

A Study of Thematic Perspective in the Novel *Pinjar: The Skeleton*

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ABSTRACT

Feminist discourse comprises the study of complications of gender discrimination, social insecurity, and religion that arose due to the patriarchal domination of women. The feminist movement allows to en route for achieving gender equality and empowers women to live freer and safer from sexual exploitation. This paper dwells deeply into the projection of women who come across the trauma of exploitation, molestation, migration, social insecurity, marginalization and subaltern during the prevalence of colonialists. In the novel, *Pinjar: The Skeleton* of Amrita Pritam portrays how women are entangled at the hands of patriarchy, with no self-identity, easy to be manhandled, and no right to put up their say. She is victimized not only before the partition but also during the partition. She is least bothered by enjoying her status in society.

KEYWORDS

Exploitation; Molestation; Marginalization; Social Insecurity Patriarchy; Partition.

Introduction: On 8th March 1947, The Congress working committee decided on the partition of Punjab in accord to skip the horrors of violence and brutality which the leaders regretfully acknowledged and the decision was taken to separate the Muslim part and non-Muslim. But the plan was announced without its aftermaths.

Amrita Pritam was the famous women writer of her time who initiated the plight of women's oppression on several grounds. She was honoured for her work

with Sahitya Akademi award and Jnanpith award. She has several works in her kitty. And her first novel, *Pinjar: The Skeleton* gave her great recognition in 1950 and it was later translated by Khuswant Singh from Punjabi to English. She was a persona of great simplicity which was drawn in her work also and the flow was lyrical. She wrote thrilling *Doctor Dev*, *Kore Kaagaz* (Blank Pages) and *Unchaas Din* (49) days. She has penned 28 novels, 18 anthologies of prose, five short stories to her credit and 1

miscellaneous prose volume. Down memory lane, we are drawn towards the scenario on the eve of partition in the novel *Pinjar: The Skeleton* by Amrita Pritam. It was witnessed by Amrita Pritam during partition and made a great impact on her life. She has seen several deaths, assaults, oppression, migration, and cultural disparity.

Religion:

She takes his name; she belongs to his religion, his class, and his circle; she joins his family, and she becomes his 'half. She follows wherever his work calls him and determines their place of residence; she breaks more or less decisively with her past, becoming attached to her husband's universe (Beauvoir 2011: 131)

In the book, *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, she stated that the woman adopts her husband's religion, caste and culture and proceeds mutely without determining her own previous individuality.

The novel makes us feel that colonialism has disturbed our culture, played the religious card unplanned transition of the formation of two nations which has brought a great massacre of history. The women who played the secondary sex of the society was totally ignored and rolled on like puppet at the hands of stereotypical society lawmakers. The novel was so much of a reality hit that it was released as a film.

When we heard of the plans of your wedding, there was talk of settling old scores. They picked on me to take an oath on the Koran that I would abduct Sahukar's daughter before she was wed. (Pritam 2009:17)

The story begins with a flashback of

revenge between shaikhs and the sahuks (the two different religious communities) due to money lent by shaikhs from sahuks and being unable to repay it on time and this resulted in Rashida's aunt being kept as a prisoner for 3 nights with the concern of Pooro's grandfather. This caused fuel to the fire and the whole family finalized to avenge this insult. As the wedding news breaks out of Pooro, it is decided to kidnap her. In both cases, Pooro's aunt and Pooro were observed as easy to grip upon hurting someone's family pride and causing harm to the dignity of both the women at the same time. She is considered as easily approachable without her concern or identity.

"Who will marry you now? You have lost your religion and your birthright. If we dare to help you, we will be wiped out without a trace of blood left behind to tell of our fate". (Pritam 2009:22)

The stigma connected if a girl is abducted by opponent religion she is never accepted by her family to protect their family pride. The loss of religion is inter-linked with the loss of birthright. Even daughter is disowned by their own family members. Religion plays pivotal role in the development of family feud for generations and this fear engulfs the parents to secure their future.

"The Shaikhs will descend on us and destroy everything we have." (Pritam 2009:22)

The fear of threat hovering upon the Pooro's father that anytime Shaikhs can attack upon them no matter even if she is their daughter that is not of great importance but securing their religion, their name and fame in the society is of higher priority.

Social Insecurity:

While marriage is a burden and a

benefit for both partners, there is little symmetry in their respective positions. For young women it is the only means of integration into the community, and 'if they remain unwanted they are, socially viewed, so much wastage'. (Beauvoir 2011: 130)

The book "Secondary Sex" by Simone de Beauvoir highlighted that marriage is the only means of survival in the community for women's social security otherwise she will be considered unfortunate women in contrast to men in society.

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. (Pritam 2009:18,19)

This situation instigates social insecurity when a Hindu woman is abducted by any Muslim group or individual, she has no doors opened for her return to the previous life, one kind of stigma is attached to her. In fear of bad name in the society she is never accepted and left insecure. The religious hybridity is not easily acceptable; they will be banned from cultural activities once realized if she has spent fifteen days with the opponent's house.

"Daughter, this fate was ordained for you, we are helpless." Pooro heard her father's voice. She clung to her mother. (Pritam 2009:22)

It was ingrained in the mindset of women by the patriarchal system that if she is kidnapped by any means she is not easily accepted in society. The opponents will never allow them to breathe easy air with all the possessions, and luxuries they have. So

she is not given her stand in the society nor freedom of expression as a living entity or equal member of the family. In the fear of the opponent's destruction attitude, she is disgraced.

"Then destroy me with your own hands" (Pritam 2009:23)

Right from childhood it is imbibed into the minds of a daughter that she is always considered as the subaltern of the family if she even doesn't have a place in society she has no right to survive. Even she considers herself a muted person with no right to speak, express, or survive with her emotions. She needs to suppress herself under the load of bottled-up emotions.

"Daughter, it would have been better if you had died at birth! If the Shaikhs find you here they will kill your father and your brother. They will kill all of us", said the mother, hardening her heart. (Pritam 2009:23)

It's imbibed in the minds of women that she has to be sacrificed for the sake of the patriarchal system's norms. Her survival is for the victory of manly powers to prevail. Her birth and death are only decided for the beneficiary of the other members of the family till she weds.

Armed gangs had started using rape as a tool of violence in Bengal and Bihar in 1946 but now took on a new ubiquity and savagery in Punjab. It sparked the deepest feelings of revenge, dishonour and shame. Many women were silent about what had happened to them: 'in most households, the woman said no, no, I was hiding in the jungle or I was hiding in the pond, or I was hiding in a neighbor's house,' recalled Ashoka Gupta, a volunteer who worked with

distraught women in the aftermath of attacks in Noakhali; 'they will not declare, or they will not confess, that they have been raped or molested ... because it will be a confession of shame, and once confessed there will be quite a possibility that they will not be taken back in their own homes.' (Khan 2017:133)

Yasmin Khan has narrated the ordeal of women from the book *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, we can see that how it was considered as taboo when women being molested or abused has brought shame to the family and terminated as bad sin. she is granted as an object who shall not be used after its first use so that was the thinking process.

After this situation Pooro realizes she has no way for comeback in the family. She gets married to Rashida and they shift to new village Sakkar. She is inscribed with new name "Hamida" left with no identity for her. Its ritual if one woman gets married she is given new name at in-laws house. (Pritam 2009:25). After kidnap, religious change, unacceptance by paternal family members she has left emotionless, lifeless, speechless, unexpressive, but has become "skeleton" with no flesh to feel anything on to her. (Pritam 2009:25)

"Where can I go to? Whom am I related to except to you?" she replied with great bitterness (Pritam 2009:26)

Hamida is engulfed with dejection with the thought of past which she never overcomes from it, she considered paternal family as whole world which no more exists to her. She is not able to absorb with her new environment because of bad past hovering upon her mind.

"What more do you want of me? I have given you a son. I have nothing more to give". Then she closed her eyes. (Pritam

2009:33)

For a woman giving childbirth is heavenly experience but here Hamida's thoughts are hovered with bad past and she surrenders herself with the acceptance of producing family successor in the form of son. Women always considers if once produced son in her lifetime is great enough than any other thing and brings pride and honor to the family.

"As if food and clothing were all a woman wanted!" said Hamida (Pritam2009:46)

The author has clearly showcased how women is marginalized with the limited requirement of food and clothing, ignorance of emotions, suppression has been witnessed, where Taro was exploited by her in-laws , she was forced to accept herself as a whore for her survival. It has been seen that parents have accepted that once the girl is married it's up to the in-laws who will have the complete rights upon her mind and soul. She is not supposed to express or utter her heart out. she is tied up in fetters (chained). Another mad woman was witnessed in the novel who is been raped and impregnated.

Gender Discrimination:

It has often been noted that from puberty, the girl loses ground in intellectual and artistic fields. There are many reasons for this. One of the most common is that the adolescent girl does not receive the same encouragement accorded to her brothers; on the contrary, she is expected to be a woman as well, and she must add to her professional work the duties that femininity implies. (Beauvoir 2011: 400)

The above statement from the book "Secondary Sex" by Simone de Beauvoir has raised the turning point that during the onset of puberty, her liberty for intellectual

and artistic stream is lost due to no motivation with compared to boys, whereas her expectations are to fulfill the feministic duties.

“Once we give away a daughter our lips are sealed. It’s up to her husband to treat her as he likes. It is a man’s privilege,” explained the mother. (Pritam 2009:47)

It’s imbibed in the patriarchal system that a woman is considered as an object not only at her in-laws place where she cannot enjoy the status of self-identity or take a stance at her views. She is considered as a man’s privilege to make all the important decisions on her behalf and termed as no point in taking her opinion, she was taken granted as the least bothered or secondary sex of the society.

“A man’s body has meaning by itself, disregarding the body of the woman, whereas the woman’s body seems devoid of meaning without reference to the male. Man thinks himself without woman. Woman does not think herself without man.” And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called “the sex,” meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him she is sex, so she is it in the absolute. (Beauvoir 2011: 26)

It has been stated in the book “Secondary Sex” by Simone de Beauvoir that women’s body has no importance as compared to male body, even in her thinking process she considers male as a prime decision maker but whereas male we find vice versa. She is always calculated as the sex object for securing pleasure and taken granted as diminished in anyway. Her feelings or opinion carries no prime focus either attention. Her intellectuality depends upon the men’s perspective.

“Taro pull yourself together Don’t blurt out everything that comes into your mind. What will people say if they overhear you?” chided the mother her eyes brimming with tears. (Pritam 2009:48)

It was observed that the girl child was never at the point of freedom to express her bottled emotions, she needs to consider society’s view of her attitude or behaviour.

Hamida’s ears burned with rage when she heard of the abduction of Hindu girls by Muslims and of Muslim girls by Hindus, some had been forced into marriage, some murdered, some stripped and paraded naked in the streets. (Pritam 2009:85)

It was a sight of mass abduction in a fit of rage of communal violence women were brutally assaulted and displayed with no clothes on them as they were the easy targets during this situation.

In Hamida’s village, they beat drums of joy and hung out green flags with the crescent moon and star. Every day with the Muslims forgathered at the mosque, the faces of the Hindus turned pale as if they had been smeared with turmeric. (Pritam 2009:85)

It was the day of 15th August 1947 one section of religion was celebrating the moment as if they were longing for this moment and the other religion was in shock and foreseeing the dark future of the village, unaware of the upcoming uncertainties that may occur and unknown fear hovered upon their mind.

“I... I’ll never get there”.

“Oh yes, you will. You will go back to your home, your husband and your

brother”.

“I am no good for anyone now. No one will accept me.” (Pritam 2009:118)

After abduction, Lajjo was rescued by Rashida but her ingrained stereotype didn't allow her to accept as an equal member of the society to survive freely she is considering herself as impure after the strangers touch. She blames herself responsible for all the bad happened to her and not ready to absorb in the society. Once the women of the house is out of the house without the consent of the family it is considered as being unloyal to other members, she is considered as a stigma being brought to family. It was the mindset of the people.

“Pooro!” said her brother, grabbing her by the arm. “This is your only chance...” Hamida understood what he was saying and for a brief moment was overcome by temptation. She knew she had only to say that she was a Hindu and they would put her in the bus and take her back to her in the bus and take her back to the people. Like Lajo, like thousands of other women in the country, she too could...But she made her brother release her arm, turned back to where Rashida was standing and clasped her son to her bosom. (Pritam 2009: 127)

It was imbibed in the mindset of the woman since childhood that if she is married through abduction, she has no way of returning back home even though she is filled up with bottled-up emotions for returning home. They consider themselves that they are bound to their marital duties after the marriage ignoring their own desires. They are habitual offenders of suppressing their emotions. Once in a

lifetime marriage occurs and the husband is considered as the sole owner of their life, they need to serve till their last breath.

Conclusion:

The motive behind feminism is that women have power over themselves rather than toxic masculinity. To rid of male dominance upon women as she is considered weak, and fragile needs to be looked after as a protector. We have to be anti-patriarchy, and anti-sexist, we need to work to construct life without societal expectations, we need to work for equal opportunity and equal lives. In greed of achieving power upon the suppressed where women are categorized under it, she is ill-treated through social insecurity, religion and gender discrimination. She is objectified as a thing rather than a human being with emotions, desires, and expectations. The colonial impact had brought tremendous change in all social security, religion and gender discrimination of women, Britisher's invasion changed the women's role in society, even during and after partition she was not spared, and was been subjectified to cruelty for their cruel desires. This novel narrates partition clashes between individual identity and women's status in the midst of social-political indifferences. The emptiness created by partition in women's life is contrast to the skeleton with no desires, emotions, great future and ambitions, only a disastrous future is promised. In this novel we witness 5 women's ordeal to fight with the circumstances they fall across, every character struggles with the situation; they are shown traditional women of the society who sacrifice their lives for the sake of their family's well-being. She is unheard; her voice carries no matter and stands at the margin of the matter.

Post-Partition in India has not changed the fate of the women it remains

similar where women depicted with domestic violence, and psycho traumatic illnesses suffer with mute silences, with heavy hearts filled with bottled-up emotions witnessed in the present scenario. She still looks forward to male agreement for any decisions. She is crushed under the pressure of patriarchy on every path. Social insecurity, religion and gender discrimination play a crucial role in the life

of a woman, she is predicted as a puppet at the hands of men. So, in this novel author, Amrita Pritam shows the mirror to society, she showcases how several aspects are held responsible for the distraught life of a woman, to bring about acknowledgement for the terrible exploitation happening to her, how she is criticized, national exodus, alternated personality, inadequacy in the men dominated world.

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