

Interrogating Gender Roles in Patriarchy in Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon*

Kamal Rai¹

Abstract

*This paper examines women's interrogation of traditional gender roles in Ahmad's novel The Wandering Falcon. Basically, in a male-dominated society, women would lack their self-autonomy due to the imposition of socio-economic constraints. Women, therefore, are often forced to live a restricted, peripheral life within particular boundaries. However, this paper analyses how women challenge traditional gender roles in pursuit of their liberation. As a counter to the imposed tribal patriarchal societal norms, protagonists Gul Bibi and Shah Zarina resist long-standing tribal laws to pursue their desires and freedom. They make a crucial decision by taking risks with their lives for individual, socio-economic, and sexual autonomy by ignoring their family legacy and societal rules of sexual conduct. Both Gul Bibi and Shah Zarina dare to desert their legitimate husbands and run with the men of their choice by challenging the strict tribal roles. In this way, they intensely resist male-oriented socio-cultural and tribal restrictions and obligations, freeing themselves from confined limitations and gaining their freedom. Methodologically, this paper draws on the feminist theorist Simon De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* to explore women's challenges to gender-based roles in pursuit of individual freedom. Therefore, this paper uncovers the women's interrogation of patriarchy and concludes by reflecting on their endeavours to attain individual liberty.*

Keywords: Interrogation, Oppressions, Traditional Gender Roles, Tribal Laws, Women's Freedom.

Introduction

This paper analyzes Ahmad's novel, *The Wandering Falcon*, from a feminist perspective, unveiling a woman's interrogation of gender based roles for their independence. Women are commonly stereotyped as peripheral beings imposing unfair traditional gender roles in a society. To get an independent status with gender equality, women often object to such stereotypical gender roles in a patriarchal society. The fictional story of the novel offers a realistic portrayal of tribal patriarchy through the narration of several nomadic stories set in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, as well as in some areas of Afghanistan. The central female characters, Gul Bibi and Shah Zarina, deserve dependent status with relatively subordinate positions; however, instead of agreeing on they challenge such unfair tribal patriarchal laws in the society.

1. Asst. Professor, English, Pashupati Multiple Campus, T.U., Email: raikamal483@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9293-7887>

Guerin et al, additionally, in their book entitled *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, discuss that in a patriarchal society, women attempt to resist oppressive conventional gender roles as Gul Bibi and Sah Zarina do in the novel. They believe that feminism interrogates the patriarchal socio-cultural roles to erase erroneous assumptions regarding women. "Indeed, feminism has often focused upon what is absent rather than what is present, reflecting concern with the silencing and marginalization of women in a patriarchal culture . . . feminism . . . can attack other approaches for their false assumptions about women. (Guerin, et al. 2005, pp. 222-223). According to them, feminist concerns are with the marginalisation of women in a male-dominated society.

Similarly, the feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex*, argues that a woman would liberate herself, rejecting ties with patriarchy. De Beauvoir clarifies "To emancipate woman is to refuse to enclose her on relations she sustains with man . . ." (De-Beauvoir, 1949, p. 782). In De-Beauvoir's illustrations, women's refusal to unjust gender based roles is the only way to emancipate, as Gul Bibi and Sah Zarina fight against the centuries-old tribal laws for their freedom.

Feminist criticism is fundamentally a socio-cultural, economic, political, and literary movement that advocates for women's autonomy by ensuring gender equality in a society. Historically, the organized feminist movement emerged since the late 1940s in several series of waves. Dominantly, the first wave concerns legal rights, the second wave focuses on socio-economic inequality, and the third wave onwards movements incorporate a diverse range of intersectionality. Particularly, the heyday of the second-wave feminism ranged from the 1960s to the 1980s, dealing with women's issues going beyond legal equality. It primarily focuses on both private and public workplace discrimination, domestic violence, sexual liberation, and reproductive rights. The writers Keith Green and Jill Lebihan, in their book *Critical Theory & Practice*, write:

The period of dramatic change in the influence of feminism that took place in the late 1960s and after has therefore become known as the Second Wave, but even the historical era to which it refers is open to debate. there is even less agreement on any key critical texts that were associated with Women's Liberation movement which gathered strength in this period (Green & Lebihan, 2006, p. 230)

In their words, the second-wave feminist movement has brought about immense changes in women's rights and freedoms. Particularly after the 1960s, women seem to have achieved equality in both public and private spheres, as Gul Bibi and Sah Zarina desire to gain.

Jamil Ahmad's novel, *The Wandering Falcon*, is a true-life story of a tribal patriarchal community in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), located between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Tor Baz (Black Falcon) is a central character, but his existence is outside the tribal laws. The novel narrates true systematic domestic violence and sexual objectification against women from 1931 to 2014 through two fictional characters, Gul Bibi and Shah Zarina. They hold marginalized positions because they are treated as inferior beings, restricting freedom, rights and identity under the rigid customs and traditional gender roles. Both of them are restricted under the tribal Jirga laws. Particularly, Gul Bibi and Shah Zarina are brutalised and turned unheard after their marriage. They are victimised by their legitimate husband because their families fail to understand their will and dignity. As a consequence, they resist the tribal patriarchy though they are severely brutalized. The Saiphad tribal chief's daughter, Gul Bibi, expresses her dissatisfaction with tribal patriarchal laws by

eloping with her servant and deserting her legitimate husband. Similarly, Shah Zarina also resists the honour-based laws of a male-dominated society by leaving her husband. Thus, in the Novel, female characters seem to fight for individual freedom, rights and self-autonomy.

Statement of problem

This article illustrates in Ahmad's novel, *The Wandering Falcon*, the resistance of women against the deeply rooted traditional gender roles based on the tribal law of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Under the patriarchal norms, Women are paralyzed, not providing a dignified status in the family and the social sphere. However, the characters, Gul Bibi and Shah Zarina seem to fight for their autonomy by resisting the tribal patriarchal laws. Instead of staying silent, following imposed social restrictions, they un after their decisions. They assertively break the strict tribal laws and domestic code of the FATA community, which are related to the honour of the family and the entire society. In this context, the following research questions are outlined to answer. What sorts of punishment are given to women if they stand against traditional gender roles? Why do women interrogate traditional gender roles to achieve the fullest freedom in a male-dominated society? How does patriarchy restrict women's freedom by imposing prejudiced gender roles? These questions would be answered by analyzing fictional characters to unveil the interrogation of traditional tribal patriarchy.

Objectives

- 1) To explore how women interrogate traditional gender roles for their liberation and independence in *The Wandering Falcon*.
- 2) To examine oppression against women and gender inequality in a male-dominated tribal society.

Review of Literature

Many scholars have interpreted Ahmad's novel, *The Wandering Falcon*, from diverse perspectives by employing distinct theoretical approaches. They try to justify their arguments by bringing the related textual evidence and contextualising it. Essentially, all scholars have limited their discussions to tribal laws, border issues, and the impact of colonialism. All the reviews have been presented here in chronological order based on the time of their publication.

Three scholars, Gulzar Ahmad, Adnan Tahir, and Muhammad Asif, in their article titled "Warrior Traits of Pakistani Tribal Community: A Stylistic Analysis of Lexical and Syntactic Choices in The Wandering Falcon", unveil the blended message of the ideological and cultural warriors' traits of a tribal community of Pakistan through an analysis of stylistic aspects such as lexical items, grammars, figure of speech and so on. They illustrate:

The FATA's tribes have been presented as brave and warrior communities. Their entire life moves around valor and courage, which they show in different tribal disputes . . . numerous lexical, syntactic and figurative expressions carry the theme of bravery and warriorship . . . used the lexical and stylistic markers to depict the valor based tribal lifestyle which is truly reflected in their love of war, revenge and hunting. (Ahmad et al., 2019, P. 71)

In their words, the FATA's tribal communities' sense of valorisation is reflected in the lexical items of the novel. The novel's linguistic terms of the novel figuratively signify the bravery of the tribal lifestyle.

Ifrah Afzal, in his article entitled “Ecocriticism: Crossing Boundaries between Human and Non-Human Spheres in Jamil Ahmed’s The Wandering Falcon”, examines from the perspectives of ecocriticism to display a symbolic confinement of the tribal culture. Both human and non-human boundaries stand as the restrictions of the tribal land, which resist adopting a new way of life with changes. Afzal shows “... in the novel, revolving around the poverty-stricken tribesmen in the Western half of Pakistan. The novel’s relationship with ecocriticism has hardly been credited regarding the tribal areas and their deep-rooted connection with the territorial spaces that they reside within and borderlines that define their existence” (Afzal, 2020, p. 34). For him, there is a direct connection between the poverty of tribesmen and the geographical location. The territorial boundaries appear as the determining factor of the peripheral tribal community and its overall existence.

Scholars Kashifa Khalid, Usama Javed, Iqbal Muneeba Liaquat, in their joint article “Legitimizing Oppression: An Althusserian Study of Jamil Ahmed’s The Wandering Falcon”, explore the coercive roles of the state upon common people by emphasizing class disparities in a capitalist society. They unveil the causes of suffering of marginalized class due to the oppressive acts of the state in the tribal areas of Pakistan. They state, “... how the state legitimizes the oppression of the poor people living in tribal areas sometimes through its capitalistic policies and sometimes through the use of RSA. The state uses repressive state apparatuses to suppress those people who emerge as a threat to the ideology of the state . . .” (Khalid et al., 2021, p. 290). For them, in the tribal areas of Pakistan, poor people are oppressed by the misuse of the state’s apparatus. The state itself mutes the voices of the poor through capitalist policies if they appear as a threat to the ideology.

Maryam Kamal, Ammara Mehmood and Ayesha Ashraf, in their co-authored article titled “Lethal Hegemony over Subaltern Tribes: Textual Analysis of Jamil Ahmad’s The Wandering Falcon”, view the novel from the perspective of subalterns through an interpretation of the hegemonic atrocities of the government on people of the margins. In fact, tribal people are forced to live precarious lives in tribal areas due to the lethal actions of the central authorities. They claim “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” (Kamal et al., 2022, p. 632). According to them, marginalised people who live uncertain lives are severely victimized under the hegemonic judicial system of the government. Particularly, FATA or Jirga law is against the people of the segregated tribal community.

Scholars Muhammad Nasir and Lesar Ahmad, in their article entitled “Unveiling the Modernist Tapestry: Tradition and Modernity in ‘A Wondering Falcon’ by Jamil Ahmed”, discuss the theme of the tension between tradition and modernity in literature, which unveils shifts in socio-cultural phenomena. The changes help to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges in individuals as well as the communities. They state:

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. (Nasir & Ahmad, 2023, p. 61)

According to them, the novel employs modernist techniques such as symbolism, narrative techniques, fragmented storytelling, and the exploration of characters' experiences and identities to portray the changing global situation.

Scholar, Toqueer Ahmed, in his research article titled “Between Past and Present: Unravelling Colonialism’s Enduring Impact in The Wandering Falcon” analyses the novel from the perspectives of colonialism, showing the deeply rooted impacts of colonialism on the nomadic life in the tribal areas of Pakistan. He points out a contrast between the past distinct tribal heritage as the source of pride and marginalized status of the tribal community at present with full of challenges and socio-economic hardship due to the imposition of British colonial legacies, especially the foreign legal system. Ahmed writes:

Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that these colonial legacies persist even after the formal end of British colonial rule in the subcontinent and the subsequent independence and formation of nation-states such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. This acknowledgement aims to clarify that even though formal colonial rule has ceased, its enduring effects persist through various socio-political mechanisms within the nation-states these tribes inhabit. (Ahmed, 2023, p.16)

According to Ahmed, even after the formal end of British Colonial rule, many regions' socio-economic practices are still under the colonial mechanism. Pakistan and Afghanistan are independent nations, but they implicitly follow the legacy of past colonialists. It means they are not entirely free from British influence in the practical ground of society.

Scholars, as mentioned, explicitly attempt to substantiate their arguments by providing sufficient evidence from credible sources. So, I do not outright disagree with them because they are sound in their claims. However, in this paper, I strongly discuss how women interrogate patriarchal gender roles as a consequence of oppression against them in a tribal, male-dominated society. In a patriarchal society, basically, gender roles play a significant role in restricting women's freedom. Compared to men, women are assigned peripheral tasks, which are regarded as subordinate. As a result of relative identity, women lack an equally decisive position in society. Thus, in this paper, firstly, I deal with the oppression of women due to the prejudiced gender roles in a tribal patriarchy. And, secondly, I discuss women's interrogation of imposed traditional gender roles in a patriarchal society.

Theoretical Framework

This research paper examines Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* from a second-wave feminist perspective to explore the plight of women in a patriarchal society. As qualitative research, it adopts the theoretical lens of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* and Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* to show the gender disparity emphasizing the empowerment of women for gender equality in a tribal society.

An Oppression Against Women and an Interrogation of Gender Roles

Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* unveils a ruthless oppression against women, imposing prejudiced patriarchal gender roles in a tribal society. Basically, two female characters, Gul Bibi and Shah Zarina, are true victims of the male-oriented gender roles. They are subjugated by confining

their individual freedom under tribal laws. As theorist Lois Tyson argues, both women are regarded as just a relative being without having independent desires and thoughts. She says, "That is, they are not viewed as independent human beings with their own goals, needs, and desires. Rather, they are evaluated only in terms of their usefulness to patriarchal men. They are viewed only as patriarchal objects" (Tyson, 2011, p. 142). Based on Tyson's words, Gul Bibi and Shah Zarina are treated as patriarchal objects who do not have their own feelings, but are useful to men.

The female protagonist, Gul Bibi, is severely objectified despite being the daughter of the Sardar, a respected tribal head. She belongs to the head family of the community, but has to suffer because she is an honour carrier rather than an individual in society. "The Sardar moved his camel . . . looked around. "Let me tell you all now", he shouted. My daughter sinned. She sinned against the laws of God and those of our tribe" (Ahmad, 2011, p. 10). These utterances of the Sardar clearly indicate that his daughter, Gul Bibi, acts against God. She is not regarded as a person with personal goals and desires rather sinner of the family and the tribe. Theorist, Beauvoir claims that existing customs are more authoritative than individual rights and freedom. She asserts, "Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as man's, and frequently it is much to her disadvantage. Even when her rights are legally recognized in the abstract, long-standing custom prevents their full expression in the more" (Beauvoir, 1949, P.19). In Beauvoir's emphasis, long-standing traditions often neutralise even the legal provisions when it comes to women's issues in a patriarchy, as Gul Bibi has to suffer in her life.

Women would not realize their subjugation, as they are subdued since birth in a patriarchal society. Patricia Waugh, in her book titled *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*, assertively focuses on how women are socio-culturally conditioned in a male-dominated society. "The emphasis on the role of culture and society in creating the self-supported the view that women had been culturally conditioned to accept an artificially constructed inferiority" (Waugh, 2006, p.333). As Waugh's emphasis, the whole society is against women in the act of marginalization. Gul Bibi and her lover happen to ask for refuge in the neighbouring tribe, but the Subedar refuses their appeal for shelter due to fear of the Siahpads tribe. Instead of giving asylum, with warm hospitality, the Subedar expresses his fear of Gul Bibi's father. He articulates, "I cannot offer. I know your laws well, and neither I nor any man of mine shall come between a man and the laws of his tribe. He repeated, Refuge, we cannot give you" (Ahmad, 2011, p. 3). Here, the Subedar is just a representative member of the patriarchal society. He is a product of the tribal patriarchal consequently, he promotes the systematic coercions against women through a tribal custom rather than understanding the genuine misery of a woman.

Feminist theorist Mary Wollstonecraft, additionally, in her book entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, believes that women are systematically dominated in a patriarchal society. Women are nurtured, instilling discriminatory gender based roles since their childhood. Wollstonecraft points out, "A mistaken education, narrow, uncultivated mind, and many sexual prejudices tend to make women more constant than man . . ." (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p. 64). In her words, women are educated to be submissive as dependent beings, injecting organised admonitions. Thus, women who feel uncultivated cannot even face the masses by exposing themselves as Gul Bibi does in a situation. "The woman was covered from head to foot in garments, but on drawing closer, her head covering slipped and exposed her face

to the watching soldiers" (Ahmad, 2011, p. 2). In this situation, Gul Bibi quietly follows her tribal upbringing, covering her whole body from top to bottom. Suddenly, her clothes slip down, exposing her face in front of soldiers. Why does she cover her whole body? Is it natural? The answer would be obviously no; thus, as Wollstonecraft argues, Gul Bibi is narrowly educated in the periphery of tribal laws.

Likewise, Shah Zarina is another female character who appears to be a true victim of patriarchal gender roles in the novel. She is often objectified as a commodity under the practices of tribal customs. Zarina's first step of objectification is in the process of her marriage, where her father, Fateh Mohamad, asks for bride prices from the boy. Ahmad writes, "This young man had asked for the hand of Shah Zarina. The negotiation about the bride price had been successful and the marriage would be taking place after one month. There was tremendous excitement in the family. To find a match for the eldest girl with a man of independent . . ." (Ahmad, 2011, p.94). The bride price negotiation is an obligatory practice which is greater than the marriage itself in Zarina's life. There is tremendous excitement in a family to find an independent boy for her life because she is the eldest daughter of the family. The status of Shah Zarina is relatable to De Beauvoir's claims that women are dependent rather than absolute in a tribal society. She asserts, "A man can think of himself without a woman. She cannot think of herself without a man" (Beauvoir, 1949, P.15). According to Beauvoir, a woman cannot think of her life without a man, which explicitly signifies Zarina's family happiness.

Wollstonecraft emphasizes the self-dependence of women having power themselves rather than relating to men. Every woman should empower herself independently in a society, but patriarchy restricts her from doing so. Wollstonecraft stresses "I don't wish them (women) to have power over the man; but over themselves" (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p. 75). In her words, women gain autonomy by empowering themselves in a society. However, Shah Zarina has to depend on her husband in her daily life. She does not even have a sense of empowerment due to the confinement of tribal society. Shah Zarina reality is:

Her husband bought some flour from his day's earnings, and they stopped in the afternoon for a rest. She opened her bundles and prepared the evening meal for the three of them. In the towns, the pattern of life changed completely. Here, the husband would rent a room on the outskirts, which would be used by the bear at night and Shah Zaria during the day, when the husband was away. (Ahmad, 2011, p. 96)

These remarks portray a pathetic position of Shah Zarina, who is totally dependent on her husband's income. She is not free to go out for work rather has to stay at home. So, she is a true representative of a housewife in a male-dominated society.

Shah Zarina is further brutalized by her husband, who tortures her severely. He devalues her, degrading lower than an animal. Shah Zarina is less significant than the bear in the eyes of her husband. "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, 2011, p. 97). Here, Shah Zarina is mercilessly treated. She is deprived of the necessities of life, such as shelter, food and clothes. In reality, the torture of Shah Zarina is an act of dehumanization. As

Researchers, Jonathan Leader Maynard and Aliza Luft, in their article “Humanizing Dehumanizing Research,” explain dehumanization is a process of treating people as less than human. They clarify, “Dehumanization refers to the perception of people as inhuman or as lesser humans” (Maynard and Luft, 2023, p.1). In their words, Shah Zarina is not perceived as human because her value is less than a common human being. Does Shah Zarina deserve the human value? Respond obviously would not be affirmative; if so, it is an example of the patriarchy’s act of dehumanization of women.

Shah Zarina is additionally portrayed as beautiful, highlighting her attractive body. She looks beautiful stereotypically in all eyes, which echoes a praise, while in depth, it is an act of objectification of women. “Shah Zarina had been a pretty girl. When she grew up, she might have been described as beautiful” (Ahmad, 2011, p.91). This indebted expression implicitly unveils the true objectification of women in a patriarchal society. A feminist, Susan Sontag, in her essay entitled *Beauty*, discusses two types of women’s beauty, outer and inner. However, she emphasises the inner beauty as the beauty with virtues based on the Greek concept. She writes, “For the Greeks, beauty was a virtue: a kind of excellence . . . we not only split off-with the greatest facility-the inside (character, intellectual) from the outside (looks) but we are actually surprised when someone who is beautiful is also intelligent, talented, good” (qtd. Lohani, 2021, p. 268). In Sontag’s definition, Shah Zarina is not beautiful. Compliment of her beauty is not real beauty with virtues and strength rather just an act of commodification of patriarchy.

Both female characters, Gul Bibi and Shah Zarina, interrogate the traditional gender roles imposed by a patriarchal society. Instead of being obedient women, they would challenge patriarchy by violating the tribal laws. Gul Bibi elopes with her father’s servant, deserting her legitimate husband. She dares to begin a new life, violating not only her father’s honour but also that of the whole tribal community. “The women had asked no questions. She packed and dressed quickly, first putting warm clothes on both herself and the boy, and then making a light load of the few things that they needed to carry for their journey” (Ahmad, 2011, p.7). In this description, Gul Bibi does not show any dissatisfaction with anyone, but she is mentally prepared to set up her new life. Packing her clothes signifies she is ready to tackle any further challenges.

Regarding the individual autonomy of women, the 20th-century feminist theorist Virginia Woolf, in her book *A Room of One’s Own*, symbolically stresses the room, which signifies women’s financial independence for the production. She focuses on “A woman must have money and room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf, 2017, p. 5). In Woolf’s claims, a woman should engage in earning, which is relatable to Gul Bibi, who is attempting to build her own foundation for the future. “She mixed some clay and water and coated the room and the floor front with it. She did more than that. She made a low wall about six inches high and enclosed an area the size of two beds in front of their room. She also made a gate into this small courtyard of hers-a gate with two small towers . . . ” (Ahmad, 2011, P. 5). Gul Bibi engages in the work outside to build rooms. It metaphorically symbolizes her sense of freedom, rejecting the tribal patriarchy.

A male-dominated society restricts women from expressing their inner desires openly. It is very hard for them to get an opportunity to discharge their strength, as Wollstonecraft discusses: “Women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what deserves the name of virtue” (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p. 29). Her discussion reveals that women’s real voices are forcefully crushed to maintain patriarchal virtue. It evidently shows women are not shy and introverted by

instinct; as the situation arises, they can speak up for their rights, as Gul Bibi does to save her lover. “The woman walked away a few paces and stood there with her back towards the man. Suddenly, she spoke out again: Don’t kill the boy. They might spare him. I am ready. The man shot her in the back while she was still speaking” (Ahmad, 2011, p.8). In these expressions, Gul Bibi is outspoken in resisting the tribal customs to save her boyfriend. She is ready to sacrifice herself for the sake of love, which means women are silenced systematically in a patriarchal society.

Similarly, another character, Shah Zarina, also assertively resists the enforced traditional gender roles. Husband’s sexist behaviour makes her realise that she is living a life worse than a bear’s. “She could not understand why the bear had to have a room, and they could not. Once she asked her husband. He looked at her coldly and said, I can get another wife but not another bear. She was bewildered” (Ahmad, 2011, p. 97). Zarina’s husband manages a room for the tame bear, but not for Shah Zarina. She raises a question to her husband about such an inhuman manner, but the response is awkward. Her dissatisfaction is itself a disagreement with the patriarchy, as a feminist theorist Helene Cixous, insists in her work, *The laugh of the Medusa*, for the empowerment of women. She asserts “let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man . . . off our backs; and not yourself” (Cixous, 1975, p. 876). Cixus’s emphasis is to move forward, raising voice, being assertive, as Shah Zarina’s expression of unhappiness with her husband.

Shah Zarina moreover, does not endure the ill-treatment of her husband, deserting him. She dares to run away from home, which is an act of resistance to the traditional gender roles. “After a few months of this, Shah Zarina broke down and ran away from her husband. Four days later, she was back in her village, having walked most of the way. She had left her marriage gifts behind and her suit of clothes with the tinsel still on them was dirty and soiled” (Ahmad, 2011, pp. 97-98). These lines reflect that Shah Zarina is immature on the surface level, but in reality, her decision is more practical. Why does she take such a step? the answer is found in Virginia Woolf’s assertion about women’s liberation. Woolf says, “The history of men’s opposition to women’s emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of emancipation itself” (Wolf,3). Woolf’s articulations signify that Shah Zarina running away from home is a consequence of her abusive husband. She takes such a bold decision due to unfair tribal patriarchy.

Shah Zarina additionally seems to cross to the narrow walls of a patriarchy. Neither she obeys her husband’s orders nor her parents; rather, she leaves home at night, internalising an injustice to her. “Shah Zarina was crushed by what she heard. She picked up the rough woollen blanket and her shoes, and walked silently out of the house and into the night” (Ahmad, 2011, p.98). After hearing her parents’ unsupportive talk, Shah Zarina comes out of her home at night. Is Zarina a conventional woman? If we see her actions, the answer is absolutely no. She is out of the tribal patriarchal societal expectations. To be a virtuous woman in a patriarchal society, every woman should be like the narrator of Ezra Pound’s poem *The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter*. Here, the narrator is a young wife whose husband leaves her alone at home for five months, but she waits for him anxiously, being faithful. “They hurt me. I grow older. If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang. Please let me know beforehand, And I will come out to meet you, As far as Cho-fu-Sa” (Pound, 2002, lines 25–29). As a wife narrator wishes to meet her husband soon, though she is in pain. She inquires and waits, but Shah Zarian is not passionate towards her husband to see and staying together. Instead, she breaks every boundary of society to fulfil her desires by gaining individual freedom.

Shah Zarina desperately wants to work after leaving her fathers and her husband, which signifies another step of resistance to patriarchy. Despite being inexperienced at work, she feels the value of work to continue life. The urgency for employment is. "Shah Zarina nodded wearily. I need employment. I can work hard" (Ahmad, 2011, p. 99). In this expression, Shah Zarian seems to be worried in a way; however, in depth, she is bold enough to fight against hardship for her survival. She is not a tearful sweetheart of anyone, rather a rational woman who dares to raise herself above the level of domestic unpaid labour. Delphy believes that a male-dominated society merely confines women within the periphery of the home by restricting them to domestic, unpaid labour. Delphy opines:

All contemporary 'developed' societies, including 'socialist' ones, depend on the unpaid labour of women for domestic services and child-rearing . . . They are excluded from the realm of exchange and consequently have no value. They are unpaid . . . The husband's only obligation, which is obviously in his own interest, is to provide for his wife's basic needs, in other words, he maintains her labour power. (Delphy, 1984, p. 60)

In a patriarchal society, women are just unpaid labour to serve their husbands and the family. However, Shah Zarina overcomes such four walls of the home to be a paid independent worker. Thus, Zarina's move truly proves that she stands against the biased patriarchal gender roles.

Finding/Conclusion

Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* illustrates a ruthless oppression against women; however, characters Shah Zarina and Gul Bibi interrogate existing gender roles for their autonomy. They do not follow the tribal laws to pursue their own desires, though they would face harsh consequences in their life. Gul Bibi dares to run away with a servant, leaving her legitimate husband. She does not seem to care about her father's dignity, eloping with a man of her choice, forgetting her family honour and legacy. Does she express any regret for her illegal and immoral action? If we observe her closely, the answer would be no because Gul Bibi is determined enough to lead her new life rather than return with her father. She seems to fulfil her motherhood dream, having a son named Tor Baz. To sustain life, she does hard work without any regrets and spends good time with her new partner. Gul Bibi, additionally, not only becomes a mother but also happily sacrifices her life for the sake of her love and liberation. In fact, she dies for her autonomy, challenging the patriarchal norms and values.

Shah Zarina also pursues her ambitions, ignoring the traditional gender roles when she realizes the severe injustice to her. Father, Fateh Mohamad, hands over Shah Zarina to a man taking the bride price as the tribal marriage custom. She would be faithful towards her husband, obeying norms and values. However, when the husband brutally tortures her life turns worse than a bear's, then she takes a bold decision. At first, Shah Zarina silently resists to abusive behaviour of her husband, but later on she comes to the point of leaving him and begins a new life, facing any consequences. Shah Zarina not only deserts her husband but also her parents after listening to their worries about her. She sets uncertain journey after leaving home as she does not find her values even in her father's family. Shah Zarina deserts her husband without taking her possessions, which reflects that she is not inferior, but rather confident enough to continue her life. Shah Zarina follows a stranger, looking desperately for a job in an unfamiliar place. She is ready to sell herself, but does not express any regret because it is her choice. It clearly shows that Shah Zarina strongly stands against the prejudiced tribal laws and follows her desires in life. Therefore, as an outcome of severe disparity against women, both Gul Bibi and Shah Zarina interrogate by resisting the patriarchal gender roles in the novel.

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