

# Representation Of Women Oppression And Identity Crises : A Feminist Perspective Of Tehmina Durrani's "My Feudal Lord"

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## ABSTRACT

The current study is an attempt to analyze women's related issues like women oppression, gender-discrimination, identity crisis, and patriarchal power abuse in Tehmina Durrani's My Feudal Lord. The study focuses on the mistreatment of women in some areas of Pakistan with reference to Tehmina Durrani's memoir My Feudal Lord in which the author has highlighted women's mistreatment by a feudal lord who is raised in a patriarchal feudal social setup of a backward area of Kot Addu, District Muzaffargarh in southern part of Punjab, Pakistan. Moreover, the study aims at analyzing women oppression, its consequences, and at contributing the misconception of gender equality in Pakistan. The research is qualitative in nature, and the selected passages from Durrani's memoir, My Feudal Lord are textually analyzed from the perspective of M.M. Lazar's (2005, 2007, 2014) feminist theory. The study concludes that women are oppressed, and their identity is challenged in some areas of Pakistan, despite their race and class. By taking women oppression and gender discrimination into consideration, the study is a valuable addition of revelation of the fact that feudalism is a hollow social system which needs reformation.

**Key Words:** Oppression; Textual Analysis; Critical Feminism.

## Introduction

The violence against women is a worldwide issue which is not limited to the territory of a particular country. In a report presented to the UN committee against torture in its forty-first session in

November 2008, the independent Medico-Legal unit reported that mostly the gender-discrimination cases remain either unreported or unpunished, and domestic violence, including marital rape, is still considered as a private issue by the police. Thus, women, reporting such cases, are mocked at by the law executing agents (OMCT, 2009). This is one of the reasons that females mostly tolerate tortures in silence as the world surrounding them do not take their problems, issues and tragedies seriously. But there are female writers, like Tehmina Durrani, who cannot tolerate violence and injustice to woman and challenge the creeds of suppressing a woman in a patriarchal society. Tehmina Durrani, a Pakistani writer and human rights activist, raised her voice against woman's suppression by writing her autobiography *My Feudal Lord* where she has depicted a clear picture of Pakistani feudalism and corrupt politicians who contemplate woman as their property and treat them inhumanely. The quest for woman's rights in a patriarchal society, especially in a feudal social setup is not easy, but Tehmina Durrani has highlighted and supported women's rights and revealed the hypocrisy of the elite, like politicians in her memoir *My Feudal Lord* which is a tragic story of Tehmina's oppression by her Pakistani politician and Feudal husband Mustafa Khar. In her note to *My Feudal Lord*, Tehmina Durrani says, "He (feudal lord) is seen as a passionate ladies' man and something of a rough diamond, the archetypal male chauvinist who forces a woman to love him despite his treatment of her" (Durrani, 1995, p. 5). *My Feudal Lord* is not merely a narration of awful experiences of a Pakistani woman, but it is a voice against all the injustices that are done under the name of feudalism. Tehmina observes this system of feudalism as a defective system which needs to be reformed after its verification (Durrani, 1995), and Tehmina's memoir *My Feudal Lord* serves as a tool for the diagnosis of this system. The autobiography is based on the personal experiences of Tehmina Durrani. Her second marriage to Mustafa Khar, the feudal lord and the central male character in the autobiography, turned the tables of her life, and she had to undergo a long-lasting series of turmoil, insults, agony, sacrifice, tolerance, chaos, harassment and violence, physical as well as psychological.

Mustafa Khar is represented as a typical practitioner of patriarchy who believes in male-supremacy and women suppression. For him women mean commodities which can be trapped, enslaved, and humiliated easily. Women mean possessions of lust, and entertainment. Beyond this role, they hardly have any other identity for Mustafa Khar.

This research study focuses on issues like "women oppression," "gender identity crisis" and "Power-abuse" in patriarchal society. Opting qualitative approach to analyze the mentioned issues in Tehmina Durrani's autobiography *My Feudal Lord*, the selected passages are textually analyzed with the lens of M.M. Lazar's (2005, 2007, 2014) version of feminism as a theoretical framework for data analysis by focusing on power, gender, and ideology expression in and through language. This study is a feminist discourse analysis of the text under study. Feminism, in general, seeks to redress women oppression and raises a voice for gender equality. If there is no such movement in the world, women will become invisible in most of world's societies.

Women oppression refers to the differences between two genders, i.e men and women. Keeping in view the social system of patriarchy, men are oppressors while women are their victims. Oppression takes different forms. It may be termed discrimination, rights' violation, identity crisis,

tortures, and sufferings for its victims. Gil defines oppression as, oppression is a term used to differentiate globally domination and exploitation between classes, groups, and individuals effecting the oppressed one economically, socially, and psychologically. ... exploitation seems to stimulate oppression resulting in undue living circumstances for its victims (Gil, 1994).

Women oppression is a globally acknowledged problem. When women saw women falling, they raised voice for women rights, since a woman can understand the sufferings of another woman. The struggle for women's identity and rights resulted in various movements: feminism is one such movement with multiple branches each struggling for its specific women's rights. Viewing feminism in depth, it can be concluded that feminism was and is a need of the day. 'Feminism is a response to women's oppression and dehumanization by the dominant class i.e men of a society called patriarchy which gives privilege to men for being men as compared to women' (Faris, 2013).

A patriarchal society is based on gender differences. Identity crisis result when an individual fails to identify the existence of another person. It causes superiority complex in such an individual who is socially placed at higher level than the other one; developing identity differences between the two.

Gender identity reflects a deeply felt and experienced sense of one's own gender, which may or may not conform with the biological sex one is assigned at birth. Gender identity is separate from sexual orientation, which refers to which sex one is attracted to; for instance, many transgenders are heterosexual (Anonymous, 2014, p. 37).

It means gender identity makes one feel self-important, evoking consciousness about own gender importance by ignoring or denying another gender. Such self-importance makes a person ignorant. He considers himself all in all, while the opposite gender is placed equal to nothing. This confusion in gender identities results in other social evils, like violence, discrimination, and injustice of the opposite gender. Patriarchal society reflects gender identity crisis by looking at men with reverence while pushing women down, crushing their identities.

Every social system has a history and cultural background. The residents of a patriarchal society have shaped patriarchy on gender crisis since long. Starting from the biological differences between a man and woman, the intensity of identity crisis sways towards role categorization, behavioral patterns, gender discrimination, and social injustice. Eckes and Trautner (2000) summarize this concept as, gender results as a socially constructed scheme based on the biological differences between male and female, which accordingly molds an individual's thought pattern and behavior. These aspects in turn lead to the differences between labors, sexes, identifying the differences between men and women, and attitude towards gender linked problems.

Tehmina Durrani remained a victim of charismatic, coercive and traditional power respectively. The negative use of power may take different forms, i.e. domestic violence, gender discrimination, identity crisis resulting hatred, rebel, and disrespect for the power exercising agent.

The misuse of power psychologically, socially, and emotionally affects the victims. A victim expresses these effects by changing his/her behavior, views, and rebellion against social order.

Tehmina Durrani was impressed by the charismatic personality of Mustafa Khar, but after marriage Mustafa started to practice coercive force. Despite the fact that Tehmina was obeying all his demands, and instead of showing his reward power for Tehmina, Mustafa started to oppress her by violence and discrimination, Tehmina's tolerance reached its limits though she coped well with all the inflicted, imposed demands of Mustafa Khar, but his misuse of power was far stronger than her endurance. As a result, she revolted against an established social belief, breaking traditional power, remaining silent victim of domestic violence. She brought Mustafa's reality to the front. She exposed him as a cruel person, cold hearted husband, irresponsible father, hypocrite politician, and morally corrupt feudal lord by writing her memoir *My Feudal Lord*. Breaking a tradition cost her more than she might have imagined.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objectives of the current study are:

1. To highlight the main problem of women's suppression in feudal society as presented in the autobiography *My Feudal Lord* by Tehmina Durrani.
2. To help the females to identify their worth and equal position in relation to males in Pakistani society with special reference to the transformation of Tehmina Durrani from a submissive domestic wife to an independent strong woman.

### **Research Questions**

The current study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does Tehmina Durrani represent women's oppression in the autobiography *My Feudal Lord*?
2. How does she represent gender identity crisis in the autobiography?

To support and to fulfill the requirements of this study, the researcher has gathered M.M. Lazar's theoretical concepts of Critical Feminist Critical from selected research papers/articles of the discourse analyst i.e. Lazar, linked with post-feminism. The references to other critics like Gill and Grant are taken from Lazar's research articles and referred from her perspectives. Through qualitative research a researcher tries to understand various weaves of social life. It tries to understand the meanings of discourse, institutions and relationships. All these are done qualitatively through various research methodologies. In short it can be said that it builds nonpareil arguments about how something functions in a specific context (Mason, 2002, p. 1). Qualitative research is an empirical study of life experiences of others. It is a realistic approach of generating meanings from people's comprehension of the world around them. It is a method of inquiry from inside of the cultural, social, political, and various other human experiences. It attempts to analyse a given text in details where a researcher has to dwell with the subject. Shank uses a metaphor of

lantern for qualitative research, which sheds light. This picture of lantern defines qualitative researchers as “discoverers and reconcilers of meaning where no meaning has clearly been understood before” (Shank, 2002, p. 11). The aim of qualitative research is to understand social life, while its method involves producing words for analysing data.

Michelle M. Lazar (2005) states that as a category, gender traverses other socially constructed categories, e.g. sex, social class, social position, culture, and geography. The ideology of patriarchy also intersects, in complex ways, with the agent and the recipient of patriarchy. Referring and explaining Cameron’s (1992) “Feminism and Linguistic Theory”, Lazar (2005) argues that all the scholarly bias was questioned by Cameron to show how linguistics practices and conventions affect and represent patriarchy as an ideology, and how oppression is imposed by using language. Motivating the use of language by authors to address gender identity crisis, Lazar views that addressing gender related issues opts a feminist perspective although an individual author may not consciously, or unconsciously use the word feminism while writing, but collectively the produced text reflect a feminist concern. Throwing a political perspective on gender, Lazar’s version of critical feminism demystifies, unveils the interaction, that remains hidden, between gender, power and ideology through discourse (Lazar,2005).

In another work, Lazar (2014) views patriarchy as a resilient social structure in the sense that in modern times the role of a father and mother (two genders) is exchanging which categorizes men in two categories. First, the egalitarian order, and second, the conservative order. Discussing the presence of both symmetrical (egalitarian representing cooperation between two genders) and asymmetrical (conservative, based on traditional concept of dominancy and subjugation of two genders) discourses during social tensions and changes, these discourses contribute to building of dominant, hegemonic hetero-normative sexual category to fit in transforming time. Lazar, further, argues that hegemony helps to maintain the dominancy by mutating, and adapting to the changing or crucial social situations, thus becoming fragile and elastic (Lazar, 2005). This molding face of patriarchay is expressed through language.

Lazar is of the view that women are taken as sex-objects, but the post-feminists’ views of a liberal woman are mistakenly opted by the opposite gender. The heterosexual females, in terms of feminists, are considered and represented (in advertisements) as sex objects. Females are believed to be dependent on men for their identity and financial support. Beside these characteristics, women are considered emotional, indecisive, foolish, and unpredictable (Lazar, 2014). Highlighting the modern representation of females by advertising companies, Lazar refers to the influence of postfeminism on these companies. Postfeminism believes in females’ freedom to live life on personal desires. ‘The neoliberal feminism is focused on the sense of self; freeing women from the traditional concept of “other-centred” at the expense of women’s sacrificies. The current post-feminist representation of women in advertisements is self-centred (Lazar, 2014). This self-identity emerges as a response to patriarchay. Instead of blaming the system, the time has come to change self from a submissive individual to a confident, self-sufficient woman. Lazar states that

the awareness about “i-dentity” results from an inner confident which is expressed in the action and performance as self-assertive thus supports Gill’s (2009) concept of “psychic-self” which results from a person’s sense of self (Lazar, 2014). Explaining the process of achieving self-confidence, Lazar states that the process of self-identity is marked with acceptance of self-contradictions and pluralism, showing unconstrained females’ individuality by celebrating the presence of both the constructive feminist elements, and stereotypical femininity. Accepting self-contradiction contribute to the development of a lively, changeable but ‘difficult to understand’ personality (Lazar, 2014).

Tehmina tells her readers about her visit to a social gathering in the main hall of the Punjab Club with her husband Anees. There she meets women from elite class and she sees Sherry. Who is introduced to her as Mustafa’s wife. And Mustafa is introduced as the chief minister of Punjab province who is known as the Lion of Punjab, by one of the ladies in the hall. Tehmina was fascinated by the way Mustafa treated women with great honor, and she was impressed surprisingly by his dominancy. The analysis of given passage answers research question 1 of the study.

Mustafa was the kind of man who could choose his place at the dinner table, and he chose to sit directly across from me. We made small talk across salt-cellars. . . . his words did not hold me, but his eyes had me riveted. They grew lustrous; they glittered and blinked rather frequently; they peered across the table at me hypnotically. Their message was far from subtle. Perhaps I should have been frightened; instead I was drawn like a moth to a flame (Durrani,1995, p. 21).

### **Identification and Labelling of Textual Tools and Features**

**Use of Modality:** “could”

**Pattern of Transitivity:** “sit”, “talk”, “riveted”

**Ideologically Loaded words:** “lustrous,” “glittered,” “blinked,” “hypnotically.”

**Simile:** “like a moth”, “flame”.

### **Analysis at the Macro Level**

Genre, (see ch.3, p.50, for further details) shows Mustafa’s dealings and actions with reference to Pakistani society which places a man at the higher level than a woman. He is free, commanding, and superior in all humanely forms. Mustafa was that kind of man who was free to do anything. For such a confident person, everything else is valueless. He seemed as a man controlling everything around him as Lazar (2005) argues about the influence of gender over other social systems e.g. sexuality, class position, and geography (see ch. 2, p. 14, for further details). Supporting Lazar’s view Mustafa being a dominant gender has the authority to influence the whole gathering, its environment, antiquates, decorum, and the opposite gender too as expressed by Tehmina in the line “Mustafa was the kind of man who could choose his place at the dinner table, and he chose to sit directly across from me.” and “his words did not hold me, but his eyes had me

riveted.” He was free to choose his chair on a table, and where did he sit? Opposite to Tehmina Durrani. He, perhaps was confirming his new target, but unfortunately, he did not know that Tehmina was sitting opposite to him, not abreast. Who could sense that a shy woman today would turn into a strong woman in future. Men know a woman’s weakness, Mustafa targeted that weakness of Tehmina Durrani, by trying to attract her through his gestures. Men always use a sexual appeal as their first attempt to seduce and attract a woman. The message that his eyes were conveying was not a subtle one, rather the appealing gaze hypnotized Tehmina and she was dragged like a moth towards the fire.

The use of modality “could” with the reference to Mustafa shows his personality in a patriarchal society as a dominant figure. The pronouns his refers to Mustafa, first to his words, second to his actions. The past participle of the verb “riveted” shows the first hold of Mustafa Khar on a woman. The adjective “lustrous” is attributed to Mustafa’s gaze. The exchange of description needs to be noticed, that Mustafa’s eyes attacked Tehmina hypnotically. Tehmina has compared herself, by using a simile, to a moth which shows women helplessness and suppression, and the simile of fire is used for Mustafa Khar.

The similes used, moth and fire, stands contradictory. Moth shows the weakness, fragility of woman nature, while fire stands for the adamancy of Mustafa. A moth flies close to the fire with a hope of light, but the same fire causes its death. Similarly, Tehmina was swaying towards Mustafa, not knowing that same person would ruin her life. She continues to describe her state of mind by using the adjective “hypnotically” producing an intoxicating atmosphere caused by Mustafa’s gestures. Tehmina’s use of clause “they grew lustrous; they glittered and blinked rather frequently” shows tactics used by men to trap women.

Talking about the background of Mustafa Khar Tehmina tells that he belongs to kharral tribe who after disputes with British in India, this tribe moved to Panjab which is now a part of Pakistan. A victim of this tribe changed and shortened the name of this tribe to khar which means ass in Persian. It was in exchange to their brutality that out of hatred this tribe was categorized in animals.

To trace back feudalism, the readers are surprised to know that the roots of this system lies in betrayal, and treachery. Feudalism is the product of unusual favors of Britishers on their “loyal” people. Who won the favors of Britishers when the Sub-Continent was fighting against the British rule. Hence, a system whose roots are rotten, the products of such system could be expected inhuman, brutal, and hypocrites. The analysis of given passage answers research questions 1 & 2 of the study.

they slaughtered their women and children, so as not to impede their journey, then packed their vast stores of gold and migrated to the Punjab, settling along the banks of the Indus river . . . Feudalism was a license to plunder, rape and even murder. The rich got richer, the poor despaired (Durrani,1995, Pp. 39-40).

### **Identification and Labelling of Textual Tools and Features:**

**Pattern of Transitivity:** “slaughter” and “impede.”

**Irony:** “license.”

**Phrase:** “to plunder, rape and even murder” used for women’s oppression and patriarchal power abuse.

### **Analysis at the Macro Level**

Of the supreme creatures, women and children are the weakest ones. The Khar family was the oppressor, and their targets were the oppressed ones. A strong creature is a challenge for an oppressor, but to oppress a weak person is always an easy to do thing. The cruelty, and stone heartiness of the Khars goes back to ancestors who did not bother to kill their own wives and children for their easy escape. The question here arises that why did not they kill “men”? Because men are born superiors, according to a feudal/ patriarchal social setup. They had had the rights to survive according to their wishes and desires, and even to control the life of other people too, only women are made to pay sacrifices because they are weak and a weak symbolizes oppressed only. Lazar (2007) views gender ideological structure as the basis of difference between men and women which gives men a privilege to monitor and control human life (see ch. 2, p. 12, for further details), as expressed by Tehmina in the line “they slaughtered their women and children, so as not to impede their journey.” The given passages highlight the issue of women oppression, and how they are discriminated on the basis of their genders in feudal society, in particular, and in a patriarchal society in general, and where lies their identity when they are treated like animals? M.M. Lazar (2007) views gender operation in two directions i.e. it makes one realize about oneself, it makes one realize the social practices (see ch.2, p.12, for further details) as ironically expressed by Tehmina in the line “Feudalism was a license to plunder, rape and even murder.” Feudals knew about their gender, and their feudal practices. As the given passage declares that males were involved in all evil doings.

With the undue favors of Britishers, feudalism reached the levels of superiority. There was no check and balance on them thus, empowering them with freedom to do anything. Even rape and murders were forgiven, if feudal was involved in committing them. As extremes always lead to self-destruction, the feudalism lost its humanity thus.

Tehmina’s purpose in words choice depicts a feminist approach to patriarchy especially to feudalism. Miss Durrani has very smartly used the verbs “slaughter” and “impede” to disclose the tyranny of the feudals, and the ironical statement regarding feudals liberty to do anything may justify feudalism as one of the terrible social systems. Tehmina’s use of irony represent her hatred towards this social system based on crudity and barbarism and directs her readers to question feudalism.

### **CONCLUSION**



At conclusion, the society plays a vital role in controlling an individual's life. Patriarchal society has its effects on both males and females where it uplifts men in some areas to the heights of honor, on other side it suppresses women to the grounds. Oppression is a word that is negatively used. It is an external power that creates survival difficulties for the victim. The agent of oppression enjoys freedom, while the victim is deprived of it. In patriarchal society, in most cases, women are the victims of oppression. An independent survival for a woman is difficult in male dominant society. Male considers himself center of attention, and treats women as neglected, tangible property as a mean of entertainment. Women are the victims of society, which badly effects their intricate relations like marriage. Patriarchy crushes women not only physically, but the inner selves are also destroyed. The effects of this oppression are long lasting. To have a secure and respectable survival in such society, marriage is mandatory, but marriage mostly becomes another label of oppression for the victims as can be seen in Tehmina's case. Women are oppressed, but they are expected to remain silent.

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