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An Analytical Study of Amrita Pritam as a Progressive Writer

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Amrita Pritam was born in Gujarawala-the western part of Punjab, which is presently in Pakistan, in 1919 in a Sikh family. She was a daughter of Sardar Kartarshinh Hitkari who was known as Nand Sadhu. He was also a religious poet and a scholar. Her mother Rajbibi was a teacher in school. She passed away when Amrita was just one and half year old. She remained the only child as her brother passed away in infancy. Since her early days of youth, she emerged as a sincere aspirant of literary world.

At the age of sixteen, she started writing poems. She was one of the writers who evidently gathered the odds and ends of Pre and Post Independence issues and stood for the cultural and intellectual continuity of Indian Literary Tradition. She came to occupy a place with a sheer consciousness of cultural and social phenomena and she had essence to put ordinary problems in such ways which would make them universal questions. There is no doubt about that she had shaped the substantial body of Indian writings and shaped the new world of writing and shared her common mode of interpretations actively.

Amrita was working in 'All India Radio' as a Punjabi announcer from 1948 to 1960. Though much is known about her marriage and divorce, she is a different personality in her literature. We can draw an outline of her life-span considering her tone and general mood reflected in her works while studying them chronologically. Besides social and religious issues of her time, she started her career as a romantic writer. Though she was far more advanced than her contemporaries, we can mark that the tradition did stay alive, to re-emerge notably later in her works. She has received many awards for her literary accomplishments, like She has received 'Sahitya Akademi Award' for her poetry collection 'Sunehadey' in 1956. She got India's highest literary award '*Bhartiya Jnanpith Award*', for her another poetry collection '*Kagaj te Canvas*' in 1981. She was honoured with Padma Shri in 1969



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and with Padma Vibhushan in 2004. Many Universities awarded her with a degree of D.Litt., like Delhi University (1973), Jabalpur University (1983), Vishwa Bharti Shanti Niketan (1983) and Panjab University (1987). She was considered as one of the members of Romantic Progressive Writers' group. Her writing is capable of many kinds of literal interpretations. But it attracts the readers today for the newness and stylistic charm that one can mark in her uncommon phenomenon of literary Romantic Progressive Writings.

The Progressive Writers' Associations established in London by Indian group of writers, including Mulk Raj Anand, Sajjad Zaheer, and Jyotirmaya Ghosh, in 1934. It was established in Lucknow in 1936. Mulk Raj Anand gave a speech at the second convocation of the All India Progressive Writers' Association at Calcutta in 1938, where he discussed the purpose of the movement in which he said that the writer should use their craft as means of exposing injustice and exploitation. Further, the purpose of social realism is to define the realism exist even in obscure lanes and alleys. He believed that writers should represent the degraded life of subalterns and it should be the pre-condition of realism. He has addressed the problem faced by farmers, women, and laborers and they wanted freedom, equality, and democracy to replace dictatorship, injustice, and slavery.

The movement for progress has the aim to bring development in so many aspects of human life. The movement encouraged nationalism and social upliftment through literature which highlighted issues like hunger, poverty, slavery, social backwardness, and orthodox views regarding women. Progressive writers introduced social realism and anti-imperialism and. Nationalism in India at that time. And all progressive writers became adventures with new diction and vocabulary.

As far as India was concerned, the movement was a reflection of libration and democracy. The movement lead by freedom-loving writers like Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Monto, Faiz Ahemad



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Faiz, Munshi Premchand, Sahir Ludhianvi, Firaq Gorakhpuri. Amrita Pritam was also a part of this movement. In 1947, Amrita Pritam was in Lahor and she has firsthand experience of India and Pakistan's partition. She was deeply moved by the bloodshed, hatred and raped occurred during that time. She had to move to Dehradun and then to Delhi from Lahor because of partition. She wrote the poem "An Ode to The Warish Shah" where she invokes the spirit of 18th century Sufi poet Warish Shah. She is describing that the river Chenab is filled with blood. Warish Shah was a love poet and he discussed the pain of Heer, while Amrita Pritam was saying that millions of Panjabi daughters were crying to Warish Shah and urging him to invoke from his grave. She has written many other revolutionary poems too, like 'Virgin', 'The Scare of a Wound', and 'Helpless' where she is narrating how a woman is suffering due to orthodox and conventional mode of living in that era. Even Amrita Pritam's novel 'The Skeleton' also depicting the partition agony, woman's situation and her emotional crisis of that time. Even in her autobiography 'The Revenue Stamp', there are many examples where she is not following a conventional notions regarding social, emotional, political, and religious traditions by offering something very new that uplifted which truly fit as the term progressive.

The literature of every age is affected by the intellectual, moral, economic and political atmosphere of its time. Time is an ocean, and moral and social values are the waves of this ocean. There are only few writers who can settle on an independent direction for their boat. And if one writer specifically belongs to progressive movement then, they are like brave sailors who fight against the odds.

A good writer or poet is one, who expresses his /her own perception through their work and instead of walking behind the people. A good literature can only produce when a writer is taking



genuine responsibilities towards oneself, other and creativity. If one writer really justifies to these responsibilities then undoubtedly he or she is deserving of extraordinary respect and honor. So when we review Amrita Pritam's poetry and her short-stories and other work from this viewpoint, we necessarily conclude that she had a deep perception of her poetic and literary responsibilities.

Amrita Pritam's short stories, poems and novel are rich with the best moral values. There is not a single work which can be censured from the viewpoint of modesty and morals. They contain all the elements. Her characters are ordinary human characters. She could examine, think and narrate her meaning in excellent style with skill and artistry. She did not just write with the direct observation of events but also made a psychological analysis of every character of her writings. An 'emotional analysis' of human life was also prominent in each of her works.

Amrita Pritam kept searching for new topics for her writing, and was successful to a very great extent. Her ideas were unusual; her paths modern. Her 'ideal' was constructive, not destructive. Like her poems, in her short-stories too she was seen to be giving a 'message' to her readers. Her message was one of life and love.

Her short stories were short in the real sense. Some short stories, like couplets, seemed shorter than was necessary. The reader wishes that they were more detailed. In this respect, the example of her *Choti Kahani* ('Brief Story') from her collection *Chabees Saal Baad* ('26 Years Later'), definitely published before 1947 from Lahore by the Lahore Book Shop can be cited here. In a mere four pages, Pritam summarized the whole philosophy of 'art for life' and the idea of selfless love with stunning economy of words and minimal dialogue between the two central characters.

Pritam's famous poem 'An ode to Warish Shah' represents progressiveness in her writing. In the



poem Pritam invokes the soul of Sufi poet Warish Shah. In the time of partition there were so many girls and women who were crying, there were getting raped and in miserable condition. With reference of Heer and Ranja's tragedy noted by Warish Shah, Pritam appeals him to rise from the grave and to say something when millions of daughters from Punjab were crying.

In the works of Amrita Pritam like the novel 'Dr.Dev' represents romantic elements like the journey of self and romantic notion between two people came from different background. Her poems were full of romanticism and metaphors. On the other hand there is a well-known novel 'The Skeleton' (Pinjar). The protagonist of this novel is a girl named Puro, who was abducted by a Muslim man before the partition of India and Pakistan. The story revolves around inner development of the character Puro and the role of partition on it. This story carries out the element of progressive movement.

Pritam's writing is a blend of romantic elements as well as progressive elements. She herself has faced the crisis which occurs during the partition of India. So, her work of art carries the effect of partition and being a progressive writer she often adds those social and psychological reformative elements into it. If we study her poems it contains aesthetic elements, acceptance of emotion, imagination and metaphors. One can find romantic and progressive elements both in her single work as well as in different type through the different genre of literary works.



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