs from maxims and idioms.

Collections of proverbs in Persian, of which the most extensive and still authentic was compiled by A.A. Dehkhodâ, usually contain all these kinds of phrases. Only recently, efforts were made to compile exclusive collections of proverbs, a successful example of which being the selection made by the late S. Haïm in his valuable work "Persian-English Proverb" (Tehran, 1965), which has served as the main guide for the preparation of the present article, and as the main source and reference of its English version.

This paper tries to study the character of women as observed in Persian proverbial phrases. Utmost effort has been made to give the more commonly used and representative examples here from among many similar proverbs mostly in versified form. Some variants in Afghan dialect for the proverbs prevalent in contemporary Iran have also been given to enrich the expression and to provide a means for comparison.

The quality of this paper, both in shape and in content, is what was achievable given the writer's limited knowledge and ability and within the short span of time allowed for its completion.

## The Image of Women

In Persian, women are idiomatically referred to as *جنس لطیف* *Jens-e latif* "the fair (or, gentle) sex" (Lit. the delicate sex), a description making them distinctive from men in nature, quality, and character. Attributes ascribed to women by Persian proverbs mostly originate from the old established images of the womankind in a society bound by tradition and distinguished by a rich literary heritage. Some distinctive characteristics of women as indicated by some well known proverbs which are still in use are reviewed here.

### Women's Deficiency

Many humiliating references and remarks in Persian literature characterize a man lacking courage, determination, honesty, firmness, bravery, loyalty, or other attributes praised in men, as a woman. In encouraging a man to perform his duties, a maxim versified by Onsorî (d.1039 A.D.), a celebrated Iranian poet, is often cited;

چه مردی بود کز زنی کم بود

*Cde mardî bovad kaz zanî kam bovad*

"call him not a man who is inferior to a woman".

A cowardly or incompetent man is sometimes abused by being referred to as *لچک به سر* *Lachak be sar*, one who wears a fichu), a contemptuous and obsolescent epithet of a woman.

An Afghan proverb says:

سال گرم آمد، زنان ریش کشیدند

*Sâl-e garm âmad, zanân rîsh kahidand*

"The hot year came and women grew a beard (i.e. incompetent men occupied positions)".

The image of women as imperfect beings has originated from the belief that women were created imperfect, and they therefore lack the intellect and reason bestowed on men. Moslems believe that Eve, the mother of all women, was created from the left side of Adam.

However, a proverb which was mainly in use in India says:

نه هر زن زن است و نه هر مرد مرد

*Na har zan zan ast o na har mard mard*

"not every woman is a woman (i.e. inferior to a man) and not every man is a

(real)man".

In the context of the traditional superiority of men, the word "مرد" *mard* (=man) in Persian is sometimes used to mean a real man or a man with sound character. The word مردانگی *mardānēgi* (lit. to act manly) means to be generous or courageouse or to act like a gentleman. a frequently cited saying, حرف مرد یکی است *harf-e mard yekist* (a man's word is one), also means that a man should not change, or go back from, his word. And مرد این کار نیست *mard-e īn kār nīst* (lit. he is not the man for the job) is said about someone who is not equal, or adequate, for the task.

An Afghan proverb regards an indebted man inferior to his creditor in the same way as a wife to her husband:

شوی مرد قرض خواه اوست

*Shōy-e mard qarzkhāh-e ūst*

However, another Afghan saying considers a daughter better than a son unworthy of his father.

از بچه (پسر) ناخلف، دختر بهتراست

*Az bācch (pesar)-e nā-khalaṭ, dokhtar behtar ast*

Many phrases in Persian literary works refer to the fact that a girl baby was unwelcomed in the traditional society, of which the following two, by Ferdowsi (940~1020 A.D.) and Onsor al-Ma'ālī (11th Century) respectively, are typical examples.

زن و اژدها هر دو در خاک به

*Zan o ezhdehā har do dar khāk beh*

"Both women and dragons are better under the earth".

دختر نابوده به، چون بیود یا به شوی یا به گور

*Dokhtar nābūdē beh, chon bebūd yā bē shāy yā bē gūr*

"A daughter is better not born, and if born she has to be given to marriage or to the grave".

## Fickleness

Women are known to like fancy and change their mind soon.

هوس زنان و حکم کودکان مرد خردمند را عاجز میکند

*Havas-e zanān o hokm-e kūdākān mard-erā ājez mikonad*

"women' capriciousness and children's desire renders a wise man helpless".

مردی را به دار می بردند، زن می گفت در بازگشتن یک شلیته گلی برای من بخر

*Mardi rā be dā mibordand, zan migoft dar bāzgashtan yek shalitē goli baray-e man bekhar*

"A man was being taken to be hanged, and his wife was asking him to buy her a red petticoat on his way back home".

On double-mindedness of women it is usually said that

زن را نمی‌شود شناخت  
*Zan rā nemishavad shenākht*

"One can not understand a woman". This remark is like the Japanese sayings "Onna no kokoro wa neko no me" and "Onna-gokoro to aki no sora" (A woman's heart (is as changeable as) the autumn weather, or a cat's eyes)

### Untrustworthiness

Persian proverbs and maxims warn against telling one's secrets to women. These have been versified by many celebrated poets and are abundantly found in Persian classics. Women are generally believed to be given in babbling and not able to resist the inwardly temptation to reveal whatever they know. this habit also leads to meddling, as indicated by an Afghan saying:

مادر الهیار، خبر ببر خبر بیار  
*Mādar-e allāhyār, khabar bebar khabar biyār*

"O! Mother of Allāhyār, bring a news and take another one".

(Note: "Allāhyār" is boy's name. In moslem countries it is traditionally indecent to mention names of other people's wives and daughters. A woman is therefore called by her son's name).

### Slyness

Women are believed to be deceitful, especially in dealing with men, and apply many tricks to win their goals. One such trick is weeping:

گریه زن مکر/دام زن است  
*Gerye-ye zan makr (dām)-e zan ast*

"A woman's trick (or, snare) is her tears." Also, مثل زنها *mesl-e zanhā* ("like women") in Persian means weeping.

Women's tricky nature is likened to that of a fox:

حيله کار زن است و روباه است  
*hīlê kār-e zan ast o rūbāh ast*

"Deceit is the act of a woman and a fox". And, versified proverb says:

مکر زن ابلیس دید و بر زمین بینی کشید  
*Makr-e zan eblīs did o bār zamīn bini kashīd*

"When faced with women's tricks, Satan threw up the sponge (lit. rubbed its nose hard to the earth).

Afghan proverbs have these to say:

مکر زن بار خراست  
*Makr-e zan bār-e khar ast*

"Women's deceit is huge (lit. an ass's load)"; and,

از آن مکاره چه گله داری  
*Az zan-e makkāreh ché geleh dāri*

"Why you complain a deceitful woman (i.e. she can not change her nature)."

## Unfaithfulness

Women (mainly as wives and sweethearts) are traditionally blamed for being unfaithful, a characteristic also attributed to man in general:

وفای هر چیز بیش از/به از آدمیزاد است  
*Vafāy-e har chīz bīsh(bēh) az ādamīzās ast*

"Man is less faithful than any other creature".

An expression widely used in Persian literature is:

اسب و زن و شمشیر وفادار که دید؟  
*Asb o zan o shamshīr-e vafādār ke dīd?*

"Who has ever seen a faithful horse, a faithful woman, and a faithful sword (since they don't stay long with a man)". A variant of this proverb is:

وفا به سگ دادند به زن ندادند  
*Vafā bē sag dādand bē zan nadādand*

"Faithfulness is a merit bestowed on dogs, not on women". Dogs are well known to be faithful to their masters. Afghans express it this way;

از زن جفا، از سگ وفا  
*Az zan jafā, az sag vafā*

"Unkindness is women's attribute, and faithfulness is dogs' quality".

The following sayings are also based on the same image of women:

یار زنده به از شوی مرده  
*Yār-e zende beh az shūy-e mordeh*

"A friend above ground is better than a husband below".

مستوری بیبی از بی چادری است  
*Mastāri-ye bībī az bi chādorist*

"The mistress's chastity is from poverty (not from piety)".

## Some Other Characteristics

### Big Appetite

زن اگر یونجه و کمبزه است، هیچ خوردنی را نمیگوید بدمزه است  
*Zan agar yonjeh o kombozeh ast, hīch khordani ra nemiguyad bad-mazeh ast*

"A woman enjoys eating even hay and unripe melon".

### Reproving and Complaining

گله‌گذاری کار زنان است  
*Geleh-gozārī kār-e zanān ast*

"Complaining is the the business of women".

### Sensuality

تا مرغ پشت ندهد، خروس پشتش نمی‌رود  
*Tā morgh posht nadehad, khorūs poshtash nemīravad*

"The cock will not tread the hen, until the latter yield to it (it is usually the female sex who is to blame for an unchast act)".

### Desire for Visiting Around

بی‌بی از بی‌چادری در خانه نشسته است  
*bībī az bi-chādorī dar khāneh neshasteh ast*

"The mistress stays in the house only because she has no vail (to wear and go out)".

دختر سعدی است  
*Dokhtar-e Sa'dī ast*

"(She is) Sa'di's daughter (i.e. a woman who is to be found everywhere except in her own house; also, a godabout)".

چادر قلعه زن است  
*Chādor qal'e-ye zan ast*

"The veil is women's fortress(i.e. under its protection they can go everywhere)".

Public baths were a favourite meeting place for women where they used to spend many hours and enjoy chatting. A noisy place is therefore likened to a women's public bath; مثل حمام زنانه *Mest-e Hammām-e zanāneh* "like a women's public bath")

☆ ☆ ☆

Some women are also rebuked by being compared to those known for their



unsightly appearance or despised character;

مثل زینب قازچران

*Mesl-e zeinab-e qāz-cherān*

"Like Zainab, the goosherd (a tall and light-minded, or lewd, woman)".

مثل سوزمانیها

*Mesl-e sūzmānihā*

"Like the shrew (a very shameless woman)".

مثل فیل کوچک

*Mesl-e fīl kūchekeh*

"Like the little elephant (a short and fat woman)".

مثل کولیها

*Mesl-e kōlīhā*

"Like gipsies (a very prattler and abusive woman)".

مثل نهنگ

*Mesl-e nahang*

"Like a leivethan (a bold and eloquent woman)".

## Beauties

Women are mindful of their appearance, and a number of proverbs expose this feature of their character:

زن زشت از آئینه بدش می‌آید

*Zan-e zeshl az āyīneh badas miāyad*

"A homely woman does not like (to look at) the mirror".

زن از غازه سرخ‌رو شود و مرد از غزا

*Zan az ghāzeh sorkhrū shavad va mard az ghazā*

"Women redden their faces by painting, and men by fighting (i.e. by weltering in their blood)". A woman with a perfect make-up is said to have attired herself in seven different ways.

هفت قلم آرایش کرده است

*Haft qalam ārāyesh kardeh ast*

(formerly there used to be 7 articles of adornment). And;

تا تیغ از اصفهان می‌آید مردان جوان، و تا سرخاب از فرنگ می‌آید زنان خوشگلند  
*Tā īlgh az Esfahā miāyad mardān javān, va tā sorkhāb az Farang miāyad zanān khoshgeland*

"As long as razors are manufactured in Isfahan, men are young, and while rouge is imported from Europe, women are pretty".

بد ماه می‌گوید تو درنیا من درمی‌آیم

*Bē māh miḡūyad to darnayā man darāyam*

"A beauty seems to say to the moon 'let me shine first before you do'".

دانه، انار داری

*dane-ye anār dārī*

"You have a single pomegranate"(an Afghan saying in praise of a beauty).

The beauty of eyes are especially admired in women;

صفای خانه آب است و جارو صفای صورت چشم است و ابرو  
*Safā-ye khāneh āb ast o jārū, safā-ye sūrat chashm ast o abrū*

"The house is made pleasant by sweeping and sprinkling of water, and the face by eyes and eyebrows".

A brunette is considered more attractive;

سفید سفیدش صد تومان سرخ و سفید سیصد تومان  
حالا که رسید به سبزه هر چه بگی میارزه  
*Sefīd-e sefīdesh sad toman Sorkh o sefīd sisad toman*  
*Hālā ké rasīd bé sabzeh Har ché begī miarzeh*

"Fair or blonde is fair enough, but peach-coloured I more appreciate.

"However, it is the dark skin, which after all wins the prize".

(Note: The words *Begī* and *Miarzeh* are vulgar forms of *Begūī* and *Miarzad* respectively. So the last part of the saying means: "whatever price you put on the dark skin, it is worth it". "Toman" is a unit of Iranian currency which was of high value in the years passed.)

A frequently cited verse by Sa'di says:

شوی زن زشت روی، نابینا به  
*Shū-ye zan-e zeshtrūy, nānīnā beh*

"An ugly woman's husband should better be blind". The statement is based on a story which goes as follows: A very ugly woman was married to a blind man. An eye-doctor in those days claimed to be able to cure blindness, but the woman's father was unwilling to have his son-in-law cured, and said, in reply to those who asked him the reason: "I fear lest my daughter be divorced if her husband is cured".

However, some sayings warn against beauties:

هر جا که پریخی است دیوی با اوست  
*Har jā ké parīrokhīst, dīvī bā ūst*

"Where there is a fairy, there is a demon".

A beauty is also said to be unfaithful, as indicated in a verse by Sa'di:

هزار وعده، خوبان یکی وفا نکند  
*Hezār va'de-ye khūbān yekī vafā nakonad*

"Of a thousand promissess made by beauties not one is fulfilled".

## Old Women and Widows

Persian fables and proverbs characterize old women as seditious, annoying and mischievous beings. Widows are also described much the same. Many Persian tales narrate about mischievous old women. Unbecoming practices are also considered acts of old women;

غم خوردن کار پیرزنان است  
*Gham khordan kār-e pīrzanān ast*

"It is an old woman who grieves (not a brave man)".

نماز زیاده کردن کار پیرزنان است  
*Nemāz-e ziyādeḥ kardān kār-e pīrzanān ast*

"To pray exceedingly is the act of old women". (A saying attributed to Khwāja Abdollah-e Ansārī, a celebrated mystic -1005~1088A.D.).

پیرزن را دست به درخت آلو نرسید، گفت مرا خود ترشی نسازد  
*Pīrzan rā dast be derakht-e ālū narsīd, goft marā khod torshī nasazad*

"The old woman could not reach the plums, so she said 'Acids do not agree with me'".

پیرزن نمرد تا روز بارانی  
*Pīrzan namord tā rūz-e bārānī*

"The old woman did not die, and when she did, it was on a rainy day (to make things more difficult for escorts of the funeral)".

An Afghan proverb recommends abuse of old women:

هرجا که دیدی پیرزن دستش بگیر سرش بزن  
*Har jā ké dīdī pīrzan, dastash begīr sarash bezan*

"Wherever you see an old woman, hold her hand and blow her on the head".

It is however advised against being cursed by an old woman, since, as Sa'di puts it:

خرابی کند مرد شمشیرزن نه چندان که آه دل پیرزن  
*Kharābī konad mard-e shamshir-zan na chandān ké āh-e del-e pīrzan*

"Curse of an old woman could be more destructive than the act of a swordsman".

Widows are characterized by Persian proverbs as helpless, poor, and verbose women with undesirable habits, who always complain about their condition;

بیوه را که دست به بند بری سر درد دلش باز می شود  
*Bīveh rā ké dast be band bebarī sar-e dard-e delash bā mīshavad*

"A widow starts to complain as soon as she finds an opportunity".

لذت انگور زن بیوه داند نه خداوند میوه  
*Lazzat-e angār bīveh dānad na khodāvand-e mīveh*

"It is the (poor) widow who appreciates the sweetness of grapes, not the owner of the vineyard" (Sa'di). And, an Afghan saying likens an unbecoming act to begging a widow.

از بیوهء فلان گدائی میکند

*Az bīve-ye folān gadāii mīkonad*

### Superstitious thoughts about Women

Most superstitious sayings about women are about dreaming, of which some examples are given here:

خواب زن چپ است

*khāb-ē zan chap āst*

"Women's dreams go by contraries". (The phrase is sometimes interpreted to mean that a woman's bad dream usually foresees a happy event).

Moon seen in a dream is interpreted as a woman, and the left hand in a dream means a girl. Women's blood is believed to be revengeful. Hence the saying;

خون زن شوم است

*Khān-ē zan shūm āst*

"It is inauspicious to shed the blood of a woman".

Also, believing in superstition is considered to be a characteristic of women, and unbecoming to men who should be led by their wisdom.

مرد را عقل رایزن باشد سنبهء فال گوی زن باشد

*Mard rā 'aql rāīzan bāshad Soghbe-ye fālgāy zan bāshad*

"Men are led by their wisdom. the clown soothsayer is a woman".

### Women as Mothers

To give birth to and raise pious children are the most natural and highly appreciated duties of women. A mother's care for her children is considered to be the most pure, genuine and natural love. When a child is in trouble, it is the mother who suffers most:

مادر را دل سوزد و دایه را دامن

*Mādar rā del sūzad o dāyeh rā dāman*

"Of the mother, it is the heartstrings, while of the nurse it is only the garments that are torn (lit. burnt)". (The Persian has "the mother's heart burns", which means "she feels a great sympathy for, or greatly pities, her child", and the idea of burning suits nicely the nurse's garments).

A mother thinks all her young ones beauties:

سوسک به بچه‌اش می‌گوید قربان دست و پای بلوریت (بروم)

*Susg be bacche-ash mīguyad "qorbān-e dast ō pā-ye bolurit (beravam)*

"The black beetle says to her young one: 'How nice and white (lit. crystalline) your limbs are!'"

In the context of the immeasurable love and care a mother for her child, an Afghan saying characterizes a person who benefits both way, or wants a double win, as "a child with two mothers".

بچه دو مادره

*Bacche-ye do mādash.*

A mother's care and anxiety for her children is exemplified by this saying:

کلاغ از وقتی که بچه‌دار شد یک شکم سیر به خود نداد

*Kalāgh az vaqtī ke bacchē-dār shod yek shekam-e sīr be khod nadād*

"Since the crew had young ones, she never ate her fill of any food".

A mother's love for her son keeps her anxious constantly. Hence the saying:

به مرد آن باد که زن گوید، نه مادر

*Bē mard ān bād ke zan gūyad, na mādar*

"May a man has been involved in what his wife suspects, not what her mother considers probable". (When a man is late to come back home, his wife usually thinks that he is enjoying himself somewhere, while his mother is anxious that lest he is involved in some accident). It is therefore said:

یک اولاد کم است، دوتا زیاد (است)

*Yek oulād kam ast, do-tā ziyād ast*

"One child is too few, two are too many". A variant of this saying is:

یکی کم است، دوتا غم است، سه‌تا خاطر جمع است

*Yekī kam ast, do-tā gham ast, sé-tā khāter-jam' ast*

"One (child) is too few, two still causes anxiety, but three gives assurance".

A mother with only one child is extremely anxious. Hence the saying

الهی هیچ سفره‌ای یک‌نانه نباشد

*Elāhī hīch sofreh-ī yek-nāneh nabāshad*

"May there be no table with only one loaf of bread on it!" (i.e. May there be no parent with only one child).

Filial piety is highly praised by Persian maxims as exemplified by this saying which is attributed to the Prophet:

بهشت زیر پای مادران است

*Behesht zīr-e pā-ye mādarān ast*

"Paradise is under the feet (i.e. influence) of mothers".

However, children seem not to respond to their mothers' love appropriately. A mother's love is therefore considered to be one sided, as expressed by this saying;

پدر و مادر عاشق بیعارند

*Pedar o mādar 'āsheq-e bī'arand*

"The father and mother are shameless lovers" (i.e. they are unrequited and still persistent lovers of their child); and,

پدر و مادر به اولاد بسته‌اند، اولاد به سگ

*Pedar o mādar bē' oulād bastehānd, oulād bē sag*

"The parents are attached to the child, the child to his dog". A similar Afghan proverb says:

دل مادر به بچه، از بچه به کوچه

*Del-e mādar bē bacchē, az bacchē bē kūchē*

"The mother is attached to her child, and the child to the street (or, the playground)". In this context, a humorous saying is also quotable:

نه نه پستان . پستان برود قبرستان

*Nanē, nanē, pestān; pestān beravad qabrestān*

"Dearie, don't you want milk?"- "No! To hell with the breast". this saying is based on an amusing story of a mother whose son kept the habit of being breast-fed until he married, and when her mother walked to the bridal chamber and offered him the breast, the youth said: "No! To hell with the breast".

A mother's bitter feeling about the fact that her children turn ungrateful when they marry, is also expressed by this proverb:

پسر زائیدم برای رندان، دختر زائیدم برای مردان، خودم ماندم سفل و سرگردان

*Pesar zā'idam barā-ye rendān, dokhtar zā'idam barā-ye mardān, khodam māndam safil o sargardān*

"I gave birth to a son only for him to be led astray, and to a daughter for her to be taken away by men, and thus I myself remained lonely and lost".

(Note. as used here, means libertines by whom young lads are led astray).

In Persian proverbs references are also made to mothers who pursue their own desires in the pretext of child-care, or simply forget their child when faced with a danger;

مادر به اسم بچه، می‌خورد قند و کلوچه

*Mādar be esm-e bacchē, mikhorad qand o koluché*

"The mother eats of sugar and cake pretended to be meant for the child".

ملک الموت من نه مهستی ام...

*Malak al-mout man na mahsati-am*

"O! Azrael, I am not Mehasti". This is based on a fable about a selfish woman who, having pretended to be a devoted mother, points to her daughter, Mehasti, when she faces with a stranger whom she mistakes for the death angel.

## Femal Relations

Among the kinswomen, one's maternal aunt is most frequently and ironically referred to in Persian proverbs, of which some typical examples are cited;

آش ماست خالته، بخوری پاته نخوری پاته

*Āsh-e māst-e khālatê, bəkhori pātê nakhori pātê*

"It is a pottage cooked by your aunt, and you are under obligation for the favour no matter whether you eat it or not". (When someone has taken the trouble to do us a favour, we should make the most of it, because we shall be considered beholden to the favour, even if we do not benefit by it).

(Note. خالته *khālatê* and پاته *pātê* are colloquial contractions of خالهاست *khālê-ast* and پات است *pāy-at ast* respectively).

خاله را می‌خواهند برای درز و دوز اگر نه چه خاله چه یوز

*Khālêrā mīkhāhand barā-ye dūz; agar-na chē khālê chē yūz*

"The aunt is wanted to help in needlework (or sewing); otherwise an aunt and a panther are one". (Relatives are expected to help one another).

رفتم خانه خاله دلم واشه خاله خسبید دلم پوسید

*raftam khāne-ye khālê delam vā-shê khālê khosbid delam pūsid*

"I went to my aunt's to be relieved of my mood, but she went to sleep and I got more depressed". (Note. <sup>vā-shê</sup>اواشه is a colloquial form of <sup>bāz-shavad</sup>باز شود).

سنگ خاله قورباغه را گرو کشیدن

*Sang-e khālê qurbāghê rā gero kashidan*

"To hold on to an invalid or unproved argument; not have a leg to stand on".

(Lit. To distraint upon Aunt Frog's stone).

وقت خوردن، خاله خواهرزاده را نمی‌شناسد

*Vaqt-e khordan khālê khāhar-zādeh rā nemī-shenāsad*

"When the time comes for eating, the aunt forgets (lit. does not recognize) her niece".

وقت گریه و زاری بروید خاله را بیارید وقت نقل و نواله حالا نیست جای خاله

*Vaqt-e gerye o zārī, beravīd khālê rā biyārid; vaqt-e nūql o navāleh, hālā nist jā-ye khālê*

"In trouble and tears you send four auntie; when you have a feast you say this is no place for auntie". (Lit. When there is weeping, (you say) "fetch Auntie"; when you have sweetmeat and victuals (you say) "There is no room for Auntie now").

Some womenfolk with unpleasant habits are ironically titled as "aunt", like

خاله خوش وعده  
*Khālê khosh-va'deh* "The frequently calling or self-invited Aunt";  
 خاله رورو *Khālê rourou* "The Aunt gadabout" (a gadabout person);  
 خاله زنک *Khālê zanak* "An old fogey who talks too much". (زنک is the  
 diminutive of زن and means a contemptible woman).  
*zanak*  
*zan*

خاله گردن دراز  
 A number of animals also are nicknamed as aunt, like *Khālê gardan-derāz*  
 "the Long-necked Auntie" (a quasi proper name for camel); خاله خرسه *Khālê kherse*  
 "the Auntie Bear"; and خاله سوسکه *Khālê suskeh* "the Auntie Beetle".

A woman's relations with her mother and sister in laws are known to be the most thorny ones. A mother in law is believed to have the habit of criticizing every act of her daughter in law. Hence the saying;

دختر به تو می‌گویم، عروس تو بشنو  
*Dokhtar be to mīgūyam, 'arūs to beshnō*  
 "I am talking to you, O maid (or daughter); so that the bride may hear it".

Sisters of one's husband are likened to biting creatures;

خواهر شوهر عقب زیر فرش است  
*Khāhar-shouhar 'aqrab-e zīr-e farsh ast*  
 "One's sister-in-law is (like) a scorpion hidden under a carpet".

Sisters in law (women whose husbands are brothers) are also believed to be each other's rivals;

رخت دو جاری را در یک تشت نمی‌شود شست  
*Rakht-e do jāri rā dar yek tasht nemishavad shost*  
 "One can not wash the clothes of two sisters-in-law in the same tub."

Before leaving her parents' home, a bride is usually advised to be patient and tolerant with her husband's kinswomen;

شوهر طاق اتاق است، قوم شوهر پایه طاق  
*Shouhar tāq-e otāq ast o. qoum-e shouhar pāyē-ye tāq*  
 "The husband is (like) the roof and his relatives are its pillars".

خانه شوهر هفت خمره زردآب دارد  
*Khāne-ye shouhar haft khomreh zardāb dārad*  
 "The husband's house has seven jars containing bitterness".

Relations with kinswomen of one's wife is said to be cordial, as suggested by the proverb;

قربان برم خدا را یک بام و دو هوا را  
*Qorbān beram khodā rā, yek bām o do havā rā*

"Good Heavens! How can there be two kinds of weather over one roof?" This



saying is based on an anecdote of a mother who treats her daughter in law and her son in law discriminately, and is cited in cases when a person gives different opinion on a matter under equal circumstances. Another proverb based on the image of a bride's mother is;

(حالا) چند کلمه از مادر عروس بشنو

*Chand kalemeh ham az mādār-e ʿarās besheno*

"Hear now a few words from the bride's mother". Saying so is a contemptuous way of drawing the attention of a crowd to the unwelcome remarks of a person.

An Afghan proverb refers to the attention paid to the wife's relatives:

خویش زن قیلہ بزن

*Khīsh-e zan, qīlê bezan*

"The best meat in the feast belongs to the wife's relatives".

However, men are believed to hate their mothers-in-law, as suggested by the proverb;

خرخر مرگ مادر زن از چچه بلبل بهتر است

*Kherkher-e marg-e mādār-zan az chahchah-e bolbol behtar ast*

"Better to hear the dead rattle of one's mother-in-law than the warbling of the nightingale".

A sister-in-law is said to be more desired by a man than his wife, as meant by the vulgar saying;

زن کیاب است، و خواهر زن نان زیر کباب

*Zan kabāb ast o khāhar-zan nān-e zīr-e kabāb*

"The wife is (like) a roast meat, and her sister (like) the bread under it (i.e. more appealing)". Another saying to this effect is:

کسی غم مردن زن را می خورد که مادر زن نداشته باشد

*Kasī gham-e mordan-e zan rā mīkhorad kē khāhar-zan nadāshleh bāshad*

"He grieves most at the death of his wife who has no sister-in-law (since when a man's wife dies her sister-in-law is considered the best replacement)".

The enmity between rival wives is a well known fact, as indicated by the saying;

هوو هوو است اگر همه سیو است

*Havū, havū-st., agar ham ē sabū-st*

"A rival wife is after all one's rival, though she may be as ugly as a pitcher".

A step-mother is known for her discriminative treatment. Hence the proverb;

برای همه مادر است ، برای من زن بابا  
*Barā-ye hamé mādār ast, barā-ye man zan- bābā*

"He or she is (like) a mother to every one, but (like) a step-mother to me". This is cited to complain against discrimination. And;

زن بابا دلبر می‌شود ، مادر نمی‌شود  
*Zan-bābā delbar mishavad, mādār nemishanad*

"A Step-mother could be a sweet-heart (for one's father, but can not be a mother (for her step-child)". However,

مادر که نیست با زن پدر باید ساخت  
*Mādar ké nīst, bā zan-pedar bāyad sākht*

"One who has no mother should put up with his or her step-mother". This proverb is cited in similar impasses.

## Women as Wives

### Marriage

A large number of Persian proverbs deal with women as wives, their conduct and relations with husbands, and the way they should be treated in family life.

Girls are usually believed to grow faster than boys, as meant by the saying:

دختر تخم تر تیزک است  
*Dokhtar tokhm-etartīzak ast* or ( as Afghans say) *Dokhtar sabzi-ye pālak ast*  
"Girls grow like mashrooms (lit. cress weeds)". A variant of this puts it;

دختر مثل کدو است ، یک شب مهتاب رشد می‌کند  
*Dokhtar mesl-e kadū ast, dar yek shab-e mahtāb roshd mikonad*  
"Girls are (like) squash; they grow in a single night with moonlight".

Girls are also believed to lose their beauty and attractiveness soon, and have to be given in marriage when still a teen-ager. Hence the saying:

زن که رسید به بیست ، باید به حالش گریست  
*Zan ké rasīd bē bīst, bāyad bē hālāsh garīst*  
"When a woman attains the age of twenty, her condition is to be deplored". A teen-ager girl is therefore called دم بخت *Dam-e bakht* or  
"marriageable (lit. approaching her fortune or luck). However, it is traditionally believed that girls do not remain unmarried, as expressed by the proverb;

مهرهء سوراخ دار به زمین نمی‌ماند  
*Mohre-ye sūrākh-dār bē zamīn nemīmānad*

"A bead doesn't stay long on the ground on account of its hole".

While boys do not have much difficulty in finding brides, it is traditionally considered a challenge to give a girl in marriage. A very clever and resourceful person is therefore commended by saying:

اگر هفت دختر کور داشته باشد، یک شب همه را شوهر می‌دهد  
*Agar haft dokhtar-e kūr dāshlê bâshad, yek-shabeh hamé rā shouhar mīdehad*

"Should he have seven blind daughters, he can marry them off in a single night".

The eagerness of a girl's parents to give their daughter in marriage has probably originated the saying:

در خانه داماد خبری نیست، خانه عروسی است (بزن و بکوب است)  
*Dar khāne-ye dāmād khabari nīst, dar khāne-ye 'arūs bezan-o-bekub ast*

"The bride home shows signs of wedding, while there is no excitement in the groom's house". (The proverb is a caution against premature hopes).

Many expressions in Persian literature suggest the need for a man to marry. Some examples of these sayings are given here;

سر پی همسر می‌گردد  
*Sar pe-ye hamsar mīgardad*

"Everyone seeks his mate or spouse".

هر کس که زن ندارد، آرام تن ندارد  
*Har kas ké zan nadārad, ārām-e tan nadārad*

"The man who has no wife has no comfort".

قرض عروسی را خدا می‌دهد/می‌رساند  
*Qarz-e 'arūsī rā khodā mīdehad*

"The money borrowed for marrying purposes will be repaid by the aid of God".

The Afghan variant of this saying is;

قرض کن، زن کن؛ قرض می‌رود، زن می‌ماند  
*Qarz-kon zan-kon, qarz miravad, zan mīmānad*

"Borrow money and marry a woman. the money will be repaid and the wife will remain".

## Single Life

Many sayings discourage men to get married. A few examples are given here;

زن نداری، غم نداری  
*Zan nadārī, gham nadārī*

"No wife, no worry (or, no wife, no strife)". A variant of this saying is;

آدم بی زن و اولاد پادشاه بی غم است  
*Ādam-e bī zan o oulād pādeshāh-e bī-gham ast*

"A man without a wife and children is (like) a worriless king".

قربان بی زنی، که یک نان تنها بزنی  
*Ghorbān-e bī-zanī; kē yek nān tanhā bezanī*

"Thank God you are not married, and you content yourself with a loaf of bread" (Afghan saying).

غم نداری، زن بگیر  
*Gham nadārī, zan begīr*

"You have no worry (and you look for it), then you marry". Still more strong expression to this effect are;

زن بگیر تا جانت را بگیرد  
*zan begīr tā jānat rā begīrad*

"You marry a woman, and she'll make you suffer to death"; and;

زن گرفتم مونس جانم باشد، بلای جانم شد  
*Zan gereftam mūnes-e jānam bāshaḡ, balā-ye jānam shod*

"I married a woman expecting her to be my intimate associate, and she made my life a misery".

In this context, the marriage contract is referred to as طوق لعنت  
*Touq-e la'nat* "The cursed necklace (i.e. the nuptial knot of marriage)"; and  
طوق لعنت به گردنش افتاد  
*Tough-e la'nat be gardan-ash oftād.*  
"He was made to wear the cursed necklace", is said about a man just married, meaning that he was deprived of the blessedness of the single life. In the same context, the following verse is often quoted from Sa'di's Golestan:

زلف خوبان زنجیر پای عقل است و دام مرغ زیرک  
*Zolf-e khūbān zanjīr-e pā-ye 'aghl ast o dām-e morgh-e zīrak.*

"The ringlets of beauties are fetters for the feet of reason, and snares for wise birds".

### Looking for a Bride

Many persian maxims lay stress on the wisdom of being well prepared before taking a wife. A saying by Sa'di to this effect is well known;

مردیت بیازمای وانگه زن کن  
*Mardīt beyāzmāy vangah zan kon*

"Test (or, prove) your virility before taking a wife".

Machmaking, a well established tradition in Iran, was an important process, since the two parties in marriage should suit each other. Some sayings advise on how to choose a wife:

پیر را به خر خریدن و جوان را به زن گرفتن مفرست  
*Pīr rā be khar khāridan va javān rā be zan gereftan maferešt*

"Send not an old man to buy an ass, nor a young man to choose a wife (the one is satisfied with any speed, and the other with any beauty)".

It is quality that counts in a prospective wife, not her mother's words;

عروس تعریفی آخرش شلخته درمی آید  
'Arūs-e ta'rifī, ākher-æsh: shelakhté dar-miāyad

"A bride who is highly commended (by her mother or other relatives) will turn out a slut."

دست ننهام درد نکند با این عروس آوردنش  
Dast-e nane-am dard nakonad bā in 'arūs āvardanash

"Thanks to mummy for the bride she has brought home". (Vulgar way for denouncing or condemning someone's act).

It is commonly believed that a girl will follow her mother's example not only in feature and stature, but also in her character and quality as a wife, as implied by this saying;

مادر را ببین ، دختر را بگیر  
Mādar rā bebīn, dokhtar rā begīr

"Look at the mother and then marry her daughter". A variant of this saying is;

دختر می خواهی ما ماش ببین ، کرباس می خواهی پهناش ببین  
Dokhtar mikhāhi māmāsh bebīn, karbās mikhāhi pahnāsh bebīn

"You may know the daughter by the mother, the quality of canvas by its width".

In Iran, the custom of marrying one's paternal cousin is considered a good one, as emphasised by the proverb;

عقد پسرعمو را با دخترعمو در آسمان بسته اند  
'aqd-e pesar-'amū rā bā dokhtar-'mū dar āsēmān basteh- and

"The marriage contract of cousins is predestinated (lit. the marriage contract of cousins is concluded in heaven)". On the contrary, an Afghan saying considers a girl of the neighbourhood not a good choice as a prospective wife;

دختر همسایه فلموک (= مفلک ) است  
Dokhtar-e hamsāyē falmūk ast

"A girl of the neighbourhood is a sickly one".

Chastity is a quality appreciated most in women in a traditional society;

زن نجیب گرفتن مشکل اما نگهداشتنش آسان است  
Zan-e najīb gereftan moškel, ammā negāhdāsh-tan-e ā āsān ast

"It is difficult to marry a chaste woman, but easy to keep her". On the contrary; زن نانجیب گرفتن آسان اما نگهداشتن دشوار است  
*Zan-e nâ-najīb gereftan āsān, ammā negāhdāsh-tan-ash-ē dōshvār ast*

"It is easy to marry an unchaste woman, but difficult to keep her". An Afghan equivalent of this saying is;

## Requirements

Prospective bride and groom have to suit each other in quality and social status. Among other requirements, it is advised that a maiden should better marry an unmarried man;

زن دوشیزه را شوی دوشیزه باید  
*Zan-e dūshīzeh rā shū-ye dūshīzeh bāyad*

Many persian sayings warn against imbalance between the parties who are supposed to live a life together, as a maxim suggests;

زن با چادر به خانه شوهر می آید و با کفن بیرون می رود  
*Zan bā chādor bē khāne-ye shouharmīāyad va bā kafan bīrūn mīravād*

"A wife should enter her husband's home in a veil and leave there (only) in a shroud."

A bride has to take a dowry with her to help establish her new home. The tradition was strictly observed as attested by the frequently cited saying;

روژه بی نماز، عروس بی جهاز، قرمه بی پیاز  
*Rūze-ye bī-nemāz, 'arūs-e bī-jahāz, qorme-ye bī-piyāz*

"Fasting without prayers, a bride without dowry, and preserved meat without onions (are all incomplete)". A dowry of considerable value is a matter of pride for the bride;

ناز عروس به جهاز (ش) است  
*Nāz-e 'arūs bē jahāzash ast*

"The bride puts on airs because of her trousseau (or dowry)"; and:

زنی که جهاز ندارد، اینهمه ناز ندارد  
*Zanī-ke jahāz nadārad, īn-hamē nāz nadārad*

"A woman who has no dowry, has no (or should not have) airs".

## A Good Wife and a Bad Wife

The importance of women in a man's life is best implied by the saying;

"Should women did not exist, there could exist no mankind (lit. nothing)".

زن (اگر) نبود، هیچ چیز نبود  
*Zan nabūd, hich-chīz nabūd*

A good woman is preised as a guardian of her husband' dignity;  
زن صندوقچه ناموس مرد است *Zan sandūqche-ye nāmūs-e mard ast!*

"Women are the treasure-box of thier husbands' chastity". ('chastity' also simply means one's wife and daughter). A variant of this saying is;

زن آئینه مرد است  
*Zan ā'īne-ye mard ast*

"The woman is the mirror of her husband". A good wife makes a man happy;  
زن اهل است کار سهل است (اگر) *Yār ahl ast, kār sahl ast*

"When one's party is amenable, it is easy to handle affairs". and  
زن خوب مرد را به دولت می‌رساند و زن بد مرد را خانه‌خراب می‌کند  
*Zan-e khūb mard rā be doulat mīrasānad, va zan-e bad mard rā khānē-kharāb mikonad*

"A good wife brings a man fortune, and a bad one ruins him". This saying reminds one of the well known phrase in Sa'di's Golestan that reads;  
زن خوب و فرمانبر و پارسا کند مرد درویش را پادشا  
*Zan-e khūb o farmānbar o pārsā Konad; mard-e darvīsh rā pādshā*

"A good, devout, and pious wife makes her husband (feel or live like) a king". However,

زن پارسا در جهان نادر است  
*Zan-e pārsā dar jahān nāder ast*

"A pious wife is a rarity in this world".

Unchaste women bring shame and disgrace to their families. Such a woman, humiliatively characterized as an ass "whose pack-saddle is askew" است *pālānash kaj ast* is uncontrollable, since "she will be unchaste even if confined in a glass vessel":  
زن بد را در شیشه هم بکنند، کار خودش را می‌کند / نم خودش را پس می‌دهد  
*zan-e bad rā dar shisheh ham bekonand, kār-e khodash rā mīkonad*  
A shamless woman is called هفت خط *Haft-khatt* "Extremely sly or leery (lit. seven stripes)".

Next to unchastity, the worst attribution of a woman is shrewness;

زن سلیطه سگ بی قلاده است  
*Zan-e salīteh sag-e bī qelādeh ast*

"A shrew is a dog uncontrolled by a collar". Such a woman rules her husband;

زن سلیطه شوهر مرد است  
*Zan-e salīteh shouhar-e mard ast*

(Lit. A shrew is her man's husband). A saying attributed to the Prophet advises;

از دیوار شکسته و سگ درنده و زن سلیطه باید حذر کرد  
*Az dīvār-e shekasteh o sag-e darandeh o zan-e salīteh bāyad hazar kard*

"Three things to avoid: a crumbling wall, a biting dog, and a shrew". A quarrelsome wife obstructs her family of God's blessing;

چه خیری برآید از آن خاندان که بانگ خروس آید از ماکیان  
*Chē kheyri barāyad az ān khānedān Kē bāng-e khorūs āyad az mākiyān*

"There is no happiness in the house where the hen crows like a cock". the expression is similar to the Japanese saying: Fu ni chōzetsu aru wa kore rei no kai . ( A woman's long tongue brings about misfortune); and the English saying: "It is a sad house where the hen crows louder than the cock".

A person with whom one can not settle nor to get rid of, is sometimes likened to a shrew; زن سلیطه را ماند، که نه نگاه توان داشت و نه رها توان کرد  
*Zan-e saliteh rā mānad, ké na negāh tavān dāshl va na rahā tavān kard*  
"Like a shrew whom the husband can not settle with nor escape from".

### Man's Ascendancy

A number of maxims, mostly in versified form, caution men to be intolerant of their wives' domination;

زن که فائق بود بر شوهر به معنی شوهر است  
*Zan ke fa'q bād bar shouhar bē-ma'nā shouhar ast*

"The woman who rules her husband is indeed his husband".

برکنده به آن ریش که در دست زنان است  
*Barkandē beh ā rīshkē dar dast-e zanān ast*

"The beard pulled by (lit. in the hands of ) women is better shaved (lit. exterminated)". (Note. A man's beard is traditionally regarded as a symbol of his dignity).

استیلاي زنان وبال باشد  
*Estila-ye zanān vabāl bāshnd*

"Domination of women is a disgrace (lit. mischief) (for men)".

مرگ به دان که نیاز به همسران  
*Marg beh dān ké.niyāz bē hamsarān*

"It is better (for a man ) to die than to beseech (or ask the favour of) his wife (or associates)".

### Compatibility and Disagreement

Intimacy and cordiality between man and wife bring them happiness, as suggested by these sayings;

اگر یار اهل است کار سهل است  
*Agar yār ahl ast kār sahl ast*



"When one's party is amenable, it is easy to handle affairs".

کدبانو و کدخدا که با هم سازند از خاک زر کنند  
*kadbanā va kadkhodā ké bā ham sâzand, az khāk zar konand*

"A compatible husband and wife will make gold out of the earth"; and

گل زن و شوهر را در یک تگهار سرشته‌اند  
*Gel-e zan o shouhar rā dar yek taghâr sereshlehând*

"(Such) a man and wife are made of the same clay". One's wife is worth to be worshipped as God;

عیال پرستی خداپرستی است  
*'Ayâl-parastî khodâ-parastî ast*  
 (Lit. He who worships his wife worships God).

Men are advised to treat their wives kindly and be caring about their family. Women cavil at their ill-humoured husband by saying;

ای آقای کمر باریک، کوچه روشن کن و خانه تاریک  
*Ey āghâ-ye kamar bârîk, kûchê roushan-kon o khânê târîk*

"O slender-waisted gentleman, who darkens your house and brighten the

همسر ناجور و صلهء ناهم رنگ است  
*Hamsar-e nâ-jûr, vasle-ye nâ-hamrang ast*

"An ill-matched wife is likened to an ill-matched patch". Such woman is a torment to her husband;

زن بد برای شوهر به کفش تنگ می‌ماند  
*Zan-e bādî barâ-ye shouhar be kafsh-e tang mîmânad*

"A bad wife is like tight shoes for her husband". And, as Sa'di puts it;

پا تهی گشتن به است از کفش تنگ رنج غربت به که اندر خانه جنگ (سعدی)  
*Pâ tohi gashtan beh ast az kafsh-e tang*  
*Ranj-e qorbat beh ké andar khâneh jang*

"Better to walk barefoot than to wear tight shoes.

"To suffer in exile is better than to have strife at home".

من هم پایم شکسته است *Man ham pâyam shekasteh ast*

"As for me, my leg is broken" This was said by a man who alone did not move when a preacher asked everybody among his audience in the mosque who have complainment about his wife to rise. When asked whether he was pleased with his wife, the man answered that he could not stand up simply because his wife had broken his legs.

However, it is generally believed that the merits appreciated in wives and the habits undesired in them most often exist together, though in different

proportion. Hence the most favourite saying of Iranian men;

زن بلاست ، (و) هیچ خانه‌ای بی بلا نباشد

*Zan balâst, va hich khânê-i bi balâ nabâshad*

"Woman is a plague; yet may no house be without such a plague".

### Young Wife and Old Husband

Marrying a young woman in one's old age invites trouble, since;

زن جوان را اگر تیری در پهلوی نشیند به که پیری

*Zan-e jâvân râ agar tî rî dar pahlû neshinad, beh ké pîrî*

"An arrow in the side of a young woman is better than an old husband by her side". (Sa'di's Golestân).

A versified maxim condemns falling in love with women in one's advanced age;

عشق پیری گر بجنید سر به رسوائی زند

*Eshq-e pîrî gar bejonbad sar be rosvâi zand*

"Should an old man falls in love, it will end in disgrace."

It is also not appropriate for an old man to become a father;

بچه سر پیری زنگوله پای تابوت است

*Bacche-ye sar-e pîrî zangule-ye pâ-ye lâbut ast*

"The child of one's old age is (like) a bell hung from one's coffin."

### Husband; a Bread Winner

Supporting one's family is traditionally considered the first and foremost responsibility of a husband, and it is not an easy task;

زن اگر امسال و پارسال میزد، مرد ساعتی صد بار میزد

*Zan agar emsâl o pârsâl mizâd, mard ruzî sad bâr mizâd*

"While women have labour (not more than) once a year, men have labour hundred times an hour". Poverty puts a man in disadvantage;

مردی که نان ندارد، اینقدر زبان ندارد

*Mardi ké nân nadârad. inqadr zabân nadârad*

"A man who cannot earn bread should not have such unrestrained tongue (i.e. he should control his tongue so as not to be rude to his wife); and:

نان بده، فرمان بده

*Nân bedeh farmân bedeh*

"Earn bread and be the head (lit. give command)".

The bread earning is a responsibility traditionally shouldered by husbands as implied by a number of sayings;

شوهرم شغال باشد، نانم تو تغار باشد

*Shouharam shoghal bâshad, nânam tû taghâr bâshad.*

"I don't mind my husband is a jackard, as long as my bin is full of bread".  
(Note the assonance between the words *shoghāl* and *toghār* which gives a proverbial shape to the saying).

شوهرم برود کاروانسرا، ناناش بیاید حرمسرا

*Shouharam beravad kār-vānsarā, nānash biyāyad haramsarā*

"So long as my husband earns bread, I don't mind where he works (lit. Let my husband go to caravanserai, (but) let his bread come to heram, i.e. the women's apartment)".

Women are usually believed to be wasteful, lavishly spending what their husbands has earned:

مرد به پارو می آورد، زن به جارو می برد

*Mard bē pārū miāvarad, zan bē jārū mibarad*

"What men bring in bags (lit. by shovels) women sweep away by broom".

## Women and the Housework

House-keeping is a highly admired art of a good, responsible and tidy wife and mother. A woman lacking such qualities is called <sup>شلخته</sup> *Shelakhteh* "a slovenly woman", and is mocked at by the following sayings;

یا کوچه گردی می شوی یا خانه داری

*Yā kūchē-gardī mishvi, yā khānē-dāri*

"You can either be a gadabout or a good house wife";

همسایه ها یاری کنی تا من شوهر داری کنم

*Hamsāyē-hā yāri donid tā man shouhar-dāri konam*

"Help me, my neighbours, so that I may be able to do my house-keeping".

(Note: شوهر داری

originally means the way of handling or managing a husband).

However, it is believed that the happily married women are not necessarily those who are good in house-keeping. Hence the saying;

فاطمه، زهرا برای شلخته ها دو رکعت نماز خوانده است

*Fāteme-ye Zahrā barā-te shelakhte-hā do rek'at nemāz khāndeh ast*

"Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, has prayed twice (lit. two units of prayers) on behalf of the slovenly (or untidy) women. (these are usually better off, and more loved by their husbands, than other women)". (Note: رکعت <sup>رکعت</sup> *rak'at* is a unit of prayer).

The fault or negligence of a wife with good standing are easily ignored;

کاسه ای که بی بی بشکند صدا ندارد

*Kāsē-ii ké bībī beshkanad sadā nadārad*

"If the mistress of the house breaks a bowl, it makes no noise (i.e. it doesn't matter)".

گناه بی‌بی به گردن کنیز است  
*Gonāh-e bibī be gardan-e kaniz ast*

"The maid has to blame for the fault of the mistress".

The housework is said to be endless, and a housewife's hard-work is not fully appreciated by other family members, including her husband. Hence the saying (mainly cited in Yazd area);

کار خانه کور است  
*Kār-e khāneh kūr ast*

"The house work is invisible, or immeasurable (lit. blind)".

Women who try hard to do their housekeeping and shoulder other burdens are sometimes called: زینب ستم‌کش *Zainab-e setam-kash* "Zainab, the oppressed" (a reference to Zainab, a sister of Imam Hosein, the third Shiite Imam, who suffered a lot of hardship after the martyrdom of her brother).

A proverb referring to the helpless situation of those housewives who shoulder the excessive load of housework says;

یا مشو زن خر، یا (اگر شدی) بکش بار خر  
*Yā masho zan-e khar, yā (agar shodi) bekaṣh bār-e khar*

"Either do not be married to an ass, or carry the ass's load".

It is said that شوهر داری سخت است *Shouhar-dārī sakht ast* "housekeeping is a difficult task". The Afghan variant of this saying is: نان شوهر دندان دارد *Nān-e shouhar dandān dārad* "The bread a husband earns has its teeth (i.e. it bites his wife)".

However, a woman who think more of adorning herself than housekeeping may excuse herself by saying;

شوهر کردم و سمه کنم، نه وصله کنم  
*Shouhar kardam vasmeh konam, na vasleh konam*

"I have married in order to (tidy myself by) dying my eyebrows with woad, not to patch up garments". (Note. The resemblance between the words <sup>vasmeh</sup> *vasmeh* and *vasleh* which produce a sort of "assonance", gives some beauty to the saying).  
 وصله

## Giving Birth to a Child

By giving birth to a child, a wife strengthens her position in the family. It is traditionally believed that;

زن تا نزاید بیگانه است  
*Zan tâ nazâyad biganeh ast*

"One's wife is like a stranger before she has had a baby". A variant of this saying puts is;

زن تا نزاید دلبر است، و چون زاید مادر  
*Zan tâ nazâyad delbar ast, va chon zâyad mādār ast*

"A woman is a sweetheart before she has a baby, and a mother after she has had one".

A barren woman is mocked at by the following saying;

سم قاطر خورده است  
*Som-e ghâter khordeh ast*

"She has eaten the hoof of a mule". This means that she is barren as a mule—a derogatory remark.

Traditionally, when a wife is barren, the husband has a good excuse to divorce her or take a second wife.

Some sayings also refer to the hardship of delivery, of which proverbs the following two are typical examples;

سه پلشت آید و زن زاید و مهمان عزیزت برسد  
*Sê-pelesht âyad o zan zâyad o mehmân-e azizat berasad*

"While one has had bad luck in gambling, and one's wife gives birth to a baby, one has to entertain a dear guest". (Note. *Sê pelesht* means "three unlucky throws (or bones)" in gambling).

شاه خانم می‌زاید، ماه خانم درد می‌کشد  
*Shâh khānom mizâyad, mâh khānom dardmikashad*

"Shâh Khānom (woman's name) is in labour, but Mâh Khānom suffers from pain".

## Quarrel of Man and Wife

Husbands and wives are advised, as an English proverb puts it, not to wash their dirty linen in public. A Persian proverb expresses it this way;

سر بشکند در کلاه، دست بشکند در آستین  
*Sar beshkanad dar kolâh, dast beshkanad dar âstīn*

"If one's head is broken, let it be in one's hat, and if one's arm is broken, let it be in one's sleeve".

A number of sayings advise against mediating between a man and his wife:

در میان زن و شوهر میانگی مکنید

*dar miyān-e zan va shouhar miyānegi nakonīd*

"Do not go between man and wife" (an admonition ascribed to Anooshiravān, the celebrated Sassanide king).

زن و شوهر جنگ کنند، ابلهان باور کنند

*Zan o shouhar jang konand, ablahān bāvar konand*

"When a man and his wife quarrel, only fools believe (that they are really quarreling)". Husbands and wives are believed to make it up soon after they quarrel.

A saying that cautions against interfering in other people's affairs uses the image of a bride;

عروس چهارتا تنبان دارد مفت کیل گنده اش

*'Arūs chahār tā tonbān dārad, moft-e kapal-e gondēash*

"If the bride has four petticoats, it must be taken into consideration that she has also big posterions".

### Beating One's Wife

A saying mainly in use in Tehran area suggests;

زن را نباید زد، حتی با یک شاخه گل

*Zan rā nabāyad zad hattā bā yek shākhe-ye gol'*

"One should not beat his wife even by a branch of flower". Advices like this seem to aim at softening the behaviour of many men who traditionally believe that it is natural to beat their wives if they show disobedience. A typical saying expressive of the minds of such men is;

زن یعنی بزن

*zan ya nī bezan zan*

"'Wife' means 'beat' her". (If "زن" *zan*) in Persian means both a woman or wife and "you beat", and there is a play of words in this saying). The Afghan variant of this expression goes to the extreme by saying;

زن را (با تیر) زن، اگر مرد دیگر زن، اگر نمرد دیگر زن

*Zan rā (bā tīr) zan, agar mard dīgar zan, agar namord dīgar zan*

"Beat (or shoot) the wife. If she died, take another wife; and if she did not die, beat her again". (The expression contains a play of words, as "زن" *Zan* in the first part of the sentence mean both "woman" and "beat" and "زن دیگر" *dīgar zan* in the latter part mean "another wife" and "beat again" respectively.)

## Divorce

Disagreement between a man and his wife may lead to separation . A divorce was traditionally initiated by men, and nowadays is sometimes applied for by women. Divorce is, however, reproached by the Islamic teachings. A widely cited tradition ( a binding statement attributed to the Prophet Mohammad) versified by Mowlavi ((1207~1273) : says;

تا توانی پا منه اندر فراق اینضالشیاء عندی الطلاق  
*Tā tavānī pā maneh andar ferāgh*  
*Abghaz al-ashyā' 'endī al-talaq*

"Do your best to avoid separation, since a divorce is what I hate most".

It is also commonly believed that;

زن و شوهر کفش تنگ نیستند که بشود عوضان کرد  
*Zan o shouhar kafsh-e tang nīstand kē beshavad 'evazeshān kard*  
 "Husbands and wives are not tight shoes that one can change them easily".

The marriage portion, usually in the form of a huge amount of money due to be paid by the husband, traditionally served to protect wives against a thoughtless divorce by husbands. In reality, however, a woman who wishes to divorce and prefers being sent away portionless to continuing a miserable life may express her desire by saying;

مهرم حلال، جانم آزاد  
*Mahram halāl, jānam āzād*

"I waive the marriage-portion due me , but crave for the immunity of my life". In the negotiations to fix a marriage, the switors in their attempt to bargain a lower marriage-portion, usually remind the uncertainty of collecting it, saying;

مهر را که داد که گرفت؟  
*Mahr rā kē dād kē gereft?*

"A marriage-portion is unprecedented to be finally paid or collected".

In most cases, the marriage-portion fixed in money looses its value gradually due to inflation, and worths very little after a few decades when the husband dies. Hence the ironical saying;

مهرش چیست که هشت یکش باشد؟  
*Mahrash chīst kē hasht-yekash bāshad*

"The marriage-portion doesn't amount to anything; much less "one-eight" of the heirloom she is entitled". هشت یک *hasht-yek*, or, in Arabic, ثمن *somn* is one-eight of a man's estate which is inherited by his widow in case she has children).

## Remarrying

There are sayings both for and against marrying a second wife. A famous verse by Sa'di has this advice for men;

برو خواجه زن کن به هر نوبهار که تقویم پارینه ناید به کار  
*boro khwajé zan kon be har noubahâr  
ké taqwîm-e pâriné nâyad be kâr*

"Remarry when the spring (the first season of the year) comes, since the old calendar is not useful any more".

The following saying is also aimed at justifying the acts of men in their 40's who remarry or are inclined to women;

مرد چهل ساله تازه اول چلچلیش است  
*Mard-e chehel sâleh tâzê avval-ê chelchelish ast*  
"At the age of forty a man just begins to have his fling".

An improvement in a man's financial stand was considered to be tempting him to remarry;

تنبان مرد که دوتا شد به فکر زن نو می‌افتد  
*Tonbân-e mard ké do tâ shod bé fekr-e zan-e nou mioftad*  
"When a man acquires two pairs of trousers he begins to think of getting a new wife". a variant of this proverb says;

پول که زیاد شد خانه تنگ می‌شود، زن زشت  
*Pâl ké ziyâd shod khâneh tang mishavad, zan zesht*  
"Wealth makes one's house too small and one's wife too ugly".

A divorcee usually finds it difficult to remarry. On the contrary, people have sympathy for a man whose wife has died;

زن مرده را زنشده، زن طلاق را ... ده  
*Zan-mordeh râ zanesh deh, zan-talâq râ ... esh deh*  
"Give a widower a wife, and a divorcee faeces".

Contentment with one's only wife is considered a merit for a man, as implied by this saying;

خانه یکی، خدا یکی، یار یکی  
*Khâneh yekî khodâ yekî yâr yekî*  
"One God, one home(country), and one wife (or friend)".

Polygamy is the source of distress and adversity;  
مرد دوزنه، دم خوش نمی‌زنه  
*Mard-e do-zaneh, dam-e khosh nemizaneh*



"A man with two wives can not live in peace even for a moment". (Note: نمی‌زنه  
nemizaneh is the colloquial form of نمی‌زند *nemīzanad*). And;

جای مرد دوزنه در مسجد است

*Jâ-ye mard-e do-zaneh dar masjed ast*

"He who has two wives will have to live in the mosque (where homeless beggars take shelter)".

Afghan people when cursing a man sometimes say;

زنش بمیرد *zanash bemīrad*

"May his wife die (i.e. may his house is ruined)".

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(2000.10.13受理)