

Silenced Voices: Women's Suffering and Trauma during Partition in *Pinjar*

Dr. Babita Rani

Assistant Professor, Deptt. of English, Bhagat Phool Singh Mahila
Vishwavidyalaya, Khanpur Kalan

Paper Received on 16-06-2026, Accepted on 18-07-2026
Published on 19-07-26; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2025.11.07.170

Abstract:

The "silenced" experiences of women after the 1947 Partition are given voice in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (1950), which depicts them as refugees whose agency was erased by patriarchal societies, traumatized bodies, and victims of honour-based violence. This study examines women's broken identities through different women characters, mainly the protagonist Pooro, whose abduction by Rashid, a Muslim man, highlights the link between personal pain and collective violence. The narrative illustrates how patriarchal structures exacerbate women's suffering and marginalization, making them collateral damage in a politically charged environment. The book highlights the terrible conditions that women endured during Partition, like as kidnapping, sexual assault, and social exclusion, also underline their fortitude and defiance of oppression. To verbalize the weak, feminist critique argues for a better comprehension of women's perspectives during times of dispute and criticizes past injustices.

Key words – Suffering, trauma, partition, patriarchal, unjust

Introduction:

Amrita Pritam was a gifted Indian novelist, essayist, and poet who wrote in Hindi and Punjabi. On both sides of the border between India and Pakistan, she is equally adored. The renowned author of Indian literature, Amrita Pritam, had a long-lasting extraordinary career journey spanning more than 50 years. On August 31, 1919, Amrita Pritam was born in Gujranwala, Punjab (now in Pakistan). Her father edited a literary journal and was a Sikh preacher. Through the female characters in her book *Pinjar* (The Skeleton), Amrita Pritam expresses a feminist viewpoint. Through her writings, she describes the diminishing standard element of humanity.

Pinjar tells the tale of Pooro, who is kidnapped and changed into Hamida, a Muslim woman. She is a young girl that Rashid kidnapped. Pooro's family, consisting

of two sisters and a brother, is a happy family throughout the majority of the first half of the book. She is the parents' favorite daughter, obedient and perfect. Like many fathers, her father links women in the family to the concept of family honor. The decisive moment happens in the story when Pooro is captured by Rashid to take revenge from Pooro's family. Pooro and Ramchand were engaged, before she was kidnapped. However, fate leads her to Rashid, a Muslim man. Pooro pleads Rashid repeatedly for sending her back to her family. But he does not willing to attend her voice. One day she is able to run away from Rashid's house. But circumstance has another plan for her. She reaches her family. But she is surprised because her family rejects her. Her family says, "you have lost your faith and birth right. If we dare to help you we will be cut down and finished without a trace of blood left behind to tell our faith." Her father denies to accept her and says that no body will marry her. Pooro sacrificed herself as a result of Rashid's ancestors' ancient retaliation. Hamida had endured a great deal of suffering, which had caused her to age. Even though she was only twenty years old, these twenty years had taught her more than she could have learned in a lifetime. She was now as contemplative and serious as an elderly philosopher. She was the only one who struggled to express her various ideas. Her feelings swelled like a wave's crest, crashed into experience's rocks, and then fell back into the ocean.

Pooro's transition into Hamida is the most melancholy and upsetting part of the book. It explores and chronicles the protagonist Pooro's life throughout the partition. The protagonist's predicament ultimately becomes the fate of thousands of women during the pivotal period of partition, as the novelist critically examines. The narrative focuses on the journey of her life after being uprooted from her homeland and cast into a strange place. The book is a judgment of society as a whole, which views women as property that may be appropriated and used whatever it pleases. Menon and Bhasin pointed out that :- "[the] material, symbolic and political significance of abduction of women was not lost _ _ _ _ on the women themselves _ _ _ _ their communior or on _ _ _ _ governments. As a retaliatory measure, It was simultaneously as assertion of the identity and humiliation of the rival community through the appropriation of its women" (Menon,3). Rashid marries Pooro forcefully and changes her name from Pooro to Hamida to hide her real identity from society. Rashid tattoos "Hamida" on Pooro's hand. The author points out that "in her parents' home every one called her Pooro. At other times she was Hamida. It was a double life, Hamida by day, Pooro by night" (Pritam 2009: 25). Pooro's convert to Hamida entirely devastates her without emotions and feeling. Pritam interprets her in this novel as 'a cage of bones'. Meantime, wife of Trilok (Trilok is Pooro's brother) and sister of Ramchand was abducted by Muslims. Taro is married to a man who neglects and mistreats her. Her spouse has disowned her and she has an unidentified illness. Her husband's treatment of her and her illness are intolerable. Her husband has brought another woman and forces Taro to work as a harlot. She wants to be forced

out of life's cage by death. To Pooro, Taro says: "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 full two years, I had to sell my body for a cup of pottage and 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 for me and only for my feet". (P.36-38) All the three characters are not viewed as human beings, but rather as bodies. There is another girl Kammo in the novel. She is a Hindu and motherless girl. She is transgressed by her father and lived with her aunt. But her aunt also misbehaves with her and restricts her to meet Pooro as she is a Muslim. Kammo tells Hamida (Pooro), "My aunt says that if I come to your house again she will shuck the blood out of my body." The widespread abuse of women during the partition is highlighted in the book.

"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). Women were not safe in these days, even in refugee camps. The refugee camps, which were completely guarded by military personnel, were known as the "safe places for women." However, the actual situation was different. The trauma, agony, suffering, and ambivalence that characterize the experience of partition are made evident by the novelist through these female characters. It tells the tale of how people are reduced to skeletons by the ongoing wounds caused by patriarchy and separation.

Works Cited

- Pritam, Amrita. "Pinjar: The Skeleton and Other Stories." Jaico Publishing House, 2003, Mumbai.
- Menon, Ritu and Kamala Bhasin. "Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition." Rutgers, 1998, New Delhi.
- Butalia, Urvashi. "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India." 1998, New Delhi.
- Wikipedia.com. "Violence Against Women during the Partition of India: Special Reference to Amrita Pritam's Pinjar." (Web)