

Incarcerating Women in Tribal Areas: A Third World Feminist Critique

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Abstract

The women is still incarcerated in third world countries despite several movements of their freedom, equality and liberty. They are maltreated not only by their husbands but also by their parents furthermore they are sold and purchased in the open market same as other commodities and their rape, slavery and subjugation are not considered obnoxious in the frontier areas henceforth, this research contributes to highlight their miserable condition of women in third world society with reference to Jamil Ahmed's debut fiction.

Introduction

This research tends to explore the incarceration of the downtrodden women in tribal areas of Pakistan with reference to *The Wandering Falcon* by Jamil Ahmed. It delineates the imperialistic and prejudiced attitude of the towards women in third world society where the women have to face a lot of issues while leading their lives in a society where the dominant patriarchal hierarchy instead of supporting women, treats them as a subject to incarceration. This study also sheds light on how the women in frontier areas are depicted as meek and helpless creature devoid of any individuality are considered as puppets in the hands of the dominant class and murdered, kidnapped and tortured ruthlessly. The women of those remote areas lose their self-respect, chastity and start living their lives under the influence of the dominant class.

The novel "*The Wandering Falcon*" is a debut novel of Jamil Ahmed based on real life experiences in *The Wandering Falcon*. His debut novel mainly portrays the subjugation and marginalization of poor villagers especially women in tribal areas of Pakistan whose lives are of no worth there. The plight of poor women belong to lower middle class in the Pakistani society in general and tribal areas in particular is somehow, unsatisfactory for the humanity. Sometimes the reek condition is exposed when the poor women are raped or forced for sex slavery. Cultural hegemony of the Pakistani society does not provide the equal rights to the women who is supposed to obey the commandments of her husband and in case of disobey they are relentlessly targeted by the dominant social groups in Pakistan.

There are some bigoted feudalists who have prejudiced mind against poor people and they use state and non-state institutions including Jirga to make the women victimized of their oppression. Every year many tribal women migrate to different areas of Pakistan to save their life. State seems completely involved in this oppression against them because sustained oppression is not possible without the support of the state.

The term marginality is generally applied to interpret economic, political, socio-cultural spheres, where underprivileged people strive to obtain access to recourses and equal sharing in social life. Marginalized class is kept away from the participation in religious, politics and social functions of the life. They have no opportunities to compete with the dominant people. Their freedom has been swallowed by the elite and ruling class in the state. Marginality is faced especially because of the caste, religion, class, age and experience.

Literature Review

The Wandering Falcon which is short listed for Man Asian Literary Prize, widely known as Asia's highest literary award, in 2011. This novel is also a finalist for DSC prize for South Asian Literature in 2013. The novel can either be construed as a short story collection or a novel, based on differing perspectives. The book narrates the story of Tor Baz (the black falcon) and his travel through the remote tribal areas along the Pakistan - Afghan border where he experiences the lives of the ethnic pashtuns. The stories travel through the strict code of conduct of the tribals known as *pashtunwali*, the lawlessness of the land where women are traded as commodity, adultery and anarchism, silhouetted against the Baluch desert landscape.

Ahmed and Gull in their article Victims of honor killing in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* and Jamil Ahmed's *The Wandering Falcon* explore honor killing by applying the theory of disgrace, shame and

honor which is associated with Post-colonial feminism. They try to highlight the perception of blame, shame and honor which is commonly linked with women who belong to the tribal areas. They illustrate the aspect of patriarchy and social practices and conventions of the society. At that time, a woman is considered as a figure of honor. She is treated in a way like she is an object for the male members of the society which gives us an impression that they are treated like animals. She is presented as having no rights, unable to speak openly but have to obey others like the way Tor's mother is represented in the novel. Their family heads are responsible for choosing their future. Whereas, a woman who takes part in adultery is marked as Kari and the best way for a man to protect his honor is to kill her. But on the other hand, a man who ignores to do this is considered as a disrespectful man.

The article explores *The Wandering Falcon* as a story of a young couple, who are expelled from their tribe in order to escape from the barbaric practices which are imposed on the individuals who trespass the limits of matrimony and household. Their son, Tor Baz, who moves from the boss and the criminals and transforms himself into *The Wandering Falcon*, he is represented such a character who visits all tribes, mountains, fields including the residents of the tribal people. Through the article, the authors formulate an astonishing portrayal of a world of tradition, compassion, devotion, ferocity, oppression and tolerance in their article. (Ahmed and Gull, 22-27)

Ethnicity refers to the cultural and social discriminations among various groups within a realm while the race is a biological phenomenon. Dividing the people or groups on the basis of physical characteristics such as gender, skin color, caste and ethnicity. "Race' is a term for the classification of human beings into physically, biologically and genetically distinct groups. The notion of race assumes, firstly, that humanity is divided into unchanging natural types, recognizable by physical features that are transmitted through the blood' and permit distinctions to be made between 'pure' and 'mixed' races" (Ashcroft 198). These social prejudices are made by human beings only God made all human being equally. Class conflict gives birth to racial bigotry. The elites, domestic masters considered themselves superior on the basis of elevated race, education and lingual foundations. The race is an imperative component to the mount of 'Marxism' and it creates binary oppositions between civilized and primitive, educated and uneducated, sophisticated and unsophisticated.

Marginality is also a core concept in feminist literature, due to the racial discriminations, violation, political and economic exploitations the poor and downtrodden communities regarded themselves as people of outskirts within their homeland. Marginalization crops up when people from a dissimilar background, from an amend culture migrated to another country and with time they felt that they are different from the people, the culture of a country with which they are in contact in present. According to Lewis "Poor class develops the feelings of 'shame' and 'guilt' with their identity when evaluated negatively by others" (Lewis 62) . After the creation of Pakistan, tribal people became marginalized and discriminated on the account of their dissimilar caste, culture, ethnicity, and due to the diverse ethnic group. Cohen defines the term marginalization as "an attempt to make a group of people unimportant and feeble shared with a strong sense of difference and discrimination of race, class, gender, culture, ethnicity, religion, caste" (Cohen 14).

According to Berry, "when marginalization is imposed by the dominant group, this state is called exclusion". In his unjustly neglected book, *Personality and ideology* Peter Leonard described social marginality as: "being outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social reproductive activity" (Berry 180). Marginalization is also a jerky occurrence, allied to social status. During the post-independent era migrants enjoyed the high-quality communal rank but afterward, they gradually became foreigners and outsiders. It means ethnic groups; families and individuals can also be marginalized within their localities. Mark Burton and Carolyn Kagan also mentioned this situation in *Community Psychology: In Pursuit of Wellness and Liberation* "Individuals or groups might enjoy high social status at one point in time, but as social point takes place, so they lose this status and become marginalized" (Burton, Kagan 4).

Marginal literature exposes the issues and problems of marginalized people. Marginalized class is kept away from the participation in religious, political and social functions of life. They have no opportunities to compete with the people who are in majority and their freedom has been swallowed by the elite and the dominant class in the state. Marginality is faced especially because of caste, religion, class, gender and ethnicity. Low caste people are not permitted to shake their hands with the elite class. They are considered untouchable. This word gives them a disgrace in society. The superstructures of the race in the USA, Australia and Africa and the caste system in Asia especially in India have deformed the identities of the marginalized people. Marxist literature exposes the marginality of the dominant and elite class. The elite class keeps the people under pressure and control. Marginality can also be seen in the Dalit literature of India. In Dalit literature, there is an exposition of the depressed and untouchable condition of the people. Dalits are considered untouchables, downtrodden, dispersed, and underprivileged and crushed people in society.

An Australian writer Kim Scott has told the elements of marginality in his novel *That Deadman Dance* that marginalized people are kept discriminated against because of color, race, age, and religion. In Tony Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the discrimination of race and color is observed. Similarly, race, class and color are

also found in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. *Heart of Darkness* of Joseph Conrad also has the elements of racial discrimination.

Muhammad Hanif in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* narrates a story of marginalization of Alice Bhatti who is the protagonist of the novel belongs to the Catholic Christian family in the French Colony of Karachi, the biggest city of Pakistan. When the novel begins, she is preparing for her job interview as a junior nurse in the Sacred Heart Hospital. She is trembling in the interview room before the interviewer panel, later on, she has been selected as a junior nurse in the hospital. She performs her duties honestly and faces a lot of problems in the hospital because of her low social status. When she was twelve years old her mother and she faced the atrocities of the people who belong to the ruling class even once they attacked her with their hockey but she was determined to not give up the mission. Once she was doing her duty in the hospital with her senior doctor in the operation theater and the patient died because of the ignorance of the doctor and she is called in the police station as a witness. In the police station, she was proved as a killer of the patient in the hospital because the doctor belonged to the elite class and he spent money to defend himself by proving Alice responsible of that killing. She is put into the cell for fourteen years for a crime that she has not even committed because she doesn't have enough resources to get justice from the state institutions. (Hanif np).

Incarceration of Women

The Wandering Falcon highlights the incarceration of women in third-world society where their status is no more than a commodity who don't have any feeling or emotion and just like other commodities they are possessed by their family so their families have authority over them to take the crucial decisions of their lives as Fateh Muhammad demands money to get her daughter Zarina married "The negotiation about the bride price had been successful, and the marriage would be taking place after one month and Fateh Mohammad had brought a part of the bride price in advance with him" (Ahmed102). This line reveals the subjugation of women in the tribal areas of Pakistan where she is merely treated as an object and her parents negotiate about her price as she is merely a commodity that can be sold and purchased in the market. Marriages in different social classes are portrayed and performed in different ways as here, one can easily understand the height of oppression and prejudice that the poor girls have to suffer in the perspective of marriages.

It is difficult for poor parents to find appropriate matches for their daughters and they often fulfill their material needs at the time of their daughters' marriage as Fateh Muhammad hands over his daughter to her groom after counting the bride money which illustrates the subjugation of women in downtrodden areas of Pakistan where the poor parents are even ready to demand money for their daughters' marriage. The rich do not want to marry their children with people having fewer resources and wealth which creates a problematic situation because poor daughters remain unmarried and if married, they find the same environment they were living in since their childhood because those who pay money for the poor women use to treat them as their personal property and treat them as a maid to manage household responsibilities. They are then treated like robots and do all household chores without raising their voices throughout their lives and their ignorant husbands impose their will and beat them for their acts of disobedience as Shah Zarina who is the daughter of Fateh Muhammad gets married to a man who treats her like an animal and often says that his wife is no more valuable than the bear for him and he treats his wife and bear in the same way as it is mentioned:

He started insisting that she would live a life no more comfortable than that of the bear. If the bear ate his food, so did Shah Zarina. If it chose to go hungry, so would she. If the bear stayed awake during the night, Shah Zarina could not join her husband in the only quilt they had. In the morning, along with the bear, Shah Zarina would get her day's beating (107).

This line sheds light on the misogynistic attitude of Zarina's husband towards her furthermore the belief of female frivolity and impiety is not new or confined to any specific creed. It takes starts with the human origin when Eve is believed to be conveniently beguiled by Satan and hence became the cause of the very 'fall of man'. Female inferiority is a universal phenomenon cherished by male chauvinist societies throughout the ages. Women have always been thought to be imperfect, defective, flawed, and faulty. Owing to all these malicious considerations this gender has never been given equal place with the perfect and flawless male gender as the husband of Shah Zarina treats his wife the same as his bear and beats her and bear in the same way because he thinks that Zarina is imperfect therefore she needs to be trained as a bear to make her a perfect being henceforth Zarina is supposed to share her room with the bear and remains hungry when the bear doesn't eat anything. Zarina tolerates all acts of cruelties and when the brutalities become intolerable, she decides to run away from her husband's house and she becomes successful in this act and goes away to her father's house where her miseries don't come to its end because the society forbids to accept a woman who runs away from her husband's house, therefore, her step-mother and neighbors start humiliating her by saying:

We only know her side of the story. What if she has not run away but has been thrown out by her husband?" "What if her reasons for running away are not what she said?" "Her sisters' marriages will pose problems because of her wayward habits." 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. “Her husband is bound to come by any day. He will demand that she be handed over to him. That is his right. If we refuse, he will ask for the return of the bride price (108).

These lines are not less than a slap on outdated traditions of the society in which the parents take the responsibility of their daughters till their marriage and after marriage, they consider them free from their responsibilities as when Zarina goes back to her house her family start considering her responsible for her tragedy and refuse to give her space in her house because they have already spent the bride money so they are afraid that if her husband would come and demand his money back, they will have no choice left except to give him the custody of Shah Zarina. This outdated cultural practice of selling girls in tribal areas for a small amount of money is an open violation of human rights but the state considers this an internal matter of tribal people and doesn't interfere in the lives of tribal people in this way it also reveals the failure of the state which is only concerned with providing the rights to the bourgeois.

Zarina realizes that her parents are not ready to take her custody therefore she decides to leave her parent's house before her parents force her to go back to her husband's house likewise she meets Afzaal Khan after running away from her house but Afzaal Khan brings her at MianMandi to sell her again to get money in return. “I will accept your three thousand rupees. Treat the rest as my marriage gift. It goes against my grain to enter into such a foolish bargain, but let not men say that Afzal Khan was unwilling to lose money when it was required of him”.(107) He chooses the place of MianMandi because he knows that the village is small and the people living their demand for something new and different moreover he knows that he can easily sell Zarina at MianMandi and get an appropriate amount of money and he becomes successful to sell her to Tur Baz for just three thousand rupees.

Afzaal Khan's treatment towards woman portrays the mindset of the society where the woman is always treated as an object of sexual gratification so women in those areas are marginalized and are demeaned very badly because instead of struggling to solve the problems of Zarina and provide her just, Afzaal Khan increases her challenges by selling her in just three thousand rupees. Zarina is the representative of those women who surrender themselves for the sake of refuge and security but in reality, they are being oppressed and marginalized because they open their eyes in such a society where she is unable to survive freely because of her gender. The state does not question the atrocities on the poor women because they propagated such ideology through a family institution which legitimizes the oppression on woman henceforth no state institution tries to end up the outdated practice of selling woman for a few thousand rupees because the ruling class is also the beneficiary of that outdated practice.

The practice of selling woman can not only be seen in the case of Zarina rather Sher Beg also sold her daughter for a bottle of opium and one hundred rupees as the narrator reveals “Oh, he remembered now what had happened to Sherakai, the Tiger's Daughter. He had sold her to somebody before he left, for a pound of opium and a hundred rupees”(94). This elaborates the social status of woman in the society where she is not considered more valuable than a bottle of opium and one hundred rupees and even pathetic thing is that the educational institutes which actual job is to aware the people to eliminate the outdated practices from the society are working to impose the agenda of the bourgeois on the poor class henceforth the poor women are ruthlessly sold and purchased for a few coins in the patriarchal society henceforth the price is Sherakai's chastity is determined as a single bottle of opium.

It had taken her mother another year to save the money to buy her back, and still, the prince had refused to let her go. She could even now feel the terror when, at her mother's pleading to spare her child, her owner had laughed coarsely and said, “A child? She is a Sherakai. I assure you if she can accept a small finger, she will find no difficulty in accepting a man's organ.” It had taken prayers, pleadings, and luck—not to speak of her mother's savings—to secure her return, and that, too, not before her master had made an attempt to prove his boast before he lost her. He had failed but mercifully had not damaged her seriously (95).

Sherakai's mother takes one year to collect the money to buy her daughter back but the prince who has bought her has refused to hand her over to her mother after that her mother tells him that she is not even an adolescent to give her sexual gratification but her owner ruthlessly states that no matter if she is not adolescent even then he will forcefully make her the victim of his lust somehow after a lot of pleadings she manages to get her daughter back from his husband. The response of the prince shows the status of the poor woman in the capitalistic society where the poor woman is dependent on the mercy of the rich for their survival henceforth the sexual abuse of the poor woman is not considered something awkward in the society but even the worse thing is that neither Sher Beg nor the prince was convicted for this criminal act which illustrates the absence of judicial

system in tribal areas where there is no check and balance by the state to protect the rights of the masses. The poor women are facing the animalistic behavior of the people because of the negligence of the state.

Jamil Ahmed is not the only writer who has highlighted the curse of selling daughters for a small amount of money rather Thomas Hardy in his novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge* also raises the same issue. Michael Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* auctions off his wife Susan and Elizabeth Jane for some money and when he starts feeling regret on his decision of selling his wife he purchases her back after twenty years same as Sher Beg who auctions off his daughter but his wife purchases her back after one year which shows that the practice of selling women for money is not merely the issue that exists in the tribal areas of Pakistan rather the similar issue was found in the Victorian age at England. highlights the socially vulnerable and socially degraded position of women. Females easily fall prey to Satan and are exploited by him as an instrument to ensnare the males. They have always been considered the pivot of all the sins hence every sort of torture and suppression is justified for females. The pathetic treatment of women isn't the problem of today's era rather the situation is the same from the centuries and the reason is that these outdated traditions are backed by the state and bourgeois who are the ultimate beneficiaries of these outdated customs.

If the new wife had merely felt happy and had forgotten Sherakai in her victory, it would have been all right. But where there had been only taunts and innuendos to contend with earlier, the new wife and her mother-in-law tried to devise all kinds of ways to hurt her cruelly and make her a figure of ridicule and contempt. Then one day they beat her with sticks in front of her daughters, and laughed when she cried out.” (107)

These lines are depicting the legitimization of oppression and marginalization on women from their parents and husband because women in family institutions are only supposed to bow their heads in front of husbands furthermore they are taught through religious teachings that disobeying husband is disobeying God therefore their husbands get a license to humiliate them likewise the poor women don't even have the option to go back to their parent's house because even the parents refuse to take the custody of their daughter of her getting married, consider her a burden and try to lift that burden as soon as possible. The height of oppression on poor people is that because of lack of awareness they are living and suffering all the oppression and the society is so judgmental which made rules and regulations in favor of patriarchal setup and woman has no choice left except to be submissive and bear the hardships of life.

Marriage again is another crucial factor that needs to be discussed here because in name of these rituals and set traditions of society, rights are being snatched from the poor people to express their opinions and choices and they end up confirming themselves into those set norms which cause anarchy and disasters in that particular society. Sherakai is suffering all the taunts and such comments which are demeaning and degrading for her self-esteem. She is not allowed to choose her partner with whom she's able to live her life according to her own will and she gets married to a cruel one who does not provide her with justice and treats her brutally.

Sherakai is married to a man who is not responsible and has no moral and ethical values. He does not know how to treat his wife so this illiteracy or lack of awareness is causing her wife to suffer. She is being beaten by her husband and she is helpless because she is only taught to respect her husband who has purchased her by paying money. She cannot protect herself and cannot raise her voice against it because society has given this dominance feature to men only that they can do whatever they want to do and females have to obey them once they get married. The situation becomes even worse when women are treated as toys and men feel proud after treating them as an object. Not only this, Sherakai is married to a man who is not responsible and who beats her woman just to satisfy his evil soul and cruel mind and she finds no way to get out of it because now she is married and already she is suffering a lot of labels on her character and is being ridiculed by the people of her family and outsiders as well.

The husband of Sherakai is so ignorant and he abuses her physically by beating her and then making fun of her. She, holding all the burden and miseries of life, keeps quiet and tolerates all the happenings and ongoing brutality. She is not only degraded by her husband privately but in front of her children as well which is even more painful for her because children do influence parents and obviously when they see such kind of harsh behaviors going on in their family, it affects them psychologically as well and ruins their future too. They then think that it is normal to treat a woman like this because they witness their mother and sister being treated and so they also practice treating their wives like this.

There are some set norms in every society which make marriages even more difficult for example; the concept of dowry is the worst. Parents who earn enough to feed their family are compelled to buy all the things for their daughter's next house otherwise their daughter has to suffer for the rest of their lives. Contrary to it, Ahmed describes a different culture in the tribal areas where instead of giving dowry parents charge money for getting their daughters married henceforth the women in both cases is the subject of oppression because she is merely treated as a material object which can be sold and purchased for some money moreover once the girl gets married after that she is not allowed to meet her family members for the rest of her life as this dialogue between Hamesh Gul and her mother in law truly illustrates the sufferings of women in tribal areas of Pakistan.

As we entered, she caught Hamesh Gul by his sleeve. "How is my daughter?" she asked. "She is well," he replied. "I will ask her to look you up." It was not until later that I came to know that Hamesh Gul had never visited his in-laws, nor had the old woman seen her daughter after the marriage. That was now more than twenty years ago (77).

Hamesh Gul neither allows her wife to meet her parents after marriage nor visits his in-laws after getting married for more than twenty years which shows the inferior status of women in the tribal areas where she is considered as a property of her husband after her marriage because the husband pays money to his in-laws as compensation or the price of the bride, therefore, the parents have no right to meet their daughters nor the daughters have right to visit the parents in grief and sorrows just because of this reason this dialogue is a criticism on the evil aspects of a tribal culture where the woman is treated as a puppet in the hands of his husband who has right to impose his decision on his wife.

The people do not consider to ask the girl that whether she wants to get married to that person or not but when it comes to divorce, people criticize and make her feel embarrassed by all means as Zarina is held responsible for running away from her husband to protect herself from his atrocities moreover. The people instead of encouraging her for this action start blaming her for her act of running away which shows the social norms of the society in which it is not considered immoral to treat the woman in an animalistic way but if the woman takes any practical initiative to get rid of her husband, the society starts discouraging her.

Conclusion

All the female characters in *The Wandering Falcon* are the victims of the biases of society because of their gender and their families instead of supporting them to fight against society prepare them for obeying outdated traditions of the society due to which women are not allowed to live freely they are still dependent on the male members of the family and if any woman tries to break the shackles she has to suffer the consequences same as Zarina suffers a lot after revolting against the set patterns of the society by running away from her husband's house without getting his permission. Society ends all the relations with her and lets her suffer the hatred of the people which illustrates that even in modern progressive societies women are not free from the discriminations perhaps the condition of the woman is not as pathetic in urban areas because the traditions and values in the capitalistic societies are only implemented on the poor class whose majority is living in underdeveloped village areas where the bourgeois control them through establishing such ideology which is merely formed to manipulate the mind of poor class and its ultimate sufferers are those poor women who are not only enslaved by the ruling class but also by their parents and husband, therefore, the family isn't playing a positive role in individual's life rather it increases the sufferings of the people through constant oppression.

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