

## **Eruption and manifestation of love amid the cycle of Hatred: Amrita Pritam`s *The Revenue Stamp***

*Rekha Saini*

*Research Scholar, Department of English, Maharaja Ganga Singh University, Bikaner*

**Abstract:** The study of love has been invariably a multifarious subject to tackle with due to its interesting interpretations and inferences. Over the ages all the philosophers in all times have tried to interpret the theme of love according to their own ways like as shared love, impossible love, lost love, platonic love, spiritual love, unrequited love etc. in philosophical discussion love has logically a “Nature” a proposition that some may oppose arguing that it is conceptually irrational in the sense that it cannot be described in rational or meaningful proposition. For some critics who are presenting a metaphysical and epistemological argument, love may be an ejection of emotions that defy rational examination. In Greek it has references from Eros, Philia and Agape.

Love’s impact on our society and literature is profound. Love is that emotion which is easy to feel but impossible to accept before the society. Amrita Pritam, renowned Punjabi writer, migrated to India from Lahore after the partition of India Pakistan in the year 1947, discussed outburst and exhibition of the emotion of love courageously instead of all social and ethical pressure of contemporary society, colleagues and relatives. Such a courageous woman who did not only express and confess what she felt but also shielded her emotions from all that existing hatred of society.

**Key words:** love, relationship, society, manifestation, emotions.

### **Eruption and flourishing of love and social ethos**

This paper will explore how easy to discuss the concept and ideology of love but it is difficult for our social institution to embrace the growth and manifestation of love in even 21<sup>st</sup> century. To carry out this discussion, a study is made on Amrita Pritam’s autobiography *The Revenue Stamp* in which she has inserted and mentioned many incidents which shows the moral pressure, social restrictions and Hatred for her and her freedom on grand scale by his contemporaries who were not able to accept her freedom of living the life as she wanted.

The paper discovers that Amrita wrote not as much to describe herself as what she is but how did she become what she is and which were the major emotional and social factors which shaped her life in this way. Amrita as a versatile writer produced novels, short stories, pen sketches of contemporary writers and biographies but her first love always remained poetry. Among her contemporaries she was much talked about her audacious and frank ideas related to relations and friendships. She was often associated with Sahir Ludhianvi, who influenced her to such an extent that she also started writing progressive poetry. Once in a meeting with Khushwant Singh she expressed her mood of writing her story then Khushwant Singh told her that her whole life story contains nothing much of huge and great, only one or two incidents that could be put down on a

revenue stamp. That was actually an indirect sarcastic statement but from thence came the title for her famous autobiography "*The Revenue Stamp*" in which she boldly spoke of her friendships and personal relations and bluntly opens up the details about the wide spread rumours and hatred which was poured on her incessantly. This is the study of Amrita as a sentimental girl and reflections on her full and creative journey of life – her edgy relationship with her father, her friendship with Sahir, Sajjad Haider and her companionship with Imroz, her ventures into the world of literature, tributes received, insults borne and abundant of criticism from the society.

Amrita Pritam as a women writer penned novel, essays, poems which had been concentrated on women and her characters were almost inspired from her real-life characters and relationships. She, the first women to receive Sahitya Academy Award, emphasized women's experience under patriarchy and tried to brought the marginalised to centre. She was outspoken and bold enough for her dreams, desires and her own individuality not only as a woman but also a human being in contemporary male dominated society where a woman's desires and ambitions had no meanings at all. Her autobiography *Rashidi ticket* was written in Punjabi and later on translated in English as *The Revenue Stamp* by Krishna Gorawara. She opens up her first-hand experiences with society social customs and traditions, patriarchal system and how a woman had to deal with them very Frankly.

She was born in 1919 Gujranwala place that was included in Pakistan after partition as the only child of Rajbibi and Kartar Singh Hitkari. Her mother was passed away when she was only eleven years old when she had not only developed the sense of reciprocity by then, with either of her parents. Being single child and motherless, she suffered a profound feeling of loneliness and none to share her grief. The memories of Amrita's turbulent childhood, resulting in loneliness always haunted her mind and returned in the fiction she created. One cannot really evade the shadows of past that lurk often in the background throughout one's life. Her father loved her so much but being a typical father of patriarchal society, he never tried to understand the emotional need of her daughter. Because of the influence of her father, she started writing poetry at very early age of eleven. Her father wanted her to write religious and patriotic poetry but in her sixteenth year, she started writing love poetry secretly and use to tore them as she was afraid of her father. In those days days fathers were the patriarchs of discipline and order and Amrita's too was a obedient daughter. Being so lonely she developed a companionship with a imaginary shadow whom she named 'Rajan' whom she visualized during prayers behind her closed eyes. She had created the image of an ideal lover and associate in her mental vision. She recalls,

"A deep dark shadow walked along my side...the face of my ideal lover, and mine that I imagined growing wiser, stronger, more mature".(Pritam,17)

Actually, her inner self was moving towards the unconventional ideas.

"I never told an untruth to Father; I can never lie to myself either"(Pritam,6)

At the age of four Amrita was engaged and was a teenager of sixteen when she was married off to Pritam Singh at Lahore in 1935. Thus, the name 'Pritam' was suffixed to her name. However, his father was aware of her state of mind that she did not want to get married.

“I kept on telling Him again and again, ‘I do not want to be married’.”(Pritam,176)

She suffered the lack of fulfilment in her married life. Nearly for twenty years or so. She was not happily married but, in those days, it was not so easy for a woman to break away with the person one branded as her husband. It is very significant to note that she did not offer much space or rather ignored the details of her marital life and relationship with her husband. It was imposed upon her not desired. The noted philosopher Bertrand Russell expresses about the institution of marriage. In his words,

“Marriage is for a woman the commonest mode of livelihood and the total amount of undesired sex endured by a woman is greater than in prostitution.”<sup>2</sup>

“I cannot retain anymore what is due to my husband. I have stolen shelter under his roof. Like what was looted once in the mutiny, I must return what is due to my husband. I must return to him what is his...I must...I must.”(Pritam,35)

They had a mutual consent and got divorced in 1960. She had a son Navraj and a daughter Kandla with him. She stayed at Delhi with them, independently. As she revealed she had an unrequited affection for Urdu poet Sahir Ludhiyanvi which is almost the background for her autobiography, *The Revenue Stamp*. And final Amrita found solace in the companionship of painter Imroz with whom she spent the last forty years of her life. He designed most of her book covers and made her the subject of his several paintings. The book *Amrita Imroz: A Love Story* is based on their life together. Though Imroz was aware of Amrita’s unrequited love for Sahir but he accepted Amrita and her happiness without any conditions. She writes,

“Imroz knows also how much love I bore for Sahir.”(Pritam, 101)

Although she had a deep impact of Sahir on her creative mind but As usually happens in our society, Sahir was pressurized by his mother not to encourage Amrita’s admiration and her emotions. At the same time struggling with her contemporaries and social criticism, her relationship with Imroz and her emotions for Sahir became the cause of social criticism and bitter attacks from the general but was mature and wise enough to ignore all assaults. However, she did not explicitly express her romantic association with his image, till his death. Only after the death of Sahir Amrita could claim her truth of passion for him. Such was the moral and social pressure on her mind when she loved him as a woman. Her love for him was so pure and noble. She was so much absorbed in his thoughts that she never cared what other would say about her emotions.

“Late that evening came a reporter and a photographer from the press. The photographer wanted me to pose me as one engrossed in the act of writing. I put a sheet of paper on the table in front of me and pen in hand. Began writing in a trance the name of the for whom I had writing *Sunhere* ‘Sahir, Sahir, Sahir...’. I had completely fill the sheet with that name. When the pressman had gone and I was alone, It struck me: ‘what if in the photo that would appear in all the papers the next morning, the incantation “Sahir, Sahir, Sahir...” would show?”(Pritam,19)

She portrayed him even in his novels like *Ik si Anita*, and again in *Dilli Diyan Gallian* as a character through the character of Sagar. Her expressions of love have always been very sensitive and aesthetically supreme. Despite all her rebellious ideas and bold expressions she could neither utter nor convey her love for Sahir for nearly twenty or more years.

It is only her autobiography where she confesses how she modelled her male protagonists after Sahir and her deep emotions of love for him through the female ones. Her love for him was very meek, silent and gracious. At one place She writes that When Sahir would come to see her he would go on chain-smoking and she would intensively long to touch him but “could not overcome...my own reservation.”

“And I would after that He was gone, light those cigarette butts. Our smoke mingled in the air as did our breath”. (Pritam, 189)

She tried not cross the moral demarcations of traditionally set values. As she said No words came between their friendship. It was a beautiful relationship in silence. She always longed for his company and companionship. In his company she could feel woman in her. At one place she mentioned an incident:

“When Sahir had turned up with fever, He had racking pain all over and was finding it particularly difficult to breath I rubbed Vicks on his throat and chest- in fact I went on and on, as if I could spend the rest of my life doing it.”(Pritam,33)

Even when she was expecting her first child, during pregnancy she imagined Sahir in her thoughts and she did not try to conceal this feeling.

“In this state of crazy love, when my baby was born on July 3, 1947, and I first looked upon his face, it was the face of Sahir in my mind...”(Pritam,133)

Sahir always respected her feelings and also reciprocated in his own way. As remembers during an Urdu poetry recitation session, people flocked around Sahir for his autograph, when they drew back, she stretched out the palm of her right hand for autograph. with his pen Sahir spread ink on his thumb and pressed it to her palm. How meek this way of expressing love.

Another artist and companion in her life is Imroz who devoted completely himself to her care and she accepted him as her ultimate man and companion. In her narration she accepts:

“The curse of my lonesome state has been broken through ...By Imroz. In the years that followed I had Imroz. He has had only loneliness.”(Pritam,21)

With Sahir she had a voiceless sense of harmony wherein her desire for love was just dreams within. But with Imroz she accepted reality of loneliness of life and she decided to spend her life with a man who devoted himself to her without a bond of marriage. Amrita could not see Imroz defeated in love as she herself was with Sahir. She accepted his commitment and realized a

different sense of fulfilment in his association. Her compatibility with Imroz as an artist never ceased her respect for him. For her pure and true Love, the greatest thing in the world which can overcome all vices of this world. Imroz also stood by her whole life. She narrates a loving incident:

“A house guest one day got down to reading our palms. Of mine he observed the line, ‘the line of wealth is deep and unbroken...you will never be in want.’ Imroz’s was a different case altogether. ‘You will never be able to save anything ...your line is all in bits...’ upon that Imroz clasped my hand in his and quipped: ‘never mind...we’ll manage to hand together on one line!’(Pritam, 96)

There was a very healthy and understanding relationship between them. They always tried to support each other in every thick and thin without worrying about any confirmation from society. Imroz deeply loved her.

“I once said to him, ‘Imroz! If I had got Sahir, I wouldn’t have got you!’

Quick came the reply, ‘I certainly would’ve got you even, if I’d had to pull you out from his house...’(Pritam,102)

As she states the relationship with him is of incalculable value. She narrated in a letter which she wrote to Imroz from Dubrovnik in the south of Yugoslavia in august 1967:

“It is the 15<sup>th</sup> today: the day of our country’s independence. Could one give a personality to this day I would say you are the 15<sup>th</sup> of August for me, since with you came the emancipation of the being that is me...”(Pritam, 103)

### **The Circle of Hatred**

Amrita Pritam, undoubtedly, carries over the attitude of female phase and truly unveils spirit. She carves out a path for herself both as a woman and as a writer. Recollecting her memories from her childhood to youth, she opens up bravely the conservative societal norms and patriarchal male dominating set up of society. She was brought up by her father as an obedient daughter raising no voice against the suppression. And this was continued after that also when she has to deal with her contemporary colleagues and haters around her. Actually some of her contemporaries were not ready to accept a woman as a writer so intellectual, talented and audacious at the same time that never cared for the opinion of society and lived her own way till her death. Despite of born and brought up in a religious Hindu family she never bounded her emotions in the barricades of religion and social taboos and loved a Muslim man Sahir and had deep Friendship with SajjadHaider.

“Neither Grandmother nor I knew then that the man I was to fall in love with would be of the same faith as the branded utensils were meant for.”(Pritam, 6)

She exhibits an exceptional straightforwardness as she does when asked by her son if Sahir is his father. Instead of betraying a moral confusion, she expresses her desire. Though brought up in a repressing atmosphere, she recalls how the seeds of resistance too were sown in her in the same

house. The autobiography exhibits many incidents with her contemporaries which made her unhappy. As she narrates:

“Rumours nonetheless kept circulating by word of mouth and through sly digs in various pieces of writing”. (Pritam, 26)

These rumours deviously mixed up in an ever-widening web Hatred. There was a certain Punjabi poet who never met her but she had heard enough of what he was in the habit of fabricating against her. She never knew the cause of animosity.

“A contemporary of mine went to the length of imploring my fellow-traveller to sign a paper so I should for the rest of my life be plagued by lawyers and court cases.” (Pritam, 37)

She reveals her agony as a woman openly and depicts some agonized experiences and feelings but with a mask as in writer she narrated in confessional mode. Her romantic quest for love took shape when Sahir and Imroz came into her life which gave the reason to numerous controversies. Some of her contemporaries branded her work as pornographic because of bluntness in style. After that a screening committee was appointed to go through her works. The verdict was that the poems she had written in 1968 on Czechoslovakia were pornographic. As she writes,

“I have had to fight a lifelong battle with my contemporaries. Only now that I am constrained to write about it, I appeal to them in the name of truth not to subtract anything or make excuses.”(Pritam, 109)

She also even got criticism from the contemporaries whom she respected her whole life like Harbhajan Singh, Gurbaksh Singh etc. A story named *Preetlari* by Gurbaksh Singh who had strong impact on her from her childhood, that story contained derogatory remarks intentionally about Amrita and this incident left Amrita speechlessly broken hearted. She was fully aware that they did not Share her sense of community and intellect. Principles and values did not find a place in their minds. She tolerated so much Hatred and Anguish from the society about her writings, love relationships, friendships and for the courageous way that she adopted to live her life but was so patient that never reacted to such filth and hatred. She just continued her duty as a true writer. She narrates,

“Incidents one has witnessed, heard, or gone through, sometimes find their way through the conscious self into creative work.”(Pritam, 116)

Her pains and sufferings can be felt by reading the descriptions which she revealed in her autobiography. She struggled at the hands of male dominating society for each and everything which she gained in her life whether it is her love of her life or her literary career just because she was a woman. She exhibits very bluntly when she says,“But only those have given me pain who have had nothing whatsoever to do with me in life. Their rancour was because I happened to be a contemporary creative artist. I have not suffered at the hands of my readers nor at the hands of those who have shared what I have had to bear.”(Pritam, 132)

## Conclusion

Love and relationships are the most challenging concepts to discuss in our contemporary society. The concept of love particular to the piece of writing is equally a study of psychology, sociology and anthropology as it is a literary endeavour. But this paper is an effort to explain how practically it is very much different from the theoretical concepts. The world and the society always tend to get in the way of lovers. Dealing with emotion of love and her personal friendships Amrita had to experience so much trauma and controversies in her whole life. She was just a woman and a writer at the same time with some dreams of idealized life full of love. Being a woman she was made to suppress her emotions and feelings as an ideal woman but she herself never idealized a woman in her. Regarding the treatment to women in society, she says: “I don’t claim any ideal in womanhood. I do not idealize woman what is important for me is the mental set-up and its evaluation. The only difference between a male mind and a female mind is that their drawbacks are different.”<sup>3</sup> She maintains the grace of her life while narrating her emotional and confessional incidents and her vision of life is wide enough to make her story ‘The Stamp of Love’. She has brilliantly mingled her childhood experiences, experiences at patriarchal society and her bitter experiences with her contemporaries and at the same time exquisitely given the traces of love in her life in the form of Sahir and Imroz as her men of dreams.

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