



Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* As A Women-Centric Novel

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Abstract

Partition literature is a complex portrayal of the tragedy of Partition, a difficult moment in Indian history. It combines history, conflict studies, border studies and politics. In Partition literature, the multi-layered dynamics of India's partition are remembered and explored from various perspectives, including its political but also its metaphoric and symbolic significance and implications. Its ultimate purpose is to go beyond and refute the state's homogenised, one-dimensional narrative of India's Partition when necessary. India was split into two parts in 1947, terrible period in world history occurred between India and Pakistan. The severe problem of India and Pakistan's division has always been a long and permanent anguish for both countries inhabitants. The traumatic experience of the partition left deep scars on people's minds. For the populations of both countries, the partition of India and Pakistan was a never-ending agony. On the surface, only boundaries were divided but in reality, hearts were divided and the two cultures were divided as well. Thus, despite achieving long-awaited independence after much pain and effort, 1947 was a year of less joy and more sadness. This study analyses the traumatic characteristics of a few Indian English literary Partition novels. An exploration into how these writers depict the people's terrible situation in their partition tales as well as how they blend memories, pangs, sufferings, thoughts, riots and experiences with their past and sense of trauma. The consequences of disaster or crisis on the inner psyche of characters and awareness that demolishes an individual's identity will be investigated in depth in this study.

Keywords: Partition, India, Pakistan, religious revival

Introduction

The global phenomenon of Indian English literature has an ideal position in the world of literature. Partition fiction is a product of Indian English literature. The Indian English writer has the advantage of having both a literary tradition tied to Indian life and the ability to use a language and literary genres that connect him to literature. Some of the most significant themes were the Indian National Movement and the struggle for Indian independence, as well as death, damage and misery caused by it as well as the conflict between

tradition and modernity. The Partition novels depict the sociological, cultural and even political aspects of life artistically.

The term “partition” refers to the enormous historical event of the subcontinent’s dissection into India and Pakistan. This introduction goes over the historical backdrop in great depth. The second element in the title reads, ‘A portrayal of something from a particular perspective.’ The expression “research” refers to new material that has been selected for in-depth analysis and interpretation. “Indian English Novels,” the next term in the title the most important portion of the title. It refers to Indian-written English-language novels. Partition of India meant not only the separation of a vast subcontinent, but also tragedy for millions of people, the ramifications of which, as recent events demonstrate, have yet to fade away. The sudden and massive involuntary migration resulted in communal clashes, deaths and a variety of crimes. Countless refugees, orphaned by the Partition storm, were crowded on both sides of the boundary. In fact, because this calamity was planned rather than a natural disaster like a natural calamity, it was devastating and heart-breaking that ended in heinous barbarism and the murder of over two million individuals. The literary expression ‘novel’ refers to a type of contemporary fiction that uses beautiful prose to describe fictitious persons, locations and events. The term “partition” refers to the actual historical and political circumstances that resulted in country’s division. The categories ‘fiction’ and ‘history’ must be defined for a more accurate assessment of this research work. The word ‘history’ comes from the Greek word ‘historia,’ which refers to a witness’s investigation, interrogation or questioning, as well as chronicles of such events. The study of human history is known as history. In other terms, it refers to the entirety of human activities throughout history. It is, however, impossible to find a specific meaning of the term “history.”

Amrita Pritam, a famous twentieth-century Punjabi poetess, was born on August 31, 1919 in Gujranwala, British India (now in Punjab, Pakistan). For her long poem ‘*Sunehade*’ (Messages) in 1956, she was the first woman to receive the Sahitya Akademi award. In 1982, she got the Bhartiya Jyanpith, India’s highest literary honour for her popular piece “Kagaz Te Canvas.” She was also awarded the Padam Shri in 1969, the Padam Vibhushan in 2004 and in 2004, she received the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship for *Literary Immortals*. In 2004, she left this world forever. Amrita Pritam was a Punjabi and Hindi author, essayist and poet from India. She is idolised on both sides of the India-Pakistan border.

The work *Pinjar* features a cast of characters who practise Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religions. Puro, the female protagonist of the tale, is a Hindu girl. It tells the story of her abduction, migration, marriage and the loss of her dreams and experiences. The Muslim protagonist Rashid, on the other hand is highlighted by the novelist, who abducts Puro and forces her to marry him. The partition period was a difficult time for people in general and women in particular. Puro is a Hindu girl who is engaged to Ramchand, a Hindu boy from a nearby village. Puro (the young lady) was obsessed with seeing Ramchand, her husband. She, on the other hand, was a victim of partition and was abducted by Rashid. Partition was a time when Muslims and Hindus fought one other. During that time period people whether Hindu, Sikh or Muslim take’s pride in seeking wrath on the opposite religion women during Partition. It was really a terrible time and only women suffered greatly. If they manage to run and return to their homes during these days, they will be rejected by

their relatives. Some individuals assume that no one will marry a girl who has been kidnapped. Puro manages to flee Rashid's clutches but her family refuses to accept her. Her family also believes that allowing or accepting her will result in the Muslims murdering her entire family. Puro received no help from her parents who instead shut the door on her face. Finally, Puro left with no choice except to return to Rashid, the abductor and she does so. Meanwhile, Muslims abducted Lajjo, Ramchand's sister and the wife of Puro's brother Trilok. Puro, with the help of her husband Rashid manages to rescue Lajjo from the Muslims. The partition of India places a strong emphasis on women's lives, including their hardships, wrath and grief. Women suffer on every level because of this separation this also emphasises the patience and sacrifice of women. It also deals with the loss and gain of women as well as rage and affection. Puro is a figure for all rural women at the time and her helplessness and pity for her situation is reduced to the 'Skelton,' with no thought or action. From this aspect, *Pinjar* is a-

“The study of the fragmented identity of the self on the basic levels of community and nationhood. Trauma shatters the well-ordered identity of a group or community or nation.”

Pinjar also makes a specific reference to the *Ramayana*, showing the terrible existence of women. The references of Sita's *Agnipariksha* is mentioned in layers of text, which allude to her woes and how they linger to this day. Puro's story parallels Sita's in that she is kidnapped and subsequently abandoned by society. Ramchand (Puro's fiancé), in contrast to the original story, is portrayed as a modest man (somewhere similar to Lord Ram) who is anxious to marry Puro even after her kidnapping.

Puro, like Sita depicts pure love for Ramchand, coupled with religious and mythical motifs (such as Sita's fire ordeal) to emphasise a Hindu woman's ethical responsibilities. According to the tale, a Hindu Sita (Puro) is kidnapped by a Muslim Ravana (Rashid) and carried to an ominous geo-space that has yet to be identified as Pakistan. *Pinjar* looks into the 'otherness' that comes with religious identities as well as how communal violence impacts women. Puro's world is flipped upside down when she is kidnapped by Rashid Sheikh while going to harvest veggies from her home. The house crossing represents the rupture of the *Lakshmana Rekha*, which works against the codification of the Hindu lady during Partition. In *Pinjar's* plot, Tara (Puro's mother) demands that Puro walks outside her house. Puro's hesitancy is visible as her mother (Tara) urges her to pick a few okras from the surrounding fields without considering any potential threat. Puro and Rashid had ominous pre-abduction contacts with the former becoming the interface of religio-gendered desirability, which depicts the build-up of her captivity. Puro's kidnapping may be enhanced by a seemingly simple parental restriction as a familiar field turns into a dangerous location where gendered violence can be carried out. Puro's blunder of crossing an unlucky boundary is eased by such parental intervention which indicates her submission to her mother and elders.

The story's recurring motif is that a girl's virtue demonstrates her family's honour. Puro's (Hindu) and Rashid's (Muslim) families are at odds because of the women in the house. Puro's grandfather assaulted Rashid's aunt three times in three days, starting a feud between the two families. Rashid is then given the command to kidnap and torture Puro. During division, Puro's future sister-in-law Lajjo is kidnapped from a refugee camp by men seeking revenge for their long-lost daughter. Even today, when a rape victim is blamed

for “being raped” and treated as a social outcast, the idea of equating a woman’s integrity with a man’s dignity persists. Puro is also blamed for ‘secretly eloping’ with Rashid in the film adaptation of the novel which discounts the claims made by her brother, Trilok. This also represents the current situation in which the rape victim bears the brunt of the aggression directed at her.

Pinjar (which means skeleton) is linked to the concept of reducing women to mere objects of male pleasure. A psychologically disturbed lady is raped and impregnated in the film’s second half. Puro raises her child after she dies during childbirth. The body of a woman is nothing more than a ‘pinjar’ for some people who can use it for anything they want. For some it is a matter of honour but for others it is just an item. We have a guilt-ridden kidnapper who kidnaps Puro only for the welfare of his family, contrary to popular perceptions about Muslim characters. In a heartfelt confession to Puro, he admits his guilt, in which he begs her forgiveness for his misdeeds. He cried out:

“It was my love and the prodding of the Sheikhs which made me do this. But I cannot bear to see you so sad.” (20)

His agitation indicates how a family rivalry that has been passed down through the centuries can traumatise both the alleged victim and the culprit. Rashid like Puro, is frustrated by his inability to express his opposition to the abduction. As a result, he defends Puro’s decisions and even arranges for her to return to her family.

Rashid’s character appears to be a negative, sinister figure at first. However, the writer eventually reveals the virtues hiding beneath his first and only bad conduct-kidnapping the girl he loved in a fit of wrath and provocation. He is naturally compassionate and considerate. He is always thinking about his heinous conduct. This adds to his character’s growing strength. His character develops as the story progresses. Puro enlists his help in rearing the Pagli’s child, abducting a Hindu girl and hiding her in their home and enables Lajjo to escape her kidnappers and safely return home. He feels a little less guilty about abducting Puro every time he helps her.

The Hindu community is represented on several layers as well. Puro’s father like the Panchayat Raj, is an irreversible social patriarch who refuses to value women and puts their vanity first. Though Puro’s father rejected her for the sake of his prestige he became a symbol of powerlessness in the face of traditional conventional thinking, religious anger and a massive movement of misguided multitudes. Puro’s religious morality is explicitly disavowed by her father in the novel, who laments the fractured nature of her religious morality (“Tera Dharma Gaya” - “your morals have been shattered”). Puro’s apparent impurity is the societal annihilation of Hindu dharma (religious/ethical traditions) if the sacred Hindu woman in the text represents Hindu dharma (religious/ethical traditions). Puro’s parents are unable to welcome her home due to socio-political restraints, unlike Rama in the mythology, who allows Sita to return if she can prove her innocence. On the other hand, Panchayat Raj blames Rashid for raising the ‘mad’ woman’s Hindu child. Rashid sarcastically answers to their hypocrisy by claiming that the youngster was never taken care to while lying

unattended and now the Panchayat finally chose to investigate after six months. This incident beautifully illustrates the story's fundamental hypocrisy within the Hindu society.

Puro is now in turmoil and dissatisfied with Rashida. Though she is physically with Rashid, her thoughts are with Ramchand. Puro still believes that Ramchand will arrive and take her away to a better life. In her dreams Hamida meet up with old friends and playing at her parent's house, everyone calls her Puro. She was Hamida at other times. Hamida's life was split in two during the day and Puro at night. She was like a *Skeleton* with no shape or name. As a woman and an item, she lived a life as a Skeleton meaningless and lifeless. *Pinjar* lexically denotes a skeleton and figuratively denotes nothingness (no life - no flesh). The loss of dream will and desire is identical with death and death is identical with the Skeleton. Such a loss not only ruins one's identity but also one's sense of security and purpose in life. A skeleton is a frame of bones devoid of flesh and blood as well as a sense of absurdity in existence. Puro's first wrath is more comparable to that of a woman forced to marry her captor than a Hindu woman forced to marry a Muslim man. Puro's brutality is strongly connected to his religion after acquiring a tattoo with an evidently Muslim name. To avoid search and inquiry in Sakkardali (a Muslim-dominated region) where Rashid's ancestors live, "Hamida" is inscribed on her hand. Puro is tortured by the carving of a tattoo with tight lips and a quivering grimace. Puro turns away, disgusted as "Hamida" is inscribed on her skin, which is shown in an enlarged photo of her arm which is relished with bangles but deformed by a new name given to Puro by writing in Urdu with no reference to the Sanskrit Sita.

This foreshadows the Partition era's use of flesh branding to physically commodify captives. Puro's tattoo of Hamida melts into her skin tying her to Rashid's wicked Ravana and depicting her physical confinement as a shackled Sita in a pre-partition Muslim home or pinjar ("cage"). She frantically washes her lower arm attempting to erase the name but her constantly re-written skin leaves no space for removal. Puro recreates the Hindu Sita to remove herself from Sita from both the Partition era and the Ramayana after this occurrence. *Pinjar* blurs the line between the homogeneous Hindu Sita and the Muslim Ravana by depicting a reconstructed Sita who is both Hindu (Puro) and Muslim (Hamida) and engaged in cross-national emotive interactions. *Pinjar* takes a fresh look at Sita (Puro), debating whether she is a "sinful" abductee by embracing the many transitions and pluralities that come with identity replication. Puro promotes herself as Pakistan's new Sita, with unusual Indian roots. *Pinjar's* Sita is a woman who merges two religions and nationalities into one individual.

Amrita Pritam, depicts the two natures of the characters Puro and Rashida. Rashida transformed into a very caring and significant man over time, much beyond his wildest dreams. Puro is forced to adjust with Rashid and adopt him as a companion by his very nature. Rashid's adjustment to Puro and assistance to other victims like Lajjo is due to the triumph of human goodwill and goodness.

Pinjar is thus a story about women's sacrifice, courage and sorrow. The tale is historical and focuses heavily on the innocent's lives and their path to experience. *Skeleton* is a thoughtful story that well describes the reality of life, Karma and fate. Puro is an excellent individual who exudes goodness and intelligence. Puro's total effort demonstrates a powerful response to religious and gender-biased societal issues. As a result, the novelist fights for women's liberation and identity. It also details the emotions, reconciliation, healing and

acceptance of women kidnapped in various circumstances during the Pre-Partition and Partition times. Chandraprakash Dwivedi, who directed the film version of novel *Pinjar*, has kept the love and hate narrative alive with evident twists, in which love ultimately triumphs.

Conclusion

The problems raised in the novel, is to highlight the violence against women during the partition. The novelist makes evident the trauma, misery and the reality are hidden by grief and ambivalence of partition through these female characters. It's the narrative of how patriarchy and partition continue to harm people, turning them into skeletons. Women victims were subjugated by society and their families as described in Pritam's writings.

Pinjar (The Skeleton) is a story about women's powerlessness and the struggle for individual existence in the face of socio-political and cultural forces. The research paper depicts the ugliness of hidden social problems as well as the anguish of upheavals caused by communal differences. Puro's story depicts women's condition as a product of political and societal manipulation, a scenario that begs for drastic and immediate reform.

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