

2025

Dismantling the Established Matrix of Power in Matrimony: A Study of Feminine Power and Subversion in *My Feudal Lord*

Asia Saeed

Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Lahore, Pakistan AND Department of English, University of Sahiwal, Sahiwal, Pakistan, mtxy3220@gmail.com

H.M.Zahid Iqbal

Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan, zahidiqbal.litt@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://kjhss.khazar.org/journal>

Recommended Citation

Saeed, Asia and Iqbal, H.M.Zahid (2025) "Dismantling the Established Matrix of Power in Matrimony: A Study of Feminine Power and Subversion in *My Feudal Lord*," *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*: Vol. 28: Iss. 2, Article 3.

Available at: <https://kjhss.khazar.org/journal/vol28/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences. It has been accepted for inclusion in Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences by an authorized editor of Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences.

ORIGINAL STUDY

Dismantling the Established Matrix of Power in Matrimony: A Study of Feminine Power and Subversion in *My Feudal Lord*

Asia Saeed^{a,b,*}, H .M. Zahid Iqbal^c

^a Ph.D. Scholar at the Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Lahore, Pakistan

^b Lecturer, Department of English, University of Sahiwal, Sahiwal, Pakistan

^c Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This research aims to highlight the phenomenon of dismantling power dynamics in matrimonial relationships and how Pakistani women are exerting their feminine power to subvert the patriarchal system. Power and oppression are inseparable and play significant roles in shaping individuals' lives and lived experiences. The findings of this study highlight that Durrani's work has explored the dual standards of the society where patriarchal control over the marriage institution is stronger than that of women, where women always pay a huge toll for making their marriages a success. This study analyzes Tehmina Durrani's memoir "*My Feudal Lord* (1995) to determine the relationship between feminine power and the subversion of the patriarchal system by employing the theoretical contributions of Hartsock (1983) and Mohanty (1991). Hartsock's (1983) Feminist Standpoint Theory advocates obtaining women situated knowledge owing to their privileged marginalized place in society for better understanding because they have objective and unbiased knowledge, while Mohanty's (1991) Postcolonial Feminist perspective stands for the voice of postcolonial marginalized women.

Keywords: Power matrix, Matrimonial life, Feminist standpoint theory, Postcolonial feminist perspective

Introduction

Power dynamics play a critical role in any social setup and are deeply rooted into economic, political, and cultural norms. Several studies (Lerner, 1986; Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Gottman, 2018) discussed this phenomenon with reference to gender, individual personality differences, and power distribution patterns. Challenging these power dynamics requires a nuanced understanding of their interconnectedness and a strategic approach

Received 12 February 2025; revised 25 April 2025; accepted 27 May 2025.

Available online 30 June 2025

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: mtxy3220@gmail.com, asiawaris@uosahiwal.edu.pk (A. Saeed), zahidiqbal.litt@gmail.com (H. M. Z. Iqbal).

<https://doi.org/10.5782/2223-2621.1005>

2223-2621/© 2025 Published by Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences. This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 Licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

to dismantle them. Weber (2009) defined power as the ability to gain one's aims and goals instead of others' resistance, and this form of power is institutionalized within social structures. Power can be relational and pervasive, exercised through discourse and episteme, because it shapes the perception of reality and norms (Foucault, 1977; Akhtar *et al.*, 2021). It can be overt in the form of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971; Imran *et al.*, 2023; Collins, 2000) or covert in society as exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 1990). It is a structural characteristic of all human relationships (Elias, 1939) and marginalized groups always emerge because of imbalance power dynamics. These marginalized groups are formed based on gender, class, ethnicity, or racial identities, and these multiple aspects of identity intersect to create unique experiences of power and inequality within marriages (Crenshaw, 2013).

Role of power in matrimonial relations is not a new scholarship; but a little work has been done in South Asian and specially in Pakistani context. A lot of research has been conducted on the significant factors which cause or dismantle power balance in marriages. Some scholars discussed the influence of patriarchy on matrimonial relations, as Lerner (1986) explored the gradual evolution of patriarchy and how it effects on marital power dynamics. Moreover, Kandiyoti (1988) discussed role of women in navigating and negotiating with these patriarchal constraints. Rhode (1989) explored the importance of legal reform and policy interventions in promoting equality and dismantling power hierarchies in marital relationships.

Financial independence is a vital factor in dismantling imbalanced power dynamics in marriages. A lot of research is being done by researchers in this context such as Frankenberg & Thomas (2001) and Bergmann (2005) connected women's economic dependency on men with the power dynamics. Further, Tichenor (2005) analyzed the case studies of financially independent women who were still victims of power imbalance instead of their economic contributions. Bennett & Daly (2014) explored the connection between gender and poverty for a UK-based foundation and highlighted the importance of economic independence of women for more balanced marriages. Gottman (2018) and Kurdek (1993) emphasized the importance of communication in promoting equal power matrices in marriages. Salem (2018) analyzed Egyptian Women's power in marriages based on costs covered by the bride or groom's side; the results show that the woman's power in marriage is directly proportional to the marriage cost covered by the bride's side. Previous researches indicate that power dynamics in matrimonial relations have mainly been examined through economic and patriarchal lenses, focusing mainly on developed countries. Unfortunately, there has been limited attention paid to the experiences of women from Third World countries, and their perspectives have largely been overlooked in discourses.

Third World women's life narratives are sources of access to their experiences (Imran, 2019; Eljanhaoui, 2024; Imran & Hart, 2018). In autobiographies and memoirs of women, they inspect their past lives, life choices, and personal strategies to gain consciousness about their personal identity and the power structures that shaped their decisions (Dadashova, 2018; Jabeen & Afzal, 2023). Adhikary (2014) discussed the importance of writing a life narrative: "Telling one's own life story is an act of self-emancipation, where one holds full control over one's life and its narration, a sign of liberation." This genre provides the liberty of 'self-representation' (p.4). Durrani *et al.* (1995) memoir reveals this ingrained system of power and oppression in feudal and patriarchal societies. She is among the women who denied remaining silent and unfold her personal life to the outer world. The international media seen her initiative as an encouraging step, and Random House published her memoir in 1995 with two co-authors. She is known as a women's and children's rights activist and remained the first lady of Pakistan from April 11, 2022,

to August 13, 2013, as the wife of Shehbaz Sharif. She worked with the Abdul Satar Edhi Foundation for three years and established the “Tehmina Durrani Foundation” in 2015 to continue the mission of the Edhi Foundation.

Durrani’s memoir (1995) is an attempt to dismantle power dynamics and she exposed the multilayered mechanism of patriarchal dominance by exerting her feminine power. Women’s life-writings are sources of feminine power through self-revelation. The concept of feminine power involves escaping from these gender-specific and traditionally loaded terms related to masculine power while focusing on women’s empowerment and equality (Connell, 2005; Nussbaum, 2000; Brownmiller, 2013). Redefining feminine power includes dismantling hierarchies, questioning masculine hegemony, and emphasizing feminine agency without being subjugated from the traditional gender roles implemented by patriarchal society (Fraser, 2013). It refers to women’s specific ways to manifest power and challenge the Mata-narratives of patriarchal society. According to Mohanty (2006), feminine power can navigate and transform the traditional patriarchal structures to create more equitable and inclusive societies. It challenges the portrayal of femininity as weak, oppressed, and passive within the framework of manipulative power.

When marginalized and outcast women write life narratives, they often break the silence against the conventional constraints of their societies and impart a medium to negotiate personal concerns within larger national or cultural contexts. According to Dadashova (2018) and Barton *et al.* (2020), the life narratives and feminine power strategies provide potential sources of individual empowerment that shed light on the lives of the other humans who are suffering from the same terrible and unequal social and marital status. Therefore, the studies as mentioned above stress on the women’s active and productive roles in promoting awareness about the rights and values, especially in marriage relations by transforming the structures and resisting patriarchal norms. Durrani’s memoir (1995) symbolizes feminine power, breaking the long-standing silence and revolting against entrenched societal norms (Singh, 2014). Her memoir sheds light on the vulnerabilities and strengths of women in patriarchal societies (Imran & Wei, 2019).

This study explores how Durrani *et al.* (1995) dismantled the established matrix of power in matrimonial relations by employing the theoretical contributions of Hartsock (1983) and Mohanty (1991). The Feminist Standpoint Theory by Hartsock (1983) deals with situated knowledge and advocates that research should be started from the marginalized section of society, and to dig up the situated knowledge of postcolonial Pakistani women, it is inevitable to understand the background and factors that affect third-world women’s standpoints. Hence, Mohanty’s (1991) postcolonial feminist perspective is incorporated into Feminist Standpoint Theory to gain a more insightful vision of Durrani *et al.* (1995) memoir. The combination of the theoretical contributions of Hartsock (1983) and Mohanty (1991) helps to gain a deeper understanding of gender differences, women’s subjugated place in Pakistani society, and how Pakistani women struggle to exert their feminine power and revert the prescribed master narratives of power.

Research methodology

The Feminist Standpoint Theory derives its working hypothesis, originated by Marx (1818–1883) in which he deals with class differences, self-consciousness, and alienation, and Hartsock (1983) developed the Feminist Standpoint theory based on the approach of Historical Materialism (1845). However, Hartsock (1983) focuses on women’s life experiences instead of proletariats or men and relates these claims as; material life figures out the social standing of any person, and due to different societal places, two opposite

groups (dominant and marginalized) appear in society. She made the “sexual division of labor” as the foundation of the feminist standpoint, and this sexual division is both social (social biases) and biological (bodily dimensions such as reproduction and labor).

In our social setup, women face double responsibility, giving birth to a child, as well as earning a living for the family. These responsibilities make women’s lives harder as compared to their counterparts. According to [Hartsock \(1983\)](#), women contribute significantly more to society being as mothers and workers, especially in capitalism. Most of the time, they work equally to men in all sectors of the society and in return, unlike men, they get lower wages, and social status. As a result, their lives are most of the time defined by their production; biological and value to household chores (pp. 293–295).

According to her point of view, there is a distinctive line between men’s and women’s lives: men only produce goods, but women produce goods as well as human beings. The sexual division of labor provides different experiences for both genders ([Hartsock, 1983](#)). The inclusion of women’s standpoints in the social system constructs a fully human society based on connections rather than separation and opposition. A male feels a threat to his identity from her mother and builds a rigid ego boundary. Therefore, the male’s self-construction results in an aggressive dichotomy between the male’s constructed community and masculinized worldview (based on his learning). Women, as members of the marginal group, have a double consciousness because they have keen insight into the lives of males. On the other hand, the dominant group (men) rarely gains insight into marginal groups, that is, women ([Nelson, 1990](#)). Women have an active consciousness of both perspectives and mediators between the two worlds. Feminist Standpoint theory is appropriate to foreground the experiences of hierarchically marginalized and oppressed women and encourages them to narrate their experiences ([Nelson, 1990](#); [John, 2011](#)). Dominant class (male or white) always has a perverse (strange and harmful) perspective, but this does not mean that the dominant group’s vision is false because they supply the material life in which both groups take part ([Hartsock, 1983](#)).

He further discussed that the women’s struggle from various third-world backgrounds, particularly in male dominant society, matters a lot to save their rights, and as well as other women who are unable to resist to this strong male-dominated social fabric. Furthermore, [Mohanty’s \(1991\)](#) concept of relations of rules provides five categories to better understand Third World Women’s struggle for resistance and identity. [Mohanty \(1991\)](#) explained these relations of rules as

[R]etain the idea of multiple, fluid structures of domination that intersect to find women differently at historical conjunctures, while at the same time insisting on the dynamic oppositional agency of individuals and collectives and their engagement in “daily life.” (p. 13)

[Hartsock \(1983\)](#) divides society into two categories because of the sexual division of labor, but [Mohanty’s \(1991\)](#) concept of complex rationality argues that these relations of rules are fluid and intersectional. [Mohanty \(1991\)](#) uses the term “relations of ruling,” coined by [Smith \(1987, p. 2\)](#), to suggest third-world women’s struggle. These “relations of ruling” systems are not parallel but intersectional and help to find the consciousness and agency of third-world women. The basic idea of “Relations of ruling” encompasses power, institutions, directions, and regulation more pervasively than traditional concepts of power discourses ([Smith, 1987](#)). Unlike Smith, who used this concept merely for Western capitalist patriarchies, [Mohanty \(1991\)](#) uses “relations of ruling” to conceptualize colonialism, imperialism, racism, and body politics. [Mohanty \(1991\)](#) categorizes the third world’s feminist struggles in five contexts: (1) colonialism, class, gender; (2) state, citizenship, and racial formation; (3) multinational production and social society (these three aspects focus

on the rules of the state at different times, political and economic shifts in history, and the formation of the multinational economy); (4) anthropology and the third world woman as native (third world women's comprehension of academic and knowledge practices); and (5) consciousness, identity, and writing (the formation of self-knowledge of third world women). The first three categories of [Mohanty's \(1991\)](#) relations of the rule are compatible with [Hartsock \(1983\)](#) idea that women's material life experiences construct their feminist consciousness and standpoint.

Colonialism played a significant role in the development of consciousness and epistemology regarding class and gender in the colonized territories. The British introduced the bureaucratization of race and gender as a strategy to rule and created a boundary between the colonial bureaucracy and the natives. Colonial rule transformed existing social/sexual inequalities based on economic power and patriarchy ([Mohanty, 1991](#)). After the colonial era, the white capitalist patriarchal regime constructed its supremacy through hegemonic discourses of individual rights and citizenship ([Mohanty, 1991](#)). The state handles the imbalance of power relations of gender and creates a gendered regime by delimiting the boundaries of property rights, domestic/personal violence, and sexuality and empowering policing and bureaucratic institutions with male personnel. The concept of racism has its origin in Britain and the USA, and it has always remained a matter of concern for feminist critics ([Mohanty, 1991](#)).

The incorporation of third-world women into the multinational labor force and domestic services introduced new perspectives on gender and race in the late twentieth century ([Mohanty, 1991](#)). Feminists took the distinction of public/private as the base to incorporate the idea of third-world women's oppression based on the sexual division of labor and considered it a challenging theoretical scenario at the macro (industrial) and micro (domestic) levels. The expansion of industrialization increased the need for cheap labor, and third-world women became an easy-targeted and desired population to fulfill this need. Theoretically, studies have been conducted on the exploitation and mobilization of third-world countries, but little work has been done on third-world women as subjects who can make their own choices ([Mohanty, 1991](#), p. 29). On the contrary, the agency and identity that anyone shows in the outer world are also based on the indigenous social ideologies managed by the state, and all third-world women have a coalition in their stereotypical image of docile and obedient. Therefore, the theoretical questions of agency, gender, and race are challenging for the feminist's 'cross-cultural' analysis. This simultaneous analysis of sexuality and racialization imparts an intersectional self and collective agency ([Mohanty, 1991](#)).

[Mohanty \(1991\)](#) considers 'Anthropology' the most pivotal discipline in knowledge production during the colonial era because it signifies the 'power of naming' and works on the concepts of 'self and others' (p. 31). According to [Mohanty \(1991\)](#), anthropological practices are discursive in a way that stands for Western White masculinity as central, and feminist anthropologists must address both issues of concern: the representation of third-world women and simultaneously speaking for third-world women. [Mohanty \(1991\)](#) exemplifies 'native (male)' with 'third world women' about the rule because both have the same racial and sexual position in comparison to their 'colonial' and 'male' counterparts, and this process of racialization and sexualization is interconnected to the production of knowledge in colonial contexts. Feminist Standpoint theory is appropriate to foreground the experiences of hierarchically marginalized and oppressed women and encourages them to narrate their experiences ([Nelson, 1990](#)). Dominant class (male or white) always has a perverse (strange and harmful) perspective, but this does not mean that the dominant group's vision is false because they supply the material life in which both groups take part ([Hartsock, 1983](#)).

Most of the third-world feminists' major concerns about third-world women have remained macrostructural phenomena, such as liberal and nationalist struggles and the political, legal, and economic rights of women, but another aspect of females' experiences is on a micro level, such as daily life (Mohanty, 1991). Women's subjectivity always overlaps with race, gender, class, and caste. Mohanty (1991) raises the question of identity and subjectivity and advocates that writing is a vital tool to reflect self and collective consciousness. Both Hartsock (1983) and Mohanty (1991) discuss the concept of power and knowledge gained through the place. They highlight the epistemic advantage women gain due to their marginalization within patriarchal society. Hartsock (1983) emphasizes the standpoint of women in general, but Mohanty (1991) discusses the inclusion of third world women's standpoints in the mainstream Western feminism. Hence, the marginalized group has an epistemological advantage, and there is an inevitably inseparable connection between power and knowledge. Research that begins with the vision of oppressed or subjugated women is less partial (Harding, 1991). Moreover, Mohanty (1991) critiques the tendency of Western feminism to ignore the diverse and intersectional experiences of women in the Global South, calling for a more inclusive and context-specific approach to understanding power. Women's places in society impart authenticity and solid objectivity (Jaggar, 2004). Feminist Standpoint Theory analyzes the everyday exertion of power in society and the production of knowledge (Van der Tuin, 2016). The ruling class produces knowledge in many societies; therefore, it conceals how power is used to exploit the rest of the population (Jaggar, 2004). Knowledge appears in social interactions and cannot be extracted from sociocultural structures. Hence, third-world feminists argue for the rewriting of histories based on specific locations and histories of the hardships of people of color and postcolonial people. It is difficult to write counter-hegemonic histories, but if 'discourse' is the main pillar in constructing discursive categories, then how the histories exclude the daily life struggles of marginalized people is acceptable (Sivanandan, 1990).

Fig. 1 below describes the link between Hartsock (1983) Feminist Standpoint Theory and Mohanty's (1991) Postcolonial Feminist perspective. It shows that material life and sexual division of labor are directly linked to relations of rule because both play a significant role in developing the feminist consciousness of third-world women.

Analysis and discussion

Power is a significant aspect of Feminist Standpoint Theory and Postcolonial Feminism because it is involved in the operations of the community, and controls ideology and praxis. Situated knowledge challenges previously established neutral and objective dominant epistemologies by exposing their prevalence in existing power hierarchies (Haraway, 1988). Hartsock (1983) Feminist Standpoint Theory and Mohanty's (1991) postcolonial feminism posit that material life imparts women a privileged place, where they can have authentic and real firsthand knowledge. Place plays a significant role in empowering someone, and empowerment causes the emergence of voice (Yoder & Kahn, 1992; Braham, 1995; Rosser & Miller, 2000). Power, place, and knowledge are interrelated. Our place determines our experiences and whether we can communicate our experiences with others (Fivush & Marin, 2007).

Therefore, the privileged place of third-world women provides them with an excess of certain experiences, and only their narratives are authentic. Durrani's (1995) memoir shows that Khar's ex-wives were at such a low status in marriage that, instead of having lived traumatic experiences, they could not have the power to articulate their miseries. Durrani *et al.* (1995) backlashed to patriarchal dominance, exerted her feminine power,

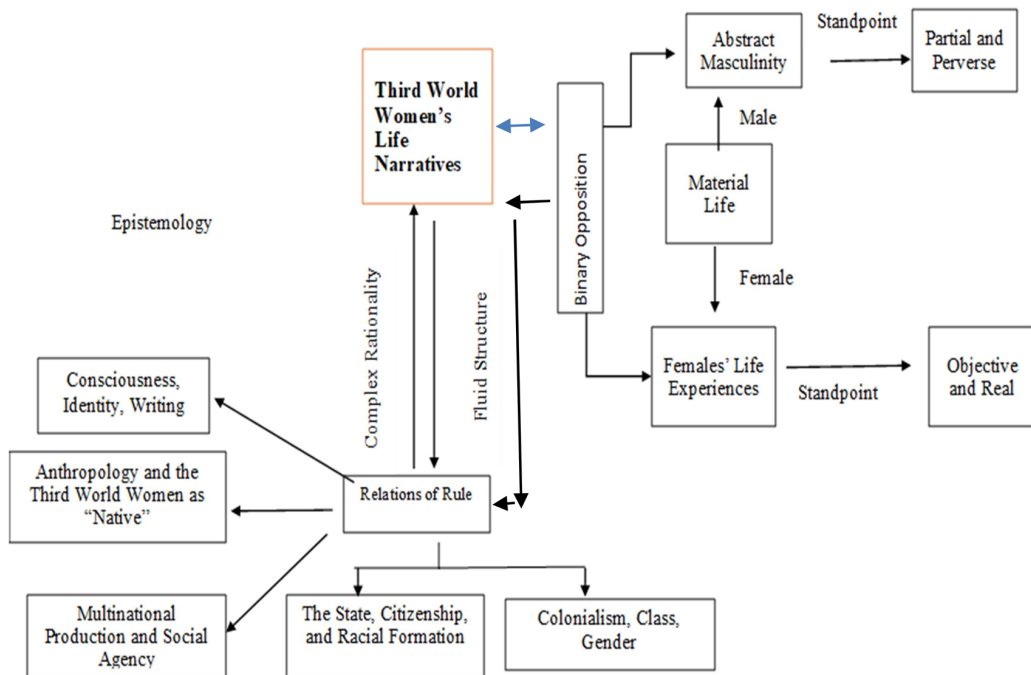


Fig. 1. Integration of Hartsock (1983) feminist standpoint theory and Mohanty's (1991) postcolonial feminist perspective.

and revealed the traumatic dark lives of Khar's ex-wives, who were compelled to bear domestic violence in the name of the norms and conditions of society (Adhikary, 2014). By choosing to share her story publicly, Durrani *et al.* (1995) confronted the cultural norms that perpetuate the control and subjugation of women. She concludes her memoir with the following consequential remarks:

In Pakistan, the system is merely used to hoodwink further those who are already exploited. I realized I could do no greater service for my country and our people than expose the camouflage.

I was determined not to waste thirteen years of my life.

I decided to cast a stone at hypocrisy.

I decided to write this book and break the traditional silence. (p. 375)

Durrani's memoir (1995) is a voice from a marginalized third-world space in feudal and patriarchal systems in which patriarchal rules are inscribed in their minds (Ali & Ali, 2019). Hierarchal differences between men and women develop different standpoints; males develop abstract masculinity, while females develop consciousness through daily life experiences (Hartsock, 1983; Crenshaw, 1989, 2013). Third-world women's place makes them doubly colonized; they fight battles on two grounds: colonialism and gender. Durrani *et al.* (1995) reveals Pakistani political history and feudal culture, and how this feudal culture is used to subjugate women in Pakistan in the name of marriage. She discusses the fact that patriarchy in Pakistani society allows men to have illegitimate affairs, multiple marriages, and the right to divorce in the name of Islam and snubs women's voices in the name of tradition and culture. Feudal traditions had double standards for them and their

women; they interpreted Islam and the Quran according to their own ease. [Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#) states that they compare women with land and treat them accordingly.

According to feudal tradition, a wife was honor bound to live her life according to her husband's whims. A woman was like a man's land. 'The Koran-say so,' he said. This was a revealing simile. A feudal lord loves his land only in functional terms. (p. 107)

[Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#) vividly illustrates a Pakistani woman's fight for autonomy, dignity, and feminist identity in a profoundly patriarchal and feudal context. She stood against the societal acceptance of masculine authority and privilege and became a symbol of resistance for Pakistani women. This act of raising voice is considered as rebellious in patriarchal society of Pakistan but proved to be a critical step toward dismantling the deep-rooted matrix of power in marriages.

[Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#) was already married to Anees Khan and had a daughter when she met Mustafa Khar, the former Chief Minister and Governor of Punjab. They indulge in incestuous relation and then she became Khar's sixth wife and had four children together. But after a long abusive companionship, [Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#) ended her marriage and unfolded her story of domestic violence as resistance. She revealed stories of five ex-wives of Khar and his attitude towards them and advocated the reevaluation and restructuring of power relations in matrimony. Khar's marital relationship with his wives is a perfect example of a 'master' and 'mistress's relationship.

In Pakistan and other third world countries, the marriage institution mostly works as a relationship between the master and the subordinate. From postcolonial feminist point of view, these two terms, master and subordinate/mistress highlight the power and social order hierarchy where one person (most of the times male) holds the significant importance, power, and social status; whereas the female as mistress/subordinate refers to as a dependent, submissive, and a commodity for male pleasure and biological reproduction. To meet her financial and social needs, she always depends on the male member of the family, before marriage to father or elder brother and after marriage to husband and in-laws to fulfil her needs.

[Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#) encapsulated the life story of Mustafa Khar, she also narrated that Khar married Wazir, his illiterate cousin, at his father's decision, when he was seventeen and she was many years older than him. After marrying her, he left her in the village and flew to Lahore; the fashionable girls of Lahore fascinated him a lot and he did not visit his village for many years. He indulged in an illegitimate relationship with many professional escorts. [Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#) writes about his illegitimate extramarital affairs:

At the hillside resort of Murree, Mustafa met women who purveyed their charms for a price, and he discovered that he was comfortable with professional sex. He scoured the market, inspected the wares, and hired the services. For their part, the women were fascinated by this wealthy young feudal chieftain, who bemoaned his enforced marriage. (p. 42)

Khar's first wife suffered in silence, and the elders of the family dissolved her marriage with Khar and gave Wazir to his much younger brother in the name of the so-called honor of the family. The second time, he married Firdaus, a mistress of his friend who betrayed her when she got pregnant and Khar married her out of sympathy, but when she was in the hospital and gave birth to a son, he divorced her. [Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#) discusses the power matrix in matrimonial relations as Khar divorced two women had extramarital affairs, but he was not considered a sinister in patriarchal Pakistani feudal society and when he came back to his village everyone forgave him. She narrates, "Somewhat chastened,

Mustafa returned to his village and, in typical feudal fashion, was forgiven by his elders' (p. 42). Thirdly, Khar met an air hostess, *Safia*, who belonged to a lower-middle-class family, married her, and confined her to his village located in Kot Addu with zero facilities. Khar applied all the feudal rules over *Safia*; according to [Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#), "The Women of the family were completely isolated from the outside world – the only sky *Safia* saw here was the patch above the compound of her new home" (p. 45). However, when his third wife, *Safia*, cheated on him with his younger brother, he punished her. [Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#) narrates,

It did not matter that Mustafa had ruined *Safia*'s life, that he had also married Naubahar and ruined her life, that he had visited *Safia* for mere hours over their seven-year marriage, that he did not love her. Feudal law allows a man to act in such a manner, but for a wife to betray a husband is the supreme sin. (p. 51)

The theoretical concepts like 'honor' and 'chastity' are only associated with women, and men are free from all moral values in feudal society. Fourthly, he married Naubahar, who was a dancer, and divorced her due to political pressure when he became the Governor of Punjab. Khar married again fifth time, to an educated modern woman, Shahrazad, to maintain his political stature, but like Khar's previous wives, she suffered both mentally and physically. The relationship of Sherry with Khar is an example of an established matrix of power in marital life; Sherry's status was not more than a 'mistress' in Khar's life instead of being his legitimate wife. When [Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#) met Khar, he was already married to Sherry, and they indulged in an extramarital affair. Sherry was in a problematic marriage with Khar, and despite knowing that Khar had an illegitimate relationship with [Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#), Sherry did not want to leave him because of her daughter. She presents this aspect of Pakistani patriarchal society as follows:

A Pakistani woman will endure almost anything in order to hold a marriage together. In our society, marriage may be purgatory, but divorce is hell. Despite my love for Mustafa, I found myself wavering. Sherry was in love with him, and yet she hated him, I thought. (p. 77)

After marrying Khar, [Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#) obtained legitimate wife status, but Khar's attitude with her was not so different from his ex-wives. [Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#) wrote about this traumatic memory as "I gasped in fresh fright at the monster who gazed back at me shiver ran through me. My teeth chattered (p. 103). She was not allowed to read the newspaper in Khar's house; there was a restriction on her thinking, and gradually, there was not a single day when Khar did not hit her. According to [Durrani et al. \(1995\)](#), Khar was sexually a brutal person; he wanted her to be responsive and then treated her like a slut; she writes, "This was a feudal hang-up: his class believed that a woman was an instrument of a man's carnal pleasure. If the woman ever indicated that she felt pleasure, she was a potential adulterer, not to be trusted' (p. 106). These revelations shattered her trust and sense of security, exacerbating the trauma of marriage. The most traumatic truth broke her completely when she came to know about the physical relationship of Khar with her youngest sister. The memoir also presents the villainous behavior of her youngest sister, who deliberately attracted Khar.

Durrani further discussed the impact of her abusive married life on her children. They always witnessed this situation in their home when their parents had those daily quarrels and experienced trauma along with their mother. Even, the situation was so worst during her pregnancy period when her husband, Khar, used to torture her physically and mentally

in front of others. She often describes that terrible time in this memoir and narrates her traumatic memories of childbirth as:

Mustafa Khar, her husband, once rose from his chair and slapped her hard two hours after I had delivered his child. He did not stop there, but during this encounter, he lashed his hand across my face, back, and forth. Then he resorted to his favorite tactic, twisting my forearm until I thought the limb would crack in two. I bit fiercely into my lip to avoid crying out. (p. 156)

Knowledge is socially situated and marginalized community's knowledge gained through lived experiences can provide more insight into the underlying established matrix of power (Harding, 1991). The Third World is often marginalized, and knowledge produced within these regions, particularly by women, frequently fails to receive adequate recognition on a global stage. It is necessary to give third-world women an adequate place in mainstream feminism because they have distinct epistemologies (Mohanty, 1991). Feminist Standpoint Theory emphasizes that marginalized groups can better understand and criticize power structures because they have firsthand experiences of these power dynamics, and these experiences should be included in social theories and practices (Hartsock, 1983). Mohanty's (1991) concept of 'relations of ruling' encompasses the struggle of third-world women to make them visible in international literary circles.

Durrani *et al.* (1995) recorded her journey toward liberation and self-empowerment, breaking free from the constraints of her abusive marriage and reclaiming her autonomy. She discussed the challenges she faced in asserting her independence and seeking justice for herself and other women in similar situations. Moreover, in this suffocated environment of emotional and physical abuse, her family and children kept on insisting to continue to bear this torture because of social norms. However, after bearing for a long time, she finally decided to choose her mental and physical peace over the socially male defined norms and taboos and separated. To reflect this situation, Durrani *et al.* (1995) states that:

Gradually, her supporters, both family and friends, began to move away from her because of her decision of living an independent and peaceful life. However, during this period, she found herself falling deeper into the worst situation of social and economic pressure as well as loneliness. Even at a point, she became so frightened that she assumed to reach the status of numbness and depression. There was no present and no future -only the past, which invaded and enveloped my whole being. (p. 358)

Critically, feminine power encourages women to be vocal and when Durrani *et al.* (1995) chose to refuse to be silent against oppression and abuse in marriage she faced many hardships. She decided to take control of her life and narrative and started writing her story. Durrani *et al.* (1995) faced criminal charges for speaking out about her story but continued it and engaged herself in political and societal issues. She provided a detailed written demonstration of her identity; she struggles to cope with external factors to regain, reconstruct, and revalue her personal identity.

At the end of the memoir, Durrani *et al.* (1995) identified her as Khar, as she wrote, "He shook his head at me and muttered, 'What have you become, Tehmina?' I returned a confident smile and chided, "I have become you, Mustafa" (p. 361). Table 1 describes the significance of vocabulary used in this memoir for various gender roles.

Table 1 presents the usage of specific words such as "weak," "power," "silence," and "voice" to depict women's roles in marriage.

According to the feminist standpoint, these words, mentioned with frequency in Table 1, used for males and females highlight the power dynamics and social hierarchy in a

Table 1. Illustration of some significant vocabulary to represent women’s place in matrimonial relationship.

S no.	Words to Represent Women’s Place in Matrimonial Relations	Total frequency of used words	Frequency used for Female’ representation	Pg. No	Vocabulary
1	Weak	27	16	26, 30, 39, 66, 77, 86, 116, 124, 125, 126, 165, 166, 172, 240, 243, 244,	Weaknesses, Weakened
2	Power	115	6	35, 38, 48, 64, 84, 125	Powerless, No Power, Overpower
3	Silence	38	20	14, 24, 47, 63, 84, 86, 100, 102, 107, 103, 122, 123, 126, 145, 148, 193, 233, 242, 256	tortured silence, stunned silence, cruel silence, deep silence, suffocated silence, traditional silence
4	Voice	49	13	48, 66, 75, 105, 110, 125, 139, 139, 146, 147, 239, 247	Inner voice, mocking voice, weak voice, did not dare voice, groggy voice, quavered voice, power and conviction in voice, cold and unnatural voice, anguish voice, mother’s voice, voice held a cutting edge, jolted voice, loud voice

Pakistani male dominant society. Particularly, the use of certain verbs and adjectives and their impact in a patriarchal set up such as the words for female as ‘weak’, ‘polite’, and ‘lower voice’, represent woman’s social status whereas the other words like ‘loud voice’, ‘power’, and ‘pride’ are for male that shows his dominance and control over the family and women. The term ‘silence’ by itself holds a significant weight, but its impact is amplified by using descriptors such as ‘tortures silence’, deep silence’ or ‘suffocated silence’ etc. On the other hand, even if the powerful word ‘voice’ is referring to women, it is paired with adverbs such as ‘mocking’, weak’ or ‘anguished’. The data in the table suggest that such vocabulary is employed in Durrani’s (1995) memoir to portray the marginalized status of women in Pakistani society, particularly within the context of marriage. Paradoxically, this vocabulary also serves to highlight Durrani’s strength, as she challenges and subverts established epistemologies.

Fig. 2 illustrates the frequency of words related to women in Durrani’s (1995) memoir. It illustrates a notable relation between the frequency of words and to whom these are referring. The term ‘weak’ by itself represents the powerlessness and it appeared 27 times in the memoir, in which 16 times it is used for women illustrating their apparent weakness. Moreover, the term ‘power’ is mentioned 115 times and shockingly only 6 times used for women and mostly suggesting ‘powerless’ or ‘no power’. Additionally, same link is present in case of the terms, ‘silence’ and ‘voice’; the word ‘silence’ is associated with women’s situations, and the term ‘voice’ is less likely used for women (George, 1973).

The above analysis illustrates the struggle of Pakistani women in a matrimonial relationship within patriarchal customs and traditions. With the awareness through education and media, women are no longer silent in their roles as wives, and they have started resisting those traditional patriarchal cultures and power dynamics in marriages, particularly. The situation is well depicted in Durrani’s (1995) memoir where she used powerful text as language power to highlight this critical issue and encouraged researchers and critics

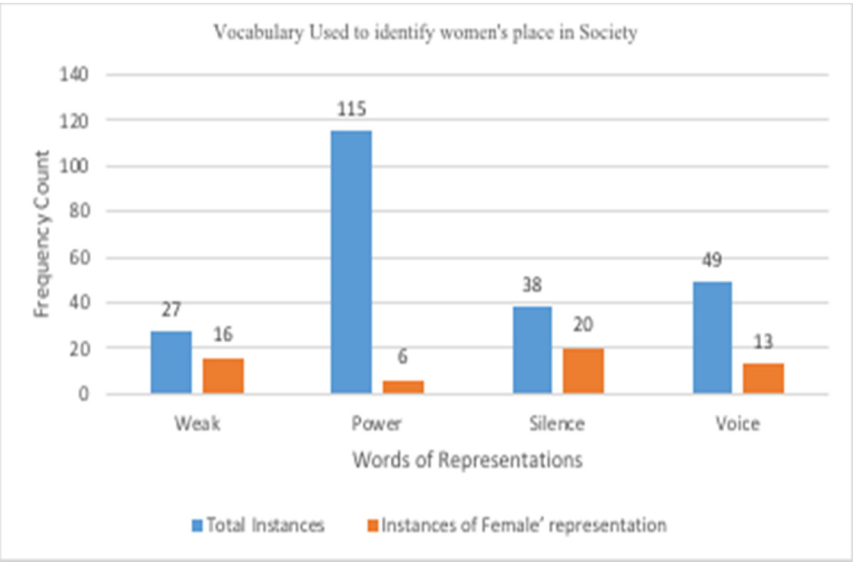


Fig. 2. Frequency of words used for women's representation.

to highlight the much-needed topics through case studies. Durrani’s (1995) raised voice against patriarchal society and abusive marriage undoubtedly plays a significant role in raising awareness about the plight of women in deeply patriarchal societies and stands as a testament to her personal journey of resistance and empowerment.

Conclusion

The analysis of the findings shows that equal status is very important for both genders in marital status. The textual critical analysis of Durrani’s (1995) memoir through the lenses of feminist standpoint theory and Mohanty’s (1991) postcolonial feminist perspective provides a complex interplay of gender, power, and colonial legacies. This study further concludes by highlighting the experiences of subjugated women through Durrani’s case in feudal settings where patriarchal control is always considered legitimate and supported by society. However, she has challenged those societal hierarchies and social taboos of being divorced and a single female with a male escort. This study is significant from the perspective of Mohanty’s (1991) postcolonial feminism because it challenges the traditional norms and makes and supports a woman who wants to get her social and political rights. In this case, Durrani’s work as a memoir works as a guiding principle for many married women who are suffering from various challenges, troubles, and torture, mentally and physically, and can be seen as a critique of the enduring effects of colonialism on gender dynamics in postcolonial societies.

Funding statement

There is no funding available for this study.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Data availability

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Author contribution

Asia Saeed: Conceptualization, Software, Data curation, Writing - Original Draft, and Visualization; H.M. Zahid Iqbal: Methodology, Validation, Resources, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision, and Project Administration; Asia Saeed & H.M. Zahid Iqbal: Formal Analysis and Investigation.

References

- Adhikary, S. (2014). Autobiography as testimony: Truth and fiction in tehmina durrani's writings. *SMART MOVES JOURNAL IJELLH*, 2(5).
- Akhtar, S., Imran, M., Xiaofei, W., & Chen, Y. (2021). Identity and nation in shamsie's kartography and kureishi's the buddha of suburbia. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 14(3), 483–501.
- Ali, I. & Ali, T. (2019). Beyond pakistani harem: Women's spaces, neo-colonial patriarchy and agency in my feudal lord by tehmina durrani.
- Barton, Bernadette, & Huebner, L. (2020). Feminine power: A new articulation. *Taylor & Francis*, 13(1), 23–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2020.1771408>.
- Bennett, F. & Daly, M. (2014). Poverty through a gender lens: Evidence and policy review on gender and poverty.
- Bergmann, B.R. (2005). *The economic emergence of women* (58). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Blood, Jr R.O. & Wolfe, D.M. (1960). Husbands and wives: the dynamics of family living.
- Braham, J. (1995). *Crucial Conversations: Interpreting contemporary American literary autobiographies by women*. Teachers College Press, Columbia University.
- Brownmiller, S. (2013). *Femininity*. Open Road Media.
- Collins, P.H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge.
- Connell, R.W. (2005). *Masculinities* University of California Press. Berkeley, Los Angeles.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.
- Crenshaw, K.W. (2013). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. In *The public nature of private violence*, (93–118).
- Dadashova, S. (2018). Power and representation in women's autobiographies. *Filosofija. Sociologija*, 29(4), 230–238.
- Durrani, T., Hoffer, W., & Hoffer, M.M. (1995). *My feudal lord*. Random House.
- Elias, N. (1939). The civilizing process.
- Eljanhaoui, E. (2024). Sahrawi women dwell: Tebra'poetry as an expression of cultural, social, and gender awareness. *International Review of Literary Studies*, 6(1), 30–38.
- Fivush, R. & Marin, K.A. (2007). Place and power: A feminist perspective on self-event connections. *Human Development*, 50(2–3), 111–118.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punishment: The birth of the prison*. London: Allen Lane.
- Frankenberg, E. & Thomas, D. (2001). Measuring power.
- Fraser, N. (2013). *Fortunes of feminism: From state-managed capitalism to neoliberal crisis*. Verso Books. Routledge.
- George, M. (1973). From “goodwife” to “mistress”: The transformation of the female in bourgeois culture. *Science & Society*, 152–177.
- Gottman, J. (2018). *The seven principles for making marriage work*. Hachette UK.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. International Publishers.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599.

- Harding, S. (1991). Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? *Thinking from Women's Lives*. Cornell University Press.
- Hartsock, N.C.M. (1983). The feminist standpoint: Developing the ground for a specifically feminist historical materialism. In S. Harding & M. B. Hintikka (Eds.), *Discovering Reality* (283–310). Springer.
- Imran, M. (2019). Contemporary Diasporic South Asian Women's Fiction: Gender, Narration and Globalisation-Ruvani Ranasinha. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 286 pages. *Asian Women*, 35(2), 129–131.
- Imran, M., Tilwani, S.A., & Morve Roshan, K. (2023). An answer to Spivak's can the subaltern speak? A study of marginalized women's autobiographies. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 2455328X231166999.
- Imran, M. & Wei, X.M. (2019). Faith and feminism in Pakistan: religious agency or secular autonomy? *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 25(2), 313–315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2019.1602243>.
- Imran, M. & Hart, J.L. (2018). Embroidering within boundaries: Afghan women creating a future. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 46(2), 335–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2018.1549003>.
- Jabeen, M. & Afzal, F. (2023). Manifestation of Gender Differences in Pakistani Society: A Critical Study of Women's Writings. *International Review of Literary Studies*, 5(1), 31–38.
- Jaggar, A.M. (2004). Feminist politics and epistemology: The standpoint of women. *The feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*, 11(7), 55–66.
- John, C.A. (2011). Strategic ambivalence: A feminist standpoint theory reading of Nella Larsen's novels. *Feminist Formations*, 23(1), 94–117.
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society*, 2(3), 274–290.
- Kurdek, L.A. (1993). Predicting marital dissolution: A 5-year prospective longitudinal study of newlywed couples. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 64(2), 221.
- Lerner, G. (1986). *The creation of patriarchy* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press, USA.
- Mohanty, C.T. (1991). Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. In C. T. Mohanty, A. Russo, & L. Torres (Eds.), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (51–80). Indiana University Press.
- Mohanty, C.T. (2006). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Zubaan.
- Nelson, L.H. (1990). *Who Knows: From Quine to a Feminist Empiricism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (2000). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach* (Vol. 3). Cambridge University Press.
- Rhode, D.L. (1989). *Justice and gender: Sex discrimination and the law*. Harvard University Press.
- Rosser, S.V. & Miller, P.H. (2000). Feminist Theories locations for Developmental Psychology. *Toward a feminist developmental psychology*, 11.
- Salem, R. (2018). Matrimonial expenditures and Egyptian women's power within marriage. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39(9), 2615–2638.
- Singh, J. (2014). Tehmina Durrani's Autobiography My Feudal Lord: Unmasking Politicization of Religion and Relation. *Dialogue: A Journal Devoted to Literary Appreciation*, 10(01).
- Sivanandan, A. (1990). The liberation of the Black intellectual. *The Literary Review*, 34(1), 12–25.
- Smith, D.E. (1987). Women's perspective as a radical critique of sociology. *Feminism and methodology*, 84–96.
- Tichenor, V.J. (2005). *Earning more and getting less: Why successful wives can't buy equality*. Rutgers University Press.
- Van der Tuin, I. (2016). Feminist standpoint theory. *The Wiley Blackwell encyclopedia of gender and sexuality studies*, 1–4.
- Weber, M. (2009). *The theory of social and economic organization*. Simon and Schuster.
- Yoder, J.D. & Kahn, A.S. (1992). Toward a feminist understanding of women and power. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 16(4), 381–388.
- Young, I.M. (1990). Throwing Like a Girl and other essays in feminist philosophy and social theory.