

**International Journal of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities (IJASSSH)**

<https://ijasssh.com/index.php/1>

ISSN Print: [3106-9118](#)

ISSN Online: [3106-9126](#)

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

---

***Asculinity, Authority, and Women's Resistance in My Feudal Lord***

**Wasim Akram**

Department of English Language and Literature The University of Lahore

[wasim.akram@gmail.com](mailto:wasim.akram@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

*This paper is a deconstructive examination of Tehmina Durrani and her autobiographical novel My Feudal Lord and how it criticizes the society of patriarchy, power dynamics, and rifts and contradictions inherent in feudal culture. Using the principles of deconstruction as developed by Derrida, the study examines how the story subverts certain wholesome meanings of gender, power, and victimization. The story by Durrani reveals the oppressive constructs of the feudal society and shows the hypocrisy of love, loyalty, violence and freedom of choice within the abusive relationship. In the study, it is noted that the text weakens the conventional signs of masculinity and authority as the fragmented identity of the narrator, who is subjected to emotional, social, and political limitations is preempted. The analysis, through its analysis of binary oppositions, including power/submission and public/private, shows how the autobiography proves the dominant discourses and provides space to allow other readings of the female agency. This contribution is one of the main points that this work brings to the feminist and poststructuralist studies of literature.*

**Keywords;** *Deconstruction, Patriarchy and Power, Autobiographical Narrative, Female Agency, Tehmina Durrani's My Feudal Lord*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Tehmina Durrani, a Pakistani writer, an artist, a human rights activist, was born on 18 February 1953 in an educated and influential family. She is the daughter of a former governor of State Bank of Pakistan and Managing Director of Pakistan International Airlines – Shahkur Ullah Durrani. Her mother Samina Durrani, was the daughter of a Nawab – Sir Liaquat Hayat Khan, the prime minister of former princely state of Patiala. She married three times. At seventeen she married Anees Khan. They had one daughter Taniya, and were divorced in 1976. She later married Ghulam Mustafa Khar, a former chief minister and governor of Punjab. Khar, who married five times, and Tehmina Durani had four children. After being abused by Khar for several years, she ended her marriage of fourteen years in divorce. In 2003, Durrani married thrice-elected Chief Minister of Punjab Mian Shehbaz Sharif. Durrani resides in Lahore with her husband, who is currently the Prime Minister of Pakistan and a part of the politically prominent Sharif family. In 2015, she founded a foundation named 'Tehmina Durrani Foundation, and continued its official activities till 2017. Once Tehmina Durrani said she continues the mission of Abdul Sattar Edhi, with whom she had worked for a few years. Tehmina Durrani is author of some books including "My Feudal Lord (1991)", "A Mirror to Blind (1996)", "Blasphemy (1998)" and "Happy Things in Sorrow Times (2013)".*

*When Tehmina Durrani's My Feudal Lord was first published in 1991, it caused a stir across the world, particularly South Asia. It is because; the novel is autobiographical in nature in which she covers her life particularly the time she spends with feudal lord Mustafa Khar. The novel, not only brings forward the brutality of domestic abuse within elite political circles, but it also breaks through deeply ingrained cultural taboos regarding female silence. On the surface level, the story which Durrani tells is personal sufferings and eventual escape. It recounts her marriage to Ghulam Mustafa Khar, a prominent political figure, whose charm and power hide his violent and controlling nature. But as we move through the pages, it becomes clear that this is not just a tale of private abuse. It is also a broader commentary on how power corrupts—how it infects intimate relationships, distorts love, and turns loyalty into a weapon. In this way, the novel operates at multiple levels: personal, political, and cultural.*

*So this became one of the reasons that the novel struck the chords in all quarters of the world irrespective of the country of her origin or other than that. Her novel has the honor to be translated into almost forty languages and it has been considered as sensational European bestseller. As the novel has features of fighting against the perceived patriarchy, so it was embraced by a huge number of feminist activists and scholars globally. They*

considered her novel as a turning point in feminist fictional arena of Pakistan which expounds the traumatic conditions of females and also, they welcomed Durrani as a real women rights' novelist. It portrays the themes of double standard of our society to women, manipulation, domestic violence against women, concept of feudalism, love of mother, materialistic approach and sensuousness, greed and class system.

Critics and scholars have over the years discussed the book in many different ways, including the feminist theory, postcolonial criticism, psychoanalysis, and even journalistic ethics. Much of this has been a useful body of knowledge. It has assisted us to comprehend how bold Durrani was in her trauma narration, how the social and political institutions supported her depiction, and how her narration challenged gender and power in Pakistan. Nevertheless, such interpretations are usually based on predetermined meanings and continuous readings. They are more inclined to construct the text as a definite protest against patriarchy or a direct survival and victimization story. However, there is more to it than that in the novel.

The story of the conflict between good and evil is obscured by a plethora of contradictions and internal oppositions that the viewer can only trace under the surface of its seemingly linear plot. As an example, Durrani rebels against her husband, although she also admits that she is drawn to his authority, power and status. She wants to be free but she keeps on going back to the same projects that master her. Her emotionally charged narration tends to shift its tone quite frequently: at times, helpless, at times, on the defensive, at times, even idealizing the same relationship she is judging. It is here that deconstruction will prove very helpful.

The term "deconstruction" is related to the French word "deconstruire" which in English connotes "to undo the improvement of or the development of, to take to pieces." (R. Gnanasekaran, 2015). In philosophy, however, the word "deconstruction" was coined by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) in the late 1960s as a response to the idea of "destructive" analysis rendered by the German word 'destruktion' of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), which literally means "destruction" or "de-building". Thus, the word "deconstruction" is genealogically linked to Heidegger. Instead of applying Heidegger's term of destruktion (destruction) to textual readings, Derrida opted for the term "deconstruction". Since then, the word "deconstruction" has entered the philosophical, literary, and political vocabulary, though it existed before, at least in grammatical and architectural jargon. (Cf. Juliana Neuenschwander, et al., 2017).

There are challenges in defining the theory of deconstruction, because Derrida himself who is its originator has never given an authoritative definition of it. As he says,

“Deconstruction does not exist somewhere, pure, proper, self-identical, outside of its inscriptions in conflicted and differentiated contexts; it is only what it does and what is done with it, there where it takes place. It is difficult today to give a univocal definition or an adequate description of this taking place”. (Jacques Derrida, 1988)

In Derrida’s view, deconstruction is neither a philosophy, nor a doctrine, nor a method, nor a discipline, but “if it happens, it happens” (*ce qui arrive si ça arrive*). As he explains the word ‘deconstruction’;

“Deconstruction is not simply the decomposition of an architectural structure; it is also a question about the foundation, about the relation between foundation and what is founded; it is also a question about the closure of the structure, about a whole architecture of philosophy”. (Derrida, 1988)

For Derrida again, there is no single deconstruction, but rather there are deconstructions in plural. Deconstruction is something heterogeneous. Each use of deconstruction cannot be taken under an existing definition of deconstruction. But

“...deconstruction is rearticulated each time it is used; it is through its particular uses, and it can always be put to new uses, so what it is, is never stable. We should think of deconstruction in terms of re-articulation”. (Derrida, 1996)

Generally speaking, deconstruction is as a response and reaction against some important 20th century philosophical movements, among which the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure is prominent one. Derrida himself frequently asserts that deconstruction is not a method, but a philosophical theoretical analysis, a critical outlook concerned with **the relationship between text and meaning**. In other words, it is an activity of reading and interpreting literary texts. It is a mode of criticism and analytical inquiry that “denotes the pursuing of the meaning of a text to the point of exposing the supposed contradictions and internal oppositions upon which it is founded—supposedly showing that those foundations are irreducibly complex, unstable, or impossible.” ([Hobson Marian](#) 2012)

In the light of above statement that is provided by Hobson Mariam, it could be said that deconstruction is a method of analysis that seeks to uncover the multiple layers of meaning in a text and highlights the contradictions upon which the text is founded. It challenges the traditional idea that texts have a fixed, singular meaning determined by the author or context. If we divide the statement into parts, it will help us to overcome the confusions related to the statement.

**a. Pursuit of Meaning of a Text to Expose Contradictions:** One of the components of deconstruction is the idea that meaning of a text is not absolute or fixed. Rather, meaning is often constructed through contradiction, ambiguity, and instability. In other words, close reading and examining a text can uncover the ideas or concepts that may disagree with other ideas or concepts in other part of the text.

In *My Feudal Lord*, one of the clearest contradictions lies in the character, Tehmina Durrani. On one hand, she portrays herself as a victim of a patriarchal and abusive marriage. She narrates the physical, emotional, and psychological violence she suffered under Ghulam Mustafa Khar—depicting him as tyrannical, manipulative, and of controlling nature. However, this narrative becomes unstable by her own acceptance that she was attracted to Khar not only because of his status, but also because of her attraction to “authoritarian, conservative and overpowering” nature. Moreover, she leaves Anees Khan, described in the text as a kind and gentle man, for Khar, whose dominance and larger-than-life persona influence over her. It appears to be a self-contradictory decision: Durrani wants to feel safe and satisfied, and she agrees to get involved in the relationship that turns out to be the place of her greatest pain. In the same way, her description of her role, Mustafa Khar is a contradiction. He is explained in the most horrible way as brutal, humiliating, and arrogant. But at other instances, Durrani also remembers that he is vulnerable i.e. when he begs her to forgive him, when he demonstrates his love to their children, or when he looks sorry and guilty after punching her. These humanly attitudes shake the visual of Khar, in order to think about him as a mere villain. The tension of condemning and compassioning generates a story that challenges the reader to sit down and be unclear. This is the arena in which deconstruction works, showing that there is no ultimate meaning that is ever determined.

**b. Pursuit of Meaning of a Text to Reveal inner oppositions:** Internal oppositions in a given text occur when the text propagates two apparent opposing ideas or states that are hard to admit when they coexist in the same time. Tehmina Durrani in the novel molds her life as a struggle to freedom i.e. a brave act of resistance against mistreatment. She resolves to write the book, quits her marriage and tells her story to the world appears to make her an empowered woman who has broken the shackles of the oppressive systems. Nevertheless, on a more thorough reading, this quest to liberation is confused with a renewed dependency- emotional, social and even financial. Durrani is still emotionally scared, desiring, and psychologically attached to Khar. She tends to experience the sense of loneliness, fear of being rejected by society, and anxiety of raising her children without the social status even when she leaves him. These emotional attachments indicate that there are certain

forms of invisible chains which keep her despite the fact that she is physically separated with the abuser, Khar. This shows that freedom in her context is not complete but conditional as associated with internal struggle and confusion. Likewise, the most evident internal resistance is the act of writing a book and writing about her life. Through this, Durrani is in charge of her narrative i.e. she turns her silence into speech, and oppression into authorship. But at the same time, this act reveals a paradox: even though she demonstrates to be powerless in the marriage, she created a tremendous power by influencing the impressions of the masses through the writing of her life. This writing and documenting about her life is thus a means of power. Therefore, the text itself undercuts itself: the powerless gets powerful, the silenced turns into a speaker, and the victim is the one shaping the public discourse.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

*My Feudal Lord* is considered one of the most important literary works in Pakistani literature. Many researchers have applied many theories on the novel. Similarly, many critics have provided their feedbacks and reviews on the novel. Some of them are following;

The article of Somya Joshi (2024) explores the shades and forms of feminist resistance portrayed in Tehmina Durrani's autobiographical novel *My Feudal Lord*. The article argues that it is not only narrative details of extreme forms of patriarchal violence, for instance, physical, emotional and social, but also a story of resistance that comes forth powerfully within an oppressive system. Her study shapes Durrani's work as a multi-layered expression of defiance. Her refusal to incorporate societal norms within herself, her pursuit of education, and her act of writing the book as a mean of presenting her own voice to the people not as an overt acts of rebellion but as personal yet political strategies of resistance. The article explores how initial romantic relationship of Tehmina Durrani with Mustafa Khar, a charismatic political figure, transforms into a prison of control, manipulation, and abuse. Joshi argues that this transformation reflects the dangers of love rooted in power imbalance, in which Khar has more control and dominance than Durrani. Similarly, the article also covers that the most radical act of Durrani is the choice to write and publish her story. She speaks out against a powerful man in a patriarchal society that resulted in Durrani's ostracization. However, her courage created a ripple effect that encourages other women to share their experiences. Joshi also touches on themes such as societal gaslighting, internalized misogyny, and the manipulation of public perception—all of which are used to suppress women's voices. The article further explores that the novel intersects the cultural expectations and structural violence. In the novel, sexual violence is addressed explicitly, with emphasis on the feeling of deep depression of

such trauma. However, the final escape and redefining Khar as “Tehmina Durrani’s ex-husband” signify the reclamation of her identity.

While exploring “Women’s Exploitation in the Feudal Society” Noor Akbar (2023) finds oppression on women as exposed in *My Feudal Lord* of Tehmina Durrani. The author of the article uses feminist theory of Kate Millett and also uses the method of textual analysis of Catherine Belsey. In his article, he adds that religion, politics, tribalism, and culture are patriarchal institutions, which collude to legitimize the subjugation of women and normalize male dominance. The article starts with illustrating that women are systematically conditioned into submission from an early age. To prove his arguments, he provides many examples on different occasions such as Durrani recalls, “They prohibited me to join any male company... I was kept aside even from female groups which seemed a bit fashionable” (p. 19). This was her mother who participates in this control. Furthermore, the criticism of the research shifts towards the feudal male figure, Mustafa Khar, who is described by Durrani as “a savage animal, jumping on me, dragging me by the hair, hitting me in my face” (p. 65). He manipulates women emotionally, physically, and sexually, treating them as disposable things: “Mustafa built relations with females and separated from them with the blinking of eyes” (p. 29). Equally, Durrani makes numerous efforts to flee but she is frustrated by the use of manipulative tools, including kidnapping of her children. The author concludes his article with the addition that the novel does not only lay bare the individual abuse but also criticizes institutions that are still perpetrating gender-based violence. His work demands a structural change in that, until patriarchal systems are harshly reevaluated, women will be confined to powerlessness circles.

Correspondingly, M. Ehsan, et al. (2015) uses feminist theory of Julia Kristeva and analyses violence of women in feudal societies emphasizing on the work of Tehmina Durrani *My Feudal Lord*. The article they write is on the exploration of the issues of sexual harassment and domestic violence as the novel depicts. Besides, the authors of the article believe that the work of Durrani is a strong narrative, which records the cruel realities many women experience, be it at home or in the broader social framework. Nevertheless, the focus of this analysis is the marriage of Tehmina Durrani to Ghulam Mustafa Khar. A detailed account of the life of Khar, a man whose life is glorified in the public life, becoming a symbol of personal tyranny is also there. He exercises his utmost efforts to regulate the life of Durrani, as well as employs the use of psychological, emotional, physical, and sexual violence to dominate the body. In the research, the attitude of Khar is not depicted as the actions of a person, but it is a manifestation of the overall social norms that validate the superiority of men over women.

*The article dwells on the feminist approach to Kristeva and how voices and bodies of women are mechanically suppressed by the patriarchal discourse. The writing and documentation of her life is depicted as a kind of radical voice and agency. Likewise, Durrani is also shown as a strong model of resistance since she is shown changing into an outspoken critic of feudal and religious hypocrisy where she used to be a subdued wife. In that way, the novel is not only the narration of the human being that can survive under severe circumstances, but also the reflection of the female experience in the male dominated cultures. The authors make the conclusion that the novel reveals the inner contradictions of the feudal masculinity and makes a significant contribution to the feminist discourse in South Asia including the discussion of gendered violence and the politics of silence.*

*In their article, S Salman and S H Rasool (2023) explore the narrative of Tehmina Durrani in *My Feudal Lord* and point out gender-based struggle between oppressive masculinity and suppressed femininity. They use feminist theories of Simone de Beauvoir, R.W. Connell, and Linda McDowell, and examine that traditional Pakistani society strengthens masculine authority and restricts female autonomy. They have the opinion that narrative of the novel can be read as a "critique of the prevalent system" that systematically marginalizes women (p. 119). The authors argue that Mustafa Khar represents hegemonic masculinity for instance, "muscular," "strong," "aggressive," and "in control", are attributes that can be used to dominate and diminish women (p. 116). On the contrary, Tehmina Durrani symbolizes feminine resistance. The transformation of Tehmina Durrani from a subjugated wife to an outspoken critic disturbs the tradition of male dominance and female silence. As she narrates in the book, "If you are Mr. Khar, I am Mrs. Khar... I will not let you get away with it" (p. 118). The article also emphasizes that many-a-times religion and culture are manipulated to justify control over women. For that purpose, they provide an example from the novel that Khar refers to the Quran to declare that "a woman was like a man's land... the Koran says so," reducing her to an object of utility and obedience. Durrani counters this interpretation with her own: "To me, land had to be tended and cultivated; only then could it produce in abundance" (p. 117). The authors conclude their analysis by describing the novel as a powerful text that questions the social construction of gender role and critiques the religious and cultural systems that sustain the oppression of women. Thus, the voice of Durrani rises from the confines of patriarchy makes space for the resistance of women.*

*While analyzing the silenced voices in Tehmina Durrani's novel *My Feudal Lord*, Ms. Aiman P. Attar and Dr. Rajaram S. Zirange (2023) describe a painful journey of Durrani from feminist point of view as a*



woman oppressed by societal, feudal, and familial pressures. The authors in the article argue that the novel is not only a personal story but also a commentary on the system that subjugates women in Pakistan. The study delves into the fact that the narrative of Tehmina Durrani is an account of a woman seeking her independence back once more following years of abuse, suppression, and dominance. The article starts with an introduction to the early life of Tehmina Durrani which is characterized by the discrimination of her own mother on the basis of dark tone of her. Her marriage to Mustafa Khar is not examined as an escape out of domestic constraint but an introduction into a new captivity. The authors put emphasis on the patriarchal and feudal mentality of Khar that oppresses women. Likewise, her physical, emotional, and psychological sufferings are equally captured in details together with some instances of child abuse, gaslighting, and religious control by her husband. What comes out strongly in the article is the defiance of Durrani who speaks out in front of people, declines to be referred to as the wife of Khar, and ultimately resolves to write and publish her autobiography. The authors also claim that Durrani, in her story, confronts the hypocrisy of religion and feudal establishments. The article ends by appreciating Durrani and her boldness in the breaking of her silence and as well as encouraging other women in defying the oppressive system. Her autobiography is not only regarded as the experience of personal liberation, but also as a figurative act of defiance against the system that feeds on the silence of women.

On the same note, the study paper titled *Feminism and Tribalism at Crossroads* reveals that women are oppressed in patriarchal and tribal systems of Pakistan (Shazir Hassan et al., 2021). The work views *My Feudal Lord* as a personal word as well as a general commentary on feudal society in Southern Punjab whereby the identity of a woman is constructed, determined, and repressed by the demands of the family and cultural values. The authors say that the boldness of Durrani to write the novel made her the key figure of change and in particular, when she writes: *Well Mustafa, now the world will soon know you just as Tehmina Durrani ex* (p.110), she makes the point. This is another sign of her opposition to the feudal silencing tradition and reestablishing narrative control. Besides, the study points out that women are also taught at an early age to be obedient. The fact that even an act of silent resistance is punished is reflected in Durrani when she says, *My crime was that I did not look obedient* (p.113). It is also a critique of the grip of tribalism on the norms in the society and their lives are controlled not by laws but the strength of the male honor. As Feudal men such as Khar, the men are above law and all authorities (p.116). The humiliating experiences of the novel like mass humiliation, compelled loyalty and use of children as hostages exposes the fact that

oppression was institutionalized. Finally, the authors of the research article come to the conclusion that the novel is not a simple autobiography, but a powerful protest against the social order that discourages the female autonomy. The voice of Durrani is a place of struggle with a system where feudalism is a license to rape, plunder and even murder and thus makes her story an immediate, radical change.

Atiq Ur Rehman (2021) in his article, applies Sigmund Freud's structural theory of personality i.e. about Id, Ego, and Superego, and analyzes the psychological conflicts of Tehmina Durrani, the protagonist of her autobiographical novel *My Feudal Lord*. The study argues that decisions made by Durrani are primarily governed by her Id, which results in a personality marked by emotionally unstable, impulsive, and morally confused. The author observes that early love of Durrani for Anees Khan is driven by irrational passion. That is why when her family warn her, she insists, "I, except Anees, would marry none, without your say in the matter" (Durrani, 1991), and regrets her decision days before the wedding. Similarly, her materialistic and emotional desires shape her later obsession with Mustafa Khar: "I was prevailed over by thought of my nuptial bonding with Mustafa and I was assured of break up with Anees" (Durrani, 1991). Even when Sherry warns her, she dismisses her as weak: "I considered Mustafa's grace and charisma too much for Sherry... and saw this as her failure" (Durrani, 1991). The author argues that her rational mediator, Ego, is largely absent, and her Superego, although occasionally active, but it is too weak to oppose her desires. For instance, when she temporarily thinks about honor of her family, she says, "I became weak by considering all the social consequences... my parents, my brother, unmarried sisters..." (Durrani, 1991). But, her Id ignores these concerns. The author of the article concludes that Durrani is a "self-indulgent, indecisive, obstinate, rebellious, immoral, and confused lady" whose psyche is ruled by the pleasure principle, Id. Her actions such as marrying impulsively, betraying partners, and writing about her life as revenge, are all symptoms of Id-driven choices.

Besides, Rajpal Kaur (2016) critically examines that *My Feudal Lord* provides a voice to women who have been silenced by patriarchal, feudal, and social systems in Pakistan. The study explores the novel as a powerful narrative that appears "from the margins" to question dominant ideologies that justify the subjugation of women. In the argument, the author states that social conditioning is a major cause of subjugation of women. Durrani has written, *My mother insisted on complete obedience... I did; however, it was my fault that I was not seen obedient* (p. 24). It refers to the fact that she is conditioned to submission since her childhood. This suppressive oppression is part of the internalization such that this is supported in a

marriage with Khar who is told, *Never--never--Disobey me! Whatever I order you to do you must do it* (p. 95). The feudal ideology recognizes women as a commodity according to the article. Durrani reminds, *A woman was as much a land of a man- sayeth the Koran- do so, said he* (p. 107) is an indication of the fact that religious literature is misapplied to legitimize the notion of male dominance. There is also excessive physical violence in the novel, where Khar threw me on a wall... another time, and another time, and another time (p. 103) which indicates the brutality that is silently endured by a woman. The author of the article takes into consideration the act of writing as a defiance by Durrani. It takes back the territory of the marginalized voices and challenges the taboos of the society: *Well I am a woman, so I naturally write about a feminine point of view, my work is about the breaking of silence of a part of society that cannot speak up* (qtd. in Srivastava, p. 157). The author recounts the article by viewing the novel as a form of personal resistance and a political protest against the systems that marginalize women. It is also a critique of feudal masculinity and reestablishes the contours of female voice and agency in the South Asian literature.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research is qualitative in nature that is grounded specifically in the framework of deconstruction theory. It does not aim to generalize findings across a broader population, as in quantitative research, but instead to perform an in-depth, contextually grounded examination of a single, complex autobiographical narrative. This approach is suitable for literary criticism, where the goal is to interpret rather than to measure. This research depends on secondary data source to conduct the analysis of the novel i.e. *My Feudal Lord*. The data consists of the textual content of the novel itself, which serves as the central subject of the research. As far as data analysis technique is concerned, the researcher chooses **close textual analysis through which the researcher examines narrative events, character portrayals, dialogues, themes and motifs** to reveal contradictory ideas and binary oppositions (from now onward internal oppositions as Hobsan Mariam said) which result into instability of meaning.

#### 2. DISCUSSION

While analyzing the narrative of the novel with a deconstructive lens, one can easily reveal contradiction and internal opposition in the dedication of the novel, *My Feudal Lord*. The novel is structured as a courageous act of exposing deeply established patriarchal and political injustices, the dedication reads, *“Four special people helped me through the nearly impossible task of writing this book..... I cannot take the responsibility of naming them, but I am indebted to them all.”* This anonymity questions

the consistency of her bold voice. Durrani names the powerful figures that oppressed her; however, she chooses to conceal the identities of those who supported her. This decision presents an internal opposition between public exposure and private protection. On one hand, the novel is considered as a radical break from silence, with a purpose to break up the taboos of female suffering and subjugation, but, on the other, it maintains silence under the guise of respect or safety for her supporters. This creates a kind of contradiction in her storytelling, an act of fear/care within a text defined by fearlessness.

There is one of the most significant contradictions rooted in emotional choice of Durrani's marriage. Despite being deeply in love with her first husband, Anees Khan, whom she had long wished to marry, she ultimately divorces him and chooses to marry Mustafa Khar, a man whom she clearly describes as authoritarian, conservative and overpowering. Durrani writes, "Mustafa was authoritarian, conservative and overpowering I knew from the start—but that was precisely what attracted me so much" (Durrani, 1995, p. 39). This confession reflects a contradiction where the said traits, she later condemns as oppressive, were initially the source of attraction. Moreover, Durrani shows a clear awareness about the traditions of feudal system, and states, "According to feudal tradition, a wife was honour-bound to live her life according to her husband" (Durrani, 1995, p. 107). Even with such knowledge, she willingly steps into the role of a feudal wife. This contradiction reveals a deeper internal opposition between her desire for "powerful and charismatic" person and her later realization of his "controlling" nature. The qualities she initially attracted towards such as dominance, power, and authority become reasons for her destruction and sufferings.

Similarly, Tehmina Durrani claims that Mustafa Khar tried to impress her, but her actions suggest the opposite, so there is also a contradiction between her words and behavior. She writes, "I was flattered when Mustafa noticed, and upset when he did not" (Durrani, 1995, p. 65), this statement clearly shows her emotional dependency on him. She appears to be constantly seeking his approval and attention; rather, being the one in control or being pursued. This contradicts the claim that it was Mustafa who tried to win over her heart. The emotional reaction she described shows that she was more interested in gaining his attention than she admits.

Moreover, in some other part Durrani admits that she lost faith in her husband, Anees. She writes, "I had no faith in his abilities and little respect for his intellect," (Durrani, 1995, p.33). This is because she feels that he is too weak to stand up to her mother. Actually, she had a distant and controlling relationship with her mother, who dominates the

household and makes all decisions. Durrani writes, "When my mother spoke, it was a command, and we were to carry out orders in silence" (Durrani, 1995, p. 25). Her mother's cold and dismissive attitude affected Durrani's emotions. During this emotional turmoil, she began seeking validation and support from Mustafa Khar, a powerful and controlling person. Later on, she claims that "Mustafa seemed always to be trying to impress me," (Durrani, 1995, p.34) but her own words reveal the opposite. She is the one trying to get his attention by changing her clothes and behavior, feeling nervous and guilty when he does not respond. She even writes, "I began to imagine that Anees would be far more suited to a woman like Sherry, and that the chemistry that Mustafa and I could combine would be unstoppable" (Durrani, 1995, p.33). This clearly shows that she is in pursuit of Mustafa. The contradiction lies in Durrani's claim that Mustafa tried to impress her, while in reality, her actions and emotions show that she was seeking his approval.

While exploring the novel through a deconstructive lens, there found a clear-cut contradiction in Durrani's claim of staying in her abusive marriage with Mustafa Khar for the sake of her children. She writes, "I had to keep my marriage together for the sake of my children and myself. I had invested too much pain and compromise in this relationship..." (Durrani, 1995, p. 140). These lines reflect that her motherhood and emotional investment were strong reasons to tolerate sufferings. However, earlier in the novel, she willingly divorced her first husband, Anees, who is described as a "good-natured and innocent" (Durrani, 1995, p. 37). Moreover, she also left her daughter, Tanya with her husband, Anees, and willingly married Khar in a complete secrecy. She states in her novel, "I left Tanya with Anees, promising to return for her in three days, and flew to Lahore. Mustafa and I travelled to his home village of Kot Addu. On 25 July 1976, in complete secrecy, we were married by a trusted mullah". (Durrani, 1995, p.140). This contradiction reveals an internal opposition in Durrani's self-image i.e. whether she is selfless or selfish: while she presents herself as a mother who sacrifices her personal desires for her children, her past actions and choices reflect a wish to leave her husband and her child when driven by personal desires.

Similarly, by using deconstructive lens on the same novel, one can find a strong contradiction that emerges in Mustafa Khar's character, particularly between his religious practices and his violent behavior. On the surface, he appears to be a devout Muslim who observes religious values with seriousness like fasting during the month of Ramadan. However, his actions reveal a stark contrast. Durrani in her novel recounts an incident happened in Ramadan: "The servant was five minutes late laying the food for iftaari, the sunset meal that breaks the day's fast during the holy month

of Ramadan. When he finally arrived, a hungry Mustafa exploded. In the presence of his mother, who lived with us, he thrashed the poor man until he was barely conscious" (Durrani, 1995, p. 59). This moment exposes a deep internal opposition of his outward piety and his inner cruelty. Ramadan teaches self-discipline, mercy, sympathy with poor, and above all patience, but his reaction reflects none of these values. Instead, it shows that he observes religious values to show himself a religious man to the people, while his inner self is governed by aggression, cruelty and impatience. The contradiction lies between the spiritual purpose of fasting and the violent action against the poor man reveals the hypocrisy in Mustafa Khar's character.

Besides this, there is another contradiction in Mustafa Khar's character that emerges by taking into consideration his expression of love and his act of violence. When he was imprisoned in jail, he wrote some letters which were deeply emotional and affectionate. Durrani writes about those letters that "His letters were embellished with romance as he explained his unreasonable attitude of possessiveness and insecurity by saying, 'All the great legends of love end in tragedy... Without you I cannot achieve anything,' he declared. 'I feel that I can achieve anything when you are at my side. I can take the greatest of risks. I would gladly die today, if I knew that you would remain committed to me'" (Durrani, 1995, p. 199). These romantic words reflect deep kind of emotions and admirations. However, this tenderness stands in direct opposition to his abusive behavior, as she recalls, "There was not a day that Mustafa did not hit me for some reason: the food was late, his clothes were creased." (Durrani, 1995, p. 62). This contradiction reveals an internal opposition in Mustafa's personality: his emotional letters of love are neutralized by his act of violence and oppressive attitude towards his wife. The man who claims that he cannot live or succeed without his wife is the same man who beats her and daily harm upon her.

In the novel, one can easily find that Mustafa Khar's proclaimed identity is clearly contradicted to his actual political motives. At first, he is shown as a visionary leader who has devoted his life to social justice, as written as, "He was pro-Russian, anti-military, anti-feudal, anti-industrialist and anti-bureaucratic corruption" (Durrani, 1995, p. 199), but at the other part of the novel, a very different side of Khar is exposed. Durrani in her novel writes, "I advised him to address the pertinent issues of the times, to pinpoint the defects in the political structure... Mustafa was not interested in being the conscience of the nation: all he wanted was power" (Durrani, 1995, p. 221). This highlights a basic internal opposition in his political character of Mustafa Khar; his public image depends upon ideological

commitment and socialist values, but his private ambitions reveal that he is ready to sacrifice those values in pursuit of power and authority.

Again a powerful contradiction reveals in the narrative of the novel when Durrani portrayed Khar's character through his dual role as an abuser and as a man who pleads for forgiveness. Durrani frequently describes him as a violent person; she says, "He threw me down on to the bed and jumped on me... Like lightning, he leaped off me... He threw me against wall, picked me up and threw me against another one- again, and again, and again. I no longer knew what was happening. Something burst in my ears. I felt an agonizing pain in my eyes. Something split. Something swelled. Then the pain merged into one deep, enthralling sense of agony" (Durrani, 1995, p. 60). Yet, in stark contrast to this portrayal of power, Khar also pleads for forgiveness. Tehmina narrates, "He fell at my feet and wept. 'I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!' he wailed. 'What have I done to you?' He begged forgiveness." (Durrani, 1995, p. 60). This description of Khar by the narrator sharply contradicts the dominant narrative about him as a violent and a powerful feudal lord. The contradiction lies in the question: how can a man who is so obsessed with power and control lower himself to such vulnerability? If Khar truly represents the patriarchal order, as Durrani frames him, then his plea for forgiveness disrupts that very image.

Additionally, Durrani often portrays herself as a submissive woman, constantly oppressed by people around her. However, several of her choices strongly contradict with her participation and active role in shaping her life. When the novel begins, she insists on marrying Anees though her family had strong opposition. She recalls, "I told my mother that, if I could not marry Anees, I would marry no one" (Durrani, 1995, p. 12). This moment shows assertiveness rather submissiveness and resistance to authority, not passivity. Later on, she chooses to divorce Anees, whom she describes as gentle and good-natured, without being forced by others. She writes, "I decided that putting him (Anees) out of his misery was the only way to quash my own. I confessed everything, and asked for a divorce" (Durrani, 1995, p. 45). Moreover, she leaves her daughter, Tanya, and secretly marries Mustafa Khar, with her own free will, although she is warned about him by his ex-wife, that he is a controlling and an abusive man. She admits, "I left Tanya with Anees... Mustafa and I travelled to his home village of Kot Addu. On 25 July 1976, in complete secrecy, we were married by a trusted mullah" (Durrani, 1995, p. 50). In addition, she decides to write and publish about her personal life that acts as a bold act of agency. These decisions show that Durrani was not simply a passive victim rather she was actively involved in shaping her life. So their lies contradiction between her characterization and actual decisions which reveals an internal opposition in the narrative: on one side she is shown as

*submissive woman while on the side she is an empowered agent who shapes her own life.*

*Similarly, the novel presents a powerful critique of the patriarchal and feudal structures in Pakistani society. The very title of the novel refers to Mustafa Khar, a political and feudal figure, who is the embodiment of the said systems and exerts total control over women's lives. Durrani in her novel exposes that her marriage-life was destroyed due to oppressive nature of patriarchy and feudalism. Keeping this perspective in mind, the book looks a call for women's empowerment and resistance against traditional power systems. However, an internal contradiction arises when Durrani describes her maternal home. It was not her father, but her mother who dominated the household. Durrani states in her novel, "It had been difficult to watch this powerful government official (her father) submit to constant nagging. Sometimes, at night, I would hear my parents argue behind closed doors; she always sounded aggressive and he always sounded apologetic" (Durrani, 1995, p. 219). In addition, she admits, "When my mother spoke, it was a command, and we were to carry out orders in silence" (Durrani, 1995, p. 25). So, these statements clearly imply that her father was a passive and a suppressed figure while her mother was dominant and powerful. Moreover, it was her mother who contributed to her sufferings during childhood. This contradictory idea clearly stands in opposition to the general critique of the novel i.e. male-driven oppression. This internal opposition complexes the feminist message of the book: while it advocates for women's liberation, it also acknowledges that power, regardless of gender, can become destructive. Thus, the text reveals that the binary of man as oppressor and woman as victim, shows that domination is a systemic issue, not solely a gendered one.*

### **3. CONCLUSION**

4. *The discussion has given a deconstructive analysis of My Feudal Lord and concentrated the contradiction, inner contradiction and changing narrative positions that are observable in the autobiographical text of Tehmina Durrani. It has shown that the story cannot be interpreted using predetermined and exclusive interpretive systems. One of the greatest discoveries made is that the face of the main character is not that of what could be considered stable and singular. Durrani shifts between two contrary positions of submissive wife and rebellious narrator, emotionally dependent partner and representation of freedom/independent woman. This constant alternation upsets the reasoning of the story. Thus, the plot of the novel is not letting the reader easily describe the main character as either completely passive or completely empowered. She is a character who was formed by complicity and resistance and was*



influenced as much by silence as speech. Such contradictory forces in her identity are exactly the issue that deconstruction is out to reveal: the instability that exists behind the appearance of coherent stories.

On the same note, the image of Ghulam Mustafa Khar is placed as the symbol of patriarchal and feudal power, though there are also some episodes when his character is depicted in the state of weakness or emotional depth. Such changes in the narration are used to break the simplicity of good versus evil, which also emphasizes the gray boundaries that define the text. They are also challenged and made to feel rather than strengthened in binary forms of power. Thus, it can be concluded that the interpretation of the novel text is full of narrative tension and the importance of the Durrani work resides in the fact that it gives the multifaceted and conflicting truths rather than that of merely giving resolution. In this way, the discussion demonstrates how deconstruction as a strategy of uncovering the hidden aspects of meaning is powerful by embracing the instability on the core of the text.

## 5. REFERENCES

- Aiman, P. A., & Rajaram, S. Z. (2023). Analysis of Silenced Voices in Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord*. *Utkal Historical Research Journal*, 36(1), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371414593>
- Akbar N., (2023). Women's Exploitation in the Feudal Society: A Case Study of "My Feudal Lord" By Tehmina Durrani. *British Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 5(2), 43-50, <https://doi.org/10.34104/bjah.023043050>
- Derrida, J. (1988). *Limited Inc*. Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1996). *As if I were dead: An interview with Jacques Derrida*. Cited by L. Thomassen, *Deconstruction as method in political theory*, 51.
- Durrani, T., (1991). *My Feudal Lord*. Vanguard Books.
- Ehsan, M., et al, (2015). A Study of Harassment and Violence against Women in Feudal Society with Special Reference to "My Feudal Lord" by "Tehmina Durrani". *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*. 15
- Gnanasekaran, R. (2015). An introduction to Derrida, deconstruction, and post-structuralism. *International Journal of English Literature and Culture*, 3(7), 212.
- Hassan, S, Rauf, R, Zia, A, & Dr Rehman, S, U,. (2021). *Feminism And Tribalism at Crossroads: A Critical Case Study of My Feudal Lord by Tehmina Durrani*. *Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology* 18(17), 109-123.
- Hobson, M. (2012). *Jacques Derrida: Opening lines*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781134774449>
- Joshi, S. (2024). Feminist Resistance in Tehmina Durrani's "My Feudal Lord". *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 9(3). <https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijels.93.29>

Kaur, R. (2016). *Speaking from the Margins: Tehmina Durrani's My Feudal Lord*. Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL), 4(1), 514-519

Neuenschwander, J., et al. (2017). Law, institutions, and interpretation in Jacques Derrida. *Revista Direito GV*, 13(2), 587.

Rehman, A.U., (2021). Tehmina Durrani's Conflict of the Self in *My Feudal Lord*, A Psychoanalytic Study. *Int.J.Lang. and Cult.*, 1(4), 11-21  
<https://doi.org/10.51483/IJLC.1.4.2021.11-21>

Salman, S, & Rasool, S, H,. (2023). Trajectories of Masculinity and Femininity in Tehmina Durrani's Autobiographical Narrative, *My Feudal Lord*, University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics & Literature., 7(2), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380360609>