

## **Hermeneutics of Lacerated Souls amidst Political Praxis of Partition in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar***

**Priyanka Bhardwaj**

Department of English,  
M.K.P. P.G. College,  
Dehradun, Uttarakhand  
Affiliated to H.N.B Garhwal  
(Central) University,  
Srinagar, Uttarakhand, India  
**DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2020.5.4.04**

### **Abstract**

*Pinjar* (1950) is a precise novel which talks and envisages the status of women. Amrita Pritam has very well constructed the narration of partition from the women's point of view. It is a snivel of women against her existential destiny and social cruelty. This novel is a demonstration of impactful narration of the archetypal social line against the weaker section of the society. She is the representation of what women had undergone during partition. These women had no thoughts in partition but they were the ones who suffered it the most. This research paper studies the unheard voices and pain of partition through literature. The novelist has used the mythos and ethos of partition to explore its various versions through fiction of the Indian subcontinent.

**Keywords-** Womanhood, Migration, Freedom, Struggle, Trauma

### **Introduction**

The partition in the Indian subcontinent and the incidents that occurred with remarkable suddenness with the singular violent character would definitely inspire more and more students to take up research based on the exploration of literature from the subcontinent. In order to reinvent the history of partition

through constant telling and retelling, the vital role was evidently played by the historians, social scientists, culturists, anthropologists, journalists and of course, the litterateurs, to discover the affected neighbour and its role in the development of internal and external mechanisms. This way, beyond the observations of the socio-political scientists of the affected countries, and their historical and political memory is documented and every part created by the division is observed as relevant to society.

This research paper looks critically into those moments of history, when countries were divided and how these divided societies created in the divided nations across the globe have accepted their geographical partition, for example, the historical event when East and West Germany was divided in 1990 or the recorded saga of suffering like that occurred during the partition in the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947. While considering these two mentioned cases, it has been deciphered that the correlative dominance that exists between the two partitioned countries appears much beyond the labyrinth and antithetical to that proposed by the well-liked effigy of a dissected nation brawling with its national destiny and smudged in steady nationalism.

### **Audacious Amrita's Gloomy Self:**

Amrita Pritam and feminism has been synonyms with each other ever since she started making her mark as a writer, especially when she started carving out strong women characters or revolutionary plots in her novels, essays, biographies and poems. Her acclaimed stature as rebellious, activist and defiant writer passionately dedicated to the narrative of partition, which definitely made her stand out amongst her readers. Her special stance amongst the community of Indian writers reflects her outrageous depiction of the complexities and ruthless reality on both sides

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E-Journal in English

Disclaimer: For Any kind of confirmation and Authentication visit the website of the journal.

of the divide during partition, which made her an accomplished writer who has been known for her aesthetic rhythm and poetic quality with distinctive paradoxical paradigms of bliss and happiness but are balanced by loaded sorrows. Her literary work exhibit moments of spiritual misery, coupled with dejection and gloominess.

This poetic quotation from one of her poems has:

The arrows of anguish  
Pierce the palms and the tips of my fingers  
But somewhere on the lacerated fringes  
A hope is awakening to life. (Pritam and Singh)

*Pinjar*, written in 1950 by Amrita Pritam has been accomplished as the most popular novel, for constructing the narrative of chronicles, which are the mournful reminder of sorrows and pain, genocidal violence and the twin horrors against women and casualties that occurred consequentially with partition. Hence, the central theme of the novel revolved around love and marriage, loss and guilt and the role played by women.

Generally autobiography is deemed to be the gospel of truth. Amrita Pritam wrote an autobiographical novel 'Revenue Stamp', which is a documentation of an experience that is fierce and explores of truth. Being a poet herself, she maintains sincerity mingled with creativity while narrating her own life story as her vision was expansive enough to make her story 'Stamp of Truth'. Her out of the box feminine awareness scans the development and she visualizes this process as an accomplishment for pursuit of life.

### Pooro: Skeleton of Muliebrity

Replete with the story of the novel, which revolves around ambitions, failures, aspirations and successes of the woman characters striving hard to resist limitations imposed as a consequence of customs and

traditions in their battle for their livelihood, is the glorification of the extended violence against them. The lives of the woman serve as a typical example of the burdens and blessings on womanhood set against different backgrounds. Being a woman and a writer, Pritam has known to replicate feelings and common tendencies and the responses of women to love, joy, pain and sorrows. Nevertheless, she simultaneously unfolds elements exclusive to the life, culture and scenario in and around women.

Etymologically 'Pinjar' has been derived from Punjabi, which literally means 'Skeleton'. Amrita Pritam strips the events of its historical significance and elucidates the divisional mishap of India-Pakistan whirling around the life of the protagonist Puro, which eventually became an epitome of sadism and atrocities against women, disgrace to humanity and ultimate capitulation to existential fate. Similarly, when we talk about the communal riots that took place during Indo-Pakistan partition, which ceased to be a local issue, and rather it became a global issue.

The human degeneration witnessed during the disturbances following the partition, the large scale abduction of women and children and the break-up of the normal way of life for millions of persons have grave sociological implications. (Vakil, 77)

Paro, the main protagonist of *Pinjar* pays a very heavy price to save her family and its reputation. Pritam sagaciously spins a tale around Pooro, especially after being kidnapped by Rashid, a Muslim, intentionally creating a metaphor of revenge, which is carved around a calamity of national and religious division that occurred in the history.

The narrative of abduction revolving around the communal divide and the agony created thereafter has been adroitly structured in the warp of the plot which only Pooro undergoes and the intensification of the agony

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E-Journal in English

Disclaimer: For Any kind of confirmation and Authentication visit the website of the journal.

of abduction after her being willingly abandoned by her father to avert severe communal riots. The narrative of the sexual harassment and abuse of a lady who was insane and a girl during the time of partition brings to the fore the narrative of violence and rape as evinced by Butalia when she calls it a "widespread sexual savagery" and further says, "it was a war on each other's women or a war waged specially on women and children." Paaro, irrespective of her own social catastrophe, evolves as a messiah for these two women characters, when she adopts the son of the insane woman not as a sign of pity but out of her love and affection.

These skeletal incidents spread throughout in the pages of history of partition have been deftly fictionalised by Amrita Pritam as a dedication in *Pinjar*, when Paaro (Pooro's sister in law) takes a solemn pledge to help these souls against the catastrophe of life. Amrita Pritam is not oblivious of the humongous strength of the woman character in Paaro after she attempts to save her sister-in-law successfully from the ominous charge of oppression and her obvious predicament. Pritam has created the strong feminist character of Paaro, with an intention to create a metaphor of discourse, obviously surrounding around war on women which moves around the issue of rape and sacrifice. Pooro, the main protagonist, along with her husband Rashid appears as substantial, in contrast to her parents who are possessive apropos khaap panchayats who would rather get involved in honour killing for the dignity of the family than suffer. Pooro, in contrast, is a pleasant character.

Evidently from the intertwining of plots and subplots, the author is creating the public opinion among its readers irrespective of being a male and female for example the question of women's honour and subsequent accomplishment of self-respect and pride. The character of Pooro, is symptomatic character

replete with the spirit of power and socially and historically significant while Rashid's character is a vital character portrayed in sync with the female counterpart in Pooro with apparent flawless characterization. Pooro stands out as a glorified and suppressed character as a foil to the Indian patriarchal society.

*Pinjar*, is a fictional document of the highlighted problems faced by the women community during partition. Violence is a language which constantly effectively constitutes and reconstitutes a subject. Pooro is a by-product of violence of partition. Hence, whenever Amrita Pritam refers to the cases of abduction and rape of women, she refers to cataclysm of violence that history seems to suggest. *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, a book by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin recounts:

The Muslims used to announce that they would take away our daughters. They would force their way into homes and pick up young girls and women. Ten or twenty of them would enter, tie up the menfolk and take the women. We saw many who had been raped and disfigured, their faces and breasts scarred, and then abandoned. They had tooth-marks all over them. Their families said, "How can we keep them now? Better that they are dead." Many of them were so young—18, 15, 14 years old—what remained of them now? Their "character" was now spoilt. One had been raped by ten or more men—her father burnt her, refused to take her back. There was one village, Makhtampura, where all night they plundered and raped, they dragged away all the young girls who were fleeing in kafilas. No one could do anything—if they did, they would be killed. Everyone was running for their lives. I saw it all—mothers telling their

daughters they were ruined, bemoaning their fate, saying it would have been better if they hadn't been born. . . . -  
Durga Rani (Menon & Bhasin)

Whenever the reference to the novel *Pinjar* is made, it is to portray it as the saga of brittle and awful aspect of partition, along with the reference to the communal riots between Hindu and Muslim and their emerging rivalry. The colonial partition remains immutable with the narrative of massacre and rape to create territories based on majorities and minorities.

The partition of India and Pakistan is the largest documented immigration in history, which caused a biggest communal riot, which inciting carnage on the largest level and atrocities and all kinds of inflictions. The national boundaries of both the countries were lined by the refugees resulting in millions of children being orphaned as a result. Almost close to two million people suffered barbarity and were rendered the victims of terrible fate created by man-made partition.

Partition, which was the source of the ghastly tragedies have been a favourite theme with most of the Indo-Anglian fiction writers. Numerous authors especially women writers and novelists from the Indian subcontinent have depicted the conditions of women caught in the vicious rigmarole of the pre and post partition era and with an yeoman spirit have drafted a realistic account of communal outrage and its malicious impact on women. Though different writers may have different perspectives and hence, the might of their subject matter may vary as far as the gripping subject matter or its thematic gist are concerned. The common connecting thematic features that have predominantly spread over the different pages the writings based on the theory of partition is that every writer believed the knee-jerk partition was done arbitrarily. The important fall-out of partition was mass migration of people who crossed over from one territory

based on religion. The mass dislocation of people led to massive up-rootedness, carnage, communal riots, haphazardous chaos, gang-rapes, kidnappings and separation of people from their families while power was being transferred from one to another.

Many authors have thematically depicted violence related to partition. These books raise concern about the socio-political conditions of women and outrageous violence against them. The incidents that were actually seen, felt and experienced were penned. The heart-wrenching tale of abduction, rape, carnage, religious conversions under coercion and forced marriage of women. The aghast narrative of women drenched in blood with their stomach ripped open and intestines popped out are some of the horrendous narratives of partition.

The most predictable form of violence experienced by women, as women, is when the women of one community are sexually assaulted by the men of the other, in an overt assertion of their identity and a simultaneous humiliation of the other by "dishonoring" their women. (Purohit)

#### **The Churning of the Dominions and Resonating Voices:**

The newly formed dominions of the two nations and their naive governmental agencies suffered from their administrative adolescence while dealing with the challenges related to unmitigated poverty, hunger and population explosion, which transcended the visible forms of violence and genocide. These challenges were too grim, uncontrollable and humongous for the government to handle due to lack of any vital resources and unkempt technology. All these flip-flops led to the most outrageous communal riots, which had unfortunately reached its zenith, with the intensifying smog of disorder and chaos, which had been concurrently prevailing all around. The communal harmony

between the Hindus and the Muslims during the pre-independent freedom movement in an undivided Indian subcontinent had paved the way for communal strains in and critical situations. People were bereft of their personal belongings like homes, family and relatives, who had been constantly shifting with an aim to protect themselves. Whereas, on the other hand, there was no concrete policy of socio-psychological rehabilitation. The construction of nation and providing the basic amenities to the constant inflow of migrants from both sides of the divide were the major challenges faced by the government of the newly formed states. Re-establishing the countless homeless people flocking in huge numbers became the most daunting task.

Interpersonal relations suffered the setback. Loot, arson, pyromania became the norm when all gilded monuments, mansions, and big bungalows were burned and looted. Worse was when innocent children were butchered while family members watched in thunderstruck. While some women were abducted, raped and murdered, others were abducted and were forced into matrimony after forcible religious conversions. Mass carnage took place when trains and buses plying across borders with migrants were attacked by the bunch of fanatic hooligans, while mercilessly killing every single individual that they met en-route. The railway tracks were littered with piled up dead bodies, and the trains were widely known as the 'blood trains'. In the entire process of increasing number of widespread cases of the recovery of the mercilessly truncated bodies, somehow the psychological impact on those people who though survived miraculously stood petrified witness to the historical event. The captive migrants were apprehended and were doused in kerosene and burned alive irrespective of their sex and age. Not only the railway tracks but the corpses lay

across in the streets narrating the horrific tale of partition.

Eventually policies were framed to constrain violence as to stop bloodshed between two major religious communities especially the Hindus and the Muslims, which followed partition. Though, preference was given to individual choices, still since India was declared a secular state, majority of the Hindus and some Muslims had made a preference to stay in India, and since Pakistan was declared a Muslim state, maximum Muslims associated themselves with Pakistan. Much beyond the anticipation of the policy makers, partition of the Indian subcontinent proved the contrary, leading to massive violence and countless number of people uprooted their lives and from their homeland. It is estimated that around two million people were killed during this whole process of separation. Due to lack of control in maintaining the law and order, weak politics, there was an outrage which caused women to be raped, murdered and trafficked. Several children were killed. Millions of people lost their homes and lives. It is the largest mass migration in the world and in human history.

Amid this massive confusion of division a large untold number of women suffered a trauma more horrific than death. Women of any age, any religion and any social class whether rich or poor were tortured and raped. Shamelessly, some were even stripped naked and paraded down streets just to intensify their trauma and humiliation. While in many other tragic cases, families forced the girls to commit suicide so to preserve their pride and honor fearing of their daughters might get raped and converted to another religion.

#### **Lacerated Womanhood: Scapegoat amidst Religious Fanaticism**

Indefensibly the foremost victims of partition were women whichever religion they belong to. Women who survived and rescued most of them were disowned by their own

## The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E-Journal in English

Disclaimer: For Any kind of confirmation and Authentication visit the website of the journal.

families. Once raped, they lost their dignity and space in the society. People abuse them and again and again misuse them. Some were forcibly sold into prostitution. Survival became very tough for them. Society never accepted them. Again life became challenging. In several cases, the rape victims unwillingly married to their rapists, somewhere converted into other religion and never ever united with their natal families again. This was the worst form of violence in the name of creating the two new nations. Men of any religion, whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh saw for revenge, they searched for women opposite to their religion, kidnapped them, raped them, and killed them. Both the countries became a slaughterhouse.

By May 1948 some 12,500 women had been found and restored to their families. Ironically, and tragically, many of the women did not want to be rescued at all. For, after their seizure they had made some kind of peace with their new surroundings. Now, as they were being reclaimed, these women were deeply unsure about how their original families would receive them. They had been 'defiled' and, in a further complication, many were pregnant. These women knew that even if they were accepted, their children- born out of a union with the 'enemy'- would never be. Often, the police and their accomplices had to use force to take them away. 'You could not save us them, said the women, 'what right have you to compel us now? (Menon and Bhasin; Butalia)

Filled with the fear, people themselves killed their own mothers, daughters, wives, sisters to protect them from abduction and rape by the fanatics. This was the ghastly condition at that time. People didn't know what freedom actually meant to them, unless they shattered with the harsh reality of bloodbath that approximately claimed the lives of more than a million people. The holocaust do not ends here only. There are much more disgusting, horrifying and real incidents which degraded

womanhood. Some brutal cases were reported where women after rape had their breasts chopped off, while others endured both physical and verbal abuse including torturing of genitals. Maximum of these sufferers didn't survive. Women and girls, who were raped, sexually violated, killed, afterwards their bodies had been mutilated and skin disfigured. Furthermore, their bodies were inscribed with graffiti that reflected the violator's political or religious proclivity, also, tattooed with words either like "Pakistan Zindabad" or "Jai Hind". Hardly ever and hardly anywhere, have women "written history". They have left few accounts, personal or otherwise, and have committed much less to writing than men. Women historians have noted this absence and emphasized the importance of retrieving women's history through oral sources. Because women have used speech much more widely than the written word, oral history practitioners have found in interviews and testimonies a rich vein to mine and to surface what, so far, has been hidden from history. (Menon and Bhasin)

Authors Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin in their book *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* recorded the trauma as stated by different women. *Durga Rani* was one of these women. She stated that- "In the villages of Head Junu, Hindus threw their young daughters into wells, dug trenches and buried them alive. Some were burnt to death, some were made to touch electric wires to prevent the Muslims from touching them. We heard of such happenings all the time after August 16. We heard all this". (Menon and Bhasin)

In this respect, the rape and molestation of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women before and after Partition probably followed the familiar pattern of sexual violence, and of attack, retaliation and reprisal. What may be remarkable is the exultation that accompanied

it. Stories of women had been stripped “just as bananas are peeled”. (Kashmiri)

The range of sexual violation during the India-Pakistan partition is much more thrilling and less noticed. Stripping, raping, mutilating bodies, parading naked on the streets, disfiguring, tattooing or branding specific religious symbols or slogans on their breasts and genitalia, knifing open the womb, breasts chopped off, killing the fetuses were not only dreadful, but it also explained to the world about women as objects under the hoax of honor in a patriarchal constructive society.

In this subject, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin raise the issue of sexual exploitation of women during the time of the Partition and point out that:

The sexual violence against women is shocking not only for its savagery, but for what it tells us about women as objects in male construction of their own honour. Women’s sexuality symbolizes ‘manhood’; its desecration is a matter of such shame and dishonor that it has to be avenged. Yet, with the cruel logic of all such violence, it is women ultimately who are most violently dealt with as a consequence. (Menon and Bhasin)

Amrita emphasizes that human beings have to prove their innocence from time to time and have to fight for their right to dignity in our male dominated society. Another thought of not accepting the abducted daughter in the family was the safety concern of other family members. It indicates the situations where men negotiated against the safety of male members during those horrendous days. The daughters were the one who had to sacrifice for the well-being of the family.

Uncountable incidents, uncountable women, unlimited violence, this is all what happened in the shade of freedom. This was freedom, which broke several homes,

humiliated people, targeted and savaged women. Hence, incidents and history cannot be changed but penned down or chronicled to bring out the hidden and forgotten tales to remind that *Desecration of Womanhood in the name of Freedom, it is not at all Freedom, Indeed a Sin*. Hence, the inevitably pre-partition communal riots augmented the condition of chaos and hopelessness, which were prevalent in those days and incessantly added more misery to the conditions of women, who were continuously victimized.

#### Works Cited

- Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, Viking. Penguin India), New Delhi, 1998.
- Kashmiri, Shorish. “Humiliated and Harassed: They Left.” *Mushirul Hasan (Tr) India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, vol. 2, 1995, pp. 145–57.
- Menon, Ritu, and Kamla Bhasin. *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition*. Rutgers University Press, 1998.
- Pritam’s, Amrita. “Chapter: IV Amrita Pritam’s The Revenue Stamp: A Candid Evidence of Individuality.” *Select Women’s Autobiographies: A Study*, p. 130.
- Pritam, Amrita, and Harbans Singh. “Pledge.” *Poetry*, JSTOR, 1959, pp. 226–27.
- Purohit, Radhika. “What the Body Remembers: A Feminist Perspective of the Partition of India and Pakistan.” *International Journal of English and Literature*, vol. 3, no. 4, Academic Journals, 2012, pp. 91–96.