CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION
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Amrita Pritam has been universally noted and acclaimed for her sensitive, emotional, profound and passionate creative writings. She was a gifted writer with a sensibility that suited her aesthetic goals. She was very much concerned with Indian womanhood and women’s issues. Her fiction reflects Amrita as a woman with a fine sensibility who wrote on and about Indian women to create an awareness of their situations and predicament. Her women characters reflect the feminine sensibility of Indian women in various shades. She provides the finest portrayal of feminine sensibility by experimenting with the inner world, the psyche of her women protagonists. She explores the reality of life through her women characters. Amrita portrays women who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. Revealing a remarkable insight into the nature of a woman’s mind, she depicts woman in myriad roles – wife, mother, daughter, sister, and lover and as an individual in her own right. The women in her fiction reveal the various aspects of feminine sensibility in their experiences in different situations and circumstances of life which is brought out in their conventional and radical images.

The study of Amrita’s fiction from feminine sensibility aspect has brought to light certain common characteristics of the feminine psyche, irrespective of social background, culture, education. The study has explored the feminine sensibility aspect; the feelings, the thoughts, the urges and ambitions, the failures and achievements of women characters who strive to resist the limitations imposed by custom and convention in their battle to survive and assert their worth. The lives of women epitomize the burdens and blessings of womanhood set against varied backgrounds. Even though their lives reveal common tendencies and similar aptitudes and attitudes in their responses to love and pain, joys and sorrows in life, each of them unfold certain elements which are exclusive to her life, culture and time.

The women characters that Amrita presents in the progression of her fiction portray the change or growth in their sensibility, from submissive, conventional to the unconventional, modern, independent and radical. The characters reflect the sensibility of
Amrita. The early fiction of Amrita portrays the sensibility of a woman who lives a conventional life. In Indian society, the woman has been living, for the most part, a dictated life – dictated to her by parents, brothers, husbands, lovers and abductors. Amrita registers her strongest protest against the senseless life a woman is forced to live. This living of a woman has become for her ‘a matter of habit’ with the passage of time. Amrita registers her protest against the senseless habit of living, which has reduced woman being to “non-being” or, at best “sub-being”.

In literature other women writers, too have protested against this. In fact, some of them have done so even more violently and loudly. They have commissioned all the roaring batteries or revolutionary ideas and expressions and raised much dust and smoke. In contrast, Amrita looks meek. She had raised no slogans, waved no clenched fist and used no ammunition perfected and ordinance by the suffragettes of every country and every language. In fact she had not registered her protest against men at all. If she agitated, she has done so against women and against their own willful acceptance of the status quo.

This may sound strange, but it is true. Man has undoubtedly tyrannized woman. But in most cases, it is the woman who has offered or opted, to be subjected to his tyranny. Amrita’s depiction of this phenomenon in her novels is fairly representative and authentic. For instance, in *Dr. Dev*, Mamta agrees to marry Jagadish, even though she loves Devraj and had a child by him. In *The Skeleton*, Pooro is abducted and converted to Islam. In the end, she gets an opportunity to escape, but does not take advantage of it. Amrita genuinely feels in essence that the woman is her own captive and if she chooses to be a “full being”, freedom and fulfillment will flow to her as naturally as water to fields below. This belief, however, is a later development which is observed in the fiction of the sixties.

In her earlier novels – *Dr. Dev, The Skeleton*, she was in mid-ocean and did not know her true bearings. She sketches conventional mode of living for her women characters. They are victims of conventional marriages and they do abide by the terms of marriage and not indulge in extra-post-marital adventures, though their lovers are nearby. In the later novels, the tolerance is replaced by a standing battle to cross the barrier if the
pressure is too heavy. And the characters do cross the barrier. The fiction of the sixties announces the emergence of a new woman, portraying the radical image of woman. She concerns herself with woman’s search for self-fulfillment and independence. She endeavours to establish woman as an individual who breaks loose from the traditional constraints and refines her identity in tune with the changed social ambience of the modern times. Amrita’s women characters are startling in their unconventional and reckless living, and above all retain their individuality with unusual determination. (Eg: Alka, Chetna and Annie). This is unique in a social milieu where women’s creed is to merge her whole identity with the male, and remain forever in the grey penumbral zone of self-effacement. Amrita’s own bold and uncompromising stance in life is reflected in her brain-daughters. She initiates the reader into the significant shift of emphasis from the outer social world to the sensibility with which the inner world is appreciated and felt. Few Indian novelists could translate the nuances of perception in quite the same way.

Pooro’s situation in life is different from all other women characters portrayed by Amrita. Dislocated and abducted Pooro presents the conventional image of woman. She goes through a traumatic period in her life – the abduction, the forced marriage, the religious conversion, new identity, motherhood – but she learns to accept all the changes in her life. This is because of love that changes her sensibility, love for her husband and her son. Pooro’s life is a unique document in this sense that it reveals the inner strength of a woman who despite personal tragedy and unimaginable suffering was able to channelize her love. Her life also records the growth and transformation in a woman. Pooro compromises with existing reality and achieves happiness by fulfilling her obligations and responsibilities. Though she gets an opportunity to leave her present life and go back to her family in India, Pooro chose to stay back. The genuine love that Pooro had for her son and husband keeps her tied down. Pooro represents a woman torn between her personal feelings and her responsibilities. She like a typical traditional Indian woman is bounded by the family bond, and does not transgress it. She finds fulfillment in what she got in life. Like a traditional Hindu wife she stays with her husband and child and finds reconciliation as a way to happy life.
Mamta represents the conventional way of life. She had loved Devraj but gets married to Jagdish. She could not refute against her parents but like a typical Indian woman bows down and accepts her fate. She is forced in the circumstances to accept Jagdish and have a daughter with him. But after marriage and her daughter’s birth, Mamta boldly tells the truth to her husband that she loves Devraj and could not stay with him anymore. She leaves Jagdish but does not go to Devraj. She leads an independent life. At the later stage of life she goes back to take care of Jagdish and the daughter. Mamta going back to Jagdish adds to the conventional image of woman. Amrita presents Mamta to be bold and truthful. She is courageous to speak the truth and leave the husband’s house. She lives lonely but does not go back to Devraj at the cost of her self-respect. Pooro and Mamta are a natural representation of the long suffering trait of self-sacrificial virtue among Indian women.

Amrita’s Kaili and Mitro also represent the conventional way of life lived by many Indian women. Kaili though not happy with the groom chosen for her had to bow down and accept the decision taken for her by her parents and accept the marriage. She does not refuse or revolt but compromises and adjusts to the life, accepting the widower husband and his children. Mitro too portrays the conventional image of woman by marrying a groom chosen by her parents and not her lover Bakshe. Though Kaili and Mitro have a miserable, sad life they do not complain but they accept their fate. Kaili’s sensibility does not tolerate the exploitation that Lakhe Shah proposes in her life. She shows courage and rebels against her husband’s deception and selfishness. Amrita provides her woman with a worthwhile excuse for crossing over. She creates an opportunity to cross the line of honour for Kaili only after suffering. She shows Kaili as a woman who becomes aware that there is a limit to which she could tolerate injustice but not at the cost of self-negation. It is significant to note that Amrita has not allowed her women characters to break the ties of the matrimony straightaway. Either she has found them an excuse or changed the social context itself. Kaili courageously saves herself from her husband’s selfishness and goes to her lover Deepak. Though Kaili’s leaving husband and going to Deepak symbolizes a new step showing self-awareness and self-fulfillment, her marriage shows the conventional attitude of a traditional Indian woman. Kaili does not leave her husband for the sake of her love. She would have continued with the
compromised life with the husband and his children if Lakhe Shah had not used her for his selfish purpose. In Kaili’s case her love Deepak becomes a prop for her future life.

Amrita, through Kammi, Chetna, Alka and Annie, showcases the emergence of the ‘new woman’ and presents a radical sensibility in them. Amrita’s ‘new woman’ emancipates herself as an independent woman from the utter desolation and trauma of being a deserted lover or wife. Though alone she does not fall down but stands up for herself. She is not emotionally shattered like economically dependent housewives. On the other hand she demonstrates strength and maturity in adversity. She displays rare courage and self-confidence in coping with the consequential problems and difficulties, humiliation and frustrations. Unlike any other in her place she has the generosity to gracefully free her husband or lover from marital bonds without venting ill-feelings. Her desertion though painful it brings out the real, hidden strength in her. She desires to be economically independent. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit displayed by her proves that she has reached a stage of self-sufficiency through self-attainment.

Amrita’s fictional journey shows a drastic change in the creation of the character of Kammi. She had signalled the change in a minute way in the character of Kaili, but a complete change is found in Kammi. Amrita portrays a new character, new image of woman in *The Closed Door*. Kammi is the new courageous woman, who defies and refuses to hand over her destiny to anyone. Through Kammi, Amrita proclaims the emergence of the new woman and heralds the new sensibility of the radical woman.

Kammi’s self-awareness from young age shapes her future. She represents the awareness in a woman of being free and economically independent. Seeing the exploitation, the suffering and death of her mother, she decides to get educated and not to get married. Later, she of her own will gets married to Satpal but gets deceived by him. Very boldly, she does not continue with the marriage but without ill-feelings gives the rightful place in Satpal’s life to Sheel. She takes the courageous step to leave the marriage behind and live self-sufficiently. She moves forward in life as she was economically independent. Life brings another opportunity in Kammi’s life to fall in love with Sumesh, but here too she suffers deception. She does not lose heart and presents the strong
sensibility of a woman who does not repent what she had done with her life. Her self-awareness brings her back to an independent life without any man as a prop. She finds fulfillment in living a new life with her child in her house, a house with the door always open. Earlier Amrita had attributed woman’s tragedy to fate or circumstance and sought a solution in submission, reconciliation, death and rebirth. But in *The Closed Door*, she realized woman’s basic weakness and hits upon the correct solution. She said goodbye to all compromises for all times and allowed the protagonist to live respectably by herself.

Anita contributes to the radical image of woman by sharing the new sensibility of being frank, candid, honest and truthful. She goes in search of truth of her self to find self-fulfillment. Anita is an exception that she had married Rampal but did not love him. She sought love outside marriage. Sagar becomes the utopian love and for this love she boldly tells her husband the truth to leave his house. This appears very blant, obscene to be accepted in the Indian society. But Amrita has created her to be a character who reveals the inner sensibility of a woman, the real one. The awareness for self-actualization takes Anita to leave her child and husband’s home behind. She finds Iqbal as the love of her life but gets deceived by him. She does not lose her grip on reality but accepts boldly the truth of her life. Though Anita was not loyal to her husband, but she was truthful. She was never afraid or ashamed of her feminine sensibility, of her longing for fulfillment in love. Amrita presents Anita as breaking down the conventional image of woman by crossing the traditional barriers of the society and going to find self-fulfillment and self-realisation. Though Anita is not in the progression of the thought of the new woman image presented by Amrita, but she contributes to the sensibility of the new woman who is bold, courageous and truthful to speak her mind and heart and go in search of self-fulfillment.

By creating the character of Chetna, Amrita adds a new dimension to the radical image of woman. This new woman in Chetna is self-respecting, independent and responsible in carrying out obligations too. Love in a woman’s life is portrayed as a very fine emotion and to fulfill it Chetna crosses all the bindings of the tradition-bound society. She experiences her first physical intimacy with Iqbal and bears the responsibility of the child all alone. She finds self-fulfillment with Iqbal and her child. She is a working, independent woman who does not break her promise to Iqbal. She does not accept
anything until she is given or gets it. Her desires, her thoughts, her way of living life, of not being dependent on man, her faithfulness in love and her honesty, bring out the feminine sensibility of a woman who respects herself and who lives a dignified life.

Alka is another character who brings out another aspect of the new sensibility of the radical woman. Alka, like Chetna expresses her love to Kumar and without being afraid and without degrading herself in her eyes, she pronounces to be that woman for Kumar who got twenty rupees for gratifying his physical hunger. Alka accepts the status of a prostitute with moral equanimity and insulated dignity. She is a respectable girl but for love she is ready to face disrespectability. Alka is very confident, even secure both psychologically and economically that she was prepared to accept whatever terms will enable her lover to make his love available honestly. Alka, though bold and self-respecting insists on seeking nothing unless Kumar wants to give it to her willingly. In a very dignified manner without any regret she faces life and Kumar. For the sake of self-fulfillment in love, one finds Amrita’s woman crossing all barriers and facing all hurdles and speaking and living honestly the truth of their lives. The acceptance of the humiliating terms of the male partner by Alka is not an immoral act, but an act of self-realization, achieved through the most genuine and willing co-operation of her partner. The relationship so achieved by Alka may not meet the standards considered perfect by society, but does represent the purest and truest form of relationship that can be achieved by an honest and self-respecting woman under the twentieth century social circumstances. It appears that Alka presents conventional side of woman when she agrees to marry Jagdish but it was again only to fulfill Kumar’s wish. Her choice to stay as his widow shows again the sensibility of an Indian woman who loved Kumar honestly and completely.

Annie’s character completes the growth of the radical image of woman. In Annie, Amrita brings out another facet of the modern Indian woman who is courageous, self-respecting and who lives an independent life. Annie’s bold stance of accepting the changes in life and preferring to live an economically independent life after Anwar abandons her portrays the sensibility of an enlightened woman. Anwar’s talk of divorce and not giving their son to Annie, does not shake her. Though the situation was a humiliating one, Annie dares to take her life in her own hands. She leads a life of dignity
and self-fulfillment. Anwar could not accept the new Annie when she comes to take care of him when he gets sick. She does not come as a ‘wife’ because a ‘wife’ meant a ‘broken woman’ and Annie was not a ‘broken woman’. She represents the sensibility of a strong woman who takes care of herself, whose life is not dependent on any man and who had started living a purposeful life.

Amrita’s ‘New Woman’ - Kammi, Anita, Chetna, Alka and Annie - all portray the new sensibility of being bold, courageous, confident, determined, self-respecting, dignified with the awareness to lead economically independent lives. They portray revolutionary morality of self-reliance and self-assertion. Their awareness for self-actualisation leads them not to be dependent on their men in any way which contributes for the sensibility of the radical image of woman.

Amrita Pritam was a writer who added luster to literature and whose life though it defied convention was life lived according to the best traditions of love. She was a romantic and her fictional women represent this characteristic of hers genuinely. In her novels, she has proved to be more arctic than tropical as she is calm, quite, concise and highly disciplined. She has not created women characters with the mercilessness of a social biologist as the aim of her characters in not merely to live, but to find how to live – unsubjected, uncompromised and uncommitted, except to their own sense of human dignity, emotional purity and truthfulness.

Amrita’s excellence lies not only in her art or craft, but in the development of the feminine personality in Punjabi literature. Her novels present some of the most enlightened and sophisticated feminine characters to be found in modern Indian literature. Honesty and truth in life was most important for Amrita. It is ingrained in the women characters and the relationships that she creates in her fiction. She was very conscious of the need to live an emotionally honest life and it is brought out in her women characters. Her women stand for truth and they uphold truth even though it breaks their homes. They do not prefer to live a sham. They are honest and sincere who break social barriers to live a respectful, dignified life. They retain their individuality and refuse to hand over their destinies to others. Amrita’s women characters leave homes in search for truth. All the women, surging forth to search for truth – the truth of their moral existence, have the self-
knowledge that their life would be difficult and tortured. Personal life would be shattered and society would treat them as pariahs because they had dared to question its norms. They stand out for their pitiless honesty, subjecting themselves to the most hazardous experiments in unconventional and uncompromised emotional living. Mamta left her husband Jagdish and chose to live a lonely life, Kammi did not bother with the society when she sacrificed her marriage for the sake of Sheel and later also when she had to leave Sumesh, Anita left Rampal Sachdeva and when she was deserted emotionally by Iqbal she was devastated mentally but still she put up the strength to face the society, Chetna did not disown her child though she found it difficult to keep her own child, Alka was rejected by Captain Jagdish when he comes to know her truth that she loved Kumar and Annie very boldly faces the society’s wagging tongue when Anwar betrayed her.

Amrita has stressed upon honesty and truth and emotional purity in relationship between man and woman, and it is found in many women characters. In fact, it is this honesty in the relationship between man and woman that she had been seeking even from the period when she wrote Dr. Devraj. Speaking the truth; honesty became a conscious act with Amrita which can be seen in her women protagonists. For instance, Mamta tells the truth to her husband Jagdish of her love for Dr. Devraj. Anita resolves to tell the truth of her love for Sagar to her husband. Similarly honest, bold and self-respecting are Kaili, Kammi, Alka, Chetna and Annie. They sacrifice all the palpable security and comfort that lies within their grasp to attain the ultimate truth. The women in Amrita’s novels have a rare honesty and candidness that men sadly lack. They have the courage to break away from their husbands because they cannot live a lie, because they must seek the truth of their life, as Mamta and Anita do, or the truth of their sheer individual dignity, as Annie does.

It may be pointed out that Amrita’s insistence on honesty and emotional purity has only broken homes and provided her characters with additional opportunities to have emotional and sexual relationships outside the frame work of marriage. Superficially speaking, this is true. In most of her novels and short stories, she has broken homes and allowed her women protagonists to try their luck elsewhere. But like the municipal authorities, she has demolished only those homes which were built on unwilling foundations, had developed cracks, and had become dangerous for habitation. Amrita, by
no standard, advocated immorality. On the contrary, she insisted upon the highest standard of moral purity: that a man and woman should be totally honest to each other: that their emotional lives should be of 24-carat purity. Amrita has undoubtedly asked her women protagonists to quit their homes. However, she has done this only when pollution has taken place in them. She has not given them a license for adultery; she has only denied them the right to continue cheating or deceiving themselves and others.

Amrita believed that “there is no greater magic than romance” and all her women, from Pooro to Annie are embraced by this magic. They have love as an integral part of their lives. They cannot really live without love. They must have love, though not at the cost of their self-respect or individual dignity. Amrita’s women do things because they believe in love, love rules their world. In spite of bitter experience, her women characters do not hesitate to admit love. Fulfillment in love only matters. No convention, no social taboos matter. Amrita believed in the concept that man and woman could honestly and honorably commit themselves to each other for the fulfillment of love. Pooro learns to love Rashida, Mamta loved Devraj, Kaili loved Deepak, Kammi loved Sumesh, Anita loved Sagar, Alka loved Kumar, Chetna loved Iqbal and Annie loved Anwar. They live and die for love. They sacrifice, adjust, compromise, reconcile and change for the sake of love but not at the cost of their self-respect. For love they give their all but do not regret for what they do and what they get in return. In Alka, Anita or any other Amrita’s woman it appears ‘love is blind.’ Love in the lives of these women characters brings out their feminine sensibility.

Another characteristic of Amrita’s women is that though they love intensely they are not weak. They are courageous in their own way, and present a bold sensibility. Mamta does not search for Devraj after she leaves her husband Jagdish, Kammi is forced to leave Sumesh, Anita leaves Iqbal as he no longer needed her, Alka leaves Kumar at his insistence, Chetna does not bind Iqbal neither does she force her on him, and Annie had to leave Anwar at his wish. All these women hold no ill-feeling or any grudge against the men in their lives when they are abandoned or forsaken by the men they are married to or they have loved.
Amrita’s women are ready to cross over all limitations imposed on them by the society for the sake of their love. What is to be appreciated here is; their sensibility of being honest and truthful in love. Though they love deeply and sincerely, they retain their self-respect. They do not regret whatever they do for the sake of their love. Their sensibility and mode of living contributes to the image of the radical woman. Alka and Chetna accept what they get in love. Chetna accepts Iqbal on his own terms and so does Alka with Kumar. Both Chetna and Alka are alike – bold, unashamed to announce their desire and also understanding, patient, dignified and self-respecting. Kammi loved Sumesh that she lived with him without marriage and conceived his child and decided to give birth to it. Annie loved Iqbal that she left her parents’ home and later leaves his house for his sake only. Though it appears all these women present the attitude of a conventional woman by accepting love on the terms suggested by their men, it is to be understood as the sensibility of women who are truly and deeply in love.

Amrita’s women characters exhibit their humanitarian sensibility in a very kind, sympathetic and understanding manner. They forget the injustice they suffer but they don’t forget their humanitarian duties. Be it Pooro, Mamta, Kammi, Anita, Annie - they with all feminine love, care and concern take care of either husbands or lovers when they are sick. Mamta returns to care for Jagdish when he needs her, Kammi goes to Sumesh when he suffered from severe leg pain, Anita takes care of Iqbal when she very well knows that he does not love her as much she loved him and Annie cares for Anwar when he gets very sick. The deceptive similarity between Annie’s and Mamta’s return to their husbands shows the underlying differences, differences which measure the degree of their emancipation. Mamta’s unquestioning return and her emotionally charged response when Jagdish expresses surprise indicate that, despite her earlier revolt, she cannot fully free herself from role expectations imposed on her as a wife. But Annie returns insisting that she will not conform to any such role. It is only humanitarian concern that Annie shows in caring for Anwar.

Amrita’s protagonists are such women who do not give pain to others but who suffer in pain and try to relieve their men from pain. The generosity of these women showcases their feminine sensibility that even in adverse circumstances they are strong. Pooro, Taro, Mamta, Kaili, Mitro, Kammi and her mother Tara, Anita, Annie - bring out
the unhappy experiences of married life. Marriage leads a woman to live a conventional life. Through these women Amrita brings out women’s experience under patriarchy and shows their marginalized status. But her women, though they suffer, take care and do not break down totally. Time brings change and awareness to them to lead better lives.

Amrita’s women portray a very strong motherly sensibility too. Pooro hates when she conceives but later loves her son. A queer phenomenon is that women leave their children behind in quest of truth. When they are forced to leave their homes they willingly leave their children behind but do miss them. Mamta leaves her daughter as Jagdish does not allow her to take, Anita leaves her son as Rampal denies her custody and Annie had to leave her son because Anwar wanted to punish or break her down. Their motherly sensibility is seen when they love and wish good for the children. Mamta returns to Jagdish for her daughter’s sake. Anita dies only after seeing her son and finding fulfillment in him as if he represented Sagar for her. Annie’s son loved and respected her for who she was and for what she was, though she had to leave him behind.

Kammi and Chetna are bold enough to continue with life as unwed mothers. They do not shirk their responsibilities. Though Sumesh tells Kammi to abort the child she does not do it but bravely tells him that she would not bring the child into his house ever, as she had a home with the door always open. Chetna though pregnant with Iqbal’s child does not tell him of its birth nor does she abandon it at the orphanage. She does not break her promise to Iqbal and also does not use the child as an excuse to get Iqbal to marry her. Very lovingly she centers her life on the child.

Amrita’s women are sensual, sensitive, dreamy people who startle with their honesty, caprice and raring escapades. Kammi, Alka, Chetna and Annie all have acquired a quiet, steely self-confidence which comes from their recognition of their own inner integrity. They can ignore conventional morality because they are sure of their own values. They adapt, but do not compromise, and they cannot be broken. Their new sensibility helps them to achieve new identity and self-actualisation.

In her fiction, Amrita has recorded the plight of the contemporary convention bound Indian Woman; simultaneously, she has envisaged the radical image of woman, the
‘New Woman’ as she breaks away from old societal patterns and discovers her own selfhood. Amrita’s fiction shows her deftness in dealing with the more modern and unconventional sensibilities of the women of the present and future days of urban India. In India, waist deep in tradition, this awareness and boldness in a woman writer like Amrita Pritam was an achievement of a revolutionary order. Her novels could very well be termed short-stories, for in their meaningfulness they are only chapters of the “Chronicle of Woman’s Progress” – the Woman of Yesterday emerging as the Woman of Tomorrow.