

# Partition of India and Pakistan in the Context of the Women and the Social Phenomena with Special Reference of *The Skeleton*

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**Abstract**—*The Partition of India and Pakistan was not only the partition of a country but it was the partition of the heart of Mother. The land of India is the mother of thousands of thousands people. But the volcanic wind of 1947 brought two nations: India and Pakistan for upcoming generations. Then the indefinite sufferings and pains started which never ended even today. The paper critically explores the sufferings of doubly marginalized displaced women and children. The main focus of the paper is on the point that women's body is seen as a site of encroachment and the patriarchy behaves as a double faced actor. Amrita Pritam attacks on the conventional dogma of society. According to her, the voice of woman in society uproots the claws of society which are deeply woven in the patriarchal thought. As a female writer, she was very explicitly critical of the oppression and of the subjugation of women through patriarchal domination and many obsolete customs that enforce double standards of morality. Her most influential story Pinjar, a dark narrative of the cross-religious abductions of women that took place in the partition, has female protagonist, Pooro is a Hindu woman who is abducted and forcibly married into a Muslim family and becomes Hamida. The paper explores the female enlightenment where grappling with the situations, she is able to achieve the real salvation.*

**Keywords:** *Voice, Woman, Amrita Pritam, Doubly Marginalized, Patriarchy.*

Even today, it is impossible to understand who woman is in some ways. What is role assigned to a woman by society and why? It is mystical to understand. The Gender Studies and the Feminist theories of the Modern period raise this issue and force us to think about the women's point of view and their perspective. Society is the knitted net of relations of the man and the woman. Both are equally participating in the society. The problem is this that the participation of the women, in the society, is never properly calculated even today, it is common prejudice that the domestic works of the women is never calculated by the large number of people in economical data because in the patriarchal society, every rule and custom is designed by the male not female. When in the new theories of the Modern period, we studied the Gender Studies and the Feminist theories, we get a kind of breach in the social rules and customs. India is a great country of culture, creed,

customs and sacraments. Some philosophers and Gurus explain this breach as the necessary part of Indian culture but in the Global phenomenon, today these customs and sacraments (the heir of family should be a boy, a woman should not interfere in the decisions of family, a woman should take long veil always etc.) are crumbling in the air of global attitude.

India is a tremendous country due to the varieties of different cultures and different religions. The culture, creed and society play an important role to paint the picture of India. Our scriptures ( Vedas, Puranas and *Bhagawada Gita* etc.) refer that India has a great history and great religion in the world. Our sacraments are guided by our cultural society that is also modified in the way of our religion. Our social structure is a vast place of moral values, respect for each-other and brotherhood etc. In our religious manuscripts, woman is regarded as divine, Mother goddess. Everyone has respect for her but it is very humorous attitude of society either it gives respect to her as goddess or it considers to her as nothing. After abducted by Rashida, when Pooro again returns to her family and wants the help of her parents then the response of Pooro's father is very painful.

"The neighbours will hear. There will be a crowd", warned her father. " Pooro's mother stuffs her mouth with the hem of her shirt." (Page no. 22, Lines 12-14, *Pinjar*)

Pooro has been shown as a victim and as weak creature in the hands of man who possessed her. The mental trauma of Pooro made her ill. She was not able to accept Rashid as her husband. She begged to Rashid many times for sending her back to her family in Rattoval. Rashid then mentioned that she was not a part of that family anymore. But Pooro did not realize his suggestion and one day she escaped to her family to meet her parents. She was totally shattered when her mother gave a cold response and requested her to go back to Rashid. A pathetic conversation takes place between her and her parents. Her father says, "Daughter, this fate was ordained for you, we are helpless."(Page no.22, Lines 15-16) "Daughter, it

would have been better if you had died at birth!...”, says her mother. On hearing this Pooro replies, “Then destroy me with your own hands.”( Page no. 23, Lines 1-3, *Pinjar*)

The above mentioned lines explain the pain and anguish of Pooro which she undergoes. Pooro was completely crushed. She was bearing the pain which was not done by her. Her family’s rejection shows us the social attitude towards the women. Pooro, who was everything for her parents even she was like mother for her younger brother and sisters, is nothing for her parents after the abduction. She has died for them. Even today, there are many families where this attitude is alive and they give more importance to their customs and rules than anything else. This episode clearly marks that the women ultimately belong to the caste and religion of the man who possesses her, either father or husband. She was earlier a Hindu girl but after abduction she became Muslim. The displacement which took place in her life due to the family rivalry and partition, displaced everything in her life. She became unknown not only with her native land but also her identity. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin has pointed out about the “Identity crisis” in the following words:

“The figure of the abducted women became symbolic of crossing borders, of violating social, cultural and political boundaries.” (*Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition*)

*The Skeleton* is a story of the Partition of India and Pakistan. Before discussing the Partition, I would like to discuss some other important things so that the essence of Partition can be understood easily. Society is like home. It helps us in our grooming. As we get construction of home, we modify its setting everyday and sometimes we need to modify even its construction for our convenience. When we live in any kind of society, we modify something also in our society for our convenience and betterment with the passage of time. We are the original society. We make society. The changes, in us, change our society, its values even its structure too. Change is the law of nature. The old traditions perish and the new traditions take its place. This change brings some positive scenario and some negative also. When society accepts easily these changes then it can be told that it is a positive kind of change but when the acceptance of these changes becomes harder and harder than some negative results occur in society. Much more complications we can see in the society after the negative consequences. The Nuclear energy and power, which is good from the point of national interest but it is disastrous from the point of humanity. ‘Atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki’ (1945), ‘Bhopal Gas Tragedy’(1984), ‘Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster’ (1986) are the heart wrenching impact of negative consequences developing in society.

Many questions remain unanswered and buried in the depth of the society. What are the reasons of the Partition of India and Pakistan? We all are coined as human beings in every religion of the world, who made the society, creed, caste, colour and boundaries of the country, society and families. Why women

only became the means of encroachment not only in the partition of India and Pakistan but in the other wars of boundaries and religions in the world. ‘Questions’ are the foundation of society. Without ‘questions’, the development of any kind of society is impossible. Our history, our present, our future, our development, why, where, how, what, when, which etc. are hidden in the realms of ‘Questions’. The present paper is also the exploration of some relevant questions: what was the impact of Partition on the people especially on the women, what was the role of women during the partition of India and Pakistan and what was the social condition of India during the partition?

Partition is not a new word, when two types of ideologies clash in our home a kind of Partition takes place. Some people start to live in the half part of home and some people start to live in the left part of home. Even in the fields, we see partition for the convenience of watering and for producing large amount of crops. Even in the rivers for controlling the fast flow of water, dams are constructed, those are also a kind of partition, which are used for restoring water and producing electricity.

But the “partition of India and Pakistan” was very different from above definitions of Partition. It was the partition of India, where two ideologies and two religions clashed with each other. These ideologies were “Hindu” and “Muslim”. First time, the word ‘brotherhood’ was searching its existence on the geographical and hearty level in the people of India. It is usually told that the tragedies or disasters bring close the hearts of people erasing the boundaries of caste, class and creed but these two ideologies created the boundary of anger and hatred between India and Pakistan. Even today, oftentimes, this boundary gets coloured with the blood of soldiers and natives. Khuswant Singh depicts the horrific picture of partition in the following words:

“...both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both Raped.”( Chapter-1, Page no. 1, Lines 14-16, *Train to Pakistan*)

The partition of India and Pakistan was nothing but the mass scale migration, death, destruction, loss, bloodshed, abduction of women. Urvashi Butalia critically mentions:

“The political partition of India caused one of the great human convulsions of history. Never before or since have so many people exchanged their homes and countries so quickly. In the space of a few months, about twelve million people moved between the new, truncated India and the two wings, East and West, of the newly created Pakistan.”( Chapter-1, Page no. 3, Lines 1-7, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*)

Religion was the base of this partition. There was a kind of hatred in the hearts of people against the religion of one-another. Hindus were against the Muslims. In the festivals, they serve food to the Muslims in the special kind of utensils. They did not mix- up these utensils with other pots of home.

Even the Muslims did not behave like this. Women became the medium of contest of encroachment during the Partition.

Violence against women is an age old practice not only in India but in other countries also. Women still today are the subordinate of men. Women's body has been a site of contest in India since Vedic ages. Draupadi of *Mahabharata*, Sita of *Ramayana* and Helen of Troy of *Iliad* were the great women in history. These women were beauty with the mind. Men treated them as a contest of victory and the great wars took place because of the patriarchal mindset pervaded in society. Mindset, to consider women as property, is prevalent in society still today. While women is not entitled to have this mindset over men because our patriarchal society has provided a valid card of freedom like bull only to the men. Thus the pros and cons' result harms women's existence only not men. Focusing over this feministic point of view, in *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Susan Brownmiller has pointed out that it is world - wide practice not only in India but in the other countries also and due to this attitude, women became the medium of contest of encroachment. For winning the kingdoms, snatching ones property and letting down to someone, abduction and rape of women was very easy and normal for the people. Sometimes, King himself ordered to kidnap the Queens and other women of his enemy kingdom so that the victory over enemy kingdom become easy for the powerful king. Women became medium of competition. During the Partition of India and Pakistan, women paid big value. Urvashi Butalia mentions the statistical record of women violation:

"Nearly 75000 women; she recounted, had been raped and abducted on both sides of the border at

Partition...Apart from the rapes, other specific kinds of violence had been visited on women. Many were paraded naked in the streets, several had their breasts cut off, their bodies were tattooed with marks of the 'other' religion; in a bid to defile the so- called 'purity' of the race, women were forced to have sex with men of the other religion, many were impregnated." (Chapter-4, Page no. 132, Lines 11- 21, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*)

It can never be understood if they were not tattooed of other religion and not forced to sex with the men of other religion then which thing was more endangered: religion, humanity, nationality or patriarchy. A large number of men were involve in this malpractice and it proves that patriarchy was more endangered than any other thing because humanity, nationality and religion cannot be so bizarre ever as the cruel patriarchy. Amrita Pritam's *The Skeleton* is a shattering blow to the hegemonic patriarchal set up where a women's body is considered as a piece of commodity and her fidelity is constantly questioned there by subjecting her physical anguish and mental trauma.

The present paper focuses upon the different dimensions of violence and their impact on the female protagonist Pooro,

who struggles through the pain of abduction, gender violence and displacement. The novel is a saga of violence not only against Pooro but for the woman kind. Not only Pooro but there are other women in the novel, who are suffering in the society. Kammo, a motherless young girl, who is disowned by her father and she stays at her aunt's house. Kammo is mistreated and exploited by her aunt. Kammo resembles Hamida( Pooro) as mother figure but her aunt stops her to meet Hamida because Hamida is Muslim. Here, society's double standard behavior is shown. Neither Kammo's aunt takes care of Kammo nor she wants that Hamida became caretaker of Kammo. Hamida realizes that the "ultimate victims in all clashes are women". "It was a sin to be alive in this world full of evil", thought Hamida. "It was crime to be born a woman". Taro, the other female character of the novel *The Skeleton*, is suffering with some unknown disease and is disowned by her husband. Her husband has brought another woman to live with him and forces Taro to become a prostitute. Her illness and her husband's attitude towards her are unbearable. She is suffering with mental trauma so she wants death to free her from the cage of life. She says to Pooro:

"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."(Page no.45, Lines5-7, *Pinjar*)

"My parents have no use for me; parents never have for a married daughter. And my husband has no

use for me, because another woman is mistress of both his heart and house."(Page no.45, Lines 9-12, *Pinjar*)

"For two years I have had to sell my body for a mess of pottage and a few rags. I am like a whore...like a common prostitute..."(Page no. 46, Lines 10-12, *Pinjar*)

Pooro's dilemma is repeated when Lajo(Pooro's sister in-law) is abducted by Muslims. Pooro convinces Rashid to help Lajo return back to her home. Almost all the female characters of the novel are doubly victimized. Firstly, they are victimized of the society and secondly, they are victimized of the Partition. Both are in the hand of patriarchy.

Another form of violence against women portrayed in the novel is the parading a woman naked through the village and towns. Pooro saw that a young girl was paraded naked while ten youths in the form of procession accompanied by drum passed by their village. In other incident, there was another woman, who was sexually assaulted and becomes pregnant. The woman was mad and was not even aware of the violence inflicted on her body and a child growing in her womb. Thus, there were many women who were mutilated and impregnated during the time of partition.

Novelist Amrita Pritam, through her violated women characters in the novels, brings forth the fact that women have been the prime victims in every communal strife, riots and wars. History gives us evidence about the suffering of women.

Women were always considered as the neglected part of society. Use them physically until they become useless then throw them in the dump of rubbish. They are always considered marginalized and due to partition they were marginalized in three ways on bases of patriarchy, caste and partition. On the caste bases, the women of lower castes never counted in the history of Partition. These women were not only neglected by the patriarchal set-up of society but also they were considered as untouchables on the basis of caste attitude. Urvashi Butalia has successfully described the condition of women of lower castes during the partition. The description is surprising and unbelievable because the women, who were neglected in society and bearing the pain of being marginalized, were actually in mental peace during partition. This does not mean that partition did not affect them but it means that there was not the line of hatred between upper and lower caste. No man and no religion were interested to loot them, to abduct and rape them because these women were the women of lower caste. Urvashi Butalia has described an interview of Maya, who was working as a sweeper in her mid-fifties. Maya says,

“I kept lots of new utensils, hamams, etc., for my wedding. I brought a lot of utensils with me when I got married. I also looted many razais, quilts, some already made and some which I made later with the

material we found. There were eleven of us, girls, we all made our dowries with the stuff we collected...”( Chapter-7, Page no. 299, Lines 32-35 and Page no. 300, Lines 1-2, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*)

“But we thought, who’s going to take us away, who’s going to kill us? We call ourselves Harijans. Hindus, Christians, no one can take us away. (my italics)”( Chapter-7, Page no.300, Lines 11-13, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*)

The lack of food and the other substances of day to day life made them to do so and they fulfilled their primary need during the partition. Thus, the women were always neglected in the main stream of society. Even today, there are many areas where women are neglected. Even today, society hardly believes that women can do everything in any area of society and system.

Amrita Pritam does not just grieve over the vulnerability of women in the upheavals of history, but piercingly looking through the minute layers of the history of which women have been missed out. Many events especially of women

victimization and persecution were not reported and buried with the dead bodies of women. Thus, Pritam has tried to show that women suffered during partition and after partition. Women were facing double violence: violence of partition and violence from the patriarchal society. Some women died because of victimization and some died because of honour. The word 'Honour' is not clear as much as to be. Because it is unable to understand that these women were saving their honour or the honour of their families or the honour of patriarchy to commit suicide. Urvashi Butalia says:

“...during this period it became important to establish the purity of Mother India, the motherland

which gave birth to the Hindu race and which was home to the Hindu religion. The country, whether referred to as Bharat, or Hindustan, was imagined in feminine terms, as the mother, and the Partition was seen as a violation of its body.” ( Chapter-5, Page no. 186, Lines17-22, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*)

Apart from all the relevant issues during the Partition, Amrita Pritam shows the middle path of salvation. The protagonist of the novel *Pinjar* grapples with the situations but she never loses the confidence. In the last phase of novel, she emerges as an enlightened woman. Choosing the way to live with Rashida is an act of enlightened woman not the act of victimized woman of the situations. Now, she have regained her existence and soul and this time, she does not want to lose it:

“...But she made her brother release her arm, turned back to where Rashida was standing and clasped her son to her bosom.”( Page no.127, Lines 12-14, *Pinjar*)

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