



Victim and Saviour: An Analysis of Puro in Amrita Pritam's "*Pinjar*"

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper examines Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (The Skeleton), focusing on the protagonist Puro's suffering and transformation. The novel is set against the backdrop of Partition of India (1947), explores the deep sufferings of violence and displacement by foregrounding the lived women experiences. Amrita also pictures Puro as both a victim and a saviour, there by impairing the conventional portrayals of women in Partition literature. Through the duality of Puro, the paper argues that Pritam reconstructs womanhood in a paradoxical yet empowering way, ultimately redefining the representation of women in Partition narratives.

KEYWORDS: Puro, Victim, Saviour, Women and Partition.

INTRODUCTION:

Amrita Pritam (1919 – 2005) a Punjabi writer, essayist and novelist. She is regarded as one of the most powerful and path - breaking voices in Indian literature, particularly in Punjabi and Hindi. She is known for her profound contribution to Punjabi literature with over 100 works including poetry, novels, essay and biographies. *Pinjar* was initially written in Punjabi in 1950 and later translated into English by Khushwant Singh in 2009 titled *The Skeleton*. The background of the novel is Partition of India. The novel is told in the perspective of Puro and the tone of the novel is feminist and psychological. The Partition of India in 1947 is remembered not only as a political rupture but also as a humanitarian catastrophe, displacing millions and leaving deep scars in the collective memory of the subcontinent. Among the most devastating consequences of Partition was the violence inflicted upon women.

Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* provides one of the most compelling literary depictions of Partition's gendered violence. The protagonist Puro's story reflects the trauma of countless women who were abducted and disowned, yet also highlights a quiet form of resistance through her ability to act as a life saver for another woman. This paper argues that Puro embodies both victimhood and agency. On one hand, she suffers the fate of being abducted

and rejected by her family, symbolizing the dehumanization of women under patriarchal honour codes. On the other hand, her decision to help Lajjo escape reclaims dignity and reconstructs womanhood, emphasizing empathy, resilience, and moral courage as markers of female strength.

Thus, *Pinjar* destabilizes the common representation of women as passive sufferers, offering instead a narrative where women—even in the face of silencing—can exert agency. The duality of Puro as victim and saviour makes her one of the most significant female figures in Partition literature, demanding a re-examination of how women are remembered in the discourse of trauma, history, and identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW :

A recent article titled “*The Skeletons of Silenced Voices: Partition and Gendered Violence in Amrita Pritam’s Pinjar*” (*The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, 2024) looks closely at how Puro’s sense of self is broken down during Partition. The author points out that when Puro is renamed “Hamida,” it is not just a change of name but also a way of wiping out her old identity. She is described as “a skeleton without a shape or a name,” which shows how her past life and individuality are taken away from her. This highlights the deep psychological harm women like Puro faced—not only through physical violence but also through the loss of memory, voice, and belonging.

The article also stresses the importance of female bonds in Puro’s journey. Her interactions with other women such as Kammo, Taro, the madwoman, and Lajjo allow her to find comfort and strength in shared pain. Through these relationships, Puro slowly moves from being only a silent victim to someone who can act with courage and compassion. Most importantly, when she saves Lajjo from the same fate she once suffered, she proves that even in the middle of trauma, women could still help and protect one another.

This research is valuable because it shows both sides of Puro’s experience—how she is silenced and erased by society, but also how she finds new meaning through empathy and solidarity. For the present study, it adds strong support to the idea that Puro is not just a victim of Partition, but also a life saver who redefines womanhood through her moral strength and humanity.

CHARACTERS:

The predominant characters in the novel are:

- **Puro(Pooro) / Hamida** – Protagonist , victim of Partition
- **Ram Chand** – Puro’s supposed fiancé
- **Rashida**- Muslim man, who abducts Puro
- **Lajjo** – Ram Chand’s sister

Some minor women characters in the novel are; **Kammo, Taro** and the **mad women**.

ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL :

Pinjar is a partition novel which is set in Punjab during the time of partition (1940's), the novel portrays the personal trauma and sufferings of women caught during the religious and national partition. The novel revolves around the life of a young girl named Puro who has been a victim of partition and that made her as a both victim and saviour. The novel opens when Puro was nine years old and she had three younger sisters and two younger brothers. Puro was born to a Hindu family in Chatto village. She belonged to a family of money lenders described as *Sahukars*. Due to some bad days, Puro's father and her uncle went to Thailand and then they came back with good fortune. Puro's family decided to marry Puro with a man named Ram Chand from neighbouring village Rattoval. Puro was only fourteen years old and Puro's brother who was twelve years was also engaged to Ram Chand's sister Lajjo.

Eventually, Puro was abducted by a Muslim man Rashida as an act of intergenerational revenge. When Rashid abducts Puro, she was frightened and feels her life is ended. Yet, he does not mistreat her. After two days, he allows her to leave. Puro runs back to her parents' home. What follows is even more heartbreaking. Instead of sheltering her, her family turns her away. They feel that because she was in another man's custody, her "purity" is gone and their social respect will be damaged if they accept her. In that moment, Puro learns that her real enemies are not just outsiders but also her own relatives, who value honour above her life. This rejection crushes her more than the abduction itself. With no other choice, she returns to Rashid. From then on, her old identity as Puro begins to fade, and her life as "Hamida" begins. Puro never fully accepts him in her heart but she slowly adjusts to live with Rashida and she also gave birth to a son who eventually became a symbol of Puro's irreversible change. *Pinjar* is both a personal story of Puro and a larger story of women during Partition—how they were displaced, silenced, and abandoned, yet also showed resilience and strength. The novel also revolves around the themes of Partition, Female body as a battle ground in partition, gendered violence and identity loss.

PURO AS A VICTIM :

Victim of Intergenerational revenge:

In *Pinjar*, Puro's abduction by Rashid is not merely a personal act but one rooted in intergenerational revenge. Years earlier, Puro's uncle had abducted a Muslim woman—Rashid's aunt—and forced her into marriage. This incident left a wound in Rashid's family that lasted across generations. When Rashid abducts Puro, he sees it as a way of settling that old score, of reclaiming his family's "lost honour." This is clearly seen in the lines from the text;

“Did you know that our families, the Shaikhs and the Sahukars have been at loggerheads for many generations? Your grandfather had advanced us Rs.500 on compound interest and taken our house as mortgage. We could not redeem the mortgage. He attacked our house and had the entire Shaikh family ejected. We were rendered homeless. That was not all. His agents used foul language towards our womenfolk, and your uncle kept my father's sister in his house for three nights – with the knowledge of your grandfather!.....They picked on me; they made me take an oath on the Koran that I would abduct the Sahukar's daughter before she was wed.”

The above lines depict the old grudges Rashida's family had on Puro's family and the despair state of Puro can be seen in the below lines;

“If my uncle abducted your aunt, what fault was that of mine? You have reduced me to a homeless vagand.” Pooro held her head between her hands, her face was wet with tears. “That is exactly what I told my uncles, but they taunted me.” “And at their instigation you took my life!” cried Pooro.”

This history shows that women in *Pinjar* are treated as objects of revenge and honour, passed between families to satisfy old grudges. Puro becomes the victim of a dispute that began long before her birth. In this way, Amrita Pritam highlights how women are made to bear the burden of men's violence and family pride.

Victim of Partition and Honour :

Puro, a Hindu girl was abducted by Rashida, a Muslim man Puro was abducted by Rashida for his own Family Honour where she became the victim for the story that began in the previous generations and it depicts the partition period where thousands of women were abducted, raped and forced to marry across religions. The trauma of partition and sufferings of women can be seen through the lines in the novel;

“Just as a peeled orange falls apart into many segments, the Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs of the Punjab broke away from each other.”(55)

“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. Thus, passed August 15 of the year 1947.” (56)

The above lines clearly depict the state of women during the Partition time. The above line also depicts the transformation of Puro (Hindu girl) to Hamida (Muslim girl). This shows that she is displaced not only from her home but also from her cultural and religious community.

“The police van was ready. An Indian constable shouted: “All Hindus going over to India, come this side! The bus is ready!””

The above line from the text reflects the situation of Puro where during her abduction there was no chance for displacement but later other women/ girls abducted during partition had the chance of returning to their country with the help of government, But Puro chose to stay with Rashida. The trauma of this displacement is intensified by the impossibility of return. When rehabilitation policies were later introduced by the Indian and Pakistani governments to “recover” abducted women, many resisted because they had been abandoned once before. Puro's case highlights this paradox: having been rejected by her family once, she knows that there is no going back. Her victimhood is thus not only physical but existential.

PURO AS A SAVIOUR :

Amrita Pritam redefines the character of women as strong and resilient which is seen through Puro's act of saving Lajjo. Puro's life takes a new direction when she hears about Lajjo, another young woman who has been abducted

and faces the same painful fate she once suffered. Instead of giving in to despair, Puro chooses to act with courage. She helps Lajjo escape and reunite with her family, breaking the silence and helplessness that Partition had forced upon countless women. By saving Lajjo, she regains a sense of agency that was earlier denied to her. She may not be able to undo her own past, but she ensures that another woman does not lose her future. The below line from the text depicts how Puro became a saviour and the way she sent off Lajjo to her motherland.

“She made Lajo a new outfit of pure silk, as if the girl were her own daughter returning to her husband’s home.”

This moment also changes the meaning of womanhood in the novel. Puro is no longer defined by her so-called “honour” or by her marital status. What makes her strong is not society’s approval but her compassion and resilience. Amrita Pritam shows that true womanhood lies in empathy and resistance, even when expressed through small but brave acts.

Through her decision to save Lajjo, Puro shows that although she had no control over her abduction, she still has the power to make choices that matter. She quietly resists the very society that once abandoned her.

“Whether one is a Hindu girl or a Muslim one, whosoever reaches her destination, she carries along my soul also,” Puro said to herself and made a last vow by closing eyes.”

The above lines clearly depicts that Puro has transformed from being a victim to a saviour. In helping another, she finds dignity, purpose, and moral strength. Thus, Puro rises above her suffering and becomes more than a victim—she becomes a saviour, proving that even in times of violence and loss, humanity can still survive through acts of compassion.

CONCLUSION :

Puro’s story in *Pinjar* captures the deep pain and silent strength of women during the Partition of India. She begins as a victim—abducted, rejected by her family, and stripped of her identity. Yet, instead of letting this suffering completely define her, Puro discovers the courage to act for others. By saving Lajjo, she reclaims her lost agency and proves that even in despair, compassion can survive. Amrita Pritam does not portray Puro as a passive figure of tragedy but as a woman who turns her wounds into strength. In her, we see both the helplessness forced upon women by patriarchy and violence, and the resilience that allows them to rise above it. Puro, therefore, stands as both victim and saviour—a reminder that while Partition destroyed homes and families, it could not erase the quiet power of women who chose humanity over hatred.

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