

Incarcerating Women in Tribal Areas: A Third World Feminist Critique

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Abstract

*The women are still incarcerated in third-world countries despite several movements for 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 the same as other commodities, and their rape, slavery, and subjugation are not considered obnoxious in the frontier areas. The purpose of this research is to highlight the miserable condition of women in third-world society and the way they are treated by men in a male-dominated society concerning Jamil Ahmed's debut fiction, *The Wandering Falcon*.*

Keywords: Incarcerated, Maltreated, Commodities, Miserable

Introduction

This research tends to explore the incarceration of downtrodden women in tribal areas of Pakistan regarding *The Wandering Falcon* by Jamil Ahmed. It delineates the imperialistic and prejudiced attitude of the men towards women in a third-world society where the women have to face a lot of issues while leading their lives in a male-chauvinistic society. Poor women are always treated as subject to incarceration whereas patriarchal dominance prevails everywhere in society. This study also sheds light on how the women in frontier areas are depicted as meek and helpless creatures devoid of any individuality and they are considered puppets in the hands of the dominant class and murdered, kidnapped, and tortured ruthlessly. The women of those remote areas lose their self-respect, and chastity and start living their lives under the influence of powerful men.

The novel "*The Wandering Falcon*" is a debut novel of Jamil Ahmed based on real-life experiences. 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 who belong to the lower middle class in Pakistani society in general and tribal areas, in particular, is somehow, unsatisfactory for humanity. Sometimes, the reek condition is exposed when poor women are raped or forced into sex slavery. The cultural hegemony of the Pakistani society does not provide equal rights to the women who are supposed to obey the commandments of their husbands and in case of disobedience, they are relentlessly targeted by the dominant social groups in Pakistan.

Some bigoted feudalists have prejudiced minds against poor people and they use state and non-state institutions including Jirga to make the women victims of their oppression. Every year many tribal women migrate to different areas of Pakistan to save their lives. The 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, and socio-cultural spheres, where underprivileged people strive to obtain access to recourses and equal sharing in social life. Marginalized class is kept away from participation in religious, political, and social functions of life. They have no opportunities to compete with the dominant people. Their freedom has been swallowed by the elite and the ruling class in the state. Marginality is faced especially because of caste, religion, class, age, and experience.

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Objective of the study

To explore incarcerating women in tribal areas in the light of a third world feminist critique.

Research question

How to explore incarcerating women in tribal areas in the light of a third world feminist critique?

Significance of the study

The study will be significant for women throughout the world commonly and particularly the women in the tribal areas of Pakistan

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 the 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 commodities, 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 have highlighted the perception of blame, shame, and honor which is commonly linked with women who belong to the tribal areas. Moreover, they illustrate the aspect of patriarchy and social practices and conventions of society in their paper. A woman is always considered a figure of honor and she is treated like an object by the male members of society. The maltreatment of women by hardhearted men gives us the impression that they are treated like animals or objects. According to the researchers, women presented in the novels have no rights, they are unable to speak up for themselves but unfortunately, they have to obey others like the way Tor Baz's mother does in the novel, *The Wandering Falcon*. Women in the abovementioned novels have no authority to choose their future, whereas, the head of the families consider it their absolute right to plan the future of their women. Furthermore, a woman who takes part in adultery is given the title of Kari and the best way for a man to protect his honor is to kill her. If a man dares not to kill the woman who is "bad" or "Kari," he has to bear the title of a disrespectful man in a patriarchal society.

The article explores *The Wandering Falcon* as a story of a young couple, who are expelled from their tribe 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* is represented as a character who visits all tribes, mountains, and fields including the residents of the tribal people. Through this 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 discrimination among various groups within a realm while the race is a biological phenomenon that divides people or groups based on 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 portrays 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). Although God has created all human beings equal, these social prejudices are made by human beings. This is a fact that class conflict gives birth to racial bigotry. The elites and domestic masters consider themselves superior based on elevated race, education, and lingual foundations. Race is an imperative component of the amount 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 racial discrimination, violation, and political and economic exploitations, the poor and downtrodden communities regard themselves as outsiders within their homeland. Marginalization crops up when people from dissimilar backgrounds and different cultures migrate to another country and with time they feel that they are different from the native people, the culture of a country with which they are in contact at 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 against on the account of their dissimilar caste, culture, ethnicity, and due to diverse ethnic groups. 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" (pg no. ?). In his unjustly neglected book, *Personality and ideology*, Peter Leonard describe 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 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 change takes place, 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 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, 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* by Joseph Conrad also has elements of racial discrimination.

Muhammad Hanif in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* narrates a story of the marginalization of Alice Bhatti who is the protagonist of the novel and belongs to the Catholic Christian family in the French Colony of Karachi, the biggest city in 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 they also attacked her with their hockey but she was determined not to 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 she is called to the police station as a witness. In the police station, she was proved as the 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 for 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 a third-world society where their status is no more than a commodity who doesn't have any feelings or emotions. Just like other objects, they are also possessed by their family so their families have the authority over them to take the crucial decisions of their lives as Fateh Muhammad demands money to get his daughter Zarina married as Ahmed shows us that "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 a woman is merely treated as an object and her parents negotiate about her price. She is considered nothing more than a commodity that can be sold and purchased in the market. Marriages in different social classes are portrayed and performed in different ways 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's 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 upon them 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 bears 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).

These lines from the text shed light on the misogynistic attitude of Zarina's husband towards her. Furthermore, the belief in female frivolity and impiety is not new or confined to any specific creed. It started with the human origin when Eve was 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 the bear in the same way because he thinks that Zarina is imperfect therefore she needs to be trained as he trains his 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 the 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. She goes to her father's house where her miseries don't come to an end because the social norms set by the patriarchs of the society forbid accepting 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 for their daughters till their marriage and after marriage, they consider them free from their responsibilities. When Zarina goes back to her house her family, starts considering her responsible for her tragedy and refuse to give her space in their house because they have already spent the bride's money so they are afraid that 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 women's rights but the state considers this an internal matter of tribal people and does not interfere in the lives of tribal

people. This also reveals the failure of the state which is only concerned about 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. She meets Afzaal Khan after running away from her house but Afzaal Khan brings her to Mian Mandi to sell her again to get the money in return. Ashraf Khan claims that "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 Mian Mandi because he knows that the village is small and the people living there demand something new and different moreover he knows that he can easily sell Zarina at Mian Mandi 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 of women 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 demeaned very badly. Instead of struggling to solve their problems of Zarina and provide her justice, Afzaal Khan increases her challenges by selling her for 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 they are unable to survive freely because of their gender. The state does not question the atrocities of poor women because they propagated such ideology through a family institution that legitimizes the oppression of women. No state institution tries to end up the outdated practice of selling women for a few thousand rupees because the ruling class is also the beneficiary of that outdated practice.

The practice of selling women can not only be seen in the case of Zarina. Sher Beg, another character in the novel, also sells his 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 on the social status of women in a society where she is not considered more valuable than a bottle of opium and one hundred rupees. The worst thing is that the educational institutes that are supposed to spread awareness amongst people to eliminate the outdated practices from society are also working to impose the agenda of the bourgeois on the poor class. Unfortunately, the poor women are ruthlessly sold and purchased for a few coins in the patriarchal society as the price of 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 attempted 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. Although, her mother tells her husband, Prince, that she is not an adolescent to give him sexual gratification but her owner ruthlessly states that no matter whether she is not an adolescent, he will still forcefully make her the victim of his lust. After a lot of pleadings, Sherakai's mother manages to get her daughter back from her 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. Besides, the sexual abuse of a poor woman is not considered something awkward in society. The worse thing is that neither Sher Beg nor the prince was convicted for their criminal act which highlights the absence of a 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 projected 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 his wife Susan and Elizabeth

Jane for some money and when he starts feeling regret about his decision of selling wife, he purchases them back after twenty years. Similarly, Sher Beg auctions his daughter but his wife purchases her back after one year which shows that the practice of selling women for money is not merely an issue that exists in the tribal areas of Pakistan rather a similar issue was found in the Victorian age in England. This 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 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 for 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 of women by their parents and husband because women in family institutions are only supposed to bow their heads in front of their husbands. In addition, they are taught through religious teachings that disobeying husbands 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 houses because the parents refuse to take custody of their married daughters, they start considering the daughter a burden on them and try their best to get rid of that burden as soon as possible. The height of oppression on poor people is that because of lack of awareness they are living and bearing all the oppression and the society is so judgmental it made rules and regulations in favor of a 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 the 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 to 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 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 his wife to suffer at his hands. She is being beaten by her husband and she cannot do anything for herself 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 their husbands 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 she is already 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 burdens 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 brutally so they also start practicing treating their wives like this.

There are some set norms in every society that 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 her life. 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 but in both cases, a woman is subject to 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 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 his 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 the 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 do the daughters have the right to visit the parents in grief and sorrow just because of this reason. This dialogue is a criticism of the evil aspects of a tribal culture where the woman is treated as a puppet in the hands of her husband who has the right to impose his decision on his wife.

The people do not consider asking the girl 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. 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 a 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 societal norms, the parents are shown to prepare their daughters 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 discrimination perhaps the condition of the woman is not as pathetic in urban areas because of 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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