

Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema
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Lecture - 29
Accounts of the Survivor - VI

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. Today, we are going to discuss Accounts of the Survivor, and we are already talking about Amrita Pritam's Pinjar. When we talk about the question of identity in Pinjar, we see that Rashid, the Muslim peasant act as the abductor of Pooru.

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Pinjar – Identity

- Rashid's mother embeds a tattoo on Pooru's hand named 'Hamida,' thus compromising her identity. Pooru, a Hindu name that could cause much disquiet in a Muslim-majority society, is overwritten by the newly tattooed name Hamida, which symbolizes status-quo.
- Like the rest of her body, which is beyond her control, her hand bears out her changed identity and witnesses her becoming visibly Muslim. The tattoo is intended to forcefully seal the process of her abduction and religious conversion, through negating her past identity and relationships.
- The identity of Hamida, especially the way she herself uses it to disguise as a blanket-seller, allows her the freedom that would be unimaginable to either a Hindu betrothed woman or an abducted riot victim.

   2

The female lead character in Pinjar is tattooed on her hand by Rashid's mother. After Rashid takes Pooru away to his home, Rashid's mother embeds a tattoo on Pooru's hand and renames her as Hamida. So, this is a moment where Pooru's original identity, her former natal identity is compromised. This is considering the question of safety and muffling any kind of communal tension centering the act of abduction of Pooru.

If she bore a Hindu name, it would cause suspicion and disquiet in the neighborhood. So, her name is in a way...she is overwritten by the newly tattooed name Hamida, which symbolizes status-quo and (like I said) silencing and muffling of the violence that was enacted on her. Like the rest of her body which is beyond her control, her hand actually attests her own case as a person, her lack of or her unmaking of personhood.

So, her hand bears out her changed identity and witnesses her becoming a visibly Muslim. Tattoo is intended to forcefully seal the process of her abduction and religious conversion through negating her past identity and relationships, as though a new person is born through purported death of the former person, Pooru. Identity of Hamida, especially the way she herself uses it later on, is however remarkable in the story.

From the question of victim, from being a victim, she goes on to become an agent who is in charge of life choices and who is also an active agent; she who plays an active role in saving another woman, who happens to be her sister-in-law Rajjo (who is also in a similar situation).

Rajjo has also been abducted during the partition riots. We see that the name 'Hamida' is cleverly used by Pooru in such a way that it renders her some freedom; it allows her some freedom that she had never enjoyed as a betrothed Hindu woman and definitely, not as an abducted riot victim. (Refer Slide Time: 03:52)

Pinjar - Identity

- Her figuration of Hamida is that of a poor Muslim woman who sells wares and is behaviorally not dictated by the strictures of the upper-class. She can enter an unfamiliar household, freely associate with unknown people and ultimately play the savior of another female victim.
- After assuming the identity of Hamida, Pooru treats Rashid as an equal partner who supports her personal goal – a kind of man-woman relationship that she had earlier never experienced with any other male relative in the past.

So, her figuration of Hamida, the way she imagines...there is a point in the narrative, where Pooru cannot identify with and does not interface with this imposed identity Hamida. She is still Pooru from within; but after a point, she has only figuration of Hamida.


She shapes Hamida, a version of Hamida from within herself; she owns the identity in a way that would suit her. She actually plays a poor Muslim in a bid to save her sister-in-law; she plays the poor Muslim woman that sells wares and someone that is not behaviorally dictated by the structures of upper-classes, refined codes of conduct.

As a saleswoman selling wares, she enters [households], she talks loudly, she enters unfamiliar households, eats at their places, freely associates with unknown people and ultimately, her agency is visible when she plays the savior of another female victim. At the point when Pooru starts intersecting with and interacting with this imposed identity Hamida, (and she has her own version of Hamida like I said),

Pooru treats Rashid as her equal partner who supports her personal goal; a kind of a man-woman relationship that was unthinkable and something that she had never experienced with any other male, any other male relative in the past. Her father, her brother, her fiance never actually treated her as an equal human being. This is something that she gains through becoming her version of Hamida. (Refer Slide Time: 05:58)

Identity

- Rashid also helps Pooru in rescuing another abducted Hindu woman from a Muslim household. This woman is Pooru's brother's wife. Pooru uses her tattooed name Hamida to her own advantage for winning the confidence of the abductor's family and helping her sister-in-law escape captivity. This is an instance of Pooru translating her body marking into a site of power.
- Pooru's tattoo is not etched on her body in normal times; it permanently defines her as a war prize. Yet it also delineates a reverse journey for her, from being the figure of an outsider that inspires communal rivalry and sacrilege to becoming kin to her abductor's family and his immediate cosmos, which begins to trust and espouse her within the new space.

 4

So, Rashid at this stage, we see helps Pooru in rescuing another abducted Hindu woman from the Muslim household; we see the entire journey, the mental landscape of Rashid [and] then how it transforms.

So, it is very difficult to see humans as fixed and totally given into evil acts or evil ideas or evil deeds; they are actually very ordinary people during partition performing heinous acts and afterwards, in other situations, they can display their humane traits and they can be solely guilty of their past actions and Rashid is a case in hand.

Rashid afterwards is sorely guilty, is cognizant of what he has done, and he helps rescuing another abducted Hindu woman from another Muslim household. This woman (like I said) Rajjo is Pooru's brother's wife and [Pooru] is using the tattooed name Hamida on her hand as an advantage for winning the confidence of the abductor's family so she can enter into the household and help her sister-in-law escape captivity.

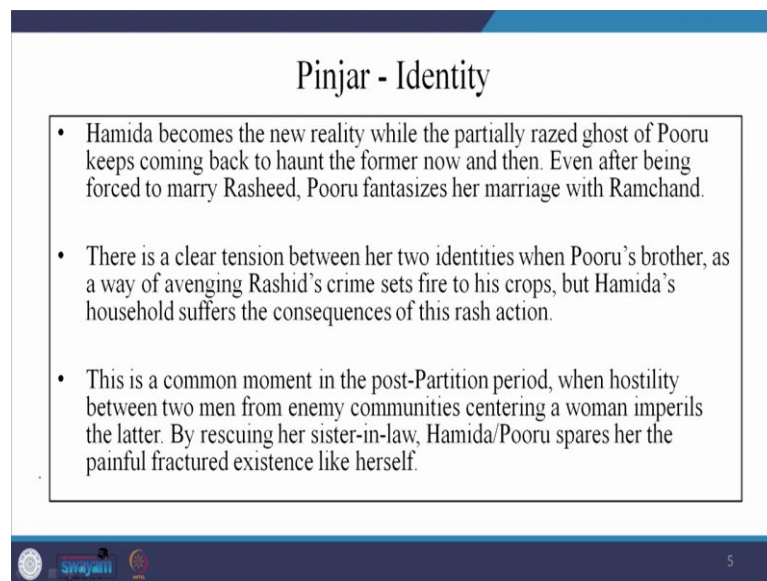
This is an instance of Pooru translating her body mark into a site of power. Pooru's tattoo...we have to understand... in an Indian situation women use tattoos as beauty statements and especially in different rural parts of India, women tattoo their bodies and that have different signification altogether -- that is the beauty statement. But she is tattooed as a war prize. She does not tattoo her body; she is tattooed in abnormal times and in turbulent times, and the tattoo defines her as a war prize.

We see that the tattoo also could delineate a reverse journey for her - from being the figure of the outsider...so when we see from the point of view of Rashid's family, she was an outsider initially; but with the tattoo, the tattoo enables her to become a part of the family. From the figure of the outsider that inspires rivalry and someone that is seen as a symbol of sacrilege to becoming a kin and someone that Rashid's family can believe.

This tattoo enables her to earn or to gain some trust and so, within her immediate cosmos, she is looked at as a familiar figure. She does not remain an alien or an unfamiliar woman. She begins to trust and in turn be trusted within the new space with the help of the tattoo.

So, Hamida becomes the new reality and yet, we see the fragmented self of Pooru coming back. She is Pooru turned into Hamida. She is a palimpsestic existence where the razed ghost of Pooru keeps coming back to haunt her, and even after being forced to

marry Rasheed, Pooru fantasizes her marriage with her fiancé Ramchand. (Refer Slide Time: 09:51)



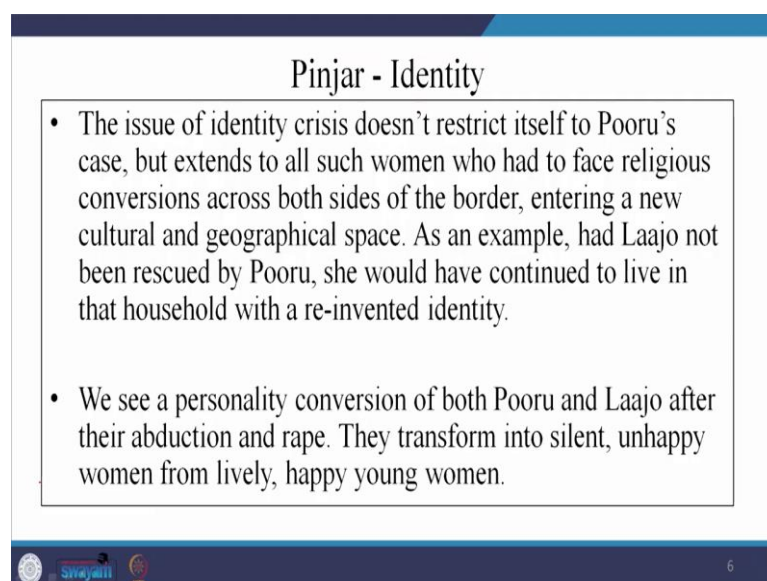
Pinjar - Identity

- Hamida becomes the new reality while the partially razed ghost of Pooru keeps coming back to haunt the former now and then. Even after being forced to marry Rasheed, Pooru fantasizes her marriage with Ramchand.
- There is a clear tension between her two identities when Pooru's brother, as a way of avenging Rashid's crime sets fire to his crops, but Hamida's household suffers the consequences of this rash action.
- This is a common moment in the post-Partition period, when hostility between two men from enemy communities centering a woman imperils the latter. By rescuing her sister-in-law, Hamida/Pooru spares her the painful fractured existence like herself.

5

So, the issue of identity crisis is not only pertaining to Pooru; but it extends to all such women, who had to face religious conversions across both sides of the border and they had to enter a new geographical cultural-space. So, had Rajjo not been rescued by Pooru, had Pooru not intervened in her case she would have to continue to live in the new household with a reinvented identity. We see how the the persona of these abducted women change.

We have seen them prior to abduction and before the riots, where Pooru and Rajjo are very cheerful. (Refer Slide Time: 11:44)

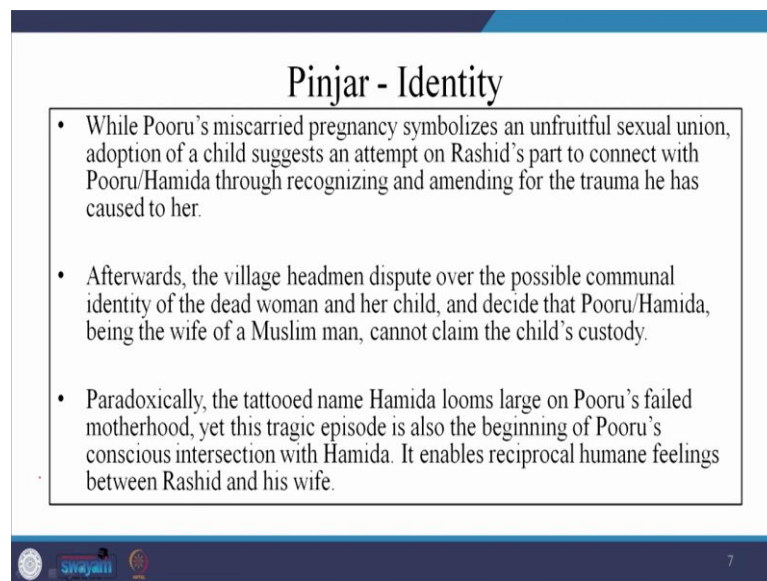


Pinjar - Identity

- The issue of identity crisis doesn't restrict itself to Pooru's case, but extends to all such women who had to face religious conversions across both sides of the border, entering a new cultural and geographical space. As an example, had Laajo not been rescued by Pooru, she would have continued to live in that household with a re-invented identity.
- We see a personality conversion of both Pooru and Laajo after their abduction and rape. They transform into silent, unhappy women from lively, happy young women.

6

They are generally cheerful, lively characters, but they transform into silent unhappy women. (Refer Slide Time: 11:49)



The slide is titled "Pinjar - Identity" and contains three bullet points. The first bullet point discusses Pooru's miscarried pregnancy as a symbol of an unfruitful sexual union and Rashid's attempt to connect with her through adoption. The second bullet point describes a dispute over the child's custody between village headmen, who decide against Pooru/Hamida because she is a Muslim. The third bullet point notes the paradoxical nature of the event, where the tattooed name Hamida becomes significant to Pooru's motherhood and the beginning of her relationship with Rashid.

- While Pooru's miscarried pregnancy symbolizes an unfruitful sexual union, adoption of a child suggests an attempt on Rashid's part to connect with Pooru/Hamida through recognizing and amending for the trauma he has caused to her.
- Afterwards, the village headmen dispute over the possible communal identity of the dead woman and her child, and decide that Pooru/Hamida, being the wife of a Muslim man, cannot claim the child's custody.
- Paradoxically, the tattooed name Hamida looms large on Pooru's failed motherhood, yet this tragic episode is also the beginning of Pooru's conscious intersection with Hamida. It enables reciprocal humane feelings between Rashid and his wife.

So, then, we can see the case of Pooru's miscarried pregnancy. Her miscarried pregnancy symbolizes an unfruitful sexual union, where Rashid in the first place initially had forced himself on her, and yet we see Rashid is also not an immutable, pre-given kind of a stock image of Muslim aggression or something like that, the aggressive Muslim abductor. He is a human and his human dimensions are being interrogated and discovered throughout the novel.

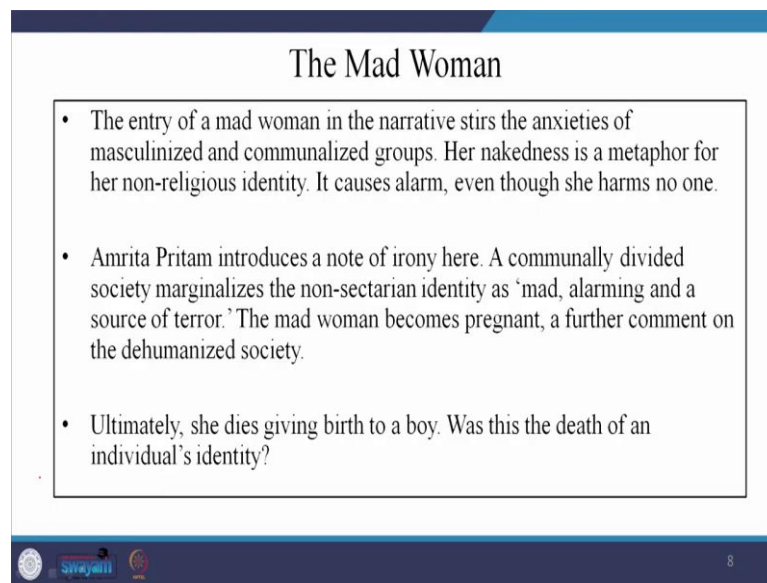
He makes up for his initial aggressive acts through adopting a child for Pooru and so on his part, it is a way of recognizing and amending for the trauma that he has caused to Pooru. Yet, there are lots of communal disputes and discussions centering this child and her dead mother and so the Hindus in the village,

actually the panchayats (the headmen), who are from the Hindu community decide that Pooru cannot claim the child's custody. There is a paradoxical situation, where Pooru happens to be originally a Hindu woman, i.e. born a Hindu, converted to Islam. And so, basically a woman's caste, a woman's community are all like outward clothing.

They are not intrinsic; they are patriarchal designs imposed on her. [At] one moment she has [a religion, at another she doesn't]; even the concept of a landed position, concept of possessing a home are not permanent when we talk about a woman. So, she does not possess a home, a caste identity, a communal identity, by virtue of the fact that she has to

bear Rashid's communal identity. The child is taken away from her, but identically she is as Hindu as the child is.

So, this tragic episode is also a beginning of Pooru's conscious intersection with Hamida, and it enables reciprocal human feelings between Rashid and his wife. (Refer Slide Time: 14:42)



The slide is titled "The Mad Woman" and contains the following text:

- The entry of a mad woman in the narrative stirs the anxieties of masculinized and communalized groups. Her nakedness is a metaphor for her non-religious identity. It causes alarm, even though she harms no one.
- Amrita Pritam introduces a note of irony here. A communally divided society marginalizes the non-sectarian identity as 'mad, alarming and a source of terror.' The mad woman becomes pregnant, a further comment on the dehumanized society.
- Ultimately, she dies giving birth to a boy. Was this the death of an individual's identity?

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The image of the mad woman in the narrative; the mad woman is naked, she is stark naked and her nakedness is a metaphor for her non-religious identity, and it causes alarm.

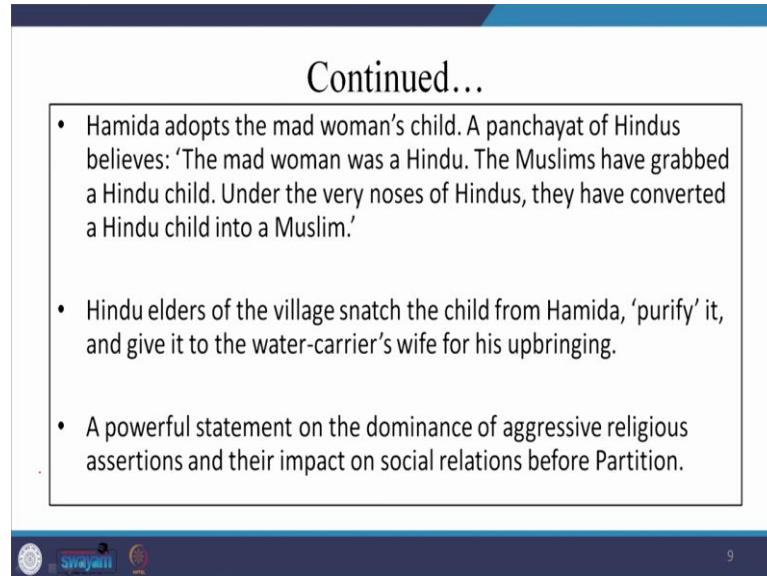
The refined people cannot look into her eye or they cannot actually see her in the way she runs about. Although she is not harmful, she is not benevolent, she is benign and yet, the society is scared of the naked mad woman. Amrita Pritam introduces a note of irony here.

Who is mad, and this actually reminds us of Toba Tek Singh, the liminal existence, which is neither here nor there; the no man's land. The person standing on the no man's land is, in other words, the non-sectarian identity in the face of communal riots and communal tensions and extremist views being fanned. [Against this scenario], the non-sectarian person is mad and causes alarm, provokes suspicion and is a source of terror.

The mad woman is impregnated. She is raped and impregnated. So, when we look at the pregnant mad woman, it is a further comment on the dehumanized society and



ultimately, this woman dies after giving birth to a boy and so, with this death we see metaphorically the death of an identity that did not belong to any pre-given meaning.

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- Hamida adopts the mad woman's child. A panchayat of Hindus believes: 'The mad woman was a Hindu. The Muslims have grabbed a Hindu child. Under the very noses of Hindus, they have converted a Hindu child into a Muslim.'
- Hindu elders of the village snatch the child from Hamida, 'purify' it, and give it to the water-carrier's wife for his upbringing.
- A powerful statement on the dominance of aggressive religious assertions and their impact on social relations before Partition.

 Sri Jayanti  9

The meanings that were shaping the metanarratives at that time. So, she did not belong to any of the nations that were to be. She actually was a space of uncertainty and she gave birth to a figure that also bears uncertainties. The child signifies a sense of not belonging anywhere. The child is actually a lack of meaning and so, there is a fight over the identity of the child. We do not know which community the rapist belongs to; maybe there is no one person, but multiple people that have raped her.


The communal identity in this case is ironically being tied up with the mother because everyone knows the community of the mad woman. She is a Hindu, but no one knows the identity of the rapist. Even if people knew, they would not divulge. So, Hamida adopts this mad woman's child and the panchayat of the Hindus believe that this is a ploy for the Muslims to grab a Hindu child. Under the very noses of Hindus, they have converted a Hindu child into a Muslim.

Afterwards, the Hindus are actually able to snatch the child from Hamida, purify it and give it to another poor Hindu woman to be brought up. So, the child is given to another woman for his upbringing. This is a powerful statement, where a woman's individual social decision [hardly matters]...I mean the dominance of aggressive religious assertions and how they impact the social relations before partition.

This is a powerful statement on how the dominance of aggressive religious assertions impact the social relationships. So, Pooru makes a strong statement. (Refer Slide Time: 19:01)

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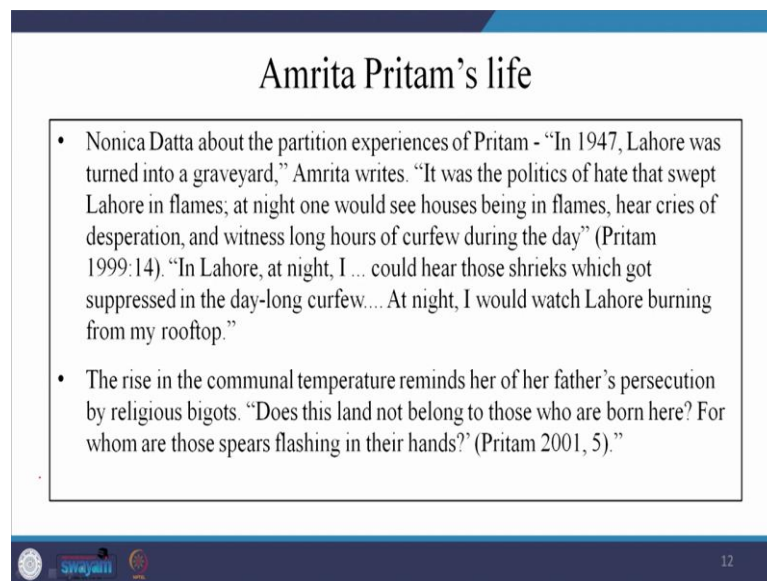
- Pooru makes a strong statement criticizing the impregnation of the helpless woman, saying, "... she who had no beauty, no youth, only a body of flesh, the one without a conscience, only a skeleton, a mad skeleton. The eagles devoured her too."
- The rape of the woman, her impregnation and the politics over her child stands as an example of how patriarchy is central to communal disputes.
- Pooru being a woman had taken a social decision, which is discarded by a panchayat of men and their decision is imposed on her.

 10

I mean criticizing the hypocrisy of the society; social hypocrisy. Regarding the impregnation of the mad woman, Pooru says, "she who had no beauty, no youth, only a body of flesh, the one without a conscience, only a skeleton, a mad skeleton. The eagles devoured her too".


So, the rape of the woman, her impregnation and the politics over her child stands as an example of how patriarchy is at the heart of and how patriarchy gives rise to communal disputes. Pooru as a woman had taken a social decision and yet, it was actually undermined. It was discarded by the a set of village headmen, the panchayat and their decision in turn was imposed on her.

In times where religious identity become a brutal blueprint of territorial boundaries, Amrita Pritam through her female protagonist critiques and analyzes the outcome of religious community overlapping with the category of nation. What happens when we start seeing a nation as a monolithic identity made up of one religious community? As well, the narrative highlights patriarchal hypocrisy and challenges nationalist obsessions. (Refer Slide Time: 20:35)



Amrita Pritam's life

- Nonica Datta about the partition experiences of Pritam - "In 1947, Lahore was turned into a graveyard," Amrita writes. "It was the politics of hate that swept Lahore in flames; at night one would see houses being in flames, hear cries of desperation, and witness long hours of curfew during the day" (Pritam 1999: 14). "In Lahore, at night, I ... could hear those shrieks which got suppressed in the day-long curfew.... At night, I would watch Lahore burning from my rooftop."
- The rise in the communal temperature reminds her of her father's persecution by religious bigots. "Does this land not belong to those who are born here? For whom are those spears flashing in their hands?" (Pritam 2001, 5)."


 12

So, Nonica Datta studies partition experiences of Pritam and notes "in 1947, Lahore was turned into a graveyard," Amrita writes. "It was the politics of hate that swept Lahore in flames; at night one would see houses being in flames, hear cries of desperation, and witness long hours of curfew during the day".

Pritam's father is persecuted by religious bigots, which make her actually ask, "Does this land not belong to those, who are born here? For whom are those spears flashing in their hands?" (Refer Slide Time: 21:19)

Amrita Pritam

- Her narrative problematizes the 'experience' of Punjabi women; as a witness and narrator, her account differs from narratives drawing on Punjab's religious and communal traditions.
- Partition is the most crucial moment in defining her worldview; it enables her to forge a *kainaati rishta* (fraternal relationship) with the universe, and to create her world in accordance with Punjab's language, culture and social history.
- Amrita Pritam's life history reveals how she locates herself in family, community, and nation in the aftermath of Punjab's Partition, and attaches inner meanings to religious languages.

 13

Partition is the most crucial moment in defining Amrita Pritam's worldview. It enables her to forge a Kainaati Rishta or fraternal relationship with the universe and to create her world in accordance with Punjabi language, culture and social history. (Refer Slide Time: 21:44)

Amrita Pritam

- Amrita Pritam interrogates the logic of Partition – “There was no basis for Partition....It had fragile foundations. Punjab’s legacy is a shared one: our poetry starts with Baba Farid in the twelfth century...”
- Punjab’s literary cultures gave her the sensibility to respond to the violence and pain of Partition, and to cope with her anguish after her uprooting and displacement.
- She narrates- “The Partition of India continued to become a festered wound in the bosom of history. Nobody would ever know how the dreams of so many girls of this country were slaughtered...”

14

We see how Pritam interrogates the logic of partition, "there was no basis for partition. It had fragile foundations. Punjab's legacy is a shared one and we start our understanding of Punjab through poems by Baba Farid". So, she narrates "the partition of India continued to become a festered wound in the bosom of history. Nobody would ever know how the dreams of so many girls were slaughtered because of this process". (Refer Slide Time: 22:13)

Amrita Pritam

- Amrita Pritam’s idea of cultural community and identity testifies to a plurality in Punjab that exemplified through cultural symbols, motifs, and landscapes.
- She does not identify with national borders, which are political constructs and imagined projections of territorial power. For her, Partition was a destructive but also a creative moment. She feels rootless, separated from her lover and her homeland.

15

She cannot and does not identify with national borders. She actually testifies to plurality -- the plurality that Punjabi community exemplifies through cultural symbols, literary works, landscapes and motifs. So, she feels rootless and separated from her lover and land. (Refer Slide Time: 22:40)

Pritam's poems

Pritam writes a poem 'Tavarikh' (history) which echoes the voice of a young girl, who like thousands of other such girls, got lost somewhere. She compares Punjab's Partition with the anguish of an abducted woman.


"Nobody to consult the stars
The honour of the house was crushed in the bazaar.
Where is the mother who is queen?
The father who is king?
Who has cursed the daughter?
Where are my own sisters, my own brothers?
Who has torn apart the ties of wood?
Where are the childhood friends, my own village?
Who can I tell what happened to me—
As if my limbs had been torn from my body?..."

In her poem 'Tavarikh' or history, she talks about Punjab's partition. She compares Punjab's partition with the anguish of an abducted woman.

"Nobody to consult the stars; the honor of the house was crushed in the bazaar; where is the mother who is queen; who the father who is king; who has cursed the daughter; where are my own sisters, my own brothers; who has torn apart the ties of wood; where are the childhood friends, my own village; who can I tell what happened to me, as if my limbs had been torn from my body?" (Refer Slide Time: 23:15)

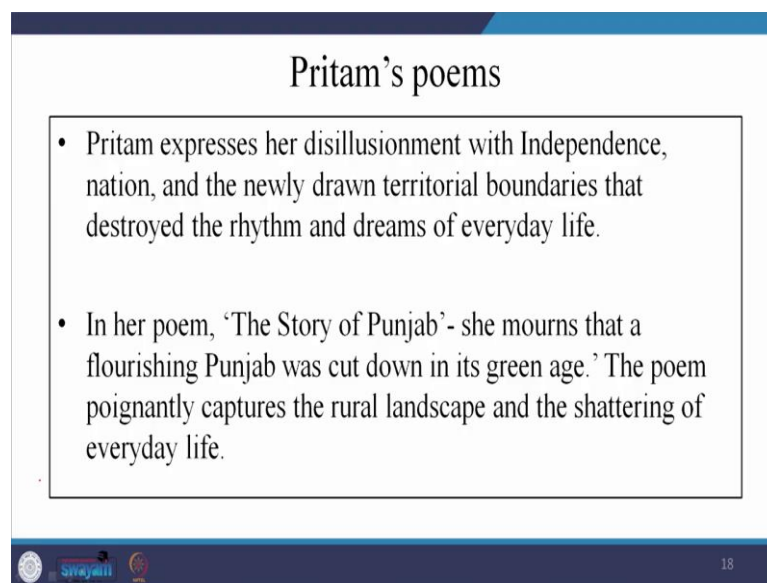
Pritam's Poems

- Without using the categories of religion, community and caste, Amrita Pritam underscores a woman's experience of Partition as universal and irreparable in 'Tavarikh'. "Who can sense the pain of such a girl— the youth, whose body is forced into motherhood" (Pritam 2001: 12).
- Amrita Pritam describes the trauma of rape in her poem "Helplessness" through the metaphor of a mother's womb. The womb is a victim of Partition's madness: "I am the symbol of that accident." Partition is like the accursed child born of the womb.
- Like the surgical operation on the womb, Punjab is divided into two parts. The helpless womb is compared to the helpless Punjab, and it bore "fruit," when "the trees of Independence were in bud." The child that was born was in fact a "blackened spot."

 17




So, she talks about the situation, where the woman... a girl in her youth has been forced to experience motherhood, who knows nothing about worldliness. So, the helplessness of the woman, the trauma of rape is actually described in her poem; helplessness through the metaphor of the mother's womb. The mother's womb is a victim of this madness about partition.

So, 'I' is a symbol of that accident. The helpless woman is compared to the helpless Punjab that has been ascended and so, the child that was born is actually a blackened spot. Partition is like a cursed child born of this womb of the unwilling mother. (Refer Slide Time: 24:11)

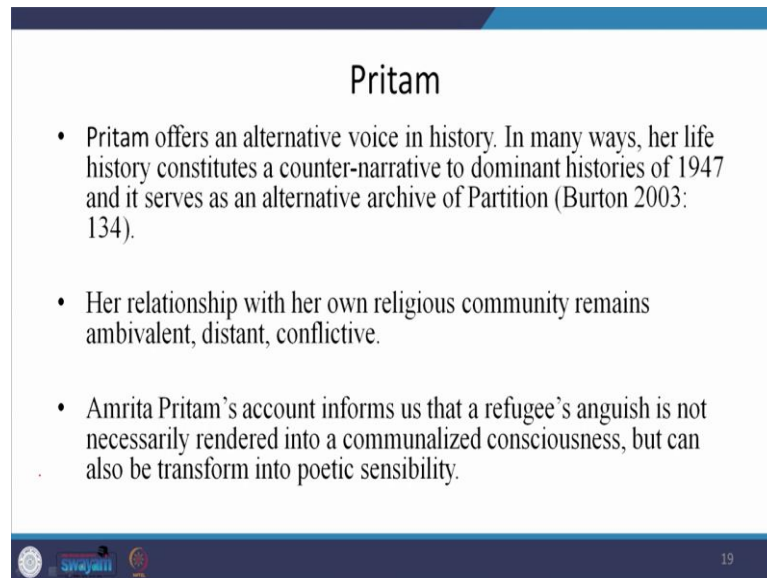


Pritam's poems

- Pritam expresses her disillusionment with Independence, nation, and the newly drawn territorial boundaries that destroyed the rhythm and dreams of everyday life.
- In her poem, 'The Story of Punjab' - she mourns that a flourishing Punjab was cut down in its green age.' The poem poignantly captures the rural landscape and the shattering of everyday life.

   18

She mourns that a flourishing Punjab was cut down in its green age, and this disillusionment with independence, with the category of nation and redrawn territorial boundaries that destroyed the mundane rhythms of people's lives is something that keeps coming back in Pritam's work. (Refer Slide Time: 24:29)



Pritam

- Pritam offers an alternative voice in history. In many ways, her life history constitutes a counter-narrative to dominant histories of 1947 and it serves as an alternative archive of Partition (Burton 2003: 134).
- Her relationship with her own religious community remains ambivalent, distant, conflictive.
- Amrita Pritam's account informs us that a refugee's anguish is not necessarily rendered into a communalized consciousness, but can also be transform into poetic sensibility.

19

So, she offers an alternative voice in history. In many ways, her life history constitutes a counter-narrative to dominant histories that are available on 1947 partition. So, it could be treated as an alternative archive of partition. So, her relationship or interaction with religious community, with national identity are ambivalent and conflictive, they are distant.

From Pritam's account, we understand that the refugee's anguish do not only render into a communalized consciousness, but they can also be transformed into artistic or poetic sensibility. With this I am going to stop today's lecture and we will meet again for another round of discussions.

Thank you.