

Psychological Aspects and Phase-Wise Analysis of Puro's Personality in Pinjar: A Trauma-Centered and Feminist Psychological Study

Capt. Dr. Sharda Ghoghre

Assistant Professor Psychology
Kirodimal Govt Arts & Science College, Raigarh (C.G.)

Abstract

The Paper examine the psychological journey of Puro in the Film Pinjar after her abduction and how the traumatic event shapes her personality in different phase of traumatic events take place in Her life. In 2003 film Pinjar which is directed by Dr. Chandra Prakash Dwivedi, adapted from Amrita Pritam's novel, offers one of Indian cinema's most complex portrayals of female trauma, identity crisis, displacement, and resilience during the Partition of 1947. This paper examines the psychological dimensions of Puro's character through a phase-wise transformation model, mapping her psychological states across the narrative: Phase of Shock, Phase of Fear and Helplessness, Phase of Conflict and Identity Fracture, Phase of Negotiation and Meaning-Making, and Phase of Acceptance and Post-Traumatic Growth. Drawing from theories of trauma psychology, learned helplessness, identity reconstruction, attachment theory, feminist psychology, and resilience theory, the paper investigates how dramatic events shape Puro's emotional, cognitive, and behavioural adaptations. The analysis demonstrates how extreme violence and social collapse alter personality trajectories, how space and context become psychological agents, and how Puro evolves from a victim of patriarchal violence into an autonomous moral agent. Ultimately, the study reveals how Pinjar represents not mere personal suffering but the collective trauma of Partition and the psychological survival of women in violent cultural landscapes.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, psychological trauma, personality trait, Trauma Psychology, Social violence.

1. Introduction

The film Pinjar (2003), based on Amrita Pritam's celebrated novel. Set against the historical landscape of the India–Pakistan Partition, the film not only exposes communal violence and administrative collapse but also illuminates deeper political questions related to nation-building, citizenship, gender politics, and identity crisis. This study argues that the film positions women at the core of power struggles and reveals how patriarchal structures, community identities, and political violence in Pinjar is not merely a novel about communal violence; it is a text that unravels the inner world of a woman whose body becomes a political battlefield. Rooted in historical trauma, Pritam constructs a narrative that intertwines personal suffering with collective catastrophe, foregrounding the female experience as the central lens through which the horrors of Partition are understood.

At its core, Pinjar (meaning “The Skeleton”) is a metaphor for the erosion of identity. The skeletal imagery symbolizes how women during Partition were stripped of agency, dignity, and social belonging. The protagonist, Puro, becomes the embodiment of this skeletal state: her abduction by Rashid and

subsequent rejection by her own family reflect both literal and symbolic violence inflicted upon women across religious communities.

Pritam's narrative masterfully exposes the patriarchal structures that bind both Hindu and Muslim communities, revealing that women's bodies were often used to avenge communal pride or assert masculine dominance. Through stark realism, she brings forth the voices of victims who remained historically unheard. Her feminist vision is not rooted in theoretical abstraction but emerges from lived experiences—fear, shame, exile, forced marriage, and the struggle for selfhood. The novel's significance also lies in its nuanced portrayal of morality. Pritam does not demonize Rashid or sanctify Puro; instead, she unravels the psychological complexities that blur the lines between victim and perpetrator.

The text reflects the moral ambivalence of Partition itself—no individual is wholly innocent or wholly guilty, but everyone is trapped within a socio-political machinery that de-humanizes. Stylistically, Pinjar stands out for its lyrical prose, its emotional intensity, and its symbolic layering. Pritam uses silence as a narrative strategy: moments of quietness speak more profoundly than loud depictions of violence. The novel remains relevant in contemporary debates on gender, nationalism, memory, and trauma.

Ultimately, Pinjar is a story of transformation—from helplessness to resilience. Even as Puro becomes a “skeleton,” she reconstructs meaning, compassion, and agency in a world that refuses to recognize her humanity. The text becomes not only a feminist critique but also a humanistic plea for empathy beyond religious and gender boundaries.

Puro (Pooro): The Embodiment of the “Skeleton”

Puro is the central consciousness of the novel, representing thousands of women who were abducted, raped, and abandoned during Partition. Her arc—from a lively, hopeful girl to a traumatized woman seeking identity beyond violence—reveals Pritam's feminist vision.

Key Dimensions

- **Victim of Patriarchy:**

Puro's abduction by Rashid is less a personal crime and more a communal act of revenge. Her own family's refusal to accept her back exposes how patriarchal honor is valued above a woman's life.

- **Symbol of Dehumanization:**

Her transformation into a “pinjar” symbolizes the loss of agency. She exists, but without ownership of her body or destiny.

- **Moral Strength and Compassion:**

Despite trauma, Puro helps other displaced women—Laajo, Kammo—showing how pain can generate empathy instead of hatred.

- **Identity Reconstructed:**

Puro ultimately develops agency not by escape but by redefining belonging. Her decision to stay with Rashid at the end is controversial, but it highlights her autonomy—she chooses compassion over bitterness, reclaiming control of her narrative.

Puro's character is a critique of nationalistic ideals that celebrate territorial freedom but ignore the cost borne by women.

Pinjar is a story of trauma, identity loss, gendered violence, and eventual reclamation of agency. The film not only captures the brutality of Partition but also highlights the unique psychological burden

borne by women whose bodies became contested sites of honor, revenge, and communal hostility. Puro, the protagonist, becomes a symbolic representation of thousands of women whose identities were ruptured and reconstructed through traumatic historical events.

While numerous literary and cinematic analyses exist, relatively few studies focus on psychological transformation. This paper addresses that gap by examining:

1. The psychological features that define Puro's personality
2. How specific traumatic events shape her personality at each stage?
3. How gendered spaces—home, captivity, borderlands, marriage—act as psychological triggers?
4. How Puro's personality evolves from a structured identity to fractured identity and finally to post-traumatic growth?

By combining trauma studies with feminist psychological approaches, this research provides a multidimensional understanding of Puro's psyche.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Trauma Psychology

Trauma is defined as an overwhelming psychological response to events that exceed an individual's coping capacity. According to Judith Herman, trauma leads to Hyper arousal, Intrusion, Constriction, Loss of self-coherence, Dissociation, Identity disruption. Partition becomes the master trauma underlying Puro's experiences.

2.2 Learned Helplessness (Seligman)

Repeated exposure to uncontrollable events leads individuals to believe they cannot change outcomes. This framework helps explain Puro's emotional paralysis and acceptance of uncontrollable circumstances.

2.3 Identity Reconstruction Theory

Trauma disrupts identity; survivors must reconstruct a meaningful sense of self. Puro's changing names, spaces, and relationships mirror this reconstruction.

2.4 Feminist Psychological Theory

Feminist psychology focuses on how patriarchal and socio-political structures produce psychological oppression. Puro's trauma is not individual—it is structurally produced through patriarchy, communal revenge, and the politics of women's bodies.

2.5 Attachment and Emotional Dependency

Trauma can produce both attachment fear and attachment seeking. Puro's shifting relationship with Rashid, though morally complex, represents trauma bonding and survival dependency.

3. Psychological Features of Puro's Personality (Pre-Trauma)

Before the traumatic rupture, Puro demonstrates several psychological traits:

3.1 Secure Identity

- Strong family bonding
- Confidence in cultural belonging
- Clear sense of future (engagement, marriage)

3.2 Emotional Stability

- Warm, empathetic
- Innocent and trusting

- Socially connected

3.3 Optimism and Idealism

Her world is structured and predictable; she trusts social norms.

These traits form the baseline personality from which trauma violently deviates.

4. Phase-Wise Analysis of Puro's Personality

PHASE 1: THE PHASE OF SHOCK (Sudden Rupture of Reality)

Event Trigger

Puro's sudden abduction by Rashid marks the first psychological rupture. The transition from familiar, safe space to captivity is abrupt and violent.

4.1 Psychological Features of This Phase 4

4.1.1 Acute Stress Reaction

- Emotional numbness
- Inability to understand what is happening
- Intense disorientation

Her scream, silence, and frozen posture signify a classic trauma response. Trauma Psychologist describe as a Freeze response where the Mind disengages from Processing reality. Puro Silence and blank expressions indicates psychological overloaded. She shows withdrawal and silence as defence mechanism which is shown in common survival of trama's.

4.1.2 Dissociation

She disconnects from reality to avoid overwhelming emotional pain. Dissociation protects the psyche but also fractures identity.

4.1.3 Breakdown of Trust

Her abduction by a stranger shatters her belief in social protection, especially the security associated with home, family, and caste boundaries.

How This Event Transforms Her Personality

- The shift from trust → fear
- From confidence → helplessness
- From secure identity → threatened identity

This moment alters her lifelong understanding of safety.

PHASE 2: FEAR, HELPLESSNESS, AND LEARNED DEPENDENCY

Event Trigger

Puro attempts to escape and briefly returns home, only to be rejected by her own family. This rejection deepens her trauma more than the abduction itself.

5.1 Psychological Features of This Phase

5.1.1 Learned Helplessness

Repeated failed escape attempts teach her that resistance is futile. Her agency collapses.

5.1.2 Identity Collapse

Her sense of self as "daughter of a Hindu family" is denied. She becomes a person without a home, without belonging.

5.1.3 Loss of Social Support

Family rejection is the most devastating psychological wound. Puro realises that “honor” is valued more than her safety, which creates:

- Self-blame
- Confusion
- Shame
- Social death

5.1.4 Fear-Based Compliance

In captivity, she becomes quieter, avoids confrontation, and minimizes emotional expression.

5.2 Transformation in Personality

- From outspoken → withdrawn
- From emotionally expressive → emotionally controlled
- From valued family member → socially erased individual

Her personality becomes survival-oriented rather than identity-oriented.

PHASE 3: CONFLICT AND IDENTITY FRACTURE

Event Trigger

Puro is forcibly married to Rashid. She becomes “Hamida,” a name imposed on her.

6.1 Psychological Features of This Phase

6.1.1 Identity Fragmentation

She exists between two selves:

- **Puro** (past identity)
- **Hamida** (new identity assigned by circumstance)

This dual identity creates constant internal conflict. Which align with Erickson Stage of Identity verses role confusion.

6.1.2 Trauma Bonding

The complex dynamic between Puro and Rashid emerges:

- He abducted her but also protects her
- She resents him but also depends on him

This emotional ambivalence is common in long-term trauma.

6.1.3 Hypervigilance

Her alertness to danger increases:

- She watches every movement
- Avoids emotionally triggering situations
- Maintains guarded behaviour

6.2 Personality Transformation

- From clarity → confusion
- From structured identity → fragmented identity
- From independence → reluctant dependency

This phase reflects psychological disintegration.

PHASE 4: NEGOTIATION, MEANING-MAKING, AND RESISTANCE**Event Trigger**

Puro begins observing Rashid's remorse, his refusal to harm her, and his attempts to give her dignity. She also navigates the violence affecting other women during Partition.

7.1 Psychological Features of This Phase**7.1.1 Cognitive Reappraisal**

She begins making psychological meaning out of trauma:

- Recognizing Rashid's remorse
- Recognizing that her family will never reclaim her
- Understanding social collapse around her

7.1.2 Moral Consciousness

Puro's empathy extends to others:

- She helps victims
- She protects other kidnapped women
- She becomes emotionally responsive again

7.1.3 Regaining Agency

Although she cannot change her past, she begins controlling her present:

- Taking decisions
- Interacting assertively
- Reconstructing identity in her own terms

7.2 Transformation in Personality

- From victimhood → survivorhood
- From identity fracture → emerging self-definition
- From passivity → emotional agency

This phase marks psychological rebuilding.

PHASE 5: ACCEPTANCE, RESPONSIBILITY, AND POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH**Event Trigger**

Puro chooses to help Rashid's family, shelters other abducted women, and eventually refuses to abandon Rashid even when given the chance to return home.

8.1 Psychological Features of This phase**8.1.1 Post Traumatic Growth**

Post traumatic growth includes:

- New purpose
- Stronger moral identity
- Emotional maturity
- Ability to help others

Puro becomes a source of strength for her new community.

8.1.2 Integration of Identity

She combines her past self (Puro) and present self (Hamida) into a coherent identity:

- Not rejecting her roots
- Not denying her new reality

- Creating a hybrid sense of self

8.1.3 Reclaimed Agency

Her final decision demonstrates:

- Autonomy
- Acceptance
- Ownership of destiny

8.2 Transformation in Personality

- From fragmented → integrated self
- From trauma-driven existence → meaning-driven life
- From psychological collapse → psychological resilience

9. The Role of Space as a Psychological Agent

Space in Pinjar is not passive; it actively shapes Puro's psychology.

9.1 Home (Pre-Trauma Space)

Symbolises:

- Safety
- Identity stability
- Cultural belonging

Psychologically: it gives her secure attachment.

9.2 Captivity Space

Symbolises:

- Fear
- Vulnerability
- Powerlessness

Psychologically: it triggers trauma bonding, dissociation.

9.3 The Borderland/Partition Landscape

Symbolises:

- Lawlessness
- Collective fear
- Rootlessness

Psychologically: it externalizes her inner chaos.

9.4 Rashid's Home

Gradually becomes:

- A space for negotiation
- A space for moral healing
- A space for reconstructed identity

9.5 Space as Transformation

Every shift in physical space corresponds to:

- Changes in emotional tone
- Changes in cognitive coping
- Changes in self-concept

Thus, space itself is a psychological catalyst.

10. Feminist Psychological Interpretation

10.1 Gendered Violence

Puro's trauma is gender-specific:

- Abduction
- Forced marriage
- Honor-based rejection
- Loss of bodily autonomy

10.2 Women as Bearers of Communal Honour

Her family's refusal to accept her reflects patriarchal conditioning.

10.3 Resistance Through Care

Unlike conventional resistance, Puro's resistance emerges through:

- Compassion
- Protection of women
- Moral courage

This aligns with feminist ethics of care.

10.4 Healing as Feminist Agency

Puro's acceptance is not submission—it is:

- Rewriting destiny
- Reclaiming body and identity
- Rejecting patriarchal definitions of purity

11. Final Personality Profile of Puro

By the end of the film, Puro demonstrates:

11.1 Psychological Strength

- Emotional regulation
- Ability to make meaning of trauma
- Higher self-efficacy

11.2 Mature Identity

A reconstructed self -built from pain, reflection, and moral action.

11.3 Empathy and Moral Leadership

Helping abducted women, supporting Rashid's family—these actions reflect deep moral evolution.

11.4 Integrated Selfhood

Both "Puro" and "Hamida" coexist harmoniously as parts of her narrative.

12. Conclusion

Puro's psychological journey in Pinjar is a profound illustration of how violent historical events reshape personality. Through trauma, loss, rejection, negotiation, and agency, Puro transforms from a carefree young woman into a resilient survivor and moral anchor. Her personality does not weaken under trauma—it expands, deepens, and ultimately evolves into post-traumatic growth.

Puro's story symbolizes the psychological survival of countless women of Partition who reconstructed themselves despite unbearable suffering. This phase-wise psychological analysis demonstrates that her transformation is not merely personal but historical, cultural, and deeply feminist.

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