



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Lethal Hegemony over Subaltern Tribes: Textual Analysis of Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon***

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study aspires to explore the downtrodden condition of subaltern people in the novel *The Wandering Falcon* by Jamil Ahmad which was published in 2011. This paper aims to manifest the hostility of hegemony over the tribes alongside the Pakistan-Afghan border. The objective of the study is to elucidate the manipulative and hegemonic actions of the government over Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Textual analysis of the novel explicates the sovereignty of local elites perverting the lawful proceedings in tribes. It further divulges the lethal atrocities being committed on subordinate groups effectuated by unjust verdicts. A qualitative research paradigm has been used for the study which is descriptive in nature. The present study is theoretically framed on Antonio Gramsci's postulates on hegemony. Robert Young's tenets on subaltern studies also support the present study. The significance of the study is to generate the interpretation of English fiction outside the fictional box which can provide the core understanding of real on-ground political and social scenarios. The study examines that the precarious living of tribal people under the supremacy of hegemonic powers is unthinkable to be rehabilitated unless and until the very regime dismantles its pervert practices. The study reveals how tribal subalterns' voices are brutally rebuffed by authorities that deny them the very right to talk about themselves resulting in their submission to remain marginalized.

**Key Words:** FATA, Hegemony, Local Elites, Subaltern, Unjust Judiciary

**Introduction**

English fictional writers have been exploring the Federally Administered Tribal Areas for years, especially the ones who keep an eye on international politics. They search for the reasons behind political mistreatment in such areas. The explorations of these fictional writers have revealed that the tribal clans residing alongside the Pakistan-Afghan border are being treated as voiceless and valueless objects. The narcissistic tribal elites, in an attempt to assure their hegemony and control over their allied tribes, behave brutally with the subjugated subalterns.

Who is a subaltern? A subaltern is a person of inferior rank or position in an institution or society. In the postcolonial narrative, the term subaltern describes the lower social classes displaced to the margins of society; in an imperial colony or neo-imperial colony. Ludden outlines the history of the subaltern word and chronologically infers that, at first, subaltern was being applied to vassals and peasants in late-medieval English. Then during the 18th century, it was denoted to lower ranks in the military. He presents the viewpoints of different critics regarding subalternity where Antonio Gramsci weaves the idea of subalterns in the class struggle where one class dominates another and Ranajit

Guha, father of subaltern history, describes the status of subalterns that they are dominated by dual-elitism; colonialist elites and bourgeoisie nationalist elites (Ludden, 2002). Such dominance is denoted as hegemony which means the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant state or a social group over subjugated groups or subalterns. The broader meaning of hegemony is coined by Gramsci (2011) who explores hegemony to investigate the dominant role of a ruling class that is so successful in promoting its own interests in society. Hegemony is recognized differently by different theorists; another writer on the power claims that hegemonic power is not just a negative, coercive or repressive thing that forces submissive people to do things against their wishes but can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society for them

Ahmad (2012) discursively portrays the hegemonic disposition of the dominant leaders by fabricating the anthology of nine stories which brings the protagonist of *The Wandering Falcon* into contact with the representatives of wonderfully varied tribes of the regions; Afridis, Wazirs, Bhattanis, Gujjars, Masuds, Brahui, Kharot, Nasirs, Dortanis, and Baluchs. He (protagonist) grows up to be the wandering falcon, a boy with no identity, who observes the hegemony and hostility of dominant leaders, and witnesses the killings and sacrifices of the Pashtun and Baloch subalterns. Ahmad projects the precarious position of FATA subalterns who have been the victims of political neglect since FATA's existence. He divulges the misuse of the autonomous judicial system of FATA, known as *Jirga*, and delineates the barbarism of the black law, known as Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), being enforced in FATA.

### Literature Review

The term 'hegemony' has been interpreted by numerous English researchers and critics differently in contemporary milieus. Flynn (2021) explains two kinds of hegemony; 'ideological hegemony' or consensus hegemony where subaltern classes, to a greater extent, give their consent to be controlled. The other form is 'state hegemony' or international hegemony where state-order overlooks subaltern classes (p.77-96). Vance (2017) demonstrates his concepts about hegemony that hegemony is the dominance or control of one particular group over the whole society as in feudalism, hegemonic power is in the hands of lords and royals. He takes hold of hegemony as 'control by consent' rather than 'control by dominance'. Comparably, Salem alludes to the hegemonic system of a society where subalterns and elites balance coercion and consent between themselves; the society where consciousness, culture and ideology are under the control of intellectuals. He describes the dominating system as "the hegemonic apparatus...comprised institutions and practices that allowed one class to gain power...it is this apparatus that bridges civil and political society, turning civil power into political power" (p.37). Riley coins the other two forms of hegemony; intra-class and inter-class. Intra-class hegemony traces back to the colonial times where British colonizers dominated over the subaltern or tri-continental world which has consequences for the ability of one group (local elites) to pursue external or inter-class hegemony. Riley says that "the specific structure of intra-class hegemony that characterized the Italian bourgeoisie undermined its capacity to develop inter-class hegemony" (p.16).

There is a diversity of thought among the critics to take hold of subalternity in present post-colonial times. A multi-authored article defines the subaltern group as a group of people who are unrepresented, under-represented or simply marginalized in society. They are reduced to perennial inferiority and their lack of representation in a society denies them the very right to talk about themselves. That article quotes that

“politically motivated local elites re-bolstered their relationship with the lower classes causing the subalterns to feel a semblance of pride” (Danish et al, p. 342).

Two readers reading the same text come up with two different meanings. Different researchers have interpreted *The Wandering Falcon* differently according to their personal, psychological and socio-cultural experiences. Ifrah interprets the selected text through the lens of eco-criticism where she investigates how tribesmen are contributing to the degradation of land with their warrior traits and patriarchal powers. She states that ecology mediates all experiences of human beings and thus pictorial imagery and natural descriptions in the novel; dry winds, dry ravines, corrosive, hardened and dry earth predict the deteriorating lives of tribal people (Afzal, p. 37). Another aspect, that a multi-authored article deals with, is patriarchy as a social tribal value in the same text through the lens of post-modern feminism. That article reflects patriarchy as a curse in tribal areas of Pakistan where women are treated as mere objects, and as animals; for instance, in the novel, a husband shows more respect and love to his bear instead of to his wife (Sattar et al, p. 4236-4242). The same incident is investigated through a feminist lens in another article that quotes “woman is one of the worthless creatures, even though she has less importance than the animals and she is treated like animals” (Safiullah et al. p.4238). Another investigation divulges the One/Other relationship between two genders where women are treated as ‘the second sex’ and the main idea is that keeping in mind the state of affairs, there is very little hope for women in men-centered tribal societies (Qasim et al. p.4). Ahmad has shaded his novel with various interpretations. Another article investigates the theme of homelessness in the selected text through a socio-political lens. It manifests that the recurring theme of the novel is to survive in the harsh and unfair landscape. It depicts that tribal world with the so-called civilized tribesmen deem to be barbaric and uncivilized as it provides no sanctuary or no shelter for its refugees. The chiefs of these tribes are attributed with the qualities like truth, integrity, principle and honor qualities but they lack all in real (Afzal, p.26).

In a great deal of written literature from the ancient, medieval and modern world, there are proofs and themes of hegemony over subaltern tribes in European, Middle-Eastern and African Literature but the present study particularly takes FATA under consideration as a subaltern setting. Shah criticizes the downtrodden position of people in FATA that the northwest part of Pakistan that runs along the Afghanistan border is known to be one of the most dangerous places in the world. This part has been a victim of great power politics, Islamic militancy, and unfortunate geography. He infers that FATA is the home base for jihad vis-a-vis terrorism across South Asia. Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, its government has been treating the tribal region very differently than the rest of the country. Colonial-era laws, and judicial and legal systems based on tribal customs have deprived FATA’s local inhabitants of their constitutionally guaranteed rights. He exclusively infers that the tribal judiciary is based on three pillars; the tribal Maliks, political agents and the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). The Maliks serve as local elites for the British and trade with Afghanistan through routes in the tribal areas. Political agents are bureaucrats who have the power to suspend the Maliks’ status whenever they want to impose their hegemonic power. Whereas FCR is the set of criminal and civil laws that resolves intra-tribal conflicts according to tribal customs or elements of the Pashtuns code, known as Jirga (p.2-10).

Judicial system of tribal areas is entirely unfair where *Jirgas* held by tribal elites usually result in unjust and biased verdicts mostly in the favor of authoritative ones. Tribal justice lacks ‘fair trial’ which according to Hafizullah Ishaq is a right to a proper hearing by an unbiased, just and competent judiciary that ensures equality of every citizen before

the law, equal protection against illegal actions and provides protection against unfair punishments (p.99). A co-researcher study posits that constitutional negation and inconsiderate behavior of government towards these areas have intensified the social and economic marginalization of the FATA residents. It claims that FCR was supposed to be a tool for the security of FATA citizens from lawlessness but it is killing people in the guise of militant operations. FCR didn't provide for human rights instead blatantly violated fair treatment, liberty and justice. Poverty and marginalization of subaltern groups are the result of FCR structural violence (Zeb & Ahmad, p.1-24).

Prasad and Bibhar (2020) point out the atrocities being committed on poor and oppressed classes that include denial of basic rights, sociopolitical empowerment, freedom of expression, access to justice, access to basic needs and negation of religious and cultural values. They support their postulate by mentioning Article 17 of the Indian constitution where no citizen can be marginalized or controlled for responsibilities, should be restricted to visiting any public place as well as the use of public sources and must be differentiated based on religion, sex, race, place of birth or any other (p.8-18).

Castetter (2002) unearths another strand of hegemony that is fabricated due to the creation of hierarchy in Pakistan. He exposes the structure in the provinces of Pakistan which is cast-ridden and tribal-feudal; with the upper classes or elites having large holdings of land while the lower casts or subaltern groups consist of peasants who are treated as slaves. (p. 543). Likewise, Abbas criticizes the subsidies being given to elites in tribal areas. He states that elites are given free electricity, no taxes are being imposed on them, and regular stipends are dispensed to them. He reveals how subalterns are mistreated, subjugated and underprivileged. Khan and Amin report that the British colonists grant patronage to influential personalities making them khans of tribes who become mere puppets of colonial administration; symbolizing and preserving the feudal system. These khans have discrete leadership skills and have a strong relationship with higher authorities. These local elites play the role of go-between the members of respective tribes and colonial authorities to implement governmental orders. British colonists increased the financial and decision-making powers of these local elites which created antagonism and hatred within the tribe. Khan and Amin says that "the primary flaw in the system has arisen when co-opting traditional tribal leadership resulted in undermining the social dynamics essential to its legitimacy and effectiveness" (Ahmad, 2012, p.17). Yousaf discusses that the state provides limited and very less support to tribal people which has resulted in tribal conflicts and discord against the army and government. These discords have resulted in mass displacement of the tribal people from their lands, destruction of their properties and dignity and also mistreatment at the military checkpoints. Chughtai (2013) asserts that the insurgency gets triggered among subaltern tribal citizens by military groups or the Pakistani army. He states that the one-to-one fight between terrorists' activities/drone attacks and Pakistani military groups caused many FATA people to leave their places and to force to seek refuge in other parts of Pakistan which are then called Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (p.28).

### **Material and Methods**

The methodology used in this research is descriptive as well as qualitative in nature. The researcher intends to investigate the instances of hegemony in *The Wandering Falcon* by Jamil Ahmad. The data for the study is collected from primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources include books and journal articles which have been consulted for cross references. The result of analyzing procedure is presented in the form

of words, sentences and paragraphs instead of numerical data. This paper follows MLA format.

### Theoretical Framework

Antonio Gramsci is best known for his contribution to the development of the term 'hegemony' in his book *The Prison Notebooks* (1947). He explicates the formation of subaltern classes in a civil society that is formed due to their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political leaders. He holds the notion of hegemony where one social group controls subaltern groups by enforcing moral and intellectual leadership and dominance over them. He asserts that the newly formed postcolonial local bourgeoisie "are not prepared to work with their hands" (2011, p.273) and they enforce the same colonial practices in their independent land. Gramsci states that the rural (local) bourgeoisie that is subversive in their conduct do not use the 'rule of law' but only absolute power around their groups (subaltern). He has highlighted the atrocities, a maneuver of the rural bourgeoisie, being committed on subaltern people by authoritative masters. He regards this as a 'crisis of authority' where when leaders lose their leadership and become narcissistic. One of the outcomes is then 'ethnic-cleansing' which is the removal of the members of one group by the dominating group or a leader (local elite) in the locality which they claim to be theirs. The legislature, judiciary and executive are three powers or pillars of political hegemony for Gramsci. Gramsci unveils the combat commando tactics of army soldiers who use illegal means to rule over the nation where a weakened state structure remains inert. He highlights that these soldiers "have tasks to make use of illegal means...where subaltern is confronted by illegal private actions" (p.232).

Young (2020) establishes a predicate about the subaltern that they form third-world countries. In his book, *Post-Colonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, he defines post-colonialism as radical agenda that "demands equality and well-being for all human beings who dwell on the planet, that there should no longer be any wretched of the earth" (p. 75-76). But he implies that post-colonial countries are not fully liberated where inferior classes are constantly the victims of marginalization and states that the tri-continental world continues "colonialism after independence; interference, invasion, subjection, and control of various kinds" (p.194). He substantiates his belief from the viewpoint of Guha who states that subalternity is the general practice of subordination in South Asian countries that are in terms of classes, races, tribes, gender, age or any other variable. He extends to describe subaltern groups as marginalized or disempowered individuals or a group, particularly concerning to gender and ethnicity. He defines subaltern as a social group located on a hierarchy "descending from the pure to the polluted and this system is hereditary defined at birth and fixed in their name" (p.153). He defines refugees of tribal areas as "internally displaced persons" (p.83). He explains them as mobile, mobilized, stumbling, unsettled, uprooted, and uncertain who are trying to preserve their recognizable forms of identity and those who are living in closed, deprived and warm communities with fragmented families and fractured existence. Young laments on the downtrodden legislature for subalterns where declaring human rights for "refugees, migrants, and stateless people has in practice prove ineffective because human rights require the possession of citizenship of a state that will enforce them the very thing that such placeless people lack, for them human rights are mere fictions that live in the hollow place between the aspirations of humanist morality and the reality of immigration laws of the nation-state" (p.90).

Alan Mckee's method of textual analysis and Norman Fairclough's textual analysis technique has been used as selected apparatus to execute the textual analysis of the

selected text. Mckee (2001) associates textual analysis with sense-making practice which includes the different ways that can make sense of one text whereas Norman Fairclough emphasizes the potential use of textual analysis where researchers can make the distinction between potential and the actual implications of the text (p.138-149).

### **Textual Analysis of *The Wandering Falcon***

Representation of the hegemony over the subaltern groups in the selected text *The Wandering Falcon* unveils the corrupt side of political and local leaders. Ahmad has realistically portrayed the nine stories where governmental agencies have been observed perverting the semi-autonomous tribal areas alongside the Pakistan-Afghan border. The protagonist of the novel wanders into the tribes to search for sympathy and harmony. He visits nine tribes and witnesses the suppression of tribal subaltern people whose voices get butchered and they silently bear unfair treatment to survive their heartbeats. The government of any country plays a protective role for all of its citizens regardless of their class and ethnicity. But the main focus of this research is to unveil the biased role of political leaders and governments who deliberately overlook people living across borders. Ahmad brings into account the lives of people who are born in precarious conditions such as the lack of basic needs and the people who live in closed, deprived and warm communities with fragmented families and fractured existence.

The events of injustice leave marks on the history of subalterns which contributes to the loss of affection, graciousness and trust in authorities. The text refers to the instance where seven people were sentenced to death due to the guilt of their tribal leader "these men died a final and total death. They will live in no songs; no memorial will be raised to them" (Ahmad, 2012, p.34). Ahmad emphasizes state hegemony which has sovereignty against subaltern people whose "pressures were inexorable. One set of values, one way of life had to die. In this clash, the state, as always, proved stronger than the individual" (p.38). Tribal customs, traditions and laws are always compromised in the hands of political leaders who take tribesmen as an inferior downcast society.

Jamil Ahmad does not only mention the subaltern state of the downcast tribal people but also alludes to the army soldiers being recruited to FATA security who face the same crisis. Ahmad quotes "the baby's (Tor Baz) thin, plaintive cries brought back memories of their (soldiers) own families whom they had not seen for years" (p.8). Ahmad implies here the hegemonic role of government over army soldiers who have "to face the ravages of storms for more than one hundred and twenty days" (p.2) in desolation and loneliness without meeting their families for years. The text presents the deprived condition of Mengals, a Brahui tribe of Baluchistan who had learned to live without their women, with less water and in dead lands.

When British Empire was dismantled in 1958 and international boundaries were becoming more rigid, nomads which are entitled to Pawindahs, had to face challenges from the Pakistani government. The text mentions the incident of that time where the Kharot tribe was moving towards Kakar Khorasan from where they used to cross the boundaries. Dawa khan, being the leader, alarms his people to "be careful...no disputes with the authorities. I have heard a rumor that the authorities are going to demand travel documents from our people" (p.42). Ahmad says "it would be like attempting to stop migrating birds or the locusts (to move)" (p.46). The text quotes "there was no way for them to obtain travel documents...birth certificates, identity papers or health documents. They could not document their animals. The new system would certainly mean the death of the camels" (p.54). This government ploy to stop Pawindahs to move across boundaries

without documents enraged tribal people, one among them bursts out, "how is it possible for us to be treated as belonging to Afghanistan? We stay for a few months there and for a few months in Pakistan. The rest of the time we spend moving. We are Pawindahs and belonging to all countries, or to none" (p.53). Moreover, the demands or requests pleaded by subalterns are rebuffed by the government as text quotes "they are not acceptable to the government. The decision has been taken and cannot be changed. You will now have to accept it and try to live with it" (p.53).

Governmental launched dreadful military acts are also portrayed in the text when Kharot tribesmen decide to pass the borders against the government orders, one woman of the tribe places Koran on her head considering that no one would dare stop them on this sacred move but to everyone's astonishment when the woman passes the border the other people followed her and they all were shot down by army along with camels. The text quotes "the firing was indiscriminate. Men, women and children died. Gul Jana's belief that the Koran would prevent tragedy died too" (p.59). If any insurgent raises his voice against the government about any malpractices or impropriety, then he has to surrender to the government's more violent reaction. The text quotes an incident of the Afridi family whose member was recognized as the chief of all Afridis whose family had to face the calamity by the Pakistani government on raising revolt, the text quotes "one of the sons (of the same family) had raised the standard of revolt against the Pakistani government. As a result, their castle had been bombed by the Pakistani air force and there it stood to this day, a blackened empty shell (p.116). Jangu, closest to the chief of the tribe, unveils how governmental agencies butcher their voices if they stand for their cause. Their crops have been burnt, grains are stolen, and animal flocks are slaughtered. Jangu, as a mouth-speaker of Ahmad, briefs the lethal acts of 'higher authorities' as text states "in our absence from our homes, our families have been made prisoners by the authorities. They, our women and children, are living in jails. Bred and brought up in the deserts, they are now living and sleeping in evil-smelling dark rooms in the city...the men who did this remain glorious creatures in their own conscience" (p.28).

Judicial system in FATA is not accustomed to national constitutional laws. They have their laws and causes that might prove terribly unjust for the accused and even accusers. Text locates an instance where Jangu tries to convince his chief for their cause that is not legally convincible but he appraises it justly right "our cause is right; because we think it is right but never depends on conscience" (p.27). In the text, eight Brahui people including Tor Baz go to the 'city court' to settle their tribal feuds and enter the courtroom, they observe 'strange' customs "where one part stands and the others sit...they swear by a book, while we swear by our chief, the Sardar of our tribe" (p.30). During the court hearing when Roza Khan, their representative, protested that they had approached the court just for the negotiations and he waved the paper in the air where he had mentioned their issue. The magistrate said, "It is of no value. It carries no signature" (p.31). The purpose to portray the court dialogue is to spotlight the upside-down state of the tribal judicial system.

Submission of subaltern people to hegemonic powers by consent can be traced in the instance when a subaltern's voice states "Sardar, you speak for us" (p.31) was reciprocated by the Sardar that "I speak as their Sardar and I say that a word does not require a signature, nor a mark nor yet an oath" (p.31). After Roza Khan, the Sardar, accepted that he had killed two men, the magistrate passed a verdict where he declared seven men accused of murder and freed the child, Tor Baz. He asked the clerk to "write down in the record that the accused admitted to the killings" (p.33). Ahmad mentions another judicial dispute in the text where Sarmast Khan, a Mahsud, and Jalat Khan and

Zabta Khan, the Wazirs, kidnap a group of teachers to earn a two-thousand-rupee bribe that has to be sent to the government. They are regular kidnappers and all of their crimes have been pardoned by the government with a deal to give government a bribery price. Another reference that projects the disharmony of the jirga system was when Mehboob Khan, an Afridi, reflects his expression about the biased Jirga system which he had to suffer. He talks about his case "the Jirgas went on. One day, there would be a tilt in my favor. Next day, they would lean in favor of Ghairat Gul. My money was almost gone and I dared not borrow it from others" (p.129).

An eloped couple, late parents of Tor Baz, was internally displaced between tribes, identities and homes. The couple struggled to live at the military check-post for nearly 6 years then they sensed the arrival of the tribal leader (father of Gul Bibi) where "once again the old familiar smell of fear was in (their) nostrils" (p.11). Gul Bibi's father and her ex-husband, after finding them, shot them to death in front of the eyes of their 6 years old child, Tor Baz. Ahmad quotes that "their agony ended with death" (p.15). This incident also highlights the ethnic-cleansing of subalterns in the name of honor killing.

Khan, leader of Brahui tribe, is portrayed as an emblem of tribal leaders who are considered idols for the tribal people but are not fertile for them. Text states "he was not fighting man, and was certainly proving as a hindrance to the free movement of the rest of the party...they (people) might have to pay with their lives for his error of judgement" (p.22). Text signals the fact that tribes cannot survive without their leaders. Tribesmen have submitted themselves to the hegemonic powers of tribal leaders who control them according to their wishes. It becomes a matter of insult if tribes lack any Sardar who could give honor to them. Khan a representative of Brahui tribesmen, avows that "when my brother tribe was told that they would have a Sardar no longer, could any man suffer such an insult? Has there ever been a Baluch who did not have a Sardar...it is said that each man needs a sardar, seeks and finds one for himself (p. 31-32). Another tribe, The Kharot Tribe, has been seen under consensus domination of their Sardar, Naim Khan, who "called himself colonel and no man dared ask him where he had obtained his rank...it was generally assumed that they had received these honorifics from some long dead king" (p.37). Submission and subalternity of the tribal people restrain them from questioning the authority provided to their leaders. They have been seen blindly following their leaders as demigods.

## Conclusion

In light of the above textual analysis, it is justified to state that the state of FATA subalterns is very tragic. The present study has examined the textual instances of *The Wandering Falcon* that epitomize the unjust and hegemonic role of the government over FATA which has proven highly disastrous for tribal people. The textual instances of the selected text have proved how the Jirga system of FATA is prejudiced and unfair. The study has investigated the role of tribal elites over their allied tribes who are observed as manipulative and corrupt. Pakistani English fiction can be used as a medium to raise consciousness and awareness about the precarious position of FATA subalterns which can contribute to pragmatic planning in making their condition healthy.



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