



Gendered Trauma and Collective Memory in the Partition Fiction of Amrita Pritam and Bapsi Sidhwa

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Abstract:

One of the most traumatic events in South Asian history is the Partition of India in 1947, which resulted in unprecedented levels of violence, displacement, communal division, and psychological trauma. The Partition narratives in the literature have been an important means of holding the memories of survivors and questioning the ideology that allowed violence to occur. This paper compares and contrasts the Partition narratives of Amrita Pritam and Bapsi Sidhwa, focusing on Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* (also known as *Cracking India*), to examine trauma, memory, and gendered resilience. This study explores how both writers foregrounded the experiences of women in the context of the larger political catastrophe of the Partition and challenged the dominant patriarchal narratives and their marginalization of women's experiences. By employing a comparative literary methodology that draws on trauma theory, feminist criticism, and memory studies, the paper examines trauma's conceptualization as abduction, displacement, violation of the body, and fragmentation of the emotions. It also delves into the ways in which memory is an ethical and cultural repository through which women negotiate identity, survival, and agency. Pritam's story focuses on the sad psychological repercussions of expelled uprootings and male violence, while Sidhwa's piece is written in a fractured first-person child's POV as he watches communal harmony disintegrate. In both cases, the writers recreate women not only as victims but also as symbols of endurance, moral resistance, and resistance in gender. This paper proposes that the stories of Pritam and Sidhwa add much to the ongoing discussion on Partition literature, gender studies, postcolonial memory, trauma studies, and feminist history. Their writings remain relevant in debates on violence, nationalism, identities, and collective memory in South Asia.

Keywords: Partition literature, trauma studies, memory studies, gendered violence, feminist historiography, Amrita Pritam, Bapsi Sidhwa, postcolonial literature, resilience, South Asian narratives

1. Introduction

The Partition of British India in 1947 was a pivotal moment in history that reshaped South Asia's socio-political and cultural landscape. The partition of the Indian subcontinent into the two states of India and Pakistan resulted in one of the largest forced migrations in history, as well as communal violence, mass displacement, abduction, rape, and murder. Millions were driven from their homes, and countless lives were forever changed. Although political discussions, territorial borders, and the creation of states are usually the subject of official histories, literary accounts offer a more intimate portrait of the emotional and psychological impact of Partition. Literature is a cell for memory, in which silenced experiences, especially of women, are brought to life in an emotional and ethical way.

Amrita Pritam and Bapsi Sidhwa are some of the most important literary voices who have been linked to Partition narratives. They delve deeply into the themes of violence, memory, and trauma through their works and focus on the

gendered aspects of violence. *Pinjar* is a story by Amrita Pritam about the untimely abduction of Puro, a Hindu woman, during the Partition as a result of the communal violence that erupted in the area between 1947 and 1948. Through Puro's fragmented identity and emotional distress, Pritam exposes how women's bodies are made a symbolic space where communal honor and patriarchal power are violently inscribed. Similarly, Bapsi Sidhwa's film *Ice-Candy-Man* delves into the Partition from the perspective of Lenny, a young Parsee girl in Lahore. The novel reflects the insurgence of communal peace and emphasizes the weak position of women during political turmoil. Both authors challenge the dominant narrative of nationalism, placing women's voices at the center and revealing the entanglements of patriarchy, violence, and displacement. They expose the official history of the situation, which leaves the problem of women in the background or almost as unimportant as it is possible to make it. Instead, they reclaim women's voices and personal memories into collective testimonies. The torture experienced in these stories does not only involve physical violence but also psychological disintegration, loss of connection, alienation from one's culture, and a sense of emotional homelessness.

The current study aims to conduct a comparative study of trauma, memory, and gendered resilience in the work of Pritam and Sidhwa. This paper attempts to explore the issues of identity, violence, and survival as they are negotiated by these writers to add to the current debates in Partition studies, feminist criticism, trauma theory, and the study of postcolonial literature.

2. Review of Previous Studies

Partitioning literature has been a major field of study because of its involvement with history, memory, identity, and violence. However, controversial critics like Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin have explored the gender aspects of Partition, focusing on the experiences of women in relation to the experiences of men. In *The Other Side of Silence*, Butalia claims that women's suffering during the Partition has often been omitted from official historical narratives. She points to the way in which abduction, rape, and forced conversion were the means by which patriarchal and communal ideologies were manifested.

Likewise, Menon and Bhasin, in *Borders and Boundaries*, discuss the transformation of the female body into a symbol of national honor during the Partition. Their study found that in the process of recovery and rehabilitation, the state has tended to value communal respectability over women's autonomy. These feminist interventions have made a significant contribution to literary criticism, leading scholars to explore women's narratives as alternative histories of the Partition.

The scholarship on Amrita Pritam has been confined almost entirely to the study of her feminist viewpoint and her portrayal of women's suffering. *Pinjar* critiques the patriarchal structures that objectify women's bodies and identities. Pritam is an individual tragedy that becomes a universal commentary on the violence of nationalism and communal hatred, Jain argues. The title also *Pinjar*, 'skeleton', has been discussed by critics in terms of its symbolic connotations of emotional emptiness, social alienation, and the objectification of women in the context of the patriarchy.

The depiction of the Partition from the child's perspective has also garnered critical acclaim for Bapsi Sidhwa's debut novel, *Ice-Candy-Man*. Researchers have contended that Lenny's viewpoint allows Sidhwa to portray violence indirectly without taking away from its emotional impact. Sidhwa is adept at showing how communal animosity creeps in to erode human relations and morals, as Susie Tharu and K. Lalita observe. The novel has also been read against the backdrop of the novel's depiction of Ayah, whose body is an arena of conflict and gendered violence among the community.

Trauma theory has provided a valuable framework for studying Partition narratives. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is an experience that is so crushing that it cannot be fully represented and is recalled through disjointed memory. This is especially applicable to Partition literature, where memory tends to be disjointed, repetitive, and

emotional. Dominick LaCapra also separates acting out from "working through" trauma concepts that reveal characters in literature's attempts to deal with psychological trauma.

Despite substantial scholarship on Partition literature, comparative studies focusing specifically on trauma, memory, and gendered resilience in the works of Amrita Pritam and Bapsi Sidhwa remain limited. The present paper attempts to address this gap by undertaking a comparative analysis that foregrounds the ethical and feminist dimensions of their narratives.

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative and comparative literary method with a textual analysis approach. The study employs a qualitative and comparative literary approach with the method of textual analysis. Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* are the main texts that have been chosen for the analysis. This research utilizes interdisciplinary theoretical approaches from trauma theory, feminist literary criticism, memory studies, and postcolonial theory.

The conceptual framework for reflecting on the psychological impacts of violence, displacement, and loss is offered by trauma theory, especially the works of Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra. Feminist criticism is used to analyze how the Partition experience affects women's lives and how women's subjectivity is constructed in nationalist discourse. Memory studies aid in understanding the interplay between personal, collective, and cultural memory. The comparative approach allows for the examination of the themes of convergence and divergence between the chosen texts. Particular focus is placed on narrative strategies, characterization, symbolism, the representation of violence, and the construction of resilience. The study also situates the texts in the socio-historical context of the Partition and the ongoing discussions about gender, identity, and postcolonial memory in the present.

4. Trauma and the Fragmentation of Identity

In both *Pinjar* and *Ice-Candy-Man*, trauma plays a significant role. Partition's violence challenges individual identity, emotional wellbeing, and social connectedness. The abduction of Puro by Rashid in *Pinjar* is not just a personal tragedy, it's a personalization of communal revenge. Her body is made an arena of contestation for the exercise of the power of patriarchy and of a particular community. Having been kidnapped, Puro feels a great sense of alienation. Her family rejects her because she would otherwise bring dishonour to their community. This rejection exacerbates her psychological trauma and creates a split in her.

Pritam's portrayal of trauma is as a permanent state of emotionality. Puro faces the sense of alienation and anonymity again and again. Her plight is indicative of the plight of countless women who were abducted, exchanged or abandoned in Partition. The metaphor of the "skeleton" represents death of emotions and social erasure. However, this anguish slowly gives rise to a moral awareness, which is beyond the barriers of the community. By being compassionate to other displaced women, she is moving from the victim to the moral agent.

Trauma is filtered through the eyes of Lenny, a child who sees a very different world than the one she's in. A failure of communal harmony has a tremendous impact on her psychological development. Sidhwa paints a picture of fear, suspicion, and moral decay in the midst of Partition through Lenny's eyes. Trauma is a result of both overt acts of violence and the gradual erosion of trust and co-existence.

It is hard not to feel disturbed by the abduction of Ayah. She is perceived as a desirable object of desire, a subject of animosity and a victim of male aggression. She was a victim of the exploitation of women during Partition. Sidhwa's story highlights the frequent justification of violence against women in the name of religious honor and national identity. The emotional impact of Ayah's suffering extends beyond the individual level, symbolizing the destruction of humanity itself. For Pritam and Sidhwa, trauma doesn't necessarily mean physical violence. It involves emotional disintegration, mental fragility, and an alienation from the culture. The stories they tell defy the easy path to a picture of suffering, and the stories they tell illuminate trauma as a long-term and multifaceted condition.

5. Memory as Cultural and Ethical Testimony

Memory is an important tool in both novels to tell a story. As a counter-history, "partition literature" keeps certain experiences that are not included in official narratives. Literary texts, in the act of remembering, defy amnesia and bring to light suppressed voices.

Memory is intricately linked to loss and displacement in Pinjar. Puro's memory of her family, childhood and pre-Partition life always haunts her current life. These memories give rise to emotional tension because they are from a world that cannot be brought back. Memory also affords resistance to erasure, however. In recalling her history, Puro's humanness is sustained amidst social dehumanization.

Pritam is a memory who reveals the shortcomings of the nationalist discourse. The stories of independence are political; but when we listen to the histories of people, we hear stories of suffering, displacement, and betrayal. The novel thus condemns the triumphalist histories which tend to overlook the emotional toll of Partition. Memory is an ethical mode of engagement which recognizes and validates past experiences that are not remembered.

Memory is fractured in Ice-Candy-Man and mediated by the use of Lenny's retrospective narration. To comprehend the violence that changed her world, the adult narrator re-creates childhood experiences. The disjointed narrative structure is echoing what traumatic memory feels like – disjointed and emotionally unstable. Sidhwa's art of memory represents a conflict between innocence and historical violence. Lenny's memories show how commonplace relationships were shattered by communal politics. Memory is an important part of the story and plays a key role in the fight against historical injustice and the inability to forget collectively. In this manner, Sidhwa uses his stories to create a larger cultural history of the Partition trauma.

Both of these writers have shown the political relevance of memory. Declaims silence, captures marginalized voices and leaves room for ethical reflection. Their stories highlight the importance of memory of Partition not only as a means to learn history but also to address the on-going manifestations of communal hatred and gender violence.

6. Gendered violence and Patriarchal structures

Exposing gendered violence is one of the most important features of Partition literature. The Partition was lived differently by the women as their bodies were often considered to be symbols of communal honour. In the violence, abduction, rape, forced marriage and forced conversion became commonplace.

In Pinjar, the tragedy of Puro shows how patriarchy takes away women's autonomy and humanity. Her family's rejection after being abducted reflects the society's obsession with the purity of women. Puro is not viewed as a person with emotions and rights, but a reminder of the honour of the community. This is an objectification that mirrors overall the patriarchal system that deems women as property.

Pritam is not just criticizing communal violence; he is criticizing the very basis of the patriarchal system within society. The novel implies that women continue to be vulnerable due to a society's emphasis on honour rather than humanity. But step by step, Puro defies these oppressive frameworks by showing empathy and ethical bravery. She's on the verge of helping another kidnapped woman get away, thus showing moral strength and human sympathy.

In the film, Ice-Candy-Man, Ayah's body is similarly the space of male control and communal aggression. Her abduction is a violent intermingling of sex, nationalism and patriarchy. Sidhwa brings to life the way men take advantage of the political unrest to assert their dominance over women. Ayah's suffering exposes the hypocrisy of nationalist rhetoric that claims to protect women while simultaneously violating them.

Sidhwa also critiques masculine violence through the transformation of the Ice-Candy-Man character. Initially charming and playful, he becomes consumed by communal hatred and obsession. His psychological deterioration symbolises the corrupting effects of violence and fanaticism. Through this character, Sidhwa demonstrates how communal politics distort human relationships and moral values.

Both novels therefore reveal that gendered violence during Partition was not accidental but structurally embedded within patriarchal and communal ideologies. By foregrounding women's experiences, Pritam and Sidhwa challenge male-centred historical narratives and insist upon the ethical necessity of recognising female suffering.

7. Gendered Resilience and Female Agency and Conclusion

Although both *Pinjar* and *Ice-Candy-Man* are about trauma and violence, they also focus on resilience and survival. The female roles in such novels are not simply those of helpless victims. In contrast, they display emotional resilience, moral bravery, and other forms of resistance against patriarchy.

Pinjar is a case in point of the complexity of resilience, and Puro is a living example. She suffers greatly but, over time, gains her own sense of empathy that crosses communal lines. She transforms from victim to ethical agent. Puro's assertion of humanity in an inhuman social environment occurs through her help of other women affected by Partition.

Pritam's take on resilience is very subtle and psychologically crafted. Puro's liberation or happiness is not the usual one. However, her compassion and moral choices are powerful acts of resistance. She will not allow hatred to take root in her. This moral ability calls into question the one-sided picture of victimhood that is often presented. Likewise, Sidhwa's female characters prove to be extremely resilient in the face of violence and displacement. Ayah suffers from a great deal of trauma but is also emotionally dignified and complex. Lenny's mother and Godmother are also vital in preventing violence and protecting vulnerable people. They represent a kind of community solidarity that is distinctly different from the brutality in which they dwell.

Sidhwa proposes that relationships, stories, and acts of caring are the sources of resilience. In broken social situations, female solidarity is a lifesaver. The novel challenges the traditional view of women as helpless victims and emphasizes their agency, adaptability, and emotional power.

Pritam and Sidhwa both contribute to a brand-new definition of resilience, one that is not about heroic victories but about maintaining humanness in the face of violence and loss. They are stories of tragedy but not of oblivion or passivity for women's lives.

Conclusions and suggestions for future research:

Amrita Pritam's and Bapsi Sidhwa's Partition stories are essential for any discussion of trauma, memory and gender-based violence in the writing of South Asia. Both writers critique official history through *Pinjar* and *Ice-Candy-Man*, foregrounding the experiences of women whose suffering was often overlooked or marginalized. Through their writings, they demonstrate that Partition was more than just a political event; it was a deeply human tragedy, suffering that resulted in emotional division, displacement, and a moral crisis. The comparative analysis shows how in these narratives, trauma is not just physical but also psychological, involving loss of identity and emotional alienation. Memory is a private and public repository for lost history, a place where it is remembered and shared. Pritam and Sidhwa deny history's silence, allowing for ethical reflection.

The study also emphasizes the issue of gender in partition literature. Women's bodies were perceived as symbols of communal honor and patriarchal control, and people were beaten and exploited. However, both authors reject the feminist image of women as victims. Their stories highlight courage, compassion, and ethical engagement, inviting nuanced portrayals of female suffering.

Today, these stories retain great significance. The ethical lessons in Partition literature are especially crucial in the midst of communalism, forced migration, and gendered violence that have swept the globe in the last few years. Pritam and Sidhwa's works invite critical engagement with the past and a sense of compassion, memory, and human solidarity.

A comparative analysis of Partition literature and other traumatic literature from worldwide situations of displacement and conflict could be looked into in the future. Students and Research Scholars can also explore the areas of cinematic adaptation, oral history, translation studies, and the relationship between memory and digital humanities in Partition

scholarship. Such cross-disciplinary work would further the study of trauma narratives and their ongoing cultural relevance.

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