

DEPICTION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL TRAUMA IN AMRITA PRITAM'S *PINJAR*

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ABSTRACT:

Amrita Pritam's novel *Pinjar* delves into the complex theme of psychological and emotional trauma experienced by individuals during the partition of India in 1947. This abstract aims to explore how Pritam skillfully portrays the deep-rooted impact of trauma on the characters, highlighting their psychological struggles, emotional turmoil, and the enduring scars left on their psyche. Through the narrative lens of Puro, the novel's protagonist, Pritam masterfully captures the multifaceted nature of trauma. Puro's abduction and subsequent separation from her family serve as catalysts for a harrowing journey, exposing her to physical, psychological, and emotional torment. Pritam intricately weaves Puro's experiences into the fabric of the novel, illuminating the long-lasting effects of trauma on her mental well-being. Pritam's exploration of psychological trauma is reflected in Puro's fragmented sense of self. She grapples with feelings of loss, abandonment, and isolation, leading to a fractured identity. Pritam portrays the internal conflict Puro experiences as she attempts to reconcile her past, her present circumstances, and her envisioned future. The author's portrayal allows readers to witness the profound psychological disarray resulting from traumatic experiences. Moreover, Pritam's narrative sheds light on the emotional consequences of trauma. The characters in *Pinjar* exemplify a range of emotional responses, such as fear, anger, despair, and numbness.

Keywords: Resilience, Vulnerabilities, Partition, Emotional and Psychological Trauma.

Amrita Pritam (1919-2005) was a renowned Indian writer and poet, best known for her contributions to Punjabi literature. She was born on August 31, 1919, in Gujranwala, which is now part of present-day Pakistan. Her birth name was Amrita Kaur. She grew up in a literary environment as her father was a poet himself. She started

writing at a young age and published her first collection of poems, titled "Amrit Lehran" (Immortal Waves), in 1936 when she was just 16 years old. Her early poetry was strongly influenced by romanticism and included themes of love and longing. In 1947, during the partition of India and Pakistan, Amrita Pritam migrated to India. This event had a profound impact on her writing and marked a shift in her literary style and themes. She began to explore more socially and politically relevant topics, particularly the experiences of women and the pain and trauma caused by the partition. One of Pritam's most famous works is her novel "Pinjar" (The Skeleton), published in 1950. The novel depicted the harrowing experiences of women during the partition and became a powerful portrayal of the human tragedy that unfolded during that time.

Psychological trauma in "Pinjar" refers to the deep psychological wounds and distress experienced by Puro and other characters due to the traumatic events they witness or endure. Puro's abduction and subsequent forced marriage to a Muslim man against her will, as well as witnessing the violence and atrocities during the partition, leave a profound impact on her psyche. She experiences fear, helplessness, anxiety, and a sense of loss. Emotional trauma in "Pinjar" relates to the intense emotional pain and suffering that Puro and other characters go through. Puro is torn away from her family, her home, and her identity, which results in a deep emotional scar. The trauma of being separated from loved ones, the constant threat to one's safety, being caught up in conflict gives rise to feelings of sadness, emotional instability. The depiction of psychological and emotional trauma in "Pinjar" highlights the long-lasting effects of violence, displacement, and loss experienced during the partition. It portrays the profound impact of such traumatic events on individuals' mental and emotional well-being, and how it shapes their lives and relationships in the aftermath. "In what pose am I sitting now? This is defined in the Holy Books as "Bhadra Mudra": that is to sit with the ankles supporting the coccyx. A yogic pose." (Pinjar 185)

Pinjar / Skelton (1950) novel by Amrita Pritam is about the partition of India. It is set during the time of partition in India, highlighting the devastating impact it had on families and individuals. The story revolves around a young Hindu girl named Puro, who becomes a victim of abduction and finds herself trapped in a world of pain, loss, and shattered identities. The novel begins with the peaceful life of the Hindu family in the village of Mirpur, located in the province of Punjab. Puro, the protagonist, is a lively and carefree girl who is deeply loved by her family. One day, during the partition riots, her village is attacked by Muslim rioters, leading to chaos and destruction. In the midst

of the violence, Puro is abducted by Rashid, a Muslim man. “My sins are forgiven me! Speak to me just once!” said a voice beside her. Puro raised her fevered head. It was Rashid who shrieked and fell back unconscious on her charpoy. She dreamed she was in a cave. A black bear was combing her hair with its claws. She shrank in size, while the bear grew bigger and bigger. The bear took her in its shaggy embrace.” (Pinjar 13)

Rashid takes Puro to his village and forcefully marries her, despite her protests and pleas to be released. Puro's life takes a drastic turn as she becomes a prisoner in Rashid's house. The trauma and anguish of being forcibly separated from her family leave her emotionally scarred. She is renamed Hamida by her captors, and her identity as Puro is gradually erased. As time passes, Puro learns to survive in her new environment. She encounters other women who have faced similar fates and forms a bond with them. Puro's family, unaware of her whereabouts, suffers immensely, grieving for their lost daughter. He had gone on – “I conferred no favor on your mother. She, poor soul, still believes I appeared as God to her. This too is a sin I confess to that I revealed nothing more to her. Perhaps the temptation of being her God still weighs more with me.” He broke into laughter and continued,

“You are her son. Considering you as my son too, I further confess to you that I wronged her in my youth. She had hardly descended from her palanquin as a bride when I left her and went to foreign lands. I earned enough for my revels, but more than the money lost, I lost my own soul. I contracted a disease that specialists told me had rendered me impotent. My name would not have lived on. All eaten up by that disease when I returned home, I did not deserve to see her face. I cursed myself for not being able to see her face to face. Years passed. I observed how much she yearned for a son. How much longer could I have gone on like that? After all, I owed her a debt... somehow or other, I had to show your face to her...” (Pinjar 242)

The novel also explores the impact of partition on both Hindu and Muslim communities, depicting the sense of loss and disarray prevalent during that period. Puro's brother, Trilok, becomes determined to find his sister and bring her back home. He embarks on a relentless search, facing numerous challenges and dangers along the way. Trilok's journey takes him through the war-torn regions of Punjab, witnessing the brutality and horrors inflicted upon both Hindus and Muslims. Meanwhile, Puro/Hamida struggles with her conflicting emotions. Although she despises Rashid for what he has done to her, she gradually develops a sense of empathy for him as she witnesses the suffering of other women in the household. Puro/Hamida's resilience and strength begin to shine through as she finds ways to

resist her captors and maintain her own dignity. As the story progresses, Puro's paths cross with Rasheed's sister, Lajjo, who shares her anguish over the suffering caused by the partition. Lajjo reveals the tragic story of her own marriage and the cruelty she faced at the hands of her husband. Puro/Hamida's interactions with Lajjo deepen her understanding of the shared pain experienced by women of both communities. Trilok's search eventually leads him to Rashid's village, where he discovers Puro's whereabouts. A confrontation between Trilok and Rashid ensues, highlighting the bitter animosity and hatred that had arisen during the partition. Trilok manages to rescue Puro and brings her back home to their family, reuniting them after a long and painful separation, "I do not know what is spread under me ... It must be the particular mat we have for the Bhadra posed... It is terribly hard... The Bhadra pose itself is hard. It needs a bull's hide to do it. To sit on this mat one has to will the welfare of folks around... Whose welfare will I be capable of?... Cannot those who derive super-powers by sitting in a particular pose on a particular mat do any good to themselves?" (Pinjar 186) What is this horrible smell? - Perhaps the bull's hide under me exudes it. No,

"It is my body that stinks... My hands, arms, chest - all stink. Like fish... 'Mastya' to be precise - the fish odor. Who was Matsya Odri? The female who was fertilized by Vasu Raja's sperm in the belly of a fish... My mother might be such a fish. I was conceived in the womb of a fish. There is the story after all that Mahant Kirpa Sagar was in a yogic trance... I do not know why this story is not in the Mahabharata." (Pinjar 186)

However, the trauma and scars of Puro's captivity cannot be easily erased. She struggles to readjust to her old life and finds herself caught between her past and present identities. The novel ends with a sense of loss and melancholy, symbolizing the irreparable damage caused by the partition and the indelible mark it leaves on the lives of individuals and communities. "Pinjar" delves into themes of identity, loss, resilience, and the devastating consequences of political turmoil. It portrays the human cost of violence and the deep emotional wounds inflicted upon individuals during times of conflict. Through Puro's journey, the novel offers a poignant exploration of the lasting impact of partition on the lives of ordinary people. In Rashid's house, Puro meets his mother, Amina, and his sister, Lajjo. She discovers that Rashid had kidnapped her to avenge the abduction of his sister, Sakina, by Puro's cousin, Hamida. Puro's world is turned upside down as she becomes trapped in a hostile environment, longing for her family and the life she once knew. Puro endures physical and emotional abuse from Rashid, who treats her as a possession rather than a human being. She feels trapped and yearns for freedom.

“I am neither Pooran nor a prince, I said simply. I was astonished. Why? What the peach tree had come to know about the weed growing out of crannied rock, Sunderan had not known. When at prayer-time she would empty out her fitful at the temple, her arm would, and snake-like, move under the heap of flowers, and at a touch of her palm or fingers, my foot would become numb. But today I held myself off from even that effect. Can the poison of a sting have any effect on a mere weed? Nothing errs can have any effect on me.” (Pinjar 175)

Over time, she develops a friendship with Lajjo, who shares her own desires for escape and the hope of returning to their respective families. Meanwhile, Ramchand, devastated by Puro's disappearance, is determined to find her. He leaves his village and embarks on a relentless search, braving dangerous situations and witnessing the horrors of partition firsthand. Ramchand encounters countless refugees, abandoned villages, and the pain and suffering caused by the violence that has consumed the region. One day, Lajjo reveals her plan to escape from Rashid's house and return home. Puro agrees to join her, and they manage to flee under the cover of darkness. However, their journey is fraught with danger and uncertainty. They encounter hostile mobs, trigger-happy soldiers, and desperate refugees struggling to survive. Despite facing numerous obstacles, Puro and Lajjo persevere, driven by their determination to find their families and reunite with their loved ones. They encounter kind strangers along the way who offer them shelter and assistance, showcasing the compassion that exists amidst the chaos of partition. Ramchand, in his tireless pursuit, comes across a refugee camp where he learns about Puro's escape. Filled with renewed hope, he follows their trail, guided by the stories of those who have encountered the two young women. His journey becomes a testament to the power of love and the resilience of the human spirit. Finally, Puro and Lajjo reach their respective villages, only to find them ravaged by violence. They discover that their families have been uprooted and displaced, and the familiar landscape has been forever changed. Puro's house lies in ruins and her family is nowhere to be found. In a heart-wrenching reunion, Puro and Ramchand find each other. They cling to each other, finding solace in the fact that they have survived the horrors of partition. They resolve to rebuild their lives together and carry the memories of their loved ones in their hearts.

Pritam writes: "When I entered your bridal chamber. I was not one but two persons. One's marriage had consummated and complete the other had remained a chaste virgin. To fulfill our union, I had to kill the

virgin. And kill her, I did. Such murders are sanctioned by the law, only the humiliation accompanying them is illegal. So I drank the poison of humiliation. Came the dawn and. I saw the dawn and I saw the blood on my hands. I washed them. Just as I washed off the odors on Amrita my body. But when I saw myself in my mirror, there she was before me; the same one I thought I had murdered during the night. Oh, God! Was the bridal chamber so dark that I could not tell the one I had slain from the one I did, in fact, kill.” (Singh 36-37)

Pritam's meticulous character development brings forth the intricacies of their emotional states, emphasizing the profound impact of trauma on the human psyche. Through their struggles, the novel illuminates the complex and often contradictory emotions that arise in response to traumatic events. Pinjar also explores the intergenerational transmission of trauma, as Pritam highlights how the experiences of one generation affect the next. The characters' psychological and emotional trauma reverberates through their family and community, perpetuating a cycle of pain and suffering. Pritam's portrayal prompts readers to reflect on the lasting consequences of trauma on both individuals and society at large.

Some of the prominent themes in "Pinjar" include: Partition and Communal Conflict: The novel vividly depicts the horrors and consequences of the partition of India, focusing on the violence and communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims. It explores how these conflicts disrupt and destroy the lives of ordinary people, tearing apart families and communities.

Identity and Belonging: "Pinjar" explores the theme of identity, particularly the struggle faced by individuals caught between two conflicting identities. Puro, the protagonist, finds herself torn between her Hindu upbringing and the circumstances she is forced into, as she becomes a part of a Muslim family. The novel delves into the question of where one truly belongs and the challenges faced when one's identity is in flux.

Gender Roles and Patriarchy: The novel provides a critique of patriarchal norms and the oppressive treatment of women within society. It highlights the vulnerability of women during times of conflict and their limited agency within a deeply patriarchal structure. Puro's journey becomes a symbol of the suffering and resilience of women in such circumstances.

Love and Relationships: "Pinjar" explores different forms of love and relationships amidst the backdrop of turmoil. It showcases the power of love to transcend boundaries, as well as the complexities and sacrifices that love can demand. The novel portrays both familial love and romantic love, examining how these relationships are tested and transformed during times of crisis.

Loss and Trauma: The novel delves into the themes of loss and trauma experienced by individuals affected by the partition. It explores the psychological and emotional impact of displacement, violence, and the destruction of familiar surroundings. The characters in "Pinjar" grapple with the pain of their losses and strive to find healing and a sense of normalcy.

Resilience and Survival: Amidst the despair and tragedy, "Pinjar" also portrays the indomitable spirit of its characters. It highlights their resilience and their ability to endure and survive in the face of adversity. The novel showcases the strength and determination of individuals to rebuild their lives, despite the scars left by the partition.

Review of Literature: In the words of D. R. More, Pinjar is remarkable for its: "poetic presentment of the theme of the exploitation of the weaker sex on the background of the partition tragedy." (More 235)

As quoted by Kalpana Raithatha, Lakshmi Chand Jain, the Director of Bhartiya Gyanpith comments about Amrita's 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/excitement of tension, conflict and pure love even in the difficult situations, such a 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)." (Lakshmi Chand 63)

But when she declares Pakistan as her home, according to Priyadarshini Dasgupta: "Poora, 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 05)

Amrita Pritam has passed through Partition and her experiences find first hand expression in Pinjar. Besides this, Unke Hastakshar and Dr. Dev also voice her trauma. She once said about Partition: "I have written a lot on communal quarrels, and now I am tired of it.....Man has still not understood Mohmmad, Nanak or Krishna. He is

still entangled in meager things and is there only where he previously was. How would he understand that love and lord are one only?" (Translated) (20)

As Raghu Ram Bandi puts it, "The cinema's business is not the photographing of theatrical décor, a pre-stylized reality, but the photographing of actual physical reality so that it has style." (Bandi 9-10)

To conclude, "Pinjar" is a deeply touching story that highlights the complexities of human nature, resilience and the power of empathy in the face of unimaginable circumstances. Through the lives of its characters, the novel reflects the indomitable spirit of those affected by the Partition and the enduring hope for healing and reconciliation. "Pinjar" ends on a poignant note, reflecting the wounds of Partition that will forever be etched on the lives of those who bear it. It is a reminder of the human cost of communal violence and the importance of compassion and understanding in times of conflict. In the midst of pain and loss, the novel leaves the reader with a glimmer of hope, epitomized by the enduring love between Puro and Ramchand and the indomitable spirit of those who forge ahead despite the darkest of circumstances. Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* is deeply revealing in its portrayal of psychological and emotional trauma. Through the character of Puro and the experiences of other characters, Pritam provides a poignant portrayal of the deep impact of trauma on the human psyche. Highlighting psychological conflicts, emotional upheavals and inter-generational effects, Pritam's novel offers readers a compelling exploration of the long-lasting effects of trauma in the context of the Partition of India in 1947.

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