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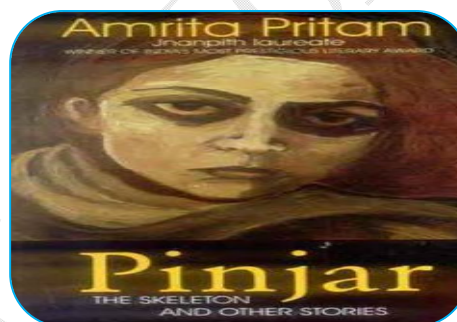


CULTURAL DISLOCATION AS REFLECTED IN AMRITA PRITAM'S *PINJAR*

Dr. Suman Keswani
Assistant Professor (English),
DRB Sindhu Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur.

ABSTRACT

The partition of India and Pakistan resulted in large-scale mass migration on both sides of the divide. People were uprooted from their place of birth. It was a traumatic experience in history. Memories of partition continue to haunt the present generations because of the exhaustive partition literature available. Partition novels, short stories, poems, oral narratives, drama and formal history helped to review the turbulent times. The long-term consequences of partition violence, migration and cultural dislocation have been brought forth by Amrita Pritam, a women writer of repute. Her novel *Pinjar* depicts the struggles of an innocent victim of cultural dislocation. Her journey of life after being uprooted from her soil and thrown into an alien land is highlighted by Pritam in *Pinjar*.



KEYWORDS: Dislocation, alienation, restoration, brutality, resilience.

INTRODUCTION :

Partition disrupted the socioeconomic fabric of the Indian subcontinent. With the sudden division of the country, people were taken unawares and ran helter-skelter for refuge. Innumerable people were rendered homeless overnight. They were forced to flee from their homeland. Hindus in Pakistan rushed towards Indian border and Indian Muslims decided to migrate to Pakistan. People were uprooted from their soil and transplanted to an alien land. Cultural dislocation occurs when an individual or a group migrates away from the

original location of upbringing and cannot culturally integrate into the new location. They have to live on someone else's terms and find hard to understand the cultural and social cues.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Amrita Pritam is a woman writer per excellence. She has carved a niche for herself in the field of partition literature. The work done on Amrita Pritam stands high especially to study the effects of partition violence and cultural dislocation in her novel *Pinjar*. Rituparna Mitra has studied the trauma of partition in her dissertation "States of Affect: Trauma of partition in her

dissertation. "States of Affect: Trauma in Partition/Post Partition South Asia submitted to Michigan State University in 2015. She studied the partition process and the formation of mineralization as well as sectarian violence. She described how the above formations of the past shape the present. She analyzed violence and trauma in South Asia which would help in developing a vernacular framework to study affect mediated trauma studies. Veena Lydia Lobo has studied womanhood in her paper "Exploration of Radical Womanhood in the partition narratives of Amrita Pritam. She

studied the partition of India according to religion, caste and political influences. Her main focus was to portray the violence against women and loss of humanity. P.S. Deepa has studied the partition and dislocation in her thesis "Dismantled Spaces, Dislocated Nationalities: Transcending Memory" submitted to Goa University. She studied the partition upheaval as reflected in the select partition literature of India and Pakistan. Bhagyashree Varma studied the literature of Modern and Post-modern women writers in her paper "Facing Fundamentalism of Partition and Post Partition Times: The Narration of Trauma by Women Writers (Amrita Pritam and Taslima Nasreen)". She investigated the events of history to understand the plight of women on crossroads of culture caught in the convictions of patriarchy and religion. Nonica Datta studied the memory pattern which forms an afterlife of partition in her paper "Reframing Partition: Memory, Testimony, History". She elucidated on the memory of partition and violence which kept haunting the future generations.

Partition disrupted the socioeconomic fabric of the Indian subcontinent. With the sudden division of the country, people were taken unawares and ran helter-skelter for refuge. Innumerable people were rendered homeless overnight. Hindu girl Pooro in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* became a victim of cultural dislocation after she was abducted by Muslim boy Rashida of the neighboring village Rattoval. At the same time partition violence had started. With the division of the country she found herself in Pakistani grounds. She had to undergo pangs of separation from her family, village and country together. Partition created havoc with her life. Rootlessness, isolation and alienation crept inside Pooro's mind. The abduction and rape had altered her psyche. The act of brutality left her shattered and dejected, robbed of her bright future with her fiancé Ramchand. She managed to escape from Rashida's clutches after fifteen days of captivity but her parents refused to accept her back.

"Daughter, this fate was ordained to you, we are helpless. The Shaikhs will descend on us and destroy everything we have.... It would have been better if you had died at birth! Who will marry you now? You have lost your religion and your birthright. If the Shaikhs find you here, they will kill all of us." (Pritam 22)

Utter hopelessness gripped Pooro. She had no other alternative but to return to Rashida's house. By this time Rashida had begun to love Pooro. He was burdened with heavy guilt and was shameful for his wrongdoing on Pooro. She started living like a skeleton with no interest in life. They shifted to a new place Sakkar. Here Pooro left like a stray calf in a strange herd of cows. (25) When our lives get too difficult to handle, we consciously work ourselves into a rage or go down into depression. (Tong 200-201) A forced marriage to Rashida converted Pooro into a Muslim suddenly. "

There were more changes in store for her. Till then Rashida had called her by her proper Hindu name. One day he brought a stranger with him and asked his wife to stretch out her arm. The man tattooed on it the new name she had been given when she was married to Rashida (25).

From that day she was called Hamida by all. The trauma inflicted in Pooro's psyche made her spiritless. Her pale skin, listless eyes and smileless face gave her a stoic appearance. She was cheerful only in her dreams when everyone called her Pooro. "It was a double life: Hamida by day, Pooro by night. In reality, she was neither one nor the other, she was just a skeleton, without a shape or a name" (25).

Pooro represents the thousands of women who were victims of violence during the partition of the Indian subcontinent. She is haunted by nostalgic memories of her childhood and young age. When she gets pregnant she feels that her body is polluted and as if she is nurturing a worm in her womb. The brilliant display of the sufferings of women during partition made. D R More praise the novel lavish for its "poetic presentation of the theme of the exploitation of the weaker sex on the background of the partition tragedy." (More 235) The impact of agony on her mind was so much that she could not even accept her own child. Again her memories were ignited when she visits her native village along with an old woman for cure of her weak eyesight. Nostalgia kept her alive in her life. "She dreamed that she was reclining on an embroidered cushion inside a silver palanquin. Her arms were weighed down with bangles; her palms were dyed red with henna" (73).

Cultural dislocation results in a loss of identity as with Pooro's case. She constantly felt she did not belong to her new home in Pakistan. She wishfully remembered the festival of Baisakh and the

dance of Bhangra, a part of it. She recalled once telling her mother when she was rolling vermicelli. "Mother, I would much prefer it out of a machine." Her mother retorted brusquely: "Fie girl, only the Muslims eat machine made vermicelli!" and now the whiplash of fate had made her Muslim. This brought tears to Hamida's eyes. Then she began to laugh (28). This shows her traumatic condition of mind.

The sufferings of Poro made her resolute to take a stand for her sister-in-law Lajo who was abducted during the partition riots. Rashida had a strong feeling that Lajo was abducted in her own village Rottoval. They searched for her frantically and at last located her by her tattoo. At night Rashida took Lajo on horseback and saved her from her abductor. This savior act managed to lessen his guilt of abducting Poro. Seeds of love and respect developed in Poro's heart on seeing Rashida's heroic act. She had a last chance to escape to the Indian soil during the Recovery and restoration process. As Lajo was being handed over, an Indian soldier shouted, 'All Hindus going over to India, come this side' (189). But she refused to go. She joined Rashida and clasped her son to her bosom. "My home is now in Pakistan. Whether one is a Hindu girl or a Muslim one, whoever reaches her destination, she carries along my soul also" (189).

During partition, many women and girls were abducted and forced into change of religion and marriage with their abductors. The Recovery Act gave permission for rehabilitation of the fallen women. But their families were unwilling to accept them. When finally Poro accepts Pakistan as her home, she manages to come out of her trauma of dislocation. According to Priyadarshini Dasgupta, Poro, thus, makes the non-normative choice to refuse the offer of inclusion and interpolation into family, community, nation that was once denied to her. In doing so she recreates her own identity, 'Hamida' which had been once thrust upon her (Dasgupta, 5).

Amrita Pritam in her writing span of sixty years wrote with words dipped in blood partition literature has received her gift of poetry compositions, short story volumes and numerous novels of repute. She had left Lahore and migrated to India during the partition riots. *Pinjar* was her debut novel, a saga of suffering of women during pre-partition and partition times. This novel in Hindi was translated to English by renowned writer Khushwant Singh and got the name *The Skeleton*. Pritam has won the Jnanpith Award, Sahitya Akademi Award, Padma Shri and many other honors. As quoted by Kalpana Raithatha, Lakshmi Chand Jain, The Director of Bhartiya Jnanpith comments about Amrita's power of writing:

The one who has the knowledge and experience of the female's physical, mental and emotional structure, the one who has heated herself to gold ornament in the force of tension, conflict and pure love even in the difficult situations, such as Amrita's creation can be appreciated only with the warmth of the blood flowing in the veins and the throbs of the beating heart (translated from Hindi). (Raithatha 63)

In Pritam's *Pinjar* the theme of dislocation, alienation and rehabilitation of the abduct women is highlighted. Women became targets of partition violence. They were molested, raped, brutally assaulted, paraded naked in streets, forced to change their religion and to marry their abductors. They underwent deep psychological trauma and could never heal themselves completely. They suffered for no fault of theirs. They were dislocated, displaced and as a result their lives disintegrated. This change in the cultural practices resulting from dislocation shocked and altered their ego. They lost their identity and felt like aliens in the new land. But their inherent will and steely determination helped them restore normalcy. As seen in Poro's case, she recoils to life because of her resilience.

CONCLUSION

The long-term disastrous effects of the tragedy of partition and its aftermath cast a spell on the lives of victims. Cultural dislocation altered their lives forever. Amrita Pritam in her novel *Pinjar* (The Skelton) focuses on the growth of her female characters from submissive to independent. Poro accepts pain as a way of life and remains faithful to her husband who is her abductor also. Thus, Amrita Pritam added gleam to partition literature by providing the women's perspective. Poro in *Pinjar* a victim of

cultural dislocation after partition recoils to life because of her innate resilience. It exhibits her strength in adverse circumstances.

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