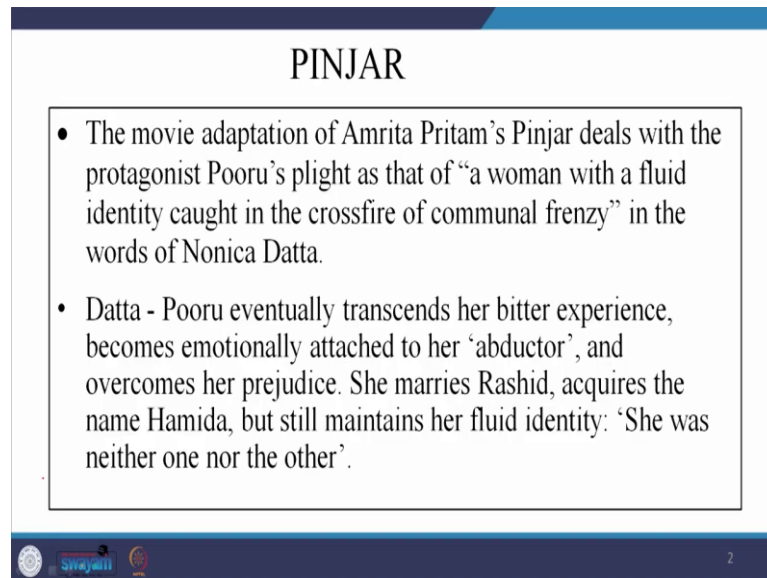


**Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema**  
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**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee**

**Lecture - 28**  
**Accounts of the Survivor - V**

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Partition of India in Print Media and Cinema. We are talking about the Accounts of the Survivor. Today, we will discuss Amrita Pritam's novel Pinjar. So, the movie adaptation of Amrita Pritam's Pinjar by Chandra Prakash Dwivedi deals with the protagonist Pooru's plight as that of a woman with a fluid identity, caught in the crossfire of communal frenzy, as Nonica Datta observes.

Once again, it is a crossfire or a rivalry between two communities, but the sufferer is (like we see in the novel), Pooru the protagonist. And Nonica Datta notes that Pooru eventually transcends her bitter experience of being kidnapped, converted to Islam and forcibly made to cohabit with her abductor; (Refer Slide Time: 01:28)



**PINJAR**

- The movie adaptation of Amrita Pritam's Pinjar deals with the protagonist Pooru's plight as that of "a woman with a fluid identity caught in the crossfire of communal frenzy" in the words of Nonica Datta.
- Datta - Pooru eventually transcends her bitter experience, becomes emotionally attached to her 'abductor', and overcomes her prejudice. She marries Rashid, acquires the name Hamida, but still maintains her fluid identity: 'She was neither one nor the other'.

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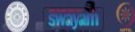
and she becomes emotionally attached to her abductor actually and overcomes her prejudice.

She marries her abductor Rashid, acquires the new Muslim name Hamida, and yet maintains her fluid identity. So, she is a case of the liminal positioning of the woman,

who belongs neither here nor there. So, she is neither the one nor the other. (Refer Slide Time: 01:52)

## PINJAR

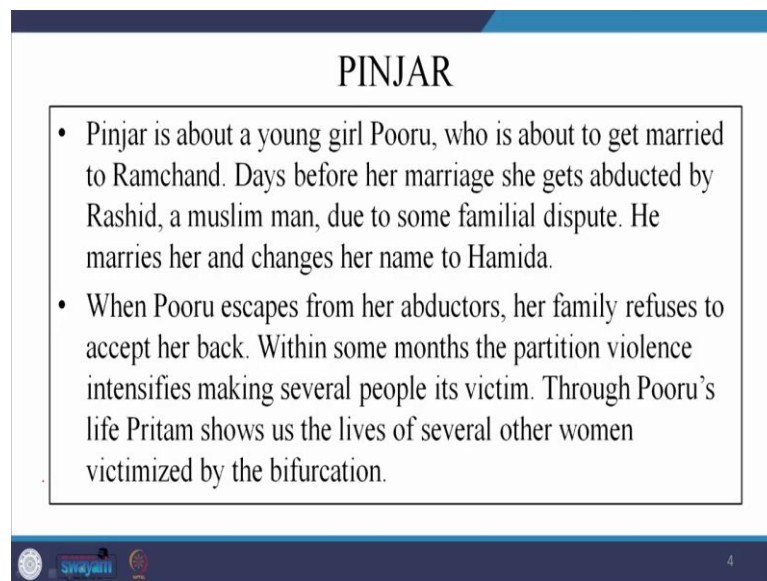
- Urvashi Butalia's 'Other side of silence' - Kamlaben Patel recounts that nearly 75000 women had been raped and abducted on both sides of partition. Along with rapes, women also underwent several specific kinds of violence, they were paraded naked, some had their breasts cut off.
- She further recollects that tattoo with marks of other religion were made on the bodies of women with the idea of defiling the purity of their race, they were forced to have sex with men of other religion. At times the children born by these rapes were forcibly taken away from them. Some families traded in their women in lieu of freedom. Women were also abducted from camps or from the caravans of people marching across the border on foot.

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In Urvashi Butalia's *Other Side of a Silence*, we see Kamlaben Patel recounting that there were innumerable women raped and abducted on both sides of the border, and the women were actually subjected to specific kinds of brutalities and animosities, such as they were paraded naked and in some cases, their breasts were cut off. [She] actually recalls that tattoos with marks of other religion were made on the bodies of women with the idea of defiling the purity of their entire community. And tattoos were made with slogans of a specific community on the body of the rival community's women.


Children born of illegitimate or forceful relations were forcibly taken away from these women afterwards. It is in the context of this parallel history/ this parallel experience by women at the time of partition that we place this novel *Pinjar* in.

We furnish this information in our understanding of Pritam's novel *Pinjar*. It is about a young girl Pooru, who is about to get married to Ramchand and days before her marriage, she gets abducted by Rashid who is a Muslim man. There is an old family dispute and as a way of getting back, as a way of taking revenge, (Refer Slide Time: 03:42)

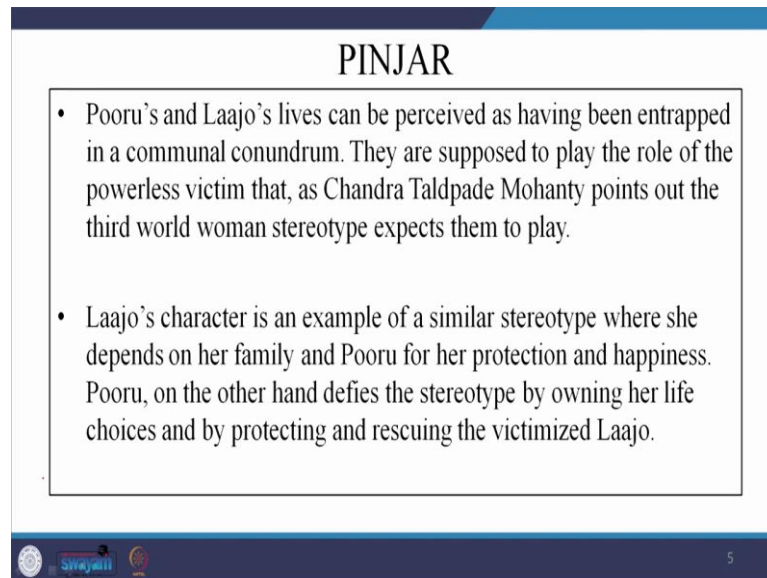


### PINJAR

- Pinjar is about a young girl Pooru, who is about to get married to Ramchand. Days before her marriage she gets abducted by Rashid, a muslim man, due to some familial dispute. He marries her and changes her name to Hamida.
- When Pooru escapes from her abductors, her family refuses to accept her back. Within some months the partition violence intensifies making several people its victim. Through Pooru's life Pritam shows us the lives of several other women victimized by the bifurcation.

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Rashid kidnaps Pooru, marries her, and changes her name to Hamida. After Pooru somehow manages to escape from her abductor and go back to her family, her family members refuse to accept her back. Through Pooru's life, Pritam is trying to write about or describe the experiences, the lives of several other women who were victimized by the bifurcation of the subcontinent. (Refer Slide Time: 04:22)



### PINJAR

- Pooru's and Laajo's lives can be perceived as having been entrapped in a communal conundrum. They are supposed to play the role of the powerless victim that, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out the third world woman stereotype expects them to play.
- Laajo's character is an example of a similar stereotype where she depends on her family and Pooru for her protection and happiness. Pooru, on the other hand defies the stereotype by owning her life choices and by protecting and rescuing the victimized Laajo.

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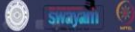
So, we see that these abducted women are supposed to play the role of the powerless victim. These abducted women, these victims are supposed to play the passive role - the role of the powerless victim which Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out is a position that, many a times, the Third World woman is expected to play. It is a kind of ideal stereotype that the Third World woman is expected to subscribe to and reenact.

Rajjo's character is an example of the stereotype, where she depends on her family and Pooru actually salvages her. So, Rajjo is the woman that Pooru's brother is going to marry; Rajjo is Pooru's sister-in-law. And so, we see two kinds of characterizations, two kinds of possibilities in both these women -- while Rajjo is dependent for her protection and for her happiness on Pooru and the rest of the family,

Pooru defies this kind of a traditionalist experience and she owns her own life choice and in fact, takes charge of not only her own life, but she goes on to protect and rescue the victimized Rajjo. (Refer Slide Time: 06:06)

### Pinjar

- Pritam shows how Pooru/Hamida defies patriarchal and territorial boundaries, and effectively uses her agency to critique the reality of Partition by choosing to stay in Pakistan.
- The issue of abduction is central to Pritam's concerns, but with a difference. She situates it within the framework of Hindu identity and patriarchal anxiety. Her worldview contrasts with the chauvinist perspective that interprets abduction as an act of Muslim depravity and aggression, and targets the entire Muslim community for its culpability.
- Pinjar is the story of a woman's liminal position in the face of hardening religious and national boundaries. Pooru /Hamida is an example of that liminality. Yet, she emerges as an active agent in shaping her destiny. Amrita shows that an abducted and raped woman is not a mere victim; her pain and anguish can be a source of powerful energy for her new identity.

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So Amrita Pritam shows how Pooru, who later on becomes Hamida, defies the patriarchal stereotype and she actually transcends the boundaries.

And it would not be wrong to say (although it's a detour from the current discussion), a figure like Pooru in Pinjar or Toba Tek Singh in Manto's short story - they are actually representative of a counter-territoriality; they are actually representative of the hyper-real position of the grey zone, which cannot be reconciled with any real and pre-existing category.

Pooru effectively uses her agency to critique the reality of Partition by choosing to stay on in Pakistan with her abductor. So, the issue of abduction is central to Amrita Pritam's concern, but she is dealing with this issue with a difference. She situates it within the framework of the Hindu identity and patriarchal anxiety.

As Pritam sees it, it's not only the Muslim violator, but also the question of the conservative ideals in a Hindu family that does not want to own violated female kin. So, Pooru's is a liminal position in the face of hardening religious and national boundaries. She is an example... she actually embodies the liminality or the lack of territory. The question of etching/engraving territory through and on women's body is something that Pooru resists through her agency.

She resists such definitive belonging being imposed on her through her agency. She emerges as an active agent in shaping her destiny, and Pritam shows that the abducted and raped woman is not merely a victim, but can alternatively become a source of powerful agency, and she can actually be in charge of shaping or fashioning a new identity, thereby using her situation, her initially victimized position to her strength rather than as her weakness.

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## PINJAR

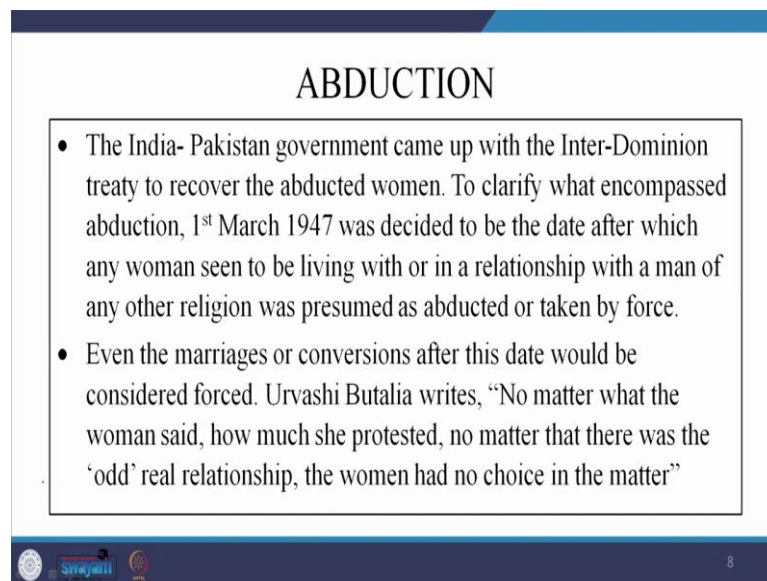
- Nonica Dutta writes of Amrita Pritam's life story that, not all Punjabis identified with monolithic religion, especially the experiences of women were "fragmented and historical", she writes "Pritam's experience of Partition impels her to invoke a shared culture of cultural symbols and language, and to transgress and ultimately transcend the languages of religious and communal mobilization."

Nonica Dutta notes how Amrita Pritam's life story subscribes to the fact that the writer herself never identified with a monolithic religion or a specific experience of women, for Pritam's experiences of women were ramified and fragmented.

As Nonica Dutta writes, Pritam's experience of Partition impels her to invoke a shared culture of cultural symbols and languages, and to transgress and ultimately transcend the languages of religious and communal mobilization.

So, we see that it is not only a narrative of a Hindu violated woman versus a Muslim violator or abductor. This sub-narrative or subplot of abduction can be placed within a larger plot of class rivalry, where the Muslims are traditionally/generationally shown as poorer and hence exploited, whereas the Hindus are the landlords and much more affluent.

There is the question of economic and socio-cultural discrepancies that informs the decision of abduction or the act of abduction by Rashid. (Refer Slide Time: 10:57)



## ABDUCTION

- The India- Pakistan government came up with the Inter-Dominion treaty to recover the abducted women. To clarify what encompassed abduction, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1947 was decided to be the date after which any woman seen to be living with or in a relationship with a man of any other religion was presumed as abducted or taken by force.
- Even the marriages or conversions after this date would be considered forced. Urvashi Butalia writes, “No matter what the woman said, how much she protested, no matter that there was the ‘odd’ real relationship, the women had no choice in the matter”

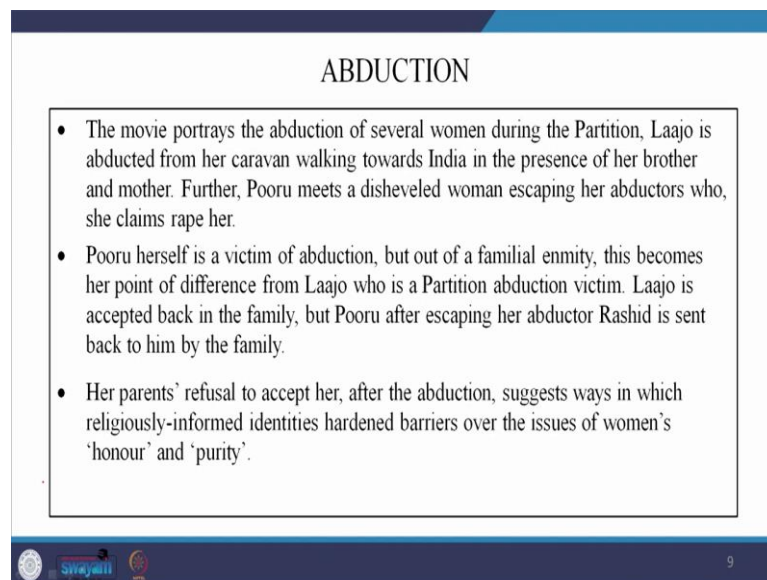
Swayam 8



Urvashi Butalia talks about the forced process of marriage, conversion and followed by that, rehabilitation.


She says no matter what the women wanted, how much they protested, no matter what the nature of the relationship or their current status, the women had no choice in their matter -- whether their question of marriage, conversion or repatriation. All these decisions were part of a larger patriarchal order.

So, the movie portrays abduction of several women during the partition, and Pooru herself is a victim initially. And her abduction (like I said) is born out of a familial enmity. (Refer Slide Time: 11:52)



### ABDUCTION

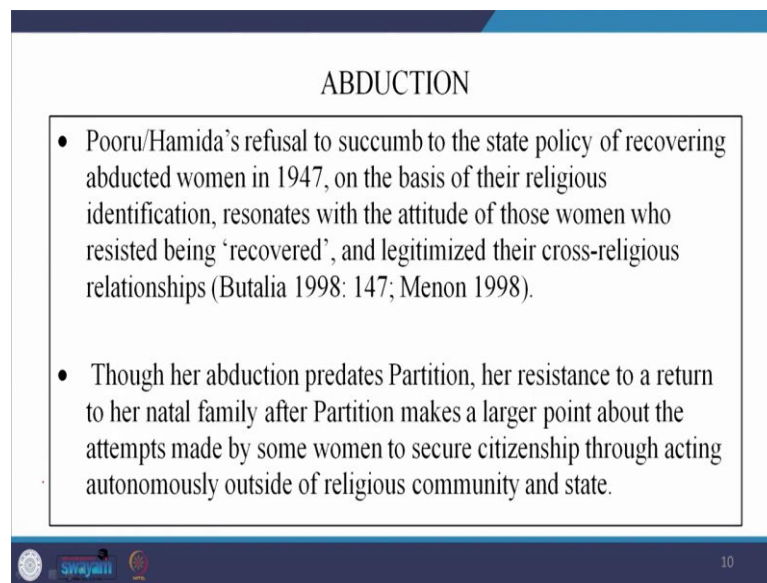
- The movie portrays the abduction of several women during the Partition, Laajo is abducted from her caravan walking towards India in the presence of her brother and mother. Further, Pooru meets a disheveled woman escaping her abductors who, she claims rape her.
- Pooru herself is a victim of abduction, but out of a familial enmity, this becomes her point of difference from Laajo who is a Partition abduction victim. Laajo is accepted back in the family, but Pooru after escaping her abductor Rashid is sent back to him by the family.
- Her parents' refusal to accept her, after the abduction, suggests ways in which religiously-informed identities hardened barriers over the issues of women's 'honour' and 'purity'.

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This becomes her point of difference from Rajjo, who is a partition abduction victim.

So, both the women are abducted; however, Pooru is abducted due to some familial enmity before the partition, whereas her would-be sister-in-law is a partition abduction victim. Rajjo is accepted back in the family, but Pooru does not want to go back.

So, her parents' refusal to accept her after the abduction suggests ways in which religiously informed identities actually hardened the barriers over the issues of women's honour and purity. (Refer Slide Time: 12:40)



ABDUCTION

- Pooru/Hamida's refusal to succumb to the state policy of recovering abducted women in 1947, on the basis of their religious identification, resonates with the attitude of those women who resisted being 'recovered', and legitimized their cross-religious relationships (Butalia 1998: 147; Menon 1998).
- Though her abduction predates Partition, her resistance to a return to her natal family after Partition makes a larger point about the attempts made by some women to secure citizenship through acting autonomously outside of religious community and state.

10

So, Pooru's resistance to return to her natal family makes a larger point about the attempts made by these women to secure a sense of belonging, a citizenship and thereby acting as autonomous identities outside of religious communities and the nation-state. (Refer Slide Time: 13:14)

## ABDUCTION

- While reflecting on her abduction, 'a sense of resentment surged in Hamida's mind. When it happened to her, religion had become an insurmountable obstacle; neither her parents nor her in-laws-to-be had been willing to accept her. And now, the same religion had become so accommodating!' (Pritam 1987: 39)
- The abduction and rape of the women led them towards a hatred for their own bodies and a sense of 'defilement'.

So, while reflecting on her abduction, as Pritam notes, a sense of resentment surged in Hamida's mind. This is from the book itself.

Pritam writes, "A sense of resentment surged in Hamida's mind when it happened to her. Religion had become an insurmountable obstacle. Neither her parents nor her in-laws to-be had been willing to accept her, and now the same religion had become so accommodating.

This is in reference to the family of Pooru coming afterwards and expressing their wish to take her back, but she resents. The abduction and rape of the woman led them towards a hatred for their own bodies and a sense of defilement. So, the film ends with Pooru's statement that whether a woman is a Hindu girl or a Muslim, whosoever reaches her destination carries along my soul too.

She would survive in all those women that are taken back by their natal family, but she herself had made an individual decision that she would not actually go back and marry Ramchand or in fact, espouse her Hindu-Punjabi identity. The work attempts to harmonize the communal differences instead of aggravating them.

Pritam not only refers to the partition violence, but gives an intricate insight of the rural life, the way of existence of the people in villages before, during, and after the partition. (Refer Slide Time: 15:02)

**ABDUCTION**

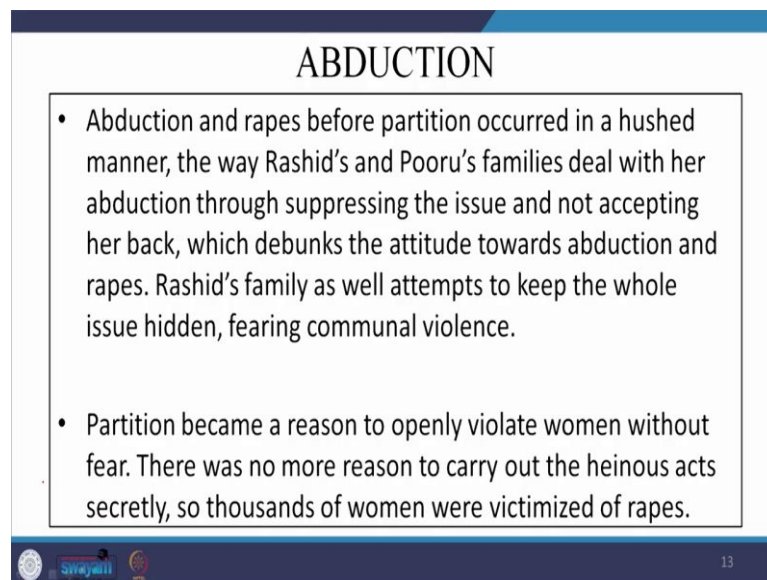
- The movie Pinjar ends with Pooru's statement that, "whether one is a hindu girl or a muslim one, whosoever reaches her destination, carries along my soul also".
- The work becomes a narrative that attempts to harmonize the communal differences instead of aggravating them.
- Pritam not only portrays the Partition violence but gives an intricate insight of the regular rural life before and during Partition and how the daily lives of the people transform in the process.
- Communal trouble, women abduction, rapes, did exist even before the partition violence. What changed by Partition is the scale of these abductions.

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...before and during the partition, and how the daily lives of these micro-societies change/transform in the process of the partition.

So, communal troubles and women's abductions conversions would exist even before; with partition what happened is that the scale of violence actually was heightened. There is a scale or the statistics became... it actually inflated into an unthinkable figure, something that the larger masses were not prepared for.

Abductions and rapes were actually... they would occur in a hushed manner, in a silent manner like Rashid takes away Pooru, for example, which goes on to debunk the general attitude of a society towards abduction and rape. (Refer Slide Time: 16:19)



### ABDUCTION

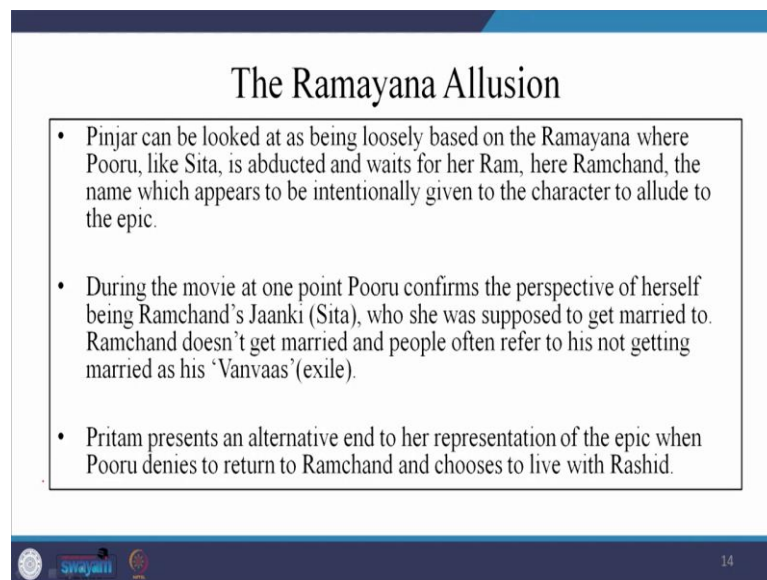
- Abduction and rapes before partition occurred in a hushed manner, the way Rashid's and Pooru's families deal with her abduction through suppressing the issue and not accepting her back, which debunks the attitude towards abduction and rapes. Rashid's family as well attempts to keep the whole issue hidden, fearing communal violence.
- Partition became a reason to openly violate women without fear. There was no more reason to carry out the heinous acts secretly, so thousands of women were victimized of rapes.

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The entire issue is kept hidden both by Pooru's natal family and Rashid's kin, fearing that it might flare up a communal violence or communal disharmony.

Partition became a reason where... I mean partition was taken as a kind of pretext where women would be openly violated without any fear whatsoever. So, there was no more reason to carry out heinous acts. The act of rape or abduction, which had traditionally remained a topic not discussed, had become normalized. This kind of atrocity was normalized at the time of partition.

Pinjar makes an allusion to Ramayana. It can be seen as loosely based on or Pinjar can be looked at as loosely speaking to or referring to Ramayana, where Pooru is the modern Sita. (Refer Slide Time: 17:41)



### The Ramayana Allusion

- Pinjar can be looked at as being loosely based on the Ramayana where Pooru, like Sita, is abducted and waits for her Ram, here Ramchand, the name which appears to be intentionally given to the character to allude to the epic.
- During the movie at one point Pooru confirms the perspective of herself being Ramchand's Jaanki (Sita), who she was supposed to get married to. Ramchand doesn't get married and people often refer to his not getting married as his 'Vanvaas' (exile).
- Pritam presents an alternative end to her representation of the epic when Pooru denies to return to Ramchand and chooses to live with Rashid.

Sri Jayanti 14

Like Sita, she is abducted and she waits for her Ram, and her fiance's name is actually Ramchand.

The name, it seems, is given intentionally to the character as a way of alluding to the epic Ramayana. The origin of Pinjar's plot makes a kind of [comparison]/ draws on Ramayana, but then it's a departure from the epic. So, during the movie at one point Pooru confirms that she is Ramchand's Janaki, and that was the man she was originally supposed to get married to.

Ramchand does not get married, and his single status is actually understood in the novel and in the film as his vanvas or his exile. So, Pooru's fiance remains in a forever exile from which he never returns, he chooses never to get married.

Pritam presents an alternative end as a way of... maybe it's a way of subverting the ideals or questioning the ideals that Ramayana poses or that Ramayana upholds. So,

we see that Pooru chooses to... I mean she denies, she refuses to return to Ramchand and chooses to live with Rashid. (Refer Slide Time: 19:35)

**The Ramayana Allusion**

- In the end, her sister-in-law goes back to her brother, but Puro decides to stay back with her abductor in Pakistan rather than return to her fiancé in India.
- In this way, she as if rewrites the story of *Ramayana* and partakes in authoring an event in her palimpsestic existence.
- She becomes Rashid's wife Hamida and accepts the conditions that the name entails, even as Rashid, sore, guilty and squarely cognizant of his transgression acquiesces to her returning to Ramchand.
- However, as an individual who is more than just a tattoo, Puro is not merely engulfed by Hamida but chooses to live in the world that Hamida has created for her.

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In the end, her sister-in-law Rajjo goes back to her brother Trilok, but Puro decides to stay back with her abductor. And she becomes an active agent in doing so, she rewrites the story of Ramayana and partakes in authoring an event in her palimpsestic existence.

A palimpsest is a piece of paper or a piece that has been written and rewritten over. So, every time there is an overlap of writing, the former history or the former writing is

erased. So, she becomes a site - her memory becomes a palimpsestic site where she is a concentrate of different cultures, different spaces, different identities and in fact, two names Pooru and Hamida. She is a fragmented existence.

She prevents the same fate for Rajjo. She ensures that Rajjo goes back, but it is an irony that...Ramayana or Indian epics have... primary epics have the oral tradition, where there are no authorial license. There can be multiple authors simultaneously writing their own versions.

And here, we have a female writer adding her own position and maybe her own burden of meaning to the pre-existing paradigm of Ramayana. So, she is adding another dimension [that] Ramayana would carry -- an extra weight of meaning, an alternative meaning, alternative/changed ideals, changed values. Through her different spatio-temporal belonging, Ramayana would be made to carry her different experience, her different narrative.

She accepts the conditions that her name Hamida entails; now the name that has been engraved on her hand. And in the end, Rashid is sore and he is guilty. He is squarely cognizant of his transgression and he is willing to/agrees to Pooru returning to her fiance, Ramchand.

So, Puro is actually accepting Hamida's name and her position, her identity as such, but she is not merely engulfed by Hamida; she chooses to live in the world that Hamida has created for her. With this, I would like to stop today's lecture and we will meet again for another round of discussions.

Thank you.