

## **Pinjar: The ‘other’ side of Partition, Feminism in India, [www.feminisminindia.com](http://www.feminisminindia.com)**

The India-Pakistan partition has been repeatedly interpreted, adapted and documented by artists across different domains in India and abroad. We have had plays, art-exhibitions, novels and poetry recalling the dark past. Hindi cinema has also traversed into it by narrating the tragic stories embedded with assorted political undertones. From Pamela Rooks’ *Train to Pakistan* and Govind Nihalani’s *Tamas* to Srijit Mukherjee’s *Begum Jaan*, Hindi cinema has given us some gut-wrenching tales of partition that seldom focus on both sides of the border.

Chandraprakash Dwivedi’s *Pinjar* (2003) takes a unique stance by narrating the event without demonising any one religion or region. Based on novel by the same name, the film deftly unveils the tragic lives of women who were mistreated by men from both the communities. With Dwivedi’s apt screenplay and Gulzar’s poignant dialogues, the film is indeed a cinematic treat supported by a mournful soundtrack. Moreover, the pathetic state of women in the society at the backdrop of partition makes it a timeless art which continues to hold relevance even in the present times.

*Pinjar* revolves around Puro, a Hindu Punjabi woman, who is abducted by Rashid as a result of a generation-old vendetta which persisted. As Puro’s brother, Trilok, and her fiancé, Ramchand, secretly search for her without the approval of their respective families, Puro struggles to survive through the trauma of isolation and ostracization. At one point, she successfully escapes only to be abandoned by her family members in the name of prestige and honour.

She returns to Rashid and unwillingly submits to her destiny by losing her religion, name, and identity in the process. Her characterisation takes an unexpected turn towards the end when she reunites with her family but decides to stay with her husband.

The film beautifully highlights various issues pertaining to gender. From gender-based discrimination to considering a woman’s virginity as a sign of the family’s prestige, the film explores them all. The metaphor of caged birds is repeatedly placed in the frame as an allusion to oppression. Puro is lovingly called Kugi (species of a bird) at home hinting at this metaphor. The song “*Maar Udaari*” (*Fly high*) in the beginning of the movie, depicts her freedom when she is at home but the tonality of the other songs turn grim as the story unfolds.

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The deep desire for bearing a son and considering daughters as burdens is revealed through Puro’s fifty-year-old pregnant mother who is constantly shown to be praying to beget a son. The father, on the other hand, keeps calling their daughters “*sir ka bojh*” (burdensome) and wants to get rid of them as soon as possible. The song “*Charkha Chalaati Maa*” (*Mother spinning a wheel*), written by Amrita Pritam, perfectly captures this tension behind the scenes as the song literally suggests that it is better off for a girl to die than to grow up and become a burden to her family.

A brief reference to Ramayana is also made in *Pinjar*, depicting the wretched lives of women. There are references made to Sita’s *Agnipariksha* – hinting at her miseries and how it continues even in the present times. Puro’s life is compared to Sita’s as she is also abducted

and later abandoned by the society. However, in contrast to the original narrative, here we see Ramchand (Puro's fiancé) as an unassuming man who is ready to marry Puro even after her abduction.

The virginity of a girl being a sign of the family's honour is a recurring idea in the film. The rivalry between Puro's (Hindu) and Rashid's (Muslim) families is also hinged upon the women in the house. The feud between the two families started off when Puro's granduncle assaulted Rashid's aunt for three days in a row. To avenge this, Rashid is asked to abduct Puro and assault her. Similarly, during partition, Puro's prospective sister-in-law, Lajjo, is abducted straight from the refugee camp by men avenging for their long lost daughter.

The idea of associating a woman's virginity to a man's honour is something which persists even today where a rape survivor is blamed for 'getting raped' and is considered a social outcast. The film also shows a policeman blaming Puro for 'secretly eloping' with Rashid and dismisses the allegations made by her brother, Trilok. This again reflects the present-day scenario where the rape survivor has to bear all the brunt of the violence meted out to her.

The title *Pinjar* (which means skeleton) is connected with the idea of devaluing women and reducing them to mere objects of men's pleasure. In the second half of the film, we see a mentally unstable woman who gets raped and impregnated. She later dies in labour and gives birth to a child who is reared by Puro. Her episode depicts that for some men, a woman's body is nothing but a '*pinjar*' which can be used for any desired purpose. While for some it is a matter of honour, for others it is only an object.

Apart from tackling gender-based issues with the help of metaphors and mythical allegories, the film also attempts to portray Hindus and Muslims in the same light without demonizing or valorizing either of the two. The abductor Rashid is not shown as a stereotypical caricature of a villain who yells '*Allah hu Akbar*' every now and then and mistreats women.

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Contrary to the general depiction of Muslim characters, here we see a guilt-ridden abductor who unwillingly kidnaps Puro only for his family's sake. His guilt is reflected in his teary-eyed confession to Puro, asking her to forgive him for his wrongdoing. The restlessness on his face suggests how a family feud that has been extended to coming generations traumatise the supposed victim as well as the perpetrator. Rashid is as distressed as Puro for not being able to assert his disapproval to the act of abduction. Subsequently, he stands for Puro's decisions and even makes sure that she returns to her family.

The Hindu community is also depicted in multiple shades. Puro's father and the Panchayat Raj are irrevocable social patriarchs who refuse to give value to women and always prioritise their vanity. Though indifferent to the father who abandoned her own daughter, the Panchayat Raj instead condemns Rashid for bringing up the 'mad' woman's child who was technically a Hindu. Rashid unabashedly responds to their hypocritical stance by saying that the child was never paid attention to when he was lying unattended but the Panchayat decided to look into it only after six long months. This scene aptly unravels the inherent hypocrisy within the Hindu community in the story.

*Pinjar* is a story set in the partition period but the issues that it raises are relevant even today. It talks about the miseries of women at the backdrop of partition to add an unexplored perspective to the partition narratives. Apart from laying bare the brutality of those times, the film does wonders in terms of characterization and cinematography. While there are no typical heroes or anti-heroes, the director has ensured that the rawness of the Punjabi region is presented as it is through folk music and Pritam's poetic interludes. The story is an attempt to give voice to the voiceless which usually gets suppressed by the existing dominant narratives.