



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA OF PARTITION ON WOMEN: A STUDY BASED ON AMRITA PRITAM'S WORKS

Greeshma. D¹, Dr. D. Vijayaraghavan²

²Research Guide, HOD, Department of English, Kathir College of Arts and Science Neelambur, Tamil Nadu.

¹Email: greeshmadileep1995@gmail.com

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.12.1.214](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.12.1.214)



Article info

Article Received:11/02/2024

Article Accepted: 16/03/2024

Published online:21/03/2024

Abstract

The idea of trauma gains legitimacy and is theorised into literature with the publishing of *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* by Cathy Caruth and Kali Tal's *World's of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996). Trauma is linked to psychological characteristics as opposed to physical characteristics, and its consequences are usually nervous breakdowns and mental dangers. Despite being relatively young, the trauma theory has developed to a stand-alone level, yet it has roots in Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Amrita Pritam has captured the lives and experiences of women during Partition in her writings. She represents the suffering that women went through at that time and the effects it had on them. The paper is an attempt to analyse Amrita Pritam's Pinjar where she portrays victimised women during the Partition and Post-Partition eras, specifically examining the violence caused, the trauma undergone by them, and the loss of identity associated with it.

Keywords: Identity, Partition, Trauma Theory, Violence, Women

Introduction

Trauma studies delve into how psychological trauma is depicted through language and how memory shapes both individual and cultural identities. In literature, trauma theory is utilized to delve into characters' innermost thoughts and experiences. According to Susannah Radstone, trauma theory represents an interdisciplinary field of Western scholarship that emerged in the 1980s, blending insights from psychology and the humanities (Abubakar 120). This approach combines elements of humanities and psychology to convey the suffering stemming from traumatic events, often

leaving a lasting psychological impact on those recounting their stories.

On August 15, 1947, India achieved independence from the British Empire, marking a significant moment in history. However, this milestone was marred by the violent partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. This division, both geographically and religiously, inflicted profound pain and trauma on millions of individuals, resulting in one of the largest and swiftest migrations in human history. Approximately 14.5 million people relocated within a span of four years, leaving behind their homes and possessions. The harsh reality of this mass exodus fueled feelings of

anger and animosity among communities, leading to various acts of community violence such as rape, murder, kidnapping, arson, and the desecration of female bodies.

The partition's impact on the daily lives of individuals on both sides of the border has been vividly portrayed by numerous literary figures and scholars, including renowned names like Amrita Pritam, Khushwant Singh, Yashpal, Bapsi Sidhwa, Salman Rushdie, and others. Amrita Pritam, a celebrated Punjabi writer, has left a lasting impact on Indian and Pakistani audiences through her works depicting the chaos of the Partition. In her works "Pinjar" (1950) and "AjAakhanWaris Shah nu," Pritam evokes a sense of regret and reconciliation for the actions of both communities during that tumultuous period. She sheds light on the vulnerability of women who often became targets of community rivalries, particularly during the violent upheaval of the Partition when the conflict between the two communities was at its peak.

Before the partition, women had limited roles in the economic and political spheres of the country, primarily confined to their homes. They were seen as upholders of family and community honor and respect. Any dishonor to women was considered a disgrace to the male members of the family and the community, making women vulnerable targets of communal rivalries and violence. They faced atrocities such as losing their loved ones, being subjected to kidnapping, molestation, rape, public humiliation, forced marriages, religious conversions, mutilation, and branding with slogans of opposing factions. Instances of honor killings were also reported, where husbands killed their wives and fathers sacrificed their children to safeguard the community's honor (Trishanjit 3). Women from all social strata, whether affluent or poor, bore the brunt of communal violence.

Psychological Trauma of Partition on Women

The novel "Pinjar" revolves around the abduction of a fourteen-year-old girl named Puro by a man from a different religious background, Rashid, seeking retribution for a family feud. It narrates Puro's transformation from Puro to Hamida, her loss

of identity, and the suffering she endures. The narrative serves as a critique of a society that views women as possessions to be taken and exploited at will. Menon and Dharin rightly pointed out that: "[the] material, symbolic and political significance of abduction of women was not lost....on the women themselves..... their communion or on.....governments. As a retaliatory measure, it was simultaneously an assertion of identity and humiliation of the rival community through the appropriation of its women" (Menon, 3). "Pinjar" delves into the pain, exploitation, and sacrifices experienced by women due to displacement and abduction during the partition, portraying the fate of numerous women through the central character's plight. Puro's abduction by Rashid, driven by a cycle of vengeance, exemplifies how conflicts between families, communities, and nations often manifest brutally and blindly on women's bodies and identities. Despite not being violated by Rashid, Puro faces rejection upon her return home, as her abduction raises doubts about her chastity and loyalty, leading to her exclusion from the family. Her father rejects her as he says "you have lost your faith and birthright. If we dare to help you, we will be cut down and finished without a trace of blood left behind to tell our faith" (Pritam 23).

Her father's refusal to accept her stems from the belief that her tarnished reputation and altered identity would make it impossible for her to find a suitable marriage prospect. This rejection from her own family inflicts a deeper wound than her abduction. She experiences a double violation - first by her abductor, Rashid, and then by her family, who emotionally rejects her. ".....she had believed she was returning to life; she had wanted to live again, to be with her father and mother, she had come with full of hope. Now she had no hope, nor any fear" (p.16).

In this scenario, family honour and religious traditions take precedence over the well-being of the daughter in the eyes of the authoritative male figure. While her brother Trilok seeks to bring Puro back home, her father's disapproval highlights how other family members succumb to the dominance of the male authority figure. The family structure emerges as a stronghold of patriarchy, disregarding

the female member's aspirations for freedom and autonomy. This aspect of patriarchal family dynamics is critiqued by Kate Millet, a prominent radical feminist and key figure in second-wave feminism, as outlined in her work "Sexual Politics" (1970) as defined by Henry Maine:

The eldest male parent is absolutely supreme in his household. His dominion extends to life and death and is as qualified over his children and their houses as over his slaves (Millett 34).

Pooro is a victim of deeply ingrained gender-based violence rather than communal violence, bearing the burden of societal expectations placed upon her. She is seen more as a symbol of familial and communal honor rather than as an individual with her own agency. Pooro was a tool for vengeance, she questions Rashid "If my uncle abducted your aunt, what fault was that of mine? You have reduced me to homeless vagrant"(Pritam 18).

Returning to Rashid in a state of grief and desperation, Pooro undergoes further trauma, living a hollow existence akin to a skeleton. Coerced into marriage by Rashid, she reluctantly bears his child, enduring immense emotional torment throughout the pregnancy. Her anguish is palpable as she reflects on the exploitation and violation she has endured, expressing her despair at the predatory nature of men. She says, "This boy... this boy's father... all mankind... all men... men who gnaw a woman's body like a dog gnawing a bone and like a dog consuming it" (Pritam 35).

Stripped of her identity, Pooro is now known as the wife of a Muslim man and the mother of Rashid's child. Clinging to her name, Pooro, as a semblance of her former self, she grapples with the imposition of the name Hamida through a tattoo, symbolizing her transformation into a Muslim wife. This act shatters her Hindu identity, leaving her profoundly affected by the loss of her true self, perpetually seeking solace in her dreams where she oscillates between her past and present identities. In reality, she exists as neither Pooro nor Hamida, but as a mere shell devoid of form or identity. The

dreams are a representation of her traumatised mind

In her dreams, when she met her old friends and played in her parent's home, everyone still called her Pooro. At other times she was Hamida. It was a double life: Hamida by day, Pooro by night. In reality, she was neither one nor the other, she was just a skeleton, without a shape or a name (Pritam 25).

Rashid grapples with guilt over Puro's abduction, seeking her forgiveness and attempting to show care and affection. However, Puro remains resolute in her unforgiving stance, unable to overlook the deep wounds inflicted by Rashid. As Hamida, Puro encounters three other women who have suffered from gender-based abuse, all reduced to mere bodies rather than individuals.

One of these women, Taro, afflicted by a mysterious illness and abandoned by her husband, is coerced into prostitution to survive. She says to Puro: "What can I tell you/ when a girl is given away in marriage, God deprives her of her tongue, so that she may not complain. For a full two years, I had to sell my body for a cup of pottage and a few rags. I am like a whore, a prostitute.....there is no justice in the world, nor any God. He (her husband) can do what he likes. There is no God to stop him. God's fetter were me and only for my feet" (p.36-38). Taro's poignant words to Puro reflect the harsh reality of her plight, highlighting the lack of justice and agency for women in a patriarchal society. Amrita Pritam underscores the dehumanization of women and the moral failure of communities that allow such violations to persist.

Another character, Kammo, a young girl neglected by her father and mistreated by her aunt, finds solace in viewing Hamida as a maternal figure. Despite Kammo's innocent perception, societal prejudices prevent her from forming a bond with Hamida due to religious differences. Through these encounters, Puro realizes the systemic victimization of women in conflicts, lamenting the burden of existence as a woman. She says, "It was a sin to be alive in this world full of evil, thought Hamida, It was a crime to be born a woman" (p.65).

Puro's own plight is repeated in the case of her sister-in-law Lajo, who faces a similar fate of abduction and captivity. Here she aids Lajo displaying immense courage by navigating the oppressive forces of patriarchy and displacement that ensnare the female characters in the narrative. The novel exposes various forms of violence against women, including the dehumanizing practice of parading a woman naked through villages, symbolizing the degradation and objectification of women's bodies.

Amrita attempts to reveal the dimensions of abuse against women and their trauma via the characters of Puro, Lajo, Taro, and Kammo. She emphasises the fact that women in our patriarchal culture had to continuously prove their innocence and claim their right to dignity. Another kind of violence against women shown in the novel is the nude parade of a woman through the villages and cities. The story mentions one such instance in which a young girl was exhibited naked, "One day Puro saw that a young girl was paraded naked while ten youths in the form of procession accompanied by drum passed by their village..." (p. 91). There is another female character who was sexually attacked and becomes pregnant. The woman was mentally ill and had no idea what was happening to her body or the kid developing inside her.

Partition is a heartbreaking disaster that has left victims and raped women with life-long pain. Though Puro is not directly harmed by communal violence, Pritam deals with other female characters who were direct victims of Partition strife. The loss of home, family, community, friends, relatives, identity, and independence leaves no room for survival desire. Many women chose death over being abducted and abused; their own families also killed them, celebrating it as an act of martyrdom and sacrifice to protect the family and community's honour. "Honour is at the centre of this transaction: in penetrating the girl, the abductor would deplete the honour and therefore the masculinity of the "other" community and enhance his own accordingly" (Misri 39, Mallika 28).

The only ones who attach the ideals of honour and respectability to the female body are those who inflict violence on women's bodies on

behalf of communalism and patriarchy. The patriarchal system's dualism towards women is what deprives women of their subjectivity and individuality, making them vulnerable to abuse. Misri states:

Female bodies as reproduces and boundaries of the community, become the repositories of the community honour. Accordingly, sexual savagery before killing in communal riot is a paradigmatic manifestation of this logic (Misri 38).

Pinjar (The Skeleton) is a novel that explores the trauma and broken self of women, with the protagonist, Puro, resembling the women who have suffered from men's cruelty during partition. The female characters, Kammo, Lajo, Taro, the mad woman, and the rescued Hindu girl, re-enact events from Puro's life, representing the collective trauma of these women.

Amrita Pritam's profound grief for the deplorable state of women during Partition is also expressed through her widely recognised poem, "AjjAakhanWaris Shah nu," which she translated as "To Waris Shah." The masses on both sides of the border who had undergone the miseries of partition received it with love and praise. The song laments the millions of lives lost and the misfortune of the women who fall prey to community violence. She begs Waris Shah to pen the sorrow of the displaced women in the same way as he penned Heer and Ranjha's love story. It is an appeal for him to write a new chapter in Punjab's history:

Speak from the depths of the grave,
to Waris Shah I say
and add a new page to your saga of love
today.
Once wept a daughter of Punjab,
your pen unleashed a million cries,
a million daughters weep today,
to you Waris Shah they turn their eyes.
(Selected Poems of Amrita Pritam).

Conclusion:

Amrita Pritam highlights the impact of patriarchal dominance and communal violence on women in Pinjar, highlighting the irrational nature of nationalist feelings. During the partition, violence, and trauma led to hatred and annihilation of women. The genuine concept of nationalism, which entails unity, harmony, love, dignity, respect, and integrity, was not practiced during India's and Pakistan's partition. Instead, wrongdoings like murder, homicide, rape, kidnapping, forcible marriages, and religious conversion were committed to satisfy the false urge for love for the nation.

Pritam, Amrita. *Pinjar: The Skeleton and Other Stories*. Translated by Khushwant Singh, Tara Press, 2009.

References

- Abubakar, Sadiya. "Art as Narrative: Recounting Trauma through Literature." *IRAI International Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, vol. 08, no. 01, July 2017, pp. 118- 123, [dx.doi.org/10.21013/jmss.v8.n1.p13](https://doi.org/10.21013/jmss.v8.n1.p13).
- Balaev, Michelle. 2012. *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*. Northwestern University Press.
- Kaur, Trishanjit, et al. "Collection and Preservation of Painful Memories of Refugee Women Survived during Partition: An Overview." 14 Aug. 2017, IFLA WLIC 2017 – Wrocław, Poland – Libraries. Solidarity. Society. Wrocław, Poland. library.ifla.org/id/eprint/1803.
- Mand, Malika. "Representation of Gender based violence in Amrita Pritam's *The Skeleton*." *Literary Herald*, vol. 2, no. 3, Dec. 2016, pp. 24-35, tlhjournal.com/uploads/products/5.malikamamd-article.pdf.
- Menon, Ritu, and Kamala Bhasin. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998.
- Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. U of Illinois P, 2000.
- Misri, Deepti. *Beyond Partition: Gender, Violence, Representation in Post-colonial India*. Women Unlimited, 2014.