



VIOLENCE DURING PARTITION AND URGE FOR COMMUNAL HARMONY: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF SELECT WRITINGS OF AMRITA PRITAM

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Abstract: India got its Independence in breaking the British fetters in 15th August, 1947 but the final blow of the British Raj was dividing this subcontinent. Partition disrupted the communal harmony and led the Hindu, Sikh, Muslim communities to the brutality and inhumanity. During Partition, the violence in this land, soaked with blood in communal riot has been depicted in the writings of many Indian writers. Amrita Pritam, one of the distinguished writers in Partition literature delineates that animosity and violence but the urge for communal harmony is also prominent in her writings.

Index Terms - Partition, Communal Harmony, Violence, British Raj, Communal Riot

Partition is one of the dreadful events in the history of India and it has been considered the final blow of British imperialism. The events during Partition and due to Partition always appeal to rethink the history and the nationhood of this country. Just before the independence of India in 1947 the conflict between the communities - Hindu, Sikh and Muslim has occurred with its heinous and horrific form with the claim for monolithic nation. That notion generated in the people the hatred and animosity. They engaged in the alarming, frightening bloodthirsty murderous activities and even the worst. The neighbours who once lived in harmony now have in this act of barbarity. The condition of the woman was the worst. The women of both communities have been raped, the genitals have been mutilated and they have been forced to walk naked on the street. Many writers present this horrific condition of this subcontinent. Amrita Pritam is one of them. She has written from her own experience as she has seen and felt.

Born in Gujranwala, Punjab, Amrita Kaur has been grown up in the environment of the amity and friendship of all communities. Her father has Muslim friends, they have visited their home. Her grandmother though cherished the mentality of religious diversity has later accepted the amicability of the Muslims. Amrita Pritam has also developed her friendship with the poets of other religions, especially the Muslim. In "The Revenue Stamp" she presents her concern about departing her Muslim friends when she has left Lahore to Delhi during Partition. She takes the refuge in Dehradun, then in Delhi as millions of people have faced the same fortune. They are refugees in their own country. They have dispossessed and displaced. Their miserable condition has been well described in "The Revenue Stamp" as she has presented her own plight.

Amrita Pritam portrays the condition of a woman in collision of two communities - Hindu and Muslim. In her writing she presents the sufferings and pains under the patriarchal societal system and male supremacy. She depicts the physical violence imposed on women as well as she presents the inner psyche of those women and the mental torture they have to suffer because of the communal conflict. In "Pinjar" the main protagonist of the story - Pooro is the victim of this conflict. She is a Hindu girl by birth and has been abducted by Rashida, a Muslim. He takes the revenge as his family members once have been humiliated by Pooro's family. Pooro has become the subject of the revenge and the injustice done to his family.

In the novel, "Pinjar" the woman of one community has been victimized by the man of other community. Pooro has been abducted by a Muslim. After a few days, when she comes back to her family, her parents do not accept her because they are afraid of retaining the family honour and the receptivity of their own community. The girl has no fault of her own but because of the conflict between the two families she has to suffer. In a larger scale, because of the communal disparity, she has fallen in such miserable condition. She appears to be alone. As Pooro's family does not accept her, she ultimately takes the refuge in the care of Rashida, her abductor. They get married but Pooro whose new name is Hamida, a wife of a Muslim cannot forget her natal bond but there is no scope for her to return. Gradually she has to accept the life that Rashida has offered her. Though Rashida has committed the sin in abducting Pooro but after that he is rather compassionate to her. By this acceptance of this new life Pooro as a woman shows the tolerance and perseverance.

In "Pinjar", the mad woman has been introduced to show the brutality of the society. She takes the refuge in an empty shade in the outskirts of the village. She eats whatever she has been offered by the people. But the mental deficiency does not save her from the lust of the man. She has been found pregnant. To give birth she died one day. Hamida takes the charge of this boy. But even there arises the communal conflict to prove the supremacy over the other. It has been found that perhaps the woman was Hindu. So, it cannot be tolerated by the Hindu that a child of Hindu community will be nurtured by a Muslim woman. They have protested and the child has been snatched away from Hamida and has been given under the care of such a woman who is not good enough to take such care. Here a child's life even becomes insignificant in this communal conflict.

The consequential portrayal of the Partition as depicted in "Pinjar" has achieved to its highest stature in artistic quality. The narrator in "Pinjar" describes the on-going violence of both communities - Hindu and Muslim during Partition. Many people were killed. The neighbours because of their communal diversity are killing each other; "It was said that men were being slaughtered in hundreds; rows of houses were being burnt down; neighbours were slitting each other's throats. No one's life or property was safe." (Pritam 84)

The blood was flooded throughout the land and corpses scattered without burial and cremation; "The streets ran with blood and were said to be cluttered with human corpses, with no one to bury or cremate them, the stink from putrefying flesh hung in air spreading pestilence." (Pritam 84-85)

In this madness of both communities, the woman has suffered a lot. They have been violated, raped and have been forced to walk naked on the street; "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" (Pritam 85) They become widow, fatherless, motherless and brotherless. They have suffered humiliation and lost the societal and communal respect. They have no fault of their own but they are the victims of the violence of other community they don't belong to. Even they have lost the respect in their own community.

The horrific condition of Punjab during Partition has been well portrayed in "I Say unto Waris Shah". The savagery and brutality in both communities has been depicted in this poem. It seems that the five rivers in Punjab- Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Satluj have become poisonous because of the hatred of human beings. The poison flooded the whole land and in the fertile land the poisonous saplings have only been sprouted. The animosity has affected the whole atmosphere and only 'the poisonous wind' is blowing. The hostility has spread in human mind. The consequence is "Corpses lie strewn in the pastures/ and the Chenab has turned crimson " (12-13)

Man's hatred has been presented through the metaphor of 'cobras'. The brutality and ferocity has affected the people of Punjab. The song of happiness has disappeared;

"The flute, / through which blew the breath of love, / is lost in bewilderment." (38-40)

Only blood is raining on this earth. Cry for loss and mourning for the dead is only echoed in this land; "The princesses of the valley/ called Love, / now weep in graveyards." (46-48)

Amrita Pritam tries to bring the sense of communal harmony and friendship. In her writing, there is always the eagerness to tie the whole humanity in the bond of brotherhood and friendship. She implores Waris Shah to make the people remember the story of 'the Book of Love' (58)- the story of Heer and Ranjha who love each other, forgetting the communal disparity. They love each other to the deepest part of their heart and for that they can die for each other. Remembrance of this story will bring the harmony which the people have forgotten for their hostility to each other.

In "Pinjar" Amrita Pritam also tries to portray the sense of friendship and brotherhood. In this story Rashida has rescued the Hindu girl, Lajo from the clutches of the person of his own community as Hamida has instructed him. They deliver her to her brother and husband. Hamida gets the scope of returning to her own people but she accepts Rashida, their son and the land, Pakistan as her own. She cannot feel totally belonging to any community but the last speech, "My home is now in Pakistan" (Pritam 127) proves her acceptance of her 'new' family and community to which she belongs now.

India is a land of diversity in language, culture and in religion. The people from different religions live in harmony and amity but the communal conflict has disrupted this harmony and led the people to brutality. Amrita Pritam in her writings depicts the violence and savagery and she also urges for communal harmony - the bond of friendship and brotherhood. In "Pinjar" she delineates the violence and brutality in the communal riot but the brotherly feeling and the humanity in the characters of the novel have also been presented. She also implores Waris Shah in her poem "I Say unto Waris Shah" to remind the people of the love and affection towards each other in commemorating the love story of Heer and Ranjha. Amrita Pritam is quite successful in her craftsmanship of artistic presentation and the yearning for the unity of the people in the sense of fellow-feeling and friendship has been well-presented.

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