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Feminism over religion: Puro's lost and gained identity in pinjar

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Abstract

Amrita Pritam's novel *Pinjar* explores the intersection of feminism and religion through the protagonist Puro, a Hindu woman abducted by a Muslim man, Rashid, during the partition of India. The novel highlights how Puro's identity is lost and gained as she navigates the complexities of her new life as Hamida, a Muslim woman. Pritam critiques the patriarchal society and religious tensions that perpetuate violence against women.

Through Puro's journey, Pritam showcases the struggles women face in asserting their identity and dignity amidst societal and religious expectations. The novel underscores the importance of recognizing women's experiences and voices, particularly during times of conflict and upheaval.

Keywords: Feminism, patriarchy, partition, religion, struggle

Introduction

Indian writing in English has a rich and diverse history that spans over two centuries. From the early days of colonialism till the present day, Indian writers have used the English language to express their unique experiences, perspectives, and cultural identities. This body of work has not only reflected the complexities of Indian society but also contributed significantly to the global literary canon.

One of the most iconic and influential Indian writers in English is Amrita Pritam (1919-2005). A poet, novelist, and essayist, Pritam was a pioneering figure in Indian literature, known for her bold and unflinching portrayal of women's experiences, social injustices, and human condition. Her writing often explored themes of love, loss of identity, and the struggles of women in a patriarchal society. Her literary corpus encompassing '*Pinjar*', '*Sunera*', '*Nagmani*' reflect her enduring resonance with readers across generations.

Pritam's words reflect this trait:

"Mujhe wo samay yaad hai jab dhoop ka ek tukda, sooraj ki ungli thaam kar, andhere ka mela dekhta, us bheed mein kahin kho gaya" (I remember when a piece of sunshine, holding the sun's finger, watched the fair of darkness, lost somewhere in that crowd).¹

Born in Gujranwala, Punjab (now in Pakistan), Pritam's life and oeuvre were shaped by the tumultuous events of Indian history, including the partition of India and Pakistan. Her writings often reflected the complexities of this experience, serving as a bridge between the two cultures and languages. Pritam's work has been widely acclaimed for its lyricism, depth, and emotional resonance, and she remains one of the most beloved and respected Indian writers of all times.

Puro's story is a tale of jumps, humps and haunts. She is neither Puro, nor Hamida but a woman encompassing all wealth of love, compassion and mercy in her limitless soul in her journey from Puro to Hamida's stay in Pakistan. Despite the temptation given by her brother to come with her to India for good, while being separated from him forever, her decision and resolution not to leave her husband and the two sons, one of whom has not been even borne by her, create a sense of pride and adoration for her in the minds of the readers. Feminist theory may relate the strength and weaknesses of women; it may be related to the rights and 'unrights', Puro is one character in the fictional tale by Amrita Pritam who goes beyond religion to take care of her feminism and faces all distortions and dangerous situations in order to evolve her feminist trait.

A girl is a born mother, says Raja Rao in his novel *The Serpent and the Rope*. Here, we have Puro as an exemplary of the same. There are born impressions and *samskaras* in each person born on this earth. There are innumerable religions and castes all over the world. Here is a story that belongs to the partition of India and Pakistan and relates the tale of one who is

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abducted from her home, merely out of revenge. The impressions in the heart and soul of Pooro do not leave her for a long time as she has nightmares at times. Sheer pangs of separation and agony do not leave her. They go along with her and get suppressed gradually in her journey with the women characters around her life. Destiny decides as an experience in her life goes beyond religion taking her on the ocean of humanity where nothing else sales other than care, incessant love, mercy, sympathy and empathy. It is her good luck that the man Rashida who abducts her, takes care of her lovingly, instead of torturing her sadistically. He goes a long way with her in helping her out with the strange experiences that she has in life. The story throws forwards the message of humanity to all the human beings in the world, not only females but males also, that whatever destiny be, humanity must prevail. Surrendering herself before her luck, Puro steers her course well through the pangs and labyrinths of tricky life. The story belonging to the time of partition shows a complex networking web of inter-class, inter-caste and inter-religious relationships which have to be borne anyhow, no matter when and where.

A sense of pride prevails for Puro towards the end of the story. In the loss of identify, she gains innumerable lessons and bold experiences in life. She even hails up as someone beyond the religious and geographical constraints of this world. She opens new vistas of hope for future. It is obvious that her real identity which has gone down the sea of forgetfulness will never be absolved. She remains a human being and it is clear that she will continue to be a source of inspiration for others. A woman lost to herself, lost to her family and familial relationships, builds around her a house of confidence, newness and novelty. He is a harbour whose shore provides the land and space for the ships to find their haven and sail further and farther. 'Pinjar' shows fraternity at its best. It is the ultimate sacrifice made on the part of Pooru who got a new name; her true identity discarded her geographical and sociological belongings and adopted new circumstances in her life.

Amrita Pritam progresses the story through the big lesson and instruction to all the abducted ones at the time of partition that a man can grow, no matter what the circumstances be; one must have the guts to face the challenges and absurdities in life. It shows that one can grow altogether in life. Life does not stop. It goes on as shown through the life of Pooro.

In the beginning of the story when she is given a boy as the 'curse', she does not feel like feeding him and just feels:

The thought went round and round in her head with insidious insistence. This boy....this boy's father..... all mankindall menmen who gnaw a woman's body like a dog gnawing a bone and like a dog consuming it.

Journey of transformation and reservation starts with Kamo who lives in the same village. She is abandoned by her father after remarrying.

Her emotions rose like foam on the crest of a wave, were battered against the rocks of experience and subsided once more into the water.

The second step in her life is Taru whom she meets. Taro is ignored by her husband as he keeps another woman in house. She shares feelings with Hamida and says:

Only my lips are sealed and my feet put in fetters. ..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.

She is encountered by yet another woman who is crazy and

her whereabouts are unknown. She is teased and exploited by everyone in the village. One day she happens to give birth to a boy and this is discovered by Hamida. It is her large-heartedness that she goes beyond all boundaries and exceptions to adopt the child as her own. After some months, there is a conflict over the adoption of the infant when the Hindus try to snap him away from her. She surrenders before her destiny but in the end, is blessed again as the child does not keep well and the Hindus give him back to Rashida. In the words of Amrita Pritam:

She had nurtured the tiny bundle of skin and bone with her own breasts for six months, till he had started to look as fat and chubby as her own Javed.

Her heart bleeds as she sees the crime being inflicted upon the young girls who were chased and choked by the opposite parties. She feels:

It was a sin to be alive in a world so full of evil....it was a crime to be born a girl.

The heart-rending episodes during the time of partition are narrated by the story-writer. After sunset, bands of goondas stoned in, picked out women they liked and took them for the night; they were returned to the encampment in the morning. She next meets a girl that had been "forced to spend the preceding nights with different men. Hamida shelters her in her house and requests Ram Chand to take her to India and locate her parents.

She becomes the rescuing ambassador, known to Rashida only. Although Rashida holds an equal weightage in playing this role, still Hamida wins as she comes in the forefront. It is a fact, nevertheless that Puro could never have borne the responsibilities alone. She gets favoured by destiny. Her forced identity-shedding becomes a boon in disguise to many abandoned women in the story. The hidden feminist trait that was latent in Puro would have lacked its sincerity had she remained Puro only. Her boldness, cleverness and intelligence come up through the entrails of time.

Dr. Jayshree Singh and Dr. Bhumika Thakur state in their article "A Critical Study of Amrita Pritam's Writings: Her Sensitivity towards Social Norms during Indo-Pak Partition Holocaust": the situation of Partition is also represented as a platform for women where they emerged as the saviours of victimized. Many women as well as victims of Partition worked as self-inspired agents of benevolence, friends, care-takers and instructors. They were either "appointed by the government" or became the members of the organisations for the rehabilitation of women. They got an opportunity to work as counsellors, friends, care-takers and instructors. They at the same time provided motherly care, love and friendly assistance to the sufferers of this conflagration ^[2].

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