



If you were to make a list of the most celebrated poems in Urdu, you would very quickly see that the production and sharing of wisdom is at the heart of Urdu literary culture. Likewise, proverbs and maxims conveying wisdom on various practical topics are a cherished part of everyday Urdu culture. Here follow some common Urdu proverbs with literal translations and brief explanations.

کوئیں کا مینڈک [kueñ ka meñḍak]

The frog of a well.

Said of someone who is inexperienced or whose views are narrow and unenlightened.

نیکی کر دریا میں ڈال [nekī kar daryā meñ ḍāl]

Do good. Toss it into the river.

Take no reward for the good you've done

اونچی دکان پھیکا پکوان [ūñchī dukān phīkā pakvān]

Tall shop, bland food.

Said when something appears good, but isn't.

اونٹ کے منہ میں زیرہ [ūñṭ ke muñh meñ zīrā]

Cumin (seed) in a camel's mouth.

Used to suggest that something is insufficient.



بندر کیا جانے ادراک کا سواد [bandar kyā jāne adrak kā svād]

What would a monkey know of the taste of ginger?

Said when someone is seen as incapable of appreciating something or not entitled to an opinion.

گرجتے ہیں سو برستے نہیں [garajte haiñ so baraste nahīñ]

If they thunder, they don't rain.

Barking dogs seldom bite.

دال میں کالا [dāl meñ kālā]

Black in the daal (lentils).

There's more here than meets the eye.

چھوٹا منہ بڑی بات [chhoṭā muñh baṛī bāt]

Small mouth, big words.

Said to express the idea of being out of one's league. Also used to refer to oneself to express humility.

پڑھے نہ لکھے نام محمد فاضل

[paṛhe nā likhe nām Muhammad Fāzil]

Neither reads nor writes, name Muhammad Fazil.

Said of someone who pretends to be knowledgeable without being educated on a subject. Also said of someone well-known but lacking real talent or ability. The idiom turns on the word فاضل, which is both a name and means “scholar, learned” or “virtuous.”

یہ منہ اور مسور کی دال

[ye muñh aur masūr kī dāl]

This face and masoor lentils?

Said of someone who isn't deserving.

ناچ نہ جانے آنگن ٹیڑھا

[nāch nā jāne āṅgan ṭeṛhā]

If one doesn't know the dance, the courtyard is crooked.

A bad workman blames his tools. Said when someone refuses to take responsibility for shortcomings and instead blames the circumstances.