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### A Subaltern Study of Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* from the Perspective of Identity Crisis: A Postcolonial Analysis

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#### Abstract



*In order to fathom the contemporary crisis of postcolonial countries, the acknowledgement of the colonial experiences of these countries plays a very important role. The Wandering Falcon by Jamil Ahmad is a wonderful novel that depicts the pre and postcolonial Pakistan simultaneously. The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the historiography of the tribal people who are the victims of territorial nationalism and face identity crisis, as a result of strict border policies after independence from colonial rule, which leaves them in the middle of nowhere. The paper also aims to explore the conflict between subaltern classes and the hegemonic power: a conflict that exist in many postcolonial countries which are now colonized not by foreign rulers but by the indigenous ruling elite which exploits and relegates non-elite to the position of the subaltern.*

**Keywords:** Postcolonialism, Subaltern, Identity, Territorial Nationalism, Tribal History

#### Introduction

Postcolonialism is like an umbrella term under which one of the most important discourse is Subaltern Studies. This paper focuses on the demographic shifts after the end of colonization which changed the lives of subaltern people especially in South Asia. Subaltern term was first used by Antonio Gramsci to refer to the people of inferior rank, those who are the victims of the hegemony of ruling class. He coined this term to refer to the people who are excluded from the colonial politics by the cultural hegemony and are also denied any voice and agency in socio-economic institutions of the society. In establishing the postcolonial definition of the term Subaltern, Spivak in an interview with Kock (1992) said "in postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern." After the end of colonialism many African and Asian countries were divided with new territorial demarcations and boundaries affecting the lives of so many people. In the midst of this demographic shift, the subaltern or marginalized people suffer from identity crisis which is brilliantly exposed by Pakistani novelist Jamil Ahmad (1931-2014), former civil servant, in his novel *The Wandering Falcon* which was short listed for Man Asia Literary Prize in 2011. The book was also finalist for DSC prize for South Asian literature in 2013. The novel is based on Jamil's observations and experiences while he was working in tribal areas of Pakistan as civil servant. *The Wandering Falcon* is a story about a boy known as Tor Baaz or black falcon who wanders between the tribes along the borders of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. The reader also wanders with Tor Baaz and gets acquainted with a traditional and honor bound culture of tribal people.

Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* is one of the best case study to understand the postcolonial problems especially of Pakistan and Afghanistan due to their complex geopolitics. The conflict between mainstream society (center) and subaltern (periphery) is explored in this novel to highlight the different factors which exacerbated these internal conflicts after the partition of the sub-continent. The novel sheds light on the internal affairs of the tribal areas of Pakistan and how the tribal people dealt with the aftermaths of the partition and the emergence of the new territorial boundaries. The identity crisis faced by tribal people is brought into our focus when the ordinary tribal nomads who

used to move freely between Pakistan and Afghanistan are now faced with the issue of national identity as an aftermath of colonialism. As these nomads were basically subaltern or marginalized so their interests were not taken into consideration while demarcating the new geographical boundaries. This shows that how the conflict of interest between hegemonic powers and the subaltern takes place and it often turns violent if not negotiated properly.

**Research Objectives:**

The objective of this study is to highlight:

- a) Aftermath of colonialism along the border lines of Pakistan
- b) Historiography of tribal people and their identity issues
- c) Reasons of the conflict between subaltern people and the hegemonic powers

**Literature Review:**

*The Wandering Falcon* narrates the story from different perspectives. It makes us familiar with postcolonial issues of identity, nationalism and ethnicity. It gives us a glimpse into the scenario of Second World War and the role played by the tribal people in this regard and the turmoil faced by these people after the end of colonialism. Despite of all the sacrifices of tribal people during colonial rule and after the end of colonial rule, they are treated as inferiors and are marginalized for violating state ideology. Khalid, Iqbal and Liaquat (2021) analyze this state oppression from Althusser's perspective. These tribal people are made destitute and oppressed by using repressive state apparatuses. Instead of engaging them through dialogue and addressing their issues and concerns the state tries to snub them by using force. And so they fight against state-sponsored oppression for their survival which is deliberately misconstrued by the mainstream media and politics as rebellion to justify state brutality. Ahmad in his novel puts forth the condition of the downtrodden strata of the society who are forced to adapt according to the ideology of the state. And if they rebel against the state or its ideology they are punished physically instead of being convinced mentally. *The Wandering Falcon* sheds light on the use of repressive state apparatus to suppress the insurgency of some Baloch people who try to demand their fundamental rights from the state. Roza Khan has struggled many years for obtaining equal rights for his people through armed insurgency and as a result he along with his fellows are frequently attacked by military jets and their relatives and families are tortured and arrested by the armed forces of state. Ahmad has represented the problems faced by the people on the periphery in an attempt to draw attention towards their problems and their struggle for basic rights.

Imran and Gull (2017) explore *The Wandering Falcon* from the lens of Post-colonial feminism illustrating the factors instigating honor killings of women. They have highlighted the issues of blame, shame and honor linked with women of tribal areas. This article also illustrates the patriarchal tribal society and its social conventions and practices. The article explores the story of young couple who escapes from the vicious practices imposed on the individuals who trespass the patriarchal boundaries of household and matrimony. Their son, Tor Baz, moves from place to place transforming himself into "the Wandering Falcon". He is a character who visits all tribes, fields and mountains. In this article the authors have portrayed a world of devotion, tradition, compassion, oppression, and tolerance.

Khanal (2016) analyses the crisis and effects of relocating cultural region on the lives of people. By using Bhabha's concept of hybridity, Khanal analyses the character of Tor Baaz as a hybrid one as he is a displaced individual who adopts different tribal cultures to adjust himself in new situations as a spy. Bhabha talks about culture in postcolonial terms because after colonialism new social formations are made due to new territorial demarcations and as a result cultural exchange happens. This cultural exchange brings about hybridity and the individual in such a cultural location adopts a hybrid identity. Change of place also brings changes in the domestic and social life of a person. He has to readjust himself according to new systems and values of a new territory. The protagonist of the novel, Tor Baz, undergoes ethnic transformation as he is constantly moving from one area to another along the borders and encounters different tribal communities. Tor Baaz never shows any allegiance with any tribal culture because he is constantly moving but whenever he leaves one place and moves to another location he feels uncomfortable as he says "'I have always lived with a little trouble of one kind or another" (Ahmad, 2011, p.83). When at one point in the novel the Pakistani Deputy Commissioner tries to ask him about his tribal identity, he replies, "think of Tor Baz as your hunting falcon" (Ahmad, 2011, p.94). Sadaf (2018) in her article portrays *The Wandering Falcon* as a story of tribal people who do not want to compromise on their societal and cultural values

considering them as the part of their religion but in reality these values are mostly man-made standards. Sadaf also highlights that the literature of Pakistan has undergone a significant change after the 9/11 incident and the war on terror to counter the propagandistic writings of the West. This new and inevitable shift of the Pakistani writers to counter-argue and represent the unspoken and highly affected community of underprivileged aims to shun the accepted and perceived notion of considering the tribal people 'enemy'. They aim to 'humanize' these communities who are fighting to have a respectable identity and status in society and for their basic human rights.

We can trace these issues in several other postcolonial novels. One such example is Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1994). In *Things Fall Apart* we find an obvious clash between Igbo' culture and religion and White missionaries' new culture and new religion. The new culture was completely adopted by people of inferior rank, who were outcast by Igbo society, in order to achieve high standards of society by siding with white missionaries. And those who resisted colonialism met a tragic end like Okonkwo. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe depicts that colonialism brought instability to a society that was once stable having its own rules and regulations and Achebe shows the life of indigenous people who were left in chaos. In *The Wandering Falcon* there is also a clash but not between foreign rulers and colonized people. Colonizers are gone but their imperial culture is adopted by elite political parties of the country who are trying to impose their writ on the tribal people who are forcefully relegated to the periphery of the country due to new policies and hence they are marginalized people. So a cultural and political hegemony is created and exercised by ruling elite class. Achebe (1978) claims that "Tragedy begins when things leave their accustomed place" (p.5). In Jamil Ahmad's novel we see the tragic consequences when people are forced to leave their original place and adopt culture which is alien to them. Unlike Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, the protagonist of Ahmad's novel Tor Baaz after so much wanderings decides to start a normal happy life. *The Wandering Falcon* is hailed by Mohsin Hamid as "Superb. The work of a gifted storyteller who has lived in the world of his fiction, who offers his readers rare insight, wisdom and above all pleasure."

As it is said that the title of the novel *Things Fall Apart* is taken from Yeats poem *The Second Coming* (1920) we can see that Jamil Ahmad, consciously or unconsciously, has also used the vocabulary and essence of the same poem while talking about postcolonial Pakistan where subaltern people are wandering and unable to find a center and anarchy is imposed on them.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer

Things fall apart the center cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

### **Research Methodology:**

This novel perfectly fits in the six point model regarding subaltern classes given by Gramsci (1971) in *Prison Notebooks* to study the formation of the subaltern classes. The *Prison Notebooks* include essays written by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. In 1926 he was arrested and jailed by the Italian fascist regime. He wrote *Prison Notebooks* while being imprisoned. Influenced by Marxism, Gramsci discusses and analyzes how the hegemony of bourgeoisie works in a society and how the working class or proletariat are ideologically manipulated to accept hegemonic cultural values and this consensus culture maintains status quo. Gramsci has made a distinction between 'political society', which includes political and legal institutions, and 'civil society', which is a non-state sphere different from business and government. Gramsci encourages this 'civil society' or proletariat class to regulate the society with democratic values instead of blindly following the hegemony of 'political society' or status quo. So the term subaltern is used by Gramsci to refer to the colonial populations who are excluded from the hierarchy of power. Subaltern classes include workers, peasants, religious groups, slaves, women and other groups who are refused access to hegemonic power. For Gramsci, the chronicle of the subaltern groups is highly fragmented and digressive as they are always subjected to the hegemony of the ruling class. Gramsci is interested in the historiography of the subaltern 'groups'. In his six-point model of subaltern, firstly he talks about the objective formation of subaltern group; secondly, their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations; thirdly, the birth of new parties by dominant groups to control the subaltern classes; fourthly, the formations subaltern groups produce to press their claims; fifth, new formations within the old established framework that assert the autonomy of the subaltern classes; sixth, other points referring to trade unions and political parties. This basic model by Gramsci is the foundation of Subaltern Studies Group. The term

“Subaltern” coined by Gramsci was adopted by a group of historians who intended to advocate systematic analysis and discussion on subaltern issues in South Asia. The group included Ranajit Guha, Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Gyanendra Pandey. This group aims to study the prejudice of the elite class in interpreting the non-elite culture and the imbalance deliberately created in academic work by elites. In Subaltern Studies the term ‘subaltern’ is used generally to refer to the idea of subordination in South Asian societies in terms of race, class and gender etc. The five volumes of Subaltern Studies produced by this group include –politics, history, sociology, and economics of subaltern classes as well as their ideologies, cultural and societal standards and belief systems. In simple terms Subaltern Studies can be defined as an endeavour to provide space to the marginalized people within the hegemony of elitist historiography to express themselves and their story to the world. Further the notion of subaltern found a new dimension with the work of postcolonial feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak “Can the Subaltern Speak”? Spivak draws on deconstructive theory of Derrida to illustrate the process of subject formations and to create the room for the ‘Others’ within the hegemonic discourses bringing the margins/outside in. Spivak claims that it is impractical to retrieve the voice of the subaltern people, suggesting the unimaginable damage done by colonial powers to repress the subaltern and its intersection with the prevalent patriarchy — with specific reference to the widow immolation in India and the colonial attitude towards it.

**Analysis:**

This novel, written in the form of short stories, does not follow a rigid chronological sequence. We are made to witness the strict code of honor of tribes in the opening story, there are stories about second world war during the colonization of India and the role played by tribal people along the borders in giving information either to the British government or to Germans, their stories of survival in harsh economic conditions and their ambivalence to either surrender themselves to the dominant civil government or to retain their personal identity.

The protagonist Tor Baaz or the black falcon, an orphan picked up by Baluch tribe and later adopted and abandoned by subedar Ghuncha khan, represents the subaltern group as he belongs to the tribal area along the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan. His wanderings, his profession as a spy and his ambiguous tribal identity gives an insight into the life of the marginalized people of society.

**Territorial nationalism:**

The novel is set in postcolonial Pakistan where there is the emergence of new border policies and new economic sphere. Gramsci's first point is the objective formation of the subaltern group due to economic conditions which relegate them to the position of subaltern. Here we can trace the historiography of tribal people to understand their position in society. In the novel we are introduced with the Pawindas or foot people who move from one place to another according to the change in seasons. Now these nomads face restrictions by border policies of Pakistan and Afghanistan. They have to choose one country. This shows that how the common people become the victims of territorial nationalism in which they have to choose their allegiance with one country. They have left the cold hills of Afghanistan to spend winter in the plains of Pakistan and to earn more. But they are stopped at the border because they have no travel documents and are told to move back as they are not Pakistani citizens. They spend many days in between the borders of two countries. Many of their people and animals were killed by the soldiers when they tried to forcefully enter Pakistan. So these people have suffered as a result of arbitrary political boundaries which denies bioregional identity. They are neither Pakistanis nor Afghans then who are they? What kind of identity they require to prove that they are the inhabitants of this world? So here Ahmad is criticizing the policies of postcolonial countries which show no flexibility to address the issues of common people who are now suffering from identity crisis.

**Political Conflict:**

The problem of insurgency in Baluchistan incited by foreign intervention, an issue which is yet not solved after so many years of independence, is brought into our focus. Baluchistan is full of natural resources but the incapability of the government to have a truce with them in order to end their insecurities is what we are made to witness in this novel. We witness the death of Baluch people. According to the second point in Gramsci's model the subaltern class either adheres to dominant political formation or to adhere to their own demands. In case of Baluch as depicted in the novel, the government wants its writ but Baluch having their own rules and regulations are unwilling to leave

their customs and accept dictation from others. Instead of maintaining a peaceful co-existence and having a meaningful dialogue with them, the elite tries to suppress them and makes them surrender through force. The invitation received by Baluch of having a truce was actually a trick to avenge the murder of two army officers and the magistrate passes the sentence of death. There was no one to speak in favor of the Baluch. As Ahmad (2011) writes:

"Typically Pakistani journalists sought slave for their conscience by writing about the wrongs done to men in South Africa, in Indonesia, in Palestine, and in the Philippines--not to their own people. No politician risked imprisonment: they would continue to talk of the rights of the individual, the dignity of man, the exploitation of the poor, but they would not expose the wrong being done outside their front door...these men died a final and total death. They will live in no songs; no memorials will be raised to them."(p.33)

Then a relationship is established between government and the tribes and Tor Baaz acts as a spy of government. We can look at this relationship from the lens of Gramsci's third point according to which dominant social group organizes government programs to control subaltern group. A treaty is made between government and tribes according to which a regular payment is to be given to the tribes and non-interference in their customs and affairs. The tribes on the other hand have to show good conduct and must not interfere in the state matters.

But then as Gramsci says in his fourth and fifth point that subaltern group realizes that government programs are not in favor of their needs, so they establish their own political formations within the established old political framework. Same issue is explored by Ahmad in this novel in the case of the people of mountainous territory Waziristan which is split into North Waziristan and South Waziristan each having its own political agent. Tribal people have made their own political formations in the form of- Jirga- to have negotiations with government. The political agents act as mediator between government and jirga:

"Regular laws did not apply here, and the Frontier Crimes Regulations were the primary instrument of administration with which they had to try to balance the needs and customs of the tribes with the commands that reached them from the government."(Ahmad, 2011, p.103)

Gramsci's sixth point is that when subaltern group accepts that their demands and needs cannot be fulfilled in current sociopolitical system so they try to replace it with their own sociopolitical system. Same is the case explored in the novel where tribal people and Baluch people resist the system but they are unable to bring change in the existing system because they are in minority and their resistance towards existing system is always answered with violence by the government instead of negotiations.

#### **Re-reading Tribal history:**

It is not like that tribal people of Waziristan have always been present as non-elite. In the novel we are shown through flashback the character Mullah who is playing a very important role during World War Second. They had retained a great position as an independent tribal territory when British were ruling India and they remained outside the British Empire. They gave a very tough time to British Indian Army and resisted their entrance in their area. They played a very significant role in the creation of Pakistan as they were the one who created many problems for British in India. Moreover the history of these tribes shows that in order to maintain peace even British had to make a truce with them but they continued their resistance. After the end of colonial rule, problems still existed between Pakistani government and Waziristan but in 1954, Waziristani Commander-in-Chief surrendered himself personally but the conflicts remained. Ahmad has revealed the story of their side and makes us understand their world of hardships, compassion, survival and love. Ahmad has tried to speak on their behalf but the question remains "can subaltern speak for themselves"? It is hegemonic power which designs narratives or discourses and in doing so they suppress the truth for their personal gains. Chakrabarty (2000) while talking about subaltern discourses analyses the real nature of academic discourses throughout history. Chakrabarty shows that the dominant elitist discourse has just one subject — 'Europe' — which has silenced other existing histories. "There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called "the history of Europe." (p.27)

Ahmad then turns to the economic survival of the tribal people and focus now shifts more on women of the tribal areas. Spivak (1988) talks about the Indian women who are caught between two discourses on the ritual of Sati. One that "white men are saving brown women from brown men" and

the other according to which "woman actually wanted to die". In this conflict between these two discourses voices of Hindu women were suppressed. In the same way voices of tribal women are suppressed in the larger conflict between their tribal men and government. As we come across in the novel group of women with pitchers on their heads to fetch water for their men folk. They become silent when they pass near the narrator and his guides. They are not allowed to raise their voices in front of anyone. Decisions are taken for women by their men without consulting them. As in one chapter mother-in-law of Hamesh Gul does not know which of her daughter is married to him. Hamesh arrives in his in-laws home and introduces himself to his mother in law as:

'It is I. Hamesh Gul. Amir Khan's son in law'.

'Which daughter of mine have you married?' the disembodied voice called back skeptically.

'The one after the eldest.' (Ahmad, 2011, p.115)

Women are facing the brutal male dominated environment in tribal areas where honor killing is a custom and is not considered as a crime. In the beginning of the novel Tor Baaz' parents are killed by tribal people for violating tribal customs. Women's misery and plight is again brought on the surface in the last chapters of the novel. Sher Beg sells his youngest daughter Sherakai to a local prince for a pound of opium and a hundred rupee and leaves his family. Sherakai's mother manages to get her back and marries her to a good man. But later during their journey to plains Sherakai is kidnapped by unknown people. In the chapters 'The betrothal of Shah Zarina' and 'Sale Completed' we find the worst oppression on women in which Shah Zarina, a tribal girl, is married but she runs away from her husband because of his brutality. Her family refuses to accept her because if they accept her, they will have to pay back the bridal price which her husband has given to Zarina's father. So women are used like an object, first by their family, which they sell to gain money and then by their husbands as a commodity. She leaves her home. A person takes her to brothel to be sold and Tor Baaz buys her and decides to end his wanderings and start a new life with Shah Zarina. Women are doubly oppressed first by the men of their tribal society and secondly by the ruling powers who control the economy.

Ahmad has realistically portrayed the lives of marginalized tribal people who are trying to retain their tribal identity as well as collective national identity. But their inability to merge into the larger milieu due to the unjust behavior of elite political class and their inability to understand the modern European concept of 'nationalism' leaves them in the middle of nowhere. As Gramsci (1971) writes:

"The subaltern classes by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State": their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States."

### **Conclusion:**

This research is an attempt to bring the suppressed discourses of subaltern class on the surface of the established literary canon. The acknowledgement of the injustices perpetuated by ruling elite authority on the people of periphery is pertinent to fathom the basis of these conflicts so that the power structures can revise their policies to make an inclusive society where people at the periphery are not being made to feel inferior in any way and they are made part of the mainstream society by providing them with equal rights and opportunities. Moreover it is also important to negotiate with people so that the grievances can be handled wisely. Ahmad's novel successfully portrays the lives of tribal people and the aftermath of colonialism on innocent nomads who are just the victims of territorial nationalism. He re-writes the history of subaltern tribal people which is distorted by elite academics. The novel moves between past and present to make the readers understand the contemporary conflicts of postcolonial Pakistan by tracing their history. Ahmad demonstrates the tribal people as the disciplined people with their own customs and values. In an interview with AFP in (2011), Ahmad said that he saw tribes as the earliest building blocks of humanity.

"There's a tribal gene somewhere embedded in each one of us," he said.

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