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An analysis of Amrita Pritam's selected poems

Hima Mehta

Research Scholar,

Department of English and CLS,

Saurashtra University, Rajkot.



Abstract:

The study of poetry is an undeniable part of literary research. Poetry is considered as highest form of literature, it enfolds the inner and outer world of human life. With the study of poetry one can observe the race milieu and moment of poet. Amrita Pritam is considered as prolific poetess and a versatile genius. She has written many poems, short stories and novels in Hindi and Punjabi. Those literary works have been translated into more than thirty languages along with English. She was honoured with prestigious awards like the 'Sahitya Akadami', 'Bharatiya Jnanpith', and 'Padma Vibhushan' and many other. This short study of Amrita Pritam's poetry will study her most praised and popular poems like, 'Ode to Warish Shah', 'The Creative Process', 'The Travelogue of Thirst', 'I will meet you again', 'A Story of Fire' and others. The study will attempt to throw a light on Pritam's poems. Amrita Pritam was a woman who wasn't accepted to be in her times but her poems has publicized the plight of Punjabi women and literature. This study will examine and analyse few of her poems and try to justify her poetic genius.

Keywords: Poetry, Amrita Pritam, Poetry and Aesthetics, Freedom – Love and Pain.



Introduction:

'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.'

-T.S. Eliot

Here through this quote Eliot convey that, the more mature poet, the more his mind is able to create various influences and emotions to create something varied and complex. These influences and emotions can turn into great poetry. He is arguing in the quotation that great poetry helps to find the *deeper* self, rather than the surface personality of the poet. Poetry may not be a 'turning loose of emotion', but it is only the poet's own rare emotion that they are escaping. And the poet seeks to escape their own undiluted emotions in order that they may better recreate authentic emotions in their work. Through this churning good poetry comes into existence.

Amrita Pritam was a prolific poetess of her time. She has written poems, short stories and novels in Hindi and Punjabi. Her works has been translated into more than thirty regional and foreign languages. Among the fellow Indian writers of her times, she occupies both romantic and harsh imaginative world which, apart from being confessional expression of a sensitive soul. Pritam's emotional poems also publicized the plight of Punjabi women; she had woven their suffering in a conservative time into poems.

Amrita Pritam's literary journey began in 1935 with the publication of 'Amrit Lehran', her first collection of poems which she wrote when she was sixteen years old. After partition 1947, she moved from Lahor to Delhi. She moved by that violent mass migration. Later she came up with her most famous poem titled as 'Ode to Warish Shah'. Which expressed her anguish about pathetic situation happen during the partition of India. There are few other poems like 'Virgin', 'The Scar of Wound' and 'Helpless' which talked about the pain and suffering of women in the time of partition.

Pritam's one of the most cherished poem is, 'Ode to Warish Shah', which talks about several people like her across the Pakistani border. Poem addressed to Warish Shah who was



an icon of love and brotherhood in old days, when Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs lived happily as brothers. Her poem is a lament on a partition of India and the pathetic scenario it brought.

‘I say to Waris Shah today, speak from your grave

And add a new page to your book of love..’

In the opening lines, Amrita asks Waris Shah to rise from his grave and speak for the woman of Punjab through his idealist writing. Waris Shah has written about Heer and Ranjha. The daughter of Punjab Heer cried and he has written a long saga on her life story. On the time of partition, thousands of women of Punjab were crying and asking for their stories to be panned down in sagas. Pritam emphasis that all those women are Heers’ of their own life and their story deserve to be written down in pages of history for the miseries they had faced when two nations were undergoing wars of partition. The very famous critic and writer of Indian English literature Khushwant Singh, has translated this ode in English and commented said : “Those few lines she composed made her immortal, in India and Pakistan.”

As Pritam is known for her partition poems and novel she is equally known for her feminist writing. In her poem ‘Virgin’ she has talked about the violence of sexual and self-annihilation. In her poetry one can observe a feministic tone. In poems she has explore uncommon subject of her time like, sexual and psychological exploitation in marriages. In her poem ‘Virgin’ she has talked about that a girl kills many of her dreams and vanish her identity as soon as she lost her virginity. When a woman is forced to indulge in sexual act under the ritual and tradition of marriage, she felt helpless and fragile in front of social norms and her husband.

There are few other poems like ‘A Story of Fire’, ‘Silence’, ‘The Scar’ and ‘The Scar of Wound’ in which one can observe a feministic tone. Pritam has talked about the woman’s body as an individual entity as well as contested space by a man’s love and the tradition’s pressure to procreate. In these poems she has expressed revolutionary ideas too and because of that some of her contemporary critics describe her as a feminist much before feminism. Her poetry reflects that women should be fearless, unabashed and courageous, she should use her



voice to speak as she see the world, precisely not in the manner that the world expects her to speak.

Apart from patriotic and painful poems she has written romantic and sentimental poems too. After partition Pritam has shifted from Dehradun to Delhi. Then she started working at Radio station. Meanwhile she has fallen in love with well-known lyricist Sahir Ludhianvi. Ludhianvi never committed his love to Pritam. It wasn't a relationship with happy ending, yet strangely chaste and conducted through silences and letters. When Ludhianvi completely left Pritam, she became close to an artist Imroz. Initially Pritam has assigned him to create a book cover for her books and later on they came close.

There are poems like 'The Talk', 'Future', 'Love', 'Cold' and 'Travelogue' which represent her powerful imagination and romantic notions. In her well-known poem 'Travelogue' she has talked about her journey of life.

“From the aqua of Ganges to the Vodka
Stretches the travelogue
of my thirst.”

From the very opening line, one can have idea of that vastness which she has travelled through. This poem reflects that an unordinary seeking leads one to become an unusual poet. In her poem love she talked about pleasures and pain she has gone through. 'The Talk' is a poem in which she presents a conversation with a loved one in a metaphoric way. There are many poems which she has written to manifest her emotional sensibility in a poetic way.

There are poems like, 'The Bridge', 'Empty Space', 'Encounter' and 'Letter'. These poems are part of her romantic journey but it also reflects the pain of separation. Her famous poetry collection 'Sunhere' won a Sahitya Akadami Award and this anthology was woven around her feeling of love for Sahir Ludhianvi. In her poem 'Letter' she has aptly express her sentiments about her love and relation with Sahir.

“My love! You wrote me a letter
But you addressed it care of the world.



My Friend you do not know that love-letter is

as long as the earth, as wide as sky.

Was grabbed by worldly people

and clipped into little pieces

of the size of different nations.”

The relationship of Amrita and Sahir was led by a silence. They never expressed their feeling directly rather they tried to express through poems. In poems of Amrita there are expression of love as well as complains also. But no one can get idea that those complains was against the person, society, situation or silence. She had accepted the fact that her dream of love for Sahir would never come true and afterwards she found compatible companion Imroz.

Pritam use to write poem which describe specific person. So, there are poems like ‘Oedipus’, ‘Marilyn Monroe’, ‘Henry Miller’ and ‘Martin Luther’. In the same way she has written a poem ‘Imroz’. It describes her depth of love and respect for him. Imroz was nine years younger than Pritam but they were sharing a caring bond filled with love. They both have accepted each other unconditionally for forever. The last poem by Pritam is titled as ‘I shall meet you again’.

“I will meet you yet again

How and where, I don't know

Perhaps I will become a figment

Of your imagination or may be

Splaying myself as a mysterious line

On your canvas”

This poem she has written just before the couple of days she left this world. This poem is dedicated to her long time companion Imroz and is now seen as her perfect epilogue. It showcase her unique perspective on life, her vision of love and the world and her underlying



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hope for a world full of love and peace. This poem is not just a piece of poetry but a legend in its own right, having been recited by many including the famous writer Gulzar.

Almost all Amrita Pritam's poem except her early poems is anyhow inspired by love. Pritam herself confess that she was a basically a poet of love. Love in her poems is symbol of fulfilment in life in its totality. She has never get confused with the conventional mannerism with which love is so widely written about in a good deal of Indian poetry. She has written on love, pain, suffering, despair, anguish, and on socio-political issue. In nutshell all her poems is an expression of heartfelt pain, pleasure and peace.



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