# **Amrita Pritam love poems – *Bread of Dreams* and *A Story of Fire***

Born in pre-Partition Punjab and schooled in Punjabi, Amrita Pritam’s words stand witness to the upheavals of the twentieth century wherein she was born. Destined to be poet, the main concerns of her writing were love, freedom, justice and togetherness. She brought Punjabi the glory it had never received before, as far as modern writing in the language goes. A crusader for gender equality and a woman’s right to live, love and write sans constraint, Pritam was often at the receiving end of unjust criticism. She never bowed to this moral policing. She walked out of a loveless marriage, had an intense yet platonic romance with the famed Urdu poet Sahir Ludhianvi and, finally, a live-in relationship with artist Inderjit Imroz for nearly half a century. The personal was indeed the political for her, and she wrote openly about her life, including the smoking of cigarettes—a religious taboo among the Sikh orthodoxy. Through her writing and her life, Pritam paved the way for freedom and choice for young writers, especially girls.

In the poem Bread of Dreams the poet Amrita Pritam talks about her dream that she had in last night. The abstract dreams took the form of a concrete bread in the dream. But shockingly this is known to the sky. After being aware of it predatory birds with big wings, long beaks, cruel teeth, sharp claws swooped at it and snatched the bread form her hands. During that time, she was hurt by the birds. Her hands and cheeks were scarred and she lost her bread of dream. At the end she had only the talk of bread and the nights were ruled by black vultures.

This poem is highly metaphorical, where the bread is a woman’s dreams of life, love, or freedom. Whereas the predatory birds are the self-proclaimed guardians of the patriarchal society. These guardians are not only aware of the dreams of an individual but also they whole heartedly try to demolish others’ dreams. The cruelty of these people of the society can be assumed by the use of the phrases like ‘big wings’, ‘long beaks’, ‘cruel teeth’, ‘sharp claws’. With these weapons these people attack an individual and left him/ her wounded. Such attacks are repeated by them until they snatch away the dream. In contrast to the bloody hands of the society the dream itself is an unprotected, naïve, object that draws attention of others and easily becomes their target of cruelty. In the last stanza Pritam is left alone just with the ‘talk’ of dream. It is suggestive of the fact that in this society a woman can not have any dream. She can only talk about it but not dare to fulfil it because this society is under the authority of the agents of patriarchy.

Through her life Amrita Pritam has proven that a woman can live her life in her own terms without caring the criticism of society. Moving away from married life, being in love with a renowned poet and lyricist throughout her life, and living with a partner for four decades without marring him – Amrita Pritam has proved that she is a not a poet but revolution personified.

## Her next poem A Story of Fire is about her love relation with poet and lyricist Sahir Ludhianvi. Sahir Ludhianvi and Amrita Pritam love story compassed a universe of love, pain, acceptance, loss, remorse, sensuality and almost everything in between. It all began in 1944, when Amrita, a married woman, met Sahir, a budding poet and lyricist, for the first time. A [report](https://www.firstpost.com/living/untold-love-story-sahir-ludhianvi-amrita-pritam-1624479.html) in Firstpost says it was at a mushaira (poetry reading session) at a village somewhere between Lahore and Delhi. It is said that their romance began, like it happens in films, instantly. Her beauty and her talent with words and his passion and idealism were the ingredients of this fascinating yet agonising romance. What is amazing is that although the two met on several occasions, their romance unfolded only through letters, silences and words. It is believed that Amrita was deeply in love and was willing to walk out of her unhappy marriage (she was married at 16) but Sahir never committed himself to this relationship. It was left for painter Imroz to fill in the void in Amrita’s life but that was much later. She did eventually walk out of her marriage and, while she reportedly stayed with Imroz for four decades, they never married. Meanwhile, the relationship between Sahir and Amrita suffered its final blow when the lyricist reportedly began his relationship with singer Sudha Malhotra. However, some still believe that Amrita was his one true love and that there may have been several reasons as to why he couldn’t commit himself to her. Meanwhile, Sahir was a permanent fixture in Amrita’s life, even after she left him for Imroz, as he often figured in her writings. While he hid his affections, she was always expressive about hers.

## The poem A Story of Fire is like her earlier poem a metaphorically comparison of her love-life with a cigarette. As fire lit a cigarette, the life of Pritam was touched by the love of Sahir. The moments of happiness (‘Sparks’) comes to her life because of Sahir. Form their first meeting Pritam got the blessing of love which she records carefully in her writings: “Time with pen in hand / Is smiling and counting”. In the third stanza she talks about their short and occasional meetings but the effects of those moments engraved in heart for ever which she captures in her works for fourteen years: “The cigarette took fourteen minutes / To smoke / To write this / Took me fourteen years.” In the fourth stanza she claims that she is alive only because of his love. She compares her body with an unlit cigarette where Sahir’s love is the fire that burns constantly in her body. In the last two stanzas she talks about the separation which causes pain to both of them. Whatever may be the reasons she prefers to stay away with a relation where it becomes the cause pain than pleasure. Even in the end Pritam suggests him to remember only the ‘sparks’ (her love for him): “Mind the spark in the butt”. Amrita’s pain, acceptance, and sense of loss is evident in the last line of the poem: Take care of your hand - / Light another cigarette”. At the end she even suggests Sahir to have another cigarette. Here this ‘another cigarette’ is possibly the reference of another lady (Sudha Malhotra) in his life.

## Thus, it is evident from the above poems that Amrita Pritam’s poems have compassed a universe of love, pain, acceptance, loss, remorse, sensuality and almost everything in between.