



# RECLAIMING IDENTITY AND CHALLENGING GENDER NORMS THROUGH THE FEMINIST LENS OF AMRITA PRITAM'S "PINJAR"

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**Abstract :** In this study, use a feminist perspective on Amrita Pritam's (a ground breaking Indian writer and poet) work and analyse her extensive investigation of gender roles and identity. Pritam's poetry, prose, and fiction offer fertile ground for exploring women's difficulties and efforts to recover their identities under a patriarchal system. In the first part of the article, the social and cultural framework of Pritam's period is established, with particular emphasis on the influence of gender norms on women's life at the time. In this researcher examine how Pritam's characters negotiate and subvert these conventions by stepping out of their prescribed positions, claiming their independence, and testing the waters of their sexuality. Her writing gives women a platform to share their stories, painting a detailed portrait of the emotional and mental landscapes that they face. Pritam's critical stance against patriarchal systems and her call for their deconstruction is also explored in this study. Iconic feminist interpretation of Amrita Pritam's "Pinjar" book. In this study, researcher explore how Pritam's writing goes beyond the realm of literature to become a potent instrument for challenging and altering conventional views of gender and sexuality. This research, via an examination of the novel's characters and plot, draws attention to the novel's depiction of the protagonists' fights against patriarchal systems, sexism, and the effects of division. This article uses feminist theory to examine how Pritam's writing encourages her characters to question and reimagine who they are and what they can accomplish. Literature and gender studies are combined in this study to provide light on how literature may affect societal change by encouraging its audience to question rigid gender roles and imagine a more equitable future.

**Keywords:** - Feminist, gender, identity, patriarchy, empowerment, struggles.

## INTRODUCTION

In India, where patriarchy is the norm, women's pain has been ignored and buried for a long time. Women experienced double subjection due to colonisation by the British and the males in their nation. Women are seen as the postcolonial "other" or a source of subjugation by the power structure. India, a country with a broad spectrum of cultural traditions, has permitted British colonial rule. The British used the "divide and rule" strategy to their advantage. Separation of awareness among the individuals contributed to the relationship's durability despite the collapse of cultural and religious divides. Consequently, throughout the war, the seeds of competition and animosity sowed in people's minds by the British flourished, culminating in mass murder.

Authors such as Amrita Pritam, Kartar Singh Duggal, Dalip Kaur Tiwana, Ajeet Kaur, Nanak Singh, Ram Sarup Ankh, and Gurdial Singh are at the forefront of modern Punjabi literature. Considering women's mental, social, and political state in India and Pakistan at the time of the partition, Amrita Pritam's best-known work, Pinjar or The Skeleton, explored feministic issues. The sensitive and prolific writer Kartar Singh Duggal has brought a unique method and viewpoint to study the social exclusion, alienation, trauma, oppression, and subjection of women in Punjab. Abducted Not, by Kartar Singh Duggal, is an excellent example of the topic of division. The dowry system, untouchability, religious hypocrisy, and prostitution are just a few of the societal ills that Nanak Singh, the "father of Punjabi novels," writes about. The key sources are Pinjar by Amrita Pritam, Twice Born and Twice Dead by Kartar Singh Duggal, and Weaving Water by Ajeet Cour. Partition, the enslavement of women, gender discrimination, the decline of culture, and male supremacy are all topics that appear often in the source texts. Various works in Indian English literature, such as Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan, set in the made-up town of Manu Majra, recall the historical events of partition and aim at the societal and religious structures that were affected by them. The Swadeshi movement, civil disobedience, and the partition riots in Punjab are all covered in Manohar Malgonkar's A Bend in the Ganges.

To discover the people who confronted the division, examine the erosion of their culture. The division affected both sexes; although males found their way after the split, many women were abandoned by their families out of fear of being raped or otherwise mistreated. The women's inability to preserve their virtuousness prompted their husbands to reject them. As a result of sexual assault, women lost the ability to control their destinies. 'Culture' may be broken down into three distinct subsets, as proposed by Raymond William. To begin, culture is the path toward human perfection, an ultimate or universal set of values. Documentaries that locate the cultural significance in works of imagination and reflection provide a valuable framework for defining "second culture." Human cognition and experience may be studied deeply to document cultural events, values, and habits. Culture is defined by the people who practice it and how they think, act, and speak. Culture is defined as society in the third category. It is a way of life representing a set of core beliefs about the importance of art and education. It also documents the everyday beliefs that inspire scathing historical analyses. Artistic, intellectual, and social works from all three categories are examined through historical critique. The background of this historical critique will be the ruin of women's lives during the division, both physically and psychologically. This gives the reader a vantage point to understand India and Pakistan's pre- and post-partition cultural values and intellectual achievements.

The literature of ancient India plays a vital role in the country's religious and cultural development. The Veda and its derivative works are the cornerstones of Indian literature. 'Veda' is Sanskrit for 'knowledge,' it comes from the root 'vid', which means 'to know'. The Veda was transmitted orally from a father to a son or from a teacher to a student. The term "Vedic age" describes this time frame. "So great an influence has the Vedic age... exercised upon all succeeding periods of Indian history," said Anglo-German historian Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900). That ancient period's religious and moral beliefs have been so firmly ingrained in the Indian national psyche that "without knowledge of the literary remains of the Vedic age, it is impossible to find the right point of view for judging Indian religion, morals, and literature." Women in the Vedic period were known for their spiritual and ascetic compassion, total giving up of self-interest, ultimate commitment to the family, and freedom to choose their spouses. The wife was a respected role in the household. They were leaders in both social and religious gatherings. They were on the same footing as men and helped them with the most important religious duty. Girls went through a time of brahmacharya, just as guys did. They had much leeway to do anything they wanted, and people held them in tremendous respect for their spiritual and literary prowess. For example, two hymns and a handful of lyrics in the Rig-Veda are thought to have been written by women. Ghosha is credited with writing the two hymns. Women were often given the chance to contribute to literary works, and several became renowned poetesses whose works are now included in scholarly anthologies.

The Therigatha, a collection of songs written by Buddhist Theris or senior nuns and dated to the sixth century B.C., is the first known anthology of women's writing. These songs provide unusually intimate looks into the life of Buddhist women. They included both married and single women, as well as impoverished farmers' wives and little artisans' children, as well as royal ladies and courtesans. Poems abound that speak to the tyranny of class and gender and that criticize religion for ignoring human suffering and yearning. Achieving the serenity and freedom of nirvana is the central theme of each line in the Therigatha, as is an epiphany experience in which the harsh structure of secular existence dissolves. The Therigatha features the works of 37 different female poets. Some examples include Mukta, Nanda, Candra, Utpalavarna, and Amarapali. Poet Vijjaka, also known as Vijayambika or Vidya, lived in Karnataka about 650 B.C. However, very little is known about her outside of the fragments of her work that have survived in subsequent anthologies like the one produced by Buddhist scholar Vidyakara around 100 A.D. Kaumudimahotsava is the name of the play she penned. Saduklikarnamita, Dasarupavaloka, Saktimuktavali, etc., are the only collections that collect her writings. She takes great pleasure in her dark skin and often discusses erotica, humour, and self-love in her writing. To begin one of her stanzas, she writes, "Without knowing about me, Vijjaka, dark, like the petal of the blue lotus, that the poet Dandin (vainly) said that the Goddess of learning was all-white."

The Maharashtrian poetess and saint Janabai (ca. 1298-1350) is a national treasure. She often writes about the difficulties of being a woman and the demands of housework. In addition to embodying her wish for a perfect mate to ease her loneliness, her sensitive poetry sheds light on the daily lives of regular women, presenting their pleasures and tensions. Several other women from the medieval bhakti movement also wrote Gujarati-language poems. However, Mirabai is the most well-known of the Gujarati saint poets. Among them are Gangasati, Radhabai, Krishnabai, Gauribai, and Ratnabai. About forty hymns make up Gangasati; all passed down orally from generation to generation. The supreme Brahma, pure energy without forms, with whom the human soul may accomplish connection only by self-surrender, is the deity to whom Gangasati refers when she talks about god. Mirabai (ca. 1498-1565) is one of the most revered poets of the Bhakti tradition. Gujarati and Vraj Bhasha, one of the several Hindi dialects in which devotional poetry abounds, were among the languages she wrote in.

Fact and fiction likely coexist in the tales of her life, which focus primarily on her conflicts with her husband and his relatives. After abandoning her family, she went on a pilgrimage to Krishna's birthplace and other sacred sites. She was not just freed from habit restrictions; she was also ignorant and practically drunk with adoration. Their passionate affection for one another brings her great happiness. Therefore, she describes physiological sensations with complete freedom, an impressive demonstration of confidence. The religious experience is joy and abandonment, and Mira describes herself as "mad" in multiple lines. Mira's dedication was the driving force behind her imagination. Her poems are meant to be sung in their entirety. She is credited with writing around 1400 short pieces, 400 of which are in Gujarati. Mira is a well-loved poet from the Bhakti tradition, and for a good reason: she has a knack for choosing just the right words and a beautiful cadence. Mira is a symbol of defiance, both against royal control and toward the authority of a spouse, in the folklore of the locations linked with her narrative. She maintains her reputation as a historical person through whom they may air their dreams and frustrations.

## DISCUSSION

Feminist theory emerged from feminist movements and seeks to understand the roots of gender inequality by examining women's everyday lives and traditional societal roles. It has developed elaborate theories across various academic fields to provide feedback on the social construction of gender and sex. Some older varieties of feminism have been criticized for privileging the experiences of white, college-educated, middle-class women. Feminists have also taken action to protect women and girls from

sexual violence, including sexual assault, domestic abuse, and sexual harassment. After this point, "feminist" from "female" perspectives in the literary canon. Using the label "feminist" suggests an ideological stance. Feminist critique, according to Sharon Spencer (*Feminist Critique and Literature*), seeks norms that are minimally coloured by racial, socioeconomic, and sexual bias. As opposed to "female," which implies a political or feminist stance, "male" refers to a difference in gender. Female writing may be considered a unique expression, especially regarding women's societal, political, and cultural views. Patricia Meyer Spacks, in her book *The Female Imagination*, makes a pointed observation on how conventional gender norms affect female authors.

Culture establishes one's gender, whether masculine or feminine, regardless of whether one is male or female, based on biological factors. For this reason, it is crucial to analyze feminist critique about "how literature and other cultural productions undermine or reinforce the political, social, economic, and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson). This approach seeks to highlight the hidden and blatant sexism in male writing, and it draws from the critical school of thought that focuses on how aspects of our society are inherently patriarchal. According to Lisa Tuttle, "new questions of old texts" is what feminist theory is all about. She lists six aims of feminist criticism, including (1) uncovering and developing a female writing tradition, (2) interpreting women's writing symbols so they are not ignored or lost by the male perspective, (3) examining women writers and their works from a female perspective, (4) opposing sexism in literature, and (5) increasing awareness of the sexual politics of style and language (Tuttle 184). "Feminist criticism...is a specific kind of political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism..." (Moi 204), explains Toril Moi in her book *Feminist Literary Criticism*.

This fight is noteworthy because it can be broken down into three distinct phases. In the literary canon, the feminist movement's beginnings, evolution over time, and changing priorities are recorded as the three waves of feminism.

*Pinjar*, written by Amrita Pritam in 1950, is a book about the agony and miseries of division from the perspective of several genders. This story vividly depicts the treatment of women before, during, and after India's division in 1947. In it, the misery of women who have been victims of violence committed in the name of culture, religion, or cultural standard is shown. Khushwant Singh translated the book into English as *The Skeleton*, while Denis Matriage rendered it into French. The film version of the book was released in 2003 and went on to get India's highest film honor, the National Award. *Pinjar* is a tale about the kidnapping of Puro, a little girl, by Rashid, a man of the opposing faith, to exact revenge on the child's family. The story follows Puro as she goes through the painful process of changing her name from Puro to Hamida. As Menon and Dharin rightly pointed out, "[t]he material, symbolic, and political significance of abduction of women was not lost....on the women themselves.... their communion or on....governments," making the novel a critique of a society that views women as property to be usurped and used at will. Retaliation in the form of "identity assertion" and "humiliation of the rival community through the appropriation of its women" (Menon, 3) was a common tactic. *Pinjar* emphasizes the hardships endured by women as a result of division, including their displacement, exploitation, and sacrifices. As the narrative progresses, the author critically examines the ways in which Puro's fate starts to mirror that of thousands other women throughout the period of partition. Puro's family consists of two sisters and a brother, and throughout the better portion of the first half of the story. Puro is the model daughter her parents could hope for. She has no qualms about following through with her parents' plans for her marriage and daydreams about her future with Ramchand. The ladies in Puro's family are crucial to his father's conception of family honor. Puro's uncle did a similar deed, and the narrative takes a dramatic turn when a Muslim child named Rashid is coerced into kidnapping Puro as revenge. This demonstrates how women are used as pawns in disputes involving their families, communities, and countries. Puro is not raped by Rashid. She eventually succeeds in escaping and returning home, but her father tells her there is no longer a place for her in the family since her chastity and loyalty are in doubt due to her abduction.

Her father says he cannot accept her since she has lost her rank and identity and hence no one will marry her. She also suffers assault at the hands of her own family, who refuse to accept her. The sorrow of rejection outweighed the trauma of kidnapping for her. She has suffered physical abuse at the hands of her kidnapper (Rashid) and mental abuse at the hands of her own family. She came here full of hope since she thought she was going back to life. She wanted to live again and be with her parents. In this moment, she felt neither hope nor dread. Devastated, Puro goes back to Rashid and begins living like a skeleton (*Pinjar*). There is a profound shift in who Puro is. Rashid alters her name from Puro to Hamida before marrying her off against her will. She chafes under her newfound independence and yearns for her old life, complete with Ramchand and her family. However, Rashid is seeking forgiveness for his role in Puro's kidnapping. He attempts to show Puro compassion, but Puro is unyielding because of the irreparable harm Rashid has caused. Puro as Hamida meets three other women who have all experienced gendered assault. The three protagonists are all reduced to simple objects rather than people. Taro's spouse has abandoned her because of her illness. Taro's husband has moved in with another lady and turned her into a prostitute. She wants to end her life since her condition and her husband's treatment of her have made it intolerable. When Puro asks her what she can advise him about marriage, she tells him, "What can I tell you? God deprives a girl of her tongue when she is given away in marriage, so that she may not complain." For a whole two years, I lived on a cup of pottage and a few rags after selling my body. I feel like a prostitute or a whore since neither the world nor God are fair. Her spouse has complete freedom of choice. No higher power can stop him. I was God's shackle, and it fit just my feet. Amrita Pritam emphasizes in this episode how the abuse of women's bodies is seen as a moral aberration of the community as a whole and how women are seen as nothing more than bodies. Kammo, a little girl that Puro encounters for the second time, is an orphan whose father has rejected her and who now lives with her aunt. Kammo's aunt mistreats and takes advantage of her. Although Kammo views Hamida as a surrogate mother, her aunt forbids her from seeing Hamida because of Hamida's religion. As Hamida (Puro) puts it, "It was a sin to be alive in this world full of evil, thought Hamida, It was crime to be born a woman" (p.65). When Puro's sister-in-law Lajo is kidnapped by Muslims and held captive in her own home, Ramchand turns to Puro for aid in freeing Lajo. To get Lajo back to her house, Puro talks Rashid into it. In the midst of a dire situation, Puro displays heroic fortitude to free Lajo from her captors. Almost every single one of the novel's female protagonists experiences some kind of abuse. The combined weight of patriarchy and upheaval is too much for them to bear. After Puro's kidnapping, not only is she shunned by her father, but even her fiancé, Ramchand, refuses to acknowledge her existence, calling into doubt her virginity, purity, and dignity. Amrita strives to reveal the many layers of violence against women and her

own trauma via the characters of Puro, Lajo, Taro, and Kammo. Amrita uses this passage to emphasize the reality that women in our patriarchal culture have always had to fight for recognition and respect. The story also depicts the practice of parading a nude woman through the streets of the hamlet and cities as a form of brutality against women. In the story, Puro witnesses a young girl being nakedly paraded around town by a group of young guys with a drum.

Another female protagonist gets sexually abused and ends herself pregnant as a result. The lady was completely insane, and she had no idea that she was being physically and emotionally abused while pregnant. During the turbulent period of partition, many women were disfigured and pregnant. Puro's animosity at Rashid and her unborn child is reflected in the suffering of their kid, who was implanted there without their will. Puro is tortured by the knowledge that a new life is developing inside of her. Puro has suffered not just physical and emotional abuse, but also mental abuse. Amrita Pritam expresses the horror of rape by using the victimized womb as a metaphor. In addition to depicting physical and emotional abuse, the work also explores religious and societal forms of violence against women. Through her abused female protagonists, Amrita Pritam highlights the reality that women are always the first to suffer in times of communal turmoil, riots, and wars. "It has been quite disturbing experience all over the world that any conflict, a war, civil strife, communal riots or disturbance women and children became the prime victims of violence," says Dr. Archana Sinha. Women and girls lose their mothers and fathers, and many are raped or kidnapped as a result. Women are often portrayed as the "other," such as Puro and Hamida, Lajo and Taro, Kammo and the insane and naked women of both the partition era and the present day. That "other," whose lives were not valued, whose voices were stifled, whose identities were subdued, and who stayed on the margins of power struggle and power equation, is still being pushed out of their homes and communities at the expense of the self. Thus, Pinjar offers a voice to this 'other' and their experiences of being uprooted, marginalized, having a dual identity, and having little to no agency.

The book takes place before the partition and tells the tale of a raped lady who has nowhere to go except into the home of her rapist. Her parents and other biological relatives refused to take her in. Because of society's severe stance towards rape victims and the weight of her dark background, she was denied a level playing field. She was put in the situation of having to wed her rapist, Rashida. The upsetting experience affected the rest of her life. Without regard for right or wrong, societal expectations of women trumped all others. Puro's character is described with such care that after going through so much suffering, she does not lose how to feel the instinct of love, despite the novel's predominant tone of tragedy, which continues until the conclusion. Rashid wed her, and he loved her as much as he did. The protagonist of Pinjar is a lady who, despite being seen as nothing more than a body by society, comes into her own through the love of her kid and the act of saving her sister-in-law (her brother's wife). Puro's tale illustrates how there is no solution to violence other than love and how she defeats the forces of hate by following her heart. No amount of political or cultural intolerance will ever extinguish the innate capacity to love. Even though she has been reduced to nothing more than a skeleton by the brutality, she still manages to pass on nothing but love and kindness. Ramchand, who was betrothed to Puro (before she was raped), becomes a heroic figure; despite being a refugee himself, he assists women who get separated from their families amid the turmoil of division. Her brother, Trilok, agreed with her in principle. Despite the bloodshed, the narrative is ultimately about love. Rashida, who had abducted and raped Puro, is the best illustration of this; his passion for Puro was evident several times. He finally earns back Puro's love by treating her with the kindness and attention he has always shown her.

Moreover, he assisted her in locating Lajo, the wife of her brother. He absolves himself of guilt by preventing Lajo's life from ending like Puro's did. Beautifully, Amrita Pritam showed us that love is the one feeling that will stay forever.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the feminist analysis of Amrita Pritam's Pinjar has shown the far-reaching effect of her efforts to subvert gender roles and recover individuality via her writing. Pritam wrote poetry, prose, and fiction that went well beyond its period and place, providing an engaging story that dove headfirst into the challenges and hopes of women living in a patriarchal culture. Characters that reject stereotypes and take control of their lives are portrayed by Pritam, and their stories serve as a constant reminder of the value of individual expression and the freedom to choose one's path. Her stories have universal appeal because they speak to people of all ages looking to push beyond conventional wisdom. Pritam's uninhibited examination of female sexuality and her open portrayal of women's wants break the taboo around discussions of sexuality. By doing so, she advances the topic of women's right to control their bodies and wants and prepares the path for a more open dialogue about sexuality. The importance of women working together is also a theme in Pritam's writings. Her stories of female friendship and support highlight the power of solidarity in the fight against patriarchy and for equal rights for women.

In a larger sense, this study demonstrates how Pritam's works are still relevant to current debates on gender, identity, and feminism. Her comments inspire people who fight against traditional gender roles and want a more egalitarian and diverse society. As consider Pritam's legacy, it becomes clear that her body of work is a living testimony to the ability of literature to spark debate, inspire action, and show the way to a more accessible and equitable society. The stories of Amrita Pritam will continue to inspire and inform the work of researchers, readers, and activists who want to bring about positive change in the world. Her skill with words as a weapon of empowerment and her unwavering commitment to reclaiming identity through a feminist lens stand as a lasting testament to the tenacity of those who defy convention and strive for a world where everyone is free to define their identity on their terms.

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