



## Voicing the miseries of Subaltern: A Feminist analysis of Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon*

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### Abstract

*Jamil Ahmad's The Wandering Falcon highlights the miseries and afflictions of women in a Pak-Afghan tribal society. Women are treated as slaves and animals. They are not allowed to marry by their own choice rather male members of the family choose partners for them. Men sell their daughters, sisters and even mothers in marriage and for prostitution. After marriage, they are subject to domestic violence. Those who choose their partner themselves are killed in the name of honor. In marriage, when women object and want to change their appalling condition, they are deemed immoral, unchaste and unworthy of respect. This is symbolic and laden with meaning from a feminist perspective that how women are considered children of a lesser god and second-class citizens. This paper is an attempt to analyze as to how men objectify, oppress, commodify by assigning traditional gender roles and applying repressive rules and regulations. It leads to loss of essential humanness of women as well as making them abject slaves incapable of choosing a husband or a career.*

**Keywords:** *Oppression, objectification, gender roles, commodification and patriarchy.*

### Introduction

Jamil Ahmed is a Pakistani novelist known for his anthology, *The Wandering Falcon*. This book is a slackly woven collection of nine stories depicting the interior view of tribal culture of Pakistan. In all the stories, Jamil Ahmed (2011) emphasizes some distinct features common to all tribes: loyalty to the leader, honor killing, domestic violence, selling of women, hospitality, code of honor and their nomadic ways of living.

The story begins in Baluchistan in the early 1950s, a tribal chief daughter married to an impotent man elopes with her father's servant and finds shelter in an isolated fort manned by a few dozen lonely soldiers. The couple finds shelter in an abandoned corner of the fort. A son is born, who is named Tor Baz, and they raise the child in a hidden corner for six months until Siaphad, their tribe, sends men in pursuit of them. The couple with their son run for safety but are hunted down. The boy Tor Baz is left to die in the wilderness and is adopted by Baloch rebels. He grows up to be the wandering falcon, a boy with no fixed identity and place.

One of the stories, A Point of Honor, shows a group of Baloch rebels who had taken in the six -years old Tor Baz after his

parent's murder debating over a Pakistani government pamphlet announcing an offer of talks, but end up being disarmed and sentenced to death for murder.

In one of the most powerful stories, *The Death of Camels*, Jamil Ahmed (2011) describes the world of a tribe of cattle herders who move their flocks from mountains of Afghanistan to the plains of Pakistan. This process of moving flocks from one place to another went on smoothly until government of Pakistan applied restrictions. They were not allowed to cross the border without valid documents. This restriction brought a lot of difficulties along with it. They decided to pass through it because there was no other way. One of the women, named as Gul Jana decided to move forward by placing a copy of Quran over her head, assured the holy book would save her, but all the men, women, children and camels were killed by the firing of the soldiers.

All the nine stories written follow the fortune of *The Wandering Falcon*, Tor Baz who moves between the tribes of Afghanistan and Pakistan. He gets to know about a lot of things. He comes in contact with different tribes such as Afridis, Wazirs, Bhattanis, Gujars, Mehsuds, Brahui, Kharot, Nasirs, Dotanis and Balochs. Tor

Baz encounters many and varied characters: a father with so many children that he has forgotten their names, rebel mullahs, aging warriors and wandering nomads, father who sells his daughters, men who sell women for prostitution and others who beat women. At Mian Mandi, he witnesses a woman sold for sex-slavery. He sees teachers kidnapped and children abandoned. When he meets a Pakistani District Commissioner who tries to pin down his tribal identity, To Baz replies: "Think of Tor Baz as your hunting falcon" (Ahmad, 2011, p. 94).

The novel presents the feeble tribal women as passive, powerless, deprived of their rights, treated as commodities, having no voice, freedom and identity of their own. They are crushed under the weight of patriarchal and tribal traditions and are bound to live as property of men. The customs and traditions present in the novel are set to marginalize and target women, and to rule upon them through so called rules of the tribal areas.

## Literature Review

Jamil Ahmad's (2011) *The Wandering Falcon* has been discussed by the researchers from different perspectives. It has been discussed from the perspectives of identity, post-colonialism, subjugation, and injustices done to the oppressed.

Khanal (2016) discusses hybrid identity of the central character of Tor Baz. When a person is subjected to new identity, his own identity is lost. In the process of having readjustment in new location a person imitates way of living which ultimately redefines one's identity. Tor Baz grows up in a typical Parsee culture where he spends his early childhood. The community is a small tribe that practices different cultures. Therefore, he encounters many different cultures resulting in a hybrid identity.

Imran and Gull (2017) highlight the killing of women in the name of honor. Jamil Ahmad (2011) represents that women are not allowed to choose a partner rather it is selected by their father. When they object and choose a husband of their choice, they are cold-bloodedly murdered in the name of honor. Honor killing and family shame are the prominent themes in *The Wandering Falcon*. In the same strain Joyia and Gull (2017) represent the marginalization and subjugation of women in patriarchal society especially Afghanistan and Pakistan. They discuss how women are victimized, sexually harassed, suppressed by the male members of the society.

Ahmad, Tahir and Asif (2018) analyze Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* stylistically. They argue that Jamil Ahmad has expressed his ideas by using different stylistic devices and lexicon – syntactic levels, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives literary figures of speech. These devices are used to convey writer's deep knowledge about the subject. Jamil Ahmad has used the style which makes the thought clear between the reader and author choosing the appealing lexical and syntactic choices. They analyzed the sentences that are optative, exclamatory and declarative. Similarly, under the figures of speech category, simile, metaphor and symbol are used which shows the warrior culture of these tribes.

Wasif (2019) looks at the novel from a post-colonial perspective. The concept of borders as boundaries is discussed by Wasif. He states that borders act as boundaries to separate humans and nations from one another to create difference and segregation started during the time of British colonization. They created boundaries to exclude the subjugated ones from the colonizers.

Kulkarni (2020) describes violence in literature by comparative study of *The Good Muslim* by Tehmina Anam and *The Wandering Falcon*. Both the novels focus on violence done on subjugated, downtrodden and repressed people who are weak and have no voice of their own. *The Wandering Falcon* is about the tribal people who abuse, beat and sell women. They treat women harshly and cruelly. Moreover, women are subject to sexual and domestic violence both in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

This study aims to look at Jamil Ahmad's (2011) *The Wandering Falcon* from a feminist perspective. It highlights objectification, commodification, stereotyping and oppression of women at the hands of tribal men. They are subject to domestic violence. Furthermore, they are sold in marriage as well for prostitution. In some cases, animals are given more importance than women which highlights abject and wretched condition of women. They seem, what Frantz Fanon calls (1963) "the wretched of the earth" (p. 1).

## Discussion:

### Oppression

Human history holds mirror to the universal devaluation of women. Throughout the ages women have been oppressed and dealt with an iron hand to keep them in leash. Oppression is the unjust or cruel use of authority or power. *The Wandering Falcon* by Jamil Ahmed (2011) deals with five faces of oppression. These five faces are Exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

Marginalization is an act to make people segregate from the society or group of people to a lower social standing. Overall, it is a process of exclusion. It is worse than exploitation because an individual is considered as nothing and marginalized on the bases of their race, caste and gender. Marginalization is actually to expel a whole category of people from useful participation in social life. Women bear more brunt than any other group. Due to marginalization, women are subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination. Women are marginalized because of their sex. It is an act of confronting women to a lower social standing or outer limit or edge of society. Overall, it is a process of exclusion. In the novel, *The Wandering Falcon* women are oppressed and they are reduced to the level of animals. Due to tribal code of honor, women are killed and abused in tribal areas. Same happens in this novel when two lovers eloped from their tribe. Gul Bibi was the daughter of a tribal chief. She was married to an impotent man while she was in love with a servant of her father. Gul Bibi eloped with her lover to a desolate place. Her father and his men chase the lovers and hunt them down. Her only crime was to marry a person of her choice.

Exploitation is an act of using people's labor and not paying them enough. This research deals with the exploitation of women at the hands of men. It is an act of using women for men's own benefits such as sexual gratification and financial gain. Exploitation also uses capitalism to oppress women. Men exploit women and use them as they like. The relation turns out what Marx calls bourgeoisie and proletariat. Men are bourgeoisie while women are proletariat. Women are always exploited sexually, verbally and psychologically. In the novel, *The Wandering Falcon*, there is exploitation of women at the hands of tribal men who consider themselves rulers of the society. Jamil Ahmed (2011) tries to explain the exploitation of women in most of the tribal areas where men are authoritative and women are submissive. They are given the stereotypical jobs as the narrator narrates, "The women too

were busy, cooking and milking the she-camels and sheep, or suckling their babies” (p.40). It shows the helplessness of women and the stereotypical home chores assigned to women. Jamil Ahmad (2011) further says:

It was Gul Jana’s turn to cook for the family that evening, but the other wife was helping her by baking the bread. The youngest child had crawled on to the dog which had come with Gul Jana in her dowry. Gul Jana tasted the stew and added some more water (p.40).

Gul Jana is the second wife of Dawa Khan. She has to do all the chores of the home. She has to obey her husband in every situation. It is in the hands of male to marry twice or thrice. Tribal men have no concern for the feelings of their women rather they only treat them as tools to gratify their sexual desires. The women are tied to tribal code of honor; never to disobey or disloyal to their husbands. They have to obey them blindly. As Jamil Ahmad (2011) writes, “Dawa Khan addressed his wives. Prepare for their dinner tonight” (p.40). They are ordered to do the chores of the house, to do the routine work of home. They are not considered that much intellectual and able to take part in any discussions of the daily matters of life rather they are ordered to focus only on doing the daily chores of household, raising children and obeying their husbands.

Exploitation leads to powerlessness which in turn makes the men more powerful than women. This idea of powerlessness links to Marxist theory of socialism where one is powerful and the other is powerless. Women are powerless while it is the men that hold the power. Men are considered as the head of the house. They have the authority to make laws and to apply those laws on the women of the house. Women are powerless that’s why they are subjugated by laws enacted by men to achieve their vested interests. In tribal areas, women are exploited and they are sold. They are not asked about their choice rather they have to marry a man of their father’s choice. Men take money and sell their daughters, sisters and even mothers. In the novel, Dawa Khan asked Torak about the matter in a meeting. As the General asked him to explain the matter:

What is this story I hear about you?’ the General inquired of him. ‘That you are suing another Kharot in the courts of the government?’ Torak grinned sheepishly. ‘The case is against a man who has left the fold,’ he replied defensively. ‘It is against a Kharot who is now settled in the city. He cannot really be considered a true Kharot any longer. The devil married my mother after my father’s death and did not pay any bride price. As the eldest son, the money is due to me and the man refuses to pay it. I have to get it out of him. My mother agrees with me. (pp. 41-42)

This shows the powerlessness of women that even she cannot ask for her due bride price. The money is taken by men. Jamil Ahmad (2011) depicts how a man married an old woman, satiated his hunger for sex and ran away. The woman had no other way but to ask her son to take help from the General of that tribe.

It is a tradition in the tribal areas that women should always be subjugated to men. Before her marriage she is slave of her father and has to act according to her father’s wishes and commands. As in Shakespeare’s (2003) *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Duke (Theseus) says to Hermia to act according to her father’s wish and marry the person he orders her to. She says, “I would my father looked but with my eyes” (1.1.56). To which

Theseus replies, “Rather your eyes must with his judgment look... Upon that day either prepare to die/ For disobedience to your father’s

will” (1.1.57 & 86). Likewise, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century a tribal woman is not allowed to choose her partner rather she is sold by her father. After marriage she has to act according to her husband’s orders. If she falls into abusive marriage, she should be quite and never thinks of leaving her husband. If she leaves, then she is considered a bad, evil and immoral woman. She has no place even in her father’s house. This happens with the character named Shah Zarina. She is married to a man who loves his bear more than his wife. When she ran away from the abusive marriage, gets rejected by the society and her parents also reject her. As in the novel,

Shah Zarina suffered in silence. One night, as she lay awake, she heard her parents talking in loud whispers. She stayed still and overheard snatches of their conversation. ‘She sits brooding all day, eating more than any of her sisters do. She hardly does any housework,’ her stepmother complained’. (p.166)

This shows the oppression that has reduced women to the level of abject slaves and animals. This also shows the strictness of the tribal code and so-called laws for women. Women are always blamed for broken marriages. So, Shah Zarina has to leave her husband’s home for being treated worse than an animal, her father’s home because she is a burden to them. She finds no way and ends in brothel house.

## Objectification

Objectification is a process of treating someone as an object, devoid of feelings. Objectification of women means to reduce them to objects of sexual pleasure and gratification. It is the process of equating women’s worth with her body appearance and sexual function. In this process, men see them as only sex objects to play with and not like human that have some feelings and emotions. Men even do not see women as a human being. As Simone De Beauvoir (1953) states in her book *The Second Sex* “Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being” (p.15). It means that authority is in the hands of male so they decide everything. Simone De Beauvoir (1953) is of the view that man see woman as a sex object. She needs man but man doesn’t need her. Beauvoir states:

Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man.’ And she is simply what man decrees; thus, she is called ‘the sex’, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her... He is the Subject. He is the absolute – she is the Other. (p.14)

Men objectify women in every possible way. Men consider themselves as the absolute ones and women as inferior, submissive, without any voice and authority. This happens within the tribal areas. Men objectify women in every possible way. Women are treated as sex slaves and some inanimate beings. One of the nine stories, *The Death of Camels* presents Dottanis tribe and many other tribes who are on their way towards plain areas. Rumors spread that no one will be allowed to cross the border without proper documents. While discussing the government order a person says:

The Dottanis almost reached the plains but were rounded up before they could scatter claimed a traveling well digger near Gulistan.’ Their leaders have been jailed. ‘If this is not true, my wife be considered divorced from me.’ He picked up three pebbles and

ritually dropped them one by one on the ground signifying the divorce and walked away. (p. 61)

The picking up of the pebbles shows that woman's worth is only of three pebbles. They are not considered worth more than three pebbles. On a small event and routinely discussion, he dares to divorce his wife if it was not true. Men in tribal areas take their women as a thing, an object or an article. They are objectified and used by men to quench their lust, sexual gratification, raising children and obey their men silently. The behavior of taking up three pebbles shows that women are only a source of pleasure for a specific period of time. In another story; The Mullah, women are objectified from religious point of view. As when the Mullah says,

This man died long ago. He must surely be resting in paradise. After his difficult stay on earth, I can imagine him sitting with the houris who are wondrous, fair and who possess breasts the likes of which are beyond your imagination. Breast so large that it would take a crow a full day and night to fly from one nipple to another. (p.73)

Mullah objectifies women by giving it a religious color. He describes the situation of man in paradise, who died long ago. Houris are known as to be the women of paradise who are beautiful more than the women of this earth. The Mullah objectifies and spread lies among men in the name of these houris. He further discusses that "these are not lies, these are like ointment, meant for healing, or like a piece of ice in the summer with which water in a glass is cooled" (p.74). These lines indicate that all those were lies and it was not from some religion but a pure lie. They even objectified women in those lies about her body, about her sexual representation. The image of the breasts and nipples clearly indicate the thinking of men about women. Women are not safe even in their profession as in the same story, Jamil Ahmad (2011) writes, "we rushed out into the dark and found out that a soldier had tried to assault one of the dancing girls, but the man in charge of the dancing girls had come to her rescue" (p.75). These lines show that from housewives to professionals, women are objectified in all the possible ways. As Simone De Beauvoir (1956) in her book *The Second Sex* says that, "At the present time, when women are beginning to take part in the affairs of the world, it is still a world that belongs to men" (p. 20). This is a world that belongs to men in all the possible ways. Women try hard to make a place in this world of tribalism but she lives in a society "Where masculine values prevail" (Woolf, 2012, p. 80) and all her efforts end in nothing.

The character named as Shah Zarina, is the eldest daughter of Fateh Mohammed, and married to man who uses her only for his sexual gratification. He considers his bear more important because it is an asset while woman is a burden. Jamil Ahmad (2011) states:

She could not understand why the bear had to have a room and they [Shah Zarina and her husband] could not. Once she asked her husband. He looked at her coldly and said, 'I can get another wife, but not another bear.' She was bewildered. (p. 164)

This is the place of women in tribal societies. They are treated badly than the animals. An animal has a room to sleep in while a woman sleeps outside. Moreover, she is subject to domestic violence and physical abuse. Being fed up of these circumstances and her deplorable condition, Shah Zarina leaves her house and runs away. Another man; Afzal Khan, deceptively provides her shelter and then sells her in the market like cattle. When women

are sold in the market then they are transported to brothels in different parts of the country where they live their life in sighing and dismay. In the market, the more beautiful, young and virgin a woman is the more its price is. Shah Zarina is among them. As in the novel author writes:

As, a virgin, she was a pearl and any man would have liked her on his string bed, but the traders appear reluctant to pay the price Afzal Khan was demanding and he was not willing to reduce it. (p.178)

## Gender roles

When looked historically, gendered identities were created by men to oppress, limit and subjugate women. Men were supposed to be rational, strong, brave, fit for the outside world and independent. On the other hand, women were deemed emotional, weak, coward, fit for domestic duties and dependent. It resulted in the absence of women in social, political, legal and financial aspects of life. They became angels in the house. These gendered identities have been practiced and repeated throughout the history. Consequently, these identities have emerged as something natural and inherent. However, Judith Butler (1999) in *Gender Trouble* says that these identities are socially constructed which oppress and subjugate women. In *The Wandering Falcon* women are not allowed to go anywhere without the permission of the husband or guardian. They are bound to follow certain dress codes, to fetch water from springs, to marry with the will of their father and brother, to not disobey their patriarchal head and to be loyal to tribal honor. If any of these stereotypical roles aren't fulfilled, then that very women will be considered bad charactered. If she elopes or falls in love, then it is considered a sin and the only punishment for the sin is death. This happens with the mother of Tor Baz who eloped with her lover. When caught, both were killed. As in the novel, Jamil Ahmad (2011) says; "the man shot her in the back while she was still speaking" (p.13). This is the assigned role given to women to be loyal to her husband in anyway either if he is disloyal or impotent.

Jamil Ahmad (2011) narrates that a girl elopes with her lover. However, they are held and the girl is raped by many men. She is just like a bird of prey for men. As Alfred Lord Tennyson (2002) in his poem "The Princess" says that "man is the hunter/woman is his game/the sleek and shiny creature of the chase" (p. 39). It shows that women, from the perspective of gendered identities are natural prey to the hunter (man). The lover, instead of sympathizing, charges her with no sense of shame or modesty as she had let so many men violate her body. The girl replies:

My love, she said, you are right. My body has been violated but think of one thing. My body has been fashioned by nature for this very purpose. What was done to me was indeed wrong, but truly speaking, it is, as it were, only what nature has intended for me when it created me. (p.100).

## Commodification

In tribal areas Women are bought and sold like animals. From a Marxist feminist perspective, it is called commodification. Commodification in feminism means that exploitation of women to that extent that they can be bought and sold. Women in patriarchal societies are treated as commodities and objects and deprived of their essential humanness. Jamil Ahmed presents a dark, bleak and gloomy picture of women where women are bound to four walls of the house, taken and given in marriage as commodities. They are

sold by their male members of the society to earn money. The author tries to unveil the hidden realities regarding women to find out what sort of oppression and commodification is faced by women in the novel.

Sherakai, a beautiful young girl is sold by her father; Sher Beg, for a pound of opium and a hundred rupees to a local prince. Sher Beg belongs to Upper Chitral. He named his daughter Sherakai- the tiger's daughter. To cope with the financial crisis, he sold his daughter, Sherakai at the age of eight. He remembers his daughter and thinks "what happened to Sherakai, the tiger's daughter. He had sold her to somebody before he left, for a pound of opium and a hundred rupee" (p.142). This shows that how women are entangled in the clutches of male dominant society, especially in tribal areas where meaningless tradition prevails and these traditions always demands sacrifices from women.

Sherakai and Shah Zarina are bought by Afzal Khan. He then brings them to market as on "Thursday was the sale of women" (p. 172). He sells them to the brothel owners. Jamil Ahmad (2011) describes heart wrenching condition of women and girls brought to be sold, in these words:

Women, some little more than infants some already on the threshold between middle and old age; some who laughed at their fate and others who never stopped crying. Some who appeared once and then vanished completely. Others came again and again, sold sometimes to one man and then to another. (p.173)

## Conclusion:

The whole conglomeration of facts and ideas unveils the hidden realities regarding women to find out what sort of oppression is faced by women in the tribal areas and how they are treated as commodities by the society governed by men. Women are assigned well defined roles which lead to subjugation and violence which deprive them of their essential humanness and reduce them to the level of cattle. Moreover, they are used as sex-slaves as well as sold for marriage or prostitution by their own family members. As long as they fulfill their gendered roles, they are acceptable. But when they choose a husband of their choice they are killed in the name of honor.

Jamil Ahmad (2011) guides us through *The Wandering Falcon* to reassess and revisit the relationship of man and woman. Men in general and tribal men in particular must accept women in the mainstream without considering repressive, unjust and inhuman social norms and practices. It will lead to a balanced society that is based on healthy relationship—socially, economically and politically—between men and women.

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