

DELINEATING THE ABYSMAL FEMALE AGONY AND GEHENNA IN TEHMINA DURRANI'S, *MY FEUDAL LORD*

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Abstract:

Women are callously bearing the brunt of male sadism and inhibition, at multihued facets and stages of life. She has become a denizen of the third world. A creature of deride and disdain. Virginia Woolf puts in her Sui generis 'A room of one's own'; "women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time". Unfortunately, female forlornness that emerged out of the abysmal oppression is profoundly immanent in the culture of the societies which cinches the abidance and durability of patriarchal stricture. This situation makes it impossible for women to seek ways of manumitting themselves, because doing so will be tantamount to challenging the age long tradition and customs of the people. This study is based on the premise that patriarchal moulded structures ensure that women remain in perpetual slavery. Thus, this study examines the type of oppression women face from infancy to adulthood as portrayed in Tehmina Durrani's 'My Feudal Lord' and the expedients taken by the women to unfetter themselves from the ligatures of male hegemony and oppression. It concludes that female oppression is at the detriment of women and the society; therefore, it should be daunted and completely stamped out.

Keywords: *Patriarchal, manumitting, oppression, tantamount, hegemony.*

Introduction

The Feminist Movement, of the 20th century proved to be a milestone in better understanding of women's issues and rights and endeavoured to bring them forward because they had marginalized for so long. It provided a rostrum in voicing their agitation and anxieties. The privileged women of the continent got into limelight by means of their writings, women belonging to third world still had their voice unheard. The following statement of Russian scientist 'Anton Nemilov' reflects the status of woman everywhere:

"Until now the concept of inequality between man and woman has been so deeply rooted not only in the lesser educated people but also in the high educated people as well as women themselves, that if, on occasion, women are treated as having full equality with men, this is attributed to men's weakness and impotency. If we pursue the thought of any scientist, writer, student, businessman... we shall soon realize that he does not in his heart of hearts regard woman as his equal. If we read any recent novel, however free a thinker, a writer might be, we shall certainly find something or other in it which expose as superficial his concept of women as equal to men.

According to Sandra Lee 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*" (63).

She further professes that;

"Those who claim that any woman can reprogram her consciousness if only she is sufficiently determined hold a shallow view of the nature of patriarchal oppression. Anything done can be undone, it is implied; nothing has been permanently damaged,

nothing irretrievably lost. But this is tragically false. One of the evils of a system of oppression is that it may damage people in ways that cannot always be undone. Patriarchy invades the intimate recesses of personality where it may maim and cripple the spirit forever”.

However, historical and literary studies unveil that much has been done to make women eye-catching and bodacious. These studies have indeed helped students and scholars of literature in getting fully acquainted about the role of feministic movement and its untiring role in making a female visible in a very callous patriarchal society. The prominent works in this very radical field are; *Sheila Rowbotham's 'Hidden from History'* (1973); *Ellen Moer's 'Literary Women; The Great Writers'* (1976); *Elaine Showalter's 'A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing'* (1977). these are the vital works in this field that provided an impetus to the feministic approach. This approach marvellously foregrounded not only the differences, but with also the hierarchy. Men, the more cardinal and paramount than women, assess their own concepts and definitions on the masculine / feminine identities. It is however stated that gender-based violence and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation including those resulting from cultural prejudice are incompatible with the dignity and worth of human person and must be eliminated. The present paper purports to highlight, " *My Feudal Lord* " as a genuine harbinger of women's precariousness and intimidating situation in the present formidable world governed by the patriarchy more horrendous than anything and their reserved condition that shows the real picture of subjugation of women in third world nations on one hand, while on other hand it brings to light the cruel practice of patriarchy that is clearly responsible for the discriminatory state of women. This work illustrates that in third world nations like Pakistan, women are considered as personal properties of men, which should be controlled with a heavy hand.

'My feudal lord,' an autobiography by Tehmina Durrani a woman of formidable courage and an epitome of abysmal intrepidity is counted among the hall of the fame, an elite of Pakistani society and wife of a well-known politician Mustafa Khar who belongs to the Reign of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and a landlord of Punjab and commonly known as Lion of Punjab (Sher-e-Punjab). Tehmina Durrani's devastating condition in the second marriage with Ghulam Mustafa Khar is the result of feudalism. Mustafa feigns loathsomeness against this menace called feudalism; he has in him the lust for feudalism deep ingrained, that lead to the devastating relationship with his sixth wife, Tehmina Durrani. Not only his attitude towards Tehmina was obdurate and desensitized, but he also used to scourge and hurl invective on his previous wives Wazir, Firdaus, Safia, Naubahar and Shahrazad (Sherry) and had several extra marital affairs. He was able to do so because his impromptu actions and decisions were justified by feudalism. Moreover, he was so vicious to his wives that none of them dared to protest against his wantonness.

This research further explicates the sexual harassment and violence against women of Tehmina Durrani's memoir "My Feudal Lord" (1995) in the light of French feminist Julia Kristeva's feministic views. In our feudal society, women are considered inferior to men because the feudal society doesn't accept their right'. Sexual harassment is intimidating of a sexual nature, or the undesirable or improper promise of rewards in exchange for sexual favours. According to the most modern legal contexts, sexual harassment is illicit. The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2014) defined: "*It is illegal to harass a person because of that person's sex.*" Harassment can include "sexual harassment" or unwanted sexual advances, desires for sexual favours, and other physical or verbal harassment of a sexual nature. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states that: "Violence against women is a symptom of historically unequal power relations between male and female" and that "violence against women is one of the vital social mechanisms by which women are forced into an inferior position compared with men" (A/RES, 2014).

Research Methodology

The present research is qualitative in nature. The methodology to survey the novel with critical lens

is largely based on analysing the text. The critical survey is based on the theory of postmodernism and the original text of the novel has been used as a tool by the researcher. In addition, other related literary pieces, articles, books, reviews on the novel in question and websites have been used as sources for help in throwing light on the given topic.

Findings, Discussion and critical survey of the text

In her Preface to *Post-Colonial Women Writers* (2008), Sunita Sinha rightly points out: Tehmina Durrani's writing... represents a distinctive and original contribution to all the oppressed voiceless classes of women around the world and provides an extraordinary insight into the vulnerable position of women caught in the complex web of patriarchal society, establishing new directions for the women's movement in South Asia.... Tehmina Durrani builds a strong case for inducement against marriage, Vedic diktats, and social mores for women, lusty Pirs and holy men, the essence of all they want to speak is not much different to what Jonathan Swift has said: "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another."

Tehmina Durrani started writing "My feudal Lord", just after the few months of her divorce. In this book, she just unmasks the true face of social ethics residing under the facade of respectability. She is much nerved to talk about the social ethics of Pakistani marital life by adducing her own marriage as an illustration. In the very sui generis autobiography, she has pent up her wrath against the callousness and severe oppression at the hands of male domination. She has flared out her inward strife and cerebral scrimmage and she merely talks about so called dogmatic and ethical teachings of Pakistani society and had expose hypocrisy of ruling elite class in general and cruel nature of her husband specifically. She spouts very dismally; "*Love's absence ailed me. I could not imagine loving my husband. He was a superior and I did not know how to love and be subservient together. Nor had he ever thought of me as a human being, let alone a woman. For no reason had he ever softened towards me, I had stirred him that little. (Blasphemy)*" In Pakistani society, where the Muslim patriarchs dominate, the entity of a woman is that of an inferior being, both intellectually and socially. Her existence is held to be an instrument for the satisfaction of the man's sexual desires and perpetuation of the species. Curiously enough, most of the women had willingly accepted this status and strove to do justice to it. Tehmina writes:

"The women in our circle did not seem to look beyond their raised noses. They chattered endlessly about disobedient servants, clothes, jewellery and interior decorations... Many a day in the lives of these women was completely devoted to the topic of what to wear that evening. (65)

The book bears an acute discord between two different forces, gender discriminations, ultra-modernized thinking of characters and conservative approach of a well-recognized and well-sounded educated feudal Mustafa Khar. Before marrying Mustafa, Tehmina was also married, but she leaves behind her husband 'innocent and simple guy' and marries Mustafa. But soon she realizes the hollowness and barrenness of this relationship. She states in the novel that "*I had no power, no rights, and no will of my own*". Throughout the novel, Tehmina has highlighted herself as an agonized and oppressed woman, this is true and so she is. Durrani has shown in an undaunted way that every woman has her identity and individuality. She says that "*I found an inner strength to fight for myself*". Her so-called roles are nothing but cultural constructs as being mother she supposed to be tender heart, as sister she is supposed to be caring enough, as daughter she needs to be an obedient and as wife she must be a loyal and remain sincere no matter what condition she may have to be indulged. She said, "*A woman has the power to challenge the whole patriarchy even at the cost of her closest relatives*". The book gives good food for thought to its readers and how will they behave in similar circumstances. *My Feudal Lord* won the Italian Marrassa Bellasario prize and was later translated into several languages. The book is divided into three parts along with an Epilogue.

These three sections reveal Tehmina Durrani's significant change from a banal, craven and fiddling snobbish house wife to a manumitted and disenthralled woman who gallantly skirmishing for equal rights. The book also offers many strategies to build resistance and create awareness regarding women's plight. Durrani's work illustrates that in third world countries like Pakistan, women are taken as personal properties and possessions of men. They are treated as what Gaytri Spivak calls 'subaltern'. She contains in her the male countenance phobia and according to Margaret Atwood; *"Men are afraid that women will laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them"*. We find that feudal lord Khar does not allow Durani even to talk to her own brother. Once, he grew very upset when she talked to her brother, Asim on the phone. He shouted; *"Why did you speak to him for so long"* he growled, *"Is he your brother or your lover?"* this is the height of injustice and ignominy she met in his own home.

In the Book, after tantalized by these enormous jibes and scoldings, Tehmina avows her allegiance and troth to feminism in an interview; *"Well I am a woman, so I naturally write from a feminine perspective. More than that, I am interested in reform. My work whether it's My Feudal Lord or Blasphemy narrated autobiography Mirror to the Blind is about issues that concern our people, about breaking of a silence from a part of the society that cannot speak out. I am not called bold because these are the issues one does not talk about, nor does one talk about one's life. I suppose my passion for reform is overwhelming. And, I think, when anything overwhelms you that much you have a natural boldness because you step out of the realm of fear"*. This clearly without a single grain of doubt insinuates that Durrani has a bureau to profess and to oppugn with a heart of Lioness. She is not fighting for herself only but becomes a representative of all the trampled and distorted women of Pakistan who are bearing the brunt of patriarchy with lips sealed and arms twisted. She becomes the mouth piece of the women of Pakistan. Therefore, it can be concluded that Durani becomes an important agent of change who boldly declares her invulnerable identity in these words, *"Well Mustafa, now the world will soon know you only as Tehmina Durrani's ex-husband"*. Throughout the textual analysis from various aspects I came to know that she has merely talk about almost each patriarchy issue of third world country and social status of women specifically and in return she has face a strong criticism of so called fundamentalist sort of people and she is been even degraded by her own family and mother for this courageous decision of writing this book. From the three sections of the book, one can map the progress of Tehmina from a meek housewife to a fierce social crusader fighting for her husband's release from prison and later for her own freedom from the clutches of her husband. She reveals after her husband's release from the prison; *"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. The sounds of his blows seemed too loud to remain confined to the four walls of the room. I fought to stifle my screams as 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. I felt a wetness run down my legs, but had no time to realize that my bladder lacked the strength to face this kind of fear/ He threw me against a wall, picked me up and threw me against another one again, and again, and again. I no longer knew what was happening. Something burst in my ears. I felt an agonizing pain in my eyes. Something split. Something swelled. Then the pain merged into one deep, enthralling sense of agony"*. (102-103) the section of the book, 'Lion of The Punjab' deals with Mustafa, who roars and destroys the lives of simple and innocent women without any hesitation... the typical trait of a lion. Tehmina is also married but she leaves her husband "an innocent, simple guy" and marries Mustafa. But soon she realizes the hollowness and barrenness of this relationship *"I had no power, no rights, and no will of my own"* (1995). Law of the Jungle starts with Tehmina and Mustafa's immigration to London. There his affair with her youngest sister makes her mad and panic. She endures all her husband's physical assaults and sexual brutality as a part of her destiny. But then she decides to rebel the king *"I am not your sister or your mother. I am your wife"* (1995). This is how Tehmina challenges the patriarchal structure denying all the roles of women as futile and abstract. But Mustafa can never allow her to leave him because he thinks that she is the

only skylark that can amuse him while he is tired.

Durrani states:

“Silence condones injustice, breeds subservience and fosters a malignant hypocrisy. Mustafa Khar and other feudal lords thrive and multiply on silence. Muslim women must learn to raise their voices against violence”.

Tehmina Durrani suffers not without the cause, her miseries arises from the second marriage with Ghulam Mustafa Khar as the result of feudalism. Although Mustafa claimed that he is against feudalism, it is his learned characteristics of a feudal lord that lead to the devastating relationship with his sixth wife, Tehmina Durrani. He also oppressed and abused his previous wives Wazir, Firdaus, Safia, Naubahar and Shahrazad (Sherry) and had several extra marital affairs. He was able to do so because his impromptu actions and decisions were justified by feudalism. Moreover, no other wife of his had ever before dared to go against his will and injustices. Despite knowing the fact that Tehmina is married to Anees, he tried his best to impress her with his charm and strategy. He was inclined towards her only because of her prettiness, long hair and the fashionable dresses Meem 28 that she wore. Only her outer appearance excited him, but she was unable to comprehend that for a long time. Tehmina also fell in love with him, because as mentioned earlier, she had become bored of Anees. After several obstacles and her family's disagreement, she was finally able to get married to Mustafa. When she married Mustafa, he was already married to his fifth wife, Sherry, and it was from Sherry that she first came to know the bitter truth about Mustafa. Sherry revealed to Tehmina that “When he had discovered Safia's infidelity, he had, apparently, beaten her without mercy and broken several of her ribs. But, even worse, he had ordered one of the maids to insert red chili powder into the vagina of poor Dai Ayesha, the nanny, for not informing him of the affair” (Durrani 94). According to Sherry, “Women were his obvious victims. He was out to destroy us” (Durrani 95). However, at that moment Tehmina could not completely believe what Sherry said. Tehmina faced Mustafa's wrath for the first time when she had a dental appointment and she was asked by her husband to register herself at the doctor's as “Begum Mustafa Khar”. As she did not want to humiliate Sherry, she did not register herself as Mustafa's wife (Durrani 95). To Tehmina's dismay, Sherry reported this to Mustafa and he got infuriated. He scolded Tehmina by saying, “*Never ever disobey me! You have to do what I tell you to do*” (Durrani 95). This incident portrays that Mustafa suffered from both superiority complex and inferiority complex. As he considered himself a superior and a powerful feudal lord, if anyone disobeyed his orders, he could not tolerate that, because according to his mentality, going against his will is a way of considering him as an inferior being. His wrath continued to shower upon Tehmina even for trivial matters. “*A feudal lord understands... the power of physical violence*” (Durrani 134). Hence, Tehmina acted according to his commands. Mustafa was such a merciless person that he used to beat up his housemaids as well. For instance, once Mustafa had ordered their Dai (servant) to bring milk for Tehmina. As she had forgotten to do so, “*Mustafa thrust his foot squarely against Dai's backside, sending her flying through the doorway*” (Durrani 100). Gradually, Tehmina realized that she had fallen into the trap of a typical Pakistani marriage (Durrani 100). Tehmina writes, “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, and no will of my own”

Conclusion

The study inarguably divulges the reality behind the muteness and forlornness of women that arises from their own nest, wholly and solely presides over by the men. The study moreover enunciates the phenomenon of violence whether gender based violence is present in our society or not. Violence against women feeds off discreteness and serves to corroborate it. Women have always been a pastime pleasure for men who whenever distorted by their own frustrations assuages themselves by deriving banter out of them. Women face physical or mental abuse throughout their lifecycle in male dominated society. In my privy views, the most facile way to fight against this bellicose is for the battered to take place and for the society

to hold up him or her. According to Durrani, “women should raise voice against violence and mistreat by their husbands and Lords”. According to me, they are whipping themselves by relinquishing before their beastly husbands. Their muteness is their weakness. They should sabotage the evil designs of their husbands against them. Durrani embraces the inkling that is to instruct the multitude not only in the transactions of the humanity, but that of our enormous religion Islam too. There is a powerful and vital requirement for mobilizing and sufficiently using all associated divisions of society for planning policy and plans. Varying social approaches regarding women in Pakistani society necessitates sustained legal and social efforts. Pakistan cannot become a modest, liberal, wealthy and a prosperous Muslim state without intensification civil society.

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