

***Pooro* in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* : An Epitome of Violence against Women**

Dr. Garima Singh Baghel

B.Ed Lecturer(English)

BSD College, Farrukhabad

Literary works on post partition India generally deal with people's experience of India and Pakistan's partition. The period of partition was a period of great suffering, trauma, sacrifice and adjustment. The writings of post partition dealt with the violence and the psychological, emotional and ideological consequences of partition.

Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*(1950) is a Punjabi novel, translated into English as *The Skeleton* by Khushwant Singh, depicting the story of a Hindu girl Pooro, abducted by a Muslim boy Rashid and her parents refused to accept the defiled girl due to the fear of communal slaughter. The novel deals with the image of women during partition era and their real status. It tries to explore the silence and painful life of women in the backdrop of partition. This paper seeks to analyze the struggle of a woman and her helplessness, highlighting the situation and status of women, especially in rural areas.

Keywords: Partition, women, violence, religion, nation, status, patriarchy, identity, trauma, struggle.

Literary works on post partition India generally deal with people's experiences of India and Pakistan's partition. The period of partition was a period of great suffering, trauma, sacrifice and adjustment. People were trying to build their life a new but the experience of partition haunted them. Many people expressed themselves by retelling their story of partition, some of which saw immense popularity and controversy. The writings of post partition dealt with violence and the psychological, emotional and ideological consequences of partition. It shows the bitter side of partition, how insensitive, arbitrary political processes uproot and destroy the happy and settled lives.

Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*(1950) is a Punjabi novel, translated into English as *The Skeleton*, by Khushwant Singh, depicting the story of a Hindu girl Pooro, abducted by a Muslim boy Rashida and her parents refused to accept the defiled girl due to the fear of communal slaughter. When the British leave India, a chance of migration and starting of new life is presented to her but she decides to stay where her home was. Amrita Pritam herself migrated from Lahore to India when the former British India was partitioned into the independent states of India and Pakistan. It seems that she was very much moved by the massacres during the time of independence. This probably encouraged her to write such an influential novel which was made into an award-winning film, *Pinjar*(2003).

The novel deals with the image of women during partition era and their real status. It tries to explore the silence around women experiences during that period and depicts the struggle of a woman and her helplessness, highlighting the situation and condition of women, especially in rural areas. *Pinjar* is such an important novel precisely because of how it conceives the status of women.

The novelist set out to construct a narrative of partition from a woman's point of view. This meant

that Pooro becomes the symbol of what women had to endure during partition. In a very powerful way, Pritam argues that the violation of the nation's women on both sides of partition is akin to how partition itself violated the nation. This is to say Pritam does not see much difference between the partition of political violation of the homeland and its consequences of actual violation of women.

As the title of the novel suggests, it is also set against the background of the plight of the women who had been turned into mere skeletons due to the abduction by the men folk. Seen through the eyes of a Hindu girl Pooro, it gives a picturesque description of the mournful condition that resulted due to the scornful attitude of the two-major religious groups of the Hindus and the Muslims against each other during India's partition.

Pinjar is basically the story of Poro who is kidnapped by a Muslim boy named Rashida to revenge a past calamity in a similar fashion. Poro goes through the mournful abduction process which is aggravated by the parental desert when her father refuses to accept her as he fears this act would lead to severe genocide. However, Rashida is deeply in love with her and promises to keep her happy throughout his lifetime in the spite of the fact that he forcefully married her. Rashida is now her husband and protector, but it does not erase the fact that-“He had robbed of her future.” (9). Poro renamed Hamida, comes to accept her new identity and prosper in a provisional, post-traumatic short of way. This shift from being Poro to Hamida is felt in deeply psychological terms. The novelist poignantly writes:

“It was a double life. Hamida by day, Poro by night. In reality she was neither one nor the other; she was just a skeleton without a shape or a name.” (11).

She becomes an agent on behalf of other women whose lives are menaced, which is almost a happy ending. It is a powerful basis for a narrative. As the story unveils, the inner psychology of suppressed woman is clearly reflective:

“The sky was a colorless grey. Poro sat on her haunches with a sack spread beneath her feet. She was shelling peas. She pressed open a pod a pushed out the row of peas with her finger. A slimmy little slug stuck to her thumb. She felt as if she had stepped into a cesspool; she ground her teeth, flicked of the slug and rubbed her hand between her knees, Poro stared at the three heaps in front of her: the empty husks, the pods, and the peas she had shelled. She put her hand on her heart and stared of into space. She felt as if her body was pea-pod inside which she carried a slimy white caterpillar.” (7).

Through caterpillar and pea Amrita Pitam shows the situation of a woman who is quenching for her own identity.

Poro comes across a mad woman and a girl who had been sexually harassed and amidst the unfavorable circumstances, she does her best according to the need of the situation. She even

adopts the son of the mad woman out of love of motherhood. She refers to these as Pinjars (skeletons) and vows to help and protect them against the initial tragedies associated with them. The elders of the village warn Hamida, “This is a matter of religion and one should not stand in its way.” (26) This is clearly reflected as she is successful in rescuing her own sister-in-law from the clutches of harassment and plight through her shrewdness and bravery along with the help and support of Rashida.

In the novel, Pooro is a victim of the misdeeds of her ancestors, she is just a pawn in the rivalry between two family. As she breaks down with Rashida, she asked him, “If my uncle abducted your aunt, what fault was that of mine?” (8) Pooro is not weak, whimpering character. She is strong minded, determined and brave.

All the women characters of the novel are oppressed by the double yoke of patriarchy and aftermath of colonialism. Either the character of Lajjo who was already married and then kidnapped by a Muslim boy during communal riots and become another victim of the partition and bears the agony or Taaro who was married to the man who was already living with some other woman and just to fulfil the wish of her parents and to satisfy the customs of the society, she agrees to marry that man, presents the helplessness and miserable condition of women. Their narratives strongly challenge a single-dimensional, essentializing notion of a nation that is based upon fixity of religious, gendered and nation identities. They show us the picture of a deracinated and alienated women who have suffered a lot because of the norms and beliefs of the patriarchal society. The solidarity exhibited by woman characters in *Pinjar* at once renders the boundaries of religion, porous and projects the relation between them as complex and nuanced rather than as pre-determined by biases.

Through Pooro, Amrita wants to convey the message that if a girl whether Hindu or Muslim after suffering reaches back to her home and is accepted warmly, it should be understood that her soul has reached its destination. Urvashi Butalia has argued that “Women have often

played out multiple and overlapping identities. An understanding of agency.... needs to take into account.... the moral order which is sought to be preserved when women act.”(12)

Pinjar is the depiction of the experience of the partition specially from women’s point of view. The novel is a critique of the society at large which sees the woman’s body as a site of crazy battle for land and territories. It is the women’s bodies that are reduced to skeletons-living skeletons, lunatic skeletons. The lust of men has not even spared the mad woman who is “neither young nor attractive; she is just a lump of flesh without a mind to go with it.... a living skeleton... a lunatic skeleton.... a skeleton picked to its bones by kites and vultures.” (22) The novel depicts how religion becomes a powerful source that constrains women in the name of owner and chastity.

The novelist was deluged by the suppression of women, largely because of their economic dependence on the male members of the family. The woman had become just an object, an artifact. Through Pooro, Amrita is showing the firm determination and boldness of a woman who stood strongly in adverse conditions which is a remarkable approach of Pritam to face the world. The novel shows the ugly side of the hidden social evils and the bitterness of the upheavals due to communal disparities. The author is keen on making the society people aware of the pains undergone by the sufferers and the sympathetic concern they need from them for no fault of their own. *Pinjar* is the voice of the huge outcry that resulted due to religious conflicts during India’s independence and partition.

Throughout the novel, Amrita Pritam has nourished the character of Pooro as an epitome of women power and significance. Although, Rashida is also brought up as a dynamic figure, still the flawless description of Pooro clearly shows the author’s great desire to glorify the suppressed power contained within the female section as against the greatly cherished position and dominating status of the male population.

In the conclusion, we can say that *Pinjar* is the women's cry in prose against her existential fate and social abuse. In this light, Pritam's work displays the status of women as a result of political and social manipulation, a situation that cries out and pleads for a swift change.

Works Cited

Butalia, Urvashi. "Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency During Partition" in *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 28, No. 17, 1993. accessed on 15 February 2018.
<<https://www.jstor.org>> Web.

Pritam, Amrita. *The Skeleton*. Trans. Khushwant Singh. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1987. Print.