

REVIEWING PARTITION THROUGH AMRITA PRITAM'S WRITINGS

Dr. Mehak Jonjua

Abstract :

Amrita Pritam, one of the prolific Punjabi writers whose contribution to the gamut of literature related to Partition of India under the British Raj is worth noting. The catastrophe of partition which, apart from other ignominies and mortifications, involved a distressing infringement of humankind especially on an appalling scale, furnished the point of view correlative for Amrita's feminine concern in her novels on the Partition theme.

Her works described rebellious women protagonists who struggled to break free from the bigoted social customs which were forced by the patriarchal system of the country.

The writer never restricted herself to the boundaries of Punjab and thus became the voice of Punjabis and humanity all over the world.

Keywords: Partition, Punjabi Literature and Religious Identity.

Introduction

Amrita Pritam, an eminent Punjabi poetess, novelist and a short story writer has been variously described as the icon of audacity, a dissenter, determined and even an avant-garde born to a school teacher parents in Gujranwala, Pakistan in 1919. Her individual involvement to the wide range of Punjabi literature during Partition is remarkable as compared to any other women writer of those times. She started her writing career at the age of 16 and in the same year obtained

Gyani Punjabi Vernacular diploma and published her first set of poems *Thandian Kiranan*. She was one of the leading 20th century Punjabi Poets revered equally in India and Pakistan.

With a career straddling over six decades, she had more than 100 books of poetry, fiction and nonfiction to her credit. She is most remembered for her poignant poem, '*Aj Akhaan Waris Shah Nu*' a dirge to the 18th century Punjabi Poet, portraying her anguish over annihilations during the partition of India.

An award winning film *Pinjar* (2003) has been made on her novel *Pinjar* (1950) describing the story of a women victim of 1947 upheaval. Amrita Pritam became the first woman to win the Sahitya Akadami award for her poem Suneha (message) and Bharatiya Gyanpith, one of the country's premier literary awards. She has also been awarded The Padmashree in 1969 and Padma Vibhushan in 2004. In 1980, she received the Vaptasarov Award, named after the national Bulgarian poet. In 1982, she was honored with Sahitya Academy of Letters, the Sahitya Academy Fellowship given to the eternal literature for her life time accomplishments.

She was one of the candid critics of the partition. Her understanding of Partition and its invocations were stormed into the Punjabi Literature though it lacked in the sternness of historian's agility.

Objective of the Study: The present study will analyze the sufferings which the people of India under the British Raj had gone through during the time of partition of India in 1947.

Partition in Amrita Pritam's Writings:

Amrita Pritam's history of life portrayed that Partition was a critical moment which created her views; it allowed her to form a fraternal association with the universe, and make a world having Punjabi landscape.

Her memories of childhood, as suggested in her biography, *Raseedi Ticket*, took us to her mother's village in Gujranwala, where she saw water being differentiated at the railway platform as Muslim Paani and Hindu Paani on which she asked her mother— "*Is water also Hindu-*

Mussalman?" to which her mother, Raj Kaur, said: "*It happens here, God knows what all happens next.*" Amrita also once raised her voice in anger against her grandmother, who used to keep her kitchen utensils separately for her father's Muslim friends. This was probably her first rebel against religion.

According to her there was no strong basis for partition and had fragile foundations. "*Punjab's legacy is a shared one: our poetry starts with Baba Farid in the twelfth century. From then onwards our language is common, and we share the same poets. After all, there was a tehzibi rishta between Hindus and Mussalmans.*"¹

She remembered 1947 as the era of wadde raule which caused huge setback to the advancement of Punjabi national distinctiveness. As a writer, she was worried to see the religious riots at the time of partition and the political upheavals thereafter. She expressed her anguish in the poem "Ajj Akhaan Warish Shah nu", addressed to the Sufi poet Waris Shah, writer of the eminent heartbreaking Punjabi saga of Heer and Ranjha. Ajj Akhaan Waris Shah Nu became the most heartrending token of the revulsion and aggression of partition.

*Speak from the depths of the grave,
To Waris Shah I say
And add a new page to the sage of love today...*²

The poem pleaded to Waris Shah to come up from his grave to write a new history of Punjab on seeing the trauma that people suffered during the fateful days of Partition. People who from generations were living in villages felt it difficult to realize that they actually have to leave that place in exchange for such independence. In this Ode, the narrator's village had fallen in to Pakistan and the insurrection busted out in the neighboring villages. Her parents had to leave the village in the dark on the advice of their good Muslim neighbors and friends. Heading east, dodging known lanes and tracks they staggered through the murky pastures, standing crops and shrubberies bearing appalling spirits to cross the Indo Pak before day break. Holding their breath

¹ Bhatia Nandi, *Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement, and Resettlement*, Pg-10

² Nandy Pritish, *Selected Poems Of Amrita Pritam*, Dialogue Calcutta Publications (1986)

and their small kids to their bodies, they reached at their relative's house in Bhakna village in Amritsar. The narrator still remembers that she lost one of her shoes in a grimy field but came all the way holding her father's hand who also on his shoulders carried her four year old younger brother. Punjab was plainly knifed into two parts illogically demarcated by a British named Radcliff who was explicitly called from England for this purpose and was asked to spend months in India prior to this unevenly partition of India and Pakistan. The familial village Jandiala, was left far behind and cannot be revisited again.

With this brilliant bewail, Amrita Pritam became popular in the Indo- Pakistan Punjabi speaking community. The Ode was featured in Kartar Singh, Pakistani Punjabi film, which portrayed a true story of the mayhems and violence perpetrated by various communities at the time of partition. It is one of the most expansively read verses in contemporary Indian literature.

Amrita Pritam was greatly influenced by Shah Hussain, Sultan Bahu, Waris Shah and Bulle Shah and by projecting them in her writings she evoked the potentiality of a cultural identity that questioned the very history of partition. She thus imitated on Punjab's enriching past and provincial distinctiveness, and sojourned on how sectarian personalities could be outdone by the eupnoea of love.

In many ways, Punjabi stories allowed her to cope with the agonizing reality of Indo Pak separation, as they fostered her poignant and artistic self. During Partition and its consequent hostility, many Sufi poets became her cohorts as she writes in one of her autobiographical poem "Akhar" (Words), "*The fire lit by the poet Waris*", "*I have inherited the same within me*". *And yet, she grieves, "nobody nourishes fire in the city of stones"*.

Amrita Pritam in her poem 'Divided' invokes up the picture of a "common motherland", and once again bemoans the maiming of rural areas of Punjab. The poet grieves the loss of her close neighbor, Sajjad Haider, who due to Partition was separated from her. Amrita Pritam raises many traditionally constructed pasts personified in Punjab's rich cultural history, and restricts the religiously special languages. The poetess in "Junoon" described that religion is being compared to a serpent's bite, and she also criticized the politics of religious adaptations and reconversion promoted by *shuddhi*, *sangathan*, *tabligh* and *tanzim*.

Punjab's literary customs gave her the feeling to react to the aggression and twinge of country's division and to deal with her pain after her uprooting and disarticulation.

In *Pinjar*, Amrita argues that the contravention of the women on both sides of the border is parallel to how division itself despoiled the nation. It is a short novel in Punjabi translated in English by Khushwant Singh. The novel depicts the conditions and nature of the Indian society during the partition of India in 1947. She very skillfully portrayed the condition of women by pouring her own experiences into the novel. The novel revolves around the protagonist Pooro. The poetess does not see much significant differentiation between the Partition's opinionated breaches of the motherland and its consequences of genuine infringements of women. The status of women in *Pinjar* is to represent how the nation's status was dishonored during Partition. As Amrita acknowledged that Partition was used as a means to influence and merge political power, she also got to know that woman had no role to play in this significant upheaval. *Pinjar* is the women's snivel in prose beside her existential destiny and mutual exploitation. The novel projects women as down caste and a neglected segment of the society. It is the narration of the society where women is thrown out of the house if she becomes the victim of molestation or if her virginity is broke “ *She had lost consciousness, and when she came to her sense she found herself on a charpoy in a room with a door shut.*”³ In that situation “ *She dreamt 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 her shaggy embrace...*”⁴ It is in this scenario as projected by the writer, the position of women as a result of opinionated and social exploitation, a state that demands a dramatic and swift change. *Pinjar* shows the character of global partition and universal memory of women through fiction. *Pinjar* is a collection of past present and future holocaust of women's status. The novel speaks about the relationship between genocide and colonialism. *Pinjar* is a voice of polluted issues which shows different form of many women. Her poem *Tavarikh*, ricochet the voice of a small girl who like many other such girls, got misplaced somewhere.

“What evil was done to me!

What a curse fell upon my head?

³ *Ibid*, P. 12.

⁴ *Ibid*, P. 13

The lines of fate written on my forehead
Have turned into serpents.”⁵

She projected various instances of partition where woman were brutally raped which became universal and irreparable truth. "*Who can sense the pain of such a girl — the youth of whose body is forced into motherhood?*" Amrita explained the pain of rape through the metaphor of a mother's womb. The womb is a victim of Partition's madness: "*I am the symbol of that accident*". The "evil in the womb" manifests itself in the division of Punjab into two parts, like the violent rending of the womb. This was a helpless womb like an utterly helpless Punjab, and it bore "fruit", when, as she says, "*the trees of independence were in bud*". The dream of "independence" was shattered. The child that was born was in fact a "blackened spot". Her Punjab was, in many ways, a belated scar of the wound, as she described in her poem "Majboor".

Conclusion:

The research paper described how there were still possibilities of creativity, liberation, transgression and transcendence in pre and post partition Punjab, despite the extent to which the politics of religious identity generated familial, communitarian, regional and national anxieties. Amrita's life history reveals that many cultural identities and subjectivities existed along with religiously strident ones.

Pritam's idea of cultural community and identity testifies to a plurality in Punjab that was exemplified in cultural symbols, motifs and landscapes. Partition liberated her from the bounds of her religious community and helped her strengthen her fluid identity and subjectivity. Her life history problematizes the experiences and consequences of a refugee. Clearly she does not identify with a national borders which are political constructs and imagined projections of territorial power. For her partition was destructive where she felt rootless, separated from her lover and her homeland.

In short, Amrita offered alternative voice in history. In many ways, her life history constituted a counter narrative to dominant histories of 1947 and it served as an alternative archive partition.

⁵ Saberwal Satish, Hassan Mushirul, *Asertive Religious Identities*, Manohar, New Delhi (2006), Pg- 449.

Her life history informed us that refugee anguish is not necessarily rendered into a communalized consciousness for it gave her the poetic sensibility to compose an ode to her undivided Punjab.

Bibliography

- Anand, T.S., ed., *Feminine Concerns: Autobiographies of Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das and Jean Rhys.*, Modern Indian English Fiction, New Delhi (2002).
- Castilo Debra A. *Punjabi Kavita, Cartographies of Affect: Across Borders in South Asia and the Americas*, Worldview Publications, New Delhi (2011)
- Dev Anjana Neira, Tiwari Bajrang Bihari, Khanna Sanam, *Indian Literature: An Introduction*, University of Delhi (2006)
- Datta Nonica, *An alternative voice of history*, Literary Review, The Hindu (Dec 4, 2005)
- Mir farina, *The Social Space of Language*, University of California Press (2010)
- Nandy Pritish, *Selected Poems Of Amrita Pritam*, Dialogue Calcutta Publications (1986)
- Pritam Amrita, *Selected Poems*, Bhartiya Jananpith Publications, Delhi (1982)
- Pritam Amrita, *Translated by Singh Khushwant, Pinjar: The Skelton And Other Stories*, Tara Press (2009)
- Pritam Amrita, *Kagaz Aur Canvas*. New Delhi: Rajkamal, (1984).
- Pritam Amrita, *Life and Times*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. (1989)
- Pritam Amrita, *Aksharon Ki Chhaya Mein*, Aman Publication, New Delhi (1995).
- Pritam Amrita, *Introduction to Punjabi Poetry in Indian Poetry Today*, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi (1985).
- Saberwal Satish, Hassan Mushirul, *Asertive Religious Identities*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi (2006)