CHAPTER IV

AMRITA PRITAM AND HER REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

Clearly, the categories and concerns of a western feminist literary criticism would prove inadequate in an attempt at reading an author like Amrita Pritam in Punjab, who like Bachmann has been the centre of a great deal of journalistic and critical attention, and in whose earlier works, like in Bachmann's later prose, issues of gender relations and women's oppression have been focused.

But here the similarity ends. Since for a middle-class woman born in India, Pritam was born in 1919 in Gujranwala (now in Pakistan), complexities of colonialism, religion, caste and class have played major roles in forming her consciousness as well as in the representation of gender relations and women's oppression both in her poems and prose.

As already discussed, by the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, the woman's question had been satisfactorily resolved according to the Nationalists, a resolution based on the nationalist ideology and its division between material life and spiritual life, with women having to bear the burden of maintaining the spirituality of the nation. The formation of the middle-class as a class had also taken place on the body and soul of women, in terms which contained their sexuality, so that
the image of Sita and Savitiri, a chaste, spiritual Hindu woman who did not smoke or drink was created, which would help distinguish her both from the western woman and the majority of women in India.

This period however also saw a manifold increase in the number of women who had access to education, since women's education was an important part of the agenda of the social reform movement, though the stress remained on women's role as wife and mother. Thus, women of this period, as has already been elaborated upon, by experienced contradictions between what the social reform movement had made them aspire for, and what they actually had to contend with.

Pritam too became conscious of these and other contradictions early in her life. Though it was through her father Giani Kartar Singh Hitkari that she acquired her love of books and learning, he had learnt Sanskrit and the skill of the hakims at an ashram, was a scholar of Brij Bhasha, his was an overwhelming religious presence which she began to rebel against. This theological influence is apparent however in her early poems and in her first collection "Amrit Laheran" (1936).

The circumstances of her birth, the meeting and marriage of Nand Sadhu her father with Raj Bibi her mother are narrated in her autobiography "Rasidi Ticket", where she also points out the contradictory pulls of a life of
renunciation and riches faced by her father and the mark this left on her.

The death of her mother when she was eleven is perceived as another shattering experience so that puberty was no longer a natural experience but one which led to the suppression of desires and a consequent questioning of parental authority, middle-class morality, rigid religious practices and the entire stratified social structure.

An early engagement at the age of four and marriage at 16 and the consequent trauma of separation and divorce in the face of social opposition also played a major role in shaping her consciousness and making her question middle-class norms, so that in the later collections of poems "Jeonda Jiwan" (1939) "Pathar Geetay" (1946) "Lamian Vatan" a reflection of her most persistent concern: the oppression of women can be seen, satire, wit and irony marking her style.

Contradictions clearly remain of, on the one hand, opposing middle-class norms and on the other, trying to fit in with the image, as is evident from her attempt at comparison sought in religion, in trying to "justify" her smoking and drinking. In "Life and Times", her autobiographical work in English, she writes:

"I am a chain smoker. I love a drop of whisky too,
occasionally. Indeed, I sometimes have a craving for it. But I am not an addict and I do not drink every day. I am acutely aware of the prevailing attitudes towards a woman who smokes and drinks.

A peculiar comparison occurs to me. After all, I was born in a Sikh family. When a plate of sweet Semolina "halwa" is placed in offering before the great Sikh book "Guru Granth Sahib" the blade of a sword is passed through it. There upon the simple 'halwa' becomes 'Kraah Prasad', which is distributed to congregation. Similarly, the cigarette between my fingers or the glass of drink in my hands transform themselves into something infinitely purer.¹

The press, literary institutions and critics have shown similar contradictory reactions to her writing which she describes at length in "Life and Times", so that her works are either highly acclaimed or denounced. In the section "on one palm henna, on the other blisters", she comments upon the reaction to her autobiography "Rasidi Ticket" which was published in 1976 in Punjabi. In 1977 there was a protest with the Punjabi Government to ban the book, with the case going on for months. On the other hand the book became a course book in SNDT Women’s University of Bombay and was prescribed as classic literature for two years.²

Similarly she points out how in the "Lok Lahar" of August 1, 1975, a charge was made against "Nagmani" her
monthly magazine, that it was vulgar, sex-oriented and plain pornography, whereas normally there had been a "more responsible "behaviour from it.

Fourteen years after the publication of her poem "Nine dreams and the Anunciation" in 1969, she recounts how she receives a lawyer's notice since she had hurt Sikh religious sentiments and hence a criminal case was to be filed against her.  

The poem, amongst her better known ones, was written on the occasion of Nanak's 300th birthday, though it hardly mentions Nanak. Full of imagery, the poem describes the mother Tripta's state during the course of her pregnancy, while awaiting Nanak. Divided in ten small segments, each complete in itself, the first nine stanzas deal with the nine months of pregnancy and the tenth one with the delivery of the child. The poem expresses through rich imagery, the thoughts and feelings experienced by the pregnant Tripta.

A parallel can be drawn with the Maharashtrian writer Vibhahavari Shirurkar, whose "Kalyacha Nishwas", (The sighs of Buds) published in 1933 had caused a stir in Maharashtrian society since it dealt with the lives and aspirations of educated women and their sexuality,  Pritam too shocked Punjabi society at large and critics in particular with her poems and prose expressing women's
sexuality and desire.

As pointed out by various critics, the central focus and theme of her prose and poetry remain women's oppression at various levels: social, cultural, and economic, as well as romantic love, the relationship between men and women not only in the context of middle-class women in cities but also women in villages and small towns, whose lives are determined by questions of gender in its interaction with caste and community.

Though Pritam was clearly one of the first women writers in the Punjab to have focused attention on the issues of women's oppression and romantic love, these were issues which had been on the agendas of the Sikh Gurus, the Punjabi folk and literary tradition and in more recent times, the writers influenced by the nationalist ideology.

Tharu and Lalita point out that the later phases of the Bhakti movements in the North, associated with Tulsidas and Nanak in the 15th and 16th centuries had become less hospitable to women than the earlier Tamil Alvar and Nayanar movements, the predominantly Kannada Vinsaiva movement in the South and the Varkari sects of Maharashtra having "provided support for more radical women poets and thinkers."5

Thus, whereas the Sikh Gurus had questioned and changed the Nath Jogi's understanding about domestic life
and women by opposing their call for assistance which saw women as impure and sexual objects, with Nanak advocating religion based on domestic life, monogamy, equal status within marriage and the active inclusion of women in religious practice by giving them "Amrit Ras", the stress remained on love and sacrifice on the part of women "to win over errant men" and women's role remained primarily that of pleasing the husband.

Nanak "extolled the role of wife and companion as the noblest role assigned to a woman. She is to cultivate the qualities of fidelity, sweet temper and loving obedience and thereby bring happiness to herself and to her family.

This was however no longer a subordinate role but the only possible basis for the achievement of true fulfillment. She was the "Grihalakshmi", or "harbinger of bliss" in the home which corresponded to the "Grihasth" or householder and his duty to be a faithful husband, the benevolent and responsible paterfamilias. Thus the state of the "Grihasth" was given greater importance than that of the enforced celibate, who abandons his home. The reason for this emphasis of the Bhakti movement "on the life of the householder and the importance given to domestic responsibilities", Tharu and Lalita suggest, are to be found in Irfan Habib's argument regarding the sociological roofs of the movement. With the introduction of new crafts and technological developments in the 12th and 13th centuries
and increased artisan production, there appeared an "increasingly affluent artisan population who aspired to a better social status, with even women sharing the same aspirations in the initial stages, since women's labour is always an integral part of home-based artisan production."

In the Punjab, Nanak and the other Gurus added a further "spiritual" tone to the concept of conjugal relations between men and women. Thus, for Amar Das, the test of a successful marriage was the complete identification of the man and woman with each other. Those simply living together were not truly husband and wife. It was essential to be united in Spirit as well. A high moral code of living was laid down for both husband and wife to ensure marital bliss which would be conducive to spiritual progress.

The need for women to be active and participate equally in social, cultural and religious pursuits with men was stressed. Thus Gurdas: "Woman is one half of the complete personality of man and is entitled to share secular and spiritual knowledge equally: Unlike orthodox Hindu belief, a woman does not have to wait to be reborn as a man to achieve "moksh".

Gurdas further regarded an ideal woman as the gate away to spiritual liberation for man himself, with the Sikh Gurus being the first to protest against the practice of Sati, besides which, for the followers of Sikhism, "Purdah"
was discarded, widow remarriage encouraged and women told to leave their homes to help men whenever necessary, with the women of the Guru's households being the first to demonstrate the role that women had to play in the development of the new social order and consciousness that the gurus were striving to create. Nanak's sister Bebe Nanaki and Mata Khivi, wife of Angad actively participated in assisting the Gurus in their religious mission. Though this social and religious role was extolled by the Gurus, the stress however clearly remained on her role as wife and mother. Nanak asks in "Asadivar",

"Why then revile woman, who giveth the birth to great heroes?" 8

Another strong literary tradition in Punjab has been the "Kissa", a lyrical epic poem which emerged in Punjabi literature through the assimilation of the folklore of various tribes by the people of Punjab throughout the 14th to the 16th centuries, and which have played a major role in valorizing romantic love and women loves, with the 'kissa' poets as opposed to the spiritual poets, stressing on physical and this worldly love.

Centred around two lovers belonging to different tribes whose love comes into conflict with tribal traditions which result in a tragedy, the 'sagas' of these folk lovers have helped immortalize such women lovers as Heer, Sohni,
Sahiban, Sassi and others, since they are supposed to be women who have sacrificed everything for love.

These women are no longer depicted as legendary figures or divine beauties, saints or whores in these folk-songs, but as earthy rural women, who on the one hand gave mortal love the status of worship of God and on the other, had the courage to defy religious constraints. Valorized for their rebellion against the conventional norms of society, these women are remembered because they had died for love and not because their lovers had died for them.

Thus, though on the one hand poisoned and punished in the legends for their rebellion, on the other, these legends immortalized them, pointing out the contradiction existing in Punjabi society. The 'kissakars' however, though they saw women only in the role of lovers, represented the emotional and psychological aspects of women's lives and advocated their romantic independence.⁹

Whereas these literary traditions continued to shape the representations of women in Punjabi literature, as already discussed earlier, the colonial period and the nationalist response to it by the end of the 19th century, which saw the woman's question as an important part of its agenda, had writers in Punjab as elsewhere, using literature to invoke the "great Indian past", to recreate a new image and role for women suited to the nationalist discourse.
Gurdeep Kaur Cheema points out how writers like Bhai Puran Singh and Bhai Vir Singh, true to the reformist discourse, no longer saw women as responsible for the downfall of men, accorded them respect and honour, but saw them in the form of "abla", that is, a vine dependent on the husband, continuing to stress the twin roles of wife and mother. And analogous to the nationalist's selective appropriation of history, Bhai Vir Singh also idealised Sikh women as courageous, saving their honour from Muslim conquerors, as opposed to Muslim women who were considered "lacking in character", thus creating an ideal image of Sikh women.

Later writers Nanak Singh, Jaswant Singh Kanwal, Narinder Pal Singh, similarly continued with representation of women within the reformist and idealist mode, Nanak Singh's novels for example being full of the problems of women, their victimisation by society and men. His women however remain tradition bound and idealist and the novels less realistic and more romantic. In his novels, 'whores' are represented for the first time in Punjabi literature, with the ones of blame on the new class of capitalists who force women into prostitution, rather than on the women themselves.

Other reformist concerns: widow remarriage, child marriage, sale of younger girls to older men etc. also find reflection in his work.
Later writers, J.S. Kanwal, Narinder Pal Singh, Sant Singh Sekhon under the influence of a 'Socialist realism', Cheema comments, see women like workers, as the oppressed and have represented them realistically, Surinder Singh Nirula's portrayals of women for example being those of human beings in social contexts without idealisation & romantisation.

Cheema draws attention to the fact that in the later period, short stories and novels of Har Charan Singh, Gurbu Singh, K.S. Duggal also succeeded in emerging out of the reformist mode to represent more progressive images of the women protagonists, Mohan Singh being the first poet to express romantic sentiments openly without use of the "kissa" form. It was however Pritam, as almost the first woman writer, who represented women no longer as object of male desire, but herself consciously and consistently reflected women's own sexuality and desire.¹⁰

Looking at Pritam together with Mohan Singh and Haribhajan Singh as part of the Romantic progressive tradition of Punjabi literature which solved the contradictions of life by abstracting them from their class context and romanticizing them through the symbolism of love, Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia distinguishes this modern romantic tradition from the romantic tradition of the medieval period, the basic difference being that the former is essentially an expression of "middle-class individualism
striving to transcend old feudal frame of values, whereas medieval romantic tradition, though reading against the then value pattern, still comprised of feudalist attitudes. It was only in the modern period, Ahluwalia argues, that romantic tradition could and did acquire a this worldly humanistic orientation.

Ahluwalia sees Mohan Singh as the originator of social humanism in the Punjabi literary tradition, with the Punjabi predominant cultural value pattern having remained more or less anti humanistic till the emergence of Nanak, who he regards as having revolutionized Indian philosophical thought by stressing that the Absolute, though indeterminate in itself, is deermanently related to world of time and space, thus painting ground for emergence of really humanistic tradition that transcends the bounds of the feudal value pattern.

Seen in this context, the modern tradition of romanticism turns out to be a humanist revolt against feudal frame of values that negated individuality of man (or woman) and a free, uninhibited self expression and self-assertion thereof."

Ahluwalia argues that it is through the romantic poets : Amrita Pritam, Haribhajan Singh, starting with Mohan Singh that the concept of love with positive acceptance of all its sensuousness emerges for the first time in the
history of Punjabi literature, Singh's love poems presenting it in a humanistic way as the natural condition of man. Stripped of all its idealistic mystical sufi trappings, Pritam's, he argues, contrary to popular impression is not a romantic sensibility, though she employs romantic means of expression: techniques, images and symbols, but that she is essentially a realist, who has been able to express the existentialist experience of valuelessness of modern man, the literary influence of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Sahim Ludhinvi, Sardar Jafri, and the writings of Gurbu Singh in "Preetlari" whose world-view was in opposition to the establishment Punjabi magazines such as "Pritam" "Phulwari" and "Fateh" having helped make her a realist.

This realism is evident in her more radical poems, dealing with the various aspects of women's oppression, "Undatta" (Bread- Giver) being amongst her better known poems, a powerful poem which uses satire and irony to express the helplessness of a woman reduced to the role of sexual object of her husband since he is her provider:

"Merei bolan ton pehlan,  
bol painda tera ann,  
Kachh ku bol sun  
per asseen ann de keere,  
Te ann bhaar lethan  
Oh dabbe gaye hun,  
Ann Data!

222
Main chamm di guddi
Khed layee Khida layee,
Lahu da piala
Pee layee pila layee."

Similarly in "Kanya Dan" and "Gau-Shala", the "traditional Hindu concept of the giving away of the daughter in marriage as an act of piety amounting to cow-worship is questioned and subjected to heavy ridicule and irony." The poem "Ik Vesva" expresses the agony of a woman whose daughter is marked for sale into prostitution.

Political events like the partition of Punjab in 1947 and the subsequent rape and rejection of thousands of women by their families and men find strong expression in poems like "Vihauta Nar" and "Akhan Waris Shah Nu".

Probably her most known and popular poem, in "Akhan Waris Shah Nu", Pritam calls upon Waris Shah, the well-known medieval poet of women's love in the Punjab to rise from his grave to witness the agony of women abducted and raped during partition:

"Aj aakhan Waris Shah nu -
Kite kabran vichon bol
Te aj kitabe ishq da
Koi agla warga phol
Ik roi si dhi Punjab di
Tu likh likh marey wain -
Aj lakhan dhian rondian
Tainu Waris Shah nu kehan -
Uthh dardmandan der dardia -
Uthh tak apna Punjab -
Ag bele tashaan vichhian
Tu lahu di bhari chenab."

Other poems such as "Punjab di Kahani", "The Helpless" and "The scar of a Wound" from the poem collection "Sarghi Vela" (1951) also speak of the trauma of Partition in terms of the grief and agony suffered by raped mothers and daughters.

Other poems "Twarik" (History) "Bharpur Jawani" (The Days of Youth) "Iqraran Wali Raat" (The Night of Promises) "Chhalian" (The Corn Cobs) and "Aman de Geet" deal with issues of war and peace, of history and tradition, of hunger and poverty, from a woman's perspective.

In the collection "Sunehray", (1953) for which she received the Sahitya Akademi award, it is Nature and her second major theme 'Romantic love' which is predominant. In "Punjab di Twarik" she uses the dialogue form, the poem being a dialogue between a mother and daughter, with the mother narrating the history of Punjab since medieval times with its seasons, flowers and fruits, winds and waters. It is also a chronicle of Punjabi poetry since its birth with verses from Sheikh Farid and Nanak to Gurdas Waris, Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussain.
Besides the imagery of nature and the elements: Wind, sun, stars, rains, sky, fire, fish, birds, tree, leaf, seeds, months and seasons, root, thorn, etc. the images of domestic life and objects as well as physical imagery of a woman’s body: womb, breasts, lips, hair, eyes, eyebrows, wrist, palm, fingers, bone, flesh, and also households objects – kitchen, bread, pots and pans, oven, lamp oil and wick, rice and milk, tea and cigarettes are found in abundance in her poems, with these having increased in middle and later years. 13

Though most critics see Pritam essentially as a poet, she has twenty novels and five collections of short stories to her credit, a great many of which also deal with the twin themes of women’s oppression and gender relations, with recent feminist criticism in Punjab attempting to critically analyse Pritam’s novels for her representation of the female protagonists. Thus, Gurdeep Kaur Cheema’s "Amrita Pritam de Naulan Vich Manavi Rishte" makes a critical appraisal of Pritam’s protagonists in their gender roles of lovers, wives and mothers, besides sisters and daughters, after a description of the differing status of women through the various socio-historical ages beginning from the Stone Age through Slave and Feudal society, the capitalist age and socialist society.

Cheema also attempts an analysis of the
representation of women in Punjabi literature beginning with ancient and Bhakti literature, the literature of the Sikh Gurus, Sufi literature, "Kissa" literature, the literature of the "Parivartan Age" and in modern times.


Cheema however does not consider Pritam's representation of her women protagonists as lovers as being very realistic. On the contrary, she concludes that Pritam's representation is one-sided with the protagonists getting carried away by their imagination, with realism lacking in their lives, their lives centering around their need and desire for emotional fulfillment.

Cheema further argues that though these novels create the impression of being liberal and progressive, they would only help in alienating the reader from his environment. Amrita, she writes, has not been able to represent the problems of the women lovers in conjunction with the problems of the women's community as a whole. Rather, she argues, the behaviour of these women which is contradictory in it's opposition to social norms is not socially relevant but remains limited to the individual self.
alone. Referring to her earlier deliberations on the status of women, Cheema comments that it is only the removal of economic inequality which can provide a solution to women's problems, whom she compares to the Dalits.\textsuperscript{14}

Regarding Pritam's representation of women as mothers, Cheema has a similar conclusion: Amrita presents her mother characters full of devotion, sacrifice and love whereas in reality mothers also become victims of traditions and social customs and have to give up their children and suppress their emotions. Here, even the economic situation plays an important role and a mother may have to part with her child because of poverty. Amrita takes no note of such situations.\textsuperscript{15}

On Pritam's protagonists as wives, Cheema stresses that though Pritam as a woman novelist has been able to portray the psychological state, the inner conflict and the situation of a wife within the existing familial and social structures, Pritam's romanticism and idealism is predominant, whereby most representations are those of self sacrificing and obedient wives. Even if they do break traditional norms the attitude remains one of sacrifice. Thus Cheema is critical of the protagonists of "Bund Barwasa", "Bulawa", "Doctor Dev", etc. for leaving their husband's house rather than remaining and making just demands.\textsuperscript{16}
It was however 'the creation of this new resilient self, one that is not easily understood or explained, but is, all the same a power to be reckoned with, as Tharu and Lalita point out, which the women writes of the 1920's to the 1940's saw as an important task, so that the works of these writers Nirupama Devi, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Mahadevi Verma, Lalithambika Antherjanam, Dhirubhen Patel, Balamani Amma etc. often appear conservative, restrained, confined to spaces that have always been sanctioned to women, the pattern of everyday life being rarely broken by the spectacular or the grotesque as compared to the positions of earlier writers like Tarabai Shinde, Bandaru Achamba or Rokeya Hossain. 17

Pritam's protagonists however, belonging to a wide range of social and cultural strata, rural as well as urban, lower caste and class as well as middle class in small towns, do express the need and degree for a subjectivity beyond that laid down by the Nationalist discourse.

Pritam's theoretical writings however clearly reflect the under - currents of nationalist ideology with its valorization of the Aryan past as the Golden Age for women. In 'Draupadi Se Draupadi Tak' for example, which is an elaboration of her gender ideology, she explains in an interview that it was the Vedic period which was an Utopia for women since twenty seven women saints could participate in the creation of the Rigveda.
Later centuries are understood to be the 'Dark Ages' for women, resulting in their mental and physical slavery. Pritam also pleads for the unity of 'science' and 'spiritualism,' a unity which had been part of the ancient consciousness but had been lost in the modern age.

A solution to the present day problem of gender dichotomies is thus sought in the mythological concept of 'Arthnarishewar':

Pointing out the similarity of the concept of 'Arthnarishwar' with the Chinese one of 'Ying' and 'Yang' she draws a further parallel with a similar conceptualization in 'Beyond the World of Opposites', by De. Fritjof Capra in his book the "7th Tao of Physics".

We tend to feel uncomfortable with the male female polarity in ourselves and therefore we bring one or the other side into prominence. We traditionally favoured the male side rather than the female. Instead of recognizing that the personality of each man and of each woman is the result of an interplay between female and male elements, it has established a static order, where all men are supposed to be masculine and all women feminine, and it has given men the leading roles and most of society's privileges. This attitude has resulted in an over emphasis of all the male aspects of human nature, activity, relational thinking, competition, aggressiveness and so on. The female modes of
consciousness which can be described by words like intuitive, religious, mystical, occult or psychic have constantly been suppressed in our male oriented society.\(^{18}\)

Pritam explains that through her writing she has made an attempt to bring the female aspect to the fore which has been suppressed for centuries, by representing such women protagonists who have the potential and desire to attain their own subjectivity so that for her it has been the journey of a consciousness: starting from the Draupadi of the Mahabharat whose fate could be decided by the dice game of the Pandavas, from one who is mere object in their game, to the Draupadi who is no longer object but subject, one who has now come to play the game herself.\(^{19}\)

Besides her book 'Draupadi se Draupadi Tak' Pritam had earlier also compiled, under the title "Aurat ek Drishtikon" (woman a viewpoint) various poems, excerpts from Punjabi novels, western feminist writing (that of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan) interviews with women writers, women activists of Nari Niketans, various victims of male brutality, middle class wives etc. in order to draw attention to various aspects of women's oppression and to 'show the actual 'status' of women in society'.

In the 'Preface' and 'Conclusion' of the book, Pritam seeks to connect the ideological roots of this oppression with the material the 'Preface' focusing on the
question of marriage where she traces the rights and duties connected with marriage as having changed through time, the reasons for such changes being both economic and political. In the conclusion Pritam attempts to connect the ideological control on women's chastity to the material one of private property and inheritance, which helped create the distinction between procreation and pleasure, that is, between the woman as 'wife' and as 'whore.'

The 'Preface' further describes the various types of marriage: polygamy, monogamy and polyandry and their existence in various societies, the changes in these are attributed to economic, political and psychological factors. Explaining the political meaning of the saying 'We are going to marry the enemy', as marriage having helped in feudal times to establish economic and political relationships between enemies, she also elaborates on the difference between the two forms of heritage: matriarchal and patriarchal, concluding with an enumeration of the eight types of marriages described in the Hindu Scriptures.

The 'conclusion' attempts an analysis, of the other important aspect of women's existence, the control of their sexuality so that Pritam focuses here on the interrelation between the institution of marriage and inheritance as also with men's desire for immortality in the form of his offspring so that women's sexuality and desire had to be controlled through the ideology of the wife's
chastity in order to ensure paternity.

Thus, punishment of the worst kind was reserved for women who committed adultery but not for men who were guilty of the same crime. Pritam argues that since this had nothing to do with a principle, but merely to ensure the paternity of the child, women were reduced to objects and were no longer allowed a subjectivity of their own, with various laws and rules being created keeping only the needs of men in mind.

A description of how the social custom of Dev Dasis came into existence in South India follows, similar customs having existed in the Unani religion in the 5th century B.C. where every woman was supposed to be a 'whore' for one night, just as feudal lords in India claimed the bride to be for a night before the wedding. Pritam argues that with prostitution being responsible for the spread of venereal diseases society began to regard it as a social evil and as the 'cause' of 'social evils' rather than the result of them.20

Clearly the concerns of the two writers Bachmann and Pritam on the question of gender relations and women's oppression vary greatly as is evident from their theoretical and literary writing as well as their lives and the reception of their works. Whereas language and the socio-cultural place (Ort) of women are major concerns with Bachmann, in the Indian context, the creation of gender
dicholomies and the woman's question had been historically rendered far more complex due to colonialism, religion, caste and class.

A great many of Pritam's short stories reflect this complexity. Though centred around issues of prostitution, motherhood (especially the social pressure to have 'male offspring) and women's sexuality, she attempts often to also explore relationships between two women i.e. a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in "Jari ka Kafan", or between a mother and daughter in "Do Khrikiyan", between two sisters in 'Maalika' or between the wife and 'Twaifh' in "Shah ki Kanjari", The relationship between co-wives is also explored from various aspects in "Ek Nishwas", "Andhere ka Kamandal", "Apna Apna Karz", etc.

Many of the protagonists of these stories belong to villages where their lives and desires are constrained and controlled by factors of caste, class and community. In "Jidi ki Jat" for example the protagonist 'Chaabili' questions the rigid social norms governing caste which prevent her and other girls like her from realising their dreams.

Thus, in most of Pritam's short stories and novels centred on women in general and 'Ganje ki Kali', 'Andhere ka Kanandal" and the novel 'Pinjar' in particular, it becomes clear that the 'focus' is on women's "consciousness, her
desire to conform to social roles as well as to her resistance to such constructs.  

Here these two short stories and the novel ‘Pinjar are analysed in some detail in order to point out the inadequacy of a Western feminist literary criticism in interpreting such representations of gender relations and women’s oppression. In the process, the various complexities of caste, class and religion which determine gender relations and women’s subjectivity and sexuality in India as opposed to those in the West, also become clear.

The short story ‘Andhere ka Kamandal’ like ‘Ein Schritt nach Gomorrha’ is about the possibilities of a relationship between two women. Like in ‘Ein Schritt nach Gomorhe’ it is late at night, or rather early in the morning. But instead of a party being over, the female protagonist Dr. Rai is lying in bed, groaning with labour pains. The other woman Vidya, is sitting by her bedside. The two women seem to be shifting their positions .... so that now it is Vidya who is lying in bed and Dr. Rai is helping her deliver her baby girl, Mitoo. Time also seems to have shifted back to that night four of five years back when it was Vidya instead of Dr. Rai on the same bed in the same room.

This time, instead of a girl it is a boy who is born to DR. Rai. Whereas in Bachmann’s story it is the colour ‘red’ which seems all pervasive and symbolic of ‘sin
and ruin' in the beginning, which is how a lesbian relationship is viewed by society since it threatens the norm, in Pritam’s story it is the symbol of the ‘Kamandal’ which is ever present, representing darkness, pain, the loss of dreams both for the two women and their children.

The relationship between the two women is one:

\[
\frac{\text{अपनी रई की रूपरेखा तथा शरीर के साथ}}{\text{विद्या का साथ}} \times (109)^{22}.
\]

Though it was Ms Rai who had first over looked this relationship and offered a home and shelter to Vidya who was homeless, it is now Vidya who attempts to define the relationship and in the process her own subjectivity though these clearly remain bound once again within the traditional gender roles.

The man, he is nameless in the story, had been visiting Dr. Rai in order to collect medicines for Vidya and then later for the child, until one day he deserts them possibly because

\[
\frac{\text{शक्ति के रूप में आत्मा के साथ}}{\text{विद्या का साथ}} \times (111)^{23}.
\]

only to suddenly return one day and then to stay
on with Dr. Rai

Till he just as suddenly leaves again one day:

Mr. Rai remembers the letter with the foreign postmark, which has just two lines in it:

The difference in perception of what that heterosexual relationship had meant to the two female protagonists becomes clear when Ms. Rai asks:

and Vidya replies:
And it is along these lines that Vidya defines the relationship even between herself and Ms Rai. She is also quite clear about who is to blame. Thus to Ms. Rai's question

Vidya says:

When Ms. Rai explains she has done that only to ease her own guilt, Vidya is clear that it the man who is to
blame and no other woman would have bothered about Vidya:

\[\text{And once again it is Vidya who defines their roles: the traditional gender roles, so that Vidya's is the female role of nurturing both children whereas Ms Rai is that of the 'male breadwinner.'}

Thus in Pritam's story the concerns of the protagonists do not centre around their sexuality or the search for a language in which communication could be possible but the more fundamental issues of existence. It is the which are of importance for Vidya and which ultimately shape her consciousness and subjectivity.

If 'Undine' in 'Undine geht' is representative of 'women's Eros and sexuality Pritam's short story 'Gange ki Kali' (1968) also has the female protagonist Gulbati's sexuality and desire as central theme. How this sexuality
and desire is however controlled and constrained by factors of caste and class in rural India is clearly brought out by this story.

The twelve year old 'Aghania' eldest child and daughter of the trader of the village 'Jhalmla' would like to change her name to 'Gulbati'.

The house of the father Kachkolprasael Pushkarna is the only brick house in the village of hundred houses, only four of which belong to the Pushkarnans and the rest to Kurmis, Paraks and other lower castes.

The father would like to marry off Gulbati to a trader like himself who would help him in his business. So when Rangilal's wife dies he does not let the opportunity pass. Rangilal is a trader in the neighbouring Chandipara village and Kachkolprasad is aware of the fact that he is an even better trader than himself. The fact that Rangilal is twenty years older than Gulbati is not important for him.
Gulbati however finds the Kurmi boys the most attractive:

When Gulbati realizes that the

who is crushing Ganga buds in his hands is her husband Rangilal, there is a protest within her and a feeling of resistance against such a fate:
Gulbati relates this injustice to that of caste:

Pritam writes, on the question of caste:

241
that is, it is Gulbati's selfhood and sexuality which began to be crushed like the Ganja buds and is smoked in his pipe bey Rangilal.

With five years having passed in a similar fashion Gulbati meets a Punjabi youth in the village fair. Attracted to him, she feels:

Asserting her selfhood and desire, Gulbati leaves her husband's house with Hemsingh the Punjabi 'Pheriwala.' Breaking her bangles in front of the Panchayats of the villages she tells Rangilal:

The Panchayats rule that Hemsingh pay a fine of Rs. 200/- which is given to Rangilal and Gulbati is allowed to go with Hemsingh.

Three months later, happy at the knowledge that
she is pregnant with his child, she awaits Hemsingh's return, only to be informed by him that has a wife and child in his village in Punjab. The son is in hospital after an accident and the wife had requested that he return home.

Gulbati, in the circumstances, prefers to let him go, and frees him from all responsibility to herself and their unborn child. She lies to him that she was carrying Rangilal's child:

Hemsingh is relieved, Gulbati convinces him to return home, telling him that she would go back to Rangilal's house and have their child there.

Having sent Hemsingh off, Gulbati leaves Nariara village for her father's village. When the father sends for Rangilal who agrees to accept Gulbati back, Gulbati refuses
to go back to him:

The whole village is surprised, but no one dares to ask her anything. Only her friend Sonia musters courage to ask Gulbati:

and Gulbati answers:

but Sonia wants to know who the father is:

and Gulbati declares:
Sonia is shaken and asks again:

"... 24 3 7 8 9 10 11"

to which she answers:

"... 24 3 7 8 9 10 11"

Like Vidya in 'Adhere ka Kamandal' who sees 'Mito' her daughter as only her own and the newly born boy as only Dr. Rai's child:

"... 24 3 7 8 9 10 11"

Gulbati also views her unborn child as only hers: no man has any part in it.
Having rejected Rangilal since he could in no way satisfy her desire, and that was a relationship which had been forced on her, Gulbati also rejects Hemsingh:

Explaining how Gulbati seeks her own subjectivity outside of, and beyond her relationships with men, Pritam herself writes that Gulbati achieves this by taking responsibility both for her own life and that of the child in her womb, refusing to acknowledge such a man as its father who has conceived it only through his body and not his soul.

Clearly in Pritam’s story, the question of women’s subjectivity and sexuality is a far more complex one since it is interconnected with that of caste and class. Like
'Undine' however, this subjectivity must be sought in a rejection of men and social norms.

If caste plays a major role in the short story, 'Ganje ki Kali' it is community and religion which determine the life of the female protagonist 'Puro' of the novel 'Pinjar' (19 ). With the partition of India as backdrop, the life and consciousness of Puro develop along the interface of religion and genders the communal divide forcing her to question the basis of religion and her own abduction by Rashid causing her to debate issues of gender oppression, not only in relation to her own life but the lives of other women as well. A "dialectical strain" is thus visible in the novel "demonstrating on the one hand the hegemonical gender ideology absorbed by women and on the other, subversive female search for selfhood and space with Pritam having dealt here as in her other novels and stories with the "constraints of the female roles of daughter, wife and mother which deny the Indian woman her dignity and rights as a human being". 53

The fourteen year old Puro, eldest child of the trader's family, the Shahs, of the village Chattone in Gujerat district is engaged to Ramchand of the neighbouring village by her parents, her brother who is hardly twelve, is in exchange engaged to Ramchand's sister still a child -

Just before the marriage is to take place, Puro is
abducted one evening by Rashid, a Muslim youth belonging to the Sheikh family who have sworn revenge on the Shahs for their treatment of Rashid's uncle and for forcibly keeping Rashid's aunt for three days by Puro's uncle. Though Rashid himself is both kind hearted and loving towards Puro, he is determined to marry her. On the night before the 'nikah' is to take place, Puro makes an attempt at escape, fleeing in the night to her parents. They however, are too afraid of retribution by the Sheikhs to accept her back. With her chastity also in doubt they know that no one will marry her now. They leave her to her fate:

The mother also says:

248
Rejected by her parents, Puro leaves her home with suicide in mind, is however saved by Rashid.

With wifehood forced on her by Rashid, motherhood is also forced on her within a few months. Comparing the unwanted child in her womb to the bug in a pea-pod she feels:

And Puro would like to get rid of the child, remove it from her womb:
For Rashid the birth of their son signifies victory over Puro:

Puro's thoughts however reflect her sense of defeat:

Her feelings towards her newly-born son reflect ambivalence - both an acceptance of him as well as
rejection, since motherhood has been forced on her:

And yet when the child is sucking at her breast she feels:

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251
This personal oppression forces on Puro the consciousness that all women are oppressed, are no more than sexual objects, victims of male sexual exploitation:

This consciousness helps Puro understand and sympathise with other victims of gender oppression: the ten or twelve year-old 'Kamo who is almost starved and beaten regularly by her aunt. Puro would like to help Kamo carry the heavy water-carrier water which Kamo must carry home every day before dawn; she would like to extend her nurturing role as mother, feed and look after the child. But Puro is now Hamida and touching the water-carrier is not allowed since Kamo is a Hindu girl:

"राट काली हो"। रात्रि के निकट
लाक्षण।
लाक्षण है कहने का निकट लोग, मेरे
लाक्षण है रात को लोगी लाक्षण, जब से लाक्षण
राष्ट्रीय गाँव बनो।" 63
Puro would like to adopt Kamo, become her mother:

Puro is also attracted to Taro, a girl in the neighbourhood, who has been married for two years, but seems to be suffering from some unknown disease. Puro has heard that every time the girl returns from her husband’s home she is even more ill than before:

Finding Taro alone one day Puro attempts to find out what is wrong:

Taro becomes vocal about her suffering though she is aware that women are supposed to suffer their oppression in silence and have no voice:
She elaborates:

The other woman is not acceptable to her husband's family since she belongs to a lower caste:

And since Taro is provided with subsistence and clothing, they see no reason why she should complain:
Taro however feels she is reduced to an object, selling her body for food and clothing:

Taro is aware that the relationship is in no way binding on the man, while she herself is a prisoner of it:

Taro’s outburst astonishes Puro since it was for the first time that she had experienced the fact that girls could also think this way, speak in this manner. Though she herself had often experienced anger, she had been unable to express it:
Later, confronted with the pregnancy of a madwoman in the village, Puro, together with the other women of the village, is once again forced into questioning gender oppression:

Puro and Rashid save the dead woman's child, bring it home and Puro begins to nuture it like a mother. Once again 'religion' intervenes and she is forced to fight communal feelings to fulfill her role.

The villagers begin to whisper:

The Hindus threaten Rashid:
Rashid cannot accept their logic:

And Puro and Rashid are forced into handing over the child:

Three days later when the child is half dead, the villagers return it to Puro:

Worse is to follow, the year 1947 brings communal tensions and hatred, her village and the neighboring villages are full of rumours and later by hordes fleeing and being killed on the way. Once again it is women who are doubly victimised:
All the Hindus flee from her village in fear. Finding a girl hidden in the sugarcane fields one evening, Puro brings her home and hides her in the store-house. When a procession of people from Rattowal, her erstwhile fiance Ramchand’s village stops by her village at night on the way to India, Puro goes in search of him, leaving the girl in safety in the procession.

Ramchand requests her to look for his sister Lajjo who has been abducted from the procession. Convinced that Lajjo is still in village Rattowal, Rashid and Puro search the village and find out that Lajjo is being held captive in Ramchand’s house by a Muslim youth and his mother.

Risking their own lives Puro and Rashid rescue Lajjo from the house and restore her to her husband and her brother Ramchand. Though Puro herself also has the option at that point of time to return to her family, and her brother tries to persuade her to come with them, the novel concludes with Puro’s decision to stay with Rashid:

"\textpersian}"
Puro would like to believe that:

Though Rashid is responsible for the destruction and ruin of her life, for Puro he is now the father of her child, the man she had grown to love. She tells Lajjo:

Though critics like Cheema are critical of Pritam's portrayal of Puro as a self sacrificing wife who, despite her anger with him, nurses him when he is sick and slowly starts to care for him, and who prefers to stay with him rather than return to her parents at the time of Partition, Pritam herself explains Puro's decision to stay with Rashid as a conscious one, signifying the development in Puro's consciousness from object to subject. Whereas in

259
the beginning, Puro is an innocent young girl, a mere object who has no say in her abduction, in the end it is she herself who chooses to stay with Rashid. Pritam would like the novel to be read as the story of the development of the protagonist from an innocent young girl to a conscious woman, a woman conscious not only of her own oppression in a male dominated society but also of other women like her: the girl child Kamo, Taro, the mad woman so that is able to intervene in their lives and finally also play a major role in the rescue of her sister-in-law Lajjo as well.25

The novel has clearly been written in a realistic mode, with Pritam often describing in detail, the every day household chores and routine of the protagonist, the food she cooks etc.

Thus, Pritam's writing is not concerned with finding another language or with the 'place' of the feminine in society, but with the representation and expression of her protagonists' subjectivity and sexuality interlinked to and determined by factors of class, caste and religion.