

BOOK REVIEW

TEHMINA DURRANI, MY FEUDAL LORD (GB: BANTAM PRESS, 1991)

My Feudal Lord is one of the extraordinary autobiographies that can ever be written. Durrani uses it as a means of exposing the hypocrisy of ruling elites in Pakistan generally and the cruel nature of her husband specifically. She started writing this book just after the few months of divorce. In this book she talks about social ethos of Pakistani marital life by citing her own marriage as an example.

The book revolves around Tehmina, who belongs to ultra-mod, westernized and well-off family of Pakistan and Mustafa Khar-the most prominent politician in Bhutto's regime, who belongs to conservative, traditional and typical feudal background. These two opposite figures come close to each other but Tehmina's dream soon turns into nightmare when Mustafa's decency turns into brutality. She divided this devastating account into three parts: Lion of the Punjab, Law of the jungle and Lioness.

Lion of The Punjab deals with Mustafa who roars and destroys the lives of simple and innocent women without any hesitation---the typical trait of a lion. Tehmina is also married but she leaves her husband "an innocent, simple guy" and marries Mustafa. But soon she realizes the hollowness and barrenness of this relationship "I had no power, no rights, and no will of my own".

"Law of the Jungle" starts with Tehmina and Mustafa's immigration to London. There his affair with her youngest sister makes her mad and panic. She endures all her husband's physical assaults and sexual brutality as a part of her destiny. But then she decides to rebel the king "I am not your sister or your mother. I am your wife". This is how Tehmina challenges the patriarchal structure denying all the roles of women as futile and abstract. But Mustafa can never allow her to leave him because he thinks that she is the only skylark that can amuse him while he is tired.

In 'Lioness' Tehmina campaigns for Mustafa and he wins the elections. But a Lion is a Lion at every cost...his violence becomes more intense. Finally, she decides to burst out all her pains in the form of book and an act of writing for woman is to break the silence that patriarchal society has culturally imposed upon her.

Durrani has shown in an undaunted way that every woman has her identity and individuality. Her so-called roles are nothing but cultural constructs and a woman has the power to challenge the whole patriarchy even at the cost of her closest relations. The book gives good food for thought to its readers that how will they behave in similar circumstances?

Throughout the novel Tehmina has highlighted herself as an oppressed woman. This is true and so she is. But another aspect cannot be ignored i.e. why did she leave her first husband who was loving and caring? And if she left him for Khar then why after leaving Mustafa she has married another eminent politician Shehbaz Sharif? Perhaps they are all chips of the same block.

When the book first appeared in 1994, it became the best selling book as it stirred a violent storm in the whole country. Now after 14 years of its publication, as the political and social scenario of Pakistan has not changed, the book is still relevant, at least as a major feminist literary effort.

RABIA MAHMOOD