

Tehmina Durrani's Autobiography *My Feudal Lord*: Unmasking Politicization of Religion and Relation

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Well, Mustafa, now the world will soon know you only as Tehmina Durrani's ex-husband (Durrani 382).

Tehmina Durrani broke long endured silence of her thirteen year marriage and challenged a feudal lord of Punjab, Mustafa Khar, by telling him that she has decided to stand on her own feet without any social crutch of husband's shelter and surname. Gradually the words of Tehmina gained international momentum and represented her as a woman who was determined to achieve her identity by her own effort and zero tolerance for abuse of her self respect. The last dialogue between Tehmina and Mustafa on telephone is a symbolic representation of self liberation from patriarchy and emergence of an assertive voice out of a terrified woman from the influential elite class family of Pakistan.

The above quotation has many connotations and each connotation serves different purpose to unfold meanings. The quotation is enough to convey the will power of south Asian women writers to reveal and share their sufferings and experiences. Tehmina Durrani has added a new dimension in South Asian literature by writing her Autobiography. She has broken the stereotypical frame of self defeating identity of woman only as a wife. This autobiography has shaken the roots of politicization of religion and relation and patriarchy in Pakistan. It has challenged the fundamental social structure of Muslim society and its functioning against Women. Interestingly her fame as a writer, as she had predicted to Mustafa, makes him known to the world and not vice-versa.

Tehmina Durrani is a daughter of a former Governor of State Bank of Pakistan and Managing Director of Pakistan International Airlines, S.U. Durrani, and ex-wife of former chief minister of Pakistan Mustafa Khar. Her name is prominent among other south asian writers, because she has chosen to narrate her life story courageously. It is difficult for a woman who is muslim and belonging to a powerful political family like that of Mustafa Khar, to write in a straightforward manner about muslim patriarchy and misinterpretation of religion and holy Kuran to subordinate woman forcefully in private relationships. The tone in the text is highly diplomatic to save her image. She does that by representing Mustafa in a rounded manner where his good qualities are also projected. At the same time she is able to critically represent herself as well where she analyses her own weaknesses. This critical self analysis in this autobiography traces the emergence of both a powerful woman and a powerful voice as a writer.

The motive of this autobiography is self analysis and to unmask the real picture of Pakistani Muslim patriarchal and feudal society and mindset rather than exposing the character of a particular person. She has only wish to let know Mustafa about his harming behavior to others and dual character. She wouldn't have been able to write this autobiography in Pakistan. She had received support from William and Marilyn Hoffer during writing of autobiography. She knew well that writing autobiography in Pakistan and revealing her private life and relation with Mustafa Khar could have

caused risk to her life and children. It was sure that no publisher had courage to publish her autobiography in Pakistan, so she had chosen U.K to publish autobiography. She shares her sense of firm determination of writing autobiography and its consequences in Author's Note and Dedication:

When I decided to write this book, I was aware of the perils of exposing the details of my private life to a male-dominated Muslim society with crushing conservative sensibilities. But My conviction did not buckle under pressure from considerations of a more personal nature.

Feudal Power is articulated and represented in government by men with a particular kind of upbringing and mentality. My ex-husband, Ghulam Mustafa Khar, symbolizes this breed of powerful men who hold the destiny of this country in their clutches. There is deep-rooted deficiency in the feudal system which should be diagnosed before suitable attempts are made to uproot it.

This book is based on the material available in the one library I visited again and again-my own mind. I have had to relieve every footnote of my life to emerge with this account. In its truth lies my ultimate vindication.

I dedicate this book.

To the people of my country who have reputedly trusted and supported their leaders—leaders who in return, used the hungry, oppressed, miserable multitudes to further their personal interests. I want our people to know the truth behind the rhetoric, so that they might learn to look beyond the façade, so that they might not be stripped of the only right they have—their vote.

To the five other ex-wives of Mustafa Khar, who have silently suffered pain and dishonour while he walked away with impunity. As his sixth wife, I am holding him accountable.

To Mustafa Khar himself. I wish that this book serve as a mirror, so that he may see in it reflections of the man, the husband, the father, the leader and the friend he is (Durrani 5-6).

Tehmina has intentionally chosen the genre autobiography to tell her tale in direct and lucid tone. Autobiography is appropriate non-fiction genre for this piece of writing to narrate the events of her life on the basis of chronological memories. Another form memoir is technically different from autobiography. There is no compulsion of sequence in narration of events in memoir while as in autobiography chronological arrangement of events is expected. Any form of personal narration is a method to give expression and analysis to pent up repressed desires and their consequences in life and the unspoken sufferings. The genre of writing belongs to the narration of own life events working towards therapy. Some critics like Saul K. Padover mentions:

The word autobiography is of recent origin. It was first used by poet Robert Southey in the year 1809. Previous to that year autobiographies went by various names such as Journal, Life, Memoirs, Confessions, often preceded by My or some comparable form.....autobiographies and their first cousins, biographies made their appearances long before there was a name for them. The oldest of the go back to Egyptian and Assyrio-Babylonian culture approximately 4,500 years ago. They were written on clay and on stone, generally for graves and temples, and hence large numbers of them have been preserved and deciphered in modern times. (Padover p.xiii)

The above quotation is very helpful to say that autobiographies written by celebrities and politician has purpose to provide their life history for further references. The writing autobiography is a form of self preservation and immortalization.

The major issue in the reading and writing autobiography is to distinguish it from other genres of same class like memoir, diaries, letters, journals etc. James Goodwin provides clear detailed characteristic of autobiography:

Though they provide historians and biographers with an invaluable resource, as literary forms the diary, the journals and letters do not share with autobiography the necessary temporal perspective, a deliberate distancing of the self from the original experiences.....Autobiography is retrospective. In most instances this is obvious, but in some cases retrospection is conducted at a provisional, implied or latent level. An autobiography represents the writer's effort, made at a certain stage in life, to portray the meaning of personal experience as it has developed over the course of a significant period of time or from the distance of that significant time period (Goodwin 10-11).

The introspective feature of autobiography unlocks new possibilities to sufferers to historicize life narratives genuinely. Introspection provides voice to marginalized women for their feminist writing. Introspection method of writing is a journey from ignorance to knowledge by going through self assessment and exhibition of emotions like self-praise, love, hatred, guilt, anger, fear, repentance, confession, apology, condemnation, criticism etc. Tehmina Durrani has applied introspective technique in her autobiography to take her readers on the journey of her life. Definitely the technique of introspection compels readers to go through each page and assess the range of experiences in their life also.

My Feudal Lord is not a reflection of life of one woman but it is very nicely connecting with larger mass of Pakistani muslim women who suffer due to unjust laws; Zina Hudood Ordinance and Law of Evidence. These laws are fundamentally anti-women and pushing women back on the margin of society. Tehmina has discussed the violation of women sanctity in the autobiography but loopholes in laws discourage women to speak against inflicted injustices upon them. These laws were introduced in 1979 under the authoritarian regime of General Zia-ul-Haq in the name of Islamization. Women are always been soft target for all social, political and legal injustices because women have not sufficient number of representatives in the leading committees and commission of nation. The process of islamization in 1979 had purpose to strengthen patriarchy through politically investing power in religious and legal laws. Though Zeena Hudood law has made strong muslim legal frame but it made feeble operation of judiciary system against women. Zia regime can be tagged as anti-women phase in the history of Pakistan when all the laws in the name of Islamization were made to make women weak legally, socially and politically. Bhutto's regime had introduced laws discouraging polygamy, severe gender discrimination, encouraging registration of marriage, right to vote and right to inherit property. Zia did away with what Bhutto tried to introduce.

Zina Hudood Law is related to extra martial relation, sex and adultery. Sex outside the marriage considered as sin and crime and any sexual relation whether done with

common consent or forcefully is termed as rape. The punishment for these laws are very hard and near to death. The law of evidence was introduced in 1984 in Pakistani Islamic legal system to overpower women by putting pressure on her to provide adequate number of witness to the incident of rape. If she fails to provide witness, her complaint will be dismissed and she will be considered guilty of adultery under the Zina Hudood Ordinance.

Durrani's autobiography is of 382 pages and heavily loaded with emotional statements and expressions to reach the heart of readers. The whole book is divided in three parts and eighteen chapters. It was first published in 1991 by Vanguard Books, a company owned by journalists Najam Sethi and Jugnu Mohsin. It was the most controversial and sensational book in Pakistan and later claimed the hottest book in Pakistan's history. *My Feudal Lord* is translated and published in 39 languages across the world.

The Map of Pakistan is attached before the beginning of first part for the convenience to readers. The book ends with epilogue of six pages. Epilogue is added at the end of text to represent the transformation of weak, docile and submissive Tehmina into a confident and self reliant woman. The three parts in the book have various purposes to serve. The first Part: Lion of Punjab contains first five chapters. The second Part: Law of the Jungle starts from chapter six and ends with chapter number eleven and the last and third part: Lioness starts from chapter twelve and ends with chapter number eighteen. The whole book is systematically divided and a few pictures of Tehmina, Mustafa Khar, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, family picture of Tehmina and her picture after divorce are added in the book to invoke the interest in readers and to motivate them to read whole book carefully. The title of the book is ironic in tone and attacks upon the implied ideology of comparing men with Lord and the feudal ideology which is supported by distorted interpretation of Islam and silence of women and society.

The first part of autobiographical work reveals inconsistent nature of Mustafa. He is a sort of man who never gives thinking upon his actions before doing nor he regrets seriously. The book starts with the first meeting of Tehmina and Mustafa in the reception party given by her uncle. Her narration swings fro and back to connect events and to achieve coherence in the development of story. In this part, writer incorporates memories of her past with present to share her suffering as a woman. The narrator in the story had known since her childhood that the dark skin colour is curse for a girl in patriarchal and feudal society where women are trained to be a fashionable wife of upper class men. She says :

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. Even as a baby I felt my inadequacy. My surrounding seemed hostile to the way I looked, very early I withdrew into an isolated, 'condemned-by-nature' cell. I never remember my mother hugging or kissing me when I was little (Durrani 27).

Relations are politicized on the basis of beauty myths defined by society. Tehmina was victim of beauty myth and neglected by her mother. Gender based definitions about woman role and appearance always hinder the growth of natural relationship

among free individuals. Tehmina's mother was socially trained to view beauty through the gaze of men rather than her own way of looking beautiful. Her relationship with her daughters was not innate and spontaneous, but it was politicized by imposed gender concepts of appearance and beauty myth. She herself was unable to present as a confident woman. So she couldn't pass the sense of self esteem to her daughters. Naomi Woolf says, "A Mother who radiates self-love and self-acceptance actually VACCINATES her daughter against low self-esteem" (Web).

Tehmina throughout the narration explains how social norms of woman and womanhood hinder the spontaneous growth of young girls. Pakistani elite class girls are given education not to prepare for their future and independent thought but they are sent schools to prepare for better marriage match. She says' "I passed my final exams and returned home qualified with the requisite education for a fashionable marriage" (Durrani 33) All the definition of behavior of woman and womanhood is injected in young girls through home training under the supervision of senior ladies at home. The purpose of education and training of decorating self and home is to find out suitable match. That is the ultimate destiny of young girls. Tehmina mentions, "Our elder half-sister Rubina was placed in charge of the younger three girls, as a training exercise in preparation for her own marriage and motherhood" (Durrani 26) The situation of Pakistani women is evident through these words, "And yet, clearly, a man was the only future available to a Pakistani girl. My role in life was to marry and to marry well" (Durrani 28) Gender socialization is all politicized in nature and one of the strongest tool of patriarchy to subordinate women of all class and religion irrespective of geographical boundaries. Gender is "To operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination" (Web). Judith Butler asserts that gender is performative through repetitions and doings.

Tehmina Durrani was isolated in the family and got attracted towards Anees. She decided to marry with Anees to get rid of her mother's authoritative environment and her control over her life without giving thinking. She wanted to feel freedom and a little care of Anees attracted her in adolescent age. Her first husband was a simple and caring man who always kept himself away from disputes. Tehmina had seen submissive figure of man in the form of her father and husband. It was major reason of her falling prey to Mustafa Khar's hunt of woman. She says in the beginning of second chapter, "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) She did not fall in love with a person but she fell in love with the strong personality of Mustafa and his power and position. The destined devastation of Tehmina by the hands of feudal lord started from this point. The mesmerizing appearance and behavior of Mustafa had severely misguided Tehmina and aroused strong urge in her to associate with him. She was not able to reason future consequences of her marriage and illicit relationship with Mustafa.

The first part of the text gives a clear picture about the personality and temperament of Mustafa. He was always after power and women for social showcasing. There were five women in Mustafa's life before Tehmina. The experience of all five women with

feudal lord was painful and heart-rending. Wazir, Fidaus, Safia, Naubahar and Shahrazad were his previous wives. He used to change wives as a commodity or decorating item in the house. It is apt to say "women entered Mustafa's life speedily and left just as quickly" (Durrani 44). Safia was an ambitious woman from lower middle class working to support her family. She was a liberated woman but Mustafa Khar "plucked Safia from the sky and locked in a cage" (Durrani 45). In the Muslim families, walls were built to keep women separate from the outer world and any access of males outside from the family.

In Pakistani society, feudalism reduced women's situation to cattle. Mustafa's was not interested in his first wife Wazir because she was older than him. Ultimately the feudal rule was practiced and Wazir was not handed over to her much younger brother-in-law, instead sending her back to home as divorcee. The feudal explanation for decision was to save Wazir from "the indignity of returning home as divorcee-which in feudal system is dismal destiny" (Durrani 42). In fact, feudalism is used as a tool to reign upon weaker people. It seems that the feudal lord reserves right to justify his all deeds on the basis of his own interpretation of *the Koran*. Meanings of religion and interpretations of *the Koran* change according to power players in Pakistan. The destiny of woman is totally in the hands of feudal men and patriarchy. Mustafa Khar has destroyed lives of many women because Koran allows men to keep four wives at a time. Islam strictly demands women to be faithful and dutiful wife but, in the case of men, they are not interrogated for extra marital affairs. Mustafa had many extra marital affairs through out his life but he could not endure when Safia ditched him for his younger brother. He was never been caring for her after meeting Naubahar. In Mustafa's feudal moral scheme, Islamic law allows a man to kill his unfaithful wife in a fit of passion.

Tehmina accepted in her text that she had an extra marital affair with Mustafa and violated the rule of Zina Haddood ordinance. She was neither complained nor discarded due to absence of four witnesses according to *the Koran*. Sherry was in awe with Mustafa and weak to take any action against Tehmina, so she suggested her friends to enforce Haddood ordinance verbally by passing sarcastic remarks. Finally Tehmina decided to take divorce from Anees and accepted her new sub status as divorcee.

Tehmina didn't care about the warnings of Sherry and willfully entered in the disputed relation with Mustafa. She found Sherry submissive to the wills of Mustafa and she had lost her identity under the shadow of a powerful man. Tehmina was also mesmerized by the dominating personality of Mustafa. She was different from Sherry and other wives of Mustafa. She had power to emerge out of the shadow of Mustafa and to give him correct feedback about his nonsensical behavior and action. She did so. The consequences of marriage with Mustafa soon appeared in the regular exercise of physical violence and marital rape. Tehmina accepts; "The awareness that had been growing slowly now blossomed into full and ghastly flower. I had fallen into the classic trap of the Pakistani woman. That is, marriage is marriage and, once achieved, the future is a life of total subordination. I had no power, no rights, no will of my own." (Durrani 100). Mustafa was a very shrewd person who used all tricks to subordinate Tehmina's position in his house and to suppress her voice. He always charged her for adultery because she had cheated Anees within wedlock. Mustafa had exercised

feudal rules to make Tehmina feel inferior and helpless. In feudal system, woman was used as an instrument of a man's carnal pleasure. Woman's situation is well interpreted by political misinterpretation of *The Koran* by feudal lord Mustafa, "According to feudal tradition, a wife was honour-bound to live her life according to her husband's whims. A woman was like man's land...Land is power, prestige and property". (Durrani 107) Land simply stands here for services, reproduction and honour. Tehmina had surrendered herself completely to Mustafa after her marriage with him, but Mustafa was divided into Tehmina and Adila. Kant explains that "the woman surrenders her sex completely to the man, but the man does not completely surrender his sex to the woman" (Kant *Lectures on Ethics*, 169).

Part second of the book throws light upon the political upheaval of General Zia's terminating the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and establishment of military regime. During this period, Mustafa was exiled with Tehmina. Both were living in London in the flat of Tehmina's father. No changes appear in the nature of Mustafa, he was still barbarous and perpetrator for Tehmina her children and servants. After going through such perverse and inhuman treatment, Tehmina has decided to take divorce. She was stopped by her father's words, "You can only leave his home in coffin" and her mother suggested her to treat her husband's insane and irrational nature as psychiatrist. Mustafa was possessive as the Duke of Ferrara in the poem "My Last Duchess". In the fit of over possession, he asks Tehmina when she was talking to her brother Asim on telephone, "Why did you speak to him for so long?" "Is he your brother or your lover?" Mustafa is insensitive sort of person who values his archaic feudal laws more than any person in his life. He accused Tehmina for spoiling his honour in the hospital by saying, "D'you realize that you were examined by male doctors. Male Doctors! You shall humiliate me. I shall not forgive you."

Mustafa had brutally tortured Tehmina when she alleged him for having extra marital relation with Adila. He had beaten her insanely and asked "Take off your clothes" at "Every stitch". He forced her to call her mother and say that Mustafa and Adila are innocent. Nothing could be more humiliating like this way to any human being. Tehmina explains her pain in words, "This episode would cripple my spirit-perhaps beyond salvation. From this moment forward, it would be nearly impossible for me to function as an individual. There was not one iota of self-esteem left. The shame had burned it down to ashes. I was exposed as nothing " The marriage of Tehmina with Mustafa had reduced her "clinically dead" person. After getting confirmation of illicit relation of Adila with Mustafa, Tehmina decided to avoid Mustafa. She started seeing Mustafa as Adila's husband. According to *the Koran*, a man can neither marry two sisters together nor can have romantic relations with two sisters at a time. It is against Islam and *The Koran*, and considered as a sin.

The clever man Mustafa, has played politics in the relation of Tehmina her mother and Adila. He used the bitterness of relation of Tehmina in her family against her to isolate her from the people and society. He had taken oath on *the Koran* not to touch any women after Tehmina, but feudal lord again failed in his words and spoiled Adila to fulfill his romantic and sexual desires. Adila created havoc in Tehmina's relation with her husband.

To take Tehmina under his control, Mustafa kidnapped children by playing sly tricks. In the second part, the transformation of Tehmina from submissive to self confident can be easily seen when she fights with him and tried to give responses with equal intensity. She challenges to Mustafa on the matter of children that "he was no longer dealing with the old, passive Tehmina." The second part ends with the return of Tehmina to Mustafa to rescue him from execution and imprisonment in Pakistan.

The third and last part of the story *My Feudal Lord* represents the power of woman and her will power to fight for husband. Tehmina was again trapped in the image of political leader of Mustafa who is fighting for democracy and common people. The spunk of patriotism, love for motherland and children encouraged Tehmina to fight for the freedom of Mustafa. The third part gives the picture of changing politics in Pakistan. Mustafa exploited the talent and skills of persuasion of Tehmina for his freedom struggle and to achieve political motives. He never left any opportunity to accuse Tehmina for her conduct and dressing. He accused her for not taking dupatta during her visit in prison. Tehmina emerged as a lioness figure who fought strategically against government to free her husband.

The sad episode of illicit relationship of Adila and Mustafa again floated up. She was very upset. She warned Mustafa in the hospital after her ovary operation not to make love. It could be called a rape. It was forcefully done against the will of Tehmina. This man was neither concerned with the health of Tehmina nor afraid of *the Koran*. It is clearly said in *the Koran* that the marriage automatically terminates when any man involves sexually with two sisters at a time. She tells him in presence of all: "Your marriage according to *the Koran*, was over years ago when you slept with my sister, I have lived with you in sin. The contract stood null and void long ago" (Durrani 362)

Tehmina has liberated herself from the trap of longing for a powerful man. She fought against patriarchy and feudalism. The nature of politicization of relation and religion always harms the innateness of relation and spontaneous growth of human beings. She is woman of strong will power who has gone through the atrocities of feudal and patriarchal system, disowned by parents and was called a woman who loves her freedom above all. She fought alone and ultimately won her respect and self confidence. She asserts in a very strong and confident voice :

I was determined not to waste thirteen years of my life.

I decided to cast a stone ay hypocrisy.

I decided to write this book and break the tradition of silence (Durrani 375).

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