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## **Manhood in the Midst of Chaos: Examining Masculinity in 'Pinjar' by Amrita Pritam''**

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### **Introduction**

Gender is the root concept of masculinity and in contrast to sex, it is a societal construct rather than a biological term. This categorises people as either "feminine" or "masculine." The features that make up the binary are, among others, loud/quiet, self-centred/self-sacrificing, strong/weak, emotional/rational, and dominant/tolerant. The term "masculine" refers to traits or attributes that are deemed typical or fitting for men as determined by culture, politics, and history. Strong physical attributes, aggressiveness, lack of emotional expression, impulsivity, and rage are hegemonic conventional characteristics of masculinity.

Masculinity has to do with certain behavioural trait and psychological qualities rather than with biology. According to R W Connell masculinity has the following equivalents "Male, Manful, Manlike, Manly, Mannish, Virile, Bold, Brave, Butch, Gallant, Hardy, Macho, Muscular, Powerful, Red blooded, resolute, robust, Stout hearted, Strapping, Strong, Vigorous, Well built" these traits represent the traditional role of masculinity across the word.

Understanding the pattern of masculinity during political upheaval helps us to decode masculinity under the lens of historical and political events. The most important historical events such as colonialism, civil wars, partition period, communal conflicts, religious conflicts. The paper aims to understand the concept of masculinity and how these events shape men or will these events bring in the new dimension to the traditional role of masculinity.

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### **Partition shapes Gender.**

The Independence of India in 1947 was accompanied by its Partition into two nations, India and Pakistan along religious lines. This partition granted independence to supposedly a Hindu India and created a new nation Pakistan which was predominantly populated by Muslims. What made this Independence and partition a singular event was the large-scale ethnic violence and mass migration that accompanied them in nine months between August 1947 and the spring of the following year. By unofficial counts at least eighteen million people Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims were forced to flee their homes and become refugees, at least a million were killed in ethnic violence; many of these refugees eventually migrated to UK and U.S. A. The partition led to a large-scale abduction of over one lakh twenty thousand women by men from the other community, thus freedom was accompanied by traumatic loss and oppression from the patriarchal society. Despite the scale and nature of the violence involved in this partition making it one of the most violent events in the history of the nation formation, World's biggest mass migration in under nine months. Very little attention has been paid to the way how men behaved or were forced to behave during this period in the public sphere. a study of this period illuminates the contours of the complex rhetoric's of masculinity.

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### **Context**

*Pinjar* is one of the best novels written by Amrita Pritam. It is based on the theme of partition of 1947 and highlights the trauma that each character undergoes during partition. All the characters belong to Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities. The novels centre on a Hindu girl Poro who is the protagonist of the novel. The partition period has been a darker side and a very traumatic episode in the Indian history.

During Partition men of all religion that is Hindu, Sikh and Muslim had a great pride in taking revenge against each other by exploiting the women of their rival community and killing each other. Physical, psychological and emotional violence was considered normal and in fact men were appreciated if they indulged in such acts. All men had to abide by the notions of masculinity which existed in the Indian society even prior to partition

This chapter focuses on the masculine ideology which forces male characters to behave in a certain way. The novel highlights Muslim protagonist Rashid, who kidnaps Poro and forcefully marries her. We see Rashid behaviour entirely different in his community and he shifts his behaviour when he with Poro. Rashid is very rationale in his behaviour which is one of the cultural constructions that society has imposed on men.

The Novel centres on Muslim Protagonist Rashid, who belonged to Muslim community. The rivalry between both the communities had filled hatred towards each other; Rashid who was powerfully built and was in his early twenties, His lips was curled in mischievous smile when he first saw Pooro was very suspicious. Rashid looked like enormous grizzly bear, he always stared at Pooro and making her feel very uncomfortable, when Pooro discussed this with their friends, they told her that it was normal and said all men stared at young women and described themselves as servant and slaves, From the very beginning when we get introduced to Rashid in the novel, he was very brave, Tuff, Muscular, and had all the masculine quality that the society had conventionally set during that period.

Rashid was asked to abduct Pooro by his family, later when he sees Pooro he falls in love with her for her beauty. In Rashid behaviour we can see multiple masculinity, later due to his families compulsion kidnaps Pooro. Once she is in her senses, she pleads Rashid to leave her but he never listens to her, in the entire novel we get to see rashid being very gentle and kind with Pooro but he restricts himself to the traditional masculine behaviour, he is the provider and Pooro leans towards the receiver.

Through this novel, we get to witness different ideology beneath the beviour of every men who has taken part of was a victim of partition, there are several instances in the novel where Rashid is shown very polite and kind in his behaviour however, there is always a self centered attribute associated to Rashid. Where Rashid does not let her go from his life, he always takes decision on behalf of her. Pooro keeps pleading him "Take me back to my People" ( Pritam15) she wanted to get back to her home but he never agreed to her, this was against his communal ideologies and all his family had always thought him that a Man can never be sensitive.

Pooro's father Mohanlal is a man with very rigid cultural ideologies. Though he loves his daughters he always has a very stern appearance. He was a decision maker in his home which was a typical practice that was followed by all Indian men, where their decision is the final decision and women had no say in their decision-making process. Mohanlal controlled the life of his children and it was he who decided the occupation for his son. This behaviour of Mohanlal is evident in his decision of marrying his son Trilok to Lajjo who was the sister of Ramchand. Thus, it is shown that masculinity is asserted by controlling the decisions of other people. The same has been shown in the larger context of how politics worked during partition where people in power controlled the oppressed. The family becomes the microcosm of the nation in private sphere, by this we get to see that men dominated men and showed their power of masculinity through controlling their decisions.

As John Baynon in his book *Masculinities and culture* says "If maleness is biological, then masculinity is cultural" ( Baynon) it holds good in the Indian context and in this novel, we get to see all the cultural prejudice that has been attached to the male gender and followed like a ritual and one does not fit in the context would be considered as feminine.

Mohanlal had two extreme personalities, he was a man who took all the decisions and ensured everything was done in a way he wished. He showed his masculine power through his decisions, for which all the men and the women agreed. On the other hand, when Pooro got abducted and was called for a meeting with Sheikh's family we could see his feebleness, all he did was requested, cried, begged and asked them to leave their daughter. However, when the daughter managed to escape and found her parents standing in front of her, the mother cried of anguish broke from her heart. He replied "The neighbour will hear. There will be crowd" "Daughter this fate is ordained for you, and we are helpless" (Pritam 22) Pooro requested the father to take her along with them to Thailand, but he denied her request by saying, there will be no one who will be ready to marry her. Every man during partition had two extreme personalities depending on the context and the situation they were leaving in. Mohanlal was completely helpless to what had happened to her daughter, he couldn't help her. A man all through his life was very tuff, brave, but now we could see the opposite side of him, he had become weak and docile.

The study focuses and concentrates on the lives of men. The novel has also captured their struggle, anger, loss and so on. During partition men too suffered at various levels. It centres on the patience and sacrifice those men underwent during the partition period. It was also about, hatred, love, sorrow, loss and gain of power.

Trilok, the son of Mohanlal and brother of Pooro, both are completely affectionate towards each other they both share a great bonding. Trilok has always been a very obedient boy who listens to his father and all his decision were taken by his father. We see Trilok evolving through his age, initially he is boy who is ignorant and innocent, we see him laughing, playing with his sister, later we see him forming patterns of masculinity discussed by Raewyn conell in his book *Masculinities*.

Trilok is married to Lajjo who is the sister of Ramchand, their marriage was never a successful marriage because he was upset that their parents were never supportive to her sister in his absence. Trilok is extremely angry all through his life, he was very unhappy with his father and all the others in the family, he started searching for his sister everywhere but he couldn't find her.

We see Trilok who belongs to the young generation, who actively takes part in all the social movements and extremely loves his family and the country, unlike his father who was dominant over him but couldn't show his dominance over the other community. Trilok being a docile man from the beginning later we see his extremely violent behaviour in his adulthood his aggressiveness is reflected during the partition period.

Trilok had now become a very aggressive man and he never had a second thought before committing any crime, all he thought was just revenge. Revenge was the only thing that was running in his mind, which was Normal and a very normative behaviour, Trilok wanted to fit into the social standard of acceptable behaviour of men. He just wanted to find her sister and take her along with him. A man who took active part in social movements has completely changed his ideologies and was different person, partition had made him behave and think in a particular way which was accepted by the masculine society. As John Baynon in his book *Masculinities and culture* says "Men as Victims and Aggressors" (Baynon ) the statement holds good in

the novel Pinjar, we see the Father who is the victim of partition and masculinity who has lost his daughter and at the same time we see Trilok the son, who has shown an extreme aggressiveness and masculinity and the thought of killing Rashid who belonged to Muslim community

To larger extent men are the “Victims “and men’s anger and their attempts to fight against what they see unfair becomes aggressiveness. Just like the way Trilok showed his aggressiveness against people who abducted Pooro and Pooro’s abduction was one traumatic experience of his life and his attempts to fight back against the unfair treatment shows is aggressiveness and masculinity.

Ramchand who was Pooro’s Fiancé was both handsome and intelligent, he was different from all the other male characters presented in the novel, Pooro’s father presented the boy’s parents with five silver rupees and a piece of sugar and booked him with his Daughter. Pooro’s friends always made fun of her and pointed out her fiancé Ramchand to her. Whenever she recalled her face a deep blush came to her cheeks, Ramchand was an educated man, who was matured and a much-disciplined man, he was not a very aggressive, tuff, bold. He was a very docile and submissive man who later feels sorry that he couldn’t help Pooro at the time of her abduction.

Pooro was madly in love with Ramchand for his appearance and gentle behaviour, though Ramchand didn’t adhere to the masculine quality that was set by the society, he was a progressive man who never believed in the so-called conventional pattern of patriarchy like any other men of that time. After her abduction she always thought that why didn’t Ramchand not come to save her. He was the person whom she was about to marry.

After getting married to Rashid, she still thought of Ramchand, they don’t meet each other for couple of years, she meets him once but he fails to recognize her, and then the next meet is when they meet at the refugee camp where he talks to Pooro of her sister’s abduction who happen to be Trilok wife. He cries and pleads Pooro to get Lajjo. We see Ramchand a very self-centred man who is not bothered about anyone, he never bothers to find Pooro even after her abduction, nor he volunteers for his sister abduction, because of his education he had become very insensitive.

Men during Partition had different faces, each men behaved differently. Lajjo who was abducted by Muslim men and then her family waiting for her was the treatment that Pooro never received, In a way she was very happy that Ramchand who had come to take her sister, and trilok had come to take her wife. Pooro was happy looking at this, Pooro says “I beseech you, never, never let the slightest slur be cast on Lajo” ( Pritam 125 ) Lajo husband looked down shamefacedly and Ramchand also kept his gaze fixed on the ground, he felt ashamed that he couldn’t do anything at the time Pooro was abducted.

The novel no doubt it’s about the women sacrifice, courage and suffering but also it’s about each man who equally underwent the trauma of being separated from their wife, daughter, Mother and family. Beyond everything the pressure from society for behaving in a certain fashion because they belong to a specific gender “Male” during communal riot. The novel focuses on the journey that each man has undergone from Innocence to Experience the novel also struggles for the emancipation of men and their identity.

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