Violence Against Women in Tehmina Durrani’s
My Feudal Lord

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Abstract

From the womb of her mother till the leaving of coffin to graveyard runs the story of the women with innumerable miserable plights including her feticide. She is molested, tortured & even raped not in public, but at home where she feels more secure. The life of the women from all corners of the world including Middle-East India has now become the focus of the modern women writers as a theme of their works. The paper explores and analyses the extent to which a woman is exploited from birth to the maturity level of womanhood from various corners in the portal of home in Tehmina Durrani’s My Feudal Lord. It also throws light on her low status in patriarchal society, as her physical, psychological and spiritual status deprives her of all powers and makes her move for suicidal tendency.

Introduction

Women in all religions & all communities had in one way or the other had been victimized with the lust of the men folk in the patriarchal society. Sexual violation, kidnapping, abduction, dowry deaths, murder, wife bettering are the violations which the women face; but regretfully female victims of violence have not been given most attention in the literature of social problems or in the literature of criminal violence. Aggression or injury committed by powerful (man) against less powerful (women) is not the violence, but it is precisely the abuse of power. In the multitude of context including schools, hospitals, homes, in workplaces, she is not spared without being tortured physically & psychologically in the present world. The incidents of trafficking of young girls & young women who are mainly sold into sexual slavery is altering their lives permanently each year.

Among all the violations, a woman faces the most harsh and wicked stage comes when she is married either forcefully or early as in Afghanistan women face a variety of discrimination ranging from child marriage, forced marriage, polygamy & even “Baad” a tribal custom of giving the forcible the hand of a widow or a girl to man from an opposing tribe to settle disputes & end enmity. Moreover the treatment meted to her by her-in-laws & by intimate partner, like bride burning or dowry death, divorce, sexual, psychological & emotional violence inflicted by intimate partner are also wide spread. It is estimated that one in three women is subject to some type of violence inflicted by partner over their life time.

Violence against women is a technical term used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. Similar to a hate crime, this type of violence targets a specific group with the victim’s gender as primary motive. The United Nation General assembly defines violence against women “as any act of gender-biased violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical sexual or mental harm or suffering to a women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or in private life”.

1993 declaration on the elimination of violence against women noted that this violence perpetrated by assailants of either gender, family member or even the state itself\(^{(1)}\).

### Violence Inflicted upon Women

**Female Infanticide:**

There is a mal practice being followed in the patriarchal society. To ensure the birth of only male in the male-dominated society, the men who ruled after Prophet Muhammad have chosen to follow the tradition of Dark Ages (Female infanticide) rather than to follow Muhammad’s words….

“Prophet Muhammad scorned the practice of infanticide, common practice in his day of ridding the family of unwanted females. He in his very words ring with his concern at the possibility of abuse and indifference towards females; whoever hath a daughter and doth not bury her alive, or scold her, prefer his male children, to her, may God bring him into paradise.” \(^{(2)}\)

In this context of female infanticide, Tehmina Durrani in her novel, My Feudal Lord writes:

“However, when my mother became pregnant, the convent nuns who looked after her told her that it was believed that the family practiced infanticide—the Nawab had no living female offspring, which was in those days, not uncommon among remote tribes. My mother left for Lahore to give birth at her own family home this was quite normal—the wife stayed away from her husband for forty days so that she could be well cared for and healthy enough to return to him.” \(^{(3)}\)

**Origin of Domestic violence**

Domestic violence refers to the physical and sexual assault in the home within the family or an intimate relationship. It also refers to intimate partner violence, marital rape, assault and battery and sexual abuse of children in the household; worldwide 40-70% of all female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner. Patriarchal structures and related misinterpretation of religion also favour violence against women.

Tehmina Durrani, in her novel My Feudal Lord very aptly, realistically and graphically explores the life of women in Muslim culture where religious doctrines are used to circumscribe, exploit and oppress them. In patriarchal society, false and rigid interpretation of holy Quran renders women as subordinate and inferior to men. As the Quran states:

“Men are in charge of women, because Allah had made the one of them to excel the other and because they spend of their property (for support of women). So good women are obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As for these (women) which ye rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart and scourge (beat) them. Then if they obey you seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is the ever high exalted, great.” \(^{(4)}\)

Considering the nature of these laws, it becomes apparent that the Quranic clause “men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made one them to excel the other” has been interpreted under the Sharia as Men having divinely sanctioned authority over women and thus the power of liberty to subjugate them as right of men as per the measures of Men and Religiosity. Tehmina Durrani aptly writes in this context:
“Mustafa, let suggestions pass, in the Feudal moral scheme, Islamic law allow man to kill his unfaithful wife in a fit of passion, but does not allow for premeditated vengeance. So he simply divorced Safia and banished his offending younger brother to Britain.” (My Feudal Lord, p. 51-52)

In the beginning of the novel, My Feudal Lord, Tehmina has made it clear how Feudal Lords have utilized Islam as a tool to subjugate women flock:

“In the areas that were later to become Pakistan, some feudal families utilized Islam as a weapon of control. The patriarchs were venerated as holy men who spoke with Allah. And, indeed at some earlier time many were pious and righteous. But gradually power passed to elder sons who were neither pious nor particularly moral, yet were revered by illiterate people of the area and perceived as ‘envoys of Allah’. They had the authority to justify their every deed on the basis of their own, quite convenient, interpretation of the Quran. A feudal Lord was an absolute ruler who could justify any action.” (My Feudal Lord, p.39-40)

Tehmina goes to the extent to say that Khar did not hesitate to break any law of Islam if his sexual drive so urged him. In addition to adultery, he also carried out borderline incest (sex with his wife's sister, which is forbidden in the Qur'an). At the general level of the masses, Pakistan is a puritanical society, where a man has to be careful to flirt with a woman. In many areas of Pakistan, such flirtation could have fatal results. But Khar, as a representative of the elites, could violate Islam with impunity.

Other causes for Battering Women

The other causes for battering a woman also include neglecting children, going out without informing the partner, not cooking properly or at time. As in my feudal lord ther author goes to extent of saying that his, (Mustafa) is thrashing to her and Dia Aeshya (The servant) was too brutal for delaying in prepration for our dinner as Mustafa played the role of the great chef. No error was allowed and the simplest omission brought his hand to her face or his foot to her buttocks.

One more cause of wife battering is her going out without her husband (Mahram). Once she goes away for the operation without her husband who was in prison at that time. This was considered a big lapse on her part for punishment. The common public image of the battering husband is of a working class male; but male violence crosses all class boundaries and has no association with poverty or lack of education. As wife battering is conceived from the public eye , it is difficult to estimate its extent in society.

Marital Violence against Women

Violence against women in the context of marriage becomes more significant when husband who is supposed to love and protect his wife resorts to beating and battering. For a woman being battered by a man, whom she trusted most, becomes a shattering experience for her. The violence can range from slaps to breaking bones, torture and attempting murder or even murder itself.

In My Feudal Lord, Tehmina Durrani, the author representing other women as well faces such violence including habit of bearing vile and disgusting language from her husband. The author, in part two of the novel, presents a scene of physical violence perpetrated by her husband that he hits his wife’s (Tehmina’s) face cutting her lips raising black and blue blotches on her cheeks, clutched her and pulled her from the bed. He threw her to the floor, kicking her even as she fell, crashed her forehead against the corner of the bed side of the table and she screamed in horror as blood gushed into her eyes.
Even in her ill health, her feudal lord did not spare her rather she was made to have sex. Tehmina narrates this incident in lurid colours:

“He wanted to make love. The stitches were still tender. I pleaded that I was not well and would need another six weeks to heal, but he didn’t care----He forced himself upon me. The pain was worse than I had feared, and the humiliation was even more excruciating. Yet I suffered silently.” (My Feudal Lord, p. 227)

This shows the male mentality towards female partner who is left without any grain of consideration for her ill health. Rather he attacks her and proves that there is an animal in him to break his wife both physically and psychologically.

Narcissistic Masochism in Conjugal Relations

The most blatant form of violence is portrayed at another episode when Tehmina, the author is stripped bare and naked by her husband, Mustafa. The author gives vent to her silent cries of life here:

“I was barely able to rise, but I did as he ordered.

‘Take off your clothes,’ he shouted. Every stitch. Take…them…off.’ I trembled, clutching at the cloth of my baggy shirt, and when he saw that I could not respond he grabbed one arm and twisted it behind my back until I shrieked in pain and screamed that I would obey. He backed off and sat in an arm chair. He watched as I slowly began to remove my shirt.

Again I was aware of the emptiness of the room, but this time it looked unsafe. There was no place to hide, nothing to which I could cling. I slipped out of my trousers. Clad only in a bra and panties, I stared at him pleading, begging, and crying for him to allow me to stop. But there was no reprieve. I felt blood drying on my swollen lips and nose. With trembling clothes I pulled off my underclothes.

He sat on the chair with his arms extended on other side, like a king on his throne. His eyes ran up and down my naked body, invading. His expression was grim his lips tightly pursed. His eyes narrowed, searching, glinting, and gloating.

Never before had I felt so totally humiliated, so utterly controlled. I could see on his face the awareness of the importance of this moment. This episode would cripple my spirit-perhaps beyond salvation. From this moment forward, it could be nearly impossible for me to function as an individual. There was not an iota of self esteem left. The shame had burned it down to ashes. I was exposed as nothing.

Please Mustafa I cried, ‘for the sake of prophet, let me wear my clothes” (My Feudal Lord, p. 164-65)

The entire scene speaks in volume the heinous thinking of her husband as she gives the minor details of the episode. Here he tries to cripple the feeling of the self-esteem in the wife, his own partner and none else. The author portrays the narcissistic masochism in the Male dominated society.
Strict Discipline for Women

Women/girls are kept barricaded in a strict discipline and force. They are segregated from social, religious and cultural life in the books of Tehmina, be it her ‘Blasphemy’ or his autobiographical novel, ‘My Feudal Lord’ women are not permitted to meet and talk to the men other than their family members. In the context of woman’s behavior, V. Geetha writes, “----men wanting to be like women, or women wanting to do all that men do, are seldom tolerated, especially if they presume their desire and interest in every day terms.” (5)

About strictness, rigidity and discipline for women, Tehmina Durrani writes very clearly and describes all in detail:

“Apart from my father, brother and a few close relatives, the Men were alien creatures, and from my earliest moments I was trained to avoid them. My childhood was encumbered to a lengthy list of don’ts, all designed to maintain an inviolate distance between myself and the masculine world: near wear make-up or nail polish. Do not look at boys. Avoid modern girlfriends and avoid any girl who has an older brother. Never visit a friend without a special permission and without your Nany. Never pick up the telephone. Never go alone with driver. Never stand around in the kitchen with the male servant. 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. Mother had an ideal man in mind for each of us. Our husbands were to be the only males to whom we would be ever exposed. Not surprisingly, they would exhibit a combination of eastern and western traits.” (My Feudal Lord, p.28-29)

The woman as per Tehmina Durrani is kept quite slaved in golden chains and she is totally cut off from the society and its happening. As such women are suppressed to develop mentally, socially and spiritually. Her mind becomes the sanctuary of secret thoughts of escaping such a house hold where she can’t even sigh on her own will.

REFERENCES:

   Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and page numbers are Indicated in parentheses.
4. The Holy Quran: Sura Alnisa-4:34.