

**“It was a sin to be alive in a world so full of evil”: A Critical
Study of *Pinjar***

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Abstract

Amrita Pritam is the foremost Punjabi woman poet. She is the first woman who received the Sahitya Akademi Award for her collection of poems *Sunehere* in 1956. In 1969, the Padma Shree Award is conferred on her by the president of India . She also receives the Bhartiya Jnanpith Award for her collection of poems *Kagaj Ke Kanvas* in 1982. She is one of the most renowned partition writers. This paper discusses about the traumatic journey of the protagonist, Pooro who is doubly violated by her family and society.

Key Words: Partition, Traumatic, Protagonist

बरसों की आरी हंस रही थी ,घटनाओं के दांत नुकीले थे
अकस्मात एक पाया टूट गया ,आसमान की चौकी पर से
शीशे का सूरज फिसल गया,आंखों में ककड़ छितरा गये
और नजर जख्मी हो गयी ,कुछ दिखायी नहीं देता
दुनिया शायद अब भी बसती है

(हादसा, अमृता प्रीतम)

One of the most glorious female writers of Partition is Amrita Pritam who is an eye-witness as well as the victim of 1947 Partition. She was twenty eight years old when she had to leave Lahore with a child in her womb, husband and her daughter. The gory consequences of Partition affected her in a way that she wrote a well known ode “ Aj Akan Waris Shah Nu”, in which she laments for thousands of women who suffered during Partition.

Nandi Bhatia in her book *Partition Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement, and resettlement* (2008) quotes Amrita Pritam to show Pritam’s mental trauma and pain when she begins her journey as a refugee. She writes: “Nobody realized that people would suffer so much – houses burnt down, neighbours killing each other , and women being abducted and raped...There was darkness all around. How could so many millions be dispossessed and displaced?” (7)

Amrita Pritam’s *Pinjar* (1950) is considered maestro in Partition literature. It is originally written in Punjabi but later it is translated into English and entitled as *The Skeleton* by Khushwant Singh, a celebrated writer. It is also translated into French by Danice Matring.

This novel is a saga of communal and religious conflicts of before and during Partition which sabotage the human’s self. It also expatiates a nasty tale of the daughter of a family who is ostracized by her own family and society. In the article “*Pinjar: A Novel Ahead of its Times*”, Nirupama Dutt quotes Amrita Pritam: “The most terrible happening of the times was Partition . I still shiver when I think of those blood- drenched days...It was thus that Puro of *Pinjar* took shape and the novel wrote itself” (1).

This novel has a flabbergast beginning because the chief protagonist Puro equates her unborn baby with the white caterpillar which is against the image of motherhood. She writes: “She felt as if her body was a pea-pod inside which she carried slimy, white caterpillar” (1). This opening astounds the readers but as novel leads, it reveals that she is not constituted as wicked but as a victim of family animosity. She is recalling her past which makes her depress. Through Puro, Pritam foregrounds the resentful relationships between Hindus and Muslims. She writes: “Hindu girls never dared to venture out except in the broad day light of the afternoon” (6).

Pooro is the prominent character of the novel. She is charming and perky girl of fourteen. Pooro's marriage is chief concern for her parents as she is just a 'burden' for them. "Pooro's parents were resolved to lighten themselves of the burden of a daughter"(3). Therefore she is betrothed to Ramchand, a wealthy young boy of nearby village. As every young woman, she begins to see dreams of happy life while she is unaware of misfortune which is going to befall. "...her night would be spent in dreaming of the youth who was soon to become her husband" (6).

Pooro's dreams shatter when she is abducted by a Muslim boy, Rasheed before Partition . Pooro finds herself in the cage of Rasheed. She laments for her misfortune and asks Rasheed "Why have you brought me here"(14). He discloses her about their family animosity and reveals that her abduction is due to family feud which shows the inferiority of women in male dominated society where they are considered as object of any target. In *Borders and Boundaries* (1998), Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin remark: We begin to discern some specific features of "communal" crimes against women...women's sexuality symbolises "man-hood" ; its desecration is a matter of such shame and dishonour that it has to be avenged...it is women ultimately who are most violently dealt with as a consequence (43).

Pooro escapes from the cage of Rasheed and thinks about the re-union with family but rejection by her family shatters her personality and questions on her identity. Therefore, trauma of abduction makes her miserable but rejection by her family is more painful for her than trauma of abduction. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman remarks "A secure sense of connection with caring people is the foundation of personality development. When this connection is shattered, the traumatized person loses her basic sense of self"(52).

Pooro is converted into Islam after being of Rasheed's wife. After marriage, she suffers from identity crisis. She has become a lady of no hope and just a skeleton. Amrita Pritam writes : she was just a skeleton , without a shape or a name" (25). After the horrific consequence of Partition, Pooro thinks that she is not the only one but there are thousands of women who are suffering the same fate. Pooro saves Lajo from the cage of abductor and she

successfully sends her India but she prefers to live with Rasheed who has changed her by his love.

It seems that Pooro is the mouthpiece of Amrita Pritam and tries to open women's untold stories of before and after Partition. It is the story of continuous wounds of patriarchy and partition and how it turns people into skeleton. Amrita Pritam was shaken by the horrendous consequences of Partition and she writes in her autobiography *Rashidi Ticket*: "At the time of partition all social, political and religious values came crashing down lives glass smarted those crushed pieces of glass bruised my soul. I wrote my hymns for the sufferers of those who have abandoned and raped. The passion of those monstrous times has been with me since, like some consuming fire".

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