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## Women's Exploitation in the Feudal Society: A Case Study of "My Feudal Lord" By Tehmina Durrani

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### ABSTRACT

The paper casts light on women's subjugation in feudalistic society. It shows that society has weaved certain institutions like patriarchy, feudalism, tribalism, religion, politics, traditions, etc., which make males much more privileged, authoritative, and give them a notion to consider themselves distinctive from females in every aspect of life. The study focusing on "My Feudal Lord" by Tehmina Durrani shows that women are used as tools; they are left in the destruction by the time when they are of no sexual satisfaction anymore to the lustful feudalists. The research article highlights that on the one hand, males have become stubborn to torture women. On the other hand, society has turned its face on them and totally sides with the oppressors. Each and every institution has freed males to do whatever is possible to quench their lust, but females are bounded to certain codes and rituals that do not let them even speak or think freely. Females lack very basic rights like motherhood, property owning, decision making, and worst of all having no decisive or thinking right. The research has been conducted under the framework of "Sexual Politics" by Kate Millet. The qualitative paradigm has been adapted under the method of "Textual Analysis" by Catherine Belsey to analyse the text.

**Keywords:** Women's subjugation, Patriarchy, Feudalism, Oppression, Marriage, and Religion.

### INTRODUCTION:

The paper uncovers certain feudalistic, patriarchal, matrimonial, and oppressional elements in My Feudal Lord- an autobiographic novel authored by Tehmina Durrani a renowned Pakistani writer. The novel is based mainly on the feudalist personae and their deeds. The research article tries to unfold the real horrific face of the male-dominant feudalistic society in which each and every rule, ritual, code, and social restriction is implemented in relation to gender. For this, the study has taken the qualitative approach to carry out the textual analysis of the novel under the framework of "Sexual Politics". Kate Millet is of the view that all

institutions are politically constructed which are full of bias and fanaticism; so patriarchy is something man-made ideology that is totally partial and one-sided. It, in any case, tries its best to prove women weak, emotional, less-wiser and subjugated. It tries to highlight the struggle between the two groups of the same society, i.e., the oppressor and the oppressed, the lord and the follower, the owner and the owned, the dictator and the silenced, the man and the woman. The study points out the root cause of the distinction which exists between the two groups within the same society. Tehmina Durrani from the very beginning starts with the family introduction in the light of social status,

legacy and wealth. Durrani is the daughter of the Ex-Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan and the director of the Pakistan International Airlines Shahkur Ullah Durrani. Her mother, Samina, first gets married to Nawab's son Hebat Khan. They belong to the tribal belt that never leave their women go out of their homes, and force them never put off their veils or purdah. But when it comes to males, all of Nawab's seven sons study abroad, and enjoys their life to the fullest. When Samina gets pregnant and the nun was called for her delivery, the nun says, "The family does not have any girl child because they are used to the dogma of killing the new-born baby girl after its birth" (Durrani 19). After hearing this, my mom gets shocked and she leaves for her parental home in Lahore to deliver the child. So, it reflects extreme hatred for the female gender that even their birth is not entertained or welcomed in certain regions (Mukta and Partha, 2022).

The feudalist and chauvinist Mustafa uncovers the real face of men, their predominance and oppression on the female silenced group. Mustafa reflects the concealed filthy side of the feudalist lord who can justify even wrong deeds by using the socially established rules and traditions. "Every feudalist had the authority to prove each of his step acceptable" (Durrani, 26). Mustafa plays with women's lives by marrying one and leaving the other. He never spares much of his time with one wife, rather he switches them in haste to fulfil his lust to the fullest. He makes each of his wife keep the message secret from others. To him the matter of re-marriage is something usual. He switches women like objects. "Mustafa built relations with females and separated from them with the blinking of eyes" (Durrani, 29). He has remained never constant in his relation. His wives' list consists of his own cousin Wazir, Firdaus, Safia, Naubahar, Sherry, Durrani and ends with the seventh marriage. Mustafa lust knows no bound, although he has many wives at a time, but he does not stop by that. He wants more and more. He crosses the boundary of etiquette and traps his sister-in-law Adila-younger sister of Durrani. He lures Adila to break her own elder sister. He pursues women the way he hunts birds. He treats them like chewing-gum- chews them and pushes them away after their taste comes to vanish. His oppression on women is worse than that of animals. He, in order to impose his authority over

them, abuses, scolds and beats them to their death. He leaves no cruelty unused to punish them. He becomes the wildest spouse for his sixth wife Durrani. On a minor issue, he becomes voracious, starts abusing and beating. Durrani adds," He would beat me like a savage animal, jumping on me, dragging me by the hair, hitting me in my face, throwing me on the ground and walls". (65) He tortures her by any means and in any case. Even though when she lies on the bed to give birth to her child, Mustafa treats her brutally; he leaves her alone on the stretcher and goes out himself. She faces the labour pain along with the psychological one with great difficulty. She is often cursed for her pregnancy. His only concern is to fulfil his lust, nothing else. When she becomes impatient and decides to divorce him, she manages for a lawyer to handle her case. She almost wins her case, but what Mustafa does is out of humanity. He kidnaps her children from her and sends them to Pakistan. He does it only to make her compelled on living with him. After hearing this, she becomes helpless and keeps on living a savage life with him because she thinks of her little children's future, their education and caring, which seem more important for her than her freedom. She is frequently entrapped in such cunning ways by her feudal husband. It is so miserable that her ultimate right of divorce is snatched from her.

The study mentions that for all these contradictions, difficulties, differences, or double standard, the responsible factors are our social established institutions which are politically, religiously, socially, or ethnically are constructed and nourished. These institutions have lots of loopholes and drawbacks which are needed to be reviewed and revised. Unless we make some amendments in them, we cannot overcome the daily happening oppressions on the weakened, silenced, and owned group, i.e., women; they will always be prone to patriarchy and feudalism.

### **Thesis Statement**

Patriarchy with the help of feudalism has made this notion prevailing in the minds of the females that they are physically and psychologically weak, and cannot be parallel to their male group in the society. This ideology is further supported by some other institutions like religion, politics, social traditions, ethnicity

and tribal rules. So, in this way, false-consciousness is created and the females fall prey to the whim that they are unparalleled to their opposite gender at any level. Slowly and gradually, it supports the dominance of the ideology making group and the subjugation of the believing one which suffers throughout their life.

### **Research Objectives**

To explore the main causes of the females' sufferings in the feudal society shown in the "My Feudal Lord". To cast light on the construction of the social-made institutions that favor only one sex, or group and neglect, or even curse the other.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the major causes of females' subjugation in the feudal society?
- 2) How has Tehmina Durrani reflected the effects of feudalism and patriarchy on the lives and psyches of females in her novel "My Feudal Lord"?

### **Significance of the study**

The feudalism and patriarchy have remained main issues of the discussion among scholars and literary personae. Lots of work has been done on to tackle the issues and find out certain solutions for them. The study paper makes an attempt to bring forward the horrific consequences of feudalism and patriarchy on the female gender within the society. It also figures out how the two systems (feudalism and patriarchy) are paved the way by some other institutions like religion, custom, tribalism, and politics that are mentioned in "My Feudal Lord". It mentions critical issues of the motherhood, right to child caring, and property owning by females as well.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

Feminism has been remained the most discussed topic for many decades. It has sharpened the revolution of the feminists who have been struggling for years to eliminate gender-based discrimination in the society. They have challenged the male bias embedded in their literature. They have also put into question the male supremacy in the society that is structured by males themselves. The study paper is delimited only to the exploitation of women in the feudal and patriarchal society. Apart from this, one can work on role of the politics, tribalism, religion, motherhood, women iden-

tity and propriety. Besides, My Feudal Lord, there are some other best works by Tehmina Durrani which are worthy-noted to work upon.

### **Literature Review**

Plenty of literary works are available that reflect oppression of the patriarchy in the feudal society. Here, I mention few of them to clearly define my stance about the female sufferings. Number of authors like Virginia Wolf, Elaine Shwalter, Kate Millet, and Graine Greer have contributed much to the awareness of females, their resistance, and their literary canon. Females always face bitter treatment in the society. "Women are target of the males' violence in the tribal and feudal society. They are no more considered as human beings rather they are thought to be property or assets of the feudalists. Males are of the notion that women exist only to be exploited. They want them to be subjugated to them because of this authority over them" (Ehsan *et al.*, 2015). In addition to this, beating and battering of women is very common in the feudal region. "About twenty-one to thirty percent of females are hit by the males around the globe as reported by the paper" (Ehsan *et al.*, 2015). Women are forced to bear the harsh dealing of their partners without any objection. "This lesson is taught to them by the societal values that are structured under feudalism and male domination. It tries to make them silently tolerate brutality without any resistance (Chaudry, 2017). Duranni being obliged does the same, she cannot do anything special to free herself of the brutalities inflicted upon her due to the social harsh restrictions. "The research article highlights the orthodox rituals of the religion and harsh societal traditions that are only constructed to make them bounded and limited" (Chaudry, 2017). It is social organization that creates male chauvinist figures in the society like Mustafa Khar. "These established norms of the society are embodied in their personalities by passing of time from the very start of their childhood" (Ehsan *et al.*, 2015). The main reason behind women's suffering is not just the male gender, rather there are some rules and institutions that are totally partial and always side with the male sex.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

#### **Research Design**

The study has adapted qualitative approach to collect the required data for the discussion. This paper has

been based on references from different secondary sources like journals, books and sites; it has also taken some key citations from the primary text. By using the qualitative paradigm, the paper has gathered the data to highlight the status, identity and women's suffering in the feudal society.

### **Research Method**

The research has been conducted by adapting the method of Catherine Belsey's Textual Analysis'. Belsey was born in 1940 in London and died in 2021. She was a British critic and literary figure. She gave this method to help readers or scholar delineate comprehend or decode a text. Belsey is of the view that to know the text in a better way, one has to go for its context. She says that context provides one with enough knowledge to reach to the underlying message in the text. For example, Titian's painting of Lucretia and Tarquin, (1571) calls readers' attention to the multi-interpretation of the sketch. By having a surface look at the picture, one will catch up one meaning, but if he repeats his observation and looks into it closely, he will come out with another quite different meaning. So, she focuses our attention that meaning is not fixed or objective, rather it is something permeable and subjective. Belsey suggests some important features of the text analysis. First of all, she says that text analysis must include a brief summary of the main text that is being analysed later on in the discussion part. For a renowned work, only a brief introduction will be sufficient, but for a common book, a detailed summary should be given. It will make readers clear what the research article is about. The next thing she talks about is context. She says that without having knowledge of the context, one cannot understand the text. It is necessary to provide readers with an insight into context, so that they may easily develop awareness about the background knowledge. The third feature she describes about is an unambiguous and logical interpretation of the text. She says that the interpretation should be based on one's original understanding of the text. The fourth factor is to finish your argument with proper proofs from the text. Your argument will be more valid and reasonable when it has text-related references. These references could be taken from the main/primary text or the secondary sources like internet, articles, books, library, etc. These are some nece-

ssary steps that one has to care about while conducting a qualitative research by applying Catherine Belsey's method 'Textual Analysis'.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Feminism is the framework that provides the base for the analysis of the novel "My Feudal Lord" to show the women's subjugation and male's dominance in the feudalistic society. It adapts the theory of Kate Millet as a major theorist of the feminist cannon who struggles for the reformation of the institutions that are built just to stabilize the stance of the patriarchy. Kate Millet was born in 1934 in Minnesota, America. She was an artist, activist, educationist and a feminist author. She wrote many works but "Sexual Politics" is her most noticeable work published in 1969. "The work has two main parts: sex and politics. The first deals with referential works from Henry Miller's "Sexes", Norman Miller's "American Dream", and the Jean Gannet's "The Thief's Journal". The second deals with power that men have over their opposite partners, family and society" (Charrier). She defines sex with respect to biological perspective, i.e., male and female. "She also describes gender as per psychological terminology that relates to masculinity and femininity" (Shahzad, 175) She is of the view that man and woman can be identified either on biological level or psychological, that is why, they take different terms. "Patriarchy is something related to the application of the male constructed ideology that is nourished by social practices to make male dominant over female (Shahzad, 175)." It shows that both the sexes and genders have equal values with respect to their capacities and values. But society and social role, status and temperament make them distinguished from one another. "Temperament is something related to politics which means how individual makes self at sex level (Shahzad, 176)." It is politically decided that how personality should grow. The second factor that is of vital importance is role, which means the stance, manners or behavior of a person. These are socially constructed which again produce discrimination between male and female. The third feature which contributes to the differences between the both is status. Status is created psychology the way people make certain position of a person or an object in his/her mind. So, "male dominance or patriarchy is the result of this psyche that men



are greater than women” (Shahzad, 176). For instance, women are given half share in property in the society, or given low wages as compare to men. As a result, it leads to a feeling of inferiority complex in women. Besides, women are restricted from sexual freedom. As Millet describes, “they are sexually considered filthy and corrupt. Menses is regarded as nothing but a sort of burden. As the women are weak enough to safeguard their chastity, men have to guard them to keep them pure. Women because of this notion of the chastity refuse sexual liberty, miscarriage and birth planning” (Shahzad, 176). Family affairs also have great significance to define the role of gender. The family is known and entitled with the name of male. Its children are reared with the men’s willing. While taking any decision, women must seek the permission of males. They are denied of compensation for their labor in the home” (Shahzad, 176).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

Not only males but even females also add to the mental and physical suffering of women. Being feudalist women Samina is sort of a mother who is always obsessed with outward look, fashion, and beauty. She also wants her daughter to follow her example. She always demands for submissiveness in her daughters but she realizes that Durrani provokes on rebellion by showing dissatisfaction with her mother’s wrong intentions of yielding to the established norms. But being weak and compelled she calmly consented with her mother. Durrani says,

*“Although I was not satisfied with myself but anyhow I had to change for my mom. This feigning stabbed me inside but I covered my true feelings and sacrificed my desires for her happiness. I yielded to her dominancy. (p. 17)”*

It shows that submissiveness is being inculcated into Durani’s personality by her own mother from her youth. She is forced to abide by whatever is uttered to her. Besides, Durrani is trained from the very early stage of her growth that what to do, where to go, whom to meet, etc. She is deprived of the life normal growth that is each individual’s right. Durrani says,

*“They prohibited me to join any male company. I was forced from my early age about what to do and what not. I was kept aside even from female groups which*

*seemed a bit fashionable. Using cellphone was restricted for me. I could not go anywhere without having permission and chaperon (p. 19).”*

The given reference clearly indicates that Durani is brainwashed by her mom to be conscious that she is somewhat different, weak or the other gender which cannot live freely in male dominant society because of some social restrictions and moralities. It shows a sort of segregation between male and female gender due to their role in the society assigned to them by the chauvinist ideologies. It makes women a sort of robots that are programmed what to say and how to react. First, family snatches the strength of voice from their female children who later on fall prey to male oppression because of their long-established behavior. So, Durani becomes exhausted with mother’s everyday chiding and lectures for doing this and not-doing that. As she says,

*“Outlook was given more priority than real passions and emotions. No one could dare to know about him/herself. Subjectivity was of lower value which contributes to the poor development of oneself. I was always obsessed with only one thing to avoid the tensed situation for which I found no other way but to get married. (p. 20)”*

Durrani finds only one way to escape this mental trauma that is to get married. She thinks that marriage is sort of salvation for any distressed and torn girl who needs social, financial and political refuge. But, again marriages depend on the parental agreement and content without caring for girl’s concern.

*“Getting married was supposed to be done as per the status and wish of the parents in the society, rather than her own willing or joy (Durrani, 19).”*

Any how she gets married with Anees and starts living happy life. Soon, she gives birth to a baby daughter Tanya. Everything goes well but, suddenly, dark clouds come in her life when Mustafa Khar runs into her in Lahore. Mustafa was the former Chief Minister and the Governor of Punjab. He is very diplomatic and cunning. Being a hunter, he knows how to trap a woman whoever he wants to. He has married five wives by the time when he lures towards Durrani. He, in the presence of his wife Sherry, makes flirt with Durani, and at last wins her love. He made her divorce

Anees and married him which not only broke Anees but shattered the soul of Sherry as well. Instead of having five wives, Mustafa's wild lust never comes down, he is always obsessed with attracting pretty lads. On Durrani's this decision, her parents, especially her mother breaks relation with her. Though my mom had been divorced once, but she still teaches us to be steadfast to our spouses and never let them lose. They object that divorce is sort of curse on one's reputation, especially, on father's side. The situation which leads to divorce is lied only on the shoulder of the wife as shown in 'My Feudal Lord'.

*"The woman had to remain steadfast unless she altered her husband's behavior if he got rude, or furious. Divorce would fall into the inability of the woman. (Durrani, 19)"*

Although Mustafa has gone through many such divorces but no one mentions his name with degradation because he is male feudalist who has the power to leave someone or marry, it frees him to do whatever makes him happy. He manipulates every institute just to fulfill his will and desire. But Durrani who is female always challenges social sarcasm due to taking divorce from Anees and marrying with Mustafa mostly from her own parental side and sometimes from the common people in the surrounding. But no one is willing to notice Mustafa's blunder upon blunder by playing on women's feelings and bodies. First, he marries his own cousin when he is seventeen. Durrani says,

*"I was told by Mustafa that he got married to his uneducated cousin Wazir who was elder than him through the consent of his parents. Very soon, she got conceived (p. 27)."*

Mustafa leaves home and the poor Wazir gets divorced to marry his younger brother. Then, he entraps another woman namely Ferdaus the wife of his friend in Murree whose spouse leaves her when she becomes pregnant. Mustafa at once brings her in wedlock. But what happens while she is on the stretcher delivering her child, Mustafa shocks her by sending her divorce papers. After committing these atrocities one after another, he returns home and no one even asks him for his wrong deeds.

*"After doing this, Mustafa on his return was given amnesty that was common in the feudal system for male gender only (Durrani, 27)."*

It shows that feudalism is the shield of patriarchy, and when/wherever it is needed, they use it, no matter if it causes the degradation of a woman. Feudalism is a tool with Mustafa by which he plays on women's lives. Durrani says,

*"Feudalism justified the killing, looting, encroaching and scandalizing in the society. It added to misery of the poor and luxuries of the wealthy (p. 24)."*

It is Feudalism that gives Mustafa free hand to exploit the chastity of innocent women one by one. When Ayesha the prettiest elopes with her lover, they are soon caught and the matter is placed before Mustafa to solve it because the feudal lord acted like a jury to give justice in the Jirga (a sort of court) system. Ayesha pleads Mustafa not to hand her over to her husband least she would be murdered, so on this she is taken by Mustafa as nun (dai) of his son Bilal from Sofia. She is given no salary but a little amount of grain to her family. So, she comes in his custody forever. Her lover is put in asylum where he meets his lord. So, instead of giving them justice, he captivates the innocent Ayesha who suffers his oppressions throughout her life. Next victim of Mustafa is an innocent family earner flight attendant Safia who belongs to lower-middle-class. She is very open-minded and a sort of modern girl. After spending some time with her, Mustafa finds a chance and at last marries her. But feudalism and male dominancy brings liberated Safia fetters of slavery.

*"Sofia was taken out from her peaceful life and entrapped into a world of hardships. Her fashionable figure was now metamorphosed into a covered woman. She was confined to Mustafas' home in Kot Addu (Durrani 29)."*

She becomes a prisoner in a male dominant mansion where there is zero freedom for women. Even she is not allowed to go out of their home without having male permission and chaperon. She only sees the patch and four-walls and nothing more. No male could enter the house except her father and brother-in-laws. She gets used to a deserted place that is full of restrictions on females and liberty for the males. "She becomes member of zannana (women's chamber) where in every sense the male is king and the female is slave. Durrani says,"

*"She entered the space where males ruled and females had to obey (p. 29)."*

Women come in and go out from Mustafa's life like tools in the market. He has played great role in provoking Durrani to leave Anees and come into his trap. He neglects his current wife Sherry's feelings; he keeps her voiceless and dumb and ruins her in a complete silence. First life moves on well, Durrani enjoys her wedding in the juvenile days, but as soon as time passes, Mustafa reveals his inner and real face. He, on very minor issues, quarrels with her, spits out abusing and chiding her harshly. He crosses the level of humanity and starts beating and battering her on the daily basis. He imposes his feudal power over her by this brutal manner. She becomes victim at emotional, physical and psychological level. For her, the most tormenting agony and pain is her psychological suffering because at her father's house, she was fed up of her mother enslaving her that is why, she preferred marriage to get salvation. But here his brutal spouse proves more voracious and determined to captivate and enslave her to the worse. Mustafa, in front of Durrani, flirt with her younger sister Adila and then pretends that Adila has gone insane and she does not leave her pursuit. He is such a man who, on one hand, uses religion for maintaining his hegemony. But, on the other hand, he violates religious codes by having sexual relations with sister-in-law. When Durrani complains about this scandal to her parents, Mustafa persuades her mother that Durrani is suffering from meningitis, which is why, she is uttering gossip. He, through his lustful deeds, makes breach between Durrani and her parents' home. She is blamed for slandering Adila because of her jealousy by Mustafa. He also snatches right of motherhood from Durrani. During their exile in England, when Durrani decides to divorce him and take her children from him as per the laws of British court, he secretly plots and kidnaps all his children, sends them to Pakistan. She lives very deserted life after she is separated from her children. She, after this great agony, becomes surrendered to rejoin him. She four times leaves his house and asks for divorce, but he, every time, through his cunning manner, makes her return to him.

#### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The study uncovers how feudalism affects females' lives in the feudal society. It uses the framework of feminist theory given by Kate Millet- American The-

orist. It further highlights the conditions of women under the male dominance. It also reveals that how various institutions like patriarchy, politics, religion, and tribalism work to stabilize males' dominance and females' subjugation.

For example, Mustafa Khar who belongs to feudalist family uses all these institutions to make women feel inferiority complex. Once women abide by the so-called social constructed structures of these institutions, then they easily fall prey to the males' conspiracies, lust and oppression like in the case of Mustafa. Broadly speaking, the study reveals the exploitation of women in male dominant feudal society in the light of the textual analysis of *'My Feudal Lord'*. It reveals that how one group takes control over the other one in every aspect of life such as from sex to abortion, from child owning to property and from thinking to decision making. One can work on *"My Feudal Lord"* from some other perspectives as well, such as religion and tribal system. In addition, women's identity is also a critical issue that can be explored by any researcher.

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#### **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:**

Author declares no conflicting interests

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