

Conflict between Self and Society in the Life of Amrita Pritam

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Abstract

Amrita Pritam is one of the most celebrated luminaries of Indian literature that had dexterity over both Punjabi and English languages. She had been a great creative genius among all the born poets and writers who achieved the greatest milestones in the field of literature and expressed the voice of not only their heart but also the common people at large. She had a bold and clear voice for all those feelings that make our eyes full of tears and sometimes give us the greatest joy of life and sometimes tell us the greatest truth of life. She is the writer whose works have been translated in various languages of India as well as world and has won most prestigious awards like Sahitya Academy, Janpith and various other awards not only in India but also in abroad. In this chapter I would like to focus on two most striking conflict of her life which changed her perceptions of the world of metaphysics and that of reality: her conflict about the existence of god and her conflict in love.

Keywords- Tradition, Culture, Society, Environment

Amrita Pritam belonged to a common middle class family of Punjab (now in Pakistan) and had an environment of creativity where her colleagues practiced in Punjabi and Hindi. She had been inspired by Sahir Ludhianvi whose image finds reflection in all her autobiographical work and she also accepts him as her ideal and lover. Her creativity grew up in the guardianship of Sahir Ludhianvi and he is a direct force behind all her achievements. She was a born poet and writer and wrote most striking verses at the very early age of her life.

Her literary domain is extended from love to death, reality to fiction, culture to fashion, poetry to philosophy, from inspiration to addiction and from history to politics. Her own autobiographies are the reflections of her own love and desires. Here she expresses her conflict of selection and rejection of the harsh realities of life which are very different from the world of books and imagination. *Kagaj Te Canvas*, *Rasidi Ticket*, and *Life and Times* are his most striking autobiographies in which she narrates not only her experiences of life but

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also her love triangle for Sahir Ludhianvi and her own husband, Imroz. Her novel *Pinjar* is a historical fiction which tells the story of an abducted Hindu girl Pooro who becomes the *mashiha* for all those abducted women during the partition of India in 1947 who are restored into their family during the discovery and exchange of lost and abducted persons after the partition. 'Ik Si Anita', 'Dilli Di Galiyan', 'Yatri', 'Doosari Manjil', *Sunehre* and 'Kore Kagaz' are among her most admired literary creations.

Her autobiographies are the mirrors of her life and thinking. Her lived experience was very different from that she studies in books and stories. She was married at very early age in her childhood to Imroz who was also a poet. She had the passion to write poems from her childhood and craving for reading literary books.

The first conflict came in her life in her teens. It was about the existence of God and her role in our daily life. It was the period of the shaping of her youth. It was also the phase of the making of a poet. During this period she had a clash of her free will with the traditions of the family where she never finds solace. All that was going to spoil her own world of happiness and freedom to think and practiced was coming close to her. It was always unacceptable to her throughout her life. As a poet in her early childhood, she started thinking about her inner being and the world outside.

Her family was very orthodox where she had to offer prayings every morning to Guru Granth Sahib and other gods and goddesses but she never had any interest in such practices. One day she overcomes this compulsion when her mother was dying and she prayed for her mother's life. That very day realised that there is no god in the real sense who hears our prayers. All her blind faith that God listens to the prayers of innocent child finds real grounds and from that day she never believed the existence of God. She believed in work and work only.

This was like a shattering experience of her life when she realised that there is no God who is there to listen to innocent children. It gave her real picture of this mortal world and the world beyond which we call metaphysics. The gods she worshipped in her life could not save her mother's life all the prayings and blessings for not only hers but also the members of her family went lost into darkness. She always had the conflict of soul and body which she finds that both are inseparable as long as we are alive. As they are separated from each other, we are dead. That is the only truth of life. No other force is controlling this universe and this earth is both the worlds of illusion and light.

"Pray to God... may be He'll show mercy... a child's prayer never go unheeded..." the good lady said to me.

.... "Please don't let my mother die."

My mother bore her illness calmly. There was no wail of agony from her. But there was a general bewilderment among those around. "why are they losing their nerves?" I asked myself. "Mother's anguish is over. I am imploring Him.... He listens to what children say...."

My mother lay there in all serenity. Suddenly I knew it was the end. Every one wept and wailed. I burst out—in red hot rage, “God heeds no one, not even children...”

From that day I gave up all the meditation and prayer I had been brought up with over the years. Father did not approve. He became stricter, but I was vehement in my resistance... (Pritam: 9).

The conflict of love was greater than her conflict of god. She might have thought that the traditions of the family cheated her because she was married with Imroz in her very childhood but as she grew up among her own parents she developed love for Rajan who was her friend in her childhood. He was the only place of peace and tranquility for Amrita Pritam when she was dejected in her family. When she was forced for prayers her body surrendered to the will of her father but her will never did so. She dreamt of her love for Rajan hoe he heard her songs, made lovely pictures of hers and pleased her;

“I’ve closed my eyes, what can He do to me if I don’t concentrate? I refuse to have anything to do with God who has not heard me. I refuse to dwell on what His image looks like. I’ll bring Rajan to my mind instead. He dallies with me in my dreams; he hears my songs; he makes such lovely pictures of me... that’s it...! I’ll fix my mind to Rajan” (Pritam:10).

As she grew up as a writer she was inspired by a well known poet Sahir Ludhianvi who changed her whole life and thinking. He not only replaced Rajan but also never let Imroz be accepted by her as her real lover. The real conflict of love started her when she came in contact with him. Now Amrita Pritam was full grown lady who could chose her life mate but somebody was already chosen for this post in her life. This conflict made her bold to choose what her heart says but it was too late. Her whole youth was spent with Imroz as her *de jure* husband but Sahir Ludhianvi remains her *de facto* lover.

The conflict of self and society never allows her in her youth to throw out the social restrictions and find her love for Sahir who dwelt in her heart. Longings for Sahir and moral grounds left her in dilemma. She understood it well but could not find herself bold enough to violate social institution of marriage. It always remained pious for her but she could not accept Imroz her lover. She found many good qualities in Imroz who could become a better husband and he did so but she could not compromise with her feelings for Sahir Ludhianvi. But she was kind enough to tell Imroz the fact that she loved Sahir. She wrote in 1960,

This is the saddest year: like a torn page from the calendar of my life. Having taken a decision, my mind had left over the threshold, yet tremblingly I did not know which way to go (Pritam: 28).

The presence of Sahir Ludhianvi in her life was not only like a driving force for love and relationship but also a creative force which made Amrita Pritam what she is today. He was the source of inspiration for her. She had immense respect for him and longings for love.

All the great creations like *Sunehre* which won Sahitya Academy Award in 1957 are outcome of her relationship with Sahir Ludhianvi. She writes,

“Lord! I didn’t write *Sunehre* for an award! If the one who had inspired me hadn’t read the book, did it matter at all to me if this entire world had?”
(Pritam: 13).

Her longings for Sahir Ludhianvi were not confined to her literary works. It also affected her personal life and family. She learnt smoking cigarette from the half finished ones left over by him intentionally. She started feeling him in cigarettes and learnt many things from his life to make him her own in her loneliness. Her emotional attachment with him was well known among her fellow persons. At public places, when she was seen with him, people make remarks to highlight their relations. At one moment of life she was surprised to be asked a question by her own son.

Navraj was about thirteen when he too said, “Mamma! Can I ask you a question? Will you tell me the truth?”

“Certainly”.

“Am I uncle Sahir’s son?” (Pritam: 96).

Now she realised that her love for Sahir had much affected not only her own life but also the lives of her own children. There was no escape from this truth so she tried to accept it. She wanted the resolution of her conflicting relationship. It does not mean that she had no love for Imroz. She loved Imroz but he was only secondary in her life who could help her in all her needs. At last she realised that the end of this conflict was in the end of her married life with Imroz. It was not due to any misunderstanding between them but it was a mutual understanding which brought then on this turn of life that they should break this up and be free to realise their dreams. She says in an interview, “If false values have until now accounted for broken homes, let a few more be broken—but, mark you from now on, at the altar of truth.” (Pritam: 67).

After all she started separating herself from her husband and started living in her loneliness because this loneliness the force of her life which could liberate her from the shackles of social restrictions and let her free will fly in the sky like a bird. She always wished Imroz a healthy and happy life because he had started falling ill. They also realised that this relationship was also an obstacle into their creative worlds. They thought that it better had last soon. They thought that this eczema of life must come to an end. She writes,

Not that there was room for any doubt about Imroz’s love for me, yet somewhere deep down inside him was an inexplicable conflict. He was in a state of irresolution. He could not get what he called the black man at the back. But our combined efforts finally established our victory (Pritam: 66).

After her separation from Imroz on “January 8, 1964, to be precise,” she found her real self winning over the society. This was the ultimate freedom of her soul to achieve the greatest goal of her life and enjoy the state of free will.

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