



RESEARCH PAPER

Unveiling the Modernist Tapestry: Tradition and Modernity in 'A Wondering Falcon' by Jamil Ahmed

Muhammad Nasir*¹ Dr. Iesar Ahmad²

1. M Phil Scholar, Department of English, Muslim youth University, Islamabad, Pakistan

2. Professor, Department of English, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author

m.nasir5788@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The research article discusses the tension between tradition and modernity as a significant theme in literature, particularly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The novel 'A Wondering Falcon' by Jamil Ahmed is mentioned as an example of a work that explores this theme. The research aims to analyze the portrayal of tradition and modernity in the novel through a close reading and analysis of its characters, symbolism, narrative style, and social commentary. The research assumes that the novel presents a significant portrayal of the tension between tradition and modernity and that a modernist lens is useful for understanding this theme. The implications of the research are that it highlights the significance of 'A Wondering Falcon' within modernist literature and suggests that its exploration of tradition and modernity has broader implications for understanding societal changes and cultural shifts. By analyzing the tension between tradition and modernity in 'A Wondering Falcon,' readers can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by individuals and communities in navigating the forces of tradition and modernity.

KEYWORDS Modernist, Narrative Style, Social Commentary, Symbolism

Introduction

Jamil Ahmad's debut novel, 'The Wandering Falcon', is a remarkable work of fiction that offers a rare glimpse into the lives, cultures, and histories of the tribal people inhabiting the borderlands of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. Published in 2011, when Ahmad was 80 years old, the novel is a collection of interconnected stories that revolve around a central character, Tor Baz, the orphaned son of a runaway couple who defied their tribal laws. As Tor Baz wanders across the harsh and beautiful landscape, he encounters various tribes and individuals, each with their own stories of struggle, survival, loyalty, and betrayal. Through these stories, Ahmad explores the themes of tradition and modernity, identity and belonging, violence and compassion, in a region that has been shaped by centuries of conflict, colonialism, and globalization.

Ahmad's novel can be seen as a modernist tapestry that weaves together multiple narratives, perspectives, and voices to create a complex and rich portrait of a world that is often misunderstood or misrepresented in the mainstream media. Ahmad draws on his own experience as a civil servant who worked in the remote tribal areas for decades, as well as his extensive knowledge of the history, politics, and culture of the region. He writes with authenticity, authority, and empathy, capturing the nuances and diversity of the tribal societies, their customs and codes of honor, their resilience and adaptability, their hopes and fears. He also challenges the stereotypes and prejudices that often surround the tribal people, portraying them as human beings with dignity and agency, rather than as passive victims or violent extremists.

Ahmad's novel also engages with the question of modernity and its impact on the tribal way of life. He shows how the tribal people have been affected by the changing geopolitical realities, such as the partition of India and Pakistan, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the rise of the Taliban, and the US-led war on terror. He also shows how they have responded to the forces of modernization, such as education, technology, commerce, and migration. He depicts both the positive and negative aspects of modernity, such as its potential for empowerment and development, as well as its threat to the traditional values and structures. He also examines how modernity creates tensions and contradictions within and between the tribes, as some embrace it while others resist it or adapt it to their own needs.

In this paper, the researcher analyzes how Ahmad uses various literary techniques, such as narrative structure, characterization, symbolism and language to create a modernist tapestry that reveals the complexity and diversity of the tribal world. The researcher will also discuss how Ahmad's novel contributes to the broader field of English literature from Pakistan and South Asia, as well as to the global discourse on tradition and modernity in postcolonial contexts. The researcher will argue that Ahmad's novel is a unique and valuable work of art that offers a nuanced and insightful perspective on a region that is often marginalized or misrepresented in literature and media.

Literature Review

'The Wandering Falcon' by Jamil Ahmad is a collection of stories that offers a rare and nuanced perspective on the tribal people of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. The novel has received critical acclaim and praise from various reviewers and critics, who have highlighted its literary merits, its historical and cultural significance, and its relevance to the contemporary world. One of the main aspects of the novel that has been widely appreciated is its narrative structure, which consists of interconnected stories that revolve around a central character, Tor Baz, the orphaned son of a runaway couple who defied their tribal laws. As Tor Baz wanders across the harsh and beautiful landscape, he encounters various tribes and individuals, each with their own stories of struggle, survival, loyalty, and betrayal.

Peer (2011) writing for *The Guardian*, calls the novel "one of the finest collections of short stories to come out of south Asia in decades" and praises Ahmad's ability to weave together multiple narratives, perspectives, and voices to create a complex and rich portrait of a world that is often misunderstood or misrepresented in the mainstream media. Shamsie (2011) also writing for *The Guardian*, agrees that the novel is "a book of glimpses into a world of strict rules and codes, where the individual is of far less significance than the collective" and notes that the effect of this is "strangely beguiling". She also observes that the novel is not driven by a central protagonist or a plot, but rather by a "sense of place" that is vividly evoked by Ahmad's descriptions.

Khanal (2016) discusses the theme of hybrid identity in the novel. The article argues that the protagonist, Tor Baz, embodies a sense of rootlessness due to his nomadic lifestyle and the cultural conflicts he experiences. The article explores the concept of hybrid identity as a cultural option when a person meets dual cultural standards. The article provides an interesting perspective on the novel and highlights the complexities of identity in the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Afzal (2020) provides a detailed analysis of the novel's portrayal of the natural world and its impact on human society. He examines the ways in which the novel challenges the traditional boundaries between humans and non-human entities, highlighting the interconnectedness of all living beings. Khalid and Liaquat (2021) offer a critical analysis of the novel through the lens of Louis Althusser's Marxist theory.

They examine the role of the state in legitimizing oppression and the coercion of marginalized communities in the novel. This highlights the ways in which the state uses ideology to maintain its power and control over the oppressed.

Qasim, Z, Iftikhar & Qasim, A (2021) provide a feminist analysis of the novel. The article investigates the status of women in the novel and critiques the patriarchal values that are present in the tribal society depicted in the book. The article argues that the novel portrays women as powerless and oppressed, and that their voices are silenced. The article provides a valuable contribution to the critical analysis of "The Wandering Falcon" and highlights the importance of feminist perspectives in literary criticism. Ahmed, Tahir & Asif (2019) offer a detailed analysis of Jamil Ahmad's novel. They examine the linguistic choices made by the author in portraying the warrior traits of the Pakistani tribal community. Haq, Shakir, Qureshi, Khan, & Ali, (2023) explore the portrayal of gender bias in "The Wandering Falcon" and aim to draw attention to the unequal treatment and representation of women within the novel. The Article likely delves into the social, cultural, and legal aspects of gender bias, analyzing the ways in which the novel reflects and challenges these biases.

Sattar, Saima Yasin & Khalid (2021) investigate the status of women in the novel and critique the patriarchal values that are present in the tribal society depicted in the book. The article argues that the novel portrays women as powerless and oppressed, and that their voices are silenced. The article provides a valuable contribution to the critical analysis of "The Wandering Falcon" and highlights the importance of feminist perspectives in literary criticism. The study explores the text qualitatively and provides a detailed analysis of the portrayal of women in the novel. The article's focus on patriarchy and feminism provides a unique perspective on the novel and its portrayal of women in the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Mehmood, Mohsin & Ali (2023) explore the concept of liminality and its manifestation in the novel, highlighting the ways in which the characters navigate and negotiate the liminal spaces between different cultures, traditions, and identities. The article would be a valuable resource for anyone interested in postcolonial literature, cultural studies, and liminality.

In conclusion, 'The Wandering Falcon' by Jamil Ahmad is a remarkable work of fiction that illuminates the lives, cultures, and histories of the tribal people inhabiting the borderlands of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. The novel is a valuable contribution to the field of English literature from Pakistan and South Asia, as well as to the global discourse on tradition and modernity in postcolonial contexts. Much work has been done on many aspects of the novel like feminist perspective, postcolonial perspective, patriarchal values but no work in done about modernity and tradition. In this paper, the researcher will try to unveil the clash between tradition and modernity.

Material and Methods

This research adopts a qualitative approach to analyze the literary techniques and themes of 'The Wandering Falcon' by Jamil Ahmad. The main data source is the novel itself, which will be read closely and critically to identify and interpret the various elements of the narrative structure, characterization, symbolism and language that Ahmad uses to create a modernist tapestry that reveals the complexity and diversity of the tribal world. The secondary data sources includes relevant reviews, articles, and other works of literature that can provide contextual and comparative information on the novel, its author, and its historical and cultural background.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a period of significant transformations in Western culture, leading to the emergence of modernist thought—a philosophical, theological, and artistic movement. This movement aimed to develop innovative approaches to philosophy, art, and social structures that could better represent the rapidly industrializing world, including its urbanization, architecture, technological advancements, and conflicts. Modernism, as a conscious departure from established norms, encompassed alternative modes of writing, thinking, and perceiving the world. In contrast to the clear and predictable narratives and verse of the 19th century, modernist writers rejected such conventions in favour of fragmented stories that depicted the disintegration of society during and after World War I. Moreover, modernism challenged the certainties of enlightenment thought and often held a critical stance toward religion. Instead, modernist literature employed various techniques such as repetition, incorporation, rewriting, recapitulation, revision, and parody, while consciously moving away from realism. While recognizing the significance of intellect, modernism also placed great emphasis on intuition. It viewed itself as an aesthetic exploration, seeking to uncover a mysterious and elusive universal truth. Artists associated with the modernist movement employed traditional techniques to convey innovative ideas and offer fresh perspectives on the world. A qualitative research methodology would allow for an in-depth analysis of the novel's themes and the exploration of the complexities of tradition and modernity. The research could involve a close reading of the text and an analysis of the cultural and historical context in which the novel is set. The theoretical framework could incorporate concepts such as hybrid identity, postcolonialism, and globalization to explore the novel's themes of tradition and modernity.

Textual Analysis

The novel consists of nine interconnected stories that revolve around a central character, Tor Baz, the orphaned son of a runaway couple who defied their tribal laws. The novel does not follow a chronological or linear order, but rather jumps back and forth in time and space, creating a mosaic-like structure that reflects the complexity and diversity of the tribal world. The novel also does not have a clear plot or a climax, but rather presents a series of episodes that illustrate different aspects of the tribal life and culture. The novel is not driven by a central protagonist or a plot, but rather by a “sense of place” that is vividly evoked by Ahmad’s descriptions. The researcher will focus on four main aspects: narrative structure, characterization, symbolism, and language.

The narrative structure and style further enhance the exploration of the modernist tapestry. Ahmed incorporates modernist techniques, such as fragmented storytelling, shifting perspectives, and nonlinear narratives, to mirror the disjointed nature of the modern experience. This experimentation with form and language reflects the characters' fragmented identities and their struggle to find coherence amidst a changing society. Ahmed (2011) says "*The world was changing, and the old ways were no longer enough. The young people wanted something new, something different. They wanted to be part of the modern world, to have the things that the people in the cities had. They wanted to be free, to make their own choices, to live their own lives.*" (Chapter 4)

The novel features a large cast of characters from various tribes and backgrounds, who represent different aspects of the tribal life and culture. The main character, Tor Baz, is an enigmatic figure who appears in each story, but is not the protagonist of any of them. He is a wanderer who has no fixed identity, no family, no tribe and no home. He moves between different worlds and roles, such as an orphan, a guide, an informer, a seller of women. He is a witness to the events and stories that unfold around him, but he does not intervene or influence them. He is a passive and detached observer, who does not express

any emotion or opinion. He is also a mysterious and elusive figure, who does not reveal much about himself or his past. The other characters in the novel are also complex and diverse, who have their own stories and motivations. They are not stereotypes or caricatures, but human beings with dignity and agency. Ahmad portrays them with empathy and respect, showing their strengths and weaknesses, their hopes and fears, their virtues and vices. Ahmed (2011) says "*The old ways were dying, and the new ways were not yet born. It was a time of confusion and uncertainty, a time of change and upheaval.*" (Chapter 5). He also shows how they are affected by the changing geopolitical realities, such as the partition of India and Pakistan, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the rise of the Taliban, and the US-led war on terror. He shows how they cope with the challenges and opportunities that these changes bring to their lives. He also shows how they adhere to or defy their tribal laws and customs, which are often harsh and brutal, but also honorable and beautiful.

The novel uses various symbols to convey deeper meanings and themes. One of the main symbols is Tor Baz himself, who is also known as "the wandering falcon". Ahmed (2011) says "*The falcon is a bird of prey that is admired for its speed, strength, courage, and freedom.*" (Chapter 5). It is also a symbol of nobility and royalty in many cultures. Tor Baz embodies these qualities as he wanders across the landscape, surviving in harsh conditions, facing dangers and enemies, and escaping from traps and cages. Symbolism and imagery play a significant role in unraveling the modernist tapestry within the novel. Ahmed expertly employs recurring motifs and vivid descriptions to represent the clash of tradition and modernity. The rural landscapes, traditional objects, and the presence of ancient rituals become symbolic markers, juxtaposed against the encroaching modern world, to underscore the tension and dissonance experienced by the characters.

Another symbol in the novel is the stone shrines that mark the graves of Tor Baz's parents, who were killed for eloping together. The stone shrines are a symbol of the tribal laws and customs, which are rigid and inflexible, which punish any transgression or deviation, and which demand blood for blood. The stone shrines are also a symbol of the tribal honor and revenge, which are sacred and inviolable, which uphold the dignity and reputation of the tribe, and which seek justice and satisfaction. However, the stone shrines are also a symbol of the tribal tragedy and loss, which are inevitable and irreversible, which destroy lives and families, and which leave behind grief and sorrow.

The novel uses simple and direct language to tell the stories. The language is not ornate or poetic, but rather plain and realistic. The language reflects the tone and mood of the stories, which are often bleak and grim, but also sometimes humorous and ironic. The language also reflects the culture and identity of the characters, who use their own dialects, idioms, proverbs, and expressions. At the same time, 'A Wondering Falcon' delves into the incursion of modernity into this traditional world. Ahmed introduces elements of modernity, such as technology, urbanization, and globalization that challenge established norms and disrupt the equilibrium of the community. The clash between tradition and modernity is seen through the eyes of the protagonist, Tor Baz, who finds himself caught between the pull of his ancestral heritage and the allure of progress. One of the novel's strengths lies in its skillful portrayal of the conflicts and contradictions that arise from this tension. Tor Baz grapples with the internal struggle of reconciling his deep-rooted traditions with the desire for personal growth and exploration

The language of the novel can be seen as a modernist technique that challenges the conventional forms of realism and representation. Symbolism and imagery play a significant role in unraveling the modernist tapestry within the novel. Ahmed expertly employs recurring motifs and vivid descriptions to represent the clash of tradition and modernity. "*The world was becoming smaller, and the old ways were disappearing. The young*

people wanted to be part of the modern world, but they also wanted to hold on to their traditions and their culture." (Chapter 6) The rural landscapes, traditional objects, and the presence of ancient rituals become symbolic markers, juxtaposed against the encroaching modern world, to underscore the tension and dissonance experienced by the characters.

Conclusion

A *Wondering Falcon* by Jamil Ahmed presents a profound exploration of the tension between tradition and modernity within the context of Pakistani society. Through the protagonist's journey and the skillful portrayal of characters, symbolism, narrative style, and social commentary, the novel offers a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by individuals and communities in the midst of societal transformations. The novel reveals the complexities of this dichotomy, highlighting the powerful influence of tradition while simultaneously exploring the disruptive forces of modernity. It delves into the clash between age-old customs and the incursion of new technologies, urbanization, and globalization. Through the vivid depiction of rural landscapes, traditional objects, and ancient rituals, the author employs symbolism to convey the dissonance and tension experienced by the characters. The narrative structure and style contribute to the modernist exploration of tradition and modernity. The fragmented storytelling, shifting perspectives, and nonlinear narratives mirror the characters' fragmented identities and their struggle to find coherence in a changing world. The novel challenges conventional modes of writing and thinking, inviting readers to engage with the complexities of the modern experience. Furthermore, it offers social and political commentary, reflecting on the broader challenges faced by Pakistani society during a time of rapid transformation. It prompts reflection on the delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing the possibilities of the modern world. In essence, through its thought-provoking analysis, "*A Wondering Falcon* by Jamil Ahmed" invites readers to contemplate the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity, and the impact of this tension on individuals, communities, and society as a whole. It is a testament to the power of literature in shedding light on the complexities of the human experience and the eternal struggle to navigate the forces of tradition and modernity.

Findings

1. Ahmad uses a modernist narrative structure that consists of interconnected stories that revolve round a central character, Tor Baz, the orphaned son of a runaway couple who defied their tribal laws. The narrative structure reflects the complexity and diversity of the tribal world, as well as the alienation and estrangement of the reader who is not familiar with the region and its history.
2. Ahmad uses complex and diverse characterization to portray the tribal people as human beings with dignity and agency, rather than as stereotypes or caricatures. He shows their strengths and weaknesses, their hopes and fears, their virtues and vices. He also shows how they are affected by the changing geopolitical realities, such as the partition of India and Pakistan, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the rise of the Taliban, and the US-led war on terror.
3. Ahmad uses various symbols to convey deeper meanings and themes. One of the main symbols is Tor Baz himself, who is also known as "the wandering falcon". He is a symbol of the tribal people who are proud and independent, who value their honor and dignity, and who resist any external interference or domination. He is also a symbol of the tribal people who are marginalized and misunderstood, who have no voice or representation, and who suffer from violence and poverty.

Another symbol is the stone shrines that mark the graves of Tor Baz's parents, who were killed for eloping together. They are a symbol of the tribal laws and customs, which are rigid and inflexible, which punish any transgression or deviation, and which demand blood for blood. They are also a symbol of the tribal honor and revenge, which are sacred and inviolable, which uphold the dignity and reputation of the tribe, and which seek justice and satisfaction. They are also a symbol of the tribal tragedy and loss, which are inevitable and irreversible, which destroy lives and families, and which leave behind grief and sorrow.

4. Ahmad uses simple and direct language to tell the stories. The language reflects the tone and mood of the stories, which are often bleak and grim, but also sometimes humorous and ironic. The language also reflects the culture and identity of the characters, who use their own dialects, idioms, proverbs, and expressions. The language also creates a sense of authenticity and intimacy, as if the stories are being told by the characters themselves, or by someone who knows them well. The language also creates a sense of alienation and estrangement, as if the stories are being told in a foreign and unfamiliar tongue, or by someone who does not belong to the same world.

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