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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## The painful lives of Pakistani tribal women: A postcolonial feminist reading of Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* (2011)

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### ABSTRACT

Jamil Ahmad in his novel, *The Wandering Falcon* narrates the miserable lives of tribal women in Pakistan. The novel depicts the violations of women's rights in the region and the absence of law to protect and secure the fundamental rights of women. This article aims to provide a textual analysis of *The Wandering Falcon* in the light of postcolonial feminist theory. The discussion concludes that the female characters in Ahmad's novel show agency in contrast to the radical and liberal feminist view of third-world women as passive and submissive. Moreover, the study confirms the postcolonial feminist standpoint that women in colonial countries face double oppression at the hands of patriarchy and colonialism. The study identifies the absence of a voice for tribal women's rights in the mainstream feminist movement in Pakistan. Therefore, this study recommends raising awareness about tribal women's rights at both local and national levels. The study also appreciates the government's step to bring the tribal areas under judicial control and it is hoped that it will prove a game-changer for the local tribal women.

**KEYWORDS:** feminism, postcolonial feminism, Jamil Ahmad, Pakistani tribal areas, *The Wandering Falcon*, Women Rights in Pakistan

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## 1. Introduction

Pakistan celebrated its independence on the 14th August 1947 when colonial India was divided into two sovereign countries, i.e., India and Pakistan. Muslims in British India wanted to ensure their rights in the region and fought hard to have a separate country to freely practice their religion, culture, and customs (Burki and Ziring, 2019). However, nothing changed for the people living along the borders of Afghanistan as the newly established Pakistani government maintained the same colonial law known as The Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) to rule the region. The FCR was an amalgamation of colonial laws and local customs which gave freedom to tribal elders to solve their problems through Jirgas, a local council of elders. In return, the loyalty of tribes was ensured to the British government. The area, known as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), remained under the control of the infamous FCR until 2018 (Jamal, 2014). However, the absence of an effective law made the region a safe haven for terrorist groups. The continuous violation of human rights and outcry of the local population and human rights organisations forced the government to introduce an ordinance for the annexation of the region with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The new arrangement brought the region under the constitutional control of the Pakistani state in 2018. Therefore, the people in the region got similar constitutional rights as people of other provinces have been enjoying since 1947.

FATA consisted of seven agencies and six Frontier Regions (FR). In the absence of the regular constitution, people of the area were deprived of fundamental human rights. They were unable to challenge the decisions taken by the Jirga. A family or a tribe could be punished for the crime committed by one person (Asrar and Malik, 2019). Moreover, the negligence of the government created a sense of deprivation in the local population. There were limited economic activities in the region. People were deprived of education. The basic health facilities were not available in the region. Therefore, the region was pushed into poverty where its people were left behind in every sphere of life as compared to other regions of Pakistan (Adel, 2024).

Due to the government's negligence, people in the region suffered as a whole but the patriarchal nature of the society made it further difficult for women to live their desired lives (Adel, 2023). It was against the tribal traditions to allow women to participate or to be a part of the Jirga. Therefore, the narrative of women was completely absent during the decision-making process. They were forced to accept the decisions taken by the men of their family or tribe. Education was extremely difficult for women, as a survey conducted in 2013–2014 shows that only 7.8% of women were literate as compared to 33% overall literacy rate. In addition, the gender difference in the employment sector is even worse. Only 5.9% of women are employed as compared to 38.6% of male members of the society (Shah, 2018).

This study analyses the exploitation of women's rights in FATA before its annexation with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province as portrayed by Jamil Ahmed in his novel, *The Wandering Falcon*. It explores the various forms of exploitation faced by the female characters in the novel. The novel provides comprehensive details of the local customs and traditions which always prove a source of women's oppression. Although the FCR has been suspended and the Pakistani constitution has been deployed in the region, the patriarchal customs are so strong that it will be a challenge for the government to implement the law in its true spirit.

## 2. The novel and the novelist

Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* is one of the finest to come out of South Asia in decades, writes the (Shamsie, 2011). Ahmad was born in undivided India in 1931 where he received his education from Lahore and joined Pakistan civil services in 1954. He served mostly in the tribal areas of KPK and Balochistan. He also served in the Pakistan embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1979 during the Afghan-Soviet war. He married Helga Ahmad and has two sons and a daughter. Ahmad died in 2014, at the age of 83 (Peer, 2011).

*The Wandering Falcon* is regarded both as a novel or a collection of stories. It is written based on the writer's first-hand experiences in the tribal areas of Pakistan along the border of Afghanistan during his service. Ahmad used to write poems but her wife suggested writing fiction related to the tribal areas. He accepted the suggestion and started writing *The Wandering Falcon* in 1971. He completed the manuscript in 1974 and sent it to different publishers in the United Kingdom and America. One publisher asked him to change the book to nonfiction, another asked to change the language but the novel never got published until 2011. In 2008, Ahmad's brother heard about a story competition and insisted that Ahmad should submit his work. The competition organizers liked his work and showed it to the publishers from Penguin. As a result, the *Wandering Falcon* was

published in 2011 when the writer was 79 years old. The book immediately won international acclaim as it was shortlisted for the prestigious Man Asian Literary Prize in 2011 and was the finalist of the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature in 2013.

*The Wandering Falcon* is a collection of stories revolving around a single main character, Tor Baz, who lives in tribal Balochistan in the 1950s. The story starts with the daughter of the chief from the Siaphad tribe, who was married to an impotent man. She later runs away with her father's servant and finds refuge in an old fort occupied by a few soldiers. She gives birth to a son named Tor Baz and raises him for six years. Ultimately, the men of the tribe hunt them down and kill them. They leave the boy to die in the desert but he is then adopted by the Baloch rebels fighting against the Pakistani government. Tor Baz grows up to become the central character in *The Wandering Falcon*. The novel is a complete encyclopaedia of the customs, rituals, and traditions of tribal life. It describes the ruthlessness and cruelty of tribal laws for the people who try to break and run away from the local customs.

### 3. Cultural background

*The Wandering Falcon* attracts the attention of many researchers interested in the tribal lives along the borders of Afghanistan as the story was written by an author who lived most of his life among tribesmen. Therefore, he was able to analyse and give a critical presentation of the local customs through his characters as he was not one of the local people. He narrates the lives of the Baloch and Pashtun tribes through his fictional characters. The novel talks about the traditions, customs, and miserable lives of women in male-dominated tribal societies. Kulkarni (2018) studied the tribal culture and the treatment of women as depicted in the novel *The Wandering Falcon*. He pointed out that the tribes do not welcome interference from the government or law enforcement agencies in their lives and code of conduct. They take pride in their beliefs of honour, revenge, and rivalry. They treat women as a commodity. Women are killed in the name of honour and are sold in the markets. They can be exchanged even for a pond of opium. They do not have any control over their lives and have only one option, which is to obey their men and their decisions.

Wasif (2010) studied the impact of borders on the lives of the tribes living across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. She applied the theory of utopian borders on *The Wandering Falcon* to prove that the newly constructed borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan affected the lives of tribal people negatively. People, who used to move across the borders freely, consider it an interruption in their lives. *The Wandering Falcon* depicts the feelings of these tribesmen in the wake of changing border scenarios.

Honour killing is an important theme in *The Wandering Falcon*. Therefore, Gull and Imran (2017) studied this phenomenon in the tribal societies as depicted in the novels *The Pakistani Bride* and *The Wandering Falcon*. They highlighted that honour killing is not considered a crime in tribal societies. Rather, it is the duty of the tribesmen to punish those who break the tribal honour code. A man is considered unworthy if he cannot ensure the sanctity of honour for his family and tribe. However, this sense of tribal honour has always subjugated and harmed women in tribal societies. Men's sense of honour has put women at the risk of losing their lives.

A detailed review of the literature reveals that the novel has not been studied from the lens of postcolonial feminism. Therefore, a reading of the novel from the postcolonial feminist perspective will prove a valuable addition to the already available literature on the novel.

#### 3.1. Postcolonial feminism

Postcolonial feminism is a critique of Western feminism (radical and liberal) and postcolonial theory. In the wake of the industrial revolution in the 18th century, European countries started exploring non-European countries to provide raw materials and new markets for their growing industry. However, this trade adventure turned into military expeditions and many countries in Africa and Asia were conquered by the European countries. The occupied countries were known as the colonies of European nations. Though these countries provided raw material and manpower for European industry, the Europeans considered colonised people as inferior and uncivilised. Therefore, they tried to transform the local culture, religion, and civilisation in an attempt to convert them into civilised, Christian people like Europeans. Postcolonial theorists (e.g., Mohanty, 1988; Said, 1978; Spivak, 2003) criticised the western colonialists for viewing the colonised as their Other. The Others, i.e.,

Indians, Africans, Latin Americans and Malays were described as lazy, uncivilized, and barbaric as compared to the hardworking and civilised Western people (e.g., British, French).

Feminism is the struggle of women against their oppression in patriarchal societies where feminists around the world are working to gain equal sexual, political, educational, economic, and social status as men in their respective societies (Asif et al., 2020). The movement started for the political rights of English women during the Victorian age and soon spread to other European countries, gradually reaching the United States. The feminist scholars and activists of the first and second waves raised the slogan of “sisterhood” to universalise women’s problems. They advocated that women face similar violations of their rights around the world. Thus, they asked women to gather together on a single platform to continue their struggle against the deprivation of their fundamental rights.

However, feminist scholars in the early 1990s raised their concerns on the stance of first and second-wave feminist scholars. They opined that women are oppressed on the basis of race, class, caste, and ethnicity along with gender. Therefore, these feminists do not only mark liberal and radical feminism as the representative of white middle-class European and American women but also blamed them for ignoring the interest of women on the basis of race, class, caste, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. So, feminists of the early age were blamed for not speaking and working for the rights of low class poor women in Europe and black Afro-American and Latin American women in America (Anand, 2020). Thus, they tried to bring the marginalised group of women like poor women, black women, Latin Americans, lesbians, transgender, and third world women to the mainstream struggle of feminism.

Postcolonial feminism does not only criticise postcolonial theory for ignoring gender issues but also disapproves the Western feminism for ignoring the differences of colour, race, region, and culture in women, as a social group. As a result, postcolonial feminism developed as a separate form of analysis. Mohanty (1988) who is one of the major theorists in postcolonial feminism criticises Western feminists for universalising the exploitative experiences of women at the hands of men. She argues that universalizing women’s experiences ignores the racial, regional, cultural, social, and sexual differences of colonised women. She also refutes the belief of Western feminists that Third World women are passive, poor, ignorant, tradition-bound, family-oriented, victimised, and submissive. She advocates for the need to understand the social, cultural, and racial obligations of women and support them in their struggle for equal rights [Adel, 2018].

Spivak (2003) who is another important postcolonial feminist, borrows the term subaltern from Italian scholar Antonio Gramsci for her famous essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Subaltern means an individual or a group of people who have been marginalized in the society. She opines, “If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak, 2003, p.2203). Thus, Spivak points towards the fact that subaltern women face double oppression, i.e., colonialism and patriarchy.

### **3.2. Feminist movement in Pakistan**

Women rights activists started working for women’s rights soon after the independence of Pakistan in 1947. Begum Rana Liaquat Ali, who is the wife of the first prime minister of Pakistan Liaquat Ali Khan, established a craftsman Centre to empower women in Karachi. She founded the first women’s rights organization in Pakistan, the All Pakistan Women’s Association (APWA), in 1949. Women activists struggled for an amendment in the law to get the Islamic right of inheritance. The constitution of Pakistan was amended in 1948 and women were given the basic right of inheritance. In 1961, the law was again amended to regularize the act of polygamy according to the principles of Islam. The rights of the first wife were ensured and the husband was bound to declare the agreement of marriage (nikkah) (Batool et al., 2018).

General Zia-ul-Haq used the religion card to extend his regime but the misinterpretation of Islam and the introduction of the Hudood Ordinance created a real problem for Pakistani women. According to the Hudood ordinance, a victim of rape had to present four witnesses of the crime, otherwise, she herself was considered an offender and punished (Ovais, 2014). Women raised their voice against this injustice and organized a platform named Women’s Action Forum (WMA) in 1981 and started a campaign against the victimization of women. It was through this platform that women were able to introduce several law amendments in favour of the women, i.e., *the Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill, the Criminal Acid Act, and the Protection of Women Act.*



Feminism in Pakistan can be divided into two types; Modern Islamic Feminism and Secular Feminism. Modern Islamic feminist scholars like Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan want women's rights to be defined according to the principles of Islam. Secular feminists treat feminism as a basic human rights movement, without the intervention of any religion. The women's march in 2019, which celebrated women's day, clearly depicted the differences between secular and modern Islamic feminists. Women holding placards with slogans against patriarchy, men, and society marched on the roads of the big cities of Pakistan (Nizam, 2019). This march was largely condemned and was marked as an attempt to divert attention from the real problems of Pakistani lower-middle and middle-class women. It was marked as a walk of the secular, upper-class, city dwellers women of Pakistan.

However, the voice of tribal women in Pakistan is not present in the feminist movement, be it modern Islamic or secular feminism. Thus, the Pakistani women's rights movement resembles second-wave feminism which was marked as the women's rights movement for the only middle class, white European and American women. Like second-wave feminism, feminists in Pakistan are criticized for not representing the exploitation of poor, rural, and tribal women of Pakistan. So this movement has been seen as a movement of the upper-class women of Pakistan. There is a need to bridge this gap and bring women from all sections of life to make this movement more effective and representative of all women of Pakistan.

### **3.3. Provision of women's rights in Pakistani constitution**

The constitution of Pakistan guarantees the fundamental rights of women in Pakistan. These rights are the right to liberty, right to equality, right to freedom of movement, profession, and speech, right to education, right to health, freedom to acquire property, right to vote, and freedom from forced labour. The acts of rape and forceful marriages are to be punished by lifelong imprisonment. Marriage, in the name of solving a dispute, is prohibited under Pakistani law. The minimum age for a girl's marriage, under the constitution, is 18 years and the perpetrators of child marriage are punishable by the law. Moreover, the law also limits the expenses in the name of dowry to 5000 rupees and expenses on marriage to 25,000 only (Mushtaq et al., 2013). However, the situation of women's rights is not satisfactory in Pakistan due to the patriarchal nature of society and the weakness of law enforcement agencies. Therefore, women face honour killing, child marriages, marriage in the name of resolving a dispute, marriages with the Holy Quran, dowry problems, domestic violence, harassment, rape, and fewer opportunities for professional development as compared to men. However, they still manage to get education and jobs in various sectors where they have access to health facilities. In addition, they play an active role in local politics and have the right to vote in most parts of the country. The right to marriage of choice is mostly available in the urban areas of Pakistan.

On the other hand, the tribal areas of Pakistan were not under the jurisdiction of the constitution of Pakistan until 2018. After the partition, the Pakistani government allowed the tribal elders (Malik) to govern the region through FCR. A council of tribal elders, headed by Malik, which is known as Jirga, acted as the local court to decide the disputes among the tribesmen. The decisions were made on the principles of tribal customs known as Pashtunwali or Pakhtunwali. The decisions of Jirga were always final, needing only to be obeyed. Malik had the power to call the local political agent, representing the federal government, who had control of the local Khasa Dar force (a type of police) (Shah, 2018). Women's voice was absent in the Jirga, as it was all men's council. Decisions regarding women were also taken by men whereas the former was forced to abide by these decisions. Women were restricted to the houses through the Pashtunwali code of either *kor* or *gor* (home or grave). "Melmastia" (hospitality), "Badal" (revenge), and "Nanawatai" (giving refugee to the person who asks for it even at the cost of life or family) is another set of tenants of Pashtun tribal customs. Other nomadic and Baloch tribes also practice the customs of Pashtunwali (Jamal, 2014).

### **4. A post-colonial feminist analysis of The Wandering Falcon**

This sub-section analyze the women's rights violations in tribal areas due to the continuation of post-colonial laws in the region. These violations of women's rights in the Baloch and Pashtun tribes living in the tribal areas of Pakistan are portrayed in the novel under study.

#### 4.1. Honour killing

Mohanty (1988) truly claimed that the Western feminists ignored the regional problems of women and honour killing is one such problem that is related mostly to Asian women. The heinous crime of killing kin, in most cases a woman, by her male relative is called honour killing. In the absence of a legal system, women in the tribal areas remained at the mercy of male relatives and the local Jirga system. Ahmad (2012) presents the grave incident of honour killing through his female character Gul Bibi. She is the daughter of the tribe's leader and she elopes with a man from the same tribe. She is already married but she refuses to live with her husband. People are aware of the reason as the woman's father tells his son-in-law in front of other people:

“He pointed a shaking finger at his son-in-law. “You know well enough what I say... Marry another woman, marry as often as you like. Every one of them shall be driven to sin, for reasons you are aware of.” (Ahmad, 2012, p.16)

Pakistan is one of the most affected countries with the evils of honour killing. According to Amnesty (2016), 1000 women and girls are killed annually in Pakistan. Sahgal and Townsend (2014) shows that four in ten (30%) Pakistanis consider it admissible to kill a woman or girl if she engages in premarital sex. This mindset, combined with the weak policing system in Pakistan, is responsible for the increasing number of honour killing cases in the country. However, international pressure and statistical increase of honour cases forced the Pakistani government to introduce amendments in the constitution in 2004 (Bilal and Haq, 2016). This amendment made it impossible for the family of the perpetrator to forgive the culprit. Moreover, the court was allowed to give the punishment of *Qatl e Amd* (intentional murder) to the perpetrator.

The Pakistani constitution allows a woman to dissolve the marriage if her husband is impotent (Mushtaq et al., 2013). However, in the absence of federal law and under the influence of tribal customs, Gul Bibi's father was forced to kill the couple even though he is aware of her daughter's helplessness. Gul Bibi and her lover hide from their tribesmen for about six years at an army check post near the borders. However, the army personnel are also reluctant to help them as they do not want to meddle with the tribal laws, as the officer declares “Refuge... I cannot offer [help]. I know your laws well, and neither I nor any man of mine shall come between a man and the laws of his tribe” (Ahmad, 2012, p.8). It is evident from these lines that there is no rule of law and the people are dependent on the customs and traditions of the tribes. Nevertheless, these laws have never cared about the lives of women. Therefore, Gul Bibi who wants to live her life according to her wishes, has no choice but to break the traditions of the tribe and for that, she is stoned to death with her lover:

The old man said nothing but picked up a stone. His companions did likewise. The lover stood still as the first shower of stones hit him. He started bleeding from the wounds on his face and temples. There was another shower of stones and yet another, before he fell. (Ahmad, 2012, p.15)

It is clear that women in the tribal areas are prone to the dangers of crimes related to honour. They do not have the protection of the law and are fully exposed to the tribal laws and Jirga's decisions. Although women like Gul Bibi show the agency and commitment to change their lives, the shades of patriarchy are overwhelmingly strong that they have to eventually succumb at the hands of the dominant gender.

#### 4.2. Right to marriage of choice

De Beauvoir (1989) marks marriage and pregnancy as a source of women's oppression and her opinion proves right in the situation of tribal women in Pakistan. Though women are allowed to marry the person of their choice in Islam and under the Pakistani constitution (Mushtaq et al., 2013). However, the tribal laws do not allow tribal women to marry the man of their choice. They are sold in the name of bride price as depicted in the following lines:

“You are right, son,” agreed the General. “No man respects his wife or her family unless he pays a price for her. But you should be able to get your due without seeking the help of other people's laws.” He looked at Dawa Khan. “You will help him, of course.” (Ahmad, 2012, p.31)

Bride price is so prevalent in the tribal areas that even sons find it obligatory to take the bride price of their mothers in case of second marriages.

Poverty is another reason for bride price as most families see their daughters as a token to the prosperity of their families. Therefore, they demand higher bride prices to take their families out of their financial worries. Sadly, in the process, women are pushed into lifelong suffering. Fateh Mohammad, in the novel *The Wandering Falcon*, is one such character who receives the bride price of his daughter, Shah Zarina, to provide food and shelter to other members of the family, "Fateh Mohammad had brought a part of the bride price in advance with him. With this in hand, the family started their preparations" (Ahmad, 2012, p. 91). Resultantly, Shah Zarina has to face gruesome treatment from her husband. It is hoped that government will take serious action to curb such practices and ensure a woman's right to marriage of choice in the previously deprived tribal areas. So the tribal customs associate a wife's honour to the bride price, where the price of a bride marks her esteem and prestige in her husband's family. However, they fail to understand that most grooms borrow money to pay the bride price, and most often, it is the woman who suffer from poverty and also face the rage and violence of their husbands.

Marriage to settle disputes between two families or tribes and exchange marriages where women of two families are exchanged for marriage without their consent are other forms of violations of this fundamental right of women (Mushtaq et al., 2013).

#### 4.3. Domestic violence

Domestic violence is any form of abusive behaviour (either physical, sexual, psychological, or even economical) committed by a person to gain power or control over his intimate partner. Most of the time, such victims are women. With the increasing statistics of domestic violence in Pakistan, the country is now ranked as the sixth most dangerous country for women in the world by the World Economic Forum (2020). In the year 2020, 1422 cases of domestic violence were recorded in Pakistan (Imran, 2021). The situation in the tribal areas remains worst as there is no provision to ensure the safety of women from domestic violence. Ahmad depicts the abusive treatment of Shah Zarina in the novel *The Wandering Falcon*. She is considered as even inferior to the pet animal, owned by her husband. The young bride becomes annoyed with such treatment and she complains to her husband. However, his remark astonishes her as he says, "He looked at her coldly and said, "I can get another wife but not another bear" (Ahmad, 2012, p.99). When Shah Zarina attempted to harm the animal (bear), her husband worsens his treatment, opting only for more brutality:

Her husband made sure that Shah Zarina would not get another chance to hurt the animal. This he did in a coldly logical way, by 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. (Ahmad, 2012, p.99)

Another female character in the novel, Sherakai, also has a pitiable story. She was sold as a child by her father, "At one time, when she was eight years of age, she had lost all hope. That was when her father had sold her for a pound of opium and a hundred rupees to a local prince" (Ahmad, 2012, p.99). However, she was rescued by her mother after paying the money and then she was married to a loving husband. She had a few years of peace but her mother-in-law then starts blaming her after the birth of three daughters. In patriarchal societies, female children are always taken as liabilities while male heirs are necessary to continue the lineage in the family. This was not however the end of her miseries; she was abducted along with three other women from the caravan. She is able to flee from her abductors but in the meanwhile, her husband marries another woman. She is made a stranger in her own house, having to face both, mental and physical torture at the hands of her mother-in-law and the second wife in front of her daughters. This forced her to do the unimaginable act of leaving her daughters behind and running away from her house. A life for a woman without the company of a man is not possible in patriarchal societies, and the Pakistani tribal areas are no exception. Therefore, Sherakai falls prey to a slave trader, Afzal Khan, who then sells her in the slave market. Thus, Sherakai was sold twice in her life and it was again the start of a new episode of miseries as she is sold to a brothel supplier.



Domestic violence does not occur within a single household; its threat exceeds beyond the territory. This is exactly what Shah Zarina experiences as she is not welcomed at her parent's house, fearing that "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" (Ahmad, 2012, p.101). When she hears this, she leaves her parents' house only to stumble into Afzal Khan on her way out. He tricks her into believing in a promised job. In the end, he sells her off to Tor Baz who promises to marry her.

Sherakai and Shah Zarina suffered at the hands of patriarchal mentality and colonial laws deprived them of justice. Therefore, Spivak (2003) rightly termed such women as *subaltern*. They are bound to suffer once they are out of their homes as life for a lonely woman is not possible in the tribal areas. It is hoped that government will work to improve the living conditions of women in the tribal areas after the implementation of the new law.

#### **4.4. Deprivation of the basic necessities**

Postcolonial scholars believe that women in the colonial territories are deprived of their basic necessities because women are deprived of their human and constitutional rights (Adel, 2024). The tribal region of Pakistan also remained underdeveloped as compared to other parts of the country. Resultantly, the people of the region face difficulties to gain education, health, and other basic necessities in life. Moreover, the tribal traditions make it further difficult for women to get education, job or health rights in the region:

Women in rural areas receive less attention than women in urban areas in terms of development and education policies. Likewise, women in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) receive much less education than do women in the Punjab, Sindh, and Kashmir provinces of Pakistan. (Jamal, 2014, p.20)

The women's employment rate in Pakistan is only 25 percent. However, for women in the tribal areas, it is considered shameful for the family to allow women to work. Therefore, only 5.9% of women are working in the tribal areas (Shah, 2018, p.9). However, it is strange that women are allowed to work on the farms where they have to walk for miles to fetch water for their families, as depicted in the following excerpt:

A few girls walked past with water pitchers on their heads to fetch water from some spring, perhaps miles away. They would make at least three trips during the day to get water for their menfolk, and yet find it within themselves to make another trip to refill the wayside casks that provided water for travellers. (Ahmad, 2012, p.70)

The provision of healthcare facilities is also a problem in the area. The absence of a permanent developmental fund with difficult mountainous terrains worsens the provision of health facilities for the authorities. Children and women are the most affected group due to the unavailability of these facilities. The harsh weather during winter causes severe problems for women and infants, resulting in a large number of casualties. Ahmad (2012) depicts this dilemma in his novel:

On the mountain, the survival of the mother and child depended entirely on nature. The timing had to be just right so that the mother did not have to carry the child on the journey during the last days of pregnancy. (Ahmad, 2012, p.88–89)

Thus, the continuation of colonial laws not only kept the area away from any developmental work but also deprived women of their religious and legal rights. Therefore, the amalgamation of colonial rules and patriarchal traditions created an environment of double colonisation where women faced deprivation of their fundamental rights. In the absence of the basic necessities of life, women are further pushed towards dependency on male members of society.

## 5. Conclusion

The discussion shows that the female characters in Ahmad's novel depict the sufferings of women in the tribal areas of Pakistan. These women could not benefit from the independence of Pakistan as the new government continues the colonial policies from the British government to win the people's loyalty in the region. Therefore, women in the area remain at the mercy of the patriarchal conventions of Pashtunwali. They face forced marriages and honour killings, experience domestic violence, and deprivation of education, employment, and health facilities in the region. Although the female characters in Ahmed's novel are vibrant, they struggle to bring change in their lives but are doomed to stagnancy because of the lack of support, i.e., from the government, society, and family to be successful in their strive for change. Thus, Ahmad's female characters contradict the assumptions of radical and liberal European and American feminists that Third World Women are passive and submissive (Mohanty, 1988).

The Pakistani government has taken the right decision to merge the tribal areas to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. It brings the area under the rule of law and it is hoped that the area will progress and women will be able to play a major role in the development of the country. However, there is a need to accelerate the pace of reforms in the region and to completely wipe off the patriarchal institutions like Jirga to ensure women's rights are preserved. Besides, there is a need to talk and highlight the problems of tribal women in the feminist movement in Pakistan in order to bring these deprived women into the mainstream women's rights politics of the country.

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## Disclaimer Statement

This article is an independent piece of work and it is not part of a thesis submitted to a university.

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## Authorship and Level of Contribution

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