

Female Body as a Site of Exploitation in Amrita Pritam's "Pinjar"

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Abstract

Women have always been subjugated by the males through this paper it is made clear by the writings of Amrita Pritam. Till date we talk about emancipation of women but still we have not broken this shackles. In Pinjar, Amrita Pritam deals explicitly with the dislocation and violence against women during the partition holocaust. She tries to unfold the truth that women suffer not only by men's act of physical violence, but she is often emotionally hurt and crippled through his arrogance, cynicism and indifference. Men wield power over women through terror. It basically reflects the fate of hapless women bringing into light the character Puro together with sufferings and the rapacious battle between the two communities. The central character Puro is a symbol of suffering of survivals.

Keywords: Physical violence, emancipation, dislocation of women

Amrita Pritam, is an outstanding Indian Hindi writer. She articulates her deep concern over exploitation of women. In her poems and writings traces of unhappy marriage are seen. Often she has provoked through her writings. She has been described as the Goddess of defiance, rebel and recalcitrant and even revolutionary. She was one who lived her life with intensity. Amrita suffered from loneliness. Though her poems and novels comprised her anguish and alienation she felt relieved by writing them. She wrote about love, rejection, desire and longing.

In *Pinjar*, Amrita Pritam deals explicitly with the dislocation and violence against women during the partition holocaust. She tries to unfold the truth that women suffer not only by men's act of physical violence, but she is often emotionally hurt and crippled through his

arrogance, cynicism and indifference. Men wield power over women through terror. It basically reflects the fate of hapless women bringing into light the character Puro together with sufferings and the rapacious battle between the two communities. The central character Puro is a symbol of suffering of survivals. She goes through the pain of life caused by a milieu of turmoil in the days just before and during partition. Together with exploitation the novel also depicts the play of love and hate, the complexities of human mind and above all the predicament of the abducted women which are portrayed against the backdrop of partition-tragedy. Puro is first abducted and then married by a Muslim youth named Rashida, and reconciled it as her fate. A lot has been written on partition but what Amrita wrote is something pathetic and poignant, because it attempts to delve into the mental trauma of the people who lived during partition. It deals with the psyche of those trapped in the era. She was the first voice portraying the pain of partition from Punjab from the woman's point of views. The most poignant fact was she herself was an eyewitness to the horrors of partition as well as a victim. She was among the thousands who migrated from west Punjab to make their home across the fence. It was then that she penned down her feelings in the poem "Aaj Akhan Waris Shah Nu" and the novel *Pinjar*. 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 against women in a heart-rending manner" (Kavya Adhyayan).

Pritam in her writings have touched all the feminine aspects. She not only deals with the questions of marriage, sexuality and woman's equality with man but also raises the question of love, hatred, jealousy and certain human emotions and values. She renders a living picture of the oppressed, depressed and suppressed life of a woman in India in a male dominated patriarchal society. "Patriarchy" is a complex term since it refers to the women's collective experiences of subjugation at social, institutional political, economic and ideological levels. The degree of subjugation may differ from women to women. Women throughout the world experience the institutionalized and interpersonal dominance of men.

Amrita examines with keen sensitivity and perception the sufferings and problems of women in marriage, who feel completely entrapped, depressed, oppressed, suppressed and doomed to the care of husband and home. It further underlines the fact that the psychology of the girl child is shaped from childhood onwards with the straitjacket of restrictions, while the male child is indulged and spoilt to end because he must grow up to be a man. As Simone de Beauvoir also says in her book *The Second Sex*:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature... described as feminine (295).

The same thing is discussed by Ugair Sain Goswami in *Woman in Man's World*:

A woman may possess lot of virtues but she is not given the same equal status as that of man.

Gender discrimination is always done. For he says about Razia Sultana:

She was endowed with all the qualities befitting a King, but she was not born of the right sex, and so, in the estimation of men all these virtues were worthless (13).

A woman may have lot of potential in her but she is never estimated above man. She is always treated inferior to man. In a traditional society when a young girl reaches puberty, her movements are restricted, whereas there are no restrictions for her brothers at that age. The double standards start opening more overtly from this stage, binding girls indoors and encouraging boys to develop outdoor activities. A spirit of competition, exploration and challenge is inculcated among boys, and they are taught to assert their supremacy over the world in general. Girls, on the contrary, are discouraged from showing aggressive modes of behavior and instead, feminine virtues of grace, modesty and self-effacement are frequently demanded from them.

Though gender inequalities are neither culture specific nor country specific, the evil is as old as human civilization on the earth and it has traveled down from the primordial period to our times. It is ironic and pathetic to note that human civilization has evolved continuously ignoring the vital half of humanity i.e. women.

So Puro, succumbs to her parents who find her a husband in the traditional arranged manner. Marriage seems to fulfill her girlish dreams without getting a glimpse of her would be husband. For marriage is no more than one event in a man's life, but the only important event in a woman's life. The concept of marriage that is related to a delicate union of two different minds has not been properly realized in tradition bound Indian male dominated families. Woman's individual identity has not been positively and open mindedly realized in her marriage. Woman has never been accepted as a full human being or an equal partner to man in marriage. She is taken for granted on number of fronts. This casual attitude causes her consistent suffering and miserable life. In the Hindu society parents try to arrange the marriage of their daughters as it is taken as an obligatory responsibility on them. In this marriage, a girl is given off to a groom completely unknown to her. She is taken to the marriage 'pandal' like an embellished and an attired goat taken to a deity for sacrifice. She marries a man to whom she has never met and her approval is taken for granted and she moves to a land with her groom which she has never seen and forgoes all individual rights. It is considered indecency on the part of girl to tell her parents of her choice in marriage. That's why these decent girls obey their parents and silently bow down before them without questioning them about their marriage or their groom. As Simone Beauvoir in *Second Sex* says:

The very nature of the institution, the aim of which is to make the economic and sexual union of man and woman serve the interest of society, not assure their personal happiness. In patriarchal regimes as today among certain Mohammedans – it may happen that engaged persons chosen by parental authority have not even seen each other's faces before the wedding day (453).

Marriage, in the eyes of the society, is the *summum bonum* of a woman's life as Simone de Beauvoir observes in *The Second Sex*, "marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society" (Beauvoir, 445). According to the popular Indian myth, woman is *paraya dhan* i.e. other's property whose custodians are her parents till the time she is handed over to her rightful owner, her husband. The husband in turn feels privileged to treat her as his personal property or his possessions..

On the other hand Rashida seems to be indifferent to the sentiments of Puro, the protagonist. He abducts Puro before the wedding night just to avenge the family's honour. Thus Puro loses her freedom, personal identity and family respect just in one night over a tragic land dispute. As Urvashi Butalia says:

The most predictable form of violence experienced by women, as women, is when the women of one community are sexually assaulted by the men of the other, in an overt assertion of their identity and a simultaneous humiliation of the other by "dishonoring their women".

(*The Other Side of Silence*, 41)

Abduction of women was a common thing. It showed the power of one community over another community. Moreover, these abductions were never reported out of fear of public disgrace. So abduction and conversions were the double blow dealt by the Hindu "community" during the time of Partition. Thus rape and molestation of Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim women before and after partition probably followed the familiar pattern of sexual violence, of attack, retaliation and reprisal. The violence had extended to its extreme that women were stripped "just as bananas are peeled" and being made to parade naked in the market – place, or being made to dance thus in Gurudwaras or being raped in the presence of their men folk. During partition the violations of womankind included dislocation and violence against women. The dislocation for women was even more traumatic than it was for men. The abducted women were dislocated from their natal families. Thus, their links with their parental homes and families were broken and the support, physical and emotional, that women do get from their natal home even after they enter their marital status, was also broken. Women were thus dislocated at two levels from the home and from the family.

Rashida kept Puro in his captivity for fifteen days. Puro's protestations and all her attempts to persuade Rashida with regard to the injustice of taking vengeance on her for

sins committed by her relatives were in vain. Though he was in no mood to listen to her logical appeal, he was quite analytical when he mentioned about the religious objections that would crop up if she escaped to her parents:

Good woman, you have no place in that family anymore! If they let you in even once, not one of their Hindu friends or relatives will take a drop of water in their house. And you have been with me for fifteen days. (8)

One day she manages to escape from there. Unfortunately she has no doors open for her. Rashida's words proved to be right. The minds of Puro parents were so much in the grip of inhuman social conventions that they could not entertain even the feelings of happiness on seeing their missing daughter. They simply blamed her plight to the fate that was ordained for her (9). The feeble excuse they had offered to come out of their moral responsibility of going to their daughter's rescue was the threat they perceived from the Shaikhs. Puro learnt that abducted women have no life. As Nina Auerbach says: "A woman's fall ends in death" (*Woman and the Demon: the life of a Victorian Myth*, 155). Having confronted disappointment from her parents and her fiancé Ram Chand, only one wish that Puro was left with was to die. Even this one wish was ordained to stay unfulfilled: Rashida caught up with her as she was proceeding on her suicidal mission from her parents' house in order to put an end to her miserable existence. She had no other option than to follow Rashida zombie-like. The unlucky girl not only had to bear the misfortune of marrying her kidnapper and bearing him children, but also, she was made to change her religion to that of her husband's. She was rechristened as 'Hamida'. She was a "fallen" woman and nobody would accept her as a wife. Remaining single was equally difficult. Single girls were not treated respectfully. Moreover they faced the threats of seduction or were despised by the society. This was the reason during partition women committed suicide or were killed by their own menfolk to stop themselves from falling into enemy's hands. A number of women were forced to die to avoid sexual violence against them to preserve chastity and protect individual, family and community "honour". The means used to accomplish this end varied. When women themselves took their lives, they would either jump into the nearest well or set themselves ablaze singly or in groups and if they fell as victims in right hands they had no choice as Puro to get married and live a honorable life. For they very well knew that going back they would not be welcomed in the family either by parents or husbands. This was the condition of females during partition of India till date though we have become liberal in many ways towards females still there are cases of exploitation nobody has forgotten the Delhi case when a women was traveling in a bus where she was raped and killed and thrown down from the running bus from the so called men's.

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