

Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*: Saga of Pain and Suffering

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Abstract

Amrita Pritam is a prolific writer and Jnanpith Laureate in Punjabi literature. In her *Pinjar*, she highlights the question of existence to both Hindus and Muslims in general and women in particular during the partition period i.e. 1940s. It is a novel originally written in Punjabi and translated by Khushwant Singh in English in 2009. The novel depicts socio-political, cultural and historical conditions and its aftermath in 1947. Author has poignantly portrayed the pathetic plight of women's life during the partition period. The story is narrated from Pooro's point of view. This story is a unique specimen of Indian partition. The present novel represents horrific situation of women. It is a real tale told by Pritam with full of sound and fury. It is about error of human judgment that enhanced pain and suffering of women at large proportion.

Key words: Partition, culture, patriarchy, dilemma, psychology etc.

Pinjar is a poignant story about how conflicts between nations, communities and families had to suffer to the subsequent generations. The novel describes the patriarchal society during that period and how women are enforced to suffocate the decisions made by them. It effectively uses historical events to its background to show severe reality. Pritam has depicted the real events that had taken place during the partition and used her own fictional imagination in this novel. *Pinjar* revolves around a Hindu girl who belongs to money lender's family. Through this character named Pooro, the author tells us the reality of the twentieth century women who are helpless and accept their tragic fate amidst the chaos created by male-hegemony. The novel is the mirror of showing pain and suffering of the partition of India. To quote from

the text:

The sky was a colorless grey. Pooro sat on her haunches with a sack spread beneath her feet. She was shelling peas. She pressed open a pod and pushed out the row of peas with her finger. A slimy little slug stuck to her thumb. She felt as if she had stepped into a cesspool; she ground her teeth, flicked off the slug, and rubbed her hand between her knees.

The above lines are apt to connote the inner world of Pooro. It is not only the geographical partition but also the partition of human souls. The soul of suffering woman is beyond the measurement of humanity. It has crossed its thresholds and reached its apex through this catastrophe called 'partition'. It is a realistic depiction of Indian society.

Pooro, protagonist of the novel, remembers her parent's home before her forceful abduction by Rashid. He was put on an oath by his uncle. The Shaikhs were taking wild justice of the abduction of their aunt by the Sahukars. Pooro belonged to the same Sahukars. However, she has been grateful to him because he had treated her well and her honour had remained clean. Pooro has requested him to let her return to her home. He brought a silk dress and given to Pooro. He told her that the next day ~~M~~ will be coming to perform their marriage:

Tomorrow you have to wear this; a maulvi will be coming to perform our nikah. Be ready in time.

Pooro shocked to listen above words and her feet slipped from the ground. Pooro's delicate dreams to become the bride to Ram Chand was shattered. Pooro requests Rashid not to do this. She warns Rashid if he forced her then ~~he~~ will commit suicide. She asked him: "Why did he do this with her?" Pooro continued "Why his head of family and brother doing such thing? What was to happen has happened?" Pooro's paused for a while and Rashid told her:

Did you know that our families, the Shaikhs and the Sahukarashave been at loggerheads for many generations? You grandfather had advanced us Rs.500 /- on compound interest and taken our house as mortgage. We could not redeem the mortgage. ...their time. My grandfather made my uncles swear that they would avenge this insults. When we heard of the plans of your

wedding, there was talk of settling old scores. They picked on me; they made me take an oath on the Koran that I would abduct the Sahukar's daughter before she was wed.

Rashid tells the whole story to Pooro. Here Amrita Pritam attempts to convince the mind of readers and given soft corner to Rashid. After listening the story of her fate, she asks Rashid:

"If my uncle abducted your aunt, what fault was that of mine?"

In this conversation, Pooro understood the fact that she was the victim of corrupted system of Indian politics. Author also shows that the dark sides of horrible partition. Many cases like loot, rape, killing happened during this period but not a single case recorded during this era. Rashid's mind was burning in the fire of revenge and Pooro is also burning in the fire of hatred for him. Pooro's anger paves the way in her behavior in small events like when she was pregnant, she was not happy at all instead she tells him that this is the outcome of his committed sin.

Pooro was caught up in the constant dilemma. She planned to escape from Rashid's confinement. One dark night she tried and succeed. After reaching in the main door of her parent's house. She rattled the chain and collapsed in house-yard. Pooro felt her family may hug her. But no one welcomed her. Even her father was not ready to accept his daughter. He told her that no one would marry her. She has lost her religion and everything. If ~~they~~ may try to help her, then all Hindu community

will outcast them. Here author shows the father's worried mind and responsibility of his family future.

Who will marry you now? You have lost your religion and your birthright. If we dare to help you, we will be wiped out without a trace of blood left behind to tell of our fate.

The scene metaphorically highlights the gender discrimination. In this event, author shows women's subordinate place in Indian society. It indicates her helplessness. We also can observe the fact that woman is also women's the worst enemy. Author highlights the hypocritical ambience of society. On the one hand woman is worshipped as the goddess but on the other hand she is helpless like Pooro. Not only her community but also her family rejects her. How absurd? She has no place and space in her parent's family and society is far away to take care of her.

Pinjar (the skeleton) explores the problem faced by women during the time of partition of India. Novelist has shown the fact that the women were used just as a tool of gratify men. She knew the sensitivity of the subject therefore portrayed it with aptly. The story dramatically captured the pain and suffering of women. Hamida (Pooro's converted name) is victim of men's inherent evilness. She is a representative figure of those women who are physically exploited, brutally raped and then rejected by ~~the~~ families. The story emotionally moves the readers. The novelist has crafted this story with a sense of commitment and full of dedication. She

was herself the eye-witness of the partition of India. Novelist describes very ambivalent nature of patriarchal culture. The rules and regulations made by male-dominated culture captured and enslaved women from centuries to till date. Simon De Beauvoir also says that 'women is not born but becomes one'. The patriarchal culture governs their ethical patterns for their selfish motifs. Novelist suggests that the codes and ethical concerns have to be redefined and reshaped in the present scenario. It always has to be tasted and verified with the passage of time and tide. The preconceived notions and prejudices about caste, class, gender, discrimination within family and in society and other undiscovered notions pressurize women to accept fate without any questions. Pritam sincerely tried to voice the voiceless through her pen. She has painted it on the background of our Partition and the treatment given to women by her fate, family and society. Pritam's *Pinjar*, though it is a novel, is a sort of critical treatise which explores patriarchal psyche to go beyond the artificially created geographical and psychological boundaries by men for women. Both the communities have shares their ups and downs for centuries together and suddenly look at each other with hatred and revenge. *Pinjar* shows how partition has provoked violence, bloodshed, displacement and migration of people from their native places. Partition also portrays the inhuman treatment given to women. ~~They~~ were the worst sufferers and exploited in different ways. Many women became widowed, lost their children, abducted,

raped and their pain and suffering cannot be explained in words.

Women's delicacy and sensitivity to deal with partition issues was very different as compared to men. They are deeper, philosophical and perceive the world in different ways. Therefore, the traumatic experience experienced by them left the permanent scars on their heart and soul. They have been ignored at large extent but Amrita Pritam has deliberately attempted to capture the dewdrop and reflected it in the larger canvas of her pen through this work of art. Those people who have survived from this partition either handicapped or could not recount the terrible experience due to mental shock they have undergone. The author-cum-poet Amrita Pritam tried her best to recount the past history in an effective way and immortalized her creation.

The *Pinjar* shows us a saga of suffering and pain. The novel brings to the forefront of an innocent girl who is crying in the dark for light. The deliberate torch bearers i.e. society switched off their critical faculty with age-old customs and destroyed many hopes and aspirations of Pooro in particular and women in general. Women are metaphorically considered as glass. If it broke down, there is no provision in society to recover and reconcile it. She has only tears, sorrow, tragic fate to console her feelings but not a single human being may comprehend her world. She is utterly alone in a wide wide sea. Pooro's suffering and pain is infinite in a wide sea. No one is willing to understand her. As S.T. Coleridge says, in his magnum opus "Rime of the Ancient Mariner":

Alone, alone, all, all alone,

Alone on a wide wide sea!

And never a saint took pity on

My soul in agony (Part IV, lines 9-12).

The book reflect how the lines of history plays hide and seek game with women's existence. The word 'history' also connotes 'his story'. The pages of history have filled with kings and men. There are rare words on historical documents that has a mention of women and queens. It also shows that religion also treated women as inferior to men. The same psyche has rolled down for ages and ages till present time and Partition event was not an exception. Women not only had the weapons in their hands but also no identity at all to face all odds. Author pin-points the ideological political clashes that proved to be highly inflammable to wipe out everything and not left even a shadow to look back again. Partition has really destroyed the rhyme and rhythm of peaceful life.

Pinjar also explains how women helplessly accepts the reality and accepts to stay with their abductors because they do not have any option. The society has closed all sides of the doors to bring back to them. It indicated women did not have their own identity and status. Pooro is the representative women to proclaim the falling standards of society. She was the partitioned and marginal voice during her time. She is marginalized twice. One from society and another from family. The title *Pinjar* itself indicates mere artificial skeleton in which human bondage erased forever. What remains? Only *pinjar* i.e. mere skeleton because society has

snatched its blood and flesh. The novel pathetically captured the miserable death of a mad woman. The scene of mad woman's pregnancy and her death shows the darkness of partition. The issues of identity crisis can be evident in the conversion events of Pooro and mad woman's child. The novels also show the honour killing incidents of women. Pritam shows the perplexed conventions and directionless society during partition time. To quote W. B. Yeats, in his poem, entitled, "Easter 1916"

All changed, changed utterly

A terrible beauty is born (lines 15-16).

Partition is really a terrible beauty where human behavior changed.

Thus, women are considered as an

incarnation of Goddess but in the novel they are incarnation of pain and suffering. They are source of joy, love and creation but made as victim of lustful eye. *Pinjar* questions the artificial status quo of women during partition. It mirrors the actual experience of women after rape and kidnapping. It focused light on thousand kidnapped women who lost their chastity and nationality due to separation of nations. Pritam pens the infinite suffering and painful transformations of nations in general and women in particular. It is not only the creation of imagination but also the saga of historical records of the events. It enkindles readers' imagination to rethink the past with objective eyes and nurture their thought processes.

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