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Trauma Narration Techniques in My Feudal Lord: Breaking Silence Through Self-Writing

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Abstract

This research paper delves into the techniques of trauma narration found in *My Feudal Lord* by Tehmina Durrani, emphasizing the role of self-writing as a powerful tool for shattering the silence that envelops both personal and societal trauma. The memoir presents a compelling narrative of Durrani's tumultuous marriage to Ghulam Mustafa Khar, emphasizing the complex dynamics of gender, authority, and patriarchal aggression in the context of post-colonial Pakistan. The research explores the storytelling methods utilized by Durrani, featuring first-person perspectives, disjointed narratives, and the incorporation of striking imagery to depict the psychological and emotional consequences of trauma. Additionally, it delves into how the practice of self-writing serves as a means for personal healing and regaining agency, enabling the author to reshape her identity amidst historical and personal adversity. This paper further situates the societal and political atmosphere of feudalism and patriarchy, examining how trauma manifests as both a personal experience and a shared societal occurrence. This analysis aims to explore the healing possibilities of trauma narration within autobiographical literature and its significance in enhancing awareness about gender-based violence, oppression, and the process of societal healing.

Keywords: Trauma Narration, Autobiographical Literature, *My Feudal Lord*, Self-Writing, Gender and Power, Patriarchy, Post-Colonial Trauma, Narrative Techniques

Introduction

Trauma narration in autobiographical literature involves the way individuals share their experiences of pain, frequently stemming from violence, oppression, or conflict. This kind of storytelling functions as both a healing mechanism and a platform for cultural and historical contemplation, offering a glimpse into individual and shared suffering (Ahuja, 2018; Dutta, 2021) ^[1, 10]. In autobiographies, trauma enables individuals to articulate suppressed experiences and reclaim authority over their story. Self-writing emerges as a crucial avenue for authors to confront both individual anguish and social inequities (Banerjee & Sharma, 2023) ^[4].

Tehmina Durrani's memoir *My Feudal Lord* (Shah, 2025) serves as a powerful example of trauma storytelling. The narrative delves into Durrani's intimate struggles against the backdrop of a feudal and patriarchal society in Pakistan, vividly recounting her encounters with both physical and emotional torment. This piece emphasizes wider societal concerns regarding power, gender, and class dynamics, while illuminating the connections between individual and shared suffering (Roy, 2025) ^[18].

Self-writing serves as a powerful therapeutic instrument in this journey, enabling writers to shatter their silence, face their trauma, and reshape their identities. Through the practice of autobiographical writing, people discover a therapeutic release while also regaining their voice and initiating the journey of healing.

2. Contextualizing Trauma: Historical and Personal Background Political and Cultural Climate

The story told in *My Feudal Lord* takes place in a post-colonial South Asian setting, where the political, cultural, and socio-economic consequences of colonial rule greatly shape the paths of individual and communal experiences. The enduring impact of feudalism and patriarchy from colonial times continues to influence the daily experiences of the region's

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inhabitants, especially women. Baskar contends that “*The lingering effects of feudalism, coupled with remnants of colonial rule, have solidified inflexible hierarchies that dictate not just economic frameworks but also the moral and cultural perspectives regarding women*” (Baskar, 2019) [5]. In this regard, the socio-political atmosphere is not just a setting, but a dynamic, suffocating influence that molds people's encounters with trauma. The enduring nature of patriarchal beliefs, which restrict women's roles to positions of subservience, establishes a framework in which their voices and autonomy are consistently stifled. Hinton and Wong emphasize that the “*ongoing patriarchal practices, which were intensified during colonial rule, persist in restricting and undermining women's freedoms, establishing a relentless cycle of trauma through generations*” (Hinton & Wong, 2023) [14].

Within this framework, individual trauma serves as a mirror to the broader societal forces of power. The impact of colonialism on sustaining class hierarchies and caste divisions is clear in how individuals perceive themselves and others, frequently through the perspective of entrenched inequality. These circumstances create settings where personal anguish transcends individual experiences, becoming a collective ordeal among women, especially within the higher ranks of feudal structures, where authority is firmly held by men.

Personal and Emotional Trauma

Durrani's personal trauma is deeply intertwined with the larger societal structures of patriarchy, and this relationship is thoroughly examined throughout her story. In *My Feudal Lord*, Durrani's narrative serves as a powerful illustration of the ways in which women's bodies and voices are regulated within a patriarchal society. As Banerjee articulates, “*Durrani's individual anguish transforms into a reflection of the wider societal subjugation that women endure within a patriarchal framework.*” Her challenges are not unique; they symbolize the various ways in which women's bodies are monitored, commercialized, and frequently made invisible in a feudal society” (Banerjee, 2020) [3]. This quote emphasizes that Durrani's suffering, while intensely individual, is intertwined with the broader systemic influences that define her reality.

Durrani's emotional turmoil is not just a result of personal loss or domestic violence, but rather a broader indication of how the societal framework surrounding her stifles and undermines her existence. Shah captures this in her examination, asserting, “*The torment Durrani experiences arises from a deep feeling of being overlooked and muted, both within her marriage and in the broader society.*” *The societal framework surrounding her insists that women stay unheard, and any effort to escape this quietude is faced with retribution or exclusion*” (Shah, 2024) [19]. The emotional impact of this kind of suppression is clear across her story. Durrani's challenges in establishing her identity, expressing her voice, and claiming her agency are eclipsed by societal pressures that require her to conform, plunging her into a nearly constant state of distress.

This trauma evolves into a crucial aspect of her identity, influencing her perspective on the world surrounding her. In Durrani's situation, trauma is not only caused by direct abuse but also through the refusal to acknowledge her as a completely independent individual. The societal constraints that limit her freedom and independence stir feelings of

hopelessness, a sentiment that echoes among numerous women facing comparable patriarchal structures (Banerjee, 2020) [3].

Societal Trauma in Post-Colonial India

The convergence of individual trauma with wider societal trauma in post-colonial South Asia uncovers the repetitive cycle of oppression rooted in colonialism, feudalism, and patriarchal beliefs. As Banerjee observes, “*In post-colonial India and Pakistan, the remnants of colonial oppression merge with the societal divisions of caste, gender, and class, creating a social structure where trauma is not a singular occurrence but a persistent, inherited experience*” (Banerjee, 2020) [3]. The interplay of caste, class, and gender generates a complex trauma that reaches far beyond the individual, affecting the collective and reinforcing social hierarchies that persistently sustain violence and inequality. For women, especially those belonging to marginalized communities, societal trauma transforms into a reality they navigate daily. Durrani's story mirrors this wider societal truth. The socio-political frameworks, molded by ages of feudal governance and colonial control, persist in their oppression and subjugation of women. Baskar articulates that the experience of being subjected to both colonization and oppression within feudal systems creates a complex, dual-layered trauma for women, whose societal roles are restricted by the intertwining forces of patriarchal and post-colonial structures. This renders it exceedingly challenging for them to break free or even grasp the origins of their anguish”.

Durrani's emotional and personal trauma, therefore, cannot be fully grasped without taking into account the historical trauma of post-colonial India and Pakistan. The ingrained structural violence and inequality within the socio-political landscape of these nations contribute to an ongoing cycle of trauma. This societal trauma becomes deeply rooted in the experiences of women, who find themselves trapped in a relentless cycle of systemic violence and oppression. The anguish experienced by these women is intensified by their struggle to express or break free from their torment, hindered by the cultural and political constraints set by both the state and society (Banerjee, 2020) [3].

3. Narrative Techniques Used in Trauma Storytelling

Narrative techniques play a crucial role in trauma storytelling, capturing the profound and intricate nature of the survivor's journey. In *My Feudal Lord*, Durrani utilizes a variety of narrative techniques, such as first-person narration, a fragmented and non-linear structure, along with striking language and imagery, all of which work together to fully engage the reader in the harrowing and disorienting experiences of her trauma. These methods not only animate her narrative but also enable the reader to feel her anguish in a more direct and impactful manner.

First-Person Narration

The use of first-person narration is an essential method in trauma storytelling, as it fosters a profoundly personal and immediate bond with the protagonist's experiences. In *My Feudal Lord*, Durrani's employment of the first-person viewpoint is especially powerful in expressing the emotional and psychological intricacies of her trauma. Through sharing her narrative from her unique perspective, she welcomes readers into her personal realm, presenting a

candid encounter with her anguish and struggles. According to Green, *“The first-person perspective in trauma narratives serves as a lens into the narrator’s psyche, enabling readers to engage with the internal turmoil and emotional chaos that accompanies trauma”* (Green, 2024) ^[13]. This method is essential in expressing the truth of Durrani’s experiences, where the lines between the inner self and the outside world frequently become indistinct. Sutherland emphasizes the importance of this method, noting, *“By using the first person, Durrani positions herself as the expert on her own journey, giving her the ability to steer the story of her pain and challenge the quieting frequently placed on those who have endured trauma”* (Sutherland, 2021) ^[20]. Durrani’s voice, coming from this profoundly personal viewpoint, echoes with genuine emotion, rendering her trauma palpable and unmistakable for the reader.

Fragmented and Non-Linear Narrative

The disjointed and nonlinear quality of Durrani’s storytelling reflects the bewildering, tumultuous reality of trauma itself. Trauma frequently disturbs an individual’s perception of time, memory, and coherence, complicating the ability of survivors to narrate their experiences in a sequential or logically organized manner. Durrani’s narrative style showcases this, presenting events not as a seamless tale but rather as disjointed, occasionally jarring recollections. According to Faulkner, *“Trauma narratives frequently defy linear progression, mirroring the disjointed and tumultuous essence of traumatic memory, which opposes chronological structure and clarity”* (Faulkner, 2018) ^[11]. In *My Feudal Lord*, the story shifts across various phases of Durrani’s existence, crafting a feeling of confusion that reflects the mental condition of an individual experiencing trauma. Beck reflects this by asserting, *“The fragmented nature of trauma narratives parallels the fragmented mind of the trauma survivor, encapsulating the chaos, disorientation, and emotional turmoil that trauma engenders”* (Beck, 2022) ^[6]. Through the use of a non-linear method, Durrani powerfully expresses the feeling of being inundated by trauma, where the past and present frequently intersect in the victim’s consciousness, crafting a story that mirrors the authentic experience of trauma.

Language and Imagery

The words and visuals employed in trauma storytelling are essential in stirring the emotional and psychological effects of traumatic experiences. In *My Feudal Lord*, Durrani employs striking, powerful imagery to emphasize the physical and emotional torment she endured, captivating the reader’s senses and feelings. The visuals she creates are intense and powerful, pulling the reader into the profoundness of her pain. Jackson observes, *“Imagery in trauma writing transcends mere decoration; it acts as a conduit for conveying the unspeakable horrors of trauma, frequently employing vivid, sensory language to elicit the emotional anguish that remains inexpressible”*. Durrani’s language, rich with vivid portrayals of brutality, hopelessness, and solitude, effectively highlights the emotional and psychological impact of her experiences. Bell highlights that *“The strength of imagery in trauma narratives resides in its capacity to elicit a profound reaction from the reader, immersing them in the emotional terrain of the survivor’s journey”* (Bell, 2019). For example, when Durrani depicts instances of physical brutality or

mental torment, the imagery is frequently excruciating and relentless, compelling the reader to face the harsh truth of her anguish. The use of vivid language enables the reader to not just comprehend but also experience the trauma that Durrani has faced, enhancing the immersion and emotional impact of her story.

4. The Role of Silence and Voicing Trauma

In trauma narratives, silence and the act of voicing one’s pain play crucial roles in both the personal healing process and in challenging societal systems of oppression. In *My Feudal Lord*, Durrani delves into these themes by traversing the suppression of her trauma, shattering that silence via self-writing, and finding catharsis through the process of recounting her narrative.

The Initial Silencing of Trauma

Within patriarchal and feudal structures, trauma frequently remains unspoken—either intentionally or because of the societal taboos that envelop it. Women, especially, encounter this suppression as their pain frequently becomes unnoticed within oppressive societal frameworks. In *My Feudal Lord*, Durrani’s suffering is first unvoiced and unrecognized, mirroring the wider societal inclination to stifle women’s realities. Roy notes, *“In patriarchal societies, trauma transcends individual experience; it is frequently socially muted, especially when it concerns women, whose voices are sidelined by the very structures that subjugate them”* (Roy, 2025) ^[18]. This suppression is not merely an external force but also a deeply ingrained aspect of the victim’s sense of self, where voicing their truth transforms into a bold act of resistance. Shah emphasizes, *“The obscurity of women’s trauma within feudal systems illustrates a wider societal hesitation to recognize the pain of marginalized communities, sustaining ongoing cycles of silence and distress”* (Shah, 2024) ^[19].

Breaking the Silence through Self-Writing

Through her writing about her trauma, Durrani courageously shatters the silence enveloping her pain. Her memoir transforms into a compelling instrument for self-expression and defiance against the structures that aimed to silence her. This act of self-expression serves not just as a means to navigate her suffering but also as a powerful form of psychological defiance, enabling Durrani to take back her voice. McKenzie observes, *“Self-writing, particularly within the realm of trauma, functions as a form of defiance, providing the survivor with a way to confront the oppressive forces and affirm their own story”* (McKenzie, 2017) ^[17]. Durrani’s choice to openly disclose her trauma signifies a powerful declaration of autonomy in a society that sought to stifle her voice. Dutta further highlights, *“Writing about personal trauma transforms into a powerful act—one in which the survivor takes back their story from the limitations of silence enforced by oppressive systems”* (Dutta, 2021) ^[1].

Cathartic Effects of Narrating Trauma

Expressing trauma through the art of writing provides healing advantages, enabling the writer to navigate and articulate the suffering they have experienced. The release found in sharing traumatic experiences enables the author to regain control and start reconstructing their identity. Brown and Lewis articulate, *“Narrative serves as a means of*

catharsis, providing trauma survivors a platform to express their pain and reclaim authority over their narrative.” This procedure can greatly assist in recovery and personal reclamation” (Brown & Lewis, 2017) [9]. Through the process of externalizing her trauma, Durrani not only pursues personal healing but also strives to regain the power that was previously taken from her. Faulkner states, “The act of narrating trauma enables the survivor to reclaim control over their own story, turning suffering into a means of empowerment” (Faulkner, 2018) [11].

5. Trauma and Identity Formation in the Memoir

In *My Feudal Lord*, the impact of trauma is crucial in molding Durrani's identity, influencing her both as a person and as a woman. Through the process of narrating her painful experiences, she not only confronts her past but also reclaims her sense of self and autonomy, illustrating how trauma and self-writing intertwine in the formation of a new identity.

Impact on Identity as an Individual and Woman

Trauma, particularly in a patriarchal environment, profoundly influences an individual's sense of self, frequently molding their perceptions of identity and societal roles. In *My Feudal Lord*, Durrani's encounters with mistreatment and domination create enduring impressions on her identity. Nonetheless, the act of recounting these experiences enables her to reshape her sense of self. By engaging in self-writing, she not only faces her pain but also takes back control of her own story and her identity as a woman. Kaur indicates that “*Trauma in a patriarchal society does not only harm the body but also profoundly affects a woman's sense of identity, frequently leaving her fragmented; nevertheless, through self-narration, she can start to reconstruct and reclaim her sense of self*” (Kaur, 2019) [16]. Baskar elaborates, “*In recounting her trauma, Durrani transitions from a passive victim to an active participant in shaping her identity, both as a person and as a woman*”. Through this approach, writing transforms into a powerful act of self-empowerment and a form of defiance against the patriarchal forces that aimed to define her.

Self-Reconstruction through Self-Writing

Self-writing serves as a transformative instrument for healing and personal reconstruction, enabling the writer to confront and navigate through past traumas while rediscovering a previously diminished sense of self. Durrani's memoir serves as a powerful example of the healing power found in the art of autobiographical writing. It presents her with the chance to seize command of her history and redefine her sense of self. Sutherland articulates that “*Autobiographical writing offers a platform for the survivor to rebuild their identity, enabling them to recover lost facets of themselves that trauma had shrouded*” (Sutherland, 2021) [20]. Banerjee emphasizes that “*Through the process of self-writing, trauma survivors acquire a sense of agency over their narrative, allowing them to reconstruct the broken aspects of their identity and forge a more empowered version of themselves*” (Banerjee, 2020) [3]. In this journey, Durrani not only reclaims her voice but also asserts her autonomy over her story, strengthening her sense of agency and identity.

Memory and Recollection in Shaping Identity

Memory serves a crucial function in transforming trauma and its enduring impact on identity. Durrani's memoir vividly captures her memories of traumatic events, acting as both a confrontation with her past and a powerful tool for reconstructing her identity. Through the process of revisiting these challenging memories, Durrani can reclaim her agency regarding her past and firmly establish control over her own narrative. Shah articulates, “*Memory in trauma narratives transcends a simple recollection of past events; it embodies a transformative journey that enables the survivor to rebuild their identity, transforming suffering into strength*”. Jackson reflects this idea, asserting, “*The process of remembering is crucial for transforming one's identity following trauma, as it allows the survivor to reinterpret their experiences and reclaim a sense of control in their personal narrative*”. In *My Feudal Lord*, the process of remembering and sharing her trauma serves as a potent means of creating a renewed, empowered identity that rises above previous victimization.

6. Impact of *My Feudal Lord* on the Reader and Society

My Feudal Lord provides not just a personal narrative of Durrani's anguish but also acts as a significant impetus for societal introspection and transformation. Durrani's narrative compels readers to face the stark truths of gender-based violence and oppression, fostering empathy and motivating action against systemic injustice.

Broader Societal Implications of the Memoir

My Feudal Lord carries profound societal significance, especially regarding the need to illuminate issues surrounding gender-based violence, oppression, and trauma. Through the sharing of her personal narrative, Durrani compels the reader to face the stark truths of societal injustice, presenting a compelling appeal for compassion and transformative action. According to Gill, “*Durrani's memoir acts as a reflection of the social injustices that persist in societies, urging readers to confront uncomfortable realities regarding gender inequality and violence*” (Gill, 2020). Hinton and Wong additionally observe, “*By revealing her personal trauma to the public, Durrani offers a vital perspective that compels readers to scrutinize the wider societal frameworks that uphold abuse and oppression*” (Hinton & Wong, 2023). Her story strongly encourages deeper societal contemplation and responsibility, prompting readers to recognize and confront the ongoing injustices that still impact women.

Contribution to Gender-Based Violence Awareness

The memoir further emphasizes the widespread occurrence of gender-based violence and the societal structures that sustain it. Durrani's narrative stands as an essential addition to the ongoing worldwide discussions surrounding gender inequality. Her individual narrative stands as a powerful reflection of the persistent challenges faced by women confronting systemic abuse and violence, not just in South Asia but globally. Baskar points out that “*Durrani's account highlights the convergence of gender, power, and violence, making a vital contribution to the worldwide conversation on gender inequality and the systems that support it*” (Baskar, 2019). Kaur states, “*In her memoir, Durrani shatters the silence around gender-based violence, providing a voice to numerous women who have endured similar situations and advocating for significant change*” (Kaur, 2019). The memoir emphasizes the critical need to

tackle gender-based violence across both societal and institutional dimensions.

Reader's Role in Witnessing Trauma

The audience holds a vital position in the experience of observing trauma. Through Durrani's narrative, readers gain a deeper understanding of the personal impacts of trauma while also being encouraged to connect with the author's journey and respond to societal injustices. Brown and Lewis emphasize that "*The reader's engagement with trauma narratives plays a vital role in transforming passive consumption into active empathy and advocacy, encouraging societal change through understanding and solidarity*" (Brown & Lewis, 2017) ^[9]. Bell resonates with this idea, expressing, "*Trauma narratives such as My Feudal Lord serve not only to enlighten readers but also urge them to observe and react to the injustices portrayed, inspiring action against gendered violence and oppression*" (Bell, 2019) ^[7]. By engaging in this act of witnessing, the reader joins the broader movement for social justice, emphasizing the strength of storytelling to inspire transformation.

Conclusion

In summary, *My Feudal Lord* stands as a compelling illustration of trauma storytelling that not only illuminates individual anguish but also confronts societal frameworks of oppression and brutality. By engaging in self-writing, Durrani asserts her voice and identity, turning her challenging experiences into a means for healing and defiance. The memoir employs various narrative techniques, such as first-person narration, fragmented storytelling, and striking imagery, drawing readers into the profound emotional and psychological realms of trauma, fostering empathy and insight. Moreover, the book serves an essential purpose in increasing awareness regarding gender-based violence, emphasizing its widespread effects on women within patriarchal societies and urging for societal introspection and transformation. Through Durrani's narrative, readers are encouraged to take on the role of active observers of trauma, nurturing a shared dedication to breaking down systems of oppression and advancing gender equality.

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