



IIT ROORKEE



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CERTIFICATION COURSE

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema

LECTURE 28 – ACCOUNTS OF THE SURVIVOR

DR. SARBANI BANERJEE

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, IIT ROORKEE



PINJAR

- The movie adaptation of Amrita Pritam's Pinjar deals with the protagonist Pooru's plight as that of "a woman with a fluid identity caught in the crossfire of communal frenzy" in the words of Nonica Datta.
- Datta - Pooru eventually transcends her bitter experience, becomes emotionally attached to her 'abductor', and overcomes her prejudice. She marries Rashid, acquires the name Hamida, but still maintains her fluid identity: 'She was neither one nor the other'.

PINJAR

- Urvashi Butalia's 'Other side of silence' - Kamlaben Patel recounts that nearly 75000 women had been raped and abducted on both sides of partition. Along with rapes, women also underwent several specific kinds of violence, they were paraded naked, some had their breasts cut off.
- She further recollects that tattoo with marks of other religion were made on the bodies of women with the idea of defiling the purity of their race, they were forced to have sex with men of other religion. At times the children born by these rapes were forcibly taken away from them. Some families traded in their women in lieu of freedom. Women were also abducted from camps or from the caravans of people marching across the border on foot.

PINJAR

- Pinjar is about a young girl Pooru, who is about to get married to Ramchand. Days before her marriage she gets abducted by Rashid, a muslim man, due to some familial dispute. He marries her and changes her name to Hamida.
- When Pooru escapes from her abductors, her family refuses to accept her back. Within some months the partition violence intensifies making several people its victim. Through Pooru's life Pritam shows us the lives of several other women victimized by the bifurcation.

PINJAR

- Pooru's and Laajo's lives can be perceived as having been entrapped in a communal conundrum. They are supposed to play the role of the powerless victim that, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out the third world woman stereotype expects them to play.
- Laajo's character is an example of a similar stereotype where she depends on her family and Pooru for her protection and happiness. Pooru, on the other hand defies the stereotype by owning her life choices and by protecting and rescuing the victimized Laajo.

Pinjar

- Pritam shows how Pooru/Hamida defies patriarchal and territorial boundaries, and effectively uses her agency to critique the reality of Partition by choosing to stay on in Pakistan.
- The issue of abduction is central to Pritam's concerns, but with a difference. She situates it within the framework of Hindu identity and patriarchal anxiety. Her worldview contrasts with the chauvinist perspective that interprets abduction as an act of Muslim depravity and aggression, and targets the entire Muslim community for its culpability.
- Pinjar is the story of a woman's liminal position in the face of hardening religious and national boundaries. Pooru /Hamida is an example of that liminality. Yet, she emerges as an active agent in shaping her destiny. Amrita shows that an abducted and raped woman is not a mere victim; her pain and anguish can be a source of powerful energy for her new identity.

PINJAR

- Nonica Dutta writes of Amrita Pritam's life story that, not all Punjabis identified with monolithic religion, especially the experiences of women were “fragmented and historical”, she writes “Pritam's experience of Partition impels her to invoke a shared culture of cultural symbols and language, and to transgress and ultimately transcend the languages of religious and communal mobilization.”

ABDUCTION

- The India- Pakistan government came up with the Inter-Dominion treaty to recover the abducted women. To clarify what encompassed abduction, 1st March 1947 was decided to be the date after which any woman seen to be living with or in a relationship with a man of any other religion was presumed as abducted or taken by force.
- Even the marriages or conversions after this date would be considered forced. Urvashi Butalia writes, “No matter what the woman said, how much she protested, no matter that there was the ‘odd’ real relationship, the women had no choice in the matter”

ABDUCTION

- The movie portrays the abduction of several women during the Partition, Laajo is abducted from her caravan walking towards India in the presence of her brother and mother. Further, Pooru meets a disheveled woman escaping her abductors who, she claims rape her.
- Pooru herself is a victim of abduction, but out of a familial enmity, this becomes her point of difference from Laajo who is a Partition abduction victim. Laajo is accepted back in the family, but Pooru after escaping her abductor Rashid is sent back to him by the family.
- Her parents' refusal to accept her, after the abduction, suggests ways in which religiously-informed identities hardened barriers over the issues of women's 'honour' and 'purity'.

ABDUCTION

- Pooru/Hamida's refusal to succumb to the state policy of recovering abducted women in 1947, on the basis of their religious identification, resonates with the attitude of those women who resisted being 'recovered', and legitimized their cross-religious relationships (Butalia 1998: 147; Menon 1998).
- Though her abduction predates Partition, her resistance to a return to her natal family after Partition makes a larger point about the attempts made by some women to secure citizenship through acting autonomously outside of religious community and state.

ABDUCTION

- While reflecting on her abduction, ‘a sense of resentment surged in Hamida’s mind. When it happened to her, religion had become an insurmountable obstacle; neither her parents nor her in-laws-to-be had been willing to accept her. And now, the same religion had become so accommodating!’ (Pritam 1987: 39)
- The abduction and rape of the women led them towards a hatred for their own bodies and a sense of ‘defilement’.

ABDUCTION

- The movie Pinjar ends with Pooru's statement that, "whether one is a hindu girl or a muslim one, whosoever reaches her destination, carries along my soul also".
- The work becomes a narrative that attempts to harmonize the communal differences instead of aggravating them.
- Pritam not only portrays the Partition violence but gives an intricate insight of the regular rural life before and during Partition and how the daily lives of the people transform in the process.
- Communal trouble, women abduction, rapes, did exist even before the partition violence. What changed by Partition is the scale of these abductions.

ABDUCTION

- Abduction and rapes before partition occurred in a hushed manner, the way Rashid's and Pooru's families deal with her abduction through suppressing the issue and not accepting her back, which debunks the attitude towards abduction and rapes. Rashid's family as well attempts to keep the whole issue hidden, fearing communal violence.
- Partition became a reason to openly violate women without fear. There was no more reason to carry out the heinous acts secretly, so thousands of women were victimized of rapes.

The Ramayana Allusion

- Pinjar can be looked at as being loosely based on the Ramayana where Pooru, like Sita, is abducted and waits for her Ram, here Ramchand, the name which appears to be intentionally given to the character to allude to the epic.
- During the movie at one point Pooru confirms the perspective of herself being Ramchand's Jaanki (Sita), who she was supposed to get married to. Ramchand doesn't get married and people often refer to his not getting married as his 'Vanvaas'(exile).
- Pritam presents an alternative end to her representation of the epic when Pooru denies to return to Ramchand and chooses to live with Rashid.

The Ramayana Allusion

- In the end, her sister-in-law goes back to her brother, but Puro decides to stay back with her abductor in Pakistan rather than return to her fiancé in India.
- In this way, she as if rewrites the story of *Ramayana* and partakes in authoring an event in her palimpsestic existence.
- She becomes Rashid's wife Hamida and accepts the conditions that the name entails, even as Rashid, sore, guilty and squarely cognizant of his transgression acquiesces to her returning to Ramchand.
- However, as an individual who is more than just a tattoo, Puro is not merely engulfed by Hamida but chooses to live in the world that Hamida has created for her.

THANK YOU

