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Autobiography and Woman Empowerment: Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord*

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Abstract

Autobiography has become an ideal vehicle to convey women's issues and experiences. This genre is also chosen by women to express their deference and resistance. This paper critically examines the autobiography of Tehmina Durrani 'My feudal Lord'. Durrani's biography throws light on the institution of marriage and family that are thoroughly embedded in cultural practices. It is a regular biography following a chronological order and the last part brings out the changes occurring in her personality. The author blames patriarchy, feudalism and cultural norms for women's oppression. Therefore, Durrani acts to discover herself when she decides to reject a life with a husband who mistreats and degrades her. Under terrible pressures, she struggles to become independent and pushes through to regain self-esteem and living fulfilment. By writing about her own life, Durrani has not only challenged the prescribed behavioural patterns but also gives vent to her angered feelings and finally comes out of the long silence indicating that she has an agency to confess and protest.

Keywords: Autobiography; women issues; women empowerment; Tehmina Durrani; My Feudal Lord; Pakistani women writers

Introduction

Women writings have special relationship with the genre of autobiography. Fortunately, these forms offered more space and freedom to woman. The genre of Autobiography is being used by women to declare their resistance and

empowerment. Women writers could take up the pen in the privacy of their home and domesticity and scribble their thoughts. The crucial concept in woman cantered writings is truthful representation of female experience and identity. The portrayal has to be multidimensional not limited in scope as what Snitow (cited in Eagleton, 1986) observes:

When women try to picture excitement, the society offers them one vision, romance. When they try to imagine companionship, the society offers them one vision, male, sexual companionship, when women try to fantasize about success, the society offers them one vision, the power to attract a man. When women try to fantasize about sex, the society offers them taboos on most of its imaginable expressions except those that when dealing directly with arousing and satisfying men. When women try to project a unique self, the society offers them very few attractive images. True completion for women is nearly always presented as social, domestic, sexual (138).

The women writer should go beyond this fantasy world since autobiographical writings closely correspond with the structures of society. Most of all, it should at least try to capture the ethos and mood of the period in which it is written. However, writing is a highly complex process and the common theme that women writers generally share with the reader is their oppression and how it affects them in different ways. Autobiographical writings have also contributed to identity formation for women. It celebrates the essence of womanhood and womanliness. Olney (1980) states that “the genre emphasizes the birth of experience, singularity of experience and the reconstruction of the sense of individuality” (135). Mitra (2009) states that being an artistic activity, the autobiographical process not only helps recreate the author’s personality, it also helps them determine their true identity as well as gain deeper knowledge of the self through self-interrogation (150).

Generally, this genre is chosen by women to express deference and resistance. Watson (1989) writes that Gusdorf praises autobiography as the “conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life, an awareness that he sees as marking the epitome of Western civilization, the previous capital of the biological self that achieves meaning by its separation and singularity. Autobiography is therefore, a genre for memorializing those who are self-evidently wise and great as their autobiographies show us, the great artist, the great writer lives, in a sense, for his autobiography” (59). Mason argues that women writers delineate identity relationally, through connection to the significant other, ‘that the self-discovery of female identity’ seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of female self is linked to the identification of some other. “This recognition seems to enable women to write

openly about themselves” (69). Invoking the research of Nancy Chodorow in the *Reproduction of Mothering*, Friedman (1993) argues that “in women’s text we can find a consciousness of self in which the individual [feels] ...very much with others in an interdependent existence.” Friedman (1993) also turns to Shiela Rowbotham to incorporate concepts of collective alienation, consciousness, and formation of new identities through reclamation of language and image. Friedman explores the notion of fluid or permeable ego boundaries to describe the sense of collective identification and yearning for maternal nurturance and community that she reads as characteristic of many women’s autobiographies, particularly contemporary ones (55).

Women autobiographies talk about patriarchy which establishes values, and gender prescriptions. Despite rejecting male hegemony these autobiographies celebrate motherhood and wifehood clearly. Women replace their individual identity with the maternal one. The development of multiple and ‘autonomous self’ is rooted in relationship but also at times women resist coherent selfhood. Leigh Gilmar (cited in Mitra (2009) points out “Autobiography demonstrates that we can never recover the past, only represent it” (144). Bruner (1993) asserts that ‘it is an extension of fiction that the shape of life comes first from imagination rather than from experience’ (77). Therefore, autobiography re-imagines the past and re-interprets it in the present context which situates it on the border of fiction writing. The synthesis of past and present build the edifice of autobiography. More or less all autobiographies by women dwell on the growth of self-esteem which leads them to seeking empowerment. Both genres of autobiography and novel extend the social sphere in which the action unfolds. According to Ricoeur (1984), “the time of the novel may break away from real time. In fact, this is the law for the beginning of any fiction. Therefore, both genres at times defy coherency and rely on teleological principles to achieve desired aims” (25). As far as the roles of the characters are concerned, it is necessary here to recall Propp’s initial thesis cited in Ricoeur that functions are to be without taking into consideration the characters of the action, therefore, in abstraction from any specific agent or passive sufferer. But Bremond says, action is inseparable from the one who undergoes it or who does it. He presents two arguments in favour of this assertion. A function expresses an interest or an initiative that brings into play a sufferer or an agent. Also, several functions become interconnected, if the sequence concerns the story of the single character. It is necessary therefore, to conjoin a subject-noun and a process predicate into a single term the role. From here the logic of the principal narrative role begins. According to Ricoeur this inventory is systematic in a two-fold sense. First, because it gives rise to more and more complex roles either by specifying them or by successive determinations, whose linguistic representation more and more articulated. Second, because it gives rise to groupings of roles by correlating them, often on a binary basis (40).

The characters or the individuals in both genres live in the world, where the boundaries of the public and the private are increasingly fluid. Some fictional narratives are also autobiographical in nature. The striking example of this form is Bapsi Sidhwa's novels. Sidhwa has written four novels loaded with autobiographical elements. On the other hand, in Durrani's autobiography representations seems to have been negotiated. "Therefore, it is important to recognize boundaries between fact and fiction" says, Evan (2005:32). According to Ricoeur (1984) "the situation here is the same as in History, where inquiry of a scientific character and ambition was preceded by legends and chronicles. History at the same time also informs that women have always been constituted by others" (58). According to Waugh (1989) "subjectivity historically constructed and expressed through the phenomenological equation self/other necessarily rests masculine 'selfhood' upon feminine 'otherness' (8). Women then become commodities in such cases. Realizing the socio/political and the historical determinants of woman's oppression, the women writers have made an effort to counter the situation through voicing. The genres of autobiography and novel share many concerns related to women question. These genres thus, challenge historico/cultural positioning of femininity by showing that woman's situation becomes the site of multiple struggles, and that at times such struggles create in women the 'essential self' that may help to counter the fixities of femininity.

Pakistani English autobiographical writing is still a new body of work. More and more writers however, turn their attention to fiction side. Durrani's autobiography though not the first of its kind attracted lots of public attention. Her predecessors like Shaista Ikramullah, Banzair Bhutto and Sara Suleri are well-known figures, but it is the story of her life that gained wider readership at national and international level. Its distinctness lies in revealing even her personal life, in order to reflect oppressive feudal traditions. The purpose of her autobiography *My Feudal Lord* (1994) becomes quite clear when she dedicates it to the people of Pakistan:

to the people of Pakistan who have repeatedly trusted and supported their leaders.... leaders who have, in written, used the hungry, oppressed, miserable, multitudes to further their personal interest ... to my beloved children who, in our closed society, shall have to suffer the trials of the family exposed may my son never oppress the weak, may my daughters learn to fight oppression (dedication).

Her purpose is two-fold. First, to expose the corrupt politicians who betray the country and the people and second, depicting the crippling status of womanhood in Pakistani society. The focus of her autobiography is the institution of marriage and family which are thoroughly embedded in cultural practices. Pakistan is one of those

countries where unfortunately violence against women has traditionally dominated the cultural scene. Durrani's discourse closely follows helplessness in these circumstances and the overall patriarchal system which dominates both public and private sphere. Durrani's autobiography is a regular autobiography following a chronological order. It has three parts. The first and the second part deal with Durrani's victimization by her abusive husband and the last part bring out the changes occurring in her personality. Unfortunately, the autobiographies written in Pakistan become documents of self-justification. The writers make every possible effort to convince the reader that they are born Angels who live good life to write about it. Their whole being is presented as spotless. Both Pakistani and Indian autobiographies show the writers as an embodiment of perfection. Though, Durrani shows some pitfalls of womanhood but mostly the narration tilts in favour of the protagonist. Another problematic feature of her autobiography is its co-authorship. The cover of a book claims three authors. These three authors of an autobiography make it appear more a fairy-tale than life-writing. The authenticity of events becomes ambiguous, contradictory and controversial. This in fact creates a big obstacle in the development of the "real-self" the writers intend to portray in the text. Therefore, Durrani's picture of "self" may be lacking coherency, since it has been detailed by the writers who have never been a part of her life. Hence, Durrani's discourse lacks transparency. But at this stage, one must admit that life can never be transparent. It is also worth-mentioning here that the Western autobiography tends to give more realistic picture of life. The autobiographer does not lose touch with the ground realities of life and instead are more real. Ours are more heroic. According to James Olney (1980) 'the autobiographer is surrounded and isolated by their own consciousness, an awareness grown out of a unique heredity and unique experience. . . separates selfhood is the very motive of creation' (22-23).

In Durrani's case, this is true. All through the text, one can trace images of loneliness and isolation and being cut from the life of action. May be it is the effect of those moments of life that foster consciousness in her and force her to wield pen in the cause of women. Despite its weaknesses, the text has its assets in the action or activism of its writer. The last part of the book, titled as 'lioness', is most impressive enriching and resourceful. Though a regular autobiography, it is written in English and English co-authors, it is set on the Western models. Unfortunately, the unhealthy relationship with her mother and an unstable one with her second husband Khar, brings about disgrace and undeserved failures in her life. Until two decades ago in Pakistan, the discourse of activism for women rights was considered to be sinful. Durrani challenged this mind-set by writing *My Feudal Lord*. First, she posed a serious challenge to patriarchy which is the root cause of gender disparity. Second, she revealed her feelings on the themes of sex and sexuality which created a storm in the then society of the time. Finally, it also threw light on her role as a politician, for

the release of her husband from jail and then to get “herself” released from abusive marriage. It became the most popular book of the time, especially amongst women. It could be categorized as a “Consciousness Raising” book.

Feminism in Muslim countries is growing on the basis of the indigenous needs of the individual countries which are at different stages of religious revivalism on the one hand, and political, economic cultural and social complexities on the other. But there are many common features of women’s movement in post-modern Muslim countries. Definitely *My Feudal Lord* marks the beginning of diverse discourses on feminism. Though, it being written with the help of English co-authors, however, it does not disturb the “innate Pakistaniness” of the text and the author. The married women in traditional Pakistani society face many problems. The South Asian societies have turned homes into an ideal location for the exercise of masculine aggression and domination. Generally speaking, women in South Asian countries are tied in such a way to the tradition and social custom of the country that it retards the development of women. Another contributing factor is that women are kept entirely ignorant of their rights as a woman and the law protection guaranteed to them by the constitution of the country. Spivak (1995) suggests, that ‘the role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored.’ (269). Durrani therefore, taking advantage of the literary genre registers her complaints and uses autobiography as a medium to unveil her hidden life. It also points to the fact that Pakistan is still in tight grip of feudal structures and at the same time makes an effort to restore the voice of the subaltern. Durrani follows a female approach which in the words of Guerin et al. (1999), ‘Feminine logic in writing is often associational (whereas) male logic is sequential, that is goal oriented’ (200). Like a native informant, Durrani in Spivakian (2003) spirit feels that “Literature can provide rhetorical space for subaltern groups to re-articulate the suppressed histories of popular struggles” (124).

***My Feudal Lord* and the Discourses of Power**

My Feudal Lord shows a woman who has conventional existence and strained relationship with her mother. It is owing to Durrani’s young age and alienation from her family that she opts to marry Anees who being a junior executive in Shipping Corporation. Durrani sought escape through marriage as she acknowledges, “I wanted to escape from my family” (37). Since she never loved Anees, therefore, there was always a sense of incompleteness in her. Most probably it was the lack of masculinity in Anees that blurred his qualities as a husband. Hence, when she sees Khar for the first time in her life she feels quite fascinated by his charismatic personality she describes, “my gaze settled open a tall, dark, handsome man in a black suit. His starched white shirt was set off by a

burgundy tie and matching handkerchief” (90). Her meeting with Khar is the first tragedy of her life. Though she classifies him as a rake but at the same time feels “a bit devilish in an appealing sort of way” (19). Throwing light on his personality she writes, “Mustafa Khar was the kind of man who could chose his place at the dinner table, and he chose to sit directly across from me....his words did not hold me, but his eyes had me riveted. Then their message was for from subtle. Perhaps I should have been frightened: instead I was drawn like a moth to a flame” (27). After this introduction Khar and Durrani continue to meet at different places but marrying Khar remained a distant dream. It is after that he musters the courage to take Durrani for dance and proposes her. She frankly confesses physical relationship with him, “common sense vanished along with caution, morality and decency, my emotion overwhelmed me” (68). Her first marriage is annulled. It is the mutual decision of both Khar and Durrani to get married, and upon their marriage the doors of the outside world are closed upon her.

Durrani being educated and brought-up in the cosmopolitan did not have the slightest idea of feudal culture. It is feudalism which considers woman a toy or play thing. Saeed cited in Babar (2000) who is a socialist says in this regard, “In the feudal system there is extreme oppression of women, while the capitalist system gives some artificial concession to women in order to get the maximum production and benefits from them” (16). Another writer Sibte-Hassan cited in Babar (2000) also observes that “the feudal system reduces a woman to be mere slave and that man and woman must first struggle to end this oppressive system perpetuated by the Feudal Lord” (16). Durrani throws light on her wrong decision, “at first I found irony in this situation. I had escaped from the domination of my mother by climbing into the lap of a tyrant” (128). Woman as a woman has no place in feudal culture. She can only survive as a mother, daughter, wife and sister. Women survive in terms of their relation with someone else. A woman is expected to be a submissive daughter, a caring mother and a docile wife. With the passage of time Durrani learns how to adjust with impulsive and abusive nature of her husband, “I had diagnosed his illness, he was confused and insecure product of his background and I had to find a cure . . . I knew my personality had to change I had become submissive and weak like his previous wives. I had, somehow to learn to deal with him on a different level” (188). Life with Khar becomes an Herculean task for Durrani. Culture is ingrained in the personality of an individual. Khar represented feudal culture. It was reflected in his domestic habits especially in his treatment of women. Durrani testifies:

I could only develop in the direction that he chose. To think independently was a crime that he had the right to punish. Many of his beliefs ran counter to everything that I considered right, but there was no way that I could engage

with him in a rational debate. His values were steeped in a medieval milieu, a mix of prejudices, superstitions and old wives tale. High on the list was the role of the wife. According to feudal tradition a wife was honour-bond to live her life according to her husband's whims. A woman was a man's land a feudal lord loves his land only in functional terms. He encloses it and protects it. If it is barren, he neglects it. Land is power, prestige and property (107).

This points to the otherness of woman. The theme of otherness is also central to autobiographical writings. However, "women in South Asian societies like Pakistan are attached to the male member of the family. In South Asian cultures, for an upper class man both conditions need to be present; for example, a Feudal Lord, tribal leader or a big industrialist is considered honorable because he possesses material riches and exercises substantial control over the women and children in his family," writes Khan in her book *Beyond Honour (2006)*. To support my argument, I would quote Spivak here:

within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of sexual division of labour, for both of which there is 'evidence' it is, rather that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (28).

Khan writes, male bondage outlaws blood bondage. This practice is not a cultural or traditional phenomenon it has very much an economic basis and material motives (54). This bondage is strengthened in many ways remarks Khan,

The system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women. This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination, educational deprivation, the denial of knowledge to women of their history, the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining 'respectability' and 'deviance' according to women's sexual activities, by restrains and outright coercion, by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power, and by awarding class privilege to conforming women (56).

The reason for this, as Spivak points out, is because the 'ideological construction of gender' in the colonial archives and the historical records of subaltern insurgency keeps the male dominant' (281). 'Women have been largely man-made' (Figs, 9). Therefore, women become the property of the relatives or her husband. Khan writes, 'women become the property of the large community of the

immediate blood relatives or marriage partner' (84). This in turn accelerates the gulf between women and their immediate family or the community. Khar used her (Durrani's) insight where appropriate and also accommodates her opinions. But he keeps her cloistered and does not allow her think independently or logically. According to Khan:

Feudals have high sense of masculinity and power and therefore, a women's defiance and rebellion is considered a monstrous act that can shake the foundations of respect and esteem of the men of the family, whether man of a feudalist or peasant family living in rural settings, or upper or lower class man living in Urban centers. Men of the family from each strata of society in these regions do not hesitate to soak their hands in the blood of their own female blood relatives (53).

Many sociologists and intellectuals think that this practice could be related to the ignorance of the masses, who articulate tradition as religion. Other factors that contribute to constructing such attitudes are community and social pressures. It is owing to these pressures that men commit crimes against the women of their own families. There are various discourse communities that one way or another influence the thinking of the protagonist and complicate the situation for women. It is important here to highlight the role the society plays. In this context, it is important to mention Gebser's Paradigm here, since it explains the position of an individual in relation to society. Gebser's in examining the contemporary structure of reality has identified earlier shifts in mankind's consciousness throughout human history.

According to Gebser (1985) "the decisive and distinguishing characteristic of these epochs is the respective absence or presence of perspective. The first three epochs, the archaic, the magic (Per-perspectival) and the mythic (Un-perspectival) were marked by a lack of perspective. The third, beginning with the classical Greeks famously discovered perspective, articulated three-dimensional space and has been dominant in Western society since. This predominantly constitute the 'perspectival'. And finally, Gebser argues is the currently emerging epoch that is aperspectival" (9).

In Gebser's view, 'we as human beings, invariably retain elements of magic and mythic structure as we exist in the presently dominant perspectival or mental epoch' (9). Since the paper is presently discussing these elements with reference to *My Feudal Lord*, therefore, it should be mentioned here that feudal culture is based on collectivistic aims. Jafri (2008) writes, since identity is extremely collectivistic in the magic/ idyllic, the individual is merely a part of a standard family (39). Therefore, when Durrani demands divorce from Khar he resists. Durrani describes

the situation as such, “he could and would spirit me off to the tribal areas adjoining the remote village of Kot Addu, where I would live as his prisoner until — who knows when . . . there were numerous women who lived such lives of imprisonment and despair. In the environment, he could easily coerce me into rescinding the divorce” (360). Hence, the Pakistani patriarchy turns man into an unaccommodating, uncaring and exploitative being.

Gadamer (1976) explains, that since ‘one’s consciousness is defined by one’s culture, one cannot step outside of the culture one inhabits’ (302). Feudalism is also entrenched in certain conventions and traditions that sustain it. Eventually, it becomes quite difficult to dislodge this status quo the very sense of identification, interdependence, and community that Gusdorf dismisses from autobiographical selves are key elements in the development of a women identity, according to theorists Rowbotham and Chodorow (cited in Friedman 1988). This model of women’s selfhood highlight the unconscious masculine bias in Gusdorf’s another individualistic paradigm. A woman cannot, Rowbotham argues, experience herself as an entirely unique entity because she is always aware of how she is being defined as women, that is, as a member of a groups whose identity has been defined in the dominant male culture (75). South Asian cultures believe that women should remain attached to the men at any cost. First, a woman is attached to her father’s family. On marriage she becomes associated with her husband’s family. After separation from her husband she stands at the ‘in between station’ belonging to neither family. This is the crisis world over as Durrani explains “I asked Mustafa, do you realize that you have taken away everything from me – thirteen years of my life my family, my children, my youth and everything I believed in? I have to start anew. He stretched took a deep breath and addressed me coolly. You have no identity of your own nobody knows you.... Because you have removed your name from mine.” Hence, Khar by asserting that “you have no identity of your own” is in a way trying to create utilitarian matrix to lay down the ideals of women’s conduct in society. Thus, Khar is translating the hegemonic discourse which is based on community’s concept of good and evil and specially the feudal community. Second, he is emphasizing women’s dependence on men. Women cannot live independently in collectivistic societies because they (the society) believe women have to be attached to a man whosoever, it be. Mirtaza & Baseer (2011) deftly contrasts aims of man and woman in a Pakistani society. Family life is not a man’s cup of tea and it is the pivot of a woman’s life (558). Suleri also supports this point. She writes, “a woman can’t come home, home is where you have a mother, second where you are a mother” (68). Society considers women great, when she endures man and practices self-negation. Men on the other hand treat woman and children as his belongings. This hegemonic discourse enters into a painful phase when the clerics, the feudal and the influential start

using religion against women. They misinterpret and twist the facts to suit their needs. 'A woman was like a man's land' believed Khar (230). For his wife he had one criteria and for himself another. He would dye his hair asserting "I will only stop coloring my hair if you agree not to color yours, and besides it is sunnat" (231). This is the term denoting that whatever the Prophet (PBUH) did, you should follow his action. Khar reminded me that the Prophet (PBUH) had dictated that "old age should be combated in every way; it helps you to be more energetic. The Prophet says that you should look as young as possible for as long as possible" (231). Keeping the above context in view, it is important to correct the above quoted words being referred to Muhammed (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) never allowed dye to be used on hair. It is an extract of a plant called henna that could be applied on hair to change colour. The above quoted lines by Khar are an example of mythic discourse. Khar here is articulating patriarchal values shared by the community that discourages deviant behaviour of women and keep men empowered at all costs. It is transmuted into another language and the context mythologized. Barthes notes "myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing, it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession; it is an inflexion" (129). The discourse of some clerics centres on favouring patriarchy, anti-women behaviour and representing men as an embodiment of perfection. As Durrani verifies this fact "I thought here is another example of Mustafa's convenient use of Islam. But his reliance upon Islamic law and custom was highly selective" (232).

Through such sacred discourses, the clerics with political motives try to justify social oppression of women. These patriarchal forces misuse Islam to match their agenda. In Khan's (1986) view when "it comes to keeping the women in a disadvantage social position, the men employ any weapon available to them. (103). "Hegemony, on the other hand, consists of interlocking active social and cultural force. Often in such social structures, that is in collectivistic societies, individuals are ignored, their rights subdued and expected to conform to certain group norms. Collectivism, therefore, favours oppressed women. This rhetoric of collectivity is popularized as such, one for all and all for one, only perpetuate the status quo which is obviously more brutally loaded in favor of the men" writes, Jafri (2008, 102).

Rowbotham (1993 cited in Friedman) argues, cultural representations of women lead not only to women's alienation but also to the potential for a new consciousness of the self. Not recognizing themselves in the reflection of cultural representations, women develop a dual consciousness . . . the self as defined according to cultural values or different from cultural prescriptions" (38). Since, South Asian cultures require complete domination of women therefore, women become quite vulnerable to customs and conventions of the society. In such conditions women's resist separation or divorce. Women do attach sympathies

with groups, families and other women; therefore, Tahmina defines her 'self' in the beginning with her sisters and later with her husband. However, after a certain period of time the new 'self' evolves in Durrani which apparently clashes with the socio/political structures of the society of the time. Durrani states regretfully, Mustafa demanded custody of the children and ownership of all of her properties the country house in England and our London flat, which was jointly titled, and house in Lahore, which was in the name of my daughter. My father expected these provisions with cavalier pronouncement, leave her penniless. She does not need anything from you. I can support her" (363). This points to the highly repressive laws which work against women. Jasam (2001) writes that "large number of women who are single, divorced or widowed cannot live independently. It is always the father, brothers, husbands, sons who provide them protection and women in general submit to this male dominated social arrangement" (8).

After her divorce, Durrani is deserted by her socio/political circle. She says, "I was a social and political outcast. People whom I formerly respected turned their backs on me. I shuddered at the realization of the position that a woman falls into after divorce . . . especially if her ex-husband is an important person. Increasingly, I experienced a humiliating lack of confidence and self-esteem. But although I cried often in bed at night I held on during the day with a determined strength" (37). Most of the time women comply with these traditions and hence become disciplined subjects, says Jasam (63). Gramsci argues that the State seeks to (cited in Khan 1986) disseminate their outlook (world views) as best as they can (127). In Durrani's case the society, and the values system promote patriarchal dominance. It can be concluded from the above discussion that the societies that are collective in nature require individual behaviour to conform to established norms. Durrani's mother was also a part of the hegemonic block, which produced patriarchal norms. However, Jasam (2001) believes that "no matter how dominant the powerful structures are, resistances do happen. However, these resistances are not systematic and do not produce any discourse. They are independent revolutions which are not always successful but have a positive effect" (55). Similarly Durrani's bold decision to opt for *Khula* (divorce) creates problems for her in the beginning but later she was accepted into the fold of the society. Through her decision Durrani shows that she has the agency to resist the system, the society and her family. Despite facing lots of pressure from Khar she pledges "I am not your kind of woman anymore. It will never work, not for one day" (364). This proves what Rowbotham (cited in Friedman) says, women have shattered the distorting identities imposed by culture and left 'The sign' of their 'presence' in their autobiographical writings (58). Khan also concludes in her work that women do have an agency despite their vulnerability and poverty (106).

However, women live in different context and conditions and negotiate accordingly. The above lines assert that publically men are always in a position to dictate their terms and conditions for women to negotiate. Despite these odds Durrani sticks to her agenda of reform and her independent position is finally accepted into the society. She writes, “Gradually, the negative publicity decreased and my account began to be received in its intended spirit, as an insight into the socio /political order of our country. Although I remained a curiosity, I became acceptable” (387).

Conclusion

Durrani has to be commended for the courage for exposing feudal lords and Moulvis (Priests) openly who are hypocrites, ostensibly performing religious duties. Nowhere in her texts (Novel and Autobiography) does she complain that Islam discriminates on the basis of sex and gender. On the other hand, she believes that the feudal lords, socio/cultural norms twist the religion to serve themselves. Durrani feels that by breaking silence and sharing her experiences of traumatic marital life with Khar, she has exposed the evils of the system he was brought up in, since ‘silence condones injustice’ (375). Therefore, the act of writing about her personal life is equal to breaking her silence because the society expects her to remain silent. Durrani gives endless examples of an ideology based on culture which is the chief enemy of religion. She believes that certain alien ideological intrusions have distorted the true nature of Islam. Referring to Khar’s use of Islam she writes, “the multitudes might be impoverished and illiterate, but invoke the name of Islam – no matter how erroneously . . . and they will rally (243). Religious practices get affected by cultural influences. Keeping this reality in view, Durrani ventures on a journey to depict feudal lords who use religion to achieve their objectives. “I realized I could do no greater service for my country and our people than to expose the camouflage” (375). It is only through bringing change in the tribal feudal and value system that a change in perception regarding women can be brought. Durrani also seeks reform through correct interpretation of Islam. She believes that real Islam gives respect to all family members equally and requires both the husband and the wife to act in a responsible manner. Marriage does not affect the legal status of women in Islam. She has the right to contract, to conduct business to earn and possess property independently. Durrani also affirms her commitment to feminism in these words in an interview:

“Well I am a woman, so I naturally write from a feminine perspective. More than that, I am interested in reform. My work whether it’s *My Feudal Lord* or *Blasphemy*, or Abdul Sattar Edhi’s narrated autobiography *Mirror to the Blind* is about issues that concern our people, about breaking of a silence from a part of the society that cannot speak out. I am called bold because

these are the issues one does not talk about, nor does one talk about one's life. I suppose my passion for reform is overwhelming. And, I think, when anything overwhelms you that much you have a natural boldness because you step out of the realm of fear" (Online Interview).

This suggests that Durrani has an agency to confess and to protest. She becomes the mouthpiece of the women of Pakistan. Therefore, it can be concluded that Durrani becomes an important agent of change who boldly declares her invulnerable identity in these words, "Well Mustafa, now the world will soon know you only as Tehmina Durrani's ex-husband" (382).

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