

## CHAOS AND DISORDER IN WOMEN'S LIFE DURING DIVISION OF INDIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*India, having been ruled by the British for nearly two hundred years, got its freedom only in 1947 with numerous losses. Markedly partition is one of them. The partition horror associated with the migration of people has been a major theme in Indian writings. Although the treatment, different writers make use of, differs from one another but the subject is the same. Amrita Pritam is one such creative woman writer whose individual contribution to the range of Partition literature in the Punjabi language is singular and far greater than that of any other woman writer. Violence against women is a worldwide problem that affects women of all ages, ethnicities, races, nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds and during Partition many sisters, daughters, wives and mothers were lost, kidnapped or simply fell behind when families ran from one side to the other. Atrocity does not have any face or religion. It is faceless and Amrita Pritam herself experienced the trauma that people suffered during those fateful days and she was made of a stuff that enabled the women of 1947 to experience humiliation and violation and yet survive. She had the rare gift of the ability to give tender expression to human sorrow and separation. She wrote with courage and without any introversion. She witnessed the human tragedy during Partition and aftermath and portrayed its pathos and the ruin of human spirit it caused in her literary works. Her novel "Pinjar" clearly deals with the dislocation and violence against women during Partition. Intolerance, cruelty, kidnapping and rape of women left thousands of innocent lives as their luck. So the main objective of this paper is to portray the character of Hindu female protagonist of her novel Pinjar who highlights the patriarchal hypocrisy and challenges the national obsession with borders even after becoming a victim in the hands of a Muslim. This paper will also highlight how a Muslim boy abducts a Hindu girl and how she chooses to remain with him rather than be shifted in India after Partition. It also tries to depict a love story of a couple thrown in a situation, not of their making, but they rise above the situation with love and care.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Partition, Women, Atrocities, Rapes, Abduction, Humiliation, Hindu, Muslim*

Being a woman is a terribly difficult trade,

Since it consists principally of dealing with men.

(Joseph Conrad)

### **INTRODUCTION**

The greatest event in the history of modern India is the attainment of freedom in 1947 along with the Partition of the Indian sub-continent on communal basis into two sovereign political units; India and Pakistan. This partition was based

on two nation theory with the argument that the Hindus and the Muslims cannot live together as one nation since both have distinct social, cultural and religious identities. This resulted in massive and violent migration. Muslims moved to Pakistan, and Sikhs and Hindus moved to India for peaceful and better living, with their own religious as well as ethnic identities. Ironically this mass scale migration entailed crimes of unprecedented violence, murders, rapes and bestiality. A million refugees crossed the borders on foot, forming human columns over dozens of miles long, in rags, exhausted, starved and crushed by sorrow. The violent nature of the partition created an atmosphere of mutual hostility and suspicion between India and Pakistan that plagues their relationship till this day. Women constitute one half of the population of the world, and they play an important role in society. Therefore it is significant to bring to focus the sufferings and sacrifices of women during the trauma of partition in 1947.

## THE PARTITION LITERATURE

The tragedy of the partition of India and the communal riots have given rise to fictional explorations and stirred the creative genius of English, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi Bengali writers. The violence and blood-shed of that time has left a tremendous impact on Indian writers like Nanak Singh's *Khooon De Sohle*(1948), Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (1950), Balchandra Rajan's *Dark Dancer*(1955), Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*(1956), Attia Hussain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*(1961), Sohan Singh Seetal's *Tootan wala Khooh*(1962), Manohar Malagonkar's *Bend in the Gangas* (1964), Rahi Masoom Raja's *Adha Gaon* (1966), Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* (1974), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980,) Bapsi Sidhwan's *Ice Candy Man*(1988), short stories by Saadat Hassan Manto and the poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz are some such examples that attempt to give us an insight into the public agitation, communal hatred, extreme disintegration and large-scale sectarian violence.

## AMRITA PRITAM

Amrita Pritam belonged to a Sikh family of Pakistan who started her writing career at the age of sixteen. At the time of Partition, she moved to her second home i.e. New Delhi like thousands of people who migrated from West Punjab to make their home across the fence. Her whole life was dedicated to writing. She wrote with words dipped in blood. She always provoked readers with her rebellious thoughts. In fact, she often provoked the whole community when she essayed to transcend her intense sexual impulse into poetic images of rare beauty. It has been said of her that her poetry depicts the feeling of a woman in love. She has loved dearly and suffered terribly. She is the first woman Punjabi poet who received Sahitya Academy award for her collection of poems. Her poems, novels, short stories, prose writings and autobiographies have been translated into so many regional and foreign languages. She has been widely read nationally and internationally. She was the first Punjabi poet and fiction writer who portrays the pain of partition from a women's point of view because she was the eyewitness to the horrors of Partition and also a victim. After witnessing the atrocities and bloodshed caused by partition, she cried out for help to Waris Shah in her famous poem "Ajj aakhan waris shah nun, kiton qabran wichon bol" resonating the sufferings of millions of people. She was basically an artist. It was her artistic skill which makes her able to write a novel like *Pinjar* in those difficult times. She had the rare gift of the ability to give tender expression to human sorrow and alienation. She wrote with courage and without any inhibitions. She portrayed the degradation of the human spirit in her works with creativity, sensitivity, and transparency. She was overwhelmed by the suppression of women largely because of their economic dependence on the male members of the family and her handling of such delicate subjects captured the attention of the readers. Even Mr. Duggal writes: "Amrita is a sensitive writer who

has highlighted the problems of Indian women in her poetry and fiction...her poetic expression lends charm to her prose. She knows the craft of weaving a plot and creating motivated characters.”

## **WOMEN AS VICTIMS**

Women were arguably the worst victims of the partition of India in 1947 and tolerated displacement, violence, abduction, prostitution, mutilation, and rape. Even figures of women abduction ranged between 33000-50000 for Hindu and Sikh women and 21000 or more for Muslim women. So during partition, the women were subjected to maximum humiliation and torture. They lost everything, their family, integrity, and respect with kidnapping and rapes. Their agony can be best judged by the fact that a number of women jumped into wells to save their honor. In a patriarchal setup men are considered as superior gender to women. Women are the victims of oppression and suffer maximum exploitation and injustice like gender inequality, male dominance, humiliation degradation etc. but still she plays the wonderful roles of an obedient daughter, abiding wife and a loving- sacrificing mother. Such women are depicted in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* which is a story inspired by the mindless bloodbath of 1947 partition and the barbarous physical abuse women suffered on both sides of the border.

## **PINJAR (THE SKELETON)**

The story of *Pinjar (The Skeleton)* by Amrita Pritam is a dark narrative of the cross-religious abductions of women that took place in the Partition. It portrays the agony of communal riots, abduction, trauma and symbolic reunion of victims and victimizers in the prophetic hope of communal amity. Pooro, a young woman of Hindu background, is finding herself living a lovely life circling the time of the partition of 1947 with her family. All is well for Pooro, who finds herself betrothed to a wealthy, sweet young man, Ramchand, from a promising family akin to her own background. Her family lives in Amritsar but journeys to their ancestral village of Chattovani to search for prospective grooms. They finally engage Pooro to Ramchand from Rattoval, a village near Chattovani. Although her life seems to be well-charted, Pooro's bliss is shattered one day as a leisurely trip in the fields beyond her home with Rajjo; her younger sister turns traumatic as she is kidnapped by a mysterious Muslim man, who turns out to be Rashid. Rashid's family has an ancestral dispute with Pooro's family. Pooro's family had made Rashid's homeless by taking over their property over a loan default. Also, Pooro's grand-uncle had kidnapped Rashid's grand-aunt, kept her in his house for three nights, and then released her onto the streets after defiling her. Rashid's joint family makes him swear on the holy Quran that he will kidnap Pooro before her wedding to settle the score and restore their honor

He did not want to kidnap Pooro because he was fascinated by her but he was forced to do so for the honor of his family. One late evening while Rashid is asleep, Pooro manages to steal the keys from under his pillow, unlocks the main door and runs back to her parents. But her parents refuse to recover a 'defiled' woman. A devastated Pooro heads for the village well to end her life, but there Rashid awaits her with a proposal for marriage. Pooro embraces life and marries Rashid. Some months following Pooro's kidnapping, Pooro's family marries their son Trilok to Ramchand's younger sister, Lajjo, and the entire family moves back to Amritsar. Lajjo wishes very much for Trilok to give her the attention she so animatedly bestows on him. Trilok, having turned cold since his sister's capture, cannot get attached to Lajjo. Meanwhile, Rajjo is married off to Lajjo's and Ramchand's cousin and lives in Rattoval. Parallel to the celebrations of the new marriage is a celebration of Rashid: Pooro is pregnant. While Rashid and his aunts rejoice, Pooro is greatly depressed as she has conceived from rape. But after the birth of her son Javed, Pooro learns somewhat of Rashid's love for her and his

repentance for his evil deed. The protagonist, Pooro renamed Hamida comes to accept her new identity, and prosper in a provisional, post-traumatic sort of way. She becomes an agent on behalf of other women whose lives are put in danger, which is almost a happy ending. One day a frail, twelve-year old girl Kammo whose father had taken another woman who refused to have anything to do with Kammo? So Kammo was abandoned by her father as well. People often say that when a person's mother dies, even a real father becomes a stepfather. And it was Pooro's misfortune that her real father had become a stepfather before becoming a widower, and her real mother had, without being a widow, become like a stepmother. Kammo seldom changed her clothes. She wore the same tattered shirt in summer and on the coldest days of winter. She never had anything on her feet. She looked like a squeezed lemon. Pooro got thrilled to see her. Pooro had suffered much; the suffering had aged her. She was only twenty years old, but these years had taught her more than she could ever have learnt in an age. She had become as serious and as thoughtful as an old philosopher. One day again she met a new girl named Taro whose bones stuck out of her flesh. Because her husband is having already a wife and Taro has to sell her body for a mess of pottage and a few rags like a common prostitute. Now she is quarreling with her mother and said that there was no justice in the world, God's fetters were only for women and men were free to do anything. This was the first time Pooro had come across a girl who had such views and who could speak her mind so boldly. Pooro had seen other people's sorrows. They made her troubles appear very small. She had heard of houses that were not homes. Taro's story made her home appear like a refuge. Now she wanted to forget that Rashid had abducted and wronged her. One day she finds the village's madwoman lying dead in a field with a newborn child coming out. She is horrified to see this and runs to Rashid for help. Rashid comes and takes the child out. They cremate the woman. After this incident, the Hindus of the village go become angered. They think that the mad woman was a Hindu and that her child should have been gone to Hindu and was surprised as to how a Muslim family can adopt him. They call Rashid and threaten him in silent words to hand over the child or else. When Pooro comes to know about this, she is angry. She asks why the Hindus did not come during the six months she had taken care of the baby as her own child? The villagers grab the child away from her and there is nothing Pooro can do except cry. But none could take care the child and the child was returned to Rashid when the child has one foot in the grave. One day Pooro journeys to Rattoval (Ramchand's village) with an aunt and goes searching for Ramchand's fields. She weeps in despair when she comes across him; he realizes that it might be Pooro but doesn't stop her as she flees away, since he has no authority to stop her. Meanwhile, the British colonialists leave India and the subcontinent reels under the effects of partition. Pooro's family is safe in Amritsar which falls in India. Ramchand's father refuses to leave Rattoval which now lies in the newly created Pakistan. Ramchand's uncle, cousin and Rajjo leave for India and are safe. But Ramchand with his parents and Lajjo is fixed in the disturbance. Ramchand hurriedly leaves on the long journey to India with his younger sister and mother; his father is already missing in the riots. They are part of a large group of Hindu and Sikh refugees on the way to India, guarded by an Indian army regiment. However, large groups of gangsters keep attacking refugee camps and kidnapping girls to spend nights with them. Lajjo is kidnapped during one such attack. Pooro and Rashid meanwhile live in Sakkadali village. She rescues a kidnapped and repeatedly gang-raped Hindu refugee woman from the sugarcane fields and promises to hand her over to the Indian army. Pooro learns that a large group of Hindu refugees from Rattoval is on way to India and that they have camped near Sakkadali for the night. There she meets Ramchand who woefully tells her of Lajjo's situation. Pooro requests Ramchand to help the rape victim find her family back in India and promises to locate Lajjo. Pooro begs Rashid to help her find Lajjo and rescue her; he says it is very dangerous but she reminds him of how brazenly he kidnapped her in the past. Roaming in Rattoval village from home to home under the alias of a saleswoman, Pooro finally finds Lajjo and helps her escape with

Rashid's assistance. They conduct Lajjo to Lahore where Trilok and Ramchand come to receive her at the refugee camp. Lajjo is welcomed lovingly by Ramchand. Trilok is also in the camp and has a tearful reunion with Poro and explains to her that she can start life anew as Ramchand is ready to accept her even now. However, Poro surprises Trilok by refusing. She is caught between two worlds: She says that she is content that Lajjo is returned and that her life is beyond repair; she is where she belongs and cannot bear further upheavals. And she says something which shows how she has grown in mental stature, since her kidnapping. She says that whenever a girl is rescued and returns home, feel that another Poro has returned. In an ironic twist of fate, Poro seeks Rashid out in the camp and the two tearfully bid Ramchand, Trilok, and Lajjo farewell, forever.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus the novel is successful in drawing attention to the women's experience of the Holocaust. Through these women characters, the novelist makes visible the trauma, anguish, pain and ambivalence that masks the experience of partition. It is an unflinching look at the partition of India through the eyes of one woman who is a daughter of a wealthy landowner whose life is completely changed by a centuries-old family dispute. Amrita has created her memorable character Poro, an epitome of violence against women, loss of humanity and ultimate surrender to existential. It explores the issues of Partition as well as the status that women occupied in Indian society then and to an extent even today. Attar Singh, an eminent critic of Punjabi Literature rightly comments: "Amrita Pritam's writings on the partition riots are the most forceful. She has projected the violence in a heart-rending manner." In Amrita Pritam's works, we find defiant women protagonists who strive to break free from the proscriptive social norms imposed by a patriarchal set up as also a straight exploration of the feminine sexuality.

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