

## Voices of Resilience: Vulnerability and Resistance in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* and Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*

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### Abstract

This paper studies the subject vulnerability of different groups in a detailed and systematic manner. Resistance in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* and Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*, stands out in acute contrast with viewpoints that provide the perspective of scholars working within and outside the contemporary Indian society. By analysing the journeys of Puro and Ma, this study emphasizes how female protagonists, situated within socio-political turmoil and traditional expectations, transform their agony into agency. The gendered violence of partition is depicted in *Pinjar* in which women's bodies are sites of conflicts of communal honor and the silencing of older women is explored in *Tomb of Sand* with their eventual claiming of identity. Both texts engage with stories as a tool of resistance in which the marginalized voice reclaims space in dominant history and culture. Through a comparative feminist lens, this paper declares that vulnerability, rather than being a sign of weakness, serves as an impetus for resilient self-formation and sociopolitical critique.

**Keywords:** Socio-political turmoil, gendered violence, communal honor, marginalized voice, vulnerability.

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### Introduction

#### 1. Narratives of Female Resilience in Indian Literature

The partition of India in 1947 was a significant event of the sub-continent's history. It was the separation of the British India into two independent states- India and Pakistan. The reorganisation of territory was not just an event, there was a disaster of a massive outburst of communal violence, uprooting and massive socio-political consequences which hit women disproportionately. One of the first things we learn about gender is that it is social construction. Moreover, it is definitely not a one-way street. In other words, the trauma-producing system of the Partition concerned not only social engagement but also the power of social identity. Furthermore, the abuse of women was perhaps a ritualization of national interfaces. In other words, it was an outcome of the unequal power structure in society. In general, the nationality of a women's community was principally mediated through engagement. In other words, it was their identities that made it possible to think of women a 'dangerous bodies'. In addition, they became 'dangerous bodies' due to women's identities being integral to their communities. Furthermore, this essay will argue how identities of community and gender intersect during partition

through assemblages of trauma of women, where social norms of womanhood becomes the "engagement". The partition had a strong influence on women who negotiated their terrain with men and this unexpectedly mapped out gender behaviour and roles. The bodies of women are frequently used to convey political messages amid the chaos afflicting the border areas. This further makes a reference to the religious violence posturing that aimed at establishing the other. By driving them out, women were a bit disconnected from their family and community and lost the way of self governing. Witnesses stated that women who were kidnapped and forcibly converted, negotiated their identities with the dominant discourse of patriotism. During the agitation, various communities tried to protect and lay claim on women. Throughout history, women often associated with male fears related to war or exile circumstances. Gender vulnerability here is stated as a historical trend overall. In these accounts of trauma and oppression, women's narratives are nonetheless manifestations of resistance that subvert the dominant discourses of victimhood. Trying to find a way out of the chaotic situation, women found the strength of their own forces and solidarity of the community creating the resilience areas in the middle of all that. Some opposed their abductions,

while others took to the streets to express their challenge against the identities imposed by the community struggle which these women conveyed. Their lived realities focus on the dynamics of identity creation in society. Such stories not only dispute the unitary image of the passive victim who are women, but also emphasize them as agents in the process of creating their own destinies and contribute to the community memory. The expressions of these women that narrated their experience which were the realities that dwell on the relations of identity construction in the post-partition society, thereby restoring historical memory. Through their recollections, they took part in an evolving speech on gender, honor and belonging and provide contemporary themes for inquiries into migration and resettlement.

## 2. Fragmented Bodies and Identities of Puro in Pinjar

Puro shows women's conditioned identity and vulnerability. Puro's portrayal in *Pinjar* creates challenges to the cultural hegemony and social restriction of women associated with incest. Her journey represents the battle of self-interest vs social expectation. It signifies the two failures of women due to patriarchy. Puro's abduction causes her to have an emotional breakdown. In this breakdown, we see Puro's vulnerability and the harsh realities of honour and shame which rule women's lives in their culture. As Puro says at one point, "It was a sin to be alive in a world so full of evil... It was a crime to be born a girl." (Pritam 87)

Puro's acknowledgement of previous trauma constructs her pain, a privately felt sadness, as an augmentation on a system-wide subjugation that seeks to name and limit women's identities. Puro's confrontation with her sense of self in a social order that fixes roles for women, and her struggle for self-like negativity within the ambience of the social restrictions highlight the interaction of personal and social self. The evolving nature of her identity demonstrates higher societal expectations that often inhibit women's agency. This suppression makes them puppets to submission and sacrifice. "It was a double life: Hamida by day, Puro by night. In reality she was neither one nor the other; she was just a skeleton, without a shape or a name." (Pritam 55). Her words indicate that her individuality is hampered by the patriarchal society she lives in. According to Puro, the behaviour of women is shaped by honor which is crucial cultural because if a woman misbehaves, they face serious consequences. The pressure and tension of the above and the flow of immigrants and the reflow of his identity are more precisely within the ideas of self-determination of the subjects. After being renamed Hamida, Puro tells, "They may call me Hamida, but I know I am Puro (Pritam 98). This shows memory and reclaiming self-identity, even in a forced socio-cultural renaming.

At last, the character of Puro sheds light on the necessity of social change to understand the oppression, identity and rights of women in the context of cultural oppression in society. We interpret it not only as Puro's personal story but also a pregnant experience that refers to the development of an argumentation of women in systems of subjugation.

## 3. The Politics of Abduction and Resistance: Puro's Agency and Voice

The abduction of Puro is a powerful and complex episode, one that demonstrates the ways in which the agency could either assert or resist power in hard political circumstance. The events that led to her kidnapping illustrate how oppression and voice interact in extreme situations of

coercion, suggesting agency is being exercised. Puro's silence could first be interpreted as an act of self-objectification. Although we have only heard one side of the story, on close reading it seems to be that there are many ways of understanding resistance that are beyond speech. Puro recalls subsequently: "I lost my name, my religion, my parents. I had lost everything. But I was still alive," (Pritam 48). This presents Puro's view and her inner conflict. The readers learn of her feelings and opinions which are not the same as that of the society which wants to silence her. This ability aligns with Fernández's discussion on the intricate functions of silence as a mode of agency (Fernández 187-204). Puro's first silence about the kidnapping can be interpreted not just as weakness but also as strategy. In other words, even if there is no actual resistance, it means that they are still living their choice. The victim and agent dichotomy is rendered as more complex through her presentation than may first be apparent. Here her silence works in a more complex survival dynamics. She clearly refuses to scream through her silent actions- "Puro got up and went out of the door. Neither her mother nor her father tried to stop her... she had come full of hope. Now she had no hope, nor any fear."

Through the narrative, we can also organize Puro's experiences in order to highlight how she exerts agency against the opposing forces. The different storytellers enable us to see Puro's struggles and her quiet efforts to resist. This formation concedes Narthey's point that voice and agency can take many forms, including in those spaces where resilience work is undertaken (Narthey). Puro's thoughts show her rebel soul and inner strength. Resistance does not always belong to the sphere of action illustration. It can even take place in the scope of consciousness.

Moreover, the imagery and symbolism in the kidnapping Puro narrative amplify her voice. The oppressive environment is often represented in clear and claustrophobic details, which contrasts strongly with the vivid memories of her life before her kidnapping. This opposition is used to enrich the narration and underline her desire to be free, and her unwillingness to be characterized by the fact that she was a victim only. Parpar and Parashar give us a reminder that when women voices are represented on the controversial territory, it may mean that they have to find a balance between being silent and spoken (Parpar and Parashar). The thoughts shared by Puro are reminiscent of agency, which dominates even on the most desperate of times, in which the human spirit resists the oppression of the system.

In addition, Awasthi addresses how trauma can echo the narratives, particularly for women affected by historical violence (Awasthi). Awasthi believes that Puro's story resonates with her. The memories remind her of what she has gone through and also prove of her agency. Puro is able to utilize her trauma to develop a form of resistance through her art and the things she feels. Her voice may be 'off' in a variety of ways, but it's a key part of her identity. At the end she exclaims, "Whether one is a Hindu girl or a Muslim one, whosoever reaches her destination, she carries along my soul also."

Puro's abduction exemplifies the difficulties of viewing agency and resistance through sophisticated narrative strategies that add voice to Puro. They trouble the vision of the innocent and passive sufferer as she reflects upon her body and the text of her life and on speechlessness and verbalism. This means even silences are a powerful form of resistance.

#### 4. Trauma and Cultural Silencing After Partition

The division of India was a disastrous event for the culture of this subcontinent. The event affected the life of millions but it also ushered in an age that saw cultural silencing, that tends to echo through the ages. An essay on Partition of India explains this further. Often, as personal narratives of this trauma evolve, the fears and permanent losses that haunt the psyches and social identities of affected communities. During this time, women went through double trauma but they were occupied with the urge to carry on. As noted by Basu (2023), the partition was a female migration but her experience has often been overlooked. The silence of these voices does not only influence women's identities, but also the collective memory of communities, maintaining a cycle of invisibility and trauma. This omission can lead to a reduced capacity for communities to retell their stories, integrating feelings of alienation and loss.

The convergence of nationalism and trauma plays a significant role in the formation of how communities recall their past. Fariha (2022) highlights how often these memories are argued, with narratives of belonging becoming debated after the partition. The outcome are exhaustive, influencing social relations and the formation of identity as communities deal with a shattered sense.

So, the consequences of the partition on cultural tradition, argues that trauma has led to cultural silence that obstructs the transference of traditions and narratives through generations. This disintegration of cultural legacy demonstrates the need to acknowledge and get involved with these narratives, as a means of reconstructing and recovering the identity of the burden of collective anguish.

#### 5. The Gendered Cage: Symbolism and Patriarchy in Pinjar

The *Pinjar* of Pritam tells the life of Puro, whose vulnerability is clearly evident in a society corrupted by community violence and social expectations. As Puro copes with her abduction and progressive healing, the narrative urges to expose the difficult subjective reality of women who are often diminished to archetypal symbols of honour and shame within the patriarchal structures. Pritam uses picturesque images and symbolism, particularly through the motive of "Pinjar" or the cage, to resonate with the catching of Puro in the physical and psychological dimensions. The cage functions as a symbol not only of its seclusion but also of the social walls that constrain the women's agency. As Puro deals with her situation, she staunchly denies and reclaims from the shame dispensed. Weaknesses and strengths also allow something more general to be commented on: the agendas that govern them. One of the biggest struggles she faces is when she has to say no to the demands of either her captors or her family. When the subject rejects oppressive customs, a battle occurs: one between the one imposed on her community and the one that threatens her. This is basically the transformation of subject into object. It illustrates the strength of women in difficult situations. Puro begins to fight back his oppressors. This is a turning point. This represents a critical juncture in the evolution of his character as she starts to regain his narrative and invoke his agency. By speaking the truth, she subverts the silence that is imposed on her and creates a place of revolt.

Because of this, the "cage" imagery is essential in understanding Puro's situation, but also in the more general feminist reading. The very structures that create women as the "Other" also contain them (Women), in their otherness where women express resistance and reclaim subjectivity.

#### 6. Old Age, Widowhood, and Silence: Ma's Vulnerability in Tomb of Sand

The novel *Tomb of Sand* by Geetanjali Shree encourages shows the reader to do an in-depth investigation of situation with various dimensions of women's ageing in contemporary Indian society. It incorporates vulnerability and the forms of opposition presented in the novel. After her husband dies, Ma, an octogenarian, goes on a transformative trip. The character she plays is a sophisticated portrayal of the impact of social pressure and personal want. The narrative of Gitanjali Shree presents us with complicated themes of loss, identity, and resilience. It talks about struggles of an old woman who at first takes upon herself the limitations by the archetypal gender roles and leaves it to the society herself which rules her actions and existence.

One important aspect of the novel *Tomb of Sand* is Shree's unvarnished voice to the challenges that women face in a patriarchal society that mostly get away with or side-line her voice. The experience reveals age-related frailty and vulnerability, grief, inner world, and social control due to widowhood. Shree is mired in the internal struggles of women confronting their death as well as the regressive structures of powerful men with community expectations. Even though there are subtle presentations of vulnerability, there are also openings for resistance. Therefore, Ma's journey becomes one of resistance against those standards which wish to constrain it, in parameters of age and gendered widowhood.

#### 7. The Journey of Self-Rediscovery: Resistance through Movement

The character of Ma is significant because it does not rely on society's conventions for a change in meaning. After her husband goes missing, the process of rediscovering herself is a way of asserting herself against expectation of grieving and conceding. Shree shows how aging women can assert their authority rather than be silenced. In going on a trip to Pakistan, Ma reconnects with her roots and confronts the past. The decision involves a constant resistance to stereotypes regarding old women who – it is believed- should be passively withdrawn in the shadows of life.

Ma says "No, no, I won't get up. Nooooo, I won't rise nowwww. Nooo rising nyooww. Nyooo riiise nyoooo. Now rise new. Now, I'll rise anew." (Shree 2021). The journey she portrays in the text reveals the senses of remembering and forgetting. Moreover, Shree's account is informed by the complexities of generational relations, especially that between Ma and Nirmala. This exchange adds depth to the portrayal of older women. They are not merely seen as passive victims but rather as competent agents. Nirmala's views on the life and existence of women in the society depicts a shattered view of family ties and society. Through the two women's conversations, the novel's goal is to present the resistance to expropriation. When challenged by Nirmala about her decision to travel, Ma replies: "Why must I remain bound to walls, when the world outside still calls my name?" (Shree 2021). The assertion of Ma revives Nirmala's understanding of femininity and independence, thus contesting the established societal accounts which often decrease the value of women as they age.

#### 8. Mother-Daughter Tensions and Generational Feminism

In Shree's *Tomb of Sand* the daughter-mother dynamics with Nirmala reflect and touch upon the complexities of one's identity along with the complexities of generational feminism.

While the mother's vision is traditional and the daughter's has a fiercely growing desire for independence and identity, the generational gap is a growing point of conflict. The mother personifies the sacrifices of feminism of the past, while the daughter embodies a more present struggle. The boundaries of modernity and feminism have shifted, as evidenced in the daughter's willingness to cross them. Mother is the one who has sacrificed those modern aspirations. The dialogue in most of the narrative reflects the struggle of one's social role and the other's desire. The search for freedom contrasts, as that search and identity rely on the establishment of social interdependence. "At her age, Ma was expected to be still, not to stir up what had long been buried" (Shree). This sums up a feeling shared by many generations – old age should be accepted in silence.

Ma, however, refuses to condense herself into silence. Ma views Nirmala's notion of femininity and independence as something which contests the established social scripts that dis-empower women as they age-the body of Mother a site of sacrifice in modern aspiration. The conversation of the narrative consists of a long debate between one social role and the aspiration for another. The term 'searching for freedom' implies a contradiction, thus shows interdependency and 'ability to construct social identity'. Shree presents Nirmala as reminding her mother that old age is meant for rest rather than for pursuing the ghosts of the past (Shree 2021). The story encapsulates a feeling of an entire generation where you'd have to keep quiet and comply when you get old.

The novel presents the mother's refusal to accept silence or finality, suggesting that her life and desires are far from over (Shree 2021). Nirmala's understanding of womanhood and independence is renewed by the declaration of her Ma who stands against the idea of women being diminished as they age.

### 9. Transcending Boundaries: Metaphors of Memory and Identity

Memory and identity are intertwined through a network of metaphors in every sense, personal and cultural, in *Tomb of Sand*. The narrative of Ma's past as a septuagenarian has a great impact on her present. Quite interestingly, the past continues to make its presence felt in the present. Dadi's reclamation of his identity shows how powerful the demand from society is and how old women suffer. The non-linear telling underlines Dadi's refusal to be part of a collective that alienates her and thus speaks of memory.

Shree's narrative is a seamless movement across and through time and space. The novel's second feature is a dual time in which the past will not stay buried. A character's actions and decisions reveal history in the story.

Shree's *Tomb of Sand* demonstrates how the idea of memory and identity conflict with each other. It does so through rich images that impose limits. These limits are specifically cross-cultural and personal. A person's identity is all about a constant negotiation of inherited legacies. The character Ma in his texts represents the loss of identity across generation and cultures. Thus, he is a focal character. When she thinks back, there arises a nostalgic feeling that reminds her of the past. This implies that subjective identity cannot exist without the psychiatric system's objective identity. The grave references more than death, implies many other things too. The unconscious is a symbol store for unprocessed feelings and experiences stuck in the psyche. The belief in identity as something inconsistent, rather than fixed, may apply here. Different histories will come together to create an identity.

The text also explains the reason for physical borders (India-Pakistan being cited as an example) to show the flimsy limits of identity. The characters, be it real or imagined, cross all barriers to show the human yearning their relationship shares apart from the geographic commitment that divides. The story shows how the Ma is nostalgic for the past. Through this, it illustrates that identity isn't a fixed thing. Instead, there is a constant happening that negotiates the sociocultural reflections, experiences and narratives. *Tomb of Sand* not only highlights the connection between human experiences but also questions the rigid boundaries that distinguish between personal and collective identities.

### 10. Puro and Ma: Two Comparative Stories on their Family Struggles

In *Pinjar* and *Tomb of Sand*, Puro and Ma wrestle with their cultural and social ruptures in order to live and grow better. In the novel *Pinjar*, the main female character suffers from the loss of her home in the times of conflict of partition. The abduction of the protagonist is a dark metaphor of the way women are treated as objects by society. The disconnection between the primary couple, who first appear with united nations, shows how the two had more to offer if their matrimony wasn't forced due to cultural expectation's sedition. Puro's fight empowers her to transform from an object to a subject that has an agency.

Unlike this, in *Tomb of Sand*, the character of Ma shows the act of socially withdrawing oneself after the death of one's husband. The cultural assumptions that women's identities are ultimately and inextricably married are closely reflected in her journey. Unlike Puro who suffers due to communal violence, Ma suffers in spirit because of the troubles of old age, widowhood and social controls. Throughout the progression of her journey, she occupies the way despite a tradition to the contrary as she embarks on the way revisiting her past – a reholder and recoiner. Even though they live in different times and situations, both Puro and Ma subvert the patriarchal system that is silencing them. Through their stories of the Partition of Punjab in 1947 and their current lives in India, the resilience of the human desire against cultural and social odds are represented. When they retrieve back their voices, the two women see vulnerability not just as weakness, but also a provocation to create awareness and resistance.

### 11. Reclaiming Voice: Storytelling as Feminist Resistance

*Tomb of Sand* and *Pinjar* intertwine women's voices as a primary transparency along the lines of vulnerability and resistance. The writings of Amrita Pritam and Geetanjali Shree exhibit the different suffering of women. They present that within a patriarchal setup, it is possible to create a space for women characters. These women counter the social conventions imposed on them and are independent. Substantiating the view that every woman has the right to this wish is not a political statement is wishful expression.

Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* and Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* illustrate feminist resistance which makes storytelling to be essential. Both narratives of the two authors throw a light on all the cultural and social challenges that the women faced especially during the partition time. *Tomb of Sand* uses the character's journey to showcase how the protagonist, through legacy and memory loss, displays recovery of her voice and identity despite limits placed on her. The tale urges females to shun traditional roles and make a statement about their independence. Similarly, *Pinjar* represents the suffering of women caught in Partition chaos, and demonstrates their

strength against the violence as well as the dislocation. Sengupta and Sinha noted that the characters are expressing their pains through the narrative and unfolding the repressed stories which empower them.

The two texts make both protagonists articulate their issues, thereby questioning the erasure of women's history through the ages. Through storytelling, a woman can have agency against patriarchy and culture. The silence created over the years by oppression is disrupted by Puro's voice in *Pinjar*. In the *Tomb of Sand*, the voice of Ma disclaims the concepts of widowhood and old-age. Overall, both of these texts affirm that telling stories helps to survive and redefine women and their voice. As per Ghosh and Mukhopadhyay, the female narratives seem to depict a struggle for independence and dignity which contributes to the feminist resistance in society. The women's point of views are needed to understand history and culture, state the authors. They use these narratives to highlight the same.

## 12. Critical Reception and Feminist Readings

Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* and Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* deal with the vulnerabilities and resistances of women vis-a-vis patriarchy rather importantly. Scholars can tell from the writings and their subtleties that it is no personal matter. They indicate factors which oppress and marginalise women in a larger socio-political context.

Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* is one-of-its kind in many ways. She represents women's fight against male domination and inner discomfort caused due to a traumatic environment created with partition. The critic believes that she can display the complexity and multilayered diversity of meanings of the reality of Puro, who protests against society in a strong voice. Nivedita Menon, an expert on feminism, states that Pritam's writings on women aptly depicts the impact of violence and chaos. Pritam's writing urges us to scrutinize the horrific violence of women during times of turmoil. According to this characterisation, then, the human being of women exists against this violence now. Simply by penning down one's thoughts, the writer resists women's relegation to the margins. As such, *Tomb of Sand* looks at the complexities of gender, age and class identity. Ma is an old woman who travels after losing her husband. This is what the story is about. It is a journey of self-discovery and challenges. Scholars propose that the disavowal of her desires and her past suggest a refusal of the demands imposed on women. The writings of Shri, particularly highlight the significance of claiming identity any time in life which complexifies the speech over women agency.

The authors are praised for their vulnerability and it is through their stress on expressions of resistance that the feminist value comes forth. Ritu Menon feels Shree and Pritam empowering women characters. Moreover, literature can have a strong vehicle of empowerment. Social criticism in literature enables us to listen to women's voices. *Pinjar* can be called a *Tomb of the Sand* whose work is recognized by a change agent.

Because there is an academic interest in these texts, many of them accept the past and present worthy of women. *Tomb of Sand* and *Pinjar* is aimed at instigating readers to support the voice of women in the Social Sphere through a feminist critical perspective especially in the basic situation of discrimination. Revisiting the texts' historical and cultural narrative will help in claiming feminist justification in the literary criticism of these texts. According to Samina Ali, Pritam and Shree's story is not theirs alone. It is the story of millions. This points out to the women whose lives are

crippled every day under the weight of patriarchy yet remain unacknowledged. Due to that academic interest, the texts seem to demonstrate a recognition of the worthiness of the life of women in the past and present. *Pinjar* and *Tomb of Sand* demonstrate to the readers to give support to women's voice in social space through the perspective of feminist critique especially when in the violent and discriminating situation. It will help to acknowledge these texts in literary criticism to be feminist, by re-visiting their historical and cultural narrative. As claimed by Samina Ali, Pritam and Shree's story is not theirs but that of millions. Also, it indicates towards the lives of women whose lives get crippled every day under the weight of patriarchy and are not even acknowledged. The diversity of female characters showcases that women's issues are not just restricted to only one female protagonist.

## Conclusion

Women's stories have political power. Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* and Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* show how women can change vulnerability into resilience and strength. These are well-grounded narratives. The protests and choices of women's voices awaken against social constraints in the writings of Amrita Pritam and spaces of others. In this essay on *Pinjar* we see how Pritam exhibits the toll of the partition on a woman Puro. A person experiencing an identity crisis, along with a fit of misplacement, undergoes a feeling of not belonging within gendered spaces. All this takes place in a context of violence. Puro's weakness is not a condition but an effect that causes the repose of Puro; who wants power or authority and is resisting institutionalised patriarchy which wants to define its value in relation to the man. Similarly, Shree's *Tomb of Sand* exhibits the narration of an old woman, Ma, who subverts the narrative of widowhood, age, and family obligation. When she makes her repressed desires and personal stories visible, it shows a certain resistance to the proposition of the framework. Shree's experience proves that being soft is not the only way to be feminine. Ma is a strong person since she does not allow her conditions rule her. A serious voice of a woman formally begins to define herself.

The principal agency of women's voices is crucial in both the texts to interrogate dominant social values and engage with pertinent feminist discourses in contemporary gender and identity issues. Women's life experiences show what they go through while their resistance is self-empowerment journey and self-fulfilment experience. The two pieces deal with male power and the pathetic layers of vulnerability and resistance which surround men. The history of women has always been both political and cultural. *Pinjar* and *Tomb of Sand* reveals how women will require an effective voice to redefine the society and its various social norms and conventions.

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