



Feminist Resistance in Tehmina Durrani's "My Feudal Lord"

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Abstract— *The paper aims to highlight the quiet, yet persistent, feminist resistance that can bloom even within the confines of a patriarchal, feudal society. Narrating her life as the wife of a powerful Pakistani feudal lord Mustafa Khar, Durrani lays bare the systemic oppression faced by women in this milieu: physical and emotional abuse, social ostracization, and a denial of basic rights. She speaks out against the sexual exploitation that is rampant within the confines of marriage, wherein women are often treated as only objects of pleasure and are considered to be suitable for childbearing purposes. However, resistance simmers beneath the surface. Durrani's defiance manifests in subtle acts of rebellion – intellectual pursuits, questioning societal norms, and even voicing her discontent to her husband. This defiance, though often silenced or met with violence, lays the groundwork for her eventual escape from the suffocating confines of her marriage. Through her raw honesty and unflinching portrayal of female subjugation, Durrani challenges the status quo and becomes a powerful voice for feminist liberation. Durrani is ostracized from her family and the Pakistani society for speaking out against her powerful husband and encouraging other women to speak up against the injustices they face. The narrative transcends personal experience, offering a glimpse into the collective struggle of women trapped within similar structures of oppression, ultimately urging readers to question and dismantle these systems.*



Keywords— *Oppression, Resistance, Subjugation, Patriarchy, Feudalism, Exploitation*

Tehmina Durrani's "My Feudal Lord" is not merely a memoir; it is a battle cry. Narrating her life within a patriarchal, feudal Pakistani society, Durrani crafts a powerful testament to feminist resistance. Her story is a tapestry woven with threads of oppression – physical abuse, societal expectations, and the dehumanizing grip of a domineering husband. Yet, amidst the darkness, Durrani's defiance flickers.

Her resistance takes many forms. There is the quiet rebellion of introspection, the refusal to internalize her husband's pronouncements. Then, there's the sharp tongue, her words wielded like daggers against his hypocrisy and cruelty. She seeks solace in education, a forbidden fruit in her world, and finds her voice through writing, breaking the silence imposed upon women.

"My Feudal Lord" is not just a story of oppression; it's a dance with fire, a tragic tango of love and betrayal. Tehmina Durrani's marriage to Mustafa Khar, Pakistan's charismatic political leader, begins as a whirlwind romance, a rebellion against her stifling first marriage. Drawn to his charm and promises of freedom, Tehmina surrenders to a love that seems to defy social norms.

Their passionate encounters under the desert moon, stolen moments amidst political turmoil, paint a picture of an intoxicating love story. But whispers of darkness lurk at the edges. Khar's possessiveness escalates, morphing into suffocating control. The public hero hides a monstrous side, subjecting Tehmina to emotional and physical abuse.

Tehmina's love becomes a cage. The initial allure crumbles to reveal a twisted game of power and manipulation. Yet, her love isn't extinguished entirely. It flickers through her

desperate attempts to save their union, fuelled by a misguided belief in Khar's potential.

Their story becomes a cautionary tale of love consumed by darkness. Durrani lays bare the devastating consequences of a love built on a foundation of inequality and deception. While her love for Khar might have started as a beacon of hope, it ultimately becomes a symbol of her entrapment and struggle for liberation.

By weaving the narrative of a passionate but toxic love story into her account of feminist resistance, Durrani offers a complex and nuanced look at the interplay between love, manipulation, and societal pressures. "*My Feudal Lord*" leaves us pondering the true cost of forbidden love and the courage it takes to break free from its ashes.

Durrani's greatest act of resistance is her escape, the ultimate rejection of her subjugated life. It is a testament to the enduring human spirit, a beacon of hope for women trapped in similar systems. "*My Feudal Lord*" is a powerful indictment of patriarchy, a celebration of female resilience, and a call for action, reminding us that even in the darkest corners, the flame of resistance can burn bright.

Tehmina Durrani's "*My Feudal Lord*" empowers women with a powerful message: every woman possesses unique identity and strength, capable of overcoming societal limitations. Despite social expectations and patriarchal pressures, Durrani defies her family, husband, and even cultural norms to reclaim her independence and self-worth.

This work is a courageous act of rebellion against societal chains. Durrani blames societal structures like patriarchy, feudalism, and cultural expectations for women's oppression. By rejecting her husband's oppressive control, she claims her own identity. Under immense pressure, she fights for self-governance and dignity, scripting a life free from imposed stereotypes and stifled voices.

The novel also unveils the brutality Durrani suffers at her husband's hands. Facing physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, she confronts a man who embodies absolute subjugation. Initially, her upbringing within a patriarchal society leads her to accept this violence as her fate. However, she eventually breaks free from this silence, demonstrating her agency to take control and reclaim her voice.

The theme of sexual violence in "*My Feudal Lord*" is unfortunately a potent and present one. Durrani's narrative unflinchingly portrays the devastating impact of Mustafa Khar's abuse, highlighting its psychological, emotional, and physical consequences on Tehmina.

Explicit portrayals of sexual violence faced by Tehmina Durrani often induces the feeling of uneasiness, but it is important to note that it is a common factor in a lot of

abusive marriages/relationships. The book doesn't shy away from detailing the brutality of Mustafa's actions. We witness the forced intimacy, the violation of Tehmina's boundaries, and the constant threat of physical harm. This graphic depiction serves to raise awareness of sexual violence and its pervasiveness, even within seemingly "normal" relationships.

The psychological trauma faced by Durrani leaves an indelible scar on her mind, body, and soul. Beyond the immediate physical pain, the book delves into the psychological trauma inflicted by sexual abuse. Tehmina grapples with shame, self-doubt, and a distorted sense of self-worth. The narrative illustrates the long-term emotional scars and the arduous journey towards healing.

Durrani's courageous decision to speak out about her experiences empowers other survivors. Sharing her story dismantles the stigma surrounding sexual violence and encourages open conversations about a difficult topic. An influential Pakistani woman speaking up against the domestic violence she faced at the hands of one of the most powerful men in Pakistan made her a pariah in her own society, but helped a lot of women speak up about their own experiences worldwide. This was seen as a courageous act by the rest of the women, who were encouraged to find their own voice.

The book subtly explores the power dynamics at play in abusive relationships. Mustafa's control over Tehmina is rooted in patriarchal societal norms that normalize male dominance and female submission. The narrative exposes the harmful effects of these ingrained societal structures on victim blaming and the silencing of survivors.

Despite the darkness of the subject matter, "*My Feudal Lord*" offers a glimmer of hope. Tehmina's eventual escape and her journey towards reclaiming her life showcase the immense resilience of the human spirit. The book serves as a testament to the power of self-determination and the possibility of healing and rebuilding.

In "*My Feudal Lord*", Tehmina Durrani also explored the refusal of the patriarchy to accept a woman who speaks up against injustices. She insists that the patriarchal society does not approve of a woman's audacity to directly confront the man of the house and dubs this "rebellion" and the woman as histrionic, emotional, or "unfit for womanhood." Mustafa Khar uses public platforms like court gatherings or feasts to ridicule Durrani, silencing her through laughter and mockery. He also resorts to veiled or overt threats, implying repercussions for her defiance. Mustafa Khar often uses sexual exploitation and ostracization from society as a threat over Durrani's head in an attempt to subdue her.

Mustafa Khar also gaslights and manipulates her words and actions, painting her as the aggressor or mentally unstable.

This ended up becoming particularly effective in a society where women's voices are often dismissed or questioned.

Mustafa Khar's attempts to silence dissent and Tehmina Durrani's outrage often makes her grapple with internalized misogyny, questioning her own right to speak up and doubting the validity of her concerns.

Towards the end of the autobiography, Tehmina Durrani reveals that she was forced to choose between her own convictions and her sense of belonging within the feudal society, which became a painful and isolating experience. However, when she is finally free from the shackles of her abusive marriage to Mustafa Khar and has spoken up about her struggles, she taunts him by repeating something he used to say to her:

"I could not resist reminding him of our lunch conversation, 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 Tehmina Durrani's ex-husband.'"

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