CHAPTER - IV

CONVENTIONAL IMAGE OF WOMAN IN AMRITA PRITAM’S FICTION
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Man for the field and woman for the hearth,
Man for the sword and for the needle she,
Man to command and woman to obey.

(Alfred Tennyson in The Princess)

“Life is a challenge”. It has to be met. The clichéd saying is very true in the case of a woman. For a woman, life is always a challenge and since ages she has been subjected to the many challenges thrown by society, customs, traditions and men. Since times immemorial woman has been the victim of the male domination and oppression and treated like a beast of burden and an object of pleasure. Man has always looked down upon her as the weaker sex, as his property, servile to him. Women’s oppression is traced not to individual male malevolence but to the social and the familial structures based on patriarchy. In a patriarchal society, a female child is brought up under the strict control of her parents to be later handed over to a husband. She does not get any encouragement to develop her individual self. Parents decide her marriage. Simone de Beauvoir observes that, “marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society” (425). The patriarchal practices reduce women’s status to inferior social beings. Their lives reveal the social and cultural constrictions that allow no freedom or dignity.

In conventional societies, a woman is always considered in relation to man. Traditionally, a good woman is considered a good wife like the chaste, faithful and virtuous Sita and Savitri. The conventional image of woman depicts her as one who is docile, self-sacrificing, the very embodiment of self-less love and a veritable monument of patience, ever willing to suffer. Such virtues are highlighted as the virtues of true womanhood. Tradition, the world over, has assigned a lower and subordinate position to woman in its social set up. However important the functions and duties of a woman are, she is always relegated to the background. And woman is obliged to subordinate her interests and desires to the collective will of her community, and in particular to male
members. These constricting and narrow social norms constrained her to obliterate her ‘self’, her individuality and separate identity.

In her fiction, Amrita has recorded the plight of the contemporary Indian Woman. Woman’s life, Amrita shows, has been and largely continues to be one of physical and mental bondage, with religion and tradition as two main props to perpetuate the condition. The division of roles and the resulting discrimination goes back to Manu who had ordained that woman’s major function is to bear children, and urged that all women be married off as soon as they begin to menstruate. For parents to harbor a daughter seven months after menstruation, declares the Artha Shastra is to be in perpetual debt to society.

Large numbers of Indian women, even today, are married in early adolescence and receive little or no education. Amrita writes of herself: “Engaged at the age of four, I had been married at the age of sixteen in the usual manner” (TRS 17). The usual manner, of course, is a marriage arranged by parents where neither the daughter’s consent nor her feelings are considered. “Amrita’s honest and accurate perceptions establish very clearly both the prevailing condition of women in India as well as the road women must travel to achieve true emancipation” (Juneja 18).

In the fiction of the early fifties The Skeleton, Dr. Dev, and Trump Card as a sensitive and anguished writer, Amrita focused on the effect the conventional living had on the lives of women. The women in these novels never fully succeed in rejecting their traditional upbringing and their early conditioning. The study traces the feminine sensibility of Amrita’s women in the different facets of the conventional image they present. The conventional image of woman in the novels is portrayed through Pooro in the novel The Skeleton, Mamta in Dr. Dev and Kaili in Trump Card.

Pooro in The Skeleton

The Skeleton is an excellent artistic piece of fiction that displays Amrita’s capacity of communicating a lot of things in a very small number of pages. The novel depicts a world of social reality. It aims at a deep probing into the human psyche during a crisis, especially a woman’s psyche. The central character of Pooro is a symbol of suffering and
survivalism. Her final and ultimate decision to stay with Rashida lends her character a different dimension. The existential philosophy that human being is a unique and isolated individual in an emphatic and hostile society, responsible for his own actions and free to choose his destiny is exemplified in the character of Pooro.

*The Skeleton* presents the tragic story of Pooro, an innocent and beautiful girl betrothed to a handsome and intelligent youth named Ram Chand. The story has the background of the partition riots between the Hindus and Muslims and the resultant massacre and bloodshed. The locale of the novel is a small village Chhatoani and its neighbouring villages like Rattoval and Sakkar in Gujarat district (now in Pakistani Punjab). The novel covers a span of nearly thirteen years i.e. 1935 to 1948. It opens on a festive note as the preparations of two marriages – Pooro and Ram Chand and Lajo and Trilok are in full swing. Pooro is the daughter of Hindu moneylender’s family in Chhatoani village and Ramchand is the son of another rich moneylender’s family of Rattoval. Pooro becomes merely a pawn in the Hindu-Muslim vendetta. A little before her marriage, when she goes to get beans from the fields, Pooro is kidnapped and abducted by a Muslim boy Rashida. After some days Pooro escapes from his confinement with great efforts and goes to her parents’ home who refuse to accept her back in the family. Finally, Pooro goes back to Rashida in a totally broken and frustrated condition and tries to adjust herself with him. She lives a compromised life with a new identity as a Muslim, as Hamida

Partition left a lasting impact on the psyche of the people of the Indian sub-continent who saw and suffered this horrible agony. History books give simple description, but the pain, trauma and suffering of partition can be experienced only through literary writings. Several novels present a vivid picture of the unfortunate lot of people who passed through the trauma of partition. Among the worst victims were the women of all communities. As Urvashi Butalia writes, “The history was a history of deep violation – physical and mental – for woman” (Butalia 131) Amrita “as a highly sensitive poetess, had captured the pains and traumas of partition most compellingly and voiced the agonizing experiences of women through the archetypal story of protagonist, Pooro” (Digole 139). She has described all these forms of violence against women in the novel in great detail. The *Skeleton* portrays the victimization of women trapped in communal
tensions. They suffered violence, displacement, helplessness exploitation during the historical riots and Amrita has delineated it in a highly realistic manner in the novel. She endeavours to explore human emotions in interpersonal relationships in the light of the prevailing circumstances that adversely affected communal harmony. Amrita looks at the partition from a woman’s point of view. Her novel presents the existential predicament of women during partition. She brings out the very fact of the exploitation of abducted women, who have to kill their feelings and emotions and reconcile with the abductors.

The novel brings out the feminine sensibility of Pooro in her changing moods; her earlier romantic mood, her frustration and helplessness after abduction, her feeling of being a lifeless skeleton, her nausea for Rashida and his son forcibly planted in her womb, and then the gradual but positive change in her attitude towards once terribly hated husband and her final reconciliation with the changed circumstances in considering Pakistan as her home, like a traditional Indian wife – all is portrayed realistically and artistically.

When Pooro is fourteen, going on fifteen her parents coming to Chhatoani from Thailand found a young man from Rattoval, a neighbouring village. Her “parents were resolved to lighten themselves of the burden of a daughter” (TS 5). This shows parents find it a great relief to marry off a daughter where then the burden is taken off their hands. This discrimination exists today too, where parents await eagerly to wash off their hands from the burden of responsibility of a daughter.

Pooro experiences a young girl’s feelings and whenever she recalled her fiancée Ram Chand’s face, a deep blush came to her cheeks. Sometimes she goes across her father’s fields and strayed on to the footpath connecting the two villages, Rattoval and Chhattoani, to have a good look at Ram Chand. The very thought would set her heart beating fast. And then her night would be spent in dreaming of him who was soon to become her husband. All this was put to an end when the horrible incident occurred that changed Pooro’s life completely.

Pooro is abducted on a horse by Rashida who is put on oath by his uncles, the Shaikhs, to avenge the abduction and humiliation of his aunt by the Sahukars, the money
lenders to which family Pooro belonged. Abduction changes a girl’s life totally. Her pain and agony is never understood. Here Pooro doesn’t know why Rashida had abducted her. She finds that the door of her own fate was shut. Her sorrow or tears could not bring her any help. But even in such a dark situation Pooro masters all courage and beats upon the entrance door to find a release. Pooro requests Rashida to take pity on her and return her to her people, but it was in vain as he expresses his desire towards Pooro. In a way Pooro feels grateful towards Rashida as he had not said a harsh word to her and her honour was unsullied.

After fifteen days, one day Pooro is told by Rashida that they would be married by a maulvi and he gives her a red silk dress. He talks to her in a matter-of-fact tone, saying, “Woman, that which has not happened yet must now come to pass” (TS 16). This was an unbelievable situation for Pooro. All the romantic dreams of young girl for her fiancée and marriage are shattered here. An abducted girl has no choice but to accept or do what is wanted of her. She is at the mercy of others. Pooro begs Rashida to free her, but he was unmoved. He said, “Pooro, your entreaties will not make the slightest difference” (TS 16). Pooro comes to know through Rashida that he had abducted her to settle an old score between their families, the Sahukars and the Shaikhs. What one can perceive is that at all times in human history, let it be war or peace, women are the victims of circumstances. Here Amrita brings out that Pooro had to resign to her fate. Her situation was she could not even fight against it. She had to accept it and live with it.

Amrita portrays Pooro also as a strong person. Even in her helpless situation Pooro asks Rashida, “If my uncle abducted your aunt, what fault was that of mine? You have reduced me to a homeless vagrant” (TS 17). Pooro has to drown her innocence and accept an imprisoned life like a caged bird due to the sins of her grandfather and his brothers. Her feeling of being ‘a homeless vagrant’ brings out the truth of circumstances and her suffering. In a tradition-bound society, a woman gone out of her home without any trace would surely suffer the homelessness. Amrita seems to showcase that in either case women have to pay a heavy price for the hostilities between the communities. Pooro is thus a ‘perennial victim’ of family vendetta between the Shaikhs and Sahukars. Through Pooro’s tragedy, Amrita has highlighted that women had to suffer for no fault of their own. The so-called ‘social stigma’ created by the patriarchal society demands the
continual surrender of innocence and other sacrifices by women only. Amrita criticizes severely the convenient religious and social practices that exploit women.

Pooro requests Rashida to let her see her mother once. He says, “You have no place in that family anymore! If they let you in even once, not one of their Hindu friends or relatives will take a drop of water in their house. And you have been with me full fifteen days” (TS 18). ‘No place any more’ these words by Rashida pronounce Pooro’s future. Abducted women were forsaken by families and there was no hope for a change. Pooro in a disheartened condition still thinks of meeting her parents. She even has the thoughts of what her wedding was to be like:

She would have bathed in oil and massaged with a stick of turmeric; her arms would have been loaded with red ivory bangles, and taseselled strings of cowrie-shells would have been tied to her wrists. She would have worn a dress of pure silk; she would have ridden to Ram Chand’s home in a palanquin; she would have been the world’s most beautiful bride. . . (TS 18).

All the dreams of the young girl’s wedding rituals had been shattered. When she hears Rashida’s words that his community had the upper hand in the village, hate welled up in Pooro’s heart. She feels that he had robbed her of her birthright; he had robbed her of her future. Pooro’s situation highlights the helplessness of a woman where nothing is in her control or in her favour. All dreams broken, the future appeared dark.

After some days Pooro escapes from Rashida’s confinement with great efforts and goes to her parents’ home in Chhattoani who refuse to accept her back in the family as she is considered a ‘defiled woman.’ Believing that ‘a lost daughter’ would be welcomed, she uses all her strength and knocks the door. The parents open the door, tears were streaming from her mother’s eyes; Pooro is taken in her arms and clasped to her bosom. But the mother and daughter are not even allowed to cry as the father says there would be neighbours and a crowd. Pooro hears her father say, “Daughter, this fate was ordained for you; we are helpless. The Shaikhs will descend on us and destroy everything we have”. Her mother, instead of solacing her in such a situation asks her, “Who will marry you now? You have lost your religion and your birthright. If we dare to help you, we will be
wiped out without a trace of blood left behind to tell of our fate” (TS 20). When Pooro hears this she is left with no alternative. Her situation was a miserable one. A daughter is not accepted back because of the fear of the society. In the name of fate a girl has to suffer. The family had grown selfish; they do not want to take the risk of saving their own blood. It shows that they had accepted Pooro was not there for them. It is really ironical that the mother who laments for her daughter on being married, the same mother does not take back Pooro when she comes back escaping from Rashida.

Not knowing what to do, Pooro begs her mother to destroy her with her own hands which shows shock, helplessness and utter failure. Her mother’s, “Daughter, it were better if you had died at birth!” (TS 21) said with a hardened heart brings out the attitude of discrimination towards a girl. It is better off for a girl to die at birth rather bring such fate for herself and family. Pooro remembers Rashida’s words: “You have no place in that home now.”( TS 10) She even thinks of Ram Chand who could have helped her. But finds that there was only one hope for her and that was escape in death. It is sheer injustice meted out by Pooro. She has to pay a heavy price for no fault of hers. The community’s fear makes her family forsake her. Here one sees how insignificant a daughter’s life is. A woman is of no value. She is left all alone to live or to die. Her fate is worse than an animal. Her family did not bother to think what becomes of her.

Pooro leaves her home and while going remembers that when she had come home, she had believed she was returning to life, she had come with full of hope. She feels now she had no hope, nor any fear. She felt, “What more could anyone take from her than life?” (TS 21). This thought dried up all her tears. When she finds Rashida in front of her, she feels that ‘even death had slammed the door in her face.’ She thought that a travail worse than death awaited her. Finally, Pooro goes back with Rashida in a totally broken and frustrated condition and tries to adjust herself with him.

Pooro has to marry Rashida as an inevitable alternative. She is given a new name, Hamida. He decides to live in a village name Sakkar, a few miles away from his own village Chhattoani. Change of place does not make any difference to Pooro. As a woman has no choice or say she followed him as the blind follows a guide. Her identity is because of her man. She is like a dumb animal, to do as told. Pooro’s plight shows how
women have to accept changes whether they like it or not. Marriage changes a woman’s identity and in Pooro’s case she had become part of the Muslim community. She ‘felt like a stray calf in a strange herd of cows’ (TS 22), when she met Rashida’s cousin Rahima’s family. Pooro not only suffers abduction but also dislocation and conversion too.

Marriage always brings change in a woman’s life. A woman’s life has to adapt to the changes or else life becomes miserable and not worth living. More changes await Pooro. One is that Rashida got Pooro to tattoo the new name on her arm. A new name, a new identity, “Hamida” was inscribed on her skin and also called by all. Here Pooro, the Hindu girl, loses her identity, as a Muslim convert she is Hamida. It is a forced conversion. What one perceives is that nobody asks if a woman likes what she gets or what she wants. She is taken for granted and has to accept and adjust to all the changes that come in her life. A woman’s sensibility is expected to accommodate a drastic change but with Pooro it was not possible easily. Though she is Hamida by day, she is Pooro in her dreams. “In her dreams when she met her old friends and played with them in her parents’ home, everyone still called her Pooro. It is a double life for her; Hamida by day, and Pooro by night” (TS 11). This dual identity is a burden as it leaves a woman with no single identity, no real self. It gives no peace or satisfaction.

Amrita presents the agony of dislocation and conversion; and proves that it is far greater and intense for women than it is for men. Pooro is dislocated from home, family, society, culture and even religion which resulted into the loss of identity and slavish survivalism. She remained ‘dangling’ between her past and present, the old identity and the newly assumed identity and had to live the double life of a Hindu daughter and Muslim wife. Pooro exemplifies this trapped dilemma of women by living with Rashid. Amrita brings out the truth of a woman’s life. It is not easy for a woman to lose one’s identity got by birth. She highlights, she was neither Hamida nor Pooro: “In reality, she was just a skeleton, without a shape or a name” (TS 11). A woman is reduced to such a life that has no proper life or identity. Pooro not only suffers the predicament of abduction and dislocation, but also religious conversion and a new identity that was forced on her, and from which she had no escape. She lives a compromised life with a new identity as a Muslim, as Hamida. This pitiable condition of Pooro is an example of women’s tremendous potential for tolerance, suffering and sacrifices.
Being married to Rashida and living in a new village, Pooro as Hamida was bound to suffer the loneliness and depression. When Rashida suggests that she should go out and relax with others, she expresses her feelings with great bitterness, “Where can I go to? Whom am I related to except you?” (*TS* 23). An abducted woman is to suffer loneliness and unhappiness because there is no loved ones, no parents or any sisters or brother to share or care. Again and again Pooro experiences the loneliness of being away from her family. She remembers the time spent and words exchanged with her mother. She remembers her new born brother who would have been celebrating his first *Baisakh* (spring festival) and she would not be there to give the baby boy his first sip of water. She remembers her mother and hoped that her mother too may be remembering her first born, Pooro. In between times she finds herself remembering Ram Chand and wonders why he had not come for her. Pooro portrays the sensibility of a daughter, a sister and a young girl’s youthful romantic heart’s yearnings.

It is quiet natural in the said circumstances that Pooro is not happy with Rashida; and every now and then she remembers Ram Chand. She still hopes that one day he would come to take her home. She is split into two: physically she belongs to Rashida and in the heart of her hearts she is beholden to Ram Chand. She experiences daily the pain and agony of being abducted, of living a forced life and of being helpless. She feels herself ‘a lifeless and sapless skeleton.’ Though Rashida treats her very well and loves her, Pooro could not submit herself completely to him. Her unacceptance of her situation presents her troubled, suffering sensibility. Within no time another happening adds to her misery. When Pooro gets pregnant she is not happy carrying Rashida’s child inside her. She is nauseated at the very thought of becoming the mother of an unwanted child. “She felt as if her body was a pea-pod inside which she carried a slimy, white caterpillar.” She feels her body was unclean and hoped “if only she could take the worm out of her womb and fling it away! Pick it out with her nails as if it were a thorn! Pluck it off as if it were a maggot or a leech. . . !” (*TS* 5) Pooro’s feelings delineate that she hates the situation she was in, feeling unclean with the child and feeling like carrying a worm inside her. It shows how much she detests the pregnancy. Pooro experiences grief, helplessness, and resignation. When Rashida comes to see her after she delivers, her eyes seemed to say, “What more do you want of me? I have given you my person and I have given you a son.
I have nothing more to give” (TS 28). The feeling of emptiness, of giving everything shows no genuine happiness but the complete acceptance of fate’s doing by Pooro.

Pooro experiences a very strange motherly sensibility, on becoming a mother does not like her son. When she felt the son’s soft face nuzzling into her bare arm, she felt a cold, chammy feeling run through her body – as if a slimy slug was clambering over her. She felt so because she was in a way forced to carry the child. The seed had been forcibly planted in her womb and so she felt no joy or happiness, but a binding burden. “She clenched her teeth; she wanted to shake the slug off her arm, flick it away from her side, draw it out . . .” (TS 28). But a drastic change occurs in Pooro’s sensibility when she has the son in her arms which shows that motherhood changes a woman. Pooro experiences motherly feelings when she nurses her son. “A strange, strong emotion welled up in Hamida’s bosom. She wanted to put the child against her cheek and cry to her heart’s content. The boy was a toy made of her own bold, a statue carved out of her own flesh. In all the teeming world; this boy was all that really belonged to her” (TS 29). She did not care if she never again saw her parents or brothers and sisters, but she felt she would gaze at the face of her son. These maternal feelings of Pooro show how vital it is for a woman to fulfill herself through her children. The child, who she did not like at birth, was now such an important part of her life that she would not part from him at any cost.

At this particular juncture, as a mother and as a woman, Pooro experiences the conflict of hate and love. When the boy sucked at her breasts:

Hamida felt as if the boy was drawing the milk from her veins and was sucking it out with force, just as his father had used force to take her. All said and done, he was his father’s son, his father’s flesh and blood and shaped like him. He had been planted inside her by force, nourished inside her womb against her will – and was now sucking the milk from her breasts, whether she liked it or not (TS 29).

In Pooro’s case, one perceives what a woman experiences when she is forced to do things that she does not want or like, especially when there is no love. Pooro has this thought in her head with insidious insistence that, “the boy . . . this boy’s father . . . all mankind . . . all men . . . men who gnaw a woman’s body like a dog gnawing a bone and
like a dog eat it up” (TS 29). Pooro experiences detest at the man’s world, at men in
general. A woman is forced to submit willingly or unwillingly and she has to accept the
consequences also. This is the patriarchal world’s rule for a woman, an inferior being,
the other. Amrita through Pooro brings out the predicament of numerous women who are
forced to submit and accept the man’s world.

Amrita gives a release to Pooro from all grief and agony when she is able to
recognize the feelings of love. Out of the conflict of hate and love, love and hate, were
born Pooro’s son and Pooro’s love for her husband, Rashida. It is observed ‘Love changes
the world’ and so Pooro on becoming a mother truly loves her son. As is understood a
child establishes a bond between the parents, so here too it happens in Pooro and
Rashida’s case. Pooro gradually accepts and begins to love Rashida. Seeing other
people’s trouble Pooro felt that her own home was like a haven of refuge. “Hamida
wanted to forget that Rashida had abducted and wronged her. She fervently longed to
make love to him. After all, he was her husband and the father of her son. This alone was
true; this alone mattered. The rest was mere prattle and a lie” (TS 39). Here one finds a
traditional Indian woman who finds her world with her husband and child; an Indian
woman who is taught to forgive and forget all injustice and look at the brighter side of
life. What is lost is gone and what is with you at present is all that matters, and this is
what Pooro follows. What Pooro feels is because of love that had changed her world.
Though it appears that Pooro compromised with her fate, it can be seen from the generous
point of view of a woman that she found happiness in what she had on her plate of life.
She accepts what life had offered her. She settles down in her life with Rashida and her
son Javed. Rashida loved his son and her home was full of child’s laughter.

Compared to other women’s condition, Pooro was lucky enough to be loved and
wedded by Rashida. Her fate was not as bad as the exploited women. Pooro becomes
annoyed whenever she hears or comes across the abducted girls living in wretched
conditions due to her personal tragedy and sensitivity. Girls like Kammo, Taro and the
mad woman suffer miserably. Pooro tries to help grief-stricken girls of the village and
gets some sense of satisfaction and solace through it. Her decision to bring home the
newly-born child of the dead mad-woman suggests her genuine sympathy for the child.
As Pooro is in a better condition she is able to extend her motherly concern to Kammo, a twelve year-old girl, who had a step-mother and who lived in the same lane as Pooro’s. Pooro was hardly twenty, but she is sensitive and so humane that she tries to relieve Kammo of her grief. They become close and share a bond. Later Pooro gets drawn towards a young, sallow-faced girl Taro, who lived next door to Rahima’s. She wants to help Taro, a victim of patriarchal domination. Amrita portrays that the tradition-bound society offers neither freedom nor any dignity of survival for a woman. When Pooro tells Taro not to let the disease destroy her, Taro says her death would only “lighten the weight of the world” (TS 36). When Pooro tells her to think of her mother’s feelings, Taro says, “She will shed a few tears and they forget about me” (TS 36). Taro’s saying, “When parents give away a daughter in marriage, they put a noose round her neck and hand the other end of the rope to the man of their choice.” And “a woman has to get used to every kind of water,” “when a girl is given away in marriage, God deprives her of her tongue, so that she may not complain” (TS 36) – all portrays the predicament of a woman in Indian traditional society where the double-standards of patriarchy dominate.

Taro was in a miserable condition at her husband’s. She felt like a whore or a common prostitute. Her husband had no use for her as he had another woman as a mistress of both his heart and his house. Knowing about this very well the husband’s parents had married Taro to him. Taro’s mother says, “Once we give away a daughter our lips are sealed. It’s up to her husband to treat her as he likes. It is a man’s privilege” (TS 37). What about a woman’s privilege? This notion brings out the patriarchy’s treatment towards women. Gender discrimination that is rampant in the male-dominant world only brings injustice to women. Fetters are only for women, man “can do as he likes; there is no God to stop him. God’s fetters were meant only for my feet,” (TS 38) says Taro. Pooro hearing Taro, finds her to be bold who could speak such views as she had often wanted to say such things but had never dared. But seeing Taro’s mental condition she felt that compared to others’ troubles she was in a haven of refuge. Amrita makes the prototype of the predicament and suffering of Pooro by presenting ‘many skeletons like her.’ The connotative force of the title The Skeleton conveys the ghost-like appearance of what remains after an individual has lost vitality, hope and dreams – a skeleton of bones without flesh and blood.
Pooro is most troubled and feels miserable to see the mad-woman in a half-naked exploited condition. She voices her pitiable condition thus: “She is neither young nor attractive; she is just a lump of flesh without a mind to go with it . . . a living skeleton . . . a lunatic skeleton . . . a skeleton picked to its bones by kites and vultures” (TS 42). The mad-woman was pregnant and Pooro is shocked to think what savage beast of a man had put her into such a condition. Pooro’s act of mercy is to be lauded when she takes care of the child borne by the mad-woman. On seeing the baby boy, Pooro thinks of all the pain, the loneliness in labour endured by the mad-woman. The mad-woman had perished in the final process of giving birth. It was a very heart wrenching incident that evokes any body’s sympathy. Pooro is able to agonise and empathise with the mad-woman over the brutality of life suffered by her. Amrita highlights the exploitation and atrocities suffered by women through the characters like Kammo, Taro and the mad-woman.

The three women, Taro, Kammo and mad-woman’s ugly exploitation makes Pooro think of herself to be in a comparatively better position. Now she “wanted to forget that Rashida had abducted her. She longed fervently to make love to him. After all he was her husband and the father of her son. This alone was true, this alone matters” (TS 41). There is a change in her psyche: “She glanced towards Rashida, who was sitting beside the hearth in the courtyard. He had not left her, not thrown her out. She was safely installed in his house. He was a kind husband. He had given her the handsome curly headed Javed” (TS 44). Pooro experiences the feminine longing for her man which is quiet natural for a woman who had begun to love her husband.

Pooro’s motherly sensibility leads her to take care of the mad-woman’s child. She feels God had increased her family by sending another son. She takes such infinite care of the babe that she feeds her own breast milk as if he is her own son. This motherly care and love of Pooro is an act of great generosity that puts a woman apart from men. She loves the baby so much that her would heart would sink whenever she finds Rashida telling her that the boy may be taken by the Hindus in the village. She had fed her milk for six months and the skin and bones boy had nurtured to look fat and chubby and she had grown a motherly attachment for the child which was quiet normal in the said situation. Pooro is not ready to part away with the child as “the foundling had become a part of her own flesh and blood” (TS 50). She thinks of Kammo and the foundling. She
feels, “Why did she have to pick up flowers which others had plucked and cast aside? What inner compulsion made her water withered buds and try to revive them? And yet they remained estranged from her and left in her solitude!” (TS 53) Pooro beats her head against the wall and sheds bitter tears. Her breasts were bursting with milk and the boy had been weaned away from her. Pooro experiences the pain and agony a mother has on being separated from her own child.

Though life had changed for Pooro her feelings for Ram Chand remained unchanged. After many years, when she contrives to get back to her village, though she is no longer Pooro but Hamida, she seeks Ram Chand out. The unfulfilled feelings of the young girl Pooro are still present inside Hamida. When she hears the name of Rattoval, her mind is full of unfulfilled desires. She has a strong desire to see Ram Chand just once, to know what he looked like. Given the context of the culture, one can understand her sentimental hankering after Ram Chand. Here one notices that how much ever a woman changes and goes forward with her life, the past is present in one or the other way and especially unfulfilled desires do not die or wither with time. Pooro is Hamida, a wife, a mother but the girl Pooro is the inside reality. Though Pooro’s mind is full of argument with herself of why she yearns to see Ram Chand, she does not find an answer. While going to Rattoval for Rahima’s mother’s eyes-treatment, Pooro’s unfulfilled desire comes in the form of a dream where she dreams of herself being a bride and going in a palanquin on the unending road to Rattoval. This is a very private, untouched part of her being; a young girl’s being that was never fulfilled.

As days went by Pooro has a strong desire to see Ram Chand and his house and she grew more restless. Many times she stifled her sobs. She also wondered if she would be able to recognize Ram Chand. Later in the fateful meeting in Ram Chand’s field at night, though she cannot bring herself to speak to him, to assert the bond she feels, she still bathes her forehead with the dust of his feet, reverently smeared it on her eyelids. This, perhaps, is a weakness, but Pooro’s strengths are of another kind. Pooro tells Ram Chand when he asks if she was Pooro, “Pooro has been dead a long time” (TS 59). This response from Pooro shows her hurt sensibility and also her strong mind.
A woman may live miles and miles away from her parental home but she will never be able to forget or cut herself off from her roots or her family. Pooro was rejected and abandoned by her parents but still she asked her brother’s wife Lajo after rescuing her: “People raise monuments to the dead; they have funeral feasts and make gifts in charity. Does anyone as much as mention my name in my home?” (TS 85) It is very heart rending to know the troubled sensibility of a daughter. Though Pooro was Hamida, she had never stopped being Pooro. A woman will never be able to forget her parents and siblings. Pooro wants to know if her being gone had really mattered to her parents or not. She deeply wished to see her mother at least once before she died.

Pooro experiences rage, anger and shame at the injustice, violence, and atrocities suffered by women during the partition days. Seeing women victimized, Pooro thought that “it was a sin to be alive in a world so full of evil. It was a crime to be born a girl” (TS 65). Always in human history it has been seen that women and children are the most victimized and they suffer a hell’s experience when fights or violence breaks out. Pooro’s strength is evident when she reaches out to help all the other persecuted young girls of the village. At the time of partition, with great courage and determination, she embarks on the dangerous mission to restore the abducted Lajo to her family. What she could not do for herself, Pooro accomplishes it for Lajo.

Amrita, through Pooro, shows the generosity, the goodness and humanitarian concern of a woman who helps other women forgetting her own abduction, dislocation and conversion. Pooro is able to locate Lajo at Rattoval held forcibly by a Muslim man at her own house. She takes the risk of her life in rescuing Lajo. With Rashida’s help she brings Lajo to her house and keeps her for six months and later takes Lajo to Lahore and sends her with Ram Chand and her own brother to India. Pooro’s sensibility suffers a sense of resentment for a short while when Rashida tells her that after the partition the government had proclaimed to hand over the abducted persons, so that they could be exchanged for others similarly abducted by Indians. She becomes nostalgic. Amrita makes a comment on her psychology: “When it happened to her, religion had become an insurmountable obstacle; neither her parents nor her in-laws-to-be had been willing to accept her. And now, the same religion had become so accommodating” (TS 74). But now parents they had been exhorted to receive back their abducted daughters. Society’s double
standards have always led the innocent to suffer. When the same fate of abduction was experienced by Lajo, it is Pooro who fills courage in her and builds the hope that she will be taken back by her family. Forgetting her fate and putting her personal feelings aside, Pooro shows a brave front and a generous attitude in freeing Lajo. She is very determined to see to it that Lajo returns to her family and is accepted back. She assures Lajo, “I will never allow such wickedness while I live. You will certainly go back to your home. You were not to blame for what happened to you” (TS 86). Amrita has not only created Pooro as a strong woman but also as courageous and determined, who sees to it that Lajo does not suffer her fate. Even in diverse circumstances Pooro did not let helplessness affect her thoughts and solid stance.

It is true that vastly different social circumstances make it possible for Lajo to be accepted back by her family. When Lajo fears rejection, Pooro consoles her: “My parents did not have the courage to face the taunts of their neighbours and relations; they had to stifle their instincts . . . . Today no one can taunt another. People are taking back their daughters and sisters.” (TS 68-69). For Lajo she will hope and plead. “I beseech you, never, never let the slightest slur be cast on Lajo.” (TS 72). Pooro seems to have accepted her parents’ helplessness as they were not in a condition to take her. Her thoughts and behaviour is certainly laudable as she struggled to see that no other woman suffered the pain of abduction and dislocation.

Pooro is portrayed as a strong-willed woman who had never given up hope in the case of Lajo. At times Lajo and Rashida would lose heart and despair, but Pooro always knew that Ram Chand or her brother would come for Lajo. Pooro goes with Rashida and Lajo to Lahore to send Lajo. She gets to meet her brother for the first time as well as the last time. Pooro on meeting them requests them to “never let the slightest slur be cast on Lajo” (TS 90). This shows how much Pooro was concerned for the future of Lajo.

Amrita Pritam describes Pooro’s final reconciliation and her choice of the present reality – her husband and son with great pathos and heights of idealism. When she meets her brother and Ram Chand, she undergoes a deep emotional crisis – the dilemma of choice between her parental home, her ‘lost paradise’ and ‘the husband.’ Pooro stood the test of time and fate and refuses to go. Her brother tells Pooro, “This is your only
chance . . .” (TS 91). It was her only chance to leave behind everything and go back to her home, India. For a brief moment, she experiences a typical split condition full of tests and temptation. But at last she overcomes her temptation and resolutely turned to Rashida and clasped her son to her bosom. She thus denies the golden opportunity of going back to India. When her brother Trilok urges her to come back with them, she consoles him in the stoical manner thus, “When Lajo is welcomed back in her home, then you can take it that Pooro has also returned to you . . .” (TS 92). Through Lajo she conquers her own fate. Critics consider her refusal to go back as a weakness, a wasting of opportunity. But to reject the present reality would be a greater weakness, a mere sentimental escape and not an assertion of her freedom. She told to herself, “whether one is a Hindu girl or Mohammedan one, whosoever reaches her destination, she carries along my soul also” (TS 92).

Pooro does not choose to go but stays back with her husband and son. One can, however, wonder at the change in Pooro’s attitude. What makes her reconcile with changed situation? To get an answer to this question one can study the character of Rashida and probe into the psyche of Pooro as well. Pooro carefully goes on to know the character of Rashida. The humane treatment that she receives from him brings in a sea-change in her attitude towards him. Once she says to Lajo, “Rashida certainly committed a crime in abducting me. But since then, he has been good to me. If he had not helped me, how could I have found you and brought you away?” (TS 47) Amrita explains, “In the end, she loves him because of his personal qualities” (Malik 14). Love is said to conquer the world, so here Pooro is bound by love for her husband and son. This reconciliation seems a compromise on Pooro’s part, but it adds different dimensions to her character and image. Her sensibility gives the message of living life in the face of adversities where love triumphs over hatred.

**Mamta in Doctor Dev**

Mamta in *Doctor Dev* is an ill-fated lover and a victim of cruel social laws. At first glance Mamta seems to belong to a different world than Pooro. Intelligent, beautiful looking and well-educated, she is hardly the ordinary, domesticated and subjugated
woman. However, like Pooro, she too has been coerced into her marriage with Jagdish and denied the chance to marry the man she loved and had a child by. But unlike Pooro, even the birth of a child from her husband Jagdish fails to reconcile her to the situation and finally she confesses the cause of her alienation to Jagdish. She states clearly and categorically that she considers her marriage to him meaningless, for emotionally she can only acknowledge Dr. Dev as her husband.

Mamta talks to Jagdish, and her face is taunt and grief-stricken. She is in a deep reverie, lost in melancholy thoughts. She looks like a marble statue, silent and unknowing. Her husband Jagdish talks to her and asks if she is all right. He could see a note of cold, biting sarcasm in her voice. Jagdish is a simple, straightforward man. Mamta tells Jagdish: “But life is never simple and straightforward. It’s a great unsolved riddle. Can we quarrel with fate for making it so?” (DD 6) Mamta’s thoughts reveal her suffering in life. She appears helpless as she could not have fought with her fate.

A sense of doom, of destiny being the prime moulder of life in the old-fashioned Homeric mode, often engulfs as one identifies with Amrita’s characters. It assumes the form of an implacable, cruel god or society, even as the moods of the protagonist change. Talking to Mamta, Jagdish questions wonderingly: “let me ask your hands how they will draw the lines of my fate straight or curved,” (DD 6) and she denies all personal responsibility, relinquishing the burden of her actions on an unseen power. Mamta seems not at all interested in continuing with Jagdish. “No Jagdish, these hands cannot make or unmake your fortune” (DD 6). Mamta sounds confused and contradictory to the person she really was. She had always been a positive-minded person. She had always believed that “man can fashion his life the way he wants, that he can change the wrong and unjust decisions of society” (DD 6). But she appears here as a person who would accept everything blindly, without question as God’s will. Mamta behaves in a confused manner as she says to Jagdish “You’re puzzled because you don’t know what I’m passing through. But now I cannot bear it any longer. I must tell the truth” (DD 6).

Mamta’s condition shows that she had hidden an important truth from Jagdish and now she could no longer keep it to her. She is passing through a rough patch. Her introspection makes her to reveal the truth to Jagdish in a very blunt manner. Mamta is
very honest and candid when she has the world to lose - her secure home, her husband’s respect and love and her child - blurts out: “Jagdish, I was not a virgin when I married you. I was not only a wife but also a mother, the mother of somebody else’s child” (DD 7). Mamta shares more truth with Jagdish. She tells that she had loved a man named Devraj. She had accepted him as husband without her parents’ approval and knowledge. Devraj was studying medicine then. When her rich parents got to know that Mamta was pregnant they had ignored her wishes, rejected her entreaties, and locked her up within the four walls of the house. She was never allowed to see Devraj again. After she bore the child, it was immediately taken away from her. She had not known what had happened with the child. Amrita presents how a woman’s life is not her own but controlled by others. From parents’ point of view, unmarried daughter bearing a child is a social stigma and it is an issue where there is no societal acceptance, respect or dignity.

Mamta philosophizes to Jagdish: “We’re all pawns in the hands of God. We take ‘actions’ but we’ve no control over them. Therefore, we’re not responsible for our actions, whether they’re right or wrong” (DD 7). Her helplessness as being ‘pawn’ in the hands of God brings to fore the innumerable times women feel as victims in the patriarchal society. Mamta’s sensibility as a woman feels “We’re mere tools, the action lies with the society, the cruel society which has crushed my love under its feet” (DD 8). Fate had proved stronger than her desires, “for when the whirlwind strikes nothing can escape. It sucks in and destroys everything that comes in its way” (DD 8). She could not fight against the society to establish her innocent love and so she had to suffer physically, emotionally and even psychologically.

Mamta could have told of her past life to Jagdish before marriage or after marriage. She had not told him the truth because she did not feel the need then. She was so hurt by what had happened to her that she says her heart had long since “become insensitive to these things. Now I find no difference between the truth and the untruth” (DD 7). She feels the need now to tell her husband of her past because, “When the truth and falsehood are indistinguishable it doesn’t matter what I want. But let me tell you one thing: I’ve never lied to you. I’ve never told you that I love you” (DD 7). Her honesty though blunt and painful is a sincere announcement of truth.
Mamta candidly speaks the truth of her past life to her husband which results in “ruining her home.” In her shaken condition, she does not even bother losing her newly born daughter. She yearns for the past, for the boy she bore for Devraj. She says, she does love her daughter but, “my son was a living throbbing symbol of my love. She is a mere lump of flesh, the result of forced lust, which I had to carry in my womb for months, reluctantly, against my will” (DD 8). Mamta is very emotional here. Traditionally, motherhood is regarded as the biological destiny and a natural instinct of a woman. A child is considered to be woman’s happiness and her justification through which she is supposed to find self-fulfillment and self-realization. It is to be noted that Mamta and Pooro detest motherhood in the beginning because it was forced on them. It is evident through Mamta’s words that society thrusts many unwanted things on a woman and it has thrust an unwanted child and husband upon Mamta. She is married to Jagdish not because of love, but because of parental pressure and societal code of conduct. Her marriage brings her no love or happiness. In turn she finds herself doing things reluctantly, things that she detests. Even her new born daughter does not bring the maternal feelings in her. This was because she still longed for her first born, the son born to her and Devraj.

Mamta had suffered so much that she holds the society responsible for her condition. She told, “Jagdish, you’re just a tool. The action lies with the society, the cruel society which has crushed my love under its feet” (DD 8). She feels that the society not only crushed her feelings but also thrust another husband and another child on her. Mamta answers Jagdish that she was not able to free herself from the clutches of society because they are very powerful. This is always true as the power of the society; tradition-bound, patriarchal society is inflexible and mighty. Women have been controlled and bound by the prejudiced social norms. Substantial things like status, prestige, honour, respect, dignity, class, caste, colour and what not have been the barriers to chain the freedom and existence of a woman. A man is free to pursue his love, his needs and wants but it is always a woman who has to submit to all the moral codes of conduct.

Mamta’s love for Devraj was very pure and divine. She said to Jagdish that she had only loved Devraj and nobody else and “He is present in my blood, in my veins, in my whole being,” “True love never dies” (DD 9). Though Mamta still loves Devraj, when she was asked to search for him and seek him out, she refuses: “I was told he didn’t need
me any longer. I never wanted to be a burden. We were walking side by side, as partners. Once our steps faltered, we parted, got lost” (DD 9). Amrita has created in Mamta a character who respects self and does not want anything at the cost of self-dignity, not even love. Amrita’s idea of a man-woman relationship is to be partners, where love binds them. Mamta was very much offended when she had known that Devraj did not need her anymore. A self-respecting woman would not want to force herself on others.

Mamta portrays the character of a woman who is not ready to live a lie. Even if her life gets into trouble, even if she loses her home, she is ready for all that, but not ready to live a false life, with true feelings hidden. Mamta married Jagdish like a conventional Indian woman who has to bow down before all kinds of power but Amrita has made her courageous to speak the truth. She may have lacked courage earlier, but she does not lack it now. And speaking the truth cost her heavy price. Since she can no longer accept the empty marriage based on an untruth. The solution for her is to quit Jagdish’s home.

Mamta finds to face another kind of test that fate brought in her life. When Jagdish learns of all the truth he very generously tells Mamta that he would not stand in her way and if she decides to leave him she has to pay a price, that is, “You’ll have to keep away from your daughter” (DD 9). Jagdish tells Mamta that he would give her whatever she needed but their daughter, Ranju must never know that Mamta is her mother. This was something in a way expected, but a woman has to suffer and bear the agony of separation. It is also strange to see that Mamta pines for the lost son and not the new born daughter. It can be justified that the son was born out of love, as a result of love and the daughter was born out of a social obligation.

There is an inexplicableness of behaviour in Mamta after the birth of her daughter. She is very much still involved in her past life that it is noticed in her behaviour with the nurse. The nurse to cheer up Mamta had said that she had borne a beautiful girl, just like a thread of silk. But Mamta in a low voice had responded saying that, “It’s a handsome boy.” She was in the illusion of seeing her daughter as the son she had borne first. This was because of her unfulfilled longings as the mother of Devraj’s son. Though Mamta was in her illusionary world, Amrita brings out her motherly sensibility. Her maternal feelings for the safety of her child are to the forefront. When the nurse tried to pick up the
sleeping child from Mamta’s side, Mamta gave a loud scream and fainted. Later she told Jagdish that the nurse was trying to snatch her son away. It is the deep-seated fear of having lost her lover, as the past recreates itself before Mamta’s eyes, recalling the removal of her illegitimate, first child. Here one perceives, a sophisticated, a highly intelligent and talented woman like Mamta is very upset with her life-situation. Considering the daughter to be her son is just a way of fulfilling the loss that Mamta had experienced in the past. It is a way of satisfying her self.

Mamta as a self-respecting person does not expect anything in return from Jagdish. She says, “Jagdish, I don’t want to take anything. I’ve not given you anything as a wife. Even if I had, I won’t accept charity in the name of marriage” (DD 10). Mamta knew very well that she had not been able to do justice to her role as a wife. She is very honest in accepting her weakness. Amrita wanted her women to be honest, to stand and face the adversities that life brings. Mamta may have lacked courage earlier, but she does not lack it now. Since she can no longer accept the empty marriage based on an untruth, she decides to walk out. She seeks no help from her husband or from anyone else and even agrees to her husband’s condition of not seeing her daughter for life. Mamta shows the dignity of self as she goes to live an independent life.

Mamta eased out of Jagdish’s life voluntarily, without being asked. After leaving Jagdish, Mamta took up a teaching job in a government school and lived in the teachers’ quarters. Except for taking her classes and studying in the library, she had no other interests. She rarely stepped out of the school campus, almost becoming a recluse. Living alone, Mamta experiences a situation of guilt. In a dream she felt she was moving in a boat and could see Devraj on the shore. He appeared mellowed by suffering and separation. Mamta with tears expressed to Devraj that she could not come to him as she had no strength and said farewell to him. She finds that “the waves are strong and cruel, the shore far away” (DD 15), which symbolizes the barriers that she was not be able to cross to reach the destination she liked, that is Devraj. In the same dream after some time she saw even Jagdish and said to him that, “What can I give you? I’ve nothing. My hands are empty. I’ve lost everything I had. Please forgive me” (DD 15). She felt ashamed and could not face him. In her eyes she, Devraj and Jagdish have been victims of society. Mamta knew that she had wronged Jagdish, but she was unable to help him. She is a
woman for who her first love could not be forgotten and also who could not make adjustments with fate and live the life that it had brought her. She represents a woman who believes that if she cannot have love in her life, then she does not want anything else also. Mamta portrays a very unconventional attitude here. Her decision to lead a life of compromise is the only revolt Amrita allows her woman, albeit within the context of Indian culture such a revolt was extraordinary.

Mamta is also haunted by maternal feelings, when in her dream she finds a small boy and a small girl, weeping on the shore. She was overwhelmed by motherly emotions, and she even stretched her hands to embrace and kiss the girl, but the shore was distant and the child far away. Mamta felt helpless and desperate. She even finds her parents, brother and sister, all kneeling on the ground and begging her forgiveness. Mamta was very hurt by their behaviour in the past, because they are responsible for her present tragedy and pain. She said “Only God can forgive you” (DD 16). She was not able to forgive them.

Years passed and Mamta’s lonely life was like ‘miles and miles of wilderness.’ The lonely life she lived has no sign of life. Everything is barren and frozen. The silence in her life was frightening. She neither has Devraj nor Jagdish or her children. This is the fate that Amrita writes for her woman who speaks the truth. Mamta does not stay with Jagdish as she would not make him happy neither herself be happy. The sacrifice that a woman makes for the well being of others leads her to suffer loneliness.

Mamta is seen as a very considerate and understanding woman. She does not totally renounce her obligation to Jagdish. Jagdish had been paralysed in a horse accident and shares with his daughter Ranju that he would not be able to die without meeting Mamta. Though he had married another woman, Jagdish says, “A man who has loved a woman like Mamta can never feel happy with any other woman” (DD 53). Mamta comes back to Jagdish when he wrote her a letter after eighteen years. He is embarrassed that he had deserted her when he was young and strong and now that he was paralysed he needed her. Mamta consoles Jagdish rather than complain, “How could I stay away when you needed me? … But you never told me before that you needed me” (DD 54). Renu Juneja comments:
This is psychologically inconsistent. If she had renounced her relationship to Jagdish as emotionally non-existent, why should she feel this obligation to return? Is it because, despite herself, she sees herself as Jagdish’s wife? In acknowledging his right over her, she is responding to him as a wife and not just as a human being in need. Pooro’s acceptance of Hamida was far more believable than this final, sentimental acquiescence of Mamta (21).

To differ in opinion, Amrita Pritam portrays Mamta as a woman whose honour and self-respect is not that fragile that it would stand in her way to help Jagdish. Humanitarian concern leads Mamta to respond to Jagdish. She did not claim the status of his wife, but she was more like an understanding friend. Moreover Jagdish’s is worried for the future of his daughter because of his failing health. When Jagdish said that his daughter Ranju needed Mamta, she very generously agrees that she would gladly do anything for Ranju and Jagdish. Coming back to the husband and being of help to him shows the concern and human understanding of Mamta. There is no jealousy, anger or hate. The generosity of a woman is portrayed in the character of Mamta. Through Mamta, Amrita shows that human relationships matter most in times when people need each other.

Mamta shifts to Delhi from Lahore after Jagdish had died in tragic circumstances during partition time. She lives with Ranju who went to college in Delhi. Mamta through a friend of Ranju gets to meet Manu, the son she had borne to Devraj. Manu traces out that Mamta is his real mother and when she becomes sick and bedridden he takes Mamta to Bihar to meet Devraj and to get treatment for her. On the train journey to Bihar Mamta said, “I wish life could continue like this and there’s no break in our journey until my life’s caravan reaches its destination” (DD 89). Though Manu tries to install hope in her by saying happiness was waiting to greet her, Mamta says, “There’re no more happy moments in my life” (DD 89). Mamta was weak and tired of life’s ups and downs. Her life mostly was lived in loneliness and suffering, far away from loved ones.

Mamta gets to see Devraj after twenty-five years and finds him without much change. She is guilty and tells Devraj, “When I had everything, I didn’t give you anything. Now my hands are empty” (DD 93). Devraj consoles her by saying that her
love has always been his and their love does not need any relationship. She hopes to live, serving Devraj in his practice but she dies in the arms of Devraj with a deadly disease that had no cure. Amrita gives Mamta death as a release but before dying she is a fulfilled and satisfied woman.

In Doctor Dev, Rajkumari is another character who is a conventional one. Rajkumari is Dr. Ravi Shankar’s daughter. She is very pretty and has a refined and sophisticated taste. Her father’s money gave her a chance to pursue her artistic and intellectual ambitions. Dr. Shankar had brought Dr. Devraj to Delhi from Lahore. He liked to spend time with Devraj at his home in the evenings. Rajkumari had a crush on Dev and her father knew her feelings. She loves Devraj and he knows it but he is unable to tell her that he couldn’t love her, and that he loved someone else.

Dr. Shankar suggests Devraj to marry Rajkumari, but Kumari on knowing about it tells Devraj that as he loved somebody else, she did not expect marriage with him ever. Devraj tells Kumari that his and Mamta’s union ad been a union of souls, not of bodies. They had pledged to live together for the rest of their lives. But society had rejected their relationship. Kumari assured Devraj that “Marriage alone is not true partnership” and, “True love is found in the happiness of the beloved. To snatch something or take someone’s place is not true love. You can’t keep a bird happy in a cage” (DD 40). Devraj sees the new Kumari here. She considers herself as Devraj’s disciple. He has become the Guru, an idol for her. Devraj has become the Krishna for Kumari. She is shown in a new picture. Even Dev is surprised to see and hear the new Kumari. She says the old Kumari was a fool, a coward, who was afraid to lose. The new Kumari had learnt that the path of true love is never difficult. “Jealousies, fears and grieves have no place in true love. They’re mere expressions of lust and passion” (DD 40). The changed sensibility of Kumari shows a woman’s capacity of transcending into a new being.

Kumari’s love does not need the sanction of marriage. Though Devraj tells her he was willing to marry her for her father’s sake, she said the ties of marriage are no longer necessary as she had found “something higher, something better than marriage”(DD 42) and that she is satisfied and happy. Devraj and Rajkumari’s relationship had reached the stage of sublime understanding where there was no hesitation or shyness. She agrees to
marry Somnath at Devraj’s persuasion. She resolves her emotional bind by doing something that seems to come easy to Indian women. She elevates Devraj to a God, spiritualizes and abstracts her love for him, and then gives all her conjugal love and loyalty to her husband. Here one finds a very conventional attitude of a woman. For the sake of her father’s happiness and also to make Devraj happy, Kumari chooses to marry Somnath. Amrita portrays Kumari as a conventional Indian woman who sacrifices her feelings and desires to makes others happy at the cost of her own happiness.

Amrita presents both Mamta and Kumari as conventional Indian women who become victims of societal codes. Patriarchy does not allow a woman to live life in the way she wants or desires. They sacrificed their love and happiness for the sake of others and show the selfless service that women are lauded for. Mamta left Jagdish as she could not do justice to him because she loved only Devraj. Though she leaves Jagdish she does not search for Devraj but leads a lonely life that did not have any happiness. In a way Mamta compromised with life and suffered. Kumari too compromised with life but gave new meaning to life and found joy in things that life offered her. Both Mamta and Kumari are presented as sentimental, and for such sentimentality, such a predilection towards martyrdom, is a very real part of the Indian character. Carlo Cappola’s objection to Pooro might well have been made about Mamta and Kumari: “Why isn’t she bad? . . . Is this how all Indian women are? All good and long suffering?” Amrita’s defense is pertinent: “Yes, Indian women are that way. They’d never do anything bad to their husband’s particularly ones who’ve been forced upon them” (Indian Literary Review 4).

**Kaili in Trump Card**

Kaili and her friend Mitro are two characters, young beautiful village girls in Punjab who have dreams of love, marriage and lively life. In Indian traditional society girls are never asked who they would like to marry. Parents decide the future of girls and they are to abide by the parents’ wishes. Kaili and Mitro trudge the traditional path in the novel *Trump Card*. Kaili is married to Lakhe Shah, a grocer. Mitro, instead of marring her lover Bakshe, the carpenter, marries a shopkeeper. The result is a complete emotional and physical disaster. Kaili is most unhappy and Mitro falls sick in soul and body.
Kaili’s mother had told her, “... Girls do not speak anything; their tongues are cut off from birth itself” (TC 9). Young Kaili bows before her parents wish to marry the middle-aged Lakhe Shah whose unshaven face reminds her of “bread infested with ants” (TC 10). Poverty happens to be one of the reasons where parents marry off daughters to homes that can feed them. They don’t bother to see if the man is worth marrying the daughter. If he provides her food it is considered a great blessing. It is told by people that, “one does not see a man’s face but one sees the man’s pockets” (TC 11). Kaili accepts the marriage that is decided for her. She has no other way but to heed to her parents’ wishes.

Kaili is neither happy nor interested to marry Lakhe Shah; her heart was not into it. Her friend Mitro suggests Kaili to refuse to marry if she was not ready for it. Kaili would have done so if she had a lover. Kaili believed in love and considered that ‘a lover was God’s blessing’ (TC 11). She thought that if it was not in a woman’s fate to get a lover, one would not get even after twelve years of meditation. Mitro her friend, teased Kaili how she could see God in human beings. Kaili very strongly believed that if one could find God anywhere it would be in the face of someone a person loved.

The dreams of young girls are shattered when married off to elderly men who would not be according to their likes. The tradition-bound society is always patriarchal in its treatment towards women. Kaili is married to Lakhe Shah, a widower who did not have consideration for his own three children. She became a mother, before she became a wife, and had to take care of the three children as in one or the other way they were sick and needed help. Kaili finds that her husband was a miser, a very stingy man. He tells newly married Kaili not to wash clothes as his four years old daughter should do it because he was concerned about the gold bangles that Kaili wore. Kaili becomes a good mother to Lakhe Shah’s children. She forgets the injustice that she suffered and took care of them. Kaili even suggests Lakhe Shah to send the children to school and took the responsibility of sending them. She does not have a happy fulfilled life as a wife. Though she has the feeling of being incomplete and unsatisfied in her life she never shows it.

Kaili gets to meet a young painter at the railway station, named Deepak. She met him daily when she went to drop the children to school. Deepak studied architecture at Lucknow. He was from a poor family. He painted in the vacation time to earn money for
his survival. Kaili finds some unknown bond, an attraction towards Deepak. Though she sees him at the station to her heart’s content, she still feels unsatisfied. Even Deepak was attracted towards Kaili. Deepak feels that there was the society-made barrier between him and Kaili. She was not free as she was a married woman.

Kaili one day finds her friend Mitro’s lover Bakshe in her place when he was on the railway tracks to commit suicide. She saves him; but in turn Bakshe saves Kaili when she fell unconscious on the tracks. She comes to know that Bakshe had lost interest to live life as Mitro was married to someone else. Kaili consoles Bakshe that she was like a sister to him and she needs him. Then on he visits her regularly.

The railway track at the station becomes a holy place for Kaili. She felt it was like the threshold at Gurudwara for her because it was the place where she had met Deepak. Once she kneels down and puts her head on the tracks to pray. That night Deepak comes back. Kaili believed that when one worshipped someone in the heart, any place would become a place of worship. She had come to the tracks when she had felt afraid and disturbed. But when she meets Deepak she was elated and feels truly blessed.

Kaili had not gone to her mother’s place after her marriage because she had felt that she was married off without a concern for her wishes and once a daughter is married off she becomes an outsider to her parents. She had made her heart a stone. When Kaili’s father dies, Lakhe Shah sends her with Bakshe to her mother’s place. Kaili stays only two days at her mother’s house. Lakhe Shah had told Bakshe to get her back on the third day. If it was possible Kaili would not have gone back to her husband’s ever again. Here the male domination is witnessed in Kaili’s life. A wife has to abide by the rules and regulations put up by the husband. Marriage takes away a woman’s freedom, and she is tied to the peg like a dumb animal. Kaili is in a helpless condition as the society’s codes do not permit her to just leave her husband. A woman has to accept her husband as he is and here Kaili is to suffer her ordeal for being married to a much older husband.

Lakshe Shah burns his godown to claim the insurance money of Rs.20000/-. His goods are shifted to a safe place and then the godown is burnt. Kaili had shared with Deepak about Lakhe Shah’s deception and the intention of burning the godown. Kaili
stands for truth and Deepak appreciates her by saying, “You yourself is the truth Kaili, where will you go to search for the truth” (TC 38). Amrita presents her women to be bold enough to face and live the truth in life.

Kaili suffers exploitation at the hands of her husband. When Kaili returns from her mother’s to Lakhe Shah’s house, the insurance officer had come to check the burnt godown. Lakhe Shah is so corrupt and selfish that he does not hesitate to use his wife to favour the officer so he could get the insurance money. This shows to what extent a man can degrade a woman to fulfill his selfish needs. In the night Lakhe Shah sends Kaili to give milk to the officer, the officer caught hold of Kaili and tries to force himself on her. Kaili hit him with a bottle on his head and escapes. She rescues herself and left the house very boldly telling Lakhe Shah that if he called police to stop her she would in turn tell the police the truth of his godown burning.

Amrita Pritam portrays Kaili as a very courageous woman who defends herself in the situation and takes care of herself. She saves herself and boldly left Lakhe Shah’s house. After Kaili left, Lakhe Shah covers up her disappearance by saying that she was kidnapped by the neighbouring village. Truly as she had felt, Lakhe Shah as a husband was not worth her while. Kaili is strong enough to face him and does not fear the consequences. Here she has a genuine reason to leave her husband’s house. The house that should have been her safe haven had become a place of exploitation. Amrita has created Kaili as a bold, honest person who was ready to speak the truth if Lakhe Shah would not let her to go.

Deepak had told Bakshe: “In this village where his Kaili lives, my love’s respect lives, protect it, and whenever Kaili needs me, inform me” (TC 42). Kaili with Bakshe’s help goes to Deepak’s room in Lahore. He receives her happily. Deepak puts bangle on Kaili’s hand, the one given by her to him earlier so he could sell it and help himself. Kaili and Deepak shift to Delhi from Lahore. Bakshe brings Kaili’s mother to Delhi. First she had been angry with Kaili as she had left Lakhe Shah but when she had got to know his reality, she then had wanted to go to Kaili. The traditional society never accepts if a woman leaves her husband but if a man leaves a wife no complain is made. Kaili not only
took a bold step in quitting her husband but she also shows a courageous stance in going to the man who loves her.

Amrita portrays Mitro as another woman who suffers the persecution of the society. She is married to someone else and not to Bakshe, the man who she loves. Kaili is a very good friend to her. When she comes to know that Mitro after marriage was living like a stone at her mother’s home, she makes it her duty to help her. Mitro was in such a bad state that she could not be identified. She had become like a shadow and lived a death-in-life existence. She had been taken to many doctors but it was all in vain. Kaili meets Mitro and is able to console and convince her to live life. Mitro’s condition showed that her marriage had done her no good and that she was living in guilt for deceiving Bakshe. Kaili assures Mitro that she would get Bakshe to meet her as Mitro wants to see him just once and ask him forgiveness. Kaili takes care that Mitro dressed, ate and drank. She then gets Mitro to her mother’s home and allows her to meet Bakshe. Both were happy and overjoyed. A loved one is like a ‘Trump Card’ that changes things. Bakshe is a card that changed Mitro’s colour and Mitro was like the card to Bakshe.

When Mitro’s condition improved she had been taken by her husband to his house. One notices here that a woman’s life is very precarious and insecure. If a woman is sick, she is of no use, she will be thrown out of the husband’s house. But if she is good she will be taken back by the husband’s. Mitro is lost during the riots of 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. The situation was such that even if she was found, her husband would not accept her. Many lost or abducted women during the partition riots were not accepted back. The double-standard ways of the male-dominant world are unjust and cruel for women. Amrita uses the partition as way that leads Mitro and Bakshe to be together. Bakshe searches and finds Mitro in Delhi and later is married to her.

In the earlier novels, The Skeleton and Dr. Dev, Amrita showed tolerance for conventional marriage, but in Trump Card, the tolerance is replaced by a standing battle order to cross the barrier if the pressure is too heavy. Kaili and Mitra cross the barrier. But Amrita still observes a formality and a convention. She provides them with a worthwhile excuse for crossing over. For instance, in the case of Kaili, Amrita had Lakhe Shah send Kaili to sleep with the insurance officer who had come to enquire about the
cause of fire in his insured godown. This provided Kaili, with a legitimate excuse to break the matrimonial tie and flee into the arms of her lover Deepak. In the case of Mitro, Amrita made the partition of the country and the Hindu-Muslim riots come to her aid. Mitro is abducted, then recovered by Bakshe, and there after given to him, for her husband would no longer accept her.

Kaili represents the Indian woman’s sensibility who sacrifices herself and lives to fulfill others happiness. Though Kaili was a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother, she does not keep silent when it comes to her self-protection. She very courageously saved herself when the insurance officer attacks her. Her husband Lakhe Shah comes out as a cheap person who does not hesitate to send his wife to warm the officer’s bed. Kaili does not leave her husband’s home and run away with Deepak. She lived within the bond of matrimony, fulfilling her duties and responsibilities. It was only when her husband failed to protect her, when he made use of her like a pawn to claim the insurance for the burnt godown, did Kaili cross the threshold of his house. In this novel a change is discernible in the image of woman. “Amrita has for the first time made use of the steering wheel and left the road to find if there is a cross-country route to her destination” (Sharma 121).

Pooro, Mamta and Rajkumari, did not step past the “Ramayanic line of honour,” of orthodoxy and convention. Amrita in her earlier fiction presents women who have not learnt to assert themselves fully, nor achieved that total integrity of self where the woman no longer needs any props to be herself, not even the man she loves. Such achievement is reserved for the heroines Amrita creates in her novels of the sixties. In Kaili, she presents a new sensibility of not suffering the injustice. Amrita provides a worthwhile excuse for Kaili to walk out of her husband’s house. She creates an opportunity to cross the line of honour for Kaili only after suffering. Kaili’s marriage had lost its sanctity when Lakhe Shah behaved in a chauvinistic manner and tried to use his wife. A woman is married by parents thinking that the husband and his home would be her secure world. But Kaili’s fate turned out to be such that she had to leave her husband’s home to be safe. Amrita by writing this novel shows her intellectual progress and presents a refined sensibility of women through her characters. She does not bring salvation to Kaili and Mitro in reconciliation or death. But this time she tried her hand at something unconventional –
she allows Kaili not only to find a lover for herself, but also helps her friend Mitro revive contacts with her old lover Bakshe. It is significant to note that Amrita has not allowed her characters to break the ties of the matrimony straightaway. Either she has found them an excuse or changed the social context herself. Kaili loved Deepak and was accepted by him. It did not matter that she had been already married once. Amrita gives hope in the life of Kaili when Deepak accepted her as she was; and Mitro finds her happiness with Bakshe.
Works Cited


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