

# Post-colonial feminism in the novels of Pinjar and Sunlight on a Broken Column

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## ABSTRACT:

The current study emphasizes on women subjugation during and after colonial era. Novels of partition literature is taken into consideration. Pinjar and Sunlight on a Broken Column is explored to study Post-colonial feminism. This study deals with both societal norms and extreme violence that women could ever face. The concepts of mental instability, rape, abduction, honor killings, religious transformation and traditional curbs are being examined.

**Key words:** post-colonialism, post-colonial feminism, hierarchal practices, oppression and subjugation of women in post-colonial era.

## INTRODUCTION:

### Post-colonialism:

Post-colonialism is related to Imperialism. Imperialism often means power, realm, authority, command and empire. Imperialism is defined as a strategy to expand territories and take control forcibly over the people of other states and countries. It not only takes control of the military but controls economically, socially, and culturally. Imperialists impose and blend their thoughts, political ideals cultural values, language and other aspects with the people colonized. A series of vast empires from the western and eastern worlds had seen extensions. Some empires are Chinese, Greeks, Egyptian, Persian empires etc. There had been three major phases of imperialism in modern history. Netherlands, England, France, Portugal and Spain established their colonies between 1492 to mid-eighteenth century. From the mid-nineteenth century to World War I, European powers fought with each other for imperialistic power. More than one-fifth of the land area of the world and a quarter of the world's population was brought under the British Empire by the end of the nineteenth century. This included India, Canada, Australia, Burma, South Africa, Sudan, and New Zealand.

France was the second-largest colonial power. Its possessions were French West Africa, Indochina, Equatorial Africa and Algeria. Japan, Italy and Germany also entered the race for power and fought with other European countries. Eventually, their thirst for power led to World War II.

Motives behind colonizing other countries are: 1) Economic benefits, 2) superior civilization and 3) selling the surplus of final goods in foreign markets, 4) looting natural resources. Though many critics argued that imperialism's economic benefits were limited to only a small group but not the whole nation, their notion of making money from colonized countries did not bother them. Rather they considered it as an opportunity to make money from suppressed countries.

A large process of decolonization occurred after Second World War. The Soviet Union and the United States engaged into the cold war having their own supporters and friends. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, America holds the status of only major power remaining.

Postcolonial literature arose as a specific literature due to the struggle during and after the colonization. The main reason for the emergence of postcolonial literature was to reexamine history and interpret it from colonized perspective. It especially focuses on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

Postcolonial works:

Some post-colonial works are: God of small things by Arundhati Roy, Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie, Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad etc.

### Feminism:

Mainstream feminism focused more on the issues and rights of women in developed countries. The goals of the first wave were to focus on suffrage and abolishing gender legal obstacles to attain gender equality. It emerged as a wave in the

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The second wave of feminism widened the debate and included the issues of reproductive rights, sexuality, family, workplace and all other de facto inequalities. In short, they focused on economic, political and social liberties for women.

#### **Post-colonial Feminism:**

Postcolonial feminism is the new stream of feminism that works on the impact of colonial and imperial structures. It analyses the subjugation of women during and after the imperial era. The description of women is explored in this feminist criticism.

Post-colonial feminism was developed as a form of resistance against mainstream feminism and criticizes it for being hypocritical and ethnocentric. Postcolonial feminist argues that the first two waves of feminism disagree with the notion of differentiation universalizing women as a whole. The most important disagreement was not considering women from developing and underdeveloped countries who are known as third-world women. Their debate mainly focuses on the burden of women from third-world countries. The burden of double colonization (gender and race), patriarchy, domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, child abuse, and female foeticide are being discussed by third-world feminist authors.

The fear of being sexually exploited, and the responsibility to maintain the family's honour by protecting their chastity became one of the important reasons for society and families to oppress girls in their own houses. The duty of managing and sustaining the culture and rituals was assigned to women of the family. She must be committed to her duties, and raise children according to prevailing norms, especially the girl child, failing to which both mother and the child will be blamed by all the people around including her husband. The husband and the family never took responsibility for failed relationships instead they were ready to get their son married again without any guilt. She was also compelled to carry forward the sustaining values which become the responsibilities of women solely. She was also expected to remain calm, and kind towards all the members of the family. They refrained from education, were not allowed in important decision-making of the family, and were restricted from choosing life partners. Their lives were no less than being slaves.

They were expected to maintain silence and secrecy about the violence, and disrespect they face in the family not sharing it with anyone.

Women carried the burden of colonization along with the burden of the so-called family which was always ready to pressurize and blame women at any time.

#### **Simon d beauvor feminine concept:**

As Simone De Beauvoir writes "One is not born a woman, but becomes one". She referred to gender socialism. One gets feminine traits and characteristics from society. They learn feminine behaviour from their parents and elders. Girls are instructed to behave well, be kind and emotional, and remain calm towards all especially family. All these traits certify a girl as a woman. The same happens with a boy becoming a man. He is taught to be rigid, not emotional, arrogant etc. If a man has emotional or crying nature then people make fun of him and compare him with a girl's character. But most of the time people fail to understand that becoming emotional, calm, kind, arrogant, and rigid are traits of human beings and emotions belong to all living things.

#### **Post-colonial feminism and description of women in Partition Literature:**

This article deals with post-colonial feminism in the novels of Partition Literature. Pinjar by Amrita Pritam and Sunlight on a broken column by Attia Hosain are considered to explore the concept of feminism in partition literature. One belongs to Sikh and the other is from the Muslim background respectively. Though they belong to a different religions, and different backgrounds they were secular in their thoughts. The pain and sacrifices of the women of India compelled them to write these novels. Both these authors witnessed the traumas and sufferings of women during the post-independence era. Amrita Pritam covers extreme violence faced by women whereas, Attia Hosain deals with societal and family norms. Also, these novels brilliantly depict the atmosphere of the post-freedom era, the kind of opportunities available for women and the difficulties they faced in succeeding them.

Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a broken column is a semi-autobiographical novel of partition literature. In this novel, she deals with societal norms and family pressures faced by women in the families. Protagonist Laila represents Attia Hosain in the novel sunlight on a broken column. Laila became the first woman from her family to attain higher education which is the same as Attia who was the first female from her family to graduate from Lucknow University. She not only deals with issues of education, but also family pressure on girls in terms of choosing life partners,

and extended family's persuading patriarchal thoughts on girls in their own house.

In the case of *Pinjar*, Amrita Pritam explores the problems of abduction, rape, forced marriages, child marriages, house arrest, forced conversions and all other extreme violence that were prevailing around during the partition. Female protagonist Pooro was abducted and married by a Muslim man Rashida to avenge the old enmity between two families. Later she was converted to Muslim as Hamida by her husband as she was abandoned by her own family after her abduction. Not only Pooro, but other characters of the story were also the victims of harsh violence such as rape, house arrest, self-immolation etc.

Both authors cleverly addressed the problems of mental pressure faced by women in society. The character transformation presented by them in their novels was excellent and so aptly reflects the emotional damage of all those women who were victims of such violence.

### **Pinjar**

Amrita Pritam is the winner of India's most prestigious literary award "Bharatiya Jnanpith". She is also the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1956), Padma Shri (1969), Shatabdi Samman (2000), and Padma Vibushan (2004). She is well known for her works related to partition literature. Her works are mostly associated with women and the violence they faced during the Partition.

*Pinjar* is a novel originally written by her in Punjabi which is about the female protagonist of the story named Pooro, and the problems she faces. It was later translated by Khushwant Singh as "The Skeleton" in 2009. Novel recognized almost all kinds of struggles faced by women both in day-to-day life and during partition. It brings out all types of emotions associated with the struggles.

She intelligibly brings out the transformation of Pooro to Hamida. The sense of belongingness, and the state of confusion within Pooro during the transformation exposed by Pritam is extremely commendable. This unveils the fight of women towards strict and rigid societal norms, also the character Pooro represents all the women during the partition who went through the transformation of their identity, character, religion etc. when they were abandoned by their own family members after being abducted, and raped by men.

She brought to light almost all types of violence towards women in this novel. Sacrifices, trauma and sufferings by women are revealed. Not only the character of Pooro, but few other characters in the novel also expose the pain of

women, they are Lajo, Kammo (madwoman), and Taro. The choice of words by her in this novel makes the people feel the situation, making readers relate to the story's characters.

Pooro (protagonist):

The story is about the abduction of Pooro, a Hindu girl by a Muslim boy Rashida.

A few days ago, before the abduction of Pooro, preparations for the marriage were taking place in her home. By that time she was engaged to Ram Chand in the nearby village of Rattowal. She often dreams of wearing a red veil, and bangles, getting ready and going in a palanquin to her in-law's home after getting married. But one day she was kidnapped by Rashida who wants to avenge the old enmity of his family, towards her family. Then she was brought to the forlorn house of enemies, where she was taken care of by him. She was informed about the old enmity by Rashida that Rashida's aunt was abducted by one of the male members of Pooro's family, kept for three nights and she was abandoned by pooro's family members. Those were times when Muslims were humiliated a lot. It's now Shaikhs turn to avenge Pooro's family.

She cleverly escaped from that forlorn house. She ran away to her parents with the hope that she will be accepted by her family. But unfortunately, she was abandoned by her own family for the sake of honour and was rejected to protect her brothers and other male members of the family from the shaikhs of Chatto village.

Then Rashida accepted her. He took her along with him and got married to her. She accepted her fate. A few days later her name was changed from Pooro to Hamida. She remained busy with her household work while she was craving her family's love. Especially her mother's love about whom she always thought about while working. She gave birth to a baby boy. She also adopted the son of a madwoman and cared for him. Her craving for Ram Chand also appeared.

Taro:

Taro, a mentally disturbed girl who lived in the surroundings of Pooro. She was married earlier and had been ill since her wedding day. Always gets fainting fits whenever she was due to go to her husband's house back. Each time she visits her maternal home, she was thinner than before.

Kammo:

Kammo, a twelve years old girl works hard for her aunt who always threatens her. As

soon as her mother died, her father married another woman. Her stepmother abandoned her and her own father treated his daughter as stepdaughter. Later she was living with her aunt who always shouts at her.

A mad woman:

A madwoman became insane as she was raped by an unknown person. Since she became insane, she was roaming around the village naked. Though people tried to help her by offering clothes, she was again seen as naked. Later she gave birth to a baby boy who was adopted by Hamida.

Unknown young girls:

Hamida found a Young girl who was being pushed by some goondas to dance naked in front of them. Same evening Hamida found another girl hiding in their sugarcane field who reveals to the former that goondas pick out women they like to spend the night with them. In the same way, latter also forced to spend her preceding nine nights with different men.

Lajo

Then comes the story of Lajo, Pooro's sister-in-law (sister of her ex-fiance Ram Chand and her brother's wife), who was abducted and kept as a mistress by a Muslim man in her own house. She was suffering from jaundice but she was deprived of proper treatment as she refused to cohabit with the man who abducted her. Pooro planned to rescue her by any means, she also succeeded in doing so.

The story ends with announcements from the governments of both countries to rehabilitate the abducted women and men as some families were ready to accept their abducted members. Pooro was also asked by her brother to join her family members who moved to divided India by that time. But she refused and decided to stay with her husband and children in Pakistan.

The critics and partition literature authors are unbiased towards the religion of people, especially those who are involved in gender-based studies.

Along with the problems of women during partition, Amrita also brilliantly depicted the struggles which are prevailed for decades. Especially the preference for a boy child over a girl child. Followings lines in Pinjar:

Pooro was fourteen years old. There was also her younger brother and succeeding him, three

younger sisters. Her mother was expecting her sixth child. (Pinjar 2)

This is a kind of characteristic of Indian society that demolishes the confidence of being a girl at the early age of her childhood. In fact, many families lament the birth of a girl child, they consider the birth of a girl child as an unfortunate one, and they recognize a girl child as the curse of god and goddess. And the harsh reality is that female infanticide was at its peak during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and at the time of partition as well; girl babies were killed by their families.

She sensibly interpreted both ways of discrimination towards girls; the first being the preference of son over daughter and the second, the opinion of "girl child being a burden" of their parents.

India is well known as its "land of cultures and diversities". Indian society and religions are famous for their special traditions. Especially when it comes to rituals performed during various festivals. In Hinduism, people worship and offer prayers to goddesses along with god. Goddess Durga is worshipped exceptionally in Bengal regions. Goddesses are hailed in the Hindu religion. After all these girls face such cruel reality, they are felt inferior to boys, women are recognized as inferior to men, and such beliefs are considered as good for both girls and society.

Such thoughts not only humiliate women, but it makes them confined at home; curb their freedom, liberty, and rights; set limits along with boundaries and make them serve only their home and families, protect and preserve the honour of their families which are considered as only responsibilities of women.

#### **SUNLIGHT ON A BROKEN COLUMN:**

This novel is written based on personal experience. It does not directly deals with violence and riots of partition rather it deals with the psychological impact of partition exclusively into a Muslim family. Moreover, this novel highlights those concerns that are related to the appropriation of women regarding their cultural values and traditions. This novel also brings out the effects of political interference in an orthodox family.

This novel revolves around the notion of personal space for women, especially about conflicts between freedom of thought and freedom of action. The novelist also talks about Zenana: a separate place for women in a Muslim family. Women in the family are confined to these walls of

zenana in Muslim families. The distinction between male and female children was much more visible as more preference was given to a male child over a female child. This preference for a male child over a female has a long history in India. Minimal rights are guaranteed to girl children. Education is one among them. Many rich families provide education to their daughters along with their sons. A possible reason could be to show off that the rich families then had liberal ideas. But in reality, they don't want their children to get into the influenced liberal ideas of western education.

Laila, the protagonist of the story, she was allowed to western education as per her father's wish. As she lost her parents in her very childhood, she was living in a joint family under the guardianship of her uncle Hamid. The family wished to take care of her as long as she was unmarried.

This novel highlights the long-lasting feudal system of a family which was practised for generations where women in the family are considered inferior to men. The concept of the feudal system is discussed in this novel, as the transition and change that occurred in the family due to the liberal ideas of the younger generation which was the outcome of western education.

New education paved for personal space for women. Slowly they got to know about their rights. They developed revolutionary thoughts and understood the oppressive modes of society. The gap between the two generations is cleverly depicted in the novel. The younger generation seems more liberated. They wanted to support and enjoy their personal freedom, identity, freedom of expression, speech, personhood etc.

The older generation is rather interested in holding up their conservative thoughts. On the other hand, women from the older generation are reluctant to approve the new developments and liberal ideas.

Anita Desai point out

The abounding love of the land they own and dominate, yes, and ideally the sense of duty and responsibility that could justify such a power, but the younger men in the family, and some of the young women, begin to question it, stirred as they are by their liberal Western education as well as the ideas of freedom and independence that they have imbibed through their reading and heated discussions at school and college (Sunlight on a Broken Column, 9)

Laila:

Laila is the narrator of the novel who is just fifteen years old. Lost her parents at her early age. Therefore she was taken care by her paternal family. She was given western education as per her father's wish. She has a modern sense of thinking despite being brought up in a highly conservative family. Throughout her teenage, she is involved in seeking answers to her conflicting thoughts about the superiority of religious thoughts which according to her imposes several restrictions on women and modern education which provides better scope for women to live with self-respect and dignity. She chose the latter to lead her life. She was portrayed as someone who fails to understand the self-sacrificing nature of women.

She had relation with Ameer and fought against her family to marry him. After Ameer death's she was supported by her maid Nandi and her cousin Asad.

Aunt Abida:

Aunt Abida has a key role in Laila's life. She is an independent-minded, strong woman. She is capable of taking care of family and crisis in the absence of the patriarch of the family. She is also sensitive to the requirements of others in the novel. She is married to a negative man who is a widower with grown-up children. As soon as she married, she was sent to her in-law's home. Laila lost her biggest support. But the relationship between them is maintained.

This relationship is tested on several occasions. 1) Laila is attracted towards her kinsman Ameer and she wished to marry him but Aunt Abida disapproved their relationship. 2) When Aunt Abida fell ill and needs Laila, she postponed visiting her aunt and spent her time with Ameer. 3) After the Death of Laila's husband, Aunt Abida failed to show her concern towards Laila as she was against their relationship.

Belonging to two different situations their attitude is the same towards approaching an issue. But the relationship between these two strong women became complicated with time.

But slowly she became submissive to her brother's wishes. Her life took a sudden downturn when she married. She constitutes those intelligent women who are being subjected to oppressive traditional and cultural values. She was deprived of her individuality, efficiency in controlling things, her decisive nature. Moreover, no serious effort was made by her husband to provide medical efforts. Her life is seen as someone who has made sacrifices to preserve her traditions

Zahra:

Laila and Zahra are cousins who are of almost same age and grown up together. Both are contrast in nature and poles apart. Zahra grew up conservatively as per her mother's wish. She was provided with education in Arabic and Persian. Unlike Laila, she accepts her fate and does not have curiosity to understand the situation. She neither interested in education nor in liberal thoughts. After her marriage, she was completely changed. She was allowed to attend parties and wear modern clothes. Zahra had no such conflicts which Laila was going through. She was ready to accept whatever future stored for her but not with courage, instead she understood it has way of living or any traditional practices.

Novelist highlighted on hierarchical practices among families which curbed women's freedom in name of traditional values and culture.

#### Secular ideals:

Novel stresses on India's secular thoughts. Beginning from the older generation to the younger generation, secular thoughts are being expressed in different forms. Friends of Baba Jan include the Hindu community, other Muslim relatives and friends, and officials of the British. She named them as, Hanstey Dada for Thakur Balbir Singh, Motey Dada for Raja Hasan Ahmed of Amirpur, and Gorey Dada for Mr Freemantle. All four friends including Baba Jan are different in terms of their backgrounds, culture, traditions and power structures. Despite having all such differences their bond of friendship was so strong. From celebrating festivals belonging to different religions to adapting to western culture such as educated women from rich families attending club meetings and parties etc. depict how secular they lived in their own way.

The younger generation in the family is more attracted towards secularism lot. In fact, their active participation and striving for new and liberal political developments across the country are emphasized again and again. Youngsters from different backgrounds – educated and illiterate, rich and poor, Hindu, Muslim, and Anglo-Indians together reacted to developing political events. Similar to her grandfather, Laila also has friends from different communities. Education in school

and college was the reason for Laila to create and maintain a bond with people from across religions. Some of her friends are Joan, Sita, Ramona, Nadira and Nita. Along with school and college, some other social institutions like clubs, parties and functions enabled people to think big and made them understand others' religions and communities.

The household servants appointed in Laila's family include people from all backgrounds, communities and religions. Interestingly they are allowed to observe their traditions and religious practices. On the other hand, they enjoy and celebrate Muslim festivals as well. The sudden downturn in Laila's life from being brought up in a joint family along with servants in childhood to a single parent bringing up her daughter with the help of Hindu women Nandi again signifies the importance of secularism.

Asad, cousin of Laila also portrayed as a man with secularist thoughts. He actively participated in political events which had major influence on younger generation.

In point of fact, there is a situation where Muslims are being abused by Hindu refugees and a Hindu friend of a Muslim reacted against this insult in support of his Muslim friend. These relationships, concerns for each other, their loyalties among them, and helping instances lay a ray of hope for people to live together in harmony.

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