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### Amrita Pritam's Pinjar: The Tragic Saga of Partition

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#### ABSTRACT

Amrita Pritam was a Panjabi poet, essayist and one of the famous Indian novelists who wrote in Panjabi and Hindi. She was known as the most prominent and prolific writer for the woman in Panjabi Literature. She received the Jananpith Award for collection of poems. As a novelist her most prominent novel Pinjar (1950) dealt with the traumatic experiences of women who suffered at the time of partition of India and Pakistan. The protagonist of the novel Pooro, a young Hindu girl, get kidnaped by a Muslim man, Rashid and her tragic journey begins. The present research paper deals with the problems of Pooro as well as other women characters in the novel such as Lajjo, a Madwoman (Pagali), Kammo. The paper takes the bird's eye view of the problems of partition.

#### KEY WORDS

Amrita Pritam, Pinjar, Partition, Women, Violence.

#### INTRODUCTION

Amrita Pritam was considered as the first Punjabi woman poet, novelist and essayist. She was born in 1919 at Mandi Bahauddin in Punjab (now in Pakistan). She started writing at the early age of her life. She was the first woman who received Sahitya Akademy Award in 1956, Padma Shree in 1969, and Padma Vibhushan in 2004. She was honored with Bhartiya Jnanpith Prize for her outstanding work 'Kagaj Ke Canvas'. At the age of 28, Amrita left Lahore and shifted to New Delhi. She was one of the few writers who voiced the silence of millions of women. Her works was translated into many Indian

and foreign languages. She was mostly praised for her notable work Pinjar which was originally written in Panjabi and translated into English by Khushwant Singh.

Pinjar expresses her anguish over the massacres during the partition of India and Pakistan, violence against women, traumatic experience of protagonist Pooro, loss of humanity etc. Pinjar highlights the gallery of characters who belong to Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religion. The novel tells the story of Pooro, a young girl of Hindu background, living a lovely life at the time of partition of 1947 with her family. Pooro is betrothed to a wealthy, sweet, young man Ramchand from a promising family. Pooro's bliss is shattered one day as a leisurely trip with Lajjo, her younger sister, turns traumatic as she is kidnapped by a mysterious Muslim man Rashid and Pooro's life begins to take a tragic way. Amrita Pritam tried to focus on the problems of women at the time of partition with the story of Pooro. It is the story of her abduction, migration, marriage, loss of dream, traumatic experience with Muslim family and effects of communal violence in 1947 where people of both sides were troubled by the decision of partition.

Pinjar means skeleton with neither a face, nor mind, nor will, nor identity, nor dreams, nor inner emotions, nor feelings. It is just a cage where Pooro lives her life with suffering and miseries. Amrita critically explores the way in which destiny of Pooro eventually becomes the fate of thousands of women at the time of partition. Both sides of nation namely India and Pakistan suffer similarly, both sides' women raped equally, they are sexually harassed, both sides of women are kidnaped by men. The situation of society becomes the worst and communal violence destroys the humanity. Amrita tries to show us the exact picture of society during partition. Women in particular suffer mentally and physically during and after partition. The social, political and religious conditions during partition in 1947 were totally changed for all mankind. These things are described with great sensitivity by Pritam.

Pooro, the central character in Pinjar, is an ideal and obedient girl. She has two sisters and a brother and all family members live happily. Her parents decide to engage her with Ramchand who lives in Rattoval. Pooro accepts the marriage proposal happily with Ramchand. His sister engaged with Pooro's brother. Both families are happy with these two relationships.

The fate turns and Pooro's life changes totally when she gets kidnaped by a Muslim man, Rashid. He takes ancestral revenge and Pooro becomes a victim of it. Rashid is a good man but he is forced to do this act. Pooro's uncle commits such heinous acts with Rashid's family member earlier. Rashid's family forcefully keeps Pooro in an unknown house. One day Pooro escapes from Rashid's house and visits her parents but they refuse to accept her. They believe that Pooro may have lost her chastity and it is difficult for them to face society. It may harm the future of her two sisters. Her parents refuse to accept her just for their own prestige that what the society will think about them. Pooro's mother in this regard says to her, "Who will marry you now? You have lost your religion and your birthright" "daughter, it would have been better if you had died at birth!".

Pooro's life turns into a tragic mode and she has left with no other options. She returns to Rashid humiliated and dejected. Her mental condition becomes the worst because of her rejection by her own family members. It brings a complete change in Pooro's identity. Amrita portrays the clear and exact picture of orthodox contemporary society. She shows how women's life completely changes by the decision of others. This shows the pathetic condition of Indian patriarchal mindset which denies the woman the basic right as a daughter. It shows that women don't have their own right to do what they exactly want from their life. They are dependent on others. She lives the life with the ways and expectations of her family before getting kidnaped. But her life turns to be a slave with Rashid. She unwillingly gets married to Rashid having no other options. Rashid's family changes the name of Pooro to Hameeda. The process of loss of identity from Pooro to Hamida brings out the tragedy of the plights of women in Indian sub-continent. The lifeless soul of Pooro lives in the body of Hameeda. Pooro's skeleton is ready for Hameeda, its mere structure of bones as she has

no feelings, no emotions, nothing inside her and her new social identity is created with the new name 'Hameeda'. Pritam writes: She was just a skeleton, without a shape or a name". After marriage with Rashid a Muslim boy, Pooro suffers by identity crisis. Pooro is the example of thousands of women who suffered at the time of partition. In *Borders and Boundaries* (1998), Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin remark:

We begin to discern some specific features of communal crimes against women....women's sexuality symbolizes "man-hood"; its desecration is a matter of such shame and dishonour that it has to be avenged... it is women ultimately who are most violently dealt with as a consequence (Menon and Bhasin 43).

Kammo is a little Hindu girl. She lives in the same village where Hameeda lives with Rashid. Pooro and Kammo share good relationship with each other. Pooro helps her with food and clothes. Pooro sees herself in Kammo, Kammo has step-mother because her own mother is died and her father remarried with other women. She is kind of parentless child that's why Pooro loves her. It can be observed that Hindu-Muslim sympathetic relationship here. But Kammo's mother doesn't like this relation and warns her against meeting her frequently. That day is the final meeting between them. This compels Pooro to ponder over the strange behavior of father to his children. Amrita Pritam shows us the way of people how the parents behave with their daughter and leave her like orphan girl when her father is alive. "The history of Partition," as Urvashi Butalia writes, "was a history of deep violation ... physical and mental for women" (Butalia 131).

The next lifeless skeleton is of a mad woman called Pagali. She is an insane middle aged woman and wanders in village for food only. She is having no sense of her cloth. The village women always try to cover her body with cloths. Unfortunately she is raped by an unknown man and this heinous act results into a delivering a baby-boy. Pooro sees her in field. When Pooro reaches to her she finds Pagali dead. Pooro covers the baby in her duppata (Weil) and take him to home. Pooro considers a rapist man to be an animal. She believes that woman is mostly victim in this world and her birth is not more than crime. Thereafter some Hindu people come to Rashid and claims the newly born baby as Hindu as the mad woman (mother of a baby) is Hindu. They take the baby in the name of religion and handover to Pooro almost a lifeless boy. Pooro accepts the baby as her son. She is not affected by his caste, religion and community. Amrita Pritam shows the picture of society where cruel men live just to use women for their need only. These men have no humanity and no sympathy for others.

The last tragic story is of Lajjo. She is a sister-in-law of Pooro. Her condition is very pathetic. Pooro's brother Trilok gets married to Ramchand's sister Lajjo. After the partition of India and Pakistan the situation of both countries becomes bad to the worst. Lacks of people suffer with this partition. Hindu people leave their own home and move to India because Muslim men plunder their houses and abduct their wives and daughter and rape them. The same situation happens with Ramchand's family and they decide to leave Rattoval and shift in India. During their journey to India on foot some Muslims men arrives and abducts some women and Lajjo is also abducted by one Muslim man who has already plundered the house of Ramchand. The Muslim man takes her home and rapes her. In refugee camp, Pooro meets to Ramchand. He tells her about Lajjo's abduction. Pooro tells him that she will try to release her. Again here one woman bears the trauma of abduction and rape. The tragic situation occurs in the life of Lajjo when Hameeda meets her first time. She looks like a lifeless skeleton. Pooro finds Lajjo with the help of Rashid, situation remains difficult for both women but they succeed. This incident gives Pooro a good thought for Rashid and sees his loyalty to her and her family members. They bring Lajjo to Lahore where Trilok and Ramchand come to receive Lajjo. Pooro has last chance to go to India with family because Ramchand is ready to accept her even now, but Pooro rejects the offer and choose Rashid and her fate. And lastly she says, "Whether one is a Hindu girl or a Muslim one whoever reaches her destination she carried my soul also" (Pritam 127).

Amrita Pritam symbolizes the different philosophy of life. How women suffer and bear the situation created by two different religious people. It also highlights how the social, political, religious, mental and even

physical condition is changed by one decision that is partition of India and Pakistan. The novel Pinjar represents the communal violence and other sufferings of people. The novel is a saga of religious, communal, traumatic and tragic conflict of partition.

## CONCLUSION

On the basis of the discourse held above, it can be concluded that Pinjar is the tragic saga of partition. The novel reflects with the episodes of suffering, traumatic experiences of women, rape, kidnaping, communal violence created after partition, etc. Pritam tries to describe her own experience of partition, when she was 28 years old and she left Lahore with husband and daughter. The partition of Indo-Pak affected her own life. The novel represents the different episodes of trauma, and tragic life of women characters and violence against women. The tragic stories of all women characters like Pooro, Kammo, Pagle, and Lajjo are truly heartrending. Amrita shows how communal violence spread like fire and burns the humanity. It shows how religious, social, political, mental and physical condition of two countries are changed by one decision that is partition.

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