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Rising above the Social Milieu: A Study of Tehmina Durrani's Autobiography *My Feudal Lord*

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Abstract:

The paper revolves around Durrani who belongs to ultra-modern, westernised and well off family with conservative, traditional, and typical feudal background, being a citizen of a patriarchal society where the culture norms for women is to remain silent against oppression taught by society and sometimes by religion. The study reveals the life of an educated lady who has been trapped between the society and the religion which hampers her own individuality. Her marriage turns into a nightmare violently possessive and jealous, her husband succeeded in cutting off her from society. Durrani endure alone in silence and when she decided to fight back she suffered hypocrisy, egoism, cruelty, immorality embedded in the society and even more. The study gave a bizarre insight into the susceptible site of women trapped in the multifarious snare of religious conviction and the social order. This study incarnates the radically woven life of women with filthy religious rules and bitter truths of society. Durrani has been described in an impervious way that every woman has the identity of her own societal actions and the deformed description of faith in religion of popular traditions are accountable for the subordinated predicament of the women. She eloquent her own experiences and embrace the political, religious and social instrument conscientious for such scrape of women in the social order. The paper throws light on the institution of marriage and family embedded in cultural practises .She faces the physical and mental assault and at the end subvert all the cultural and religious roles assigned to her and proves herself to be an autonomous person having the identity of her own.

Keywords: Society, religion, patriarchy, hypocrisy, egoism, cruelty, immorality, mental assault.

Introduction:

The research is based on her memoir, *My Feudal Lord*. The paper is designed at exploring various conventions like feudalism, male supremacy, religion, political, and culture as the core cause of repression, exploitation and subjugation of women responsible for their plight in society. The study procures to dismantle the existing female uniqueness of subservient, modest, compliant, fragile, and passive to strong, vigorous, utterance, and audacious as the novelist. Women usually tolerate atrocity and discrimination as a part of their destiny. Durrani is an astounding Pakistani woman writer, whose memoir reflects female suppression and misery encountered by the majority of women in the predictable

milieu of society in Pakistan. She eloquent her own experiences of life and draw a parallel it with every distinct women. As quoted in Habib:

According to Barkty, "Women's oppression under male domination not only consists of solely in depriving women of political and legal rights but also extends into the structure of our society and the contents of our culture and permeates our consciousness".(92)

Her works include: *My Feudal Lord* (1994), *Mirror to the Blind* (1996), *Blasphemy* (1998) and *Happy Things in Sorrow Times* (2013). She was born on 18th Feb, 1953 in an prominent influential family of Pakistan. Shakirullah U. Durrani, father of Durrani, was the Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan and also the former chairman of Pakistan International Airlines. Samina was her mother, who belongs to Hayat family of Khattar tribe. At a very early age, Tehmina got married to Anees Khan, a junior executive in the National Shipping Corporation of Pakistan. *My Feudal Lord* (1994) is a life history of Tehmina Durrani about her second marriage and cruel husband Mustafa Khar, the ex-Chief Minister and the ex-Governor of Pakistani Punjab. Besides unfolding her life with Mustafa Khar, Tehmina has disclosed her individual enormous effort towards her own unrestraint. Being the wife of Mustafa Khar, her feudal lord, Tehmina has to lead a life of a conquest, autocracy, subordination and cruelty. Tehmina Durrani takes us on a journey from being born and raised in a repressive society to endure a traumatic marriage as a wife of Gulam Mustafa khar (her husband). This memoir portrayed every single life of a women who is poor or rich, adolescent as well as mature, educated as well as uneducated, psychosomatic conflicts as well as similar conditions faced by women in all social classes. Durrani meant to categorize women creative and equal contributors of values. It is a factual narrative of a fine-looking and elegant Tehmina Durrani, born into an influential family in Lahore and how being the 6th wife to one of Pakistan's most eminent political figures, turned into horrendous. Her desired of marrying a colourful, tall, dark and attractive feudal lord was far-off from realism. Sadistically overprotective and envious, her husband succeeded in shunning her off from the outside world, Tehmina endured alone, in silence. And when she decided to revert, she suffered even more but pushed through with inexorable courage. After adhering monstrous violence for fourteen years of her married life, she takes control of her own life and breaks the restraints by raising her voice opposing violence and subordination.

In her autobiography, she had screamed out her personal inconsistency and psychosomatic tussle and talked about dogmatic and ethical teachings of Pakistani society. It contains clashes between two different forces gender discrimination and ultra mod westernised thinking of character. This story provided astonishing insights into the susceptible circumstances of women caught in the intricate mesh of Muslim society. It touches the heart, surprises the mind, makes the eyes of the readers moan and opens the mind towards autonomy and liberty which is the right of each woman. Valerie Bryson in *Feminist Political Theory* opines that according to Millett:

Patriarchy's chief institution is the family', and many other radical feminists have agreed that, contrary to the assumptions of conventional political theory, the family is indeed a central part of society's power structure; as such it both



sustains patriarchal power in the 'public' world and is itself a source of women's oppression. (175-176)

Durrani has revealed in an impervious way that every woman has the identity, uniqueness and personality of her own. A woman is constructed according to the social norms of the society, on contrary going against her family, husband and even the societal customs, she proved the power of the women who can change her life to be successful and liberated. *My Feudal Lord* is a heroic endeavour on part of Tehmina Durrani to break free the shackles of the society. The author blamed patriarchy, feudalism and cultural norms for women's oppression. Therefore, Durrani originate herself when she rejected confined and degraded life with her husband. Under awful pressures, she put great effort to become self-governing and revert to self-esteem life. By in scripting her life, Durrani not only confronted the predetermined stereotypic patterns but also gave vent to her exasperated conviction and ultimately came out of the stretched silence demonstrating that she has an agency to possess and protest. It studies how the novelist is forced to encounter the brutal treatment by her husband. She faces the physical, sexual and psychological violence at her husband's house. Mustafa Khar is portrayed as a man who reveals total subjugation, repression, and oppression of his female counterpart. Her conventional upbringing by her patriarchal social environment in which she lived made her accept her husband's physical assault and sexual brutality, enduring these attacks as a part of her destiny. "Feudal law allows a man to act in such a manner, but for a wife to betray a husband is the supreme sin." (51)

In the novel *My Feudal Lord*, Durrani was apprenticed by her mother, who has a governing personality. She wanted all her offsprings to be dutiful, "My mother demanded total obedience and, although I always complied, she discerned early signs of rebellion in both my expression and my body language. I obeyed, but my crime was that I did not look obedient (24)". Her mother argues that if she is not a respectful descendant, she can never become a supreme spouse or mother. Dormant by the govern persona of her mother, Durrani goes through from a disease called meningitis. Women have to be abided by the male members of the folk. In a woman's existence, the only objective is getting married: There was no matter of discovering oneself character and distinctiveness were trampled traits failed to expand. "My mind became a sanctuary for secret thoughts of escaping from this household. But for that there was no other goal in life but marriage". (29-30)

In a conformist culture of Pakistan, bulk of the cases of matrimony are not based on shared perceptive, love and concern rather they turn into a source of debasing women, abusing them because of their deficient financial and genetic fault. In this custom, the conventional laws and the predominance of feudalism are the foremost causes of women's abuse and tyranny. Durrani's novel *My Feudal Lord* presented the delineation of such a social order, as in the words of Srivastava:

My Feudal Lord (1995) is the true archetype of women's plight and their repressed condition. It has been written unambiguously and specifically in Pakistani context referring to the plight of women in patriarchal symbolic order. Durrani's work illustrates that in third world countries like Pakistan, women are

taken as personal properties and possessions of men since men control every sphere of lives of women even their behaviour and movements. (159)

If the woman could not perform her duties in accordance to the cultural and societal customs, she faces atrocities through physical violence, containment and anxiety. An authoritative, dominating and traditionalist husband is considered idyllic. Very candidly Durrani opens her heart that she falls into the trap of Mustafa Khar, "That Mustafa was authoritarian, conservative and overpowering I knew from the start – but that was precisely what attracted me so much. Psychologically I had suffered from my father's weak role in our family. Now here was someone who presented a quite different personality (Durrani 39)". After wedding, Mustafa imposes many obligations upon Durrani, restricts her to confinement and abandoned her from the world. She is affronted and ridiculed throughout her life not to shirk and aligned with this social order, at times she tried to come out of it she was abused endlessly Tehmina Durrani states, "Later, in our bedroom, my insolence was punished with yet another sharp slap. He called me an exhibitionist, a woman without shame (216)". Tehmina is physically assaulted, sexually harassed, humiliated and psychologically distressed by Mustafa. As an outcome, she has to confer with a doctor for serious injuries:

Suddenly he threw me down on to the bed and jumped on me. Sitting astride my belly, he slapped me in the face repeatedly with his open palm, forehand and backhand . . . he pulled at my hair, thrusting my head from side to side. Like lightning, he leaped off me. One hand clutched my long, braided hair and jerked me off the bed and on to the floor . . . He threw me against a wall, picked me up and threw me against another one – again, and again, and again. (102-103)

There was not a single day when he did not beat her up. She always tried not to provoke him. She was afraid that a slightest response to him would reinforce his image of her as a common slut. This was become the everyday inclination of Mustafa to assault her. Even a trivial mistake or hold-up was not tolerated by him, which results in vicious beating. He cannot abide any defiance from her at any cost, "Never – ever – disobey me! You have to do what I tell you to do (95)."

He restrained her into the four walls of the house and engraves her from the complete world. She can go out by covering her body and face. The hypocritical nature of Mustafa always restricted Tehmina Durrani and tangled her emotionally so that she may not vent her frustration and elevate her voice against the suppression on her. He convinced her not to spit a single word against him which will ruin the reputation of the family and he will be dishonoured. He manipulated that their community (Islamic) would not reverence her of being a good wife:

Your position will be reduced to the lowly one that all my other wives had. I don't want you to be humiliated. Nobody should ever say that I dared or wished to lift my hand to you. I want people to respect you – if they thought that I didn't, why should they? . . . I was conditioned to believe in the concept that image is the



paramount thing. This was a personal and private matter between my husband and me. (104)

Tehmina Durrani wanted to save her married life and thought it to be an undisclosed affair of husband and wife that's why she kept her silence alive. She was swayed with the deformed version of Koran, "According to feudal tradition, a wife was honour bound to live her life according to her husband's whims. A woman was like a man's land – 'The Koran says so,' he said." (107)

In this way, the men make use of religion to implement his own typical stereotypic thinking on the women and also sanction his judgment concerning the women's role in family or society. Religion was misapprehended and deformed description is presented to women to make them subjugated. She felt herself to be ensnared, "I had fallen into the classic trap of the Pakistani woman. The goal is marriage and, once achieved, the future is a life of total subordination. I had no power, no rights, no will of my own (100)". Women were taught that they will get respect in the society only when they are married, a detached or divorced woman does not get admiration in culture. In Pakistani culture a separated woman was measured unrespectable, "In our society, marriage may be purgatory, but divorce is hell (77)" and "A divorcee in Pakistani society is always a prime target for malicious gossip. Wagging tongues and leering glances turned me into a recluse (85)". In spite of the brutality, heinous treatment, odious and tyrannical behaviour of her husband, a Pakistani woman always took an audacious step try to save her married life from being apart, "I had to keep my marriage together for the sake of my children and myself. I had invested too much pain and compromise in this relationship to let it go now." (217)

The societal habituation of women works to such an amount that the treatment of them is kept under the superficial cover of destiny. But that was the limit of adhering the criticism. Durrani bears a lot, and whenever she settled on leaving her husband, she was brought back to confinement (home) by her husband very shrewdly. Once she confronts: 'If you are Mr Khar, I am *Mrs* Khar. If you learned from Mr Bhutto, I have learned from you. If you blackmail me, I'll blackmail you. I will face up to the situation and fight you just as you are fighting me. I will not let you get away with it!' (244)

When Mustafa got imprisoned, Durrani was very cunningly brought back home to support him at the time of misery like a perfect wife. Mustafa very manipulatively bunged up being a penitent husband and became an ideal politician, who did not frightened of being assassinated and compelled her to remain faithful to his cause. She was in a social context habituated to be a good wife, so she got agreed, "I fell suddenly in love with a noble idea – the return of the exiled leader (252)". She was persuaded by Mustafa to be his part, "The words I had written on the Koran haunted me: 'I will stand by Mustafa through his incarceration be it for life.' (292)". By agitation for her husband for a long time, she got succeeded in getting him free. However, Mustafa did not even appreciate her for her hard efforts. On other side, Mustafa had an affair with her sibling, he resumed his illicit relation with Adila when Durrani opposed their unlawful relations, Mustafa declared Tehmina to be a

psychologically sick person: 'Tehmina isn't well at all,' he said with feigned compassion. He referred to meningitis that had struck me down as a child . . . 'She's Imagining things,' he contended. (166)

She was not able to prove his illegal relation and even was unsuccessful to save her sister from the trap of Mustafa Durrani once again was treated brutally. Once, Mustafa kidnapped his own children. Another time, he locked her up in the bathroom. After being endured for so many years, Durrani got tired from subjugation by her unrefined and brutal husband. She had tried to get divorced from him, many times, and at last she became successful in the end also. However, she has to disburse very serious penalty for a life of sovereignty. She had to leave the supervision of her children and also the monetary support from her husband. Tehmina Durrani had endeavoured to undermine the long-established gender and civilizing norms of the society. In the words of Susan Hekman,

What Butler advocates in lieu of feminist identity politics is 'gender trouble': engaging inactions that subvert gender identity. If 'woman' is created by the acts that define gender, then acting subversively will destabilize that identity. Such acts were Butler's prescription for feminist politics. (99)

By intensifying up aligned with the life of miseries, mental ordeal and mistreatment, Durrani has stimulated and enthused thousands resembling her. She has made an attempt to dismantle the existing reflection of woman as twisted by the society. She does not embrace Islam liability for the despondent predicament of women; rather she clasps patriarchal tradition, community and ancestral taming and feudalism responsible for their agony and woe.

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