



PARTITION TRAUMA AND WOMEN : UNENDING LAMENT IN AMRITA PRITAM'S *PINJAR* (THE SKELETON)

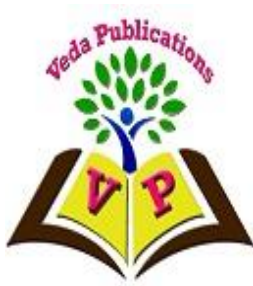
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ABSTRACT



The research explores the gendered experience of partition. Partition changed the whole scenario of sub-continent creativity of two different nations India and Pakistan. The themes of gendered discriminations, separation, communal riots, cultural deterioration, double marginalization, identity crises, the feeling of disgust are studied theoretically. Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* demonstrates the role of religion in the partition that largely impacted the Psychological and sexual condition of women. The Present Paper endeavors to interpret Amrita Pritam's *Partition classic Pinjar* (The Skeleton) as a metaphor of violence against women offering a realistic portraiture of their excruciating suffering, victimization, trapped anguish and traumas.

Keywords: *Partition , Gender , Women , Trauma , Amrita Pritam*



INTRODUCTION

The Partition of the sub – continent was one of the most distressing and bloodiest massacres in the history. Violence against women is an old age practice. Women's body has been a site of contest in India since Vedic ages. Indian epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the examples of age old maltreatment, suppression, torture, and humiliation of women.

The Partition of India was the great historical event in 1947. Partition is one of the most tragic events causing unprecedented traumatic experiences of physical suffering, pangs of loss, and pangs of separation. During partition women were subjected to maximum exploitation, male dominance, torture, humiliation and injustice like gender inequality but still they play the wonderful roles of an abiding wife, obedient daughter and a loving sacrificing mother.

The tragedy of the partition of India and the communal riots have given rise to the creative genius of English , Hindi , Punjabi , Urdu and Bengali writers across the globe . The trauma and holocaust of that time has left a tremendous impact on the works of Indian writers like Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (1950) , Manohar Malagonkar's *'Bend in the Ganges'* (1964) ,Khushwant Singh's *'Train to Pakistan'* (1956), Balchandra Rajan's *'Dark Dancer'* (1955), Bapsi Sidhwa's *'Ice Candy Man'* (1988) , Bhasham Sahni's *'Tamas'* (1974) , Salman Rushdie's *'Midnight's Children'* (1980) are distinguished signatures in the arena of English literature who have published novels based on the themes of partition.

The testimonies of women who sacrificed for their family and suffered the consequences of displacement , forced marriage , destitution and rape

challenge the very rhetoric of nationalism and statehood .

Amrita Pritam was an Indian novelists, essayist and poet, a versatile talent who wrote in Punjabi and Hindi. She is equally loved on both sides of India and Pakistan border. Amrita Pritam, doyen of Indian literature, had a magnificent career extended over half a century. Amrita Pritam was born in Gujranwala in Punjab (now in Pakistan) on 31st August 1919. Her father was a Sikh Preacher and the editor of literary Journal.

Amrita Pritam's heaves a feminist voice through her female characters of her novel *Pinjar* (The Skeleton). She delineates the declining standard element of humanity through her novels. She has an in-depth and idiosyncratic approach towards feminism because she was also a victim of Partition. The novel 'Pinjar' shows that communal hatred was mainly and deeply rooted in the minds of Hindus and Muslims.

The novel is a saga of pain and compassion of women of both sides. Pritam in her novels shows us the women who have suffered a lot because of the norms and beliefs of society. It explores how men establish their masculine powers and fulfill their desire by assaulting women. The novel 'Pinjar' was translated into English by Khushwant Singh as the 'Skeleton' and into French by 'Denis Matriage'. The cinematic adaption of the novel was released in 2003, which won the National Award in the best film category conferred by the Indian Government. The novel 'Pinjar' is a saga of communal and religious conflict during Partition which sabotage the human's self.

'Pinjar' is a story of abduction of a young girl 'Puro' by a man (Rashid) of rival religion in order to avenge the family enmity. The entire journey



of reversal of Puro to Hamida analyses the novel as depressing and saddening. The novel examines and traces down the hitch in the life of a protagonist Puro during the time of Partition. The novelist critically explores the ways in which the destiny of its protagonist Puro eventually becomes the fate of thousands of women at the time of Partition. Her journey of life after being uprooted from her soil and thrown into an alien land is highlighted by Pritam in *Pinjar*.

The novel is a critique of the society at large which considers the woman as a property to be usurped and used according to its wish, as Menon and Bhasin rightly pointed out that :-

“ [the] material, symbolic and political significance of abduction of women was not lost _ _ _ _ on the women themselves _ _ _ their communior or on _ _ _ governments. As a retaliatory measure, It was simultaneously as assertion of the identity and humiliation of the rival community through the appropriation of its women.” (Menon,3).

Pinjar is basically the story of Puro who is kidnapped by a Muslim man Rashid in order to avenge a past calamity in a similar way. She after struggling a lot manages to escape and goes home, but her father refuses to accept her saying that he can not keep her as nobody will marry her because she has lost her status and identity. She had been abducted which now puts her chastity and fidelity to question:

“You have lost your faith and birth right. If we dare to help you, we will be cut down and finished without a trace of blood left behind to tell our faith.” (P.23)

Rejection was a bigger blow of pain than her abduction. Puro's identity undergoes a drastic

change. Rashid forces marriage on her and changes her to 'Hamida' from Puro. Meanwhile Lajjo, Ramchand's sister and wife of Trilok, Puro's brother kidnapped by Muslims. Puro somehow manages to free Lajjo from the Muslims with the help of Rashid, her husband.

All the three characters are treated merely as body, not as humans. Taro is suffering from unknown disease and disowned by her husband. Her illness and her husband's attitude towards her are unbearable. She wants death to force her from the cage of life. Taro says to Puro:

“What can I tell you / when a girl is given away in marriage, God deprives her of her tongue so that she may not complain. For full two years, I had to sell my body for a cup of pottage and few rags. I am like a whore, a prostitute _ _ _ there is no justice in the world, nor any god. He (her husband) can do what he likes. There is no God to stop him. God's fetter were for me and only for my feet”.(P.36-38)

Another incident is mentioned in the novel, where a young girl was paraded naked.

“One day Puro saw that a young girl was paraded naked while ten youths in the form of procession accompanied by drum passed by their village _ _”(P.91)

The novel highlights the large scale of women molestation during partition. Even in refugee camps women were not safe during these days. The refugee camps were called the safe places for women and they were fully protected by military guards. But the reality was different, the novelist narrates the situations at the refugee camps as follows:



There was a refugee camp in the adjoining village set up for the Hindus and Sikhs. The camp was guarded by the military. But daily the Muslim hooligans would come and take away Young girls from the camp at night and bring them back next morning.

Through the characters; Puro, Kammo, Lajo, Taro, Amrita tries to unveil the facets of brutality against women and her trauma. Here, Amrita highlights that women are considered merely bodies nothing more than the bodies and violation of women's bodies becomes the moral perversion of the community itself. Women had to constantly prove their innocence and assert their right to dignity in our patriarchal society. The story dramatically captured the trouble and despair of Puro as a victim of situation while the story moves on an emotional ride with twists and turns which leaves us wonder struck as what will happen the next.

The communal violence being inflicted upon people is precisely penned down by Amrita Pritam :

"The streets ran with blood and were to be cluttered with Human corpses, with no one to burry or cremate them, the stink from putrefying flesh hung in the air spreading pestilences." (84)

Reena Mitra gives comment on *Pinjar: Pinjar* depicts a world of social reality which draws its meaning from an interpretation of experienced reality, a reality which engendered not by a system or a doctrine that prevails but by a sense or sensitivity which helps organize that raw data of experiences into takes stock of that which asserts itself in the experiential past, however much we try to banish it from our consciousness. (Mitra 100)

The novel focuses on the fact that when a social evil surpassed by the victim is on a sole basis it is difficult to accept the sufferer fearing the disrespect due to the social system. The novel is a tragic tale of conflicting loyalties which is resulted as a horrifying appearance or nothingness (no life – no flesh) metaphorically.

The novel shows that the female has an appealing body which is continuously abused by egotistical society. The story shows the narrow-minded and rationally debilitated society. Pritam highlights the enduring and the agonizing barbarity of human frenzy and human disaster in the novel. The author draws the picture of dislodged individuals just as an endeavor to show their inclination, compassion and anguishing torment. *Pinjar* outlines a universe of social reality which draws its importance from the depiction of experienced reality.

The novel *Skeleton* is a saga of women's sacrifice, courage and suffering. Amrita Pritam has highlighted the deep human psyche during partition. Puro, the central character symbolizes that even a *Skeleton* has to live in the face of adversities. The novel *Skeleton* very well narrates the truth of life, the Karma and the destiny. The title *Skeleton* is highly symbolic in nature. The novelist thus struggles for the emancipation of women and identity.

It can be concluded that the issues discussed in the novels bring forth the brutality against women during the partition. Through these women characters, the novelist makes visible the trauma, anguish pain and ambivalence that mask the experience of partition. It is the story of continuous wounds of patriarchy and partition and how it turns people into *Skeleton*. Rejection of women victims by society and family oppressed them which were depicted in Pritam's novels.



Pinjar (The Skeleton) is a saga of helplessness of women and the struggle for survival of the individual amidst the socio – political and cultural forces. The novel highlights the ugly side of the hidden social evils and also the bitterness of the upheavals due to the communal disparities. Her novel displays the status of women as a result of political and social manipulation, a situation that cries out and pleads for dramatic and swift change.

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