

Research Article

Women A Deity Or A Curse : Justification In Terms Of Pritam's 'Pinjar'

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Abstract

The tragedy of the Partition encounter has given rise to fictional explorations with an attempt to define the inner turmoil and social complexes that plagued the subcontinent. Writing Partition narratives, in a sense is almost like a compulsory act of 're-memory' for the South Asian people who have either personally experienced Partition or heard about it through family lore and legends. The Partition of India and the associated bloody riots inspired many creative minds in India, Pakistan and modern day Bangladesh to write literary/cinematic depictions of this event. The moving issue of Partition and the holocaust that followed it stirred the feeling of the writers who thought it their responsibility to recreate the events through their writing. Many of the Partition writers were direct witness and even victims of the Partition holocaust.

In the present research article , the researcher has explored the status of women being a boon or a curse for her family and society in general and explored the tragic experiences of partition and its impact on women. The inhuman torture ,violence and injustices that women went through hits the process of women awareness, consciousness of the society so that women can also stand as a voice.

Key words: *Torture, violence, partition, women, holocaust, abducted.*

INTRODUCTION

The incognizance and dichotomy that society has showered womenfolk with is totally not justifiable. The inhuman torture, violence, injustice that women had since time immemorial underwent raised undercurrent in their psyche. So, the process to make women conscious of society and provide courage to women in particular to be a voice for the voiceless arouse. Thus the initiative to change the destiny and turn the wheel of time in favour of women was initiated by several women writers. It is really surprising even these days, the unwillingness to provide women education, support their wellbeing and let them fly high metaphorically is a big interrogation.

Society neglects the perspective of women's growth. It is funny and witty enough. We offer gratitude, prayers and honor to mother earth, mother nation but when the question of respecting a mother or in short a woman arises, she becomes a soft target of every battle – communal and caste based. The patriarchal society becomes a partner in crime to disempowered women even considering her birth as a curse. Sometimes the cases of killing of foetus of a girl child is prevalent, which is a deadly crime.

Pooro in Pritam's 'Pinjar' is a replica of a homeless, parentless, forcefully converted and married lady with no single fault of hers. The incident of partition of India made communal discord. The partition riots caused records of cruelty and unbelievable horror on the onset. The world in the novel emerged from a simple past into a violent complex. The novelist presents realistic images of the violence which causes effects on individuals and on society. In the time of partition people's daughters, sisters and wives were abducted and were forcefully held by strangers in their home and Pooro is no exception.

The incidents of partition are full of shameful of human nature that crossed all boundaries of evilness. Thus our mind wanders at the action of the hypocritic and orthodox society that boasts of equality, justice and freedom for all equivalently. The challenging times have unmasked the real nature of a brutal society that takes away the peace, happiness and freedom from women and enslaves her within the four walls of societal cage and boundaries. So it is really a dilemma for us to consciously or even unconsciously decide whether women's place in society is yet of a deity or a curse.

Pinjar depicts the violence between the two communities-Hindus and Muslims. It shows the partition triggered off violence, bloodshed and displacement of people from their homes. Women were the worst victims and sufferers who were abducted, raped, slaughtered or lost their children. The novel that shows the intentional and emotional struggles of women brings out the multitude of misfortunes that could strike a girl for no fault of hers. It is translated into English under the title *The Skeleton* by Khushwant Singh. In *The Skeleton*, the conflicting complexities of human mind, the play of love and game of hatred and the predicament and consequences of the abducted women are vibrantly depicted on the background of the tragedy of partition holocaust. Throughout the novel Amrita Pritam has nourished the character of Pooro as an essence of women power and significance. The writer through this story brings lights upon the problems faced by women during the time of partition of India. There were rites, rape cases, abduction of young women of opposite community.

Urvashi Butalia said in her book *The Other Side of Silence*:

*Women jumping into well to drown themselves so as to avoid rape or forced religious conversions, Fathers beheading own children so they would avoid the same dishonourable fate*¹ (Butalia 5).

The women were used just as a symbol of sex for the pleasure of men. Amrita Pritam understood the sensitivity of the subject matter on which she wrote the novel and she has handled it with utmost respect. She describes the whole situation of that time. Women were victimized in different ways, many were widowed or lost their children, and many were abducted and raped by other. The pre-partition communal passion and the related confused conditions presented and added advantage. Rashida, a young man of the Shaikh clan had been

¹ Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*:pg-5

chosen to be the instrument to the inerascable mark on the Sahukars. He was made to take an oath on the Koran that he would settle old scores by abducting Pooro before she was married. It was a classic case of love at first sight. In the novel, he told:

*Allah is my witness that on the very first day I cast my eyes on you, I fell in love with you. It was my love and prodding of the Shaikh Clan that made me do so*² (Pritam 18).

Amrita Pritam portrays in this novel how the political decision of partitioning Punjab changes the equation of Hindu, Muslim relation in the arena. Before, the partition Hindu money lenders dominated the Muslim population of these villages but now they fell helpless. The law and order situation deteriorates and a Muslim young man Rashida of Rattowal village, abducts Pooro when she had gone out in the fields to get vegetables. In the novel *Pinjar* Pooro argued with Rashida after her abduction: *"Tell me, in the name of your Allah, Why did you do this to me?"*³ (Pritam 16). He continued after a pause,

*"Did you know that our families the Shaikhs and the Sahukars has been at loggerheads for many generations? Your grandfather had advanced us Rs.500 on compound interest and taken our house as mortgage. We could not redeem the mortgage. He attacked the entire Shaikh family ejected"*⁴ (Pritam 17).

This abduction and rape of the women of one community by the men of other community was a way of dishonouring the other community as a real symbolic subjugation. These acts are also the notions of women as property.

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 (Pritam 22).

She further lamented: "Daughter, it would have been better if you had died at birth" (Pritam 23). Amrita Pritam highlights that human had to the novel *Pinjar* is basically the story of Pooro who is kidnapped by a Muslim man named Rashida. Amrita Pritam depicts the journey of Pooro and highlights the atrocities that she faces in her life through the partition era. From the very beginning, she is abducted, she even goes to the parental desert when her father refuses to accept her. Pooro's hope to live her life again was shattered as her father expressed his inability to take her back as she would bring social disgrace to the family. He says: "Daughter this fate was ordained for you, we are helpless." (Pritam 22)

The other reason for not accepting the abducted women was the safety of the other members of the family. It points to the instances of men being bartered for the safety of the male members of the family during those harrowing days. Usually it was a daughter who scarified for their family. The reaction of Pooro's mother makes it clear when she reveals that where will they keep her? And indirectly asked her to go away at once and that the Muslims

² Pritam, Amrita, "Pinjar", Page:18

³ Pritam, Amrita, "Pinjar", Page:16

⁴ Pritam, Amrita, "Pinjar", Page:17

will follow her: "They will kill your father and your brothers. They will kill all of us" (Pritam 23). This is the inexplicable plight of the abducted women very touchingly narrated. Amrita Pritam tries to highlight that women had to constantly prove their innocence and assert their right to dignity in our patriarchal society. Pooro's suffering springs from the long standing between Shaikhs and Sahukars but the male dominated society hardly takes cognizance of the misery and agony that are perpetuated in her life. It is through these encounters that Pooro grows into Hamida. In the novel there are many women who are abducted, raped and exploited. The mad woman also impregnated through she was merely a lump of flesh with no mind to go with. Pooro says:

'What sort of a man could have done this to her?' the women of Sakkar asked each other. They clenched their teeth in anger..... 'He must be a savage beast to put a mad woman in this condition.' 'She is neither young nor attractive she is just a lump of flesh without a mind to with it...a living skeletona lunatic skeleton...a Skeleton picked to its pones by kites and vultures'⁵ (Pritam 53).

There are many heart rendering incidents in which young girls and women become victims for the hooligans. One day Pooro sees a band of dozen or more 'goondas' pushing a young girl before them. She had not a stitch of clothing on her person. The 'goondas' beat drums and danced about the naked girl. Hamida could not find out where they come from or where they were going. Hamida laments "It was sin to be alive in a world so full of evil, It was a crime to be born a girl" (Pritam 87). In the evening Pooro discovered a young girl hiding in their field. She understands that the girl comes from the refugee encampment in the neighbouring village and was waiting her turn to be evacuated to India. The medium of the girl novelist narrates a tale of the camp:

The camp was guarded by Pakistani soldiers. After Sunset bands of goondas stole in, picked out women they liked and took them for the night; they were returned to the encampment in the morning. The girl has been forced to spend the preceding nine nights with different men'⁶(Pritam 88).

Amrita Pritam highlights that the cases of molestation and rape of women were stray happiness. These happened not only during attacks on caravans of refugee camps protected by military guards. Pooro accepts her fate and lives with Rashida and even bears her son. Pooro makes efforts to send back her sister-in-law, Lajo to her parents. Pooro regrets that she has not been accepted by her parents after her abduction, but helps Lajo to join her family. She justifies Lajo's recovery saying that the abductions have taken place on such a large scale that the parents have started accepting their daughters abducted by the opposite community. Rashida says that the Muslim girls are also recovered from India. Such of the recovered girls are with the offspring's. Her final and ultimate reconciliation was with a different dimension. She symbolizes the face of adversities. She put a stone on her heart and takes a decision of living with her husband and son in Pakistan. She convinces her brother: "When Lajo is

⁵ Pritam, Amrita, "Pinjar", Page:53

⁶ Pritam, Amrita, "Pinjar", Page:88

welcomed back in her home, then you can take it that Pooro has also returned to you. My home is now in Pakistan” (Pritam 127). In her transformation skeleton turned Pooro could easily be back to her home at that time when parents had been exhorted to receive back their daughters in the post-partition period. Throughout the novel, many qualities of women are brought out like courage and motivation to raise above all the problems and still strive for happiness in other's life are painted in the character of Pooro. It is emphasized that it is woman who plays for any failure in upholding family honour. The writer portrays the horrible picture of young ladies of opposite religion who were used as sexual object. She shows the emotions and happening through a journey of self and political culprits. The novel is a testimony to the powerful narration of the typical social strands against weaker section of the society. Partition has transformed the geographical, demographical, political, cultural, social and economic phase of these regions that have been commonly believed to be most affected by this event. Different literary texts respond to this fraught suppressed history. Partition violence has been represented in literature written in several languages such as Urdu, Punjabi and English. The writers like Saadat Hasan Manto, Attia Hosain, Bhisham Sahni and Anita Desai are few examples of vernacular literary works that represents the brutality and savagery within which women were raped and people were killed during Partition. Among all these writers who have portrayed the furious conditions of partition Bapsi Sidhwa and Amrita Pritam contributes marvellously in the partition literature.

According to social phenomenon, woman is a mirror which reflected the divine power of God. Women are an image of cosmic element. But human badly defiles this image with ugly and beastly designs. A woman is figure of a goddess. Such icon blesses us with worship and adoration. But such illustration was pampered and caressed by us very harshly. According to Amrita Pritam, society thinks that woman is an eternal source of love and joy which inspire us for good future. Society also thinks that woman is a sign of feminine beauty but man always exploits her and serves for his own egocentric ends.

There was no mercy in the social system. It is one way for women and there were no hope for rehabilitation. They still pain to be merged to them. *Pinjar* is a heart touching story about how conflicts between families, communities and nations are so often brutally portrayed. The novel was related to the plight of women during the bloodiest time in recent Indian history that of partition and the period just preceding and following it. The novel describes the male dominating nature of the society during that period and how women were bound to accept the decisions. The novel uses historical elements to set off a fictional tale that effectively demonstrates victim's reality. The novelist depicts the picture of women victims with incidents that had actually taken place during Partition. *Pinjar* depicts a world of social reality which draws its meaning from the description of experienced reality. The story revolves around a Hindu girl who belongs to a family of money lenders. Through this character the author depicts how the women of the twentieth century were bound to accept their conditions calling it as their fate. The novel is successful in implanting the anguish and terror of the partition of India in the minds of the readers. The novel is quite interesting and creates the picture of India society.

The story of helpless Kammo, who has lost her mother, whose father took another

woman and moved to the city. The helplessness and trauma went parallel in case of the girl as her father's mistress refused to have anything to do with her. Kammo was abandoned by her own father as well. It's said that when once mother dies the real father even starts behaving like a step-father and it is very much applicable in case of our character Kammo. The concept of communal consciousness that the society in general and Kammo's aunt in particular wants to infringe in her mind when Hamida extended her help to carry the pitcher that slipped down Kammo's arms on seeing her aunt. The reply: "You will pollute my pitcher" (Pritam 38) unabashedly by Hindu Kammo to Muslim Hamida questions the concept of universal brotherhood of mankind and the narrow communal mindset that have polluted the global fraternity. The story of Taro, the next door girl of Hamida who had been married two years earlier and had been ill since her wedding day heightens the weight of our heart with sympathy.

The helplessness, trauma and pathetic realization by Taro when she utters:

"There is no justice in the world; nor any God, he can do what he likes; there is no God to stop him. God's fetters were meant only for my feet" ⁷(Pritam 47).

OBJECTIVES:

- (1) To explore the status of women and their authenticity associated with it.
- (2) To find out the depth of despair, dismay, identity crisis that added a transformation to their sense of being.
- (3) To explore the devastating affect that partition event has across class, caste, age and gender.

FINDINGS:

- (1) The story of Pooro, Taro, Lazo, Maid woman , hidden girl, Kamo ----- the concept of subjugation sacrifice and domination has been found bound for women as the curse to be born as a girl child.
- (2) In "Pinjar" the abduction and identity crisis of Pooro, Taro ,Lazo, Kamo etc and the trauma , rape , dismay they went through raises our eye brows, fills our eyes with tears and melts our heart with sympathy. These had added space and social outlook.
- (3) The partition not only created a division in the borders of the nation geographically but the division, distortion and fracture in our female characters. The human cost of partition found by women in the form of rape, violence and exploitation in the stories of Kamo, Lajo, Taro ,mad woman, hidden girl is really a pathetic saga.

⁷ Pritam,Amrita,"Pinjar",Page:47

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