

Pinjar by Amrita Pritam as a Critique of Partition and Women Suffering

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Abstract:

The novel 'Pinjar' by Amrita Pritam is set on the historical backdrop of 1947 when India got independence from British colonial rule after a long struggle. But It also proved as a deadliest episode in the Indian history which forced people to face the harsh realities of their lives. The time was a dawn of Independence for every Indian who were celebrating independence but the same time India faced partition in two states as 'Hindustan' and 'Pakistan'. Many people migrated from both the countries and took shelter in refugee camps. It was the worst phase in the country which trembled the every citizen of India. The intolerance during the partition created the differences between two countries which have not been improved till now.

*Partition affected to everyone but women had to suffer a lot during that time period. Many young women were abducted and forced to transform their identity. The country witnessed the thousands of women abducted and raped mercilessly .Women had to face the extreme violence during the phase of partition. Partition becomes the base for many of the novels as adapted by **Khuswant Singh, Amitav Ghosh, Bapsi Sidhwa** and other writers. The novel Pinjar is considered as one of the most popular novels deals with the issues of partition and women hardships which they have to face because of gender inequality and religion.*

My paper focuses on the critical study of the novel as described through the historical event.

Key words: Hardships, Partition, Differences, Independence.

Introduction: The paper concentrates on various conflicts depicted in the novel which occur between different communities and nations. It deals with the themes of *Hindu- Muslim* relationships, gender inequality, religious intolerance resulted in partition. Amrita Pritam has presented the artistic development of the novel and tries to give it a feministic touch. The paper also shows the concern for community or religion is not hurt by the novels as it highlights the heart-warming situations during that time period. The paper effectively examines the critical circumstances of women as the novel develops through a sentimental mode which has been highlighted through many turning points. Amrita Pritam is very well conversant about the

stuff and deals it with uttermost respect. The pathetic conditions during the partition have been heightened with the effect of inconstancy. Amrita Pritam puts her excellent efforts to describe the story in the most appropriate manner for being an eye witness during the span of partition. The novel was translated by Khuswant Singh as '*The Skelton*' which carries the literal meaning of Pinjar prevailed in Punjabi language. The paper effectively examines the issues that have been depicted in the novel as religious intolerance, gender inequality and sexual harassment. *Puro* fulfils the meaning of '*Pinzar*' while facing all the adversities of her life, transformed into a mere Skelton carries no soul. Through various incidents she tries to portray the characters who face the miserable circumstances during the trembling episode of partition. During the partition situations become so critical as abduction, rapes, riots prevailed everywhere. The young women are kidnapped and forced for intercourse to fulfil their sexual desires. The importance is given to them only because of their body.

History witnesses the violence of women in all the ages whether it is faced in ancient or medieval. The status of women is not more developed till the present day. In the epics like '*Ramayana*' and '*Mahabharata*', women have to face the violence due to gender inequality. In '*Ramayana*', *Sita* has to prove her virginity due to her abduction by *Ravana*. We can also trace the elements of violence in *Mahabharata* when *Draupadi* becomes the victim. The *Pandavas* are defeated by *Kauravas* in gambling and *Draupadi* is claimed by them. *Draupadi* is disrobed by *Duryodhana* before the entire court. So in every time period women is always used as a puppet who can dance according to male desires. Amrita Pritam focuses on the pathetic conditions faced by women during every time period.

The story is the description of '*Puro*', a Hindu girl who is engaged to '*Ramchand*' but meanwhile abducted by a Muslim boy named '*Rashid*' who kidnaps her due to their paternal enmity. The paper delicately highlights the complicated role of *Puro* experiencing all the hardships during the early stage of her life. Through *Puro*'s successful efforts she succeeds to escape and returns to her family but is not welcomed because of her loss of status. Women's chastity is always questioned in spite of nothing attempting wrong by them. After facing the rejection by her family she has neither any hope nor any fear because she tortured on two levels. She is physically tortured by *Rashid* and on emotional level she is tortured by her parents. *Puro* is totally scattered and is not just than a mere Skelton who has no thoughts, no feelings but only a piece of flesh. So *Puro* fulfils the meaning of the novel '*Pinjar*'.

The novel deals with the horrified circumstances created during the partition. It is that time period when *Hindu* and *Muslim* feel satisfaction in the bloodshed of opposite community.

Religious violence exists everywhere and people don't hesitate to kill someone mercilessly because of belonging to another community. The partition highlights the previous differences between *Hindus* and *Muslims*. In the novel, the relations between *Sheikhs* and *Sahukars* are not cordial and *Puro* becomes the victim of their differences. The situations are so critical that if a woman succeeds to escape from the trap of abductors to save her honour and return to her family but not allowed by the parents because of the terror and cruelty of Muslims as they horrify them not to bother even a single family member. This idea is highlighted through the character of *Puro's* father when he ignores her to enter in the family.

"You have lost your faith and birth right. If we dare to help you we will be cut down and finished without a trace of blood left behind to tell our faith."(P23)

Through these lines it is highlighted that women have to suffer always whether this sufferings may be of any type such as religious or cultural. The partition thoroughly meditates on the lives of women and describes their helplessness and exploitation which they have to suffer on the basis of religion and societal norms. It is considered as a shivering episode in Indian History which compels women to face the utmost degree of sufferings on the name of religion and gender

The idea of search for Identity has also been viewed through the character of *Puro*. She is entirely shattered when her identity is transformed from *Puro* to *Hamida*. The novel concentrates on the miserable condition of *Puro* through her transformation into another personality as a *Muslim*. She herself is puzzled about her recognition as a *Hindu* or a *Muslim*. The dilemma of identification is faced by *Puro* due to *Rashid* because of not facing any crisis in future due to her religion as a *Hindu*. Here the positive side of *Rashid* has been voiced in the novel but he also gains the criticism of readers who considers *puro* as his property. So society puts in cynicism which compels women to behave as 'the other.' Menon and Dharin give the remarks that:-

"[the] material, symbolic and political significance of abduction of women was not lost..... on the women themselves..... Their communion or.....government.....a retaliatory measure, it was simultaneously as assertion of identity and humiliation of the rival community through the appropriation of its women."(Menon,3).

The moment of transformation becomes the worst phase of her life when she feels alienated from the society. She also helps '*Lajo*' her sister in law to make her free from the trap of abductors and at last, when *Lajo* is welcomed in the family and *Puro* is also accepted but she

prefers to live with *Rashid*. Amrita Pritam throws light on the female sufferings that they have to make the compromise always in the male dominated society. History becomes the eye witness for the humiliation of women in all the ages whether in ancient or modern. They are tortured on the basis of religion, culture and sex. Society has set many barriers against the women and forced to play a role as 'the Second Sex' in the male dominated society. The story is also adapted for cinema and a movie has been directed on the novel with the same name as '*Pinjar*'. The movie presents the true picture of partition and women's suffering which gains the more attention of the spectators. The movie has won the National award for best art direction delivered by Indian Government. So the novel highlights that women have to live according to male dominated society.

Through the deep study of the novel it is revealed before us that *Puro* not only gains the reflection of the readers facing extreme sufferings of life during the span of partition but there are also various characters who gain the sympathy of the readers due to their physical and mental torture. An another character '*Taro*' is mentioned in the novel who faces the humiliation of her husband and is dishonoured by him due to her chronic ailment and is forced to join the prostitution. Another perspective about feminine inequality has been depicted by Amrita Pritam that a woman is only acceptable until she fulfils the male desires. Her own desires do not matter in the patriarchal society and always subjugated by the same. The women sacrifice and devotion to the society has been reflected by Amrita Pritam throughout the novel. The sufferings of partition have also been highlighted through *Lajo* '*Puro's sister-in-law*'. She is kidnapped by Muslims and is forced to be a concubine. When the matter comes into the notice of *Puro*, she puts her sincere efforts to make her free from the trap of abductors. *Lajo* is physically violated by Muslims but she also experiences the mental trauma about her acceptance in the family due to her loss of virginity. But with the *Puro's* attempts she is welcomed in the family with extreme respect. So *Puro* draws the more attention of the readers to assist everyone facing adversities in her own life. There is another woman character senses the sufferings of partition whose name has not been mentioned in the novel. She is called as a mad woman by the people because of her mental disturbance. She is sexually violated during the terrifying event of partition and is not conversant about the sexual harassment applied deliberately on her body even she is not aware about herself of becoming a mother. The highlights of abduction, sexual violence has been mentioned by the novelist through various characters such as *Puro*, *Lajo*, *Kammo* but partition also affects the lives of many young women of India who face the extreme degree of sufferings. Partition is regarded as a hilarious movement in the history of India which left everyone in miserable condition but women became the prime victim during the period.

Conclusion:- The paper focuses the sufferings of women which they have to face because of gender inequality, societal and cultural norms and religious intolerance. Women become the prime victim during the riots and war. They have to face the physical as well as mental torture due to the restrictions of male dominated society. Their virginity is always tested in all time period. Amrita Pritam has focused on the feministic point of view. Women are always subjugated and forced to remain passive for their own rights. They have to live according to the social barriers imposed on them. Their choices are not put in priorities because of being a woman who are nothing than 'the second sex', the ideology which has been developed by patriarchal society. So the novel highlights the migration of women their displacement, their search for identity and helplessness which they have to face because of their gender. *Puro* fulfils the aim of the novelist who suffers the utmost degree of suffering due to religion and gender. So partition leaves a bad impression on the minds of readers which compels the women to suffer a lot.

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