

Awadhi Proverbs: Mapping Culture Through Conceptual Metaphor Theory

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Abstract

This study explores the proverbs of the Awadhi dialect as rich socio-cognitive and cultural texts that encapsulate the lived realities, moral frameworks, and conceptual worldviews of rural communities in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Far beyond ornamental expressions, Awadhi proverbs function as linguistic vessels for transmitting collective memory, regulating social conduct, and navigating everyday experiences tied to caste, gender, kinship, agriculture, and ritual life. Anchored in conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) this qualitative-descriptive research employs native speaker insights and empirical observation to uncover how these proverbs act as cognitive schemas and cultural scripts. By analyzing the ways in which language encodes social hierarchies, behavioral norms, and embodied metaphors, the study reveals how proverbs not only reflect but also shape the socio-cognitive patterns of Awadhi speakers. The metaphorical framing of social roles portraying lower castes as inherently inferior and women as naturally subordinate reveals how everyday language encodes and normalizes social hierarchies, disguising systemic inequality in the familiar guise of folk wisdom. The research positions Eastern Awadhi proverbs as dynamic tools of thought and tradition central to the maintenance of cultural identity and the vernacular imagination.

Keywords: *Proverbs, Awadhi Dialect, Language and Culture, Cognition, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Cognitive Schemas, Linguistic Anthropology*

Introduction

Research on Indian proverbs rarely examines how East Awadhi proverbs convey caste and gender ideology through conceptual metaphors. This study addresses this issue through sociocognitive analysis. Language is not merely a utilitarian tool for communication it is a living archive of human thought, a vessel through which culture is transmitted, preserved, and reconfigured. Language focuses on fulfilling human needs to convey feelings, ideas, and thoughts both verbally and in writing Ramadhani A.R, Marhalisa et al. (2025). Proverbs, as a critical facet of oral tradition, represent concentrated cultural wisdom and socio-cognitive frameworks. These concise expressions function as linguistic artefacts that encode a community's collective memory, moral values, and experiential knowledge. Far from being mere stylistic embellishments, proverbs operate at the intersection of language, cognition, and culture, serving as instruments of both reflection and social conditioning.

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In cultures with strong oral traditions, such as Assamese or Awadhi, proverbs are woven into everyday discourse and ritual practice, shaping worldviews and behavioral expectations. In Assamese society, for instance, folk songs and proverbial expressions do not simply entertain but orient individuals within a cultural cosmos defining their roles, duties, and relationships with the environment and the divine. Similarly, Awadhi proverbs encode local epistemologies, capturing in compact form the agrarian rhythms, kinship structures, gender norms, and religious ideologies of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. They offer insight into how knowledge is localized and how values are ritualistically transmitted through generations.

As Bryant (1945) rightly observes, proverbs are “relics of philosophical thought salvaged from antiquity,” preserved not merely for their wit but for their enduring explanatory power. Cuddon (1984) complements this view by describing proverbs as generalized truths, distilled into maxims and aphorisms, which are inherently cultural and generationally sustained. In this way, they function as mnemonic and pedagogical tools, enabling individuals to make sense of personal and social experience through culturally accepted frameworks.

Viewed through the lens of cognitive linguistics, proverbs emerge as more than rhetorical or literary devices—they are conceptual tools that facilitate reasoning, decision-making, and the interpretation of events. Their use reveals patterns of cognitive framing that are deeply embedded in the cultural logic of a society. Proverbs do not merely describe the world; they construct it cognitively, by providing templates for categorizing people, predicting behaviors, and evaluating situations. This makes them powerful instruments for both social reproduction and epistemic control, reinforcing dominant ideologies such as patriarchy, caste hierarchy, and moral binaries.

In this regard, the proverbs of Eastern Awadhi are not ideologically neutral. They often reflect and reinforce asymmetrical power structures, particularly in the domains of gender, class, and authority. Embedded within them are implicit rules about what is socially acceptable, who holds power, and how deviations are to be interpreted or sanctioned. Proverbs thus become not only reflections of cognition but active agents in shaping cognition, perpetuating social norms that influence how individuals perceive themselves and others.

2. Language, Culture, and Identity in Eastern Awadhi

Awadhi, a prominent dialect of Eastern Hindi, belongs to the Central Zone of the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. It holds a significant place in the linguistic landscape of northern India. As both a spoken and literary medium, Awadhi has long served as a marker of cultural and regional identity, particularly across the districts of Uttar Pradesh and adjoining Nepali territories such as Kapilvastu and Lumbini. Historically associated with classical devotional poetry (Tulsidas’s *Ramcharitmanas*), the dialect continues to thrive in rural and semi-urban contexts, where it functions as a primary means of interpersonal communication and community cohesion.

Awadhi, as a dialect of Eastern Hindi, exhibits notable regional variation shaped by geography, historical migration, and socio-cultural influences. In his foundational linguistic study, Saksena (1971) offers a detailed classification of the Awadhi dialect, dividing it into three major regional varieties: Western Awadhi, Central Awadhi, and Eastern Awadhi, each associated with specific districts and characterized by subtle phonological, lexical, and syntactic differences.

This study concentrates specifically on the Eastern Awadhi variety spoken in Balrampur and surrounding regions, which form a culturally rich and linguistically distinctive sub-region. Eastern Awadhi retains many of the core grammatical and phonological features of the Awadhi continuum while exhibiting unique lexical items, intonational patterns, and sociolinguistic registers shaped by local traditions, caste dynamics, and religious coexistence. It is not merely a dialect in the linguistic sense but a symbolic resource through which speakers express belonging, heritage, and social position.

According to the 2011 Census of India, Awadhi is spoken by approximately 3.8 million native speakers, although this number may underrepresent actual usage due to the tendency of respondents to report "Hindi" as their mother tongue in official contexts. Within the Balrampur district and adjacent areas, Awadhi is used across generations and social classes, maintaining its status as a vibrant spoken vernacular, especially in rural households, marketplaces, agricultural settings, and religious gatherings.

In the context of language and identity, Awadhi serves as a linguistic boundary marker that differentiates local speakers not only from outsiders but also from speakers of closely related dialects such as Bhojpuri, Bagheli, and Standard Hindi. The use of Awadhi often signifies cultural rootedness, respect for tradition, and social familiarity. It encodes layers of meaning that go beyond lexical choice, encompassing local histories, power relations, caste affiliations, and moral worldviews. As such, it is inseparable from the cultural lifeworld of its speakers.

3. Proverbs as Cultural and Cognitive Texts

In Awadhi society, proverbs commonly known as *Masala* (/masala/) or *Kahāwat* (/kəha:vəʈ/) function as dense cultural and cognitive repositories. Far more than ornamental speech, they crystallize the lived realities, moral judgments, and inherited wisdom of the community into compact verbal units. These expressions serve simultaneously as cultural scripts and cognitive models, shaping not only how individuals speak but also how they perceive, categorize, and navigate the world around them.

Guided by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), this study treats proverbs as cognitive-linguistic artifacts that encapsulate abstract social and emotional experiences through concrete imagery. By drawing on metaphorical mappings grounded in embodied experience, Awadhi proverbs offer culturally anchored ways of understanding complex domains such as authority, kinship, suffering, and morality. They act as schematic templates that help structure thought, rationalize social order, and predict outcomes based on collective memory and precedent.

Unlike disembodied idioms, Awadhi proverbs are context-sensitive utterances that arise spontaneously in rural speech events be it disputes in the village panchayat, marriage negotiations, storytelling at dusk, or the instructive talk of elders. Their performative force lies not just in what they mean but when, where, and by whom they are spoken. In this way, proverbs are enactive cultural texts, participating in the real-time reproduction of social norms and hierarchies.

As cultural texts, these proverbs preserve and transmit embedded systems of knowledge covering agronomy, social etiquette, ritual conduct, and cosmological beliefs. They function as mnemonic frameworks (Finnegan, 2012), enabling oral communities to encode, remember, and retrieve culturally vital information across generations.

Cognitively, Awadhi proverbs instantiate metaphorical reasoning within a socially specific frame, allowing for abstract ideas such as justice, danger, trust, or betrayal to be understood through image-schematic structures rooted in everyday experience. This reflects Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) assertion that metaphor is a central mechanism of human thought, not merely a linguistic flourish.

1. How do Eastern Awadhi proverbs metaphorically encode caste-based hierarchies and identities?

2. In what ways do Awadhi proverbs construct and sustain gender ideologies, particularly regarding women's social roles?

Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive methodology rooted in ethnolinguistic fieldwork, supplemented by a socio-cognitive and cultural analytical framework. The aim is

to explore the conceptual structures and cultural logics encoded in the proverbs of Eastern Awadhi, revealing how language reflects and shapes the community's worldview, values, and social relations.

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations with senior male and female members of the community, ensuring a balanced representation of gendered experiences and linguistic practices. As the researcher is a native speaker and cultural insider, this insider status facilitated trust-building, deeper access to linguistic data, and more nuanced interpretation of cultural meanings.

Proverbs were documented in their authentic communicative contexts, audio-recorded with the participants' consent, and later transcribed in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to capture phonological features of the Eastern Awadhi dialect. Each proverb was translated into English using Newmark's (1982) communicative translation approach, which prioritizes the preservation of meaning, affect, and cultural nuance over literal form.

To examine socio-cognitive patterns, the proverbs were analyzed using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This allowed for the identification of recurring cognitive schemas, metaphorical mappings, and culturally specific frames through which speakers understand social roles, behaviours, and values. CMT posits that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical flourish but a fundamental mechanism of thought, whereby abstract concepts are structured and understood through more concrete, embodied experiences. In the context of proverbial discourse, metaphor functions as a cognitive strategy through which complex social realities such as caste hierarchies, gender norms, moral judgments, and power relations are conceptualized via familiar source domains like nature, animals, tools, or the body. By applying CMT, this research identifies systematic metaphorical mappings that underlie proverb usage and reflect culturally shared cognitive schemas. This theoretical lens allows for a deeper understanding of how language both reflects and shapes community-based models of social order, resistance, and value systems

Further, proverbs were categorized thematically according to domains such as gender roles, caste relations, morality, labour, kinship, and ecological knowledge. Within each domain, attention was given to how shared social cognition and collective memory are encoded in proverbial language.

This multi-layered approach integrates linguistic form, cognitive content, and cultural function, offering a holistic understanding of how proverbs in Eastern Awadhi serve not just as linguistic artefacts, but as repositories of folk wisdom, social critique, and cognitive models of life in the region. The corpus of Eastern Awadhi proverbs reveals a remarkable range of functional and thematic diversity, reflecting the socio-cognitive priorities and lived realities of rural communities. For the purposes of this study, the proverbs have been classified into two primary categories: (1) caste-based expressions, (2) gender-specific proverbs. Each category offers a distinct cognitive lens into the symbolic universe of Awadhi speakers, yet they are interwoven by a shared reliance on metaphor, embodiment, and cultural experience.

Results and Discussion

Caste is one of the most rigid and enduring forms of social stratification in Indian society. It is characterized by hereditary transmission of lifestyle, occupation, and social status. The caste system originating in ancient India was subsequently reconfigured by various political regimes through the medieval and colonial periods. In the linguistic landscape of Indian languages, caste-based identities are often encoded and perpetuated through proverbs, idioms, and oral narratives. These proverbs are not just linguistic devices but cultural expressions that reflect and reinforce social hierarchies, power relations, and cognitive stereotypes.

The Eastern Awadhi dialect, like many Indian languages, features a wide range of caste-based proverbs that reveal the community's attitudes toward different occupational and

social groups. What follows is a socio-descriptive account of how specific castes are represented in Awadhi proverbs and what these representations suggest about cognition, social perception, and power structures in rural Awadhi society.

5.1. Brahmins (Priestly Class)

The Brahmin caste, traditionally positioned at the apex of the Varna hierarchy, occupies a paradoxical role in vernacular discourse. While religious texts idealize Brahmins as spiritual custodians and moral exemplars, vernacular proverbs particularly in Eastern Awadhi often encode a more critical, socially grounded perception. Through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, such proverbs reveal culturally embedded cognitive schemas that challenge Brahmanical authority and expose the contradictions between ritual status and social behavior.

Risley (1969) records a well-known North Indian proverb:

"Is duniya mein teen qasai - pisu, khatmal, Brahman bhai"

(*Is dʊnʒa: mē̃ t̪i:n qasa:i - pɪssʊ, khʌʃmʌl, bɛrəhmʌn bʰa:i*)

Translation: *There are three bloodsuckers on earth - the flea, the bedbug, and the Brahmin.*

This proverb activates the people are parasites metaphor, cognitively mapping the Brahmin onto blood-sucking insects organisms that extract value without producing it. The comparison implicitly critiques the economic and ritual dependence that non-Brahmin castes experience, framing the Brahmin not as a benevolent priest, but as an exploitative figure whose social authority is sustained by parasitism.

A similar sentiment is echoed in Eastern Awadhi, where Brahmins are perceived as instigators of social unrest:

"Jahan peepal wahan bayar, jahan babhan wahan rayaal"

(*ʒəhā: pɪ:pəl vəhā: bəʒa:r, ʒəhā: bɑ:bʰən vəhā: rəʒa:l*)

Translation: *Just as the pipal tree brings wind, the presence of a Brahmin brings conflict.*

Here, the brahmin is a force of disruption metaphor is at work. The proverb draws on a natural schema where the pipal tree is believed to attract wind or storm (bayar) to suggest that the Brahmin's presence is similarly destabilizing. This framing reflects a cause-effect conceptual mapping: just as the tree is followed by unsettling weather, the Brahmin is followed by social unrest (rayaal). The metaphor naturalizes this causality, implying that disruption is an inherent trait rather than an occasional outcome.

Such proverbs do not merely reflect anti-Brahmin sentiment; they serve as cognitive instruments through which rural Awadhi speakers navigate social hierarchies, articulate resistance, and expose contradictions between sacred ideology and everyday experience. In this way, proverbs function as cultural diagnostics, identifying and critiquing power imbalances within the socioreligious structure.

5.2. Baniya (Trader/Moneylender)

In the socio-cognitive landscape of Eastern Awadhi, the *Baniya* typically associated with trade, moneylending, and grain dealing is consistently portrayed as an embodiment of economic cunning and moral ambiguity. Proverbs surrounding the *Baniya* construct a powerful metaphorical framing in which economic roles are directly mapped onto ethical qualities. Take, for instance, the proverb:

"Baniya jiska yaar, usko dushman kya darkar?"

(*bəniʒa: ʒis ka ʒa:r ʊs ko dʊʃmʌn kj: d̪ərka:r*)

Translation: *He who has a Baniya as a friend needs no enemies.*

This reflects the conceptual metaphor: ally is enemy, or more precisely, friendship with the baniya is a liability, thereby undermining the expected schema of friendship as a domain

of loyalty and safety. Here, the *baniya* is not just a social figure, but a metaphorical inversion of the friend archetype a trusted companion recast as an imminent threat. The proverb leverages anticipated benefit is hidden harm, presenting the *baniya* as a relational paradox: a "friend" who destabilizes the very essence of trust. Another proverb—

(*Baniya aur sonar kehuk hit naai hot hain*)

(*bəniʃa: ɔr sona:r kehuk hiʃ na:e hoʃ hē*)

Translation: *baniya* and goldsmith have never been fried to any.

Draws on the metaphor trade is deception. the professions of the *baniya* and the *sonar* (goldsmith) are metaphorically aligned with betrayal and self-interest. This constructs a moral accounting schema in which transactional relationships are framed not as neutral exchanges, but as inherently exploitative. The implication is that material gain is achieved at the expense of ethical conduct, thereby collapsing profit is success into profit is moral failure.

A third proverb intensifies this schema:

"daaon pawe baniya to dhai diye das sera"

(*d̪a:õ pave bəniʃa: ʈɔ dʰae dije d̪əs sera*)

Translation: *if a baniya gets a chance, he will short-weigh ten seers.*

This proverb encodes the metaphor: Opportunity is exploitation, mapping the cognitive schema of weighing (a culturally familiar act of fairness and balance) onto deception. here, measurement is morality, and the act of short-weighing symbolizes the *baniya*'s moral deficit. The proverb does not merely describe economic malpractice; it establishes a cause-effect frame in which agency and opportunity are cognitively linked to dishonesty. Taken together, these proverbs construct a socio-cognitive model wherein the *baniya* becomes a moral archetype of instrumental rationality devoid of communal ethics. he embodies the contradictions between market logic and social trust. the proverbs serve as cultural commentaries and moral allegories, reflecting collective anxiety over rising mercantile influence and its perceived erosion of traditional values. By metaphorically encoding distrust and commodification into the persona of the *baniya*, Awadhi speakers navigate complex relationships between economy and morality, tradition and change. as such, these proverbs are not just linguistic artifacts but cognitive instruments compressed metaphors that reinforce community values and provide heuristics for social judgment.

5.3. Nai (Barber)

The *Nai* (barber) holds a multifunctional role in rural Awadhi society—not just as a personal groomer, but also as a folk healer, message-bearer, and marriage negotiator. Despite these important services, the *Nai* is frequently portrayed in Awadhi proverbs as opportunistic and morally ambiguous. One such saying is:

"Nawwa sikhe chamarek darhi"

(*nɔʋʋa: si:kʰe tʃəma:rək d̪a:ri*)

Translation: *The barber learns to shave by practicing on a Dalit's beard.*

At the heart of this expression lies a dual metaphor: The *Nai*'s learning process is metaphorically framed as an act of harm or exploitation visited upon the socially vulnerable. The Dalit's beard, in this schema, becomes a training ground, reinforcing a utilitarian person-as-object metaphor where marginalized bodies serve as tools for others' advancement. This reflects a deeper social hierarchy is natural order metaphor, wherein structural inequalities are not merely described but normalized through metaphorical reasoning. Just as apprentices practice on scrap material, so too does the *Nai* "practice" on Dalits—presenting caste-based exploitation as an inevitable or even practical reality. Thus, the proverb encodes a cognitive mapping of skill development through exploitation, revealing how social mobility or cunning in certain castes (like the *Nai*) is constructed atop the systemic devaluation of Dalit bodies. It is not merely a commentary on the *Nai*'s character, but a cultural diagnosis of the hierarchy-driven utilitarianism that underpins rural social dynamics.

5.4. Julaha (Muslim Weaver)

The *Julaha*, traditionally a Muslim artisan associated with weaving, holds a critical place in the rural economy of Awadh. Yet, in the vernacular imagination, the *Julaha* is often framed through proverbs that cast him as cognitively deficient, disorganized, or socially ineffectual. A striking example is:

"Ek aguwa bina nau sau Julaha budat rahein"
(*ek əgʊʊɑ: bina: nəu səu ʤʊləhɑ: bʊrət̪ rəhē*)

Translation: *Without a leader, nine hundred Julahas end up drowning.*

This proverb activates multiple conceptual metaphors that function simultaneously:

At its core, the proverb reflects the structural organization is bodily coherence metaphor. *Julahas* are imagined as a headless body numerous, but without cognitive or directional control. In this schema, the absence of a leader is tantamount to the absence of reason, leading to inevitable collective failure. The metaphor of "drowning" draws on the well-established mapping of life is a journey and society is a vessel, where direction lessness leads to ruin. The *Julahas'* metaphorical drowning signifies the collapse of social coherence in the absence of authoritative guidance. thus, leader lessness is shipwreck, encoding the assumption that artisan communities, especially marginalized ones, cannot function autonomously.

The folklore accompanying the proverb where *Julahas* mistake a moonlit linseed field for water cements the ignorance is vision failure metaphor. *Julaha's* error is framed not as an accident but as symptomatic of an essential cognitive flaw, suggesting a community inherently prone to misperception and irrational behavior. This proverb, like others targeting occupational or caste identities, does not simply reflect prejudice it reproduces it by embedding the stereotype in everyday cognition. The *Julaha* is constructed not just as a weak social actor but as a cognitively deviant one, reinforcing hierarchical ideologies that position artisan castes as needing supervision, control, or external leadership.

By mapping cognitive capacity onto social hierarchy, the proverb contributes to a broader epistemic regime in which leadership, wisdom, and order are reserved for dominant castes, while subaltern groups are represented as inherently chaotic or naive. Thus, the saying operates both as a narrative of exclusion and a justification for social control.

5.5. Chamar (Dalit/Leather Worker)

Chamars, associated with leatherwork and historically categorized as 'untouchables', occupy a stigmatized position within the traditional caste hierarchy. Their exclusion from mainstream social, economic, and ritual life is not only institutional but also symbolically reinforced through proverbial language. In Eastern Awadhi, certain proverbs serve as linguistic carriers of social prejudice, embedding casteist assumptions into everyday speech.

"Jahan chaar Chamar, wahan baat hamaar"
(*ʤəhɑ: tʃɑ:r tʃəma:r vəhɑ: bɑ:t̪ həma:r*)

Translation: *Where there are four Chamars, our case is surely lost.*

This proverb does more than express a bias; it encapsulates a conceptual metaphor that equates Dalit identity with inevitable failure. Within the framework of CMT, this can be understood through the metaphor inequality is destiny, wherein social outcomes are prefigured by caste affiliation rather than individual capacity or collective strength. The presence of "four Chamars" (a non-trivial number) is framed as irrelevant or even counterproductive suggesting that structural inferiority is impermeable to numbers, unity, or effort.

Additionally, the proverb draws on the metaphor social power is a battlefield, with disputes conceptualized as contests in which certain participants are permanently

disadvantaged. The idea that "they will lose the battle for sure" signals a culturally ingrained belief in the futility of lower-caste assertion, thereby discouraging resistance or dissent.

The cognitive framing here naturalizes injustice by presenting it as a foregone conclusion rather than a product of oppressive systems. The mapping from the source domain (competition, conflict) to the target domain (caste-based social order) serves to reinforce the belief that outcomes are fixed by one's birth and not subject to change.

Moreover, such proverbs do not merely reflect public opinion; they participate in the construction of that opinion by shaping how social actors conceptualize worth, capability, and legitimacy. The implication is not simply that Chamars are powerless, but that their powerlessness is an unquestionable, even logical, aspect of social reality.

By using metaphor to align social position with predetermined failure, the proverb contributes to a wider epistemological framework that privileges the dominant castes' version of order, morality, and competence. In this way, metaphor is not just rhetorical it is ideological. It encodes and perpetuates hierarchies by making them seem cognitively and culturally "right."

6. Gender and its Reflection in Awadhi Proverbs

Proverbs are not merely rhetorical flourishes or oral traditions; they are cognitive artefacts compressed cultural knowledge through which societies encode, transmit, and naturalize dominant ideologies. In the Awadhi-speaking region, proverbs reflect a deeply patriarchal conceptual framework, wherein gender relations are shaped by recurring metaphorical mappings that privilege masculinity and subordinate femininity.

Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which posits that our thinking is largely metaphorical in nature, this analysis understands proverbs as structured around source-target domain mappings that make abstract social relations cognitively accessible.

As Bucholtz and Hall (2004) argue, language is a key site for identity construction, and proverbs in particular perform this role by embedding normative gender identities into everyday speech. The iterative performance of such metaphors contributes to a collective cognitive schema where men embody order, discipline, and moral authority, while women represent chaos, emotional excess, or domestic containment.

This metaphorical patterning is not unique to Awadhi. Kerschen (2012) demonstrates that American proverbs frequently depict women as verbose, illogical, or deceitful, while Shivtiel (1996) highlights how Yemeni proverbs often reduce women to moral extremes either saintly mothers or manipulative wives. These cross-cultural parallels reveal how metaphor functions as a universal cognitive tool through which patriarchy is locally articulated.

Within the Awadhi context, a notable metaphor is wife is a burden / mother is a blessing, where the female figure is evaluated based on her relational role and perceived social utility. Wives are often cast in face-threatening proverbs that portray them as quarrelsome or irrational, while mothers are idealized in face-saving expressions, aligning with the metaphor maternity is sacrifice / wifeness is trouble. This dichotomy reflects a conditional valuation of women where virtue is granted only when the woman conforms to prescribed roles.

By rooting these representations in embodied metaphors such as domestic space is a prison for women or male control is balance Awadhi proverbs not only describe social norms but help sustain the epistemological scaffolding of patriarchy. The cognitive unconscious shaped by these proverbs positions male authority as natural and inevitable, while female autonomy is construed as disruptive or dangerous.

Ultimately, this metaphorical encoding of gender renders hierarchy intelligible and justifiable. It transforms social inequalities into perceived cognitive truths, thereby making metaphor not merely decorative but deeply ideological. Proverbs, then, are not just linguistic artifacts they are conceptual blueprints that maintain and reproduce patriarchal order through seemingly innocuous everyday speech.

6.1. Representation of Wives in Awadhi Proverbs

Proverbs in Awadhi, as in many traditional cultures, often encode patriarchal ideologies that frame women's identities in narrow, often demeaning ways. Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), these representations can be understood as metaphorical mappings from culturally salient source domains onto target domains such as gender roles and marital expectations. Below are examples of how wives are metaphorically constructed in Awadhi proverbial discourse.

1. Selfish and Greedy

Proverb: *Maai nihahre petwa, Mehri nihahe tetwa/Batwa*

(*ma:ai niha:re pətva: məhri niha:re tətva*)

Translation: Mother takes care of your belly, while wife looks for your money.
Interpretation: The wife is portrayed as materialistic and opportunistic, in contrast to the nurturing image of the mother.

This proverb illustrates the metaphor wife is a financial burden, where the wife is framed not as a partner but as a transactional figure who seeks material gain. By contrast, the mother is positioned within the metaphor mother is nourishment, aligning her with unconditional care. These mappings reflect deep-rooted schemas where women's worth is judged in opposition to each other, sustaining the cultural logic of women in competition (Johnson, 1987; Kövecses, 2010).

2. Ineligible/Incapable

Proverb: *Natin se kheti, Bahuriyan se ghar naayi huye paawat hai*

(*na:ten se khet̪i bəhʊrjən se gʰər na:e hʊe pa:ʋət hai*)

Translation: A newly married woman cannot manage household chores just as young bullocks cannot perform well in the fields.

This proverb draws upon the conceptual metaphor **woman is an agricultural tool** where the bride is cognitively aligned with young, untrained bullocks. The comparison dehumanizes the woman by locating her social worth within the domain of utility and productivity. By mapping the source domain of non-human, pre-functional animal labour onto the target domain of a newlywed's domestic integration, the proverb naturalizes the idea that a woman's primary function is household efficiency under male oversight. This metaphorical construction not only delegitimizes the emotional and adaptive aspects of entering a new family structure but also enforces a utilitarian view of marriage where the bride is assessed on immediate task performance. As **Lakoff and Johnson (1999)** emphasize, such metaphors structure habitual thought and reinforce systemic ideologies in this case, the expectation that women must assimilate into domestic roles through obedience, not autonomy. The proverb thereby becomes a cognitive instrument for sustaining patriarchal norms under the guise of rural pragmatism.

3. Physically Weak

Proverb: *ynke yesus bitiya, ChhagRid munh kohDa leeli*

(*jənke jəsʌs bitija: chʰəgʀik mʊh kohʀa: li:li:*)

Translation: A girl like you, with a mouth like a goat's, trying to gulp down a whole pumpkin.

This proverb ridicules someone typically a young woman for overestimating her abilities, particularly in physical or intellectual tasks. The incongruity between the goat-like mouth (source domain) and the pumpkin (target task) evokes an image of absurd overreach.

When applied to women, the proverb implies that their attempts at taking on large or serious responsibilities are inherently foolish or doomed, thus reinforcing a gendered hierarchy of capability. Within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the metaphor reflects a deeper cognitive bias where women are systematically conceptualized as inadequate agents in public or challenging domains.

Such imagery naturalizes the belief that women are unfit for roles that require strength, leadership, or complex judgment thereby framing ambition itself as laughable when expressed by women. The proverb, therefore, functions not merely as a linguistic insult but as a cognitive and cultural mechanism for policing gender boundaries and discouraging female assertiveness.

6.2. Representation of Mothers in Awadhi Proverbs

In stark contrast to the often face-threatening portrayals of wives, mothers are depicted in Awadhi proverbs as nurturing, morally superior, and spiritually elevated figures. The mother is frequently idealized as a selfless caregiver, embodying virtues such as unconditional love, sacrifice, and emotional resilience. This dichotomous representation reinforces the cultural ideal of motherhood as the most valued and legitimized form of femininity.

1. Caring and Loving

Maai nihahre petwa, Mehri nihahe tetwa/Batwa
(*ma:az niha:re pətva: məhri niha:re tətva*)

While this proverb casts the wife in a materialistic light, it simultaneously elevates the mother as genuinely concerned with her child's nourishment and well-being. Within the framework of conceptual metaphor theory, this can be read as an instance of the metaphor love is nurturance (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), where the mother's love is conceptualized through bodily care specifically, feeding and physical concern.

The proverb maps emotional virtue onto bodily sustenance, reinforcing the idea that a mother's love is instinctual, selfless, and corporeal. Unlike the wife, whose interest is portrayed as transactional, the mother is depicted as altruistic and spiritually pure. This reflects a culturally embedded cognitive schema in which the good woman is a mother, and motherhood becomes the moral benchmark against which all other female roles are judged.

Such representations, while reverent, also participate in a broader ideological pattern that limits women's social value to reproductive and caregiving roles. They sustain the cultural logic of patriarchy by venerating mothers only insofar as they remain within their expected, non-threatening social boundaries.

2. Kind-heartedness

Mayyak jera gayya ghat, putwak jera qasayya ghat
(*majjək jeira gəjja gʰət̪, puʈʰək jera kəsəjja gʰət̪*)

Translation: A mother has a gentle heart like a cow, while the son has a heart like a butcher.

This proverb uses stark animal imagery to contrast maternal kindness with filial cruelty. The **mother's heart** is metaphorically likened to a cow an animal revered in Indian culture for its gentleness, nurturing nature, and association with selfless giving. The **son's heart**, in contrast, is compared to that of a butcher symbolizing violence, detachment, and moral hardness. The cow becomes a source domain for understanding the mother's emotional disposition: passive, nourishing, and pure. Conversely, the butcher represents the source domain for emotional detachment and harm, which is projected onto the son. This conceptual mapping not only reinforces a culturally valorized image of the mother as the moral center of the household but also serves as a subtle critique of changing intergenerational dynamics, especially the erosion of filial piety. By framing **motherly compassion as natural and inherent** and **male insensitivity as socially acquired**, the proverb elevates the emotional authority of the mother while implying the moral decline in patriarchal successors

3. Sacred Personality

Maa baap kai sewa karo, Makka Madina ghar hin kro
(*mā:ba:p ke seua kəro, məkka məd̪i:na gʰər h̄i kəro*)

Translation: Serve your parents and that alone is equivalent to a pilgrimage to Mecca and Madinah.

The proverb implies that holiness is not found only in distant sacred places but can be achieved through reverence within the domestic sphere.

The use of Mecca and Madinah central to Islamic religious life adds cultural and theological gravity to the message. It transforms the act of serving one's parents into a sacred journey, suggesting that righteousness and spiritual elevation begin at home. This metaphorical mapping aligns with the broader schema in many South Asian societies where mother is divine or parental figures are god-like, deeply rooted in both Islamic and Indic moral traditions.

By equating the home with holy pilgrimage sites, the proverb also reinforces domestic space is sacred space a metaphor that spiritually valorises everyday acts of care, particularly when directed toward mothers. This not only elevates the mother's status to a moral apex but also sanctifies her needs as a religious obligation.

While such proverbs reinforce respect for elders and familial piety, they also underscore how cultural metaphors sustain specific moral hierarchies in which mothers are repositories of virtue and sanctity, shaping intergenerational relations through deeply embedded belief systems.

This proverb frames parental devotion particularly the service of one's mother and father as a form of spiritual fulfilment equivalent to completing a sacred pilgrimage.

The juxtaposition of negative portrayals of wives and positive depictions of mothers in Awadhi proverbs reinforces a gendered dichotomy. A woman's worth is measured not by her individuality but by her function within the patriarchal framework revered if maternal, ridiculed if assertive or independent. This deeply ingrained ideology, expressed through proverbial discourse, serves not just as social commentary but as a cultural script that regulates and maintains patriarchal power structures in Awadhi society.

Conclusion

This study establishes that Eastern Awadhi proverbs are not static remnants of tradition but dynamic instruments of socio-cognitive and cultural regulation. Far from being ornamental expressions, they function as vehicles of communal memory and normative discourse, shaping how individuals perceive identity, power, and social roles. Anchored in the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the analysis reveals that abstract structures of caste and gender are conceptualized through embodied and culturally salient source domains such as animals, agriculture, tools, and sacred geographies.

In the domain of gender, Awadhi proverbs systematically map women's identities onto metaphors of fragility, subservience, and moral dualism. Wives are often depicted through metaphors of burden, greed, and incompetence, whereas mothers are sanctified as embodiments of sacrifice and compassion. This dichotomy reflects a patriarchal valuation of women based on their roles within the familial structure, reinforcing the notion that female worth is conditional and role-dependent. Such mappings reveal how metaphor operates as a cognitive mechanism to naturalize male authority and suppress female autonomy.

The performative power of these proverbs in everyday speech particularly when invoked by dominant caste speakers demonstrates their role in what Bourdieu (1991) terms *symbolic violence*: the subtle, often invisible reproduction of domination through linguistic and cultural practices. In this sense, proverbs act not merely as reflections of ideology but as instruments through which power is enacted and legitimized at the micro-level of rural interaction.

By integrating ethnolinguistic insight with metaphorical analysis, this study uncovers the deep cognitive structures and cultural scripts embedded in Awadhi proverbial discourse. It shows how language serves as both a repository of collective memory and a mechanism of social conditioning, regulating behaviour and reinforcing hierarchies through metaphorical

logic. The findings illuminate the dual role of proverbs as tools of both resistance and reproduction vehicles through which communities negotiate, internalize, or challenge dominant ideologies.

In recognizing these patterns, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how vernacular traditions encode lived realities and sustain systemic inequalities. It calls for a critical re-engagement with folk discourse, not just as cultural heritage but as a site of ideological contestation where meanings are made, contested, and passed down across generations.

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