

**A Portrayal of Violence, Obstacles and Agency of Muslim Female Characters in the Novels,
Woman at Point Zero and *My Feudal Lord***

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**A Portrayal of Violence, Obstacles and Agency of Muslim Female Characters in the Novels,
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Abstract

This thesis is based on the feminist theory of patriarchy. My theoretical base is Deniz Kandiyoti's theory, "Patriarchal Bargain". I will also relate the theories of Western feminism, post-colonial feminism, Muslim feminism, etc. in order to get a varied perspective on the issues discussed. Moreover, I will address how and why both these women protagonists, Tehmina and Firdaus, were oppressed and tortured by their husbands and by other men. In addition, as both Tehmina and Firdaus belong to two different social classes, one is a rich house-wife and the latter is a poor prostitute, I will concentrate on the similarities and differences in the treatment of their body where the topic of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) will also be addressed. Finally, I will analyze these two Muslim women protagonists' way of utilizing their ability to make choices, to take decisions and to take actions in order to get their agency, which emerges out of conditions. This will then lead to the examination of to what extent they get their agency – whether they get it fully in order to deal with their gender inequality and to find a stance in their respective male dominated societies.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The reasons and the effects of patriarchy on Muslim females starting from their childhood to adulthood are profound. It is not that Muslim girl children and women always remain subjugated under patriarchy or male dominance. Rather, after a certain point, these females become rebellious to some extent if not fully. They often gain their agency that is not given to them but it emerges out of conditions. They struggle and persevere, only then do they get their honour and recognition in their society. Otherwise, they remain the weak, silent beings who do not have any choice and right of their own.

The struggles for Muslim women writers are even harder because they take up a profession that is something out of the list of few jobs considered as suitable for women. This is so, because language is male dominated. In relation to this, Nasrullah Mambrol explains French feminist, Helen Cixous' theory of "écriture feminine". According to Cixous, Mambrol writes, "Writing is also structured by a "sexual opposition," one that favoured the male and reduced writing "to his laws"" (Mambrol). Male writers are free to write whatever they want to, but this is not the same for women authors. Women use the men's language in order to portray their experiences and stories to the world. Hence, they get very limited freedom through writings. "The need is thus for a woman's writing, one that will be a flow of "luminous torrents," excess, never-ending and open, without hierarchy, repressive logic or control" (Mambrol). Nasrullah Mambrol then explains Helen Cixous' term, "écriture feminine" by quoting her, it is "a feminine writing practice — Cixous suggests that such a feminine writing can never be "theorised enclosed, coded"" (Mambrol). Thus, "The subversiveness of écriture feminine is the rejection of

such a repressive binary logic—of man/woman, theoretical/creative, nature/culture, and inside/outside—and therefore of the *reality* the logic represents. The stories need to be retold without the oppressive logic of patriarchal society” (Mambrol).

Furthermore, Bangladeshi writer, Taslima Nasreen, writes on an online article published on 6th July 2017, “The patriarchal society of Bangladesh doesn’t want any woman to write stories or novels about a woman’s sexuality. Men in this society think: Women do not possess any sexuality, and even if they do, they shouldn’t. Even if they have it, they should keep it hidden. Stories or novels should not be written about it. And if anyone does write on the topic of sexuality, it should be men – men and men only. Modesty is not for men; so they have the freedom to write about sexual desires or feelings – these are men’s properties. They will express it. Women are not even supposed to have them, let alone express!” (Nasreen). Although Taslima Nasreen’s criticism is based on the Bangladeshi context, it is also true for other Muslim countries.

However, there are many prolific female writers and poets from South Asian and Middle Eastern countries who have been breaking this dominating tradition since many decades and recently. For example, the most prominent Bangladeshi female writers are, Professor Niaz Zaman, Professor Firdous Azim, Tahmima Anam, Taslima Nasreen among few. Indian female novelists, such as, Ismat Chughtai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Arundhati Roy, etc. There are also Pakistani female authors, such as, Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie, Tehmina Durrani, etc. One of the most popular female novelists from Egypt is Nawal El Saadawi.

Nawal El Saadawi and Tehmina Durrani are the two Muslim female writers whose novels I have chosen to do my thesis on. Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* and Tehmina

Durrani's *My Feudal Lord* are the two feminist semi-autobiographical and autobiographical books that had created controversy during its publications in 1975 and 1991 respectively. These novels were also criticized, rejected and banned in Egypt and Pakistan. Both the novelists had to confront many issues during its publications because they wrote about certain explicit details and painful truths about Muslim women's plights that were greatly considered as taboos before and during the nineties' Muslim societies. Tehmina Durrani and Nawal El Saadawi did a courageous act by writing these novels. However, it was such a struggle for Tehmina that even her father disowned her after the novel's publication. Likewise, "All of Saadawi's writings were banned for eleven years under Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, her books were censored in Jordan, Libya, and Saudi Arabia, and eventually she was imprisoned by Sadat for speaking out against male domination in Egypt" (Saliba 132). This tendency of criticizing, rejecting and banning women authors' narratives can be explained through Taslima Nasreen's words. She argues that people who speak against such writings "are insecure misogynists" (Nasreen). "This misogyny or male insecurity is only a symptom of the disease that is patriarchy. Until society gets rid of this malady, the symptoms will remain" (Nasreen).

Although, the two female protagonists analyzed in this paper are Muslims, it is important to note that my thesis is not specifically based on Islamic feminism in which Muslim feminists work for the equal rights of Muslim women basing their point of views or "arguments in Islam and its teachings" (Islamic Feminism). My thesis is rather, based on patriarchy, and in order to analyse this issue, I will look at various types of feminism, such as, postcolonial feminism, Muslim feminism and Western feminism. For theoretical grounding, I will look at the Turkish author and academic researcher, Deniz Kandiyoti's paper, "Bargaining with Patriarchy". It is also important to consider how the factors such as, religion, nationality, gender, culture, etc intertwine

or intersect in order to investigate and produce the exact image of the Muslim women in Middle Eastern and South Asian patriarchal nations.

There is a myth that a Muslim woman cannot be a feminist – she is either a Muslim or a feminist, because, feminism is in favor of emancipation, whereas, Islam, as most people wrongly perceive, is an oppressive religion (Chavura). Hence, these two opposites cannot become one. However, this is a complete misconception, especially among the Western feminists. For example, if the Western feminists see Muslim women wearing a veil or a “hijab”, they think they are highly subjugated. Actually, the truth is, if someone thinks the veil as an oppressing agent, then a simple veil can become burdensome and can create hindrance towards a woman’s progress. On the contrary, if a Muslim woman thinks that a veil gives her the spiritual power by complying with the Islamic *sharia* or law, then that simple veil can become a useful tool for emancipation. It is actually the varied perspectives and perceptions that lead to such controversies. The truth is, Islam is not an oppressive religion at all and wearing veil does not make a woman subjugated. Only the willingness of accepting and complying with the rules of Islam is what women need in order to feel empowered both at home and outside. Thus, Stephen Chavura rightly states, “One thing is certain: the notion that Islam and contemporary feminism are mutually compatible...” (Chavura).

On the contrary, what really makes Muslim women subjugated is when they are physically and verbally abused by their husbands, by other men close to their family or by the oppressive males in the society in general. Even at the work place, her male colleagues discriminate between her and themselves because she is considered as the weaker sex. Moreover, many Muslim Africans and Egyptians enforce female genital mutilation (FGM) on girl children in the name of traditional religious beliefs. The fact is, nowhere in the Qur’an is it written that

women are inferior beings and FGM is obligatory. These misconceptions emerge only out of the wrong moral teachings prevalent in many Muslim societies. Thus, if a woman silently tolerates these kinds of tortures, then we may say that her husband and/or the men in the society oppress her. Similarly, if her parents and the society do not allow her to come out of the subjugation, then also she becomes the victim of society's restrictive rules and norms for women. Conversely, if a woman resists and raises her voice against her husband or other men's brutalities, against the society's injustices, frees herself from the shackles imposed and works for women's rights, then we may call her a Muslim feminist because being a Muslim she has worked hard to get her agency that many women fail to gain in post-colonial nations.

The similarity between Tehmina Durrani and Nawal El Saadawi is that they were the sufferers of patriarchy and of the fake religious beliefs crafted by men in South Asian and Middle Eastern countries. The similarity also lies where they emerged as rebels and adopted contemporary feminism in order to advocate justice and enforce solidarity among battered Muslim women. Another similarity between them is that they wrote about gender and class oppression of Muslim women through autobiographies and semi-autobiographies. Tehmina Durrani has utilized autobiography in order to convey the oppression and turmoil that she had to go through during her married life with Ghulam Mustafa Khar. Similarly, Nawal El Saadawi represented the experiences of the prostitute, Firdaus, through her semi-autobiography, *Woman at Point Zero*, which is based on both facts and El Saadawi's imaginations (El Saadawi viii).

These particular non-fictions, *My Feudal Lord* and *Woman at Point Zero*, are not only the portrayal of two oppressed beings – Tehmina and Firdaus, but also the portrayal of those post-colonial females who experience multiple “problematic social conditions” everyday in their lives (Saliba). This thesis attempts to look at the representation of two very unique female characters

whose situations of oppression and sense of agency are intertwined. Thus, in chapter two, I have analysed the effects of patriarchy and the representation of Muslim girl children. In the third chapter, I have discussed the patriarchal abusive men and husbands' dominance or oppression on two Muslim women, Firdaus and Tehmina. In chapter four, finally I have discussed the power play of choices, decisions and actions that women of color need in order to get their full freedom or agency, which emerges out of conditions.

Chapter 2

Patriarchy and the Representation of Muslim Girl Children in the Novels

It is common in Middle Eastern and South Asian countries that women always face several obstacles at every stage of their life. These obstacles or problems arise mainly because of the different kinds of oppressions, such as, “cultural, social, religious, patriarchal, gender and sexual” oppressions (Nadaf). Male domination or women subjugation is a common phenomenon in Muslim countries. No matter how well the family a woman belongs to or how much educated she is, she ultimately becomes the victim of family and social pressures. Every now and then in Muslim countries, women are confronted with the huge burden of complying with the men’s order. This typically starts from her father’s house. Initially, it might occur that a father may not want a baby girl, because sometimes girls are considered as “burdens” and as “inferior beings”. As time passes, even if the father somehow accepts the existence of a girl child, he may not provide her the basic requirements. For example, she may not get education or she may be married off at a very tender age in the hope of getting some dowry from her in-laws. If the girl dares to deny getting married and instead wants to pursue her education or her career, her gender role is restricted by the social norms.

According to the Turkish author and academic researcher, Deniz Kandiyoti, the tendency of men oppressing women and women’s tendency of accepting their subjugated and inferior position is known as “classic patriarchy” (Kandiyoti 278). “Patrilocal households... represent a powerful cultural ideal” (Kandiyoti 278). When faced with cultural and social oppressions, a woman’s duty is determined. Her only duties are to do household chores, get married and protect the honor of her family. There is nothing wrong with such expectations. Yet, these expectations

become unbearable when parents, relatives and the society pressurize her in the name of strict religious beliefs and social ideologies. Thus, in this chapter, I will concentrate on the representation of two Muslim girl children, Firdaus and Tehmina, from various feminist perspectives and my theoretical base will be Deniz Kandiyoti's article, "Bargaining with Patriarchy".

Firdaus, the female character in the novel, *Woman at Point Zero* by the Egyptian author, Nawal El Saadawi, is one of the many females who face such obstacles and oppressions of classic patriarchy discussed above. As this novel is a true story and a semi-autobiography, we may consider Firdaus as one of the sufferers of phallogocentric oppressions in the real world. Firdaus' troubles began from the point onwards when she realized that her father discriminates between boys and girls. For example, when any of her brothers died out of diarrhea, her father would beat up her mother, have his meal and then fall asleep. Whereas, when any of his female children died, he would simply have his meal and fall asleep. He would thrash his wife for the death of a boy because he blamed her for her negligence. On the contrary, the death of a girl child would only relieve him of the trouble of caring for a "burden". What is more, Firdaus' father used to keep an eye on what she ate and how much she ate. After her father and brother finished having meal, she used to get to eat the leftover; sometimes she ate nothing at all. Only the head of the family, that is, the father, had his food was what simply important for the women. It did not matter to the parents whether the children ate or not. Firdaus' father used to blame her mother for the death of male children. However, he failed to realize that it was only because of his self-centeredness that resulted in malnutrition among children and caused them to die one after the other (Fwangyil 17).

Not only her father, would even her stepmother discriminate between boys and girls. She also used to dominate girl children. For example, she would hit on Firdaus' hand for washing her father's legs as she had now replaced her biological mother after her death. She would not allow her to wash her father's legs because she did not want her stepdaughter to occupy her biological mother's position. She thinks only she has the right to replace her husband's first wife. This tendency of belittling girl children is a firm cultural and social construction that most of the stepmothers adopt in order to dominate the young girls at home. However, on other aspects, she would take full advantage of Firdaus' hard work. Just like her real mother, her stepmother would also make her do most of the household chores. Her every day duties were to carry water in a heavy earthen jar, sweep the cow dung, and to knead dough to bake bread in the kitchen. Firdaus was dominated by her stepmother because, "Ironically, women through their actions to resist passivity and total male control, became participants with vested interests in the system that oppressed them" (Kandiyoti 281). In addition, all this mistreatments towards Firdaus is because, in male dominated societies, it is expected that girl children and women should always remain like slaves and serve their masters – men and other elders at home. Hence, they live a life full of slavish insecurities. Thus, post-colonial girl children face patriarchal oppression starting from her home because family has been thought to be the centre of patriarchal ideology.

Firdaus' relationship with her biological mother was also somewhat complicated. She projected her mother like a shadow after her death. Firdaus recalls that although her stepmother used to resemble her biological mother, she could not feel the same warmth and care that her mother often used to bestow upon her. She says, "when I used to look into her eyes I could feel she was not my mother. They were not the eyes that held me up each time I was on the point of falling" (El Saadawi 17). This statement indicates that her biological mother was the epitome of

pure motherly love; she was there for her daughter without any kind of self-centeredness. Yet, there is one instance where her mother beat her up and imposed female genital mutilation (FGM) on her (I will discuss this topic of FGM in the next paragraph). She did so because Firdaus did and said something that her mother found offensive. On another occasion, Firdaus narrates, “I stood in front of the mirror staring at my face. Who am I? Firdaus, that is how they call me. The big round nose I got from my father, and the thin-lipped mouth from my mother... I was filled with a deep hatred for the mirror” (El Saadawi 20). This incident indicates that she could not come into term with her broken identity. She could neither relate to and admire her father because of his mistreatments towards his girl children, nor could she love her biological mother because she imposed FGM on her. Hence, seeing her “big round nose” and “thin-lipped mouth” in the mirror reminded Firdaus of her father and mother, and according to her, she got the worst facial features from her parents. Thus, according to Firdaus, there was nothing pleasant about her parents that would make her think about them admiringly.

Apart from societal discrimination, Firdaus also became the victim of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). “Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) [1] as all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or injury to the female genital organs, for non-therapeutic reasons” (Kaplan et al. 1). Female genital mutilation may cause chronic pain, infection, psychological trauma, etc. FGM is performed in order to make women “appear “desirable” in oppressive patriarchal societies” (Female Genital Mutilation). It is frequently executed in African and Middle Eastern countries, and it is a common part of the rural Egyptian tradition (Female Genital Mutilation). Those who perform this ritual on girl children believe that it is the commandment of Islam. Those who say so are the ones who have a wrong interpretation of the Qur’an. They actually

follow fake religious beliefs and tradition. The truth is, it is not at all an Islamic rule. FGM is actually the outcome of the over practice of patriarchy.

In the novel, *Woman at Point Zero*, there is no detailed discussion on FGM but there is only a fleeting description of why and how this act was conducted on Firdaus. When FGM was performed on her, she was still young. Her bodily features had not fully developed yet. She also “knew nothing about men” (El Saadawi 11). Every day she used to carry water in an earthen jar from a nearby pond. On her way back home, she used to see men invoking Allah’s name and behaving in almost the same fashion every day (El Saadawi 11). Hence, she “could not distinguish which one of them was” her father as “he resembled them so closely that it was difficult to tell” (El Saadawi 12). In order to clear her confusion she once asked her mother about it, “How was it that she had given birth to me without a father? First she beat me. Then she brought a woman who was carrying a small knife or maybe a razor blade. They cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs. I cried all night” (El Saadawi 12). This example described above shows how language and body are interrelated. Firdaus was punished because she had made a comparison between her father and other men, although she had no intention of meaning it otherwise. Still she was found guilty by her mother for asking about men, which meant to her that Firdaus was interested in them. However, this is absolutely a misconception of her mother. Yet, Firdaus’ very utterance made her subject to punishment through FGM. This indicates that in the Egyptian society, the topic of discussion on men by girl children is mistakenly assumed as the females’ desire of men’s body.

Thus, female genital mutilation is practiced because “the act of FGM is not only about warding off sin, but preserving honor, for oneself, ones family, community and nation. Egyptian

women proudly carry this responsibility... Currently there is no united sentiment towards FGM, many like El Saadawi are fighting against it but still the practice continues. The practice of FGM although outlawed in Egypt since 2007 is still continued” (Female Genital Mutilation).

Although it is true that this tendency of ignoring and subordinating female children is mostly common in the rural areas of Muslim societies, we cannot also deny the fact that it is also deeply ingrained among the elite class men and women as well. Just like Firdaus, Tehmina Durrani, the Pakistani author of the autobiography, *My Feudal Lord*, was also the victim of “cultural, social, religious, patriarchal, gender and sexual” oppressions, despite the fact that she belongs to an affluent family with influential political background (Nadaf). She also faced discrimination when she was a child, and that was from her mother’s side. She had a “difficult childhood relationship” with her mother (Durrani 129). Her mother, Samina, has Anglicized family as she “came from the Hayat family of Khattar tribe” (Kaur 35). Hence, she has fair complexion. However, her daughter, Tehmina, has dark complexion. Her family criticized her for her dark skin; especially her mother never used to adore her. About this Tehmina writes, “Only over time would I come to understand what a shock I was to my mother. She was light-skinned beauty – and proud of it; her family was fair-skinned and considered itself to be superior by that fact. A dark child was condemned to neglect. And yet there I was, arriving in the world in 1953, with a dark skin. It seemed evident by my mother’s attitude that she regarded me as ugly and was embarrassed to present me to friends and relatives. Even as a baby I felt my inadequacy. My surroundings seemed hostile to the way I looked, and very early I withdrew into an isolated, ‘condemned-by-nature’ cell. I never remember my mother hugging or kissing me when I was little” (Durrani 23). This is because, in Pakistan, like in many other countries, a woman with dark skin color is not eligible for marriage. Pakistani men tend to choose fairer skinned wife. This

tendency of giving little importance to women with dark skin is aggravated due to the racism weaved within the community. According to Maria Sartaj, “the theory being that a fair *bahu* will produce fair grandchildren, which will ultimately lead to a *gora* Pakistan!” (Sartaj). For this reason, Tehmina’s mother also taunted her own daughter most of the time. Conversely, her father loved her, but because of her mother’s command, he was unable to show his affection towards his daughter. Only her maternal grandmother, Shamshad, took her sides every time she fell into troubles.

Moreover, Tehmina grew up in a very strict environment. In relation to this, Tehmina writes, “There was no play and very little laughter in the household and a childhood burst of enthusiasm was frowned upon. Untidiness was a crime” (Durrani 25). “The lesson was clear and I learned it well: blind acquiescence was necessary to gain approval; being yourself earned only condemnation. I was acceptable only when I was unlike myself – whoever that was – because I wore a mask of submission. I developed a personality that was against my true nature, but compatible with mother’s. Inwardly I became confused and sometimes ashamed that what I must really be was incorrect and unacceptable” (Durrani 25).

Not only this, Tehmina’s childhood was not normal like any other girls’ because, at the age of only twelve her duty was, as ordered by her mother, to organize her mother’s bedroom, wardrobe and jewelry every day. She writes, “The muscles in my neck and shoulders still relieve the tension created by the ever-present fear that I would misplace something or be unable to locate the keys to her armoire or jewelry box. To do so would render me inadequate in her eyes and create such wrath that I became obsessed with the seemingly simple task. Panic would overtake me and the location of the keys took precedence in my mind over everything else. Schoolwork and other responsibilities paled in comparison (Durrani 27).

These above examples portray that being within her home, Tehmina could not be her own self because of her mother's strictness. This kind of extreme strictness is also a kind of mental torture. Her suppressed self was unbearable to the extent of becoming mad. Tehmina observes, "Looking back, I realize that we were being raised to be schizophrenic; an appearance of perfection was more important than genuine feelings. There was no question of discovering oneself. Identity and individuality were crushed. Personality failed to develop. My mind became a sanctuary for secret thoughts of escaping from this household. But for that, there was no other goal but marriage" (Durrani 30).

Thus, we observe that at a very tender age, Tehmina was constantly under pressure to live up to her mother's expectations and in case of her inability to do so, made her suffer from inferiority complex. Her mother's strictness towards her children, especially towards Tehmina, is perhaps due to the social demand. This means, living in a Muslim country, such as, Pakistan, a girl is expected to be within her limits and suppress her childish enthusiasm so that she could grow up as an obedient woman. Failing to do so would be a shameful thing for her parents because then the patriarchal society would say that her parents could not teach their girl children to behave themselves. However, we all know that being adults, we cannot expect such strict obedience from any child, but as the society expects girl children and women to always remain under total subjugation just like slaves, the mothers also push their daughters to follow the patriarchy. We may relate this to what Simone de Beauvoir says, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 295). According to Laura Maguire, this statement by Beauvoir means, "the roles we associate with women are not given to them in birth, by virtue of their biology, but rather are socially constructed. Women are taught what they're supposed to be in life, what kind of roles they can or can't perform in virtue of being of "the second sex""

(Maguire). Beauvoir has given childhood a place in her book, *The Second Sex*, because childhood is the early phase of gender construction, and it is during this childhood phase that the socialization of boy and girl takes place.

Another reason for her mother's strictness towards her children could be the "patriarchal bargains" as Deniz Kandiyoti terms it (Kandiyoti 285). Even though Tehmina's father never dominated her mother, rather she would every time command him, she made a patriarchal bargain with her daughter. That is, as the culture and society pressurized her to raise her children properly with full guidance, she herself perhaps found it too much to comply. She even said that she felt ashamed to present Tehmina to her friends and relatives because of her dark skin (Durrani 23). Thus, Kandiyoti explains, in classic patriarchy women "often adhere as far and as long as they possibly can to rules that result in the unfailing devaluation of their labor" (Kandiyoti 280). "The cyclical nature of women's power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourages a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves. In classic patriarchy, subordination to men is offset by the control older women attain over younger women" (Kandiyoti 279). In this case, instead of naming it "subordination to men" specifically, we may call it subordination to the patriarchal society as a whole. Hence, classic patriarchy becomes such a rigid boundary that women have to make a bargain out of it in order to combat their initial inferior position in family and society.

On the other hand, when the novel, *Woman at Point Zero*, was first published in Arabic, that is, in 1975, access to education for Egyptian children was gradually increasing irrespective of gender. Although Egyptian women always faced gender inequality and marginalization, Firdaus always had high aspirations. She was eager to study but initially her parents and her uncle would not allow her. This is because, if a girl child achieves higher goals in life, such as,

education, then she would become equal to men and would gradually become stronger, and men always being the dominant one, cannot let this happen (Fwangyil 22). As Firdaus was not allowed to study in the beginning, she became upset and she started pondering about her life and her existence. She says, “as I walked along the country road, wondering about myself, as the questions went round in my mind. Who was I? Who was my father? Was I going to spend my life sweeping the dung out from under the animals, carrying manure on my head, kneading dough, and baking bread?” (El Saadawi 15). From her inner thought, we observe that even during childhood, Firdaus knew the importance of achieving something high in life and being a girl neither she is doomed to nor she is bound to adhere by the rules for women imposed by the male dominated society. Although she was unsure whether she was destined to be dominated all her life or not, she had the courage to think and question about her future and thus prove herself different from other oppressed females in her Egyptian society. Nonetheless, Firdaus was lucky enough to some extent as after her parents’ death, her uncle allowed her to go to an elementary school and later on to a boarding school, but that was only out of fury. Apart from her primary and secondary school certificates, she had no other qualifications and advantages.

As mentioned earlier, Firdaus aspired big about her future. After proving her brilliance at the school by getting second position in the exams and getting merits for that, she dreamt of studying at the university. Besides, her aunt wanted to get rid of her by sending her off to the university. However, her uncle halted her further education saying, “To the university? To a place where she will be sitting side by side with men? A respected Sheikh and man of religion like myself sending his niece off to mix in the company of men?!” (El Saadawi 37). Her uncle was against the idea of females getting education, but with the passing of time and with his changing attitude, he let her go to the school, but her education was limited to that stage only. Firdaus’

uncle had problem with the fact that she will have to study at the university where she will have to mix up with boys. This implies that females' decisions are made by the men. Moreover, when Firdaus was just a child, he himself did the heinous act of touching her with ill intentions and sleeping close to her when he was unmarried. We can say that her uncle had also taken advantage of her childhood when she was unable to fathom such sexual indications. He used her body to satisfy his desires, but he speaks big about the religious rules for women. Her uncle is one of those men who impose patriarchal dominance on women and decide what is best for them, whereas, he himself went against the religious beliefs and dared to molest his niece for his pleasure. These kinds of men only know how to impose restrictions on women, but for themselves they do not see the need to abide by the rules of Islam.

Similarly, Tehmina's second husband, Mustafa also did not spare his daughters from his brutality. Tehmina heard the stories from the servants that when Mustafa's daughter from his fifth wife, Sherry, "howled as he tried to sleep, Mustafa picked her up and shoved her under the bed!" (Durrani 113). He was equally ruthless with Naseeba – Mustafa and Tehmina's daughter. "On a number of occasions, Mustafa stifled Naseeba's yells with his hand, or with a cloth" (Durrani 113). On another occasion, Mustafa exceeded all his limits and mercilessly inflicted extreme violence on his baby girl for wailing. He pushed Naseeba's head into the water-filled bathtub and held her there for a few seconds until he was satisfied of punishing her. He was so merciless that when Tehmina continuously begged for her daughter's life, he became even more violent. The poor little girl was all shocked and suffocated when finally her mother took her out of the water. Mustafa proved to be tyrannical on girl children because he wanted complete obedience from them as well. The earlier they learn, the better for them, because then these girl children would grow up to be the perfect inferior beings, just as the way the patriarchal society wants them to be.

In case, the girl children disobeyed his orders, it became a punishable act for them. Hence, for their “betterment”, the lesson was taught to them with extreme brutality, but it is a punishable offense according to the law that the abusive men tend to over power.

Therefore, in this chapter, we see how Muslim girls grow up negotiating with patriarchy. As we know, autobiographies and semi-autobiographies are a strong means of talking about childhood, both Tehmina Durrani and Firduas through Nawal El Saadawi, have embraced these genres as their strength and fully utilized it to represent the childhood sufferings of girl children.

Chapter 3

Patriarchy and Marriage

The female protagonists, Tehmina and Firdaus' troubles do not end with their childhood. Rather, the responsibility of marriage was imposed upon them when they were just on the verge of adulthood. According to the Pakistan's Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) 1929, the legal age for women to get married is sixteen (Sohail). The Egyptian marriage laws also set the legal age for women's marriage at sixteen, whereas, the "Islamic law (Shari'a) defines the age of marriage with the age of puberty, which the majority of Muslim scholars generally set at 15"(Mostafa). "However, Egypt's constitution adopted in 2014 stated that "every person below 18 years of age is a child"" (Mostafa). In Tehmina and Firdaus' case, their marriage can also be called child marriage because only at the age of seventeen and eighteen respectively, they were not mentally matured enough to understand the value and the responsibility of marriage. According to Deniz Kandiyoti, "Under classic patriarchy, girls are given away in marriage at a very young age into households headed by their husband's father. There they are subordinate not only to all the men but also to the more senior women, especially their mother-in-law" (Kandiyoti 278). Thus, in this chapter, I will discuss the treatment of their body, that is, the extreme physical violence and the mental or psychological torture that these two female protagonists had to go through in their marriage and in the society.

Women's plights become double or even triple when they get married. This is not to say that all marriages end up as a complete failure. However, we get the examples and knowledge of the torture done on wives by their husbands in few cases. As Huma Iqbal writes on her blog, "Seen in the larger context, violence against women is not the result of random, individual acts

of misconduct, but rather is deeply rooted in structural relationships of inequality between women and men in our society. The deeply rooted patriarchal values and norms and the prevailing social attitude that violence against women is a private domestic issue is a huge impediment in curtailing the ugly practice” (Iqbal).

In the autobiographical novel, *My Feudal Lord*, Tehmina Durrani, in spite of the fact that she belongs to an affluent family with political background and the proper education that she has, she faced brutal torture from her husband, Ghulam Mustafa Khar, a politician during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s regime in Pakistan. Since her childhood, Tehmina was taught to stay away from boys and men. “And yet, clearly a man was the only future available to a Pakistani girl” (Durrani 28). She writes, “Despite the fact that our mother had divorced her first husband, we were taught that marriage was a sacred and irrevocable institution. If a husband turned out to be a brute, it was the wife’s duty to persevere until she changed his character. A broken marriage was a reflection of a woman’s failure” (Durrani 29). From childhood, Tehmina was taught that it is the woman’s responsibility to make her marriage successful. Even if her husband is not a gentle man, she has to do her best to adjust to his character. This kind of notion is nothing but a patriarchal ideology that is technically and forcefully infiltrated into women’s mind. In order to keep their stance strong, men force women to follow such rules and restrictions. It is always in his best interest that a man regulates and treats a woman. Hence, women are forced to comply with the social norms.

Tehmina’s first marriage to Anees at the age of seventeen was the consequence of this social norm. Initially, it was her urge to get out of the restrictive environment at her home. As mentioned earlier, during her childhood, her “Personality failed to develop. My mind became a sanctuary for secret thoughts of escaping from this household. But for that, there was no other

goal but marriage” (Durrani 30). Hence, she accepted the twenty-seven years old Anees’ proposal in the hope of getting a little freedom. When at first her mother had turned down the proposal because Anees was not well off, her best friend insisted her into accepting the proposal saying, “Samina, she’s not your best-looking daughter. It won’t be so easy for her to find a boy who’ll love her as Anees does. I suggest you agree to the proposal. You still have three daughters for whom your position will be stronger” (Durrani 34).

However, later on Tehmina had changed her mind. When she informed her family and Anees that she was not interested to get married to him anymore, she in turn was pacified by saying that it was just her nervousness regarding this big event (Durrani 37). Actually, the fact is, as she had already presented her former intention to her family, she was now bound to adhere to her previous decision. The act of changing her mind and following her heart every time she felt like was not acceptable by the elders because the society will then have a negative impression about her. Besides, as child marriage is common in Pakistan, Tehmina was already eligible for marriage at the age of seventeen. This made her mother concerned that her daughter was exceeding the suitable age for marriage for Muslim females. On top of that, she is dark. Hence, it would be difficult to find a husband for her, because as mentioned earlier, Pakistani men tend to prefer and marry fairer skinned women. Thus, under cultural and social pressure, Samina – Tehmina’s mother – agreed to the proposal as she saw no other alternative for her dark-skinned daughter, although Tehmina had no more willingness to marry Anees at that moment. The consequence of this forced marriage was that she became bored of this relationship and it became difficult for her to adjust to motherhood. She was still immature to “understanding little of the woman into which I was developing... I loved Tanya dearly, and yet I still felt so unfulfilled as a child and daughter myself” (Durrani 38).

Apart from the cultural and social pressures, there is also the issue of marriage to older men. As an online article reports, “in Pakistan today, a large number of females are married to men who are far older than the females themselves. This, in its current extreme form is nothing if not a crime against nature itself. Islamic Shariah, which grants all females the right to consent, i.e. no female can be married off to anyone without their prior consent. The effects of such unions, where the women have no right in choosing their mate, range from depression, low self-esteem, to living a life of complete misery” (Patriarchy and Pakistani Society – II).

Similarly, in *Woman at Point Zero*, at the age of only eighteen, Firdaus was forced to marry an old man of sixty years of age. After completing her secondary school, as Firdaus’ aunt did not want to keep her again at their home, she suggested the idea of marrying her off to her sixty-year-old uncle, Sheikh Mahmoud. Firdaus’ uncle accepted the proposal because according to him, at such a young age of eighteen, it is not right to let Firdaus live without husband. Her aunt’s logic for getting her married was that she is ugly due to the “big and ugly like a tin mug” nose she has (El Saadawi 38). “Besides, she has inherited nothing, and has no income of her own. We will never find a better husband for her than Sheikh Mahmoud” who will give them a dowry of one or two hundred pounds (El Saadawi 38). Moreover, “Girls of her age have already married years ago and borne children. An old but reliable man is surely better than a young man who treats her in a humiliating way, or beats her. You know the young men these days” (El Saadawi 38). However, the irony is, the sixty-year-old man himself turned out to be ruthless.

Thus at the age of only eighteen, child marriage was thrust upon Firdaus. As she did not want to marry an old man, she even escaped from her uncle’s place in order to get rid of this forced marriage. Later on, she returned and agreed to marry the old man in the hope of getting a little freedom that she always wished for, just as Tehmina wished the same. Yet, they were denied

all the possibilities. Firdaus remained like an obedient homemaker and satisfied her husband's carnal desires. However, when she dared to refuse to fulfill his cravings because of his foul smelling swell on the chin, her husband would thrash her. Her husband would hit her mercilessly even for trivial matters as Firdaus says, "he got into the habit of beating me whether he had a reason for it or not. On one occasion he hit me all over with his shoes. My face and body became swollen and bruised" (El Saadawi 46). Even so, just like her father, her husband would also keep an eye on what she ate and how much she ate. She remained like a prisoner in her husband's house. This is because, being a female, it is Firdaus' responsibility to please her husband, and it does not matter whether she wants to do so or not. Moreover, as she was still young, she could not revolt against her husband for exercising marital rape and oppression on her. As her husband had manly powers, she had to silently accept what her husband asked her to do.

When finally she could not tolerate this torture any more, she escaped from her husband's home and went back to her uncle's house where her uncle and aunt had different opinions than Firdaus. According to her uncle, "all husbands often beat their wives" and her aunt said, "her husband often beat her" (El Saadawi 46). She also added that, "it was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives. The precepts of religion permitted such punishment. A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience" (El Saadawi 47). Moreover, we read about Firdaus' father assaulting her mother. This is because, from generations to generations, men have seen their father hit their mothers. Hence, the men internalize this habit and impose violence on women thinking that this is the only way of keeping women under control and thus the only way of exerting his power and importance in the family and society.

Not only did Firdaus' husband oppress her, would even the other men in the Egyptian society take advantage of her when she started living alone. As Firdaus was returned to her husband's place from her uncle's place, Sheikh Mahmoud became even more violent on her. Firdaus' narrates, "One day he hit me with his heavy stick until the blood ran from my nose and ears" (El Saadawi 47). This became so unbearable for her that she left her husband's home for the second time, but this time she did not return to her uncle's place anymore. Rather, she took to the streets. She then came across Bayoumi, the owner of a coffee shop. He seemed to be unlike other men. He let her stay at his home, gave her food to eat, and he never used to stare at her plate while she ate. In return, she also took good care of him. Although he seemed to be a gentle man and took care of her, Tehmina was unable to tell him the torture she had to go through. She remained silent about the whole matter.

However, the abusive nature of Bayoumi soon revealed when one day Firdaus told him that she wants to make use of her education and her secondary school certificate; she wants to do a job. She was also not willing to stay with him under the same roof because the society would speak badly about them. She was saying all this very calmly and in a low voice, when suddenly Firdaus' wish to do a job infuriated Bayoumi. He said, "How dare you raise your voice when you're speaking to me, you street walker, you low woman?" (El Saadawi 52). Hence, for the first time Bayoumi slapped her tight. He then gave her dirty looks and hit her on the belly – she became unconscious (El Saadawi 53). From then onwards, he locked her up in the room while he went outside. Bayoumi also physically abused and raped her. Even so, he continuously brought other men to do the same with her. She would occasionally raise her voice against him, but in vain.

At this point in this chapter, it is important to briefly discuss here what do we mean by violence against women and the types of violence that are inflicted on them. “The United Nations defines violence against women as: Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (Iqbal). “According to Punjab Gender Parity Report 2016, incidents of torture on women have increased by 20% while 173 women were killed for honour in 2015. In 2013, more than 5,800 cases of violence against women were reported in Punjab. Those cases represented 74% of the national total that year” (APP). However, “Unfortunately, most of these crimes go unreported due to lack of women independence and weak legal and justice framework. These dreadful instances highlight the sufferings of women in the name of cultural and religious norms that male dominated societies endorse” (APP). “Multiple forms of violence include rape, domestic abuse, murder, mutilation, burning, disfiguring faces by acids, torture, etc.” (Chughtai). “Dowry-related domestic violence is especially on a rise where the new bride is abused, often assaulted and even physically tortured for failing to bring the preferred size and matter of dowry. Many of these unlucky women are purposefully burned to death or mutilated to have committed the ‘crime’. Ironically, many consider death to be the safest possible solution to get rid of the living hell!” (Iqbal).

There is no doubt that patriarchy and fake religious beliefs are the main reasons for Muslim women’s plight, but there is also one section of this patriarchal system where the dominance of women reaches its extreme form. Tehmina Durrani blames the feudal system that causes the extreme form of torture on women. According to Tehmina, feudal lords think it is their right to subjugate females, whether it is their wives, sisters, housemaids or even girl children. By

its very own crafted law, feudalism gives men the power and authority to be brutal on the so-called weaker sex. In relation to this, Tehmina states, “Feudalism was a license to plunder, rape and even murder... 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 the 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 Koran. A feudal lord was an absolute ruler who could justify any action” (Durrani 40-41). Thus, it turns out that women are greatly subjugated in feudal system as well and they accept their subordinated position to some extent because the male chauvinistic society, especially the feudal lords, have the ability to justify their every action. Husbands think that it is their right to dominate and abuse their wives and any attempt on the women’s side to avoid such oppression and violence is a pure sign of rebellion. Hence, according to the men’s law, such women should be punished.

Tehmina Durrani’s devastating condition in the second marriage with Ghulam Mustafa Khar is the result of feudalism. Although Mustafa claimed that he is against feudalism, it is his learned characteristics of a feudal lord that lead to the devastating relationship with his sixth wife, Tehmina Durrani. He also oppressed and abused his previous wives – Wazir, Firdaus, Safia, Naubahar and Shahrazad (Sherry) – and had several extra marital affairs. He was able to do so because his impromptu actions and decisions were justified by feudalism. Moreover, no other wife of his had ever before dared to go against his will and injustices. Despite knowing the fact that Tehmina is married to Anees, he tried his best to impress her with his charm and strategy. He was inclined towards her only because of her prettiness, long hair and the fashionable dresses

that she wore. Only her outer appearance excited him, but she was unable to comprehend that for a long time. Tehmina also fell in love with him, because as mentioned earlier, she had become bored of Anees. After several obstacles and her family's disagreement, she was finally able to get married to Mustafa.

When she married Mustafa, he was already married to his fifth wife, Sherry, and it was from Sherry that she first came to know the bitter truth about Mustafa. Sherry revealed to Tehmina that "When he had discovered Safia's infidelity, he had, apparently, beaten her without mercy and broken several of her ribs. But, even worse, he had ordered one of the maids to insert red chili powder into the vagina of poor Dai Ayesha, the nanny, for not informing him of the affair" (Durrani 94). According to Sherry, "Women were his obvious victims. He was out to destroy us" (Durrani 95). However, at that moment Tehmina could not completely believe what Sherry said.

Tehmina faced Mustafa's wrath for the first time when she had a dental appointment and she was asked by her husband to register herself at the doctor's as "Begum Mustafa Khar". As she did not want to humiliate Sherry, she did not register herself as Mustafa's wife (Durrani 95). To Tehmina's dismay, Sherry reported this to Mustafa and he got infuriated. He scolded Tehmina by saying, "Never – ever – disobey me! You have to do what I tell you to do" (Durrani 95). This incident portrays that Mustafa suffered from both superiority complex and inferiority complex. As he considered himself a superior and a powerful feudal lord, if anyone disobeyed his orders, he could not tolerate that, because according to his mentality, going against his will is a way of considering him as an inferior being. His wrath continued to shower upon Tehmina even for trivial matters. "A feudal lord understands... the power of physical violence" (Durrani 134). Hence, Tehmina acted according to his commands. Mustafa was such a merciless person that he

used to beat up his housemaids as well. For instance, once Mustafa had ordered their Dai (servant) to bring milk for Tehmina. As she had forgotten to do so, “Mustafa thrust his foot squarely against Dai’s backside, sending her flying through the doorway” (Durrani 100). Gradually, Tehmina realized that she had fallen into the trap of a typical Pakistani marriage (Durrani 100). Tehmina writes, “I had fallen into the classic trap of the Pakistani woman. The goal is marriage and, once achieved, the future is a life of total subordination. I had no power, no rights, no will of my own” (Durrani 100).

From that point onwards, Tehmina faced continuous verbal and physical abuse from her husband for various reasons. Even during her pregnancy with her first child with Mustafa, he exerted extreme torture on her. As she was unwilling to talk about every detail of her wedding night with Anees, Mustafa, “Sitting astride my belly, he slapped me in the face repeatedly with his open palm, forehand and backhand. I fought to stifle my screams as he pulled at my hair, thrusting my head from side to side (Durrani 102). He even threw her against a wall, picked her up and threw her “against another one – again, and again, and again” (Durrani 103). Mustafa assaulted Tehmina because, her “divorce and remarriage had proved to him that” she “was capable of adultery” (Durrani 106). She was badly bruised, in excruciating pain, bleeding profusely, yet, she forced herself to keep mum about the violence, lest anyone at home heard her scream in pain and point fingers at her.

Mustafa stopped thrashing her at last when all of a sudden he calmed down. He even touched her feet and begged for her forgiveness. She felt pity on him and tried to forgive him but the excruciating pain would not let her forget the torture inflicted. Mustafa also successfully convinced her not to reveal the bad side of him to anyone. This entire episode of beating her up, asking for forgiveness and she forgiving him, kept on going for thirteen years of her married life

with him. However, in his good moods, he was “loving” and “considerate” towards Tehmina, but by that time, she had already learned that Mustafa has double standards and for him, women are only for satisfying men’s carnal desires. Just like Firdaus, when Tehmina, for the first time, dared to refuse her husband’s sexual approaches, he beat her up badly. Similar to Firdaus’ situation, in order to prevent any further thrashings from Mustafa, several times Tehmina had to go through marital rape. Mustafa had control not only over her body, but also over her mind. He controlled her thoughts to such an extent that “I became incapable of thinking logically; indeed I was afraid to think, for irrationally I was certain that he could penetrate my mind. He fed this fear frequently, by saying, ‘I know what you’re thinking, Tehmina, believe me. You daren’t think of anything that I have forbidden you to think about.’ My brain was washed, bleached and hung out to dry. I was afraid to sleep, lest I dream images that would annoy him... Only the schizophrenic quality of his behavior – and my own ambivalent reactions to him – allowed me to survive” (Durrani 108).

Tehmina could not leave him because it was a controversial marriage. Besides, she married him on her own will. Hence, she was compelled to “strive to keep it intact”; “A lasting and happy marriage was my only value” (Durrani 108). “High on the list was the role of the wife. According to feudal tradition, a wife was honour-bound to live her life according to her husband’s whims. A woman was like a man’s land – ‘The Koran says so,’ he said” (Durrani 107). According to Tehmina, “The physical abuse was not his crime – it simply affirmed my own inadequacy”, her inadequacy “of falling short of” her “mother’s definition of the ideal wife” (Durrani 131). In addition, her father was at first angry with her for divorcing Anees and marrying for the second time. Although he gradually forgave her, he put a restriction on her saying, “This is your second marriage and I don’t want you, for any reason at all, leave him. You

can only leave his home in a coffin. This is the point on which I take you back into the family” (Durrani 126). In relation to this, Kandiyoti observes, “In Muslim communities, for a woman to press for her inheritance rights would be tantamount to losing her brother’s favor, her only recourse in case of severe ill-treatment by her husband or divorce” (Kandiyoti 279). Although Tehmina’s brother was always there for her when she needed his support, she was afraid that going against her husband would result in a consequence she would not be able to tolerate. She was afraid that her parents would again disown her as they did so several times after her marriage to Mustafa. Hence, even if Tehmina tried to escape, she was afraid that her parents and the society would not accept her anymore and to think the worse, Mustafa would hunt her down and kill her. She suspected that her mother knew about the tension going on in her married life, yet her mother “believed ruthlessly in keeping one’s private life locked away” (Durrani 130). Consequently, Tehmina had learned to hide her feelings, bruises and humiliation from the world, she also started taking tranquillizers for relieving her tension (Durrani 114, 130).

The matter became worse when Tehmina came to know that her husband has an extra marital affair with her very own younger sister, Adila, who was only thirteen years of age at that time. There were times when her other sisters tried to warn her about the secret relationship going on between Mustafa and Adila, but she did not believe them. Even if just for a moment any doubt aroused in her mind, she would confront him, but he was so cunning that every time he would start up his pitiful charade and make Tehmina believe that all this rumors were a conspiracy against him, and she was so naïve that she fell into his trap and believed his melodrama. Every time she questioned him, every time he lied. He made her a “puppet” – she believed whatever he said. At times she became confused, but she did not want to believe that she was being betrayed (Durrani 153). When finally Minoos (Tehmina’s sister) spoke openly

about the truth of Mustafa and Adila's illicit relationship, Tehmina's reaction was, "My response was that of a conditioned zombie, who could neither discern the whole truth of the matter nor deal with it. I was a dutiful wife, only conscious that it was my role to defend Mustafa. I ordered Minoos out of my house, because she was insulting my husband" (Durrani 154). Tehmina, was thus, completely under Mustafa's control.

Gradually, Tehmina got solid evidences of Mustafa and Adila's illicit relationship. She came to know everything about their betrayal and lies, yet she could not leave her husband only for the sake of their children and because she did not want to be recognized as a "two-time divorcee" (Durrani 223). Even if she occasionally raised her voice against Mustafa, she had to later on apologies to him, because her husband threatened her in several ways. For instance, once he warned her that if she ever mentions leaving him again, he would throw acid on her, maim her and take her children away from her (Durrani 189). He always blamed her for everything, and continuously abused her both physically and verbally. He wanted pure submission from Tehmina, just as we see how Firdaus had to be submissive to her uncle, her husband, coffee-shop owner Bayoumi, Ibrahim – Firdaus' lover, who used her body for his carnal pleasure only and later on betrayed her by engaging with his boss' daughter, but Firdaus sincerely loved Ibrahim.

Moreover, according to Kandiyoti, "The young bride enters her husband's household as an effectively dispossessed individual who can establish her place in the patriline only by producing male offspring" (Kandiyoti 279). Mustafa was also no different from this rule of patriarchy. He also pressed Tehmina for having a child that he believed would be a boy this time. As Tehmina was fed up of his torture, she denied. He then somehow convinced her into having a baby and for that, he wore his mask of a gentle man. However, as soon as the baby boy was born, he instantly got back into his old habit of abusing Tehmina. Mustafa always exceeded all his

limits in new ways every time. He created such plots and plans that made Tehmina and the reader, wonder with disbelief. For example, at a certain point, when Tehmina decided to divorce Mustafa, he in turn black mailed her by kidnapping their children – Naseeba, Nisha, and Ali. Ultimately, Tehmina had to back off from her decision of leaving him forever in order to get back her children. However, in spite of all the ill-treatments that he inflicted on her, Mustafa always expected full support from his wife during his hard times in the politics. He used her for keeping his political position intact when he was in the prison. Actually, she was just a slave to him and he was her master. She felt that she had no other option but to act upon his orders.

Consequently, Tehmina stuck to her oppressor only because of her fear – fear for her children’s future and for her life ahead. It was mainly for the sake of her children that she had to sacrifice her freedom. So much so, at such a crucial point of Mustafa’s life, when he was struggling to regain his political position, she could not leave him alone and gain her freedom that she always craved. Hence, she had to suppress her anger and ego in order to collaborate with Mustafa as they shared the same goal – the betterment of Pakistan. In relation to this, Deniz Kandiyoti writes, “Their passive resistance takes the form of claiming their half of this particular patriarchal bargain – protection in exchange for submissiveness and propriety” (Kandiyoti 283). This statement helps us to understand Tehmina’s situation, that is, a little protection and shelter were all that Tehmina expected for her children from Mustafa in return for her favor to him.

Therefore, men always want total submission from women just as we observe from Tehmina and Firdaus’ experiences. Then if women get some opportunities to break themselves free of their oppressors (I will discuss this issue in the next chapter), they cling to the root cause of their turmoil. It is only because of the classic patriarchy, fake religious beliefs and cultural-social norms that often make women fail to recognize their true space in the society. Thus, they

often lack the courage to raise their voice and fight against injustices and torture, just as Tehmina and Firdaus failed to get their freedom initially.

Chapter 4

Agency of Tehmina and Firdaus

There is a correlation between struggle and agency. When people are in struggle, they want to get the agency. Through their struggle, they try to find specific ways or various means of dealing with problems. Hence, it is necessary that we analyze the types of agency that these two female protagonists, Tehmina and Firdaus, had adopted and the extent to which they had the capability to make their choices and to actions in order to get their ultimate freedom. Agency in a literary context means “the freedom and capacity to live or act in a defined world. In a literature sense, we can interpret this in a few different ways. We could look at a specific character in a novel, and see his/her ability to make choices, act freely, and control their respective lives within the novel. The character is able to engage socially, take action on desired things, and have control over their own life” (Yamaguchityler).

According to Kelsy C. Burke, there are four approaches to understanding agency. “The resistance agency focuses on women who attempt to challenge or challenge some aspect of their religion. The empowerment agency approach focuses on how women interpret religious doctrine or practices in ways that make them feel empowered in their everyday life. The instrumental approach focuses on the non-religious positive outcomes of religious practice, and a compliant approach focuses on the multiple and diverse ways in which women confirm to gender-traditional religious teaching” (Burke). It is the first and the fourth type of agency – resistance agency and compliant agency – that these two Muslim female characters, Tehmina and Firdaus, adopted in their life in order to get out of their confined and subjugated situation. They used

various strategies and plans to gradually raise their voices and show their strengths to the dominating men and society.

Agency is not about how to utilize freedom; rather it is the ability or “the power to make choices”, to take decisions and “the ability to act” (quoted by Wrede). Tehmina’s first rebel against Mustafa was when on one occasion he was kicking her down a staircase (Durrani 134). This time Tehmina did not remain silent. She revolted by saying, “This is my father’s house and I do not think that you should dare to lift your hand on me here!” (Durrani 134). However, this brought only a moment’s “stunned silence” and he resumed thrashing her (Durrani 134). Tehmina gradually built up her confidence to face Mustafa when she had confided the truth about her turmoil to Bhutto’s wife, Husna, who in turn had advised her to divorce him. Next time when she was in the hospital to deliver her second daughter, Nisha, she mustered her courage to vent her anger on Mustafa in the hospital thinking he would not dare to hit her in this public place. However, she was mistaken because after she was done with venting her anger, he slapped her hard on the face and twisted her forearm (Durrani 156). In spite of all this, she suppressed her scream. When she spoke her heart out about this matter to her obstetrician, she advised her softly, “Nobody can help you unless you help yourself” (Durrani 156). This piece of advice later on made her realize that she did a big mistake by not shouting to get the doctors’ and the nurses’ attention; she had simply let him beat her because she let herself to be the weaker one. However, according to her, she did not scream because she thought that the doctors would call the police but the police would only “admonish” him and eventually she would be alone with Mustafa all over again who would torture her even more (Durrani 156). She thought that by not screaming she was protecting herself and not Mustafa, but she was actually mistaken. This idea was nothing but an extension of her misconception and fear. In this instance, Tehmina had the chance to take

a decision on her favour and to act accordingly. She could have made a choice of revealing her husband's real character to the public, but she did not do so. Consequently, she missed the excellent opportunity and failed to gain her agency at that crucial moment.

From the examples above, we observe that initially Tehmina had the scope or chance to get out of the oppression. Although her parents had forbidden her to divorce Mustafa and advised her to adjust with her husband's brutality, she could have got out of her tortured relationship at the very early stage if only she had decided to go against her parents and the society as she had done earlier by divorcing her first husband, Anees, and marrying Ghulam Mustafa Khar on her own will. At that point, even though her parents were against her decision of marrying Mustafa, she still chose the path that she thought was better for her. Thus, agency is about the power of making that crucial choice and moving ahead with that decision which Tehmina had failed to realize at the beginning of her married life with Mustafa. The consequence of that choice may be "good or bad", but what really matters is to have the power or ability to choose and to act accordingly (Wrede). It is true that Mustafa had threatened her several times by saying that if she divorces him he would kidnap the children and do the worst with her, we also cannot deny the fact that it was actually because of Tehmina's inner fear that she could not challenge him and take a stronger stance for herself and for her children. As Mustafa had told her that if she divorces him, he would not let the children stay with her, she backed off from her initiative of rebelling against her husband and silently endured the abuse and tolerated the truth about Mustafa and Adila's sinful affair. Thus, from the analysis of these few incidences, we find out that to gain agency it is also necessary that a woman has to have the courage to face her oppressor which Tehmina lacked at the beginning.

However, when she eventually pushed aside her fear and confronted Mustafa for the third time with real guts and confidence, her husband in turn became baffled by her changed behavior and became a little subjugated under Tehmina's wishes and demands. For instance, when he once got enraged over a trivial matter, he pulled Tehmina's hair and threatened her of breaking her bones into pieces, she in turn revolted (Durrani 188). In relation to this, she writes, "I grabbed the pot from the stove and threw it at him. He screamed in pain from the burning brew. For a moment he was paralysed. Then, as he raised his hand to strike back, I pushed him in the chest and yelled, 'The next time you raise your hand to me I will pick up a knife and kill you!' There was power and conviction in my voice, although my heart was beating madly. I had declared war. Mustafa backed off... he appeared subdued" (Durrani 188). This incident portrays that violence begets more violence and women often have to opt for more violence in order to get rid of the initial violence inflicted upon her. This was also the first time when she demanded respect from him and suggested him to mend his ways as she was in a contract with him – the contract of marriage – "a relationship of choice" (Durrani 188). Hence, she had the ability to tear up that contract of living together whenever she felt like it (Durrani 188). Thus, she mustered her courage and succeeded in threatening him that if he misbehaved once more, she would leave him forever (Durrani 189).

Moreover, not only once did Tehmina resist and hit her husband. On another occasion, when he rose to strike her again, she reacted with disdain (Durrani 189). She revolted by saying, "Don't be foolish, Mustafa. Grow up. You don't need to hit me. Talk to me like an adult. Sit down," I ordered. For a moment, he actually sat on the edge of the bed and glared at me with a puzzled expression. But then his fury was unleashed and he lunged towards me. I kicked him in the belly with both feet, sending him reeling from the bed. He attacked once more and I

scratched and shoved him as hard as I could. I clawed at his face and pulled his hair. No woman had dared do this to Mustafa Khar, I could tell that his mind was devising new blueprints of terror” (Durrani 189). Then when he was attempting to crush her windpipe, she sank her teeth deep down into his flesh (Durrani 190). After few more blows on Tehmina, he finally slunk back (Durrani 190).

Thus, these examples illustrate that Tehmina had begun to utilize her power of taking a drastic decision in her life, and by thrashing and ordering him, she was gradually gaining her authority over her brutal husband. This shows that being a woman she is no less than he is. She was now learning to raise her voice against injustice and was gradually stepping towards her agency. She further narrates, “I refused to cry. I stared at him with sheer contempt, and I could tell that he was confused and even frightened by my resistance. I tortured him with indifference. I did not sulk. I demanded no apology. He tried to offer one, but I brushed it aside with the admonition, ‘Forget it, Mustafa. Sorry is a very inadequate word. Events have over taken it.’ In the past, my tears, my arguments, my pleadings had been like applause to his great acts of misplaced masculinity. Now my composure upset him; my silence weakened him” (Durrani 190). Consequently, even if that was only for a short period, Mustafa was shattered. He was actually shredding off his superiority complex and was speedily drifting towards inferiority complex that was making him weaker in position and in comparison and he could not restrain that even with his dominance. So much so that one day Tehmina dared to reveal her bruise to the guests at home and when asked what was the matter, she replied frankly, “Mustafa hit me” (Durrani 216). This shows that she was now brave enough to fight for her rights and reveal the nasty side of her husband to the people. This time she did not repeat her mistake of keeping silent.

Mustafa was now subjugated to her. His dominance could not last for long because he came to realize that in order to get back his wife whom he claimed to “love” with all his heart, he had to start adjusting to her, as if she was his “equal”. However, he never failed to demean Tehmina whenever he got the chance. On top of that when Tehmina left his home, he kidnapped their children, but Tehmina was strong enough to threaten him by saying, “If you are Mr Khar, I am *Mrs* Khar. If you learned from Mr Bhutto, I have learned from you. If you blackmail me, I’ll blackmail you. I will face up to the situation and fight you just as you are fighting me. I will not let you get away with it! (Durrani 244)”. Her strong will ultimately helped her to get back her children. In spite of all this, when Mustafa went to jail for political reasons, he became dependent on Tehmina for her help to get him out of the prison. She supported him in politics because they shared the same goal in this field and she felt sympathy for his condition. She only fulfilled her duty as a politician’s wife in getting a politician out of the jail. Gradually, she was finding her new authoritative voice when she started emerging as a successful politician due to her impressive public speeches. Over time, she became mentally strong and an independent thinker as she had now played an active role in the politics. Yet there were times when Mustafa became violent and raped Tehmina in the prison and she was unable to protect herself.

The next time when Tehmina became more confident and fearless, she again left Mustafa’s home, decided to lose the custody of her four children and to go ahead in her life with dignity and achieve full autonomy only in the hope of getting back her children someday. This time even her parents supported her, because Adila had confessed having illicit relationship with Mustafa. After several hindrances from Mustafa’s side as he was unwilling to divorce her, Tehmina finally got the divorce from him and won the battle against Mustafa in the court for getting back the custody of her children. Tehmina thus had finally achieved her complete agency

and authority. It is this particular decision and action that I am talking about that Tehmina could have taken earlier in order to save herself and her children from Mustafa's wrath, which she tolerated for almost thirteen years of their married life. Thus, she had several scopes or chances to free herself from this abusive relationship. Several times, she had the power or the ability and the chances or options to free herself from her oppressor, yet she lived with her tormenter only out of fear and shame. In other words, she had the agency, but she did not utilize her power to choose a "productive course of action" initially. Here we can relate Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "bad faith", which she took from Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophical theory of "existentialism" (Maguire). According to Laura Maguire, "If someone is living in "bad faith," they allow themselves to be ruled by identities imposed on them from the outside. Their decisions do not reflect who they truly are" (Maguire). Hence, Tehmina needed the opposite of "bad faith", that is, "good faith" in order to achieve "radical freedom" (Maguire).

Moreover, according to Deniz Kandiyoti, "Systematic analyses of women's strategies and coping mechanisms can help to capture the nature of patriarchal systems in their cultural, class-specific, and temporal concreteness and reveal how men and women resist, accommodate, adapt, and conflict with each other over resources, rights, and responsibilities. Such analyses dissolve some of the artificial divisions apparent in theoretical discussions of the relationships among class, race, and gender, since participants' strategies are shaped by several levels of constraints. Women's strategies are always played out in the context of identifiable patriarchal bargains that act as implicit scripts that define, limit, and inflect their market and domestic options" (Kandiyoti 285). Kandiyoti's statement is applicable for Tehmina just as it is for Firdaus.

Firdaus also had the capability and several chances to take decisions and to act, and she even utilized those opportunities in order to save herself from total subjugation. However, in

Firdaus' case what is more important to consider is the fact that the circumstances were not in her favor. There were times when she made the choice of leaving her uncle's home and her husband's home, but the different circumstances rather dumped her into even more obstacles. She was tortured not only by her husband Sheikh Mahmoud but also by Bayoumi – the coffee shop owner – for deciding to lead a better life with her secondary school certificates; she believed she could get job with the little qualification that she had, and she was even right to think so. However, Bayoumi instead of supporting her, thrashed her brutally, raped her and then brought other men to do the same with her. Firdaus, in this case, utilized the power of choice and escaped from Bayoumi's confinement but she did not yet get the agency. Faced by the many obstacles in her life, Firdaus was eventually thrust into prostitution by Sharifa Salah el Dine, a high-class prostitute. "Indeed, all those who supposedly rescue Firdaus, men and women alike, end up using her for their own purposes" (Saliba 135). She taught Firdaus about life that to live in this world, one has to be "harder than life", just the way she is; life has made her cruel (El Saadawi 57). Firdaus gradually learned to value herself and realized her worth to men. Although at first she had no idea about the kind of life she was going to live, she eventually took the profession of prostitution as her fate. This shows that she was gradually progressing towards her agency by taking the decision that she thought was good for her. She was not afraid of the consequences from the very beginning when she left her husband's home, which is quite contrary to Tehmina's courage.

However, Firdaus did not yet gain her full agency or autonomy when she managed to escape from the brothel in order to save herself from Fawzy – the pimp who had raped and killed Sharifa. At that point, she was only becoming mentally strong, but not strong enough to be independent. For example, although, she did not trust men anymore, she let a policeman take

advantage of her body. Initially she tried to shake herself free of him, but then she became submissive because she was dependent on his money (one pound) for her own living (El Saadawi 67). Later on when she got rid of him, a man in a car did the same with her. For her service, he gave her ten pounds. When she bought food with that money from a restaurant, the waiter “watched it through the corner of one eye, while his other eye looked away as though shunning the forbidden part of a woman’s body” (El Saadawi 72). That mere note of ten pounds had given her a sense of pleasure. She asks herself, “I was seized with a feeling of wonder. Could it be that the ten pound note I held in my hand was as illicit and forbidden as the thrill of sacrilegious pleasure?” (El Saadawi 72). From then on, she held her head high with newly bestowed confidence and realization. Firdaus, after getting that ten-pound note, had achieved her long awaited and newly found courage to face the world. This shows that mere few notes of money can change a prostitute’s life. This gave her confidence to say “no” to pimps and the right to choose the pimp she wanted to. She realized her real worth even more when one man paid her twenty pounds for her service. Thus, at the age of twenty-three, Firdaus considered herself all free because she recognized her value with the amount of money she earned. She now had a home of her own and she could exercise freedom of choice. According to her, money is the means to emancipation.

Although she took the profession of prostitution as her own way of having partial control over her body and the right to choose the men with whom she shared her bed with, she was still dependent on men for this profession. Conversely, according to her, in this manner she was able to get herself out of the total subordination that she had to endure since her childhood. Thus, she had eventually used her ability or power to choose, but she was yet to achieve her full agency.

Apart from utilizing her ability to choose, Firdaus also raised her voice against being considered inferior. For example, when a pimp remarked that she is “not respectable”, she responded by questioning him, “My work is not worthy of respect. Why then do you join in it with me?” (El Saadawi 76-77). According to Therese Saliba, “In her outcry against male dominance, exposes the multiple forms of hypocrisy and control used to gain authority over women” (Saliba 135). She then refused him any further intimacy. That man’s words seemed to her as though he spat upon her with the words, “not respectable” (El Saadawi 78). She felt restless and sleepless because those two words had stung her bad. She had a self-realization that she was not a respectable woman (El Saadawi 78). It was as if a veil was lifted from her eyes; she was seeing things from a newer perspective (El Saadawi 78). From then onwards she chose to become different; she wanted to change herself. She became desperate to become a respectable woman (El Saadawi 79).

This is the point when Firdaus took another major decision of her life. As she was still willing to get a respectable position through her secondary school certificate, soon she left prostitution and took the job as an office assistant. Firdaus’ tendency of always changing her course of action can be explained through Kandiyoti’s words as “the strategic nature of women’s choices” and “coping mechanisms” (Kandiyoti 283, 285). As Firdaus was continuously facing setbacks in her life, she adopted strategic means of progressing through it. At the work place, Firdaus got more respect than she expected, although the higher officials approached her with negative intention, she declined them because she wanted respect for herself. However, she was again betrayed when her colleague and lover, Ibrahim, ditched her after using her body. Though her heart was shattered for some time, Firdaus did not give up. Rather she again chose the path

that she thought was best for her. She hence returned to prostitution because according to her, prostitution is better than being a virtuous woman (El Saadawi 94).

Thus, her self-realization gave her a certain sense of independence and self-worthiness. She learned that money is everything. According to her, money is needed to buy honor that she always craved for. Hence, she “preferred to be a free prostitute, rather than an enslaved wife” (El Saadawi 99). She trusted herself so much that she did not even heed anyone’s advice. Thus, unlike Tehmina, Firdaus was determined from the very beginning. Whenever Firdaus faced the need to change her course of action, she never failed to decide and choose what she thought to be right for her. She was not concerned of the consequences, whereas Tehmina was deeply concerned which hindered her progress several times. However, according to Kandiyoti, “female conservatism as a reaction to the breakdown of classic patriarchy does not by any means exhaust the range of possible responses available to women” (Kandiyoti 283).

Firdaus finally fully emancipated herself from the men and the society when she utilized her power and courage of killing Marzouk – her pimp who wanted to take share of Firdaus’ earnings, to protect her and to marry her against her wishes. According to Therese Saliba, “The fighting back is part of the process of claiming a “self,” part of what Tambu calls the “painful process . . . of expansion” beyond the borders of gender, race, and class hierarchies” (Saliba 142). Before deciding to kill him, she did go to the police station but that was only to find out “that the law punishes women like” Firdaus, “but turns a blind eye to what men do” (El Saadawi 101). This made her realize that she is not free at all. Everywhere men would dominate her, but she wanted to be a master and not a slave who is always subjugated (El Saadawi 103). However, at that moment, she was completely the master of her will power that she could direct in any way she wanted to. Although, stabbing Marzouk was an impromptu act, her deeply rooted hatred

towards men led her to this action. While killing him she even wondered why she did not do the same with the other men who oppressed her (El Saadawi 104). Then she realized that it was because of the fear that had been within her all the time, just as Tehmina harbored a sense of fear and shame in her mind (El Saadawi 104).

Firdaus held strong hatred and vengeance against men for a long time, but as she is a woman, she had to hide her anger. Firdaus says, “Anyone who saw me spitting on the picture might think I knew that particular man personally. But I did not... However, every single man I did get to know filled me with but one desire: to lift my hand and bring it smashing down on his face. But because I am a woman I have never had the courage to lift my hand. And because I am a prostitute, I hid my fear under layers of make-up” (El Saadawi 10). However, in this case we should also note the fact that Firdaus was not afraid of matters, such as, leaving her husband’s place and escaping from Bayoumi’s house, rather she was afraid of the most dangerous act of killing someone. Whereas, Tehmina was initially afraid of making use of the few opportunities that could lead to her emancipation. This is the big difference that lies between Tehmina and Firdaus, that is, the extent of courage that these two protagonists portrayed from the very beginning.

In addition, agency is also about forming an identity. It is so because as a woman gradually utilizes her power and courage, she consequently steps out of an enclosed space or shell and blooms into a completely new woman with newly found confidence, individual identity and recognition. Her identity changes from an oppressed woman into an independent, daring woman. This same happens with Firdaus and Tehmina as well. Firdaus felt relieved and light after the killing incident. She had no more burdens on her shoulder. She was no longer under anyone’s dominance. She was highly confident about her own authority. She belonged to no one.

She was thus free in the real sense for the first time in her life. After the killing incident, her newly found autonomy gave her the right to tear up the three thousand note offered by a man for her service. At first, the man thought her to be a prostitute, but then it seemed to him or he doubted her to be a princess when she was tearing up the bank notes (El Saadawi 108). She said she was none of them, because she had become an independent human being who is without any label or tag on her identity.

Furthermore, the men and the male dominated society were afraid of her because she “exposed the face of the ugly reality” – the reality of the abusive men with patriarchal powers being stripped off their masks and being revealed of their injustices inflicted upon females (El Saadawi 110). They were also afraid to let her live because she could prove dangerous for them. In other words, her dangerous rebellious actions might force them either to die or to lose their superior position, and none of these is acceptable to men. Hence, she was jailed for her crime “and her refusal to accept her position within their enslaving structure condemns her to death” (Saliba 136). However, according to her, her “crime was no crime” and hence she did not beg for pardon from the court (El Saadawi 110). Rather, she preferred to die for the crime she committed because with the act of killing, all her fears and wants had diminished (El Saadawi 110-111). Living with needs and desires would only enslave her (El Saadawi 110). In relation to this, Therese Saliba writes, “Firdaus... cannot escape the material limitations of her class position. Thus the hope for her freedom lies only in the fact that she is willing to die for what she believes in” (Saliba 143).

Moreover, according to Firdaus, “When I killed I did it with truth not with a knife. That is why they are afraid and in a hurry to execute me. They do not fear my knife. It is my truth which frightens them. This fearful truth gives me great strength” (El Saadawi 112). Her determination

made her do a crime for which she had no regret; rather she was proud of it. She was proud of this journey to the “unknown destination” because this place is unknown to the kings and rulers on this world (El Saadawi 111). She also says, “All my life I was looking for something that would fill me with pride, something that would make me hold my head high, higher than the heads of everyone else, especially kings, princes and rulers” (El Saadawi 111). Moreover, by killing Marzouk and by getting the death sentence, her identity had changed from an enslaved being to a new identity as a master because symbolically no more men could oppress her after her death. Thus, through her death, she got her long awaited agency. She also got the agency to create her own identity as the symbolic killer of all the abusive men in general.

Similarly, Tehmina also found her separate identity and recognition as an individual human being by divorcing Mustafa. For example, after freeing herself from the oppressor, she started socializing, or in other words, she was learning to be social. She enjoyed the social gatherings and parties as a silent spectator and got inspired by other independent women. She missed all this in her life when she was married to Mustafa. She also removed herself from politics and started painting as a means of portraying her experiences of the world. Her paintings now portrayed the explicit images of the rapes on women executed in the goals.

Moreover, when they were married, although Mustafa abused her in the name of fake religious beliefs, Tehmina on the contrary, got hold of the true religious beliefs and used it as a shield against her husband’s wrath. She remained faithful towards her religion and profusely prayed to the Creator during her crisis and used her prayers as her power and strength to face the tormentor. In other words, instead of opting for the other two approaches of agency (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter), she was more inclined towards the resistance approach and the compliant approach where she rejected the fake religious beliefs by embracing the true religious

beliefs and sought multiple possibilities in order to get her autonomy. The most important example of her autonomy could be that she broke the traditional silence of Muslim women in general by writing her first autobiography, *My Feudal Lord* (Durrani 375). According to her, exposing hypocrisy is the best answer to the injustice done (Durrani 375). Hence, women should not remain silent; they should raise their voice against injustice so that Mustafa and other feudal lords do not “thrive and multiply on silence” (Durrani 375). This is her social message to the oppressed women, especially in the Muslim context. Later on, Tehmina started up working for women’s rights.

Tehmina’s another crucial identity is that she was no longer Mustafa’s wife. When once Mustafa told her that she has “no identity” and importance of her own, she is only Tehmina Durrani and the “ex-wife” of Ghulam Mustafa Khar, Tehmina became helpless because his words had stung her deep and at that moment, she had no strong answer for him (Durrani 374). Yet, she rejected the suggestion of keeping her surname “Khar” because she “did not want to lean on a pillar that had fallen upon” her “instead of supporting” her (Durrani 374). Later on when the newspapers announced the “pending international publication” of her autobiography *My Feudal Lord*, with full courage and confidence she replied to Khar’s previous statement saying, “Well, Mustafa, now the world will soon know you only as Tehmina Durrani’s ex-husband” (Durrani 382). With these very few words, she had completely freed herself and built her new independent identity as Tehmina Durrani and the master of her own will. Although Mustafa, being a man, his identity as the master in the patriarchal society did not yet change, Tehmina did get the new identity as a master because she was no longer tied up with her husband’s surname and she no longer had to act upon his demands.

Thus, Tehmina Durrani's autobiography, *My Faudal Lord* is one such novel that reveals the bitterest truth of the sufferings of a Pakistani Muslim woman who had to undergo mental and physical abuses for almost thirteen years of her married life with her second husband, Ghulam Mustafa Khar. This is not only Tehmina's story; rather it is the representation of the majority of the battered married women. This true story would otherwise have remained blanketed if Tehmina's strong will to expose her husband to the world had not worked in her. Her marriage to Mustafa had devastated her so much that the only way to make other women aware of this abusive relationship was through writing this book. In this way, several other women will get the courage to raise their voice against injustice and hence, become stronger. In other words, through her first autobiographical novel, Tehmina Durrani has paved the path for the battered women to rise up higher from their subjugated position with exuberance.

The same is with Firdaus. When Nawal El Saadawi had gone to the prison to meet with Firdaus and to record her reasons for killing Marzouk, Firdaus, did not want to speak to her, but then she agreed to tell her life's story. By letting her story to be recorded, she proved her agency not only for herself, but also for all the women suffering social violence. According to Therese Saliba, "the individual woman struggling against social and economic dominance represents her sisters' struggle and lends courage to that struggle; and the doctor interrogates her position of privilege and relinquishes her authority in order to hear Firdaus. The doctor takes Firdaus in – "she vibrated within me" (iii) – even as she realizes that "Firdaus had more courage than I" (110). Firdaus's story, therefore, operates as a "way in" to the subaltern woman's experience, for Firdaus's courage has infused those stony parts of the doctor, of the listener, of the reader. Thus the story functions as a collective cure for the many female listeners who might hear it" (Saliba

136). “Her story emphasizes her sexual and economic exploitation as means by which patriarchal tactics of domination have oppressed Arab women” (Saliba 136).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In the conclusion, I would like to sum up all the main points written so far. In the first chapter, I have provided a brief introduction of this entire thesis. I have provided a short explanation of the French Feminist, Helene Cixous' theory of "écriture feminine" and the Bangladeshi writer, Taslima Nasreen's idea of male dominated language. I have also mentioned the names of few prolific female writers from South Asia and Middle East, including the fact that Tehmina Durrani and Nawal El Saadawi had to go through several struggles for the publication of the two novels discussed in this paper. I have ended the introduction with the point that my thesis is based on wider feminist perspectives, rather than limiting it to only one type of feminism.

In the second chapter, I have looked at the obstacles, oppression and violence that Tehmina and Firdaus had to suffer due to patriarchy. Through her semi-autobiography, El Saadawi has revealed the bitter truth of the plights in the life of the Egyptian prostitute, Firdaus. Since her childhood, Firdaus was a subject to mistreatments. Her father used to consider her as a burden. She had to endure female genital mutilation (FGM), because of a misconception her biological mother had about her. Even her stepmother was not affectionate towards her. Her uncle did not allow her to have further education after completing secondary school because according to him, females should not mix with boys because otherwise they would become equal to men (Fwangyil 22). Having higher education could also mean that women may become independent and this is not something the dominating men could accept. Moreover, during her childhood she was even molested by her uncle. Firdaus had to go through all this because she is a

female and it is believed that women in Muslim societies should keep silent about such oppressions. Hence, their voices are strangled or overpowered when the females demand justice or want to rise above in terms of their ambitions and conditions.

Similarly, in her autobiography, *My Feudal Lord*, Pakistani novelist, Tehmina Durrani has explicitly pointed out all the oppressions she had to endure since her childhood and the reasons behind being considered as inferior being by others. As she was of dark complexion, her mother never used to adore her. Her mother's tendency of making her do tasks, such as, organizing her jewelry, dress, etc., made Tehmina nervous because she was afraid of losing something or the other, which her mother would not tolerate at all. Moreover, the restrictive environment at home and the obligation of remaining as an obedient child without having any enjoyment, made her somewhat schizophrenic.

Tehmina and Firdaus were thus mistreated by their parents and they had to grow up in restrictive environments. The most prominent difference between them is that Tehmina belongs to an affluent family, whereas Firdaus is poor. Even though Tehmina is not less educated like Firdaus, she also had to endure discrimination because they were after all Muslim girl children, and oppression is not limited to class boundaries, it is rather something beyond that and widespread. Class is thus a contingent factor. Hence, class itself cannot save women from domestic violence. This is why we see men demanding total submissiveness from women belonging to different social classes, and most of the females even comply with the men's demands and live enslaved under patriarchal oppression. According to Deniz Kandiyoti, Muslim elder women also dominate girl children because in this manner they do a bargain with patriarchy (Kandiyoti 280). In other words, as most of the elder Muslim women are oppressed, they in turn find means of freeing themselves and becoming the dominating subject by

oppressing the younger females. Thus, in patriarchy role reversals are common depending on who is the subjugated and who want to use their oppressive power.

In the third chapter, I have discussed the mental and physical torture that these two female protagonists, Tahmina and Firdaus, had to suffer in their married life. Their husbands thrashed them. Tehmina had to tolerate the bitter truth of Adila and Mustafa's illicit affair. She could not initially free herself from her tormentor because she did not want to lose the custody of her children and was afraid of being disowned by her parents and of being rejected by the society for being a "two-time divorcee" (Durrani 223). On the other hand, Firdaus was forced to marry an old man. As she escaped from her husband's place, she was forced into prostitution and was used, betrayed and tortured by oppressive men. All this happened with these two Muslim women because of the classic patriarchy and fake religious beliefs. Tehmina, being a Pakistani Muslim woman, and Firdaus, being an Egyptian Muslim woman, were culturally and socially oppressed, irrespective of their class differences.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I have analysed the extent to which these two female characters utilized their ability to choose, to decide and to act in order to get complete freedom or agency. Initially Firdaus was forced into prostitution, and she was not willing to do this kind of work. Yet, she chose prostitution as a means of getting agency even though it was very difficult for her. Hence, prostitution is a strategic way of developing one's agency. In other words, prostitution is a problematic agency. Prostitution is a result of situation. It is a very specific and contextualized agency that is born out of particular struggles. On the other hand, for Tehmina, divorcing her husband was her strategic way of gaining autonomy. However, Tehmina initially suffered from insecurity and fear that held up her independence at the beginning. Hence, when Firdaus and Tehmina raised their voices against injustice, they were gradually progressing

towards their agency. Ultimately, they got their full freedom and new identities in their own different ways. Thus, agency creates out of process and it is not a product that could be generalized.

From these two novels discussed so far, we learn that patriarchy and the distorted interpretation of religion are the main causes for postcolonial or particularly Muslim women's oppressed and battered conditions. We get to know about the violation against women in Middle Eastern and South Asian countries through the fictions and non-fictions written by the prolific writers of those countries. Similarly, Bangladeshi women, irrespective of their class, are also greatly and increasingly abused. As few novels about gender violence on Bangladeshi women have been published, it is quite difficult to make a comparison and to come to a concrete conclusion so that the findings could be penned down as theories. In other words, multiple perspectives are needed in order to understand how such topics are treated by different writers in Bangladesh. Hence, it is necessary that these kinds of fictions and non-fictions are written in profusion so that these may help us to understand the varied conditions of women prevalent in Bangladesh. Thus, reading and understanding the novels, like, *Woman at Point Zero* and *My Feudal Lord*, help us to understand our own condition and to wage a feminist battle against patriarchy.

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