

Women amid Partition in Amrita Pritam's Novel "PINJAR"

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Abstract:

Pinjar is a novel written by the renowned Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam. Published in 1950, it is a powerful narrative exploring themes of Partition, identity, and human resilience during the distorted times of the India-Pakistan Partition in 1947. The story revolves around the life of Pooro, a young Hindu woman who becomes a victim of abduction during the Partition. Through Pooro's journey, Amrita Pritam deeply explores the Partition's emotional and psychological impact on individuals and communities, highlighting the tragedies and sacrifices endured by many. The novel remains a significant work in Indian literature, offering a poignant reflection on the human cost, specifically women as objects of possession during the Partition.

Keywords: Partition, resilience, rehabilitation, women's voices.

Introduction:

Amrita Pritam is remembered as one of the first renowned poets, essayists, and novelists of Punjabi literature. Amrita was the first prominent poet of Punjabi literature who migrated to India from Lahore after the India-Pakistan Partition in 1947. Amrita Pritam became the first woman to win the Sahitya Akademi Award for '*Sunehre*' (*Messages*) in 1956. Amrita as a novelist, wrote novels that depict an extensive array of social, cultural, and psychological elucidation. Amrita Pritam can delve deeply into the souls of her female characters and empathize with them. Amrita Pritam's most famous novel *Pinjar* (1950), depicts the plight of women amid Partition. The novel was translated into English by Kushwant Singh as '*The Skeleton*' in 2009.

Furruk Khan said in his article, Embodied Voice and Violence: Women, Subjective Experience and Agency in the Narratives of Participation.

"The injuries that seemed to crystalize partition's violence were mostly inflicted on women of 'other' groups. Through their bodies, 'self and other' were defined as diametrically opposed notions of differentiation."

Partition left an unforgettable impact on people's life. It was not just a political event; it was a profoundly personal and emotional rupture that left scars on the hearts and lives of countless individuals and communities. It brought untold suffering, tragedy, trauma, pain, and violence to communities living together in some social contract.

Pinjar is an outcry hidden behind the silent sobs of thousands of females like Pooro, also known as Poornima, the novel's central character. At the novel's outset, Pooro, while peeling peas, finds herself choked and disrupted. She feels her body is polluted as if carrying a sinful embryo in her womb. As she peels the peas, her thoughts unveil her past. Pooro, a beautiful young fourteen-year-old girl's life turns traumatic when she is abducted by a Muslim man named Rashid during the Partition. Pooro was engaged to a wealthy, handsome man named Ramchand. Her ecstatic life turns upside down after she was abducted. Even in her impotent state, Pooro asks Rashid,

"If my uncle abducted your aunt, what fault was that of mine? You have reduced me to a homeless vagrant" (T.S. 17).

Pooro requests Rashid to let her visit her mother once. He denies stating,

"You have no place in that family anymore!"

If they let you in even once, not one of their Hindu friends or relatives will take a drop of water in their house. Moreover, you have been with me full fifteen days" (T.S., p 18)." *'No place anymore'* These words by Rashid exhibit not only Pooro's future but the lives of many innocent abducted women during the Partition. Amrita here depicts the uncertainty of women's life during Partition. Pooro lost her own identity; she sees herself as neither Hamida nor Pooro:

"In reality, she was just a skeleton, without a shape or a name" (I.S., p11).

Though Rashid loves her, Pooro cannot surrender entirely to him, and she experiences disappointment and abhorrence towards men and disgust towards her male child. When the boy sucked her breast milk, she felt:

"Hamida felt as if the boy was drawing the milk from her veins and was sucking it out with force, just as his father had used force to take her. All said and done, he was his father's son, his father's flesh and blood, and shaped like him. He had been planted inside her by force, nourished inside her womb against her will – and was now sucking the milk from her breasts, whether she liked it or not."(T.S., p 29)

Ritu Menon, in her work "No Woman's Land: Women from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh Write on the Partition of India (2004), says:

.. Women were bartered like oranges and apples; apportioned between countries

According to official classification -Hindu, Muslims, Sikhs; minor; legitimate or illegitimate; abducted or not; forcibly converted vs. voluntarily married -with no choice or rights...

There are other female characters who not only contribute to the plot but also make a lasting impression on the readers. Pooro's mother wants one more son, a brother for her daughters but rejects abducted Pooro. Women were reduced merely as bodies carrying the burden of honors of their families. Taro, another female character in the novel, suffers from some unknown deadly disease. She feels devastated and trapped; her bones are stuck out of her flesh, she appears like a breathing skeleton, and she wants to die as her husband forces her into prostitution. Taro cries out that another woman is the mistress of his husband's heart and house. Taro still survives though she is neither loved nor wanted. The mad woman becomes a victim of some lustful men and gets pregnant. K.K. Sharma and B.K. Johri, in the Preface to *The Partition in Indian English Novels* (1988), writes:

"Women became a special target of communal fury; they were abducted, raped, and paraded naked in the streets, with shaven heads and breasts severed from the trunks."

Kammo, the little girl who lives with her aunt in a very miserable condition, tries to find her mother in Pooro. Laajo, Ramchand's sister, fears returning to the family that had once rejected abducted Pooro's comeback; she says to Pooro:

"So far, our families have been mourning the loss of one, and now they can grieve the death of two. Pooro, I have nowhere to go. What face will I show to anyone?"(79)

Conclusion:

The story concludes with Pooro finding a sense of closure and a chance for a new beginning. Despite all she has been through, she returns to her new family, symbolizing her resilience and determination. The novel's ending leaves readers with hope and a reminder of the human spirit's ability to endure and rebuild, even in the face of profound tragedy. The novel ultimately portrays women as central figures in preserving their families' honor and humanity during one of the most tumultuous periods in Indian history.

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