

Ecological Feminism in Amrita Pritam's novel *The Skeleton* (Pinjar)

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Abstract

This paper attempts to take an in-depth study of Amrita Pritam's *The Skeleton* (Pinjar) from an ecofeminist perspective. Within this text, power and domination, directly oppress both the feminine world and the natural world. Feminist theory denies all patriarchal systems. It tries to understand and explain the difference between men and women. In the feminist setting, the exploitation of the environment has also been added to the exploitation of women by men. With this a new word has been created, Eco Feminism. Ecological feminism is an interdisciplinary movement that encourages a new way of thinking about nature, politics, woman, spirituality. Although many novels were written on the background of the partition of Hindustan-Pakistan, but Pinjar has its own distinct and important place among them. The female characters in Amrita Pritam's novel are not only sympathetic to the sufferings of other women but have self-empathy. She is seen trying to relieve them by taking their pain as her own. That is, she does not only apply ointment on the pain of women, but tries to remove the reason due to which she is suffering. When the events of the novel are drawn from around life events, then the depiction of fictional events also appears to be filled with credibility. It is written around 1950 after Amrita Pritam's own departure from Pakistan and being influenced by the circumstances of those days during partition. The objective of this study is to recognize the eco-feministic aspects of female protagonists of Amrita Pritam's novel 'Pinjar'. This study was done through literary reviews based on eco-feminism and this is important to evoke the society against the exploitation of women and the

environment by awakening the sensitivity and humanity among them.

Keywords: Eco-feminism, Feminist, Eco-system, Exploitation, patriarchal system

Introduction

Amrita Pritam (31 August 1919 – 31 October 2005) is a well-known writer of Punjabi literature. Although she was originally a poetess but she has equal rights in all genres like story, novel, memoir, essay, autobiography etc. So far, about 90 of her books have been published and most of them have been translated into other Indian and foreign languages including Hindi. She was against all forms of exploitation no matter which country she belonged to. She always gave priority to the freedom of human being. This is the reason that despite being a Punjabi writer, she remained equally popular in the literature of other languages. She was awarded the Sahitya Akademi (for the collection of ‘Sunhde’ poetry in 1955) and the Bharatiya Jnanpith Award (for the book ‘Kaagaz Te Canvas’ in 1970), is also taken with great respect in the Hindi literary world. The main feature of her writings is that the female mind, her pain, her feelings have got full expression in it. All the aspects of feminism are present in her works. The female characters in Amrita Pritam’s novel are not only sympathetic to the sufferings of other women but have self-empathy. She is seen trying to relieve them by taking their pain as her own. That is, she does not only apply ointment on the pain of women, but tries to remove the reason due to which she is suffering, woman is presented as a strong woman who does not give up on circumstances and decorates the lives of others along with herself, this is the concept of ecological feminism where the author’s works make themselves meaningful. Here one such novel of hers named ‘Pinjar’ is being considered from the point of view of ecological feminism.

The term ecofeminism was first used by the French feminist Francois d’ Eaubonne in 1974 and it was hailed as the third wave of feminism. She saw eco-feminism as humanism. As we have seen the first and second wave of feminism had largely dealt with women’s right, women’s body, women’s sexuality. Third wave of feminism have moved beyond and looking at their relationship with

their surroundings and ecofeminism has been born out of this understanding. Its goal is not to substitute a woman for a man, but to relax the male-centred authority and structure. Eco-feminism has been working in the creation of a world of people who see, understand and believe in human form without gender discrimination. Puro, the story-heroine of 'Pinjar', absolutely fits this criterion. She herself is exploited but not only takes care of herself but also becomes the support of many oppressed like herself, provides them security. Although the story of this novel is based on the tragedy of the Indo-Pak partition of 1947, but through this the author has narrated the story of the atrocities, injustice and exploitation of women in which the story-heroine Puro presented as a strong woman.

The story begins in the year 1935. Pooro is about to get married but Rashid kidnaps Pooro before marriage due to his caste enmity and she is turned down by her parents. Rashid also loves her, so marries her, due to which Puro has a child, but seeing his son, Puro remembers his father's misdeeds and a feeling of hatred for the entire male caste arises in her mind. She feels, "This boy...this boy's father...all mankind....all men...men who gnaw a woman's body like a dog gnawing a bone and like a dog consuming it." (p 35) Here the author has drawn attention to the animalistic tendencies of men, where she disrespects and despises her by not respecting her like-minded woman. Women are considered to be another form of nature, so ecological feminism sees the exploitation of women by men as well as the exploitation of the environment. It rejects all patriarchal systems. Another character in the novel, Taro, treats the girls as animals whose masters hand them over to anyone whenever they want. She says to Pooro, "What about the girls, in whose hands the parents want to hold the rope around her neck." At another place she says, "My mouth was locked, my feet were fettered. What was wrong with it? God did not put him in bondage. God was not born to bind him. God put all the ropes at my feet". Through Taro, the author has depicted the reality of the entire female world. This is the specialty of Amrita Pritam's female characters that even though they are exploited, they understand their rights and also have the courage to oppose. Taro also wants to know that men and women are all equal and children of God,

then why so much discrimination in the society?

Pooro herself is oppressed but has immense affection in her heart for other oppressed. She also has a special sympathy for Taro. She is always ready to help others. She loves the orphan girl Kammo like a mother, helps her in carrying water in Batloi, gets her a new shoe sewn when she does not have a shoe, that is, finds her happiness in the happiness of others. She wants to become the mother of all orphans. A thought comes in her mind, "She is the mother of Javed (her son), she should also become the mother of Kammo, she should become the mother of all orphans.... She could not become a good daughter, but she should become a good mother..." This sense of motherhood proves a woman to be superior to a man. In ecological feminism also it is accepted that the land based on motherhood or femininity gives protection to all because it has immense affection for all in its heart. There also lived a madwoman in Sakkarali village of Pooro. When the other women come to know that the madwoman is pregnant, they are very sad to see her condition. She says, "What sort of a man could have done this to her?" They clenched their teeth in anger..." He must be a savage beast to put a mad woman in this condition." (p 53) The author describes Puro's state of mind as, "She is neither young nor attractive; she is just a lump of flesh without a mind to go with it... a living skeleton ... a lunatic skeleton . . . a skeleton picked to its bones by kites and vultures," (p 53). The eagles ate it by scratching it too... Pooro used to get tired thinking about it." Even in a madwoman, Pooro sees herself, considers her misery as her own, Pagli's After death, she adopts her son, feeds her milk and brings up him as her younger son as her mother. She feels sisterhood with every unhappy woman seeing their grief, Pooro's heart melts. This is the specialty of a woman who is capable of tying the living beings of the whole world together in a string of harmony. She is capable because she speaks the language of the heart and also behaves in that language. Ecological feminism advocates this quality of women. Anyway, the basic mantra of eco-feminism is to see consciousness in all the living beings of the earth and to save them from the exploitation they face by the behavior of compassion and affection. Despite this, she is full of self-confidence and is always ready to serve others. Describing the situation of the riots that

took place during the Indo-Pak partition (the focus of the novel) in 1947, the author says, “just as the melon is torn apart, in the villages in the cities, humans were torn apart by human beings. The tragedy of Partition also hit women more. Hindu women were coerced by Muslims and Muslim by Hindu, some were put to death, some were taken as their wives, some were stripped naked and driven into the streets and markets, thus oppressing women during the partition. There were many types of atrocities. This situation has been an embarrassment to the entire human race. ‘Puro felt as “it had become difficult to live in this world, as if it was a sin to take the birth of a girl in this age.’ Can’t think of any answer to them. She did not know whether now on this earth, which had been soaked in human blood, like before, golden ears of wheat would be born on this earth, whose fields are rotting dead, Whether or not the corn kernels will still smell like before... Will these women still produce children for these men, the men who had done such atrocities to these women, their sisters...” Again this position seems to be related to ecological feminism, where there is opposition to patriarchy and also concern for nature. In the patriarchal system, men have the right to sow seeds in crops and women, due to which only the matter of exploitation of nature and women has come to the fore, whereas many thousands of years ago there was a matriarchal system and women had the right of farming, then all the people were happy, everyone equality was seen. Ecological feminism has taken a wider meaning from feminism. It not only based on equality of men and women but also opposes capitalism and war. It opposes all tendencies based on the capitalist structure and advocates holistic redemption (woman, man, nature). Therefore, we all should not fall into the gender discrimination of man or woman, consider ourselves to be human and give importance to our humanity. Amrita Pritam herself also accepts this fact. She wrote in his autobiography ‘Reseedi Ticket’, “I have always thought of myself as a human, regardless of the difference between a man and a woman.”

In the end, Puro finds his brother’s wife, without caring for her life, takes her safely to her hideout. Puro said to herself, “Whether one is Hindu girl or a Muslim one, whoever reaches her destination, she carries along my soul also”, seeks salvation. Lenin

said, “No society can progress without making a woman free.” Non-violence, motherhood, sisterhood etc are the main weapons of any woman, on the strength of which she can bring lasting peace which is also urgently needed at present. Mahatma Gandhi also understood this feminine power, that is why he has also said, “The world trapped in war is thirsty for the nectar of peace. It is the woman’s job to teach her the art of peace.” Similarly, there were many great men like Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar who always talked about the upliftment of women and also worked for them throughout life. The end of evil practices like Sati system, child marriage etc and advocacy of widow marriage is the result of this. It is necessary that the woman should recognize her power. Take inspiration from women like Maharani Laxmibai and always be ready to protect others. In the novel, Pooro also risks his life to protect others. In this her husband Rashid helps her as much as possible. The characteristic of ecological feminism is that its aim is not to establish any one, but to talk about coordination. It talks about the welfare of the whole world. Those who are exploited on earth, by saving them from that exploitation, emphasizes on creating a balanced lifestyle and entrusts it to the woman because woman has motherly qualities and who can think more about the welfare of others than that?

Similarly, glimpses of ecological feminism can be seen in other works of Amrita Pritam, where the woman is exploited but full of self-confidence and is aware and ready for her rights, as well as is filled with a sense of benevolence. Prabhakar Shrotriya’s comment about Amrita is absolutely correct in which he says, “The loss of the poignant creator of a versatile, sensitive, detailed panel will haunt the reader and writer society. She was as much Hindi as she was Punjabi. He was read by the Hindi reader like an original writer and was overwhelmed by her she is present in her body of creation even at this time.” Due to these characteristics, the relevance of most of the works of Amrita Pritam remains even today.

Conclusion

The women character of Amrita Pritam’s novel is not limited only to her suffering and its solution, she is concerned about

the entire female race. She find her happiness in redressing the misery of other woman. The qualities of humanity, love, nonviolence, fraternity are innate in her. Being ready to help other by risking one's life is the hallmark of female power, which Amrita Pritam has tried to tell through Puro. The woman does not want that she would be considered as a Goddess or a great one, she wants that she should be treated just as a human being.

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