

Social Recognition, Identity Dislocation, and Constrained Agency in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*: A Trauma-Informed Textual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Traumatic experiences can unsettle a person's sense of continuity and belonging, particularly when violence is followed by rejection from significant others. This study examines the representation of identity in Puro, the protagonist of Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*, through qualitative textual analysis supported by a thematic-network approach. Selected passages concerning abduction, familial rejection, imposed religious and marital identities, displacement, belonging, and Puro's response to Laajo's victimization were organized into basic, organizing, and global themes. The global theme, "Identity and Trauma: A Reciprocal Relationship," comprises four organizing themes: trauma disrupts identity; identity shapes the appraisal of trauma; identity may enable or constrain adaptation; and trauma becomes entangled with self-understanding. The analysis focuses on the interaction between personal memory and social recognition, arguing that Puro's identity disruption is intensified when her family refuses to restore her former relational position. Her efforts to help Laajo and her final decision are interpreted as forms of agency and solidarity within constraint, not as evidence that the consequences of violence have been resolved. The article does not claim that trauma, identity, or agency have been overlooked in existing scholarship on *Pinjar*; rather, it offers a focused synthesis of social recognition, contested identity, and unresolved agency. As a reading of fiction, the analysis supports conceptual interpretation but cannot establish clinical processes or outcomes in trauma survivors.

Keywords: Amrita Pritam, *Pinjar*, trauma, identity dislocation, social recognition, constrained agency, textual analysis

INTRODUCTION

Identity provides a sense of continuity across time and helps people locate themselves within relationships, social roles, communities, and systems of meaning. It includes personal understandings of values and commitments, but it is also shaped by social recognition: being understood as a daughter, spouse, or member of a religious or cultural community depends partly on the responses of others. Identity is therefore not simply an internal possession. It develops and is maintained through the relationship between self-understanding and the social contexts in which a person lives (Erikson, 1968; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Traumatic experiences may challenge both a person's understanding of who they are and the social recognition on which that understanding depends. Violence, forced displacement, betrayal, and rejection can sever connections with familiar roles and places. The consequences represented in trauma narratives may extend beyond distress about an event to include uncertainty about belonging, disruption in the continuity between past and present selves, and difficulty imagining a future connected to one's earlier life. Such disruption is especially visible when an individual's identity depends on social roles or relationships that are withdrawn or denied.

The relationship between trauma and identity is not necessarily one-directional. Existing identities and cultural meanings influence how an event is interpreted, including whether it is experienced as loss, shame, threat, betrayal, or exclusion. Traumatic events may, in turn, alter the importance or availability of those identities. The concept of event centrality offers a way to consider how an event can become a prominent reference point in autobiographical memory and self-understanding (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006). However, an event becoming central to identity should not automatically be interpreted as successful integration or psychological growth. A traumatic experience may become defining because it continues to restrict how a person understands the self and the future. Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* offers a literary narrative through which these tensions can be examined. Puro's abduction by Rashid, her family's refusal to receive her, the imposition of a new religious and marital identity, and the upheaval of Partition expose the relationship between self-definition and social recognition. The name "Hamida" does not simply replace "Puro"; the narrative stages an unstable relationship between the identity Puro remembers,

the identity imposed on her, and the social meanings attached to both. The novel also complicates a simple victim-to-survivor narrative. Puro's later actions, particularly her effort to find Laajo and her decision at the end of the narrative, suggest agency without establishing that the violence done to her has been resolved.

Literary texts do not provide clinical records, and a fictional character cannot be treated as a research participant. They can, however, be examined as constructed narratives that make social meanings, contradictions, and experiences of selfhood available for interpretation. Textual analysis can therefore support close examination of how trauma and identity are represented within a particular cultural and historical setting (Belsey, 2013). The present study uses Puro's narrative as a case for interpretive inquiry, not as a basis for diagnosing the character or generalizing directly to survivors of trauma.

The study addresses four questions: (a) How does the narrative represent disruption in Puro's personal and social identities following abduction and familial rejection? (b) How do family, gender, religion, and community shape the meaning of her experiences? (c) What forms of adaptation, solidarity, or agency become possible within the constraints of her circumstances? and (d) How does the narrative represent the continuing negotiation of identity rather than a simple return to a pre-trauma self?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION

Identity as Personal, Relational, and Social

Psychological accounts of identity provide a starting point for understanding why Puro's abduction affects more than her physical safety or location. Erikson (1968) conceptualized identity in relation to continuity across time and the negotiation of personal commitments with social expectations. Identity theory further emphasizes the social roles and relationships through which self-definitions are enacted and recognized (Stryker & Burke, 2000). These approaches are relevant to *Pinjar* because Puro's remembered sense of herself as a daughter and prospective wife does not exist independently of the family and community structures that give those positions meaning. Her identity is challenged not only by what happens to her but by the refusal of others to recognize her as the person who can return to those roles.

A distinction is useful here between self-understanding and social recognition. A person may retain memories, attachments, and a sense of continuity, while the people or institutions that once confirmed those identities deny their legitimacy. In Puro's story, the refusal of her natal family to receive her is therefore not simply an additional painful event after abduction. It changes the social conditions under which a return to her earlier life could be imagined. This relational approach does not mean that others wholly determine identity; rather, it highlights the tension between an experienced self and the identities that social systems permit or withhold.

Gendered Violence, Partition, and the Politics of Women's Bodies

Scholarship on Partition has challenged accounts that treat the event only as a territorial or diplomatic division. Butalia's (1998) oral-history-based study places individual and family experiences, including women's experiences of violence and silencing, at the centre of Partition memory. Menon and Bhasin (1998) similarly examine how women's bodies, sexuality, and family status became implicated in communal boundaries and the restoration of community honour. These works are important to a reading of *Pinjar* because Puro's body and social status are treated as symbols through which family and communal claims are negotiated. Her experience is not adequately understood as a private psychological crisis detached from these structures.

Didur (2006) cautions against reading women's Partition narratives only as transparent records from which a single historical truth can be recovered. Literary form, silence, ambiguity, and the limits of narration matter: they can expose the difficulty of representing violence within the very cultural languages of honour, purity, and belonging that helped structure it. This perspective is especially relevant to Puro's conflicted relationship with the names Puro and Hamida and to the novel's refusal to offer a simple return to a pre-Partition identity. The present study therefore treats the novel as a crafted literary narrative, not as a clinical case history or an unmediated historical testimony.

Pinjar scholarship has repeatedly foregrounded the gendered nature of violence. Arora and Jha (2016) discuss women's bodies as sites of encroachment and connect gendered violence in the novel with displacement, marginalization, dual identity, and powerlessness. Srinivasan and Jacob (2019) read the novel through structural violence and the shame, fear, and dishonour associated with women's experiences of Partition. Sagoo (2020), examining selected works by Pritam, addresses violence and trauma as forces shaping the feminine self. Khurana (2023) likewise focuses on gender violence, Puro's transformation into Hamida, suffering, and loss of self. Together, these readings establish that the body, gendered violence, social exclusion, and identity are already central concerns in the critical discussion of Pritam's work.

Trauma, Identity Dislocation, and Literary Representation

Trauma-informed approaches help clarify how violence may unsettle expectations about safety, trust, control, and the reliability of relationships. Janoff-Bulman's (1992) account of shattered assumptions describes how highly

challenging events can undermine basic beliefs about the self and world. Applied cautiously to a fictional narrative, this framework draws attention to the rupture between Puro's expectations of familial protection and the rejection she encounters. The analysis does not infer a clinical disorder or symptom profile from the novel. It examines how the narrative represents disrupted continuity, loss of belonging, and narrowed possibilities for imagining a future.

Trauma scholarship on Pritam and Pinjar already overlaps directly with the present topic. Kelaiya (2023) explicitly examines sexual violence, trauma, alienation, identity, and sexuality in the novel, and discusses fragmentation of identity alongside women's autonomy and attempts to reclaim identity. Bhatnagar (2024) focuses on the woman's body as a site through which Partition violence, memory, anguish, and the contested identity of Puro/Hamida are represented. Biswas (2023) also frames Pinjar through women, Partition, patriarchal violence, displacement, marginalization, and constrained autonomy. Borah (2020) explicitly discusses trauma, sexual violence, and alienation of the self in relation to the novel. These studies make it inappropriate to claim that the novel's trauma, identity, or agency themes have been overlooked.

The value of these studies is that they establish the interpretive field against which a further reading must define itself. They also set a limit on broad novelty claims: describing Puro's identity as fragmented, noting that violence leaves psychological scars, or identifying the body as a site of communal control cannot by itself constitute the present article's original contribution. The current analysis instead asks how a specific social response—the family's refusal to receive Puro—extends the consequences of abduction by withdrawing recognition from her former relational identity. It then considers how the narrative represents agency without making agency synonymous with recovery.

Event Centrality and Narrative Identity

Berntsen and Rubin (2006) developed the Centrality of Event Scale to examine the extent to which an event becomes a reference point in a person's identity and life story. In this study, event centrality is a conceptual lens, not a measured variable: no scale was administered, and no score can be inferred from a literary character. Puro's reflection that she is neither Puro nor Hamida but "only a pinjar" can be interpreted as representing a traumatic history that has become difficult to separate from self-understanding. Yet the passage conveys estrangement from available identities, not necessarily the successful integration of an event into a coherent life story.

Narrative identity theory describes how people connect reconstructed accounts of the past with present self-understanding and anticipated futures (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Narrative coherence, however, does not require that contradiction disappear. Nor does the fact that an experience becomes central to identity mean that it has been resolved. In *Pinjar*, Puro's remembered identity, imposed identity, family rejection, and later choices remain in tension. The analysis treats that tension as part of the novel's representation of selfhood rather than as evidence that Puro eventually arrives at a single, settled identity.

Meaning-Making, Adaptation, and the Limits of Growth Narratives

Park's (2010) integrative review distinguishes global meaning—such as broad beliefs, goals, and assumptions—from situational meaning constructed in response to a particular stressful event. When experience conflicts with existing beliefs, a person may try to understand what occurred, revise assumptions, or find ways to act within a changed reality. Meaning-making is not uniform and does not necessarily result in a coherent explanation or a positive outcome. This distinction is useful for reading Puro's response to Laajo: the action may carry meaning and solidarity without resolving Puro's own history or restoring the relationships that were denied to her.

Post-traumatic growth theory concerns positive changes that some people report after struggling with highly challenging circumstances; it does not claim that trauma inevitably produces growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). In literary analysis, a risk arises when an act of courage or care is treated as proof that a character has healed. Puro's actions are better understood as possible expressions of agency within constraint. They do not erase abduction, familial rejection, or the unequal social conditions under which her options are shaped. This article therefore does not use post-traumatic growth as the outcome of the narrative and does not claim that Puro has achieved clinical recovery or full identity integration.

Positioning the Present Study and Its Provisional Contribution

The literature reviewed here establishes several overlapping lines of interpretation: Partition scholarship foregrounds women's experiences, silences, and the politics of honour; *Pinjar*-specific studies examine gendered violence, the body, trauma, alienation, identity fragmentation, and agency; psychological theories offer concepts for thinking about social identity, event centrality, and meaning-making. The present article does not claim these themes as new. Instead, it brings them together around a narrower interpretive proposition: familial refusal functions as social non-recognition that compounds the rupture of abduction by blocking Puro's return to a former relational identity. Her later actions, particularly her effort to help Laajo and her final decision, are then read as agency that remains compatible with unresolved conflict.

This proposed contribution is provisional, not a claim of priority. The literature search conducted for this revision was targeted rather than systematic, and some directly relevant articles were available only through abstracts or bibliographic records. A final submission should follow up the closest studies in full text, check citation details, and search academic databases and library catalogues for additional scholarship. On the evidence currently located, the most defensible claim is that this article offers a focused synthesis and close reading of social non-recognition and constrained agency, rather than a wholly new theory of trauma or identity.

Conceptual Synthesis

The analysis combines four concepts without treating them as interchangeable. Social identity and role theory direct attention to the relational positions through which Puro is recognized (Erikson, 1968; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Trauma theory helps frame the disruption of expectations and belonging (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Event centrality and narrative identity help examine how the experience becomes entangled with self-understanding (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Meaning-making literature allows for action and adaptation without assuming that the experience is resolved (Park, 2010). These concepts guide interpretation; they are not operationalized as clinical constructs or measured variables in this study.

Research Rationale and Aim

The study aims to explore how *Pinjar* represents identity through a trauma-informed textual reading, focusing on (a) the disruption of Puro's personal and social identities after abduction and familial rejection; (b) the role of gender, family, religion, and community in shaping the meaning of her experiences; (c) forms of solidarity and agency available within constrained circumstances; and (d) the continuing negotiation of identity rather than a simple return to a pre-trauma self. Its contribution is an interpretive synthesis, and the degree of novelty should be assessed against a fuller review of directly relevant scholarship.

METHOD

Research Design and Textual Source

The study used qualitative textual analysis supported by thematic network analysis. The primary source was Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*. The analysis was first developed in the author's master's dissertation (Divyangana, 2022), and the present article substantially reframes that work around social recognition, constrained agency, and the limits of recovery narratives. The dissertation identifies the edition used as Pritam (2019); the final manuscript must confirm the exact edition, language, publisher, and page numbering against the copy consulted. The novel is treated as a literary text. Its protagonist is not treated as a research participant, and the analysis does not attempt to assign a clinical diagnosis to her.

Textual analysis was appropriate because the research questions concern how the novel represents identity, trauma, gender, family, religion, and belonging. Thematic network analysis was used as an organizing approach: selected passages and coding notes were grouped into basic themes, which were then organized into broader interpretive themes and a global theme. The analysis follows the structure documented in the researcher's dissertation. It does not claim independent coders, inter-rater reliability, participant validation, or other procedures that were not documented.

Analytical Procedure

Passages were selected purposely because they directly addressed the research questions and the recurring concepts of abduction, familial rejection, imposed identity, displacement, belonging, adaptation, and agency. The analysis concentrated on episodes documented in the source dissertation, particularly Puro's return to her natal family and its refusal, the narrative's contrast between Puro and Hamida, the "pinjar" self-description, Puro's response to Laajo's abduction, and the final scene. The selected passages were read in relation to their narrative and social context rather than treated as isolated quotations. Interpretive observations were grouped into basic themes and then organized into four themes: (a) trauma disrupts identity; (b) identity shapes the appraisal of trauma; (c) identity may enable or constrain adaptation; and (d) trauma becomes entangled with self-understanding. These organizing themes were brought together under the global theme "Identity and Trauma: A Reciprocal Relationship." The themes are overlapping interpretive categories, not sequential stages that all people who experience trauma would follow.

The analysis is interpretive and was conducted by the author, whose training is in psychology. This orientation makes identity, meaning-making, and agency salient analytic concerns, while also creating a risk of privileging psychological concepts over literary form or historical context. The analysis therefore treats the novel as a constructed literary narrative and situates Puro's experiences within gendered and communal structures. No independent coder or formal reflexive audit was documented in the underlying dissertation, so none is claimed here.

The analysis considered both the events represented in the narrative and the social responses that give those events meaning. Particular attention was paid to the contrast between Puro's remembered identity and the identity assigned to her, the family's refusal to receive her, the "pinjar" metaphor, and the final scene involving Laajo. Interpretations were developed through close reading and then considered in relation to the conceptual literature on identity, event centrality, meaning-making, and gendered violence.

RESULTS

The analysis produced one global theme, "Identity and Trauma: A Reciprocal Relationship," and four organizing themes. Together, the themes suggest that trauma is represented not only as a rupture in Puro's life but also as an experience whose meaning is shaped by family and community responses. Her identity is neither wholly preserved nor completely replaced by the name Hamida. Instead, the narrative presents a continuing conflict among remembered identity, imposed identity, social recognition, and constrained agency.

Theme 1: Trauma Disrupts Identity

Puro's abduction disrupts the life and future she had expected. Yet the narrative's representation of identity loss becomes more complex when her family refuses to take her back. Her mother's response is framed through religious and marital status and the consequences that Puro's return might have for the family. The dissertation records the following passage: "हम तुझे कहाँ रखेंगे? तुझे कौन ब्याह कर ले जाएगा? तेरा धर्म गया, तेरा जन्म गया। हम जो इस समय कुछ भी बोले तो हमारे लहू की एक बूँद भी नहीं बचेगी।" (Pritam, 2019). This rejection suggests that Puro's identity as a daughter is made conditional on her perceived social and religious acceptability.

The passage matters because it shows that the harm represented in the narrative is not confined to the act of abduction. Puro is also denied the possibility of returning to a familiar relational position. The family's response turns the event into a lasting social exclusion: she is not simply separated from home but told that home cannot accept her as the person she was. In this sense, identity disruption is produced through both direct violence and the withdrawal of recognition by significant others.

The novel's use of names further represents the loss of continuity. Puro remains connected to the identity she remembers, while Hamida marks the identity imposed within her new circumstances. Neither name fully resolves the question of who she is. This tension is consistent with an understanding of identity as relational: the self is shaped by memory and personal meaning, but also by the names, roles, and statuses that others recognize or refuse to recognize (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Theme 2: Identity Shapes the Appraisal of Trauma

The second theme concerns the meanings through which Puro's experiences are represented. The same events are not interpreted in a social vacuum. Family expectations, gendered ideas of honour, religious belonging, and the social significance of marriage influence how her abduction and return are understood. The family's refusal frames Puro as a source of shame rather than as a daughter who has experienced violence. The narrative thus exposes a distinction between the harm done to a person and the social meaning assigned to that harm.

This distinction also shows why identity is not merely an outcome of trauma. Puro's pre-existing position as a daughter and prospective wife shapes what is lost and why the loss carries such force. The social meanings attached to these roles influence the possibilities available to her after the abduction. In a narrative identity perspective, an event gains significance partly through its relationship to the broader story of a person's life (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In *Pinjar*, however, the story is not entirely authored by Puro: family and community meanings constrain the terms through which her experience can be interpreted.

The conflict between Puro and Hamida becomes especially pronounced in the passage in which she reflects that she is neither identity but "only a pinjar." The dissertation records the passage as follows: "दिन की रोशनी में पूरो हमीदा बन जाती थी, रात के अंधकार में वह पूरो रहती। किंतु पूरो सोचती थी वह वास्तव में न हमीदा थी, न पूरो, वह केवल एक पिंजर थी, केवल पिंजर, जिसका कोई रूप न था, कोई नाम न था।" (Pritam, 2019). The metaphor of the cage conveys more than a change in name. It suggests a condition in which available identity categories no longer provide a secure place from which Puro can understand herself.

Read alongside the concept of event centrality, this passage suggests that the experience has become central to the narrative of Puro's self-understanding (Berntsen & Rubin, 2006). Yet the centrality is represented as painful estrangement, not as evidence that she has successfully integrated the experience. The analysis therefore avoids treating the metaphor as a clinical symptom or as proof of a specific psychological mechanism. It is interpreted as a literary representation of identity dislocation.

Theme 3: Adaptation, Belonging, and Constrained Agency

The third theme concerns the ways Puro acts within circumstances that sharply limit her options. Her later actions, particularly her effort to help Laajo return to her family, can be read as an expression of solidarity with another woman exposed to gendered violence. Puro recognizes a form of vulnerability in Laajo's situation that resonates with her own history. Her response creates a space for action where earlier decisions about her life were made by others.

This act should not be reduced to a simple story of resilience. Puro's ability to help Laajo does not reverse her own abduction or restore the family relationship that was denied to her. Nor does the narrative establish that the act resolves her internal conflict. Instead, her action can be understood as a limited form of agency that emerges within constraint. She cannot undo the conditions that shaped her life, but she can make a consequential choice in relation to another woman's future.

This reading is compatible with meaning-making accounts that allow people to respond to adversity in different ways without assuming that every response produces a coherent or positive resolution (Park, 2010). Meaning may emerge through action, care, or solidarity; it need not take the form of a fully articulated explanation for what happened. In Puro's case, the effort to help Laajo is meaningful because it changes what she is able to do, not because it proves that trauma has been overcome.

Theme 4: Trauma Becomes Entangled With Identity

The final scene complicates conventional ideas of return and resolution. When Puro's brother attempts to take her with him, she withdraws her hand and returns to Rashid, explaining: "लाजो अपने घर लौट रही है, समझ लेना कि इसमें पूरा भी लौट आई। मेरे लिए अब यही जगह है।" (Pritam, 2019). Her decision can be read as an effort to define the meaning of home on terms that differ from those imposed by her family. However, the scene should not be romanticized as proof that the abduction has become acceptable or that the relationship began without coercion. Puro's choice is made within a life already shaped by violence, rejection, and narrowed options. Her sense of return appears to be redirected through Laajo's restoration and through the possibility of choosing, however constrained that choice remains. The ending therefore represents agency and constraint together. It is not possible to conclude from the scene alone that Puro has achieved complete psychological integration, that she has forgiven the harm, or that she has experienced post-traumatic growth.

Across the four themes, trauma appears not simply as a past event but as a continuing condition that shapes the meanings available to Puro. Incorporation here means that the traumatic history remains inseparable from the decisions and relationships through which she understands the present. It does not mean that trauma has been resolved or that identity has become fully integrated.

Table 1 Thematic network illustrating the relationship between trauma and identity

Global theme	Organizing themes	Basic themes
Identity and Trauma: A Reciprocal Relationship	Trauma disrupts identity	Identity loss; displacement; identity distress; loss of continuity; rejection
Identity and Trauma: A Reciprocal Relationship	Identity shapes trauma appraisal	Pre-trauma identity; family and social roles; gendered honour; religious identity; social recognition
Identity and Trauma: A Reciprocal Relationship	Identity may enable or constrain adaptation	Belonging; solidarity; agency; adaptation; restricted choice
Identity and Trauma: A Reciprocal Relationship	Trauma becomes entangled with identity	Event centrality; self-defining memories; competing names; unresolved identity negotiation

Note. The themes are interpretive and overlapping. They do not represent a validated sequence of psychological stages.

Conceptual Model

The findings support a reciprocal, non-linear model rather than a linear progression ending in an integrated identity. Existing identities and social expectations shape the appraisal of an event; traumatic rupture and social responses can disrupt identity and belonging; the person negotiates the roles and forms of agency that remain available; and the event may become part of later self-understanding. These processes may recur, coexist, or remain unresolved. The model is a conceptual interpretation of one literary narrative, not an empirically validated psychological model.

Existing identity and social context ↔ appraisal of traumatic events ↔ identity disruption and loss of belonging ↔ adaptation, solidarity, and constrained agency ↔ continuing negotiation of self-understanding. Feedback may occur at every point; no final stage of complete integration is assumed.

DISCUSSION

Identity Disruption Is Socially Produced as Well as Personally Experienced

The analysis suggests that Puro's identity disruption is represented through both the violence of abduction and the social consequences that follow it. Her family's refusal to receive her is pivotal because it denies her access to a former relational identity. The event changes not only where she lives but also the terms on which she can be recognized as a daughter. This supports a relational reading of identity in which social roles and recognition contribute to self-definition (Erikson, 1968; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

The finding also cautions against locating the entire burden of adaptation within the person who has experienced harm. Puro's circumstances are shaped by gendered norms and ideas of family honour that restrict her options. The narrative therefore represents identity disruption as an interaction between personal experience and social structures. A reading focused only on Puro's internal response would miss the role of others in making her former identity inaccessible.

Event Centrality Does Not Necessarily Mean Integration or Growth

The "pinjar" metaphor and Puro's statement that she is neither Puro nor Hamida suggest that the experience becomes central to the way the self is narrated. Berntsen and Rubin's (2006) work on event centrality offers a useful conceptual reference for considering how events can become organizing features of autobiographical understanding. However, the novel's representation is one of estrangement from available identities rather than clear evidence of a coherent, integrated life story. The analysis therefore distinguishes the continuing significance of trauma from successful recovery.

This distinction is important because the original conceptual model of identity reconstruction could be read as implying that trauma inevitably leads through meaning-making to an integrated identity. The narrative does not support such certainty. Puro's later choices may indicate agency, but they do not demonstrate that the consequences of violence have been resolved. Post-traumatic growth is a possible response to adversity in some contexts, not an automatic outcome of suffering or a label that can be assigned to every act of adaptation (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Agency Is Possible Within Constraint

Puro's effort to help Laajo and her final decision matter because they depict action emerging from a history in which others repeatedly made decisions for her. Her response may be read as solidarity and as an attempt to claim authorship over a decision. At the same time, her available choices remain bounded by familial rejection and the social conditions represented in the novel. Agency and constraint coexist; one should not be used to erase the other.

This reading also avoids a simplistic division between victimhood and empowerment. Puro's actions do not make the earlier violence less serious, nor do they establish that she is free of its consequences. The narrative allows the reader to recognize the significance of her decision while retaining attention to the circumstances that make the decision necessary and limit its meaning.

Meaning-Making Without a Guaranteed Resolution

The narrative can be read as representing meaning-making through action rather than through a fully articulated account of recovery. Puro's effort to facilitate Laajo's return gives her an opportunity to respond to another person's suffering. Her final decision also suggests that "return" has acquired a meaning different from a literal return to her family. These actions alter the significance of the present without restoring the past. This is consistent with the view that meaning-making involves attempts to negotiate the discrepancy between prior assumptions and changed circumstances, but does not always produce a neat resolution (Park, 2010).

Narrative identity theory provides a further way to understand this unresolved quality. A life story may connect experiences without eliminating contradiction (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Puro's narrative continues to contain the identities of Puro and Hamida, the memory of rejection, the reality of her present relationships, and the decision to help Laajo. The result is not a single, final identity but a contested self-understanding formed under historical and social pressure.

Theoretical Contribution

The study's theoretical contribution is modest and interpretive. It brings identity theory, event centrality, meaning-making, and gendered readings of Partition into a single analysis of Puro's narrative. The resulting framework positions identity as both shaped by trauma and involved in the interpretation of traumatic experience. It also emphasizes social recognition and constrained agency as important features of identity reconstruction. Because the study examines one fictional narrative, it proposes a way of reading the text rather than validating a general psychological model.

Implications for Trauma-Informed Practice and Teaching

For trauma-informed practice, the analysis offers a reminder to attend to disrupted belonging, imposed social meanings, loss of agency, and tensions between remembered and socially assigned identities. These are considerations for clinical reflection, not treatment recommendations established by the study. The literary narrative may be useful for teaching and conceptual discussion when its fictional status, historical specificity, and limits are kept explicit. It should not be used to infer a diagnosis or predict the responses of real survivors.

The analysis also highlights the importance of avoiding assumptions that recovery must mean a return to a pre-trauma self or that a survivor's decisions necessarily indicate forgiveness, acceptance, or growth. A trauma-informed reading leaves room for ambivalence and partial adaptation, while also recognizing the structural conditions that shape the choices available to a person.

Limitations and Future Research

The study examines one fictional narrative, and its interpretations depend on the selected passages, theoretical orientation, and researcher's reading. It cannot establish the prevalence or causal effects of trauma-related identity disruption in clinical populations. The analysis derives from a prior master's dissertation, so the article's contribution lies in its reframing and more explicit argument rather than in claiming a wholly new dataset. The available dissertation notes do not document independent coding, inter-rater reliability, participant validation, or a formal reflexive audit trail; these procedures are therefore not claimed. The literature search used to position the article was targeted rather than systematic, so the novelty claim must remain provisional until a fuller database search and close comparison of relevant full texts are completed. The exact edition of *Pinjar* and page numbers for quoted passages also require verification.

Future work could compare *Pinjar* with other literary, oral-history, or autobiographical accounts of Partition and displacement, attend more closely to differences in language and translation, or examine how gender, family honour, and religious identity are represented across narratives. Comparative work could clarify which features are specific to Puro's story and which recur across different narratives. Empirical studies with survivors would require a separate design, ethical safeguards, and methods appropriate to lived experience; they should not be inferred from this textual analysis.

CONCLUSION

Puro's narrative in *Pinjar* depicts identity as contested, relational, and vulnerable to both violence and social rejection. Her abduction disrupts her expected future, while her family's refusal to accept her intensifies the rupture by denying her former social position. Across the narrative, Puro negotiates the remembered identity of Puro, the imposed identity of Hamida, the need for belonging, and the possibility of acting in solidarity with another woman. Her response to Laajo and her final decision make agency visible, but they do not erase coercion or establish complete recovery. The article's contribution is therefore deliberately bounded: it offers a trauma-informed literary interpretation of social non-recognition and constrained agency, rather than a universal model of psychological recovery. Further scholarship is needed to determine how distinct this synthesis is from existing readings of *Pinjar*, and all quotations and edition details must be verified before publication.

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