

**Modern Indian Writing in Translation**  
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**Stench of Kerosene Part - 2**

**Length: 42:23**

So as I said, it is an assortment of ideas that have culled from various interviews that were published in the 1960s and '70s. So much of this is a bit old in terms of timeline but the ideas are still relevant, the ideas that she is discussing is still very relevant which tells us that the structural discrimination against women is still ongoing in some fashion or the other. So, some of her ideas are pretty interesting to look at in connection with this particular story the Stench of Kerosene. So can we skip to the third slide? Next one, please.

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Interviewed by Rama Jha, *Indian Literature*, Vol.25, No.5

Women's Lib is not a separate thing from man's lib. Like woman, man also is mentally a slave. Man has not yet tasted the friendship and company of liberated woman as an equal partner. Men and women have not yet met as two independent human beings. If men and women are not economically independent, how can they love?



So this is from an interview published in Indian literature and she is interviewed by Rama Jha. So here she says, Amrita Pritam says 'women's liberation is not a separate thing from man's liberation. Like woman, man also is mentally a slave. Man has not yet tasted the friendship and company of liberated woman as an equal partner. Men and women have not yet met as two independent human beings. If men and women are not economically independent, how can they love?' So there are several ideas here. The first one is that we need to see liberation as a joint enterprise where men are also included. We cannot kind of

eject them out of this board of enterprise. So it has to be an inclusive struggle where the other sex is also brought on board and such a united front would somehow change the status quo. And she says, this point is interesting in respect to the Stench of Kerosene, 'like woman, man also is mentally a slave.' So I want us to look at a particular section where, two sections in fact, two points in the story, let me come to the first one.

Page 103 in my copy, 'Guleri do not go away,' he begged her. 'I ask you again, do not go this time.' He handed her back the flute unable to continue. 'But why?' she asked 'You come over on the day of the fair and we will return together. I promise you, I will not stay behind.' That's one section, which is interesting. Interesting because he does not have the courage to open up the subject matter, the subject that is bothering him with his closest partner. Basically he is being enslaved by someone or something.

And come to the next section. 'Entering the house, he slumped listless on his charpai. 'You have been away a long time' exclaimed his mother. 'Did you go all the way to Chamba?'" She is irritated there. 'Entering the house, he slumped listless on his charpai. 'You have been away a long time,' exclaimed his mother. 'Did you go all the way to Chamba?' 'Not all the way. Only to the top of the hill,' Manak's voice was heavy.

'Why do you croak like an old woman?' asked his mother severely. 'Be a man.' Manak wanted to retort, 'you are a woman. Why don't you cry like one for a change' but he remained silent.'

But he remained silent. He wants to but he cannot. So he is mentally a slave and that is echoed here, 'like a woman, man is also mentally a slave' and what is pretty interesting in this story is the fact that, as someone else pointed out earlier, patriarchy is channelled. It is channelled through the figure of the mother.

So it becomes doubly powerful, doubly potent when women pick up the cudgels of patriarchy. When it is the man, it is something but when it is the woman who is the custodian of this kind of structural discrimination it becomes really, really monstrous. The other thing that we, of course, are aware of is this, "'why do you croak like an old woman?' asked the mother severely."

So she is kind of provoking him in a gendered way. She is attacking his masculinity there. His manhood is being attacked, and he kind of has an internal response, 'you are a woman so why do not you behave as a woman should,' cry, in moments of difficulty. So we do get that stereotypical set of roles a man or woman should perform. This is how they are supposed to perform but they are not performing in expected ways and there is a problem.

Let's go back to the quote. 'Men and women have not yet met as two independent beings. If men and women are not economically independent, how can they love?' So it is pretty clear there is an economic imbalance between the two sexes. If you apply this principle to the story, Manak is a farmer, his is a rural based economy. However, Guleri is not independent. She is not even represented as a farm worker even though she does a lot of household chores. That is not paid job, that's part of the gendered roles and responsibilities a woman is supposed to carry out.

What is further interesting is that Guleri is compared to farm produce. That corn, the reference to the corn, Manak, page 103. "Later managing to meet alone, Manak remembered taking her hand and telling her, 'You are like unripe corn full of milk.' " So that comparison to farm produce tells you the status which belongs to the female identity, which is something which can be consumed for physical consumption, for biological satisfaction. So they are definitely not independent in relation to this particular story and therefore, Amrita Pritam's question is, if they are not economically independent how can they love as equals? You cannot, that's her argument. If you are not economically independent, you cannot love as an independent being because dependency will corrupt. There is an ulterior motive for falling in love, that's the subtext. That is the subtext so, that will come up in the next quote I think. Sourav, if you please.

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Interviewed by Rama Jha, *Indian Literature*, Vol.25, No.5

Generally women love out of a sense of insecurity. Love is admiration and companionship of the other person. Economic enslavement obstructs the experience of love. Women's liberation is not mere shouting of slogans for one's rights. At least I do not believe in that sort of liberation. To me woman's lib means a fuller development of her personality, so that, she does not have to ask for freedom. She herself develops a capacity to achieve it.



So here she spells it out, 'Generally women love out of a sense of insecurity'. It is a great line I would think, great statement. 'Generally women love out of a sense of insecurity. Love is admiration and companionship of the other person. Economic enslavement obstructs the experience of love. Women's liberation is not mere shouting of slogans for one's rights. At least I do not believe in that sort of liberation. To me women's lib means a fuller development of her personality, so that, she does not have to ask for freedom. She herself develops a capacity to achieve it.'

Economic enslavement obstructs the experience of love, it is an important point to remember. And the last one, fuller independence, greater subjectivity, a fulfilling subjectivity would mean that the woman is completely developed, mature and independent and that she doesn't have to ask for it.

How would you apply this idea of insecurity in relation to the Stench of Kerosene? We need to kind of probe the motivations behind Guleri's need to commit suicide. We need to probe that idea, we will come back to it. Sourav, could you move on to the next one?

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Interviewed by Rama Jha, *Indian Literature*, Vol.25, No.5

my theme is human relationship, particularly man-woman relationship. It is their treatment that differs according to the genre in which I choose to write. The novel certainly provides a bigger range. And some times, the same theme acquires a different treatment according to the projected focus.



So in general, here she is talking about her theme, the major concerns which inform her work. 'My theme is human relationship, particularly man-woman relationship. It is their treatment that differs according to the genre in which I choose to write. The novel certainly provides a bigger range. And sometimes, the same theme acquires a different treatment according to the projected focus.'

So once again, in this story, it's the man-woman relationship that kind of strengthens and informs this plot. I am somehow reminded of another story, some of you might have read this. Kamla Das' Summer Vacation. How many of you are familiar with that story? Okay, it is a very interesting story, Summer Vacation. Summer Vacation by Kamla Das.

There we have as one of the characters a widower. A man who loses his wife and he has a child, a young female child and the story is told through her eyes, how the loss of the mother kind of affects the way she looks at the world and how the grandmother in the story takes care of her and things like that.

But the point of comparison between that story and this one is that the husband, the widower, is still mourning the loss of his wife. He is so affected by that loss, that tragic loss of his wife that he is not willing even to come back to the mother-in-law's house

because he would be kind of flooded by the emotions that are suffused in each and every corner of that house.

So he doesn't come into that house at all. He drops the kid at the railway station, the grandmother comes and picks the child up and then you know, spends time with her for the vacation. Brings her back again to the train station there, father picks her up from the train station, takes her back to Calcutta where he works.

So the point of comparison for me there is the romantic narrative. The romantic narrative where even after the loss of the partner, the female partner, the husband is not kind of forced at least for the sake of the daughter to remarry. So there are different ways of treating the romantic subject, and it has been treated differently in Indian literature. So this is not the only treatment of romance. There are really beautifully rendered romantic stories, even as subplots.

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Interviewed by Rama Jha, *Indian Literature*, Vol.25, No.5

For example, one of my earlier stories—'Yatri' is about a child who is given over to a sadhu as a result of his mother's vow that she would dedicate her son to God if he survives. The story is projected through the boy's consciousness who feels angry for being the victim of somebody else's choice. In my novels when I deal with the theme of love it is not isolated love but love connected with different aspects of life.



This idea is also very interesting. Here, she talks about one of her earlier stories, 'Yatri' is about a child who is given over to a sadhu as a result of his mother's vow that she would dedicate her son to God if he survives. The story is projected through the boy's consciousness who feels angry for being the victim of somebody else's choice. In my novels

when I deal with a theme of love it is not isolated love but love connected with different aspects of life.’

Why I think this idea is interesting in relation to the Stench of Kerosene is the role of the mother. The role of the mother who gives away her child to fulfill a vow. So somehow the mother is at fault. The problematic character is the mother and here, again, in the Stench of Kerosene we have a problematic mother who is forced to do certain things to fulfill her obligations to some greater ideal or system.

In the case it is the sadhu, here the mother of Manak fulfills an obligation towards some unseen forces of patriarchy. And the child, the child who is a victim is resentful and he would inevitably, also have a son, the son of Manak who would turn out to be, most likely to be resentful. The baby is a victim of the forces of this particular insidious system.

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Jasbir Jain, “Remembering Amrita”, 2005

“Can she be labelled a feminist writer? In her concerns with the right to body and her defiance of social norms she can be.”



So ‘can she be a feminist writer? Can she be labelled a feminist writer? In her concerns with the right to body and her defiance of social norms she can be.’ It’s pretty clear, needs no explanation.

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## Of Pain and Protest

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There is a recurrent note of bitterness—but unobtrusive and obviously sublimated—in Amrita Pritam's conversation.

The Statesman, 1968



This excerpt is titled, this excerpt from a longer piece titled, Of Pain and Protest and I took it from The Statesman published in 1968. 'There is a recurrent note of bitterness but unobtrusive and obviously sublimated in Amrita Pritam's conversation.' The conversation refers to her ideas, which come through during her interviews but I could sense bitterness and resentment, which has sublimated even in her literary works.

There is a lot of bitterness in the Stench of Kerosene, bitterness on the part of Manak, bitterness on the part of Guleri, bitterness on the part of the mother, the older figure. So there is a kind of circulation of this angst, this anger in this story which is reflective of certain concerns in the society. What is interesting in the Stench of Kerosene is that, against this landscape of bitterness there is also bubbling joy on the part of Guleri.

Despite all her laborious day-to-day routine affairs, she still kind of finds joy in small pleasures of life, which is decking her up, herself during the you know carnival, festivals and so on, and looking forward to the journey home and things like that, enjoying the walk with Manak up to that hill. All those small pleasures are dotted in this story, which gives you a window into the kind of life, or perspective to this life Guleri has.

We somehow tend to focus a lot on the finale to the story. The death kind of attracts our attention but the joys of Guleri is very, very interesting in the sense that she is not



oppressed. Mentally, she does not reflect that oppression so much. She does not reflect that. In fact, you know her encouragement of the husband to play the flute, to enjoy his music, her attempts at cheering him up when she is on the verge of leaving.

So she does have a kind of a vibrant attitude towards life which perhaps may be an indication towards a very, very aware, self-aware personality. And we haven't talked about the other important thing, the fact that she is childless. She does not seem to exude that pain at all. One reason could be the fact that she is too young to realize the burden that is there on her, the invisible burden of lack of childlessness that is there on her shoulders. Everybody else seems to notice this not her, that is one way to look at it. The other way is to see her as a person who is not limited by the fact that she is childless. She does not think that it is a kind of a disability that would lessen her joys with her husband or with the rest of the society. She still continues to have fun with her friends. So she could either be a very, very mature but romantic young woman or she could be a very carefree but clueless young woman. There are, there are two ways of looking at her.

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## Of Pain and Protest

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"If a woman were too intelligent, it would be a double tragedy.

People don't like intelligent women here. Women are not taken

seriously..."

The Statesman, 1968



That nicely leads it to this citation. 'If a woman were too intelligent', Amrita Pritam says, 'if a woman were too intelligent, it would be a double tragedy. People don't like intelligent women here. Women are not taken seriously.' Let us stick to the first one because it has a nice echo with this story. 'If a woman were too intelligent it would be a double tragedy.

So as I said, the lack of a child is not undercutting her happiness or defining her happiness there. She seems to disregard that fact, maybe she is you know deliberately suppressing the pain, we do not know but all other indications in the story point to the fact that she seems to have, to find her own happiness despite this lack. And the very interesting thing here is that in this story there are only two references to her lack of children, there are only two references.

The first one is in connection with her going away to her parents home and the second one is in connection with the mother, the mother of Manak who makes a resolve that she would not let another year pass without making arrangements for a child for Manak. So in terms of narrative, this idea is not talked about so much in order to preserve the mystery of the story, to kind of intensify the effects towards the second half of the story. That could be one of the reasons.

I want us to think about another story, not a story, a novel by Perumal Murugan, *One Part Woman*, where childlessness is at the heart of the novel. The havoc childlessness causes a very romantic couple, it really kind of tears them apart, brings tragedy into their lives. In *One Part Woman*, the fact that the central couple cannot have children and it also causes a great havoc among the people around them.

So there you can see how much pain the central woman character is in. She herself feels the pain, society is giving her pressure but she herself gives herself pressure because of this fact. But here in this story, we don't see Guleri kind of crumbling under the pressure of not having a child. So there are two very distinct treatments. So it is a very interesting comparison. You can compare Perumal Murugan's work with this one.

This couple, Guleri and Manak doesn't seem to be bothered by it. At least the story does not tell us overtly that they are bothered by it. It is the mother, who seems to kind of push things along but there things are different. The couple is affected. The couple is really affected by the fact that they cannot have children. Okay, can we move on?

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## The Stench of Kerosene

"It seems to me that you have passed through the bluebell wood; you do not hear anything that I say."

"You are right, Guleri. I cannot hear anything that you are saying to me," replied Manak with a deep sigh.



So this is from the Stench of Kerosene. 'It seems to me that you have passed through the bluebell wood; you do not hear anything that I say.' 'You are right, Guleri. I cannot hear anything you are saying to me.' So if you connect this with the previous quote, women being not understood, women being not listened to, intelligent women not being taken seriously, there is a kind of a thematic parallel.

Perhaps Manak should listen to Guleri and let things go and find pleasures in the everyday simplicity, in the joys of society, in pastoral pleasures such as flute playing. So he is not listening to an intelligent voice like Guleri's, so that idea seems to come through. Can we move to the next one?

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## Padma Sachdev, "Amrita: The Flame on the Smoke Ball" (trans. by Amar Mudi)



"She championed the cause of women defying the saying that women are the worst enemy of women. She supported women writers to such an extent that it seemed she was the brigadier welcoming new recruits to her brigade."



Okay, this is from another article by Padma Sachdev. She is a poetess herself, she writes poetry, Padma Sachdev. Somebody who is really encouraged by Amrita Pritam. Padma Sachdev also went on to win a Sahitya Akademi Award. So the title of the article is The Flame on the Smoke Ball, and she says that 'Amrita championed the cause of women defying the saying that women are the worst enemy of women. She supported women writers to such an extent that it seemed she was the brigadier welcoming new recruits to her brigade.'

I'm interested in the first statement, the idea that women are the enemy of women that seems to be one of the cultural truisms which keeps circulating every now and then among particular sections of the population. You can even hear the comment these days that the worst enemy of women are women, and in this story, in the Stench of Kerosene on a superficial level that seems to be very true. It seems to be very true in the sense that the mother-in-law seems to pack the daughter-in-law away, the barren daughter-in-law away and arranges for another woman to be the wife of her son.

So on the surface it seems to be the mother-in-law who is the tyrant, who is the monster, who is the reason behind the death of this really happy-go-lucky cheerful young wife. So women being the enemy of women seems to be one of the concerns of this particular story, but on further exploration we know that the mother-in-law is dictated by the tenets of

patriarchy. She is championing the cause of patriarchy. She is the custodian of patriarchy, which is why she is pushing this apparently indifferent, apparently unwilling son into another marriage.

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### Padma Sachdev, "Amrita: The Flame on the Smoke Ball" (trans. by Amar Mudi)



'How can you be a traditional mother-in-law! For that you need to have that stern appearance.'

...I told her many stories of the proverbial tyrant mothers-in-law. She used to laugh heartily and remark: "This type of women force their daughters-in-law not to respect their elders." Eventually, the foreigner bahu left Shaillee and an ideal Indian daughter-in-law stepped in. She took care of Amrita well and also blessed the house with children.'



This is in connection with the personal details of Amrita Pritam. I just brought it along because again, there seems to be a resonance with this storyline to a certain extent. So the first idea is said by Padma Sachdev, and she says 'how can you be a traditional mother-in-law! For that you need to have that stern appearance.

I told her many stories,' I referring to Padma Sachdev so, she is a very kind a close friend of Amrita and she tells Amrita many stories '...of the proverbial tyrant mothers-in-law. She used to laugh heartily, she, Amrita used to laugh heartily and remark 'This type of women force their daughters-in-law not to respect their elders.' Eventually the foreigner bahu left Shaillee and an ideal Indian daughter-in-law stepped in. She took care of Amrita well and also blessed the house with children. '


So Amrita's son was first married to a foreigner, so the son is referred as Shaillee that is the fond nickname Amrita used this to call her son Shaillee, and he was married to a foreigner but that woman eventually leaves the husband, the son of Amrita. And later on, he is remarried to an Indian daughter-in-law who blesses him with children. So the last

point is what is kind of resonating with this particular story where the next daughter-in-law kind of offers children, so that very interesting link is there between the biography and this particular story.

So what is the duty of a daughter-in-law? To be very respectful of the parents-in-law and to bear children. The romance does not come in. The fact that the daughter-in-law should be romantically associated with the husband does not come in, that is the interesting point. So the jarring element in the Stench of Kerosene is the romance. Why is romance problematic? Why is romance problematic? Because romance has its own rules and regulations, which can, at times, be in contrast to the rules and regulations of society here.

So the role of a dutiful daughter-in-law is to perpetuate the male line by producing heirs, male heirs most preferably, and if that does not happen then the romantic trajectory has to be sniped and somebody has to step in to sort out the issue. So that idea is there, can you move on to the next one?

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### Carlo Coppola interviews Amrita Pritam

Mahfil: Yes, as I recall, you were the first woman to receive this Award too. There seems to be a preponderance of certain types of images in your poetry, ones that remind me a good deal of the Urdu ghazal, the lover waiting for the beloved, the beloved never coming to the lover. . .

Amrita Pritam: The idea does perhaps come from there; . . .it's a pretty common idea in nearly all of the poetry of North India, particularly Northwest India. But my expression of these themes, I think is different. This is an eternal thing; one has to deal with it in life as well as in poetry.

AMRITA PRITAM Author(s): Carlo Coppola and AMRITA PRITAM Source: Mahfil, Vol. 5, No. 3, AMRITA PRITAM NUMBER (1968 - 1969), pp. 5-26 Published by: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University



Okay, this is from another journal, source is Mahfil. This journal now continues as the Journal of South Asian literature, I think. So this is the older one and she is interviewed by Carlo Coppola and there are related ideas which might be interesting in relation to the

Stench of Kerosene. So he says, the staff reporter for Mahfil asks this question comments saying 'Yes, as I recall you were the first woman to receive this award.'

Sorry, Carlo Coppola is the one who is standing in for Mahfil. 'You were the first woman to receive this award, Sahitya Akademi Award. There seems to be a preponderance of certain types of images in your poetry, ones that remind me a good deal of the Urdu ghazal, the lover waiting for the beloved, the beloved never coming to the lover.'

And she says 'The idea does perhaps come from there, it is a pretty common idea in nearly all of the poetry of North India, particularly North West India. But my expression of these themes, I think is different. This is an eternal thing, one has to deal with it in life as well as in poetry.' 'That eternal thing is the image of the lover waiting for the beloved.

So the preponderance, the predominance of the romantic notion, the romantic idea is always there in Amrita Pritam's work. And in that context I really like that section where Guleri and Manak meet in a kind of a pastoral setting, idyllic setting, a timeless sitting where there is no interference of society of any sort. There is no regulation in place there of course, Guleri somehow kind of channels some of the wild desires there. It is a nice scene there. In fact, let us have another look at that section. 'Natu took the mare a few paces ahead to leave the couple alone. It crossed Manak's mind that it was this time of year, seven years ago that he and his friends had come on this very road to go to the harvest festival in Chamba and it was at this fair that Manak had first seen Guleri and they had bartered their hearts to each other.'

So that section as well as the last idea there where he says, 'you have walked all this distance better get on the mare,' that comment is very interesting. It is a very courtly gesture, it is a romantic gesture. You have walked all the way, why do you not get on to the mare. Harsher things are to come, the very next day but till the last minute we see that courtly gesture and it somehow suddenly reminds me of Persuasion. I mean, it is a big jump from Indian literature to British but the gesture of making sure that your beloved is in comfort occurs there to where you see Wentworth, Frederick Wentworth helping Ann Eliot onto that gig driven by his relatives. So offering succour is one of the gestures of the romantic hero. To take care, to protect, so that gesture is what is evident here too.

But there is a big fall coming, not far away. There is a big fall where he fails to protect the woman in question where she kind of sets herself afire because of this break in romantic fidelity, breaking romantic fidelity. Her clinging to his flute is an indication of her loyalty towards her lover. So it is an important narrative which is kind of sniped off in this story, so I would see this as a clash of narratives of romance and the institution of marriage. They come to a head whereas I said in the last class something has to give and romance gives, romance falls, collapses.

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### Carlo Coppola interviews Amrita Pritam

Mahfil: The fire images are also very outstanding: the hot breeze, the cigarette, the hot veins of the body or a cooking pot.

Amrita Pritam: Yes, I used the cigarette image in one of my latest poems called "Amrita Pritam." You published it in Mahfil not long.

AMRITA PRITAM Author(s): Carlo Coppola and AMRITA PRITAM Source: Mahfil, Vol. 5, No. 3, AMRITA PRITAM NUMBER (1968 - 1969), pp. 5-26 Published by: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University



This is something I also pointed out in the first class for this story. Mahfil points out that 'the fire images are also very outstanding' in her work, in general. The hot breeze, the cigarette, the hot veins of the body or a cooking pot. The idea of heat, visceral eviscerating, unbearable heat is one of the frequently used images of Amrita. Heat that seems to somehow offset the pain in the heart of the woman.

So and she says, 'yes, I used the cigarette image in one of my latest poems called 'Amrita Pritam.' We did have a look at that point where somehow, as I said, the heat seems to kind of tone down the pain. The imagery of heat seems to tone down the pain. In the Stench of Kerosene setting oneself on fire seems to be Guleri's way of dealing with the pain of Manak's betrayal there. So that is possibly the best way for her to deal with it, to forget that kind of agony. Okay, can we move on to the next one?



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## Carlo Coppola interviews Amrita Pritam

Mahfil: Let's go back to your poetry. I notice the image of the unborn child as a scar in a couple poems, the one called "The Scar," and then in "The Scar of the Wound," where you have the child referred to as "the shame of the mother.

"This certainly isn't the traditional Indian view of childbearing.



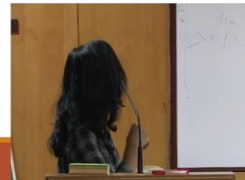
Carlo Coppola asks, says 'Let's go back to your poetry. I notice the image of the unborn child as a scar in a couple of poems, the one called "The Scar" and then in the "Scar of the Wound," where you have the child referred to as "the shame of the mother." This certainly is not the traditional Indian view of childbearing.' So this is the question. The stigma associated with the unborn child seems to crop up in your work, why is that?

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## Carlo Coppola interviews Amrita Pritam

Amrita Pritam: No, no. You're not looking at them in the proper context. It has nothing to do with Indian traditions toward childbearing, directly at least. This second poem is about the child of an abducted woman, born at the time of Partition. The other poem, "The Scar," is about an illegitimate child. If you look at the original first line, you'll see, "kaccii kandh muhabat vaalii," or, "one born of mud-wall love," or love not recognized by society. The child has not been born in wedlock.



So that is the question, and this is the response.( Sourav, please.) She says ‘No, no. You are not looking at them in the proper context. It has nothing to do with Indian traditions towards child bearing, directly at least. This second poem is about the child of an abducted woman, born at the time of partition. The other poem “The Scar,’ is about an illegitimate child.

If you look at the original first line, you will see, okay my pronunciation may not be the right one “kaccii kandh muhabat vaalii,” or “one born of mud wall love” or love not recognized by society. The child has not been born in wedlock.’ Therein lies the stigma, just because the child is not legitimate there inevitably is a stain on the identity of the child.

Why I picked this exchange is because there is again a resonance with the Stench of Kerosene where there is a stigma associated with this child, a child born in wedlock within the institution of marriage but it still carries a stain, a stigma for the husband, for the father. Why is that? Everything is fine and dandy. The child is born within the four acceptable walls of custom and tradition but not accepted by the father because the child is the price, the blood price given by Guleri. So the child is born out of the destruction of a very beautiful, perhaps very happy-go-lucky carefree young woman, a very self aware young woman. Perhaps that is the reason why he does not want anything to do with this particular child and therefore the child carries the stigma. So we have a kind of a paradox here, usually

the male heir is welcomed, massively welcomed by the father, by the family and that welcome is not given to Manak's child here because the stain of Guleri's death, the stain or the break-up of that romantic relationship is associated with that baby, with that child.

We cannot absolve him of the crime. We still need to remember that he is not willing to discuss the subject matter. He needs the support. He needs the physical presence of Guleri with him in order to prevent that marriage, the marriage to the other woman, so he needs her as a support, which in itself perhaps indicates that he is a weak person, maybe a weak individual who needs the strength of Guleri to stop certain things being set in motion.

So we need to always remember the complicity and again those very disturbing ideas there, 'obedient to his mother and to custom Manak's body responded to the new woman, but his heart was dead within him.' So what? So the heart is dead but the body responds and again, so that perhaps a very insidious set of double standards is at work, we do not know but we need to kind of question the silence, the weakness and the participation in perpetuating this structural system of patriarchy. So that idea needs to be kept in mind.

'His face was sad, lifeless as a cinder.' Again that imagery associated with fires is there page 105, 'Mute with pain, Manak mute with pain could only stare and feel his own life burning out.' There seems to be an emotional disconnect in him with the events that are happening around him. So we need to question that mental shutdown, we need to question that. It is there but it is a very culpable, fatal emotional shutdown, isn't it? So we need to question that.

We also need to talk about one other thing, which we have not touched on at all, which is the father of Guleri. 'Among Manak's kin' page 103 'Amongst Manak's kinsmen it was customary to settle the bride price before the wedding. Manak was nervous because he did not know the price of Guleri's father, know the price Guleri's father would demand from him but Guleri's father was prosperous and had lived in cities.'

The father-in-law is prosperous and knows about the urban world where discriminations are lesser, less obvious as well. More torn down. 'So he had sworn that he would not take money for his daughter,' no bride price for the daughter 'but would give her to a worthy

young man of a good family.' 'Worthy young man of a good family.' So his trust has been broken too by the silence, the very culpable silence, the emotional disconnect of Manak. By the cowardice, let us call it by its original name the cowardice. So Guleri's father, a very brief appearance in the story but a very interesting character. In that he breaks traditions there in not demanding a bride price. The other daughter-in-law who is bought quote unquote is bought with a bride price. So we can compare the two different families that are there, families of brides that are there in the story, one Guleri's and the other the second wife's, who is bought for 500 rupees, isn't she?

So the father is a very interesting character. Perhaps this interesting father brought his daughter up in an interesting, more carefree way, in a more modern way quote unquote. Here I am reminded of Kabuliwala, where the father raises Mini by not teaching her or telling her about all these marriage rituals and so on and so forth. The child is kind of brought in a more or less healthy environment where she is not constantly reminded of the fact that she has to go away to the in-laws' house. So we do have references to such modern fathers in Indian literature.

I think I will stop here. Thank you for listening.