

## **DURRANI'S MY FEUDAL LORD – A VOICE OF RESISTANCE AND IDENTITY**

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### **Abstract**

*"Society, being codified by man, decrees that woman is inferior; she can do away with this inferiority only by destroying the male's superiority" says Simone de Beauvoir. The suppression, subjugation and unbearable torture to women have become a major question of concern. Thus many sociologists are focusing upon the contemporary status and condition of women in all nations. Therefore after so many researches it is found that women, no matter which country they belong to, are subjected to unimaginable torture, discrimination and violence. My Feudal Lord is an autobiography of Tehmina Durrani, a Pakistani activist and now a well-established writer who started her literary career not by choice but by determination in order to break the traditional silence of women by portraying the brutal picture of her own disastrous married life. The autobiography is a cry of the victim in the hands of patriarchy which ultimately becomes a voice which answers its suppressors in a baffling way by making its own stand in public. Durrani's attempt has changed the mindset of thousands of women all over the world and has given them the power to resist the violent activities against them. This book portrays the gory details of her marriage with Mustafa Khar, CM of Punjab who beats, abuses and shows almost inhuman behavior towards his wife. He not only threatens her but also kidnaps his own children so that Durrani could not divorce him.*

**Keywords:** *Codified, discrimination, flabbergasted, menacing, subjugation, suppressors, tarnished, shattered.*

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**Introduction**

“Society, being codified by man, decrees that woman is inferior, she can do away with this inferiority only by destroying the male’s superiority” (Simon de Beauvoir)

Simone de Beauvoir has expressed the reality of the existing norms of the society wherein women are considered as inferior to men. Truly, the life of a woman is actually controlled by the people who have set those norms which are socially and behaviorally accepted by women either by choice or by force. Women have been forced to bear torture and inhuman treatment meted out to them by their husbands and other dominating members of the family. Eventually they try to resist but are unable due to the fear of getting scolded or of fear of more physical torture. This has been the story of every second woman not only in India but across the nations. The suppression, subjugation and inhuman torture to women have become a major concern today. Thus many sociologists are focusing upon the contemporary status and prevailing condition of women. Therefore after so many researches it is found that women no matter which country they belong to, are subjected to unimaginable torture, discrimination and violence which is similar in every society. Thus those people who have ability to raise their voice against injustice and suppression have tried their hand in writing and have been successful in their attempt. Autobiographies usually are an attempt at self-exploration wherein the writers, while writing their own story with truth and clarity, try their personal pains and sufferings. This cures them of the psychological hurt they have borne and they can gradually emerge out of the darkness they have been surrounded in. Not just this, these stories also help several readers connect with the suffering of the writer and often motivates the readers who might be experiencing similar violence or pain in their own lives. It is a voice of the subordinates whose plea for justice and their rights is buried in the coffin of powerful groups and its followers. All the writers who have faced injustice or brutal behavior themselves have tried to expose the reality before their readers so that their voice of awareness may reach them, clear and loud.

If we consider this new wave of literature then these days autobiographies have become a strong genre of literature in which Dalit autobiographies and Black writings are most powerful. In literature, Dalits and Blacks have adopted the autobiographies as a mode of resistance in their writings which not only portrays the sufferings of the members of their community but as Baby Kamble, P. Sivakami, Bama and many other Dalit writers have written. The social stigma and exploitation of people including their own self. For them writing an autobiography is in itself a big challenge as it may have terrible repercussions which may prove fatal for their own self but even then they confidently fight against this injustice.

TehminaDurrani's autobiography is nowhere less than Dalit's and Blacks as she has portrayed the whole community which is under subjugation and suppression of patriarchy. In most of the families the marital life of a woman becomes hell for her where she has to suffer wife battering, sexual assault, abuse, harassment, infidelity, and complete annihilation of the self. Dr. NirojSinha, 'Beating of the wife or wife battering is perhaps the most pervasive and age-old method of subjugating women to the males in marital life. It is the commonest form of violence towards women in marital life.' (67).

TehminaDurrani (1953- ) is a Pakistani woman who became a writer not by choice but by determination in order to expose the reality of her husband Mustafa Khar whose presence in her life gave nothing except torture, humiliation and sufferings. The novel is Durrani's intentional attack on the hypocrites of the so called civilized society who victimize an individual or a family and even the society for their own vested interests. Durrani's attempt became successful ultimately because she willfully resisted the tortures and inhuman behaviour which was shown towards her either by her husband or her own family. It is an autobiography which details her hardships and sufferings not only after her marriage to Mustafa Khar but before her marriage to Anees Khan.

In the initial chapters of the book she has given a reasonable background to her marriage to Anees Khan as her mother's attitude used to be violent and negative towards her. She says,

'...what a shock I was to my mother. She was a light skinned beauty-and proud of it; her family was fair skinned and considered itself to be superior by that fact. A dark child was condemned to neglect. And yet there I was, arriving in the world in 1953 with a dark skin. It seemed evident by my mother's attitude that she regarded me as ugly and was embarrassed to present me to friends and relatives.' (22-23)

This somehow became a reason for her to marry a person whom she never liked. But after meeting Mustafa Khar she divorced her husband in search of love. Her decision to marry Mustafa Khar unfortunately, was not to fulfill her hopes of leading a life of love and happiness. Therefore in *My Feudal Lord* (1991), Durrani details her marriage with Khar who was known as the 'Lion of Punjab', serving as right hand to Bhutto (PM of Pakistan) and portrays the hypocrisy of the elite class and the contradictions that flawed the Muslim people. She depicts the gory details of her marriage delineating vividly the physical and mental torture inflicted on her by her powerful husband. In the course of the thirteen years of her married life she tried in several ways to get a divorce and free herself from his clutches but she could not succeed in her numerous attempts. Her marriage to Mustafa Khar, one of Pakistan's most eminent political figures, soon turned into a nightmare. Though Mustafa Khar holds a reputable position in Pakistan's political structure yet he feels jealous of TehminaDurrani's strong political concern and her power to persuade the masses, therefore he tries to cut her off from the outside world.

Since the decision of her marriage to Mustafa Khar was her own, Durrani's family disowned her completely. This incident broke her from within because she received no support

from anyone while she was undergoing inhuman treatment given to her by Mustafa Khar. Later on, conditions turned for the worse for her when Mustafa Khar was alleged as the murderer of Zia- ul -Haq in a secretive plane crash due to which he had to flee abroad and take refuge in a foreign land. In the same country Durrani's family also stayed and they come close to them finally by accepting Tehmina and Khar's wedding and forgiving Tehmina. But soon after this Tehmina got to know about Mustafa's affair with her younger sister, knowing about this Tehmina tells her mother about this secret which results in her sexual harassment by Mustafa Khar. When Mustafa Khar receives this information he forced Tehmina to tell her mother that whatever she said about his affair was wrong and she herself cooked that story for shattering his image before her. He beats her savagely and forced her to strip naked until she did what he asked her to do. He was a dual face personality who emotionally fooled Durrani each time after his violent behavior towards her, his love for Durrani put her in prison from where she could not escape '...love is essentially a much simpler phenomenon--it becomes complicated, corrupted or obstructed by an unequal balance of power'( Firestone: 33) and the same was happening to TehminaDurrani. Her husband loved her but it was a serious and most complicated relationship which never gave her a chance to escape. Her most challenging and troublesome period of her life began when she decided to divorce him. This decision put her into a cage which was invisible yet too strong to be broken. Mustafa Khar kidnapped his own children and sent them to Pakistan. This left Tehmina awestruck with no other option than accepting all his demands. Kha never liked his daughters thus to save them from Khar's wrath she didn't divorce him and instead started persuading people to supporting Mustafa in elections. She comes forward and says,

'the *Sardar's* [chiefs] of all these areas hide their wives from the poor, oppressed people of their villages. They place them behind the *chadar* so that you, who come from their soil, cannot set your eyes on their "honour". But in the cities they let their women remove their veils and mingle with aliens. Mustafa has asked me to inform you that he is not from that breed of men.' ( 318)

She then continued further, '... he has, by my presence in front of you, given proof that you are the people who can behold his woman, because for you I am a daughter, a mother or a sister. You are his family. He will not hide his woman from you. He is breaking false and hypocritical tradition today-for you!' (318)

In the same way she almost convinced everyone in Muzaffargarh and brought the task to its completion. Mustafa's affair with Adila, Tehmina's younger sister continued for so long even in her presence. Eventually her grandmother, the most loving person in Tehmina's life turned ill and came closer to her death and on the other hand her marriage also reached its termination. With the death of her grandmother, she ended her disastrous marriage also. Before leaving she held a long and painful discussion with her children, explaining the situation to them. She says, 'they cried in tears of desolation when I told them of my decision, and I knew that it would take them much time to understand.' (357) Leaving home could not provide satisfaction until she as well as her children escaped from Mustafa's prison but she says,

'Zarmina picked me up, and I left Mustafa Khar's house for the fourth and final time...this time my decision was irrevocable.'(357) This decision of leaving Mustafa Khar tarnished her image and she was once again targeted by the media for her actions.

Soon after her divorce she realized that she was not only a family outcast but also society and political outcast. She details,

'The response of people, whom I formerly respected, turned their backs on me. I shuddered at the realization of the position that a woman falls into after divorce- especially if her ex-husband is an important person. Increasingly I understood why women dare not break away. Increasingly I experienced a humiliating lack of confidence and self-esteem.' (372)

Moreover she assessed Mustafa's political philanderings and his sudden announcement of seventh marriage with a twenty-two year old divorcee. Over a lunch Durrani's meeting with Khar on his demand was not fruitful. He kept on speaking rubbish which only humiliated her even further. After his arrogant remarks Durrani asked, 'Mustafa, do you realize that you have taken away everything from me-thirteen years, my family, my children, my youth and everything I believed in? I have to start anew.'(373) To this Mustafa relaxed himself and then struck a terrible blow to the self-esteem of Durrani by saying,

'Tehmina, you are nothing anymore. Once you were Begum Tehmina Mustafa Khar. Now you are just TehminaDurrani. When you ring up people you have to introduce yourself as my ex-wife. You have no identity of your own... women won't let you come to their homes because you're a threat to their marriage. Even if you think that you can work politically, you'll be made to wait outside offices for hours, because you've removed your name from mine.'(374)

Durrani gulped back tears, pretending to be unaffected, but stung by such derogatory words, Durrani 'decided to cast a stone at hypocrisy. I decided to write this book and break the traditional silence.'(375) Thus this book is a voice of resistance which overcame all impossible tasks put before Durrani either physical or intellectual. Moreover it is a war waged against the inhuman treatment towards women and a fight for their rights against the dominating male community. Eventually when a book *My Feudal Lord* appeared as international publication Mustafa remained flabbergasted and furiously rang up Durrani and said, 'What is this nonsense! I hear about the book?' to which Durrani could not help reminding him of their conversation over lunch as she writes, 'when he said that I had no identity of my own and would have to introduce myself as Mustafa Khar's ex-wife. I said "Well, Mustafa, now the world will soon know you only as TehminaDurrani's ex-husband". (382) With this remark she ended up her conversation with him.

Though the condition of women has been similar everywhere since ages yet it is found that in the Arabic and Muslim countries the suffering of women is more severe in comparison to the Hindus and westerners on all grounds. KhaledHosseini, author of *The Kite Runner* and *A*



*Thousand Splendid Suns* has also portrayed the condition of women in his country in his works. He said that it is undeniable that the treatment of women in some Muslim countries including Afghanistan, his own, is dismal. Similarly Durrani has also witnessed and experienced the same inhuman torture and domination of her husband which astonished the readers. Being a beautiful lady, an artist and now a writer she leads a noble life with her third husband maintaining her surname 'Durrani'. She attacks the hypocrisy and distortion of Islam by its leaders. Her autobiography is a motivating work for all women residing in Pakistan or any other country all over the world. Moreover, a recently published book *I Am Malala* by YusufzaiMalala has also become a source of great inspiration for women world over. It is the autobiography of Malala who fought for the rights of women in Taliban infested Afghanistan. Despite so many tortures and even attempts to murder her she was not discouraged. Her fight for life and rights of women is never ending and she is fighting it with determination and valour.

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