
Silenced Wounds: Violence and Trauma in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*

Dr. Sridatta Nirjharinee

Asst. Prof (Guest Faculty),Sambalpur University

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Abstract

Tomb of Sand (2022) by Geetanjali Shree offers a profound exploration of the enduring trauma of Partition through the experiences of its central character, Ma. The book explores the psychological, historical, and generational ramifications of trauma, demonstrating how unresolved past events continue to shape relationships and identities across time. By highlighting disadvantaged viewpoints, especially those of women, Shree challenges conventional depictions of Partition through Ma's transition from silence and seclusion to self-assertion and rediscovery. The narrative is both intensely personal and politically significant because of the lyrical language and fractured narrative style, which mirror the fractured character of traumatic memory. Through an analysis of Ma's journey, her relationships with Beti and Rosie, and the generational transmission of memory, the book emphasizes the significance of facing past trauma as a means of recovery and rejuvenation. This paper analyzes how Shree reinterprets the legacy of Partition through the interconnected themes of trauma, gender, and intergenerational memory.

The protagonist, Ma, subtly but meaningfully captures the profound and enduring effects of India's Partition. The process of facing and overcoming past trauma is symbolized by her transition from silence and seclusion to resistance and self-awareness. Ma is seen laying in bed with her back to the wall at the beginning of the book, signifying her disengagement from life and the present (21). According to Geetanjali Shree, the painting depicts an elderly woman who has lost all desire to live and appears to be attempting to vanish by sinking deeper into the wall. This behaviour can be interpreted as a response to the bitter memories of Partition that were kept secret and unresolved for many years. As the story progresses, Ma's choice to go back to her former home of Pakistan turns into a potent effort to confront long-suppressed memories and recover her past. Her story serves as a reminder of how crucial it is to confront past suffering in order to find closure and healing. The novel also shows how unresolved trauma affects relationships and identities across generations. Through Ma's trip, which compels her to face her past, memory plays a significant role in the book. Her recollections of Partition, which were previously concealed by the daily grind of household life, reappear in shattered and agonizing pieces, demonstrating how trauma modifies memory itself. The novel's multiple meanings, shifting timelines, and clever use of language all reflect how memory is dynamic and ever-changing. The novel depicts memory

as a dynamic, ever-evolving force that continues to impact the present rather than as a static narrative of the past. Geetanjali Shree presents a very real and intimate view of the long-lasting effects of Partition via Ma's journey, challenging the official and frequently oversimplified perspectives.

The emotional and psychological scars left by India's partition are also reflected in a number of other characters in the book. One important figure is Rosie, a transgender Pakistani lady who represents the shattered boundaries and broken identities brought forth by Partition. Her persona draws attention to the pain endured by underprivileged groups whose lives were uprooted and whose tales were frequently left out of popular historical narratives. In *Tomb of Sand*, healing is presented as a convoluted and non-linear process. The book makes the argument that healing results from facing, comprehending, and progressively lessening the effects of trauma rather than from forgetting or deleting it. Ma's quest to find emotional closure and revisit painful memories is symbolized by her physical and symbolic return to Pakistan. Additionally, her friendship with Rosie represents being receptive to new identities, relationships, and opportunities for rejuvenation. Healing is a communal and shared experience rather than a solitary procedure. It demonstrates that acknowledging and interacting with painful memories is a necessary part of moving ahead rather than giving up on the past. The novel's disjointed narrative structure highlights how difficult it is to adequately convey the profound effects of Partition. The poem reflects the chaos, upheaval, and dislocation brought forth by the historical event as well as the ongoing attempt to comprehend it by eschewing a single, coherent narrative. Rosie exhibits resiliency and the capacity to find joy in spite of her struggles, providing hope and implying the potential for recovery and rejuvenation beyond trauma. The book highlights humanism, resiliency, and survival in the face of historical violence via her character.

As Cathy Caruth observes in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), “The repetitions of the traumatic event—which remain unavailable to consciousness but repeatedly intrude on sight—thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing.” (92) According to Caruth, the quiescence and dissociation of trauma prevent both individual traumatic gestures and collaborative literal events of extreme nature from being fully understood or depicted. Rather, they are comprehended through fragmented narratives that suggest the significance of history as a kind of performance or reduplication. For the elderly main character Ma, this is exactly the situation. As a metaphor, she rejects the social line and instead undergoes a kind of rebirth; this illustrates the novel's silent but pervasive anguish of partition. Ma's shift from passivity to proactive self-discovery is comparable to the gradual emergence of suppressed identity and suffering. When Ma highlights that she is the “Goddess of Solitude” (Shree 334), it emphasizes the sensation of alienation, loneliness, and estrangement brought on by one's own traumatic experiences. Analogously, Elis Marder in her essay “Trauma and Literary

Studies: Some 'Enabling Questions' "states, "The importance of finding a new way to acknowledge the impact of events that can only be known belatedly and of listening to the power of experiences that can only be expressed indirectly" (2) He suggests that, trauma often cannot be understood immediately when it occurs. Instead, its effects emerge later, in fragmented memories, silences, or indirect expressions. Marder states that traumatic experiences resist straightforward narration and demand alternative forms of listening, interpretation, and representation. Trauma therefore becomes visible not through direct articulation alone, but through gaps, repetitions, and emotional echoes in literature and memory. Both perspectives (Caruth and Marder) contend that trauma is incredibly complex. It affects people's identities and interpersonal relationships throughout generations, even if it may not always be obvious. Beyond those who were directly impacted, Partition had a long-lasting impact on their descendants, subtly affecting their lives. Relocation and separation-related suffering becomes a hereditary emotional burden that affects future generations psychologically and emotionally for a long time. Ma's life in *Tomb of Sand* is closely connected to an unresolved past and the silence she adopts as a response to her terrible experiences. However, her pain is not limited to her private life. It has an impact on her children's life, especially Beti, who struggles with inherited worries, anxieties, and identity problems. This blending of individual and collective memory highlights the continued relevance of the past. In her old years, Ma's activities and disobedience of patriarchal norms also represent the persistence of women's history that have been suppressed. Through her travels, the book unearths long-forgotten experiences and gives voice to people who were overlooked or excluded from popular historical narratives.

In *Tomb of Sand*, Geetanjali Shree presents nature as a powerful source of healing from trauma. As noted by Weiling Deng in "Death and Life in the Bordersands: On the Queer Remembrance of Partition through Gitanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*", sand functions as a symbol that connects people across time and space, representing universal empathy that transcends borders. The novel implies through this symbolism that physical, emotional, and cultural barriers can be overcome by comprehending common suffering. In the face of trauma and historical atrocity, the collapse of such barriers suggests a sense of global connectivity and common humanity. Ma withdraws into quiet following her husband's passing and stays away from the people who come to console her. In an attempt to cope with her emotional suffering, she even avoids confronting her son and daughter. However, a gradual transformation begins when Sid gifts her a cane decorated with butterflies of many colours. The butterflies symbolize change, renewal, and freedom, helping Ma slowly emerge from the resistance and emotional confinement that hold her back. Similarly, the moments when Ma, Beti, and Sid take photographs together symbolize happiness, healing, and personal transformation. "And from there it twinkled in Granny's eyes. Rainbow here, rainbow there, rainbows, everywhere! And the one reflected in the eyes the sparkiest of all" (96). Shree also uses the image of the rainbow as a symbol of hope, renewal, and the possibility of a new beginning. Through these natural and colourful images, the novel

suggests that healing can emerge through connection, empathy, and openness to transformation. With renewed brightness in her eyes, Ma slowly begins to rediscover life and energy within herself. Her move from Bade's house to Beti's home marks the beginning of a deeper transformation in the mind of the survivor. It is here that Ma starts to reconnect with herself and learns to embrace her body despite the scars left by displacement and trauma. As the novel states in *Tomb of Sand*, "Your body is your body, whether it's your sixteenth year, seventeenth, or seventy-eighth, you prance about strutting your burgeoning blossoming shape." (260) This reflects the idea that self-worth and vitality are not limited by age or suffering. By wholeheartedly accepting her scars and past experiences, Ma gains confidence and begins to move through life with assurance and freedom. Her transformation symbolizes resilience, growth, and beauty emerging from pain, almost as if she is celebrating her own rebirth and metamorphosis.

Healing and transformation begin with acknowledging, understanding, and integrating the past into one's present identity. Ma's journey of self-discovery opens the possibility of a new way of living that had previously remained unknown to her. In *Tomb of Sand*, Ma's attempt to reconnect with her former self truly begins when she decides to revisit Pakistan, the homeland where she spent her early years before Partition. Geetanjali Shree portrays Ma's silence as a state of emotional withdrawal that continues until she begins to rediscover herself and chooses to return to the origins of her past, emphasizing the need to confront one's roots in order to heal. Through her return to Pakistan, Ma uncovers memories of her family history and life before Partition, which symbolizes a larger search for identity, belonging, and healing in response to generational trauma.

In *Tomb of Sand*, intergenerational relationships are essential in showing how memories of the Partition of India are passed down and reshaped over time. The relationship between Ma and her daughter, Beti, demonstrates how trauma and memory continue to influence later generations. Beti's curiosity about her mother's past reflects the younger generation's desire to understand and come to terms with a history they did not personally witness but which still affects their identity and sense of belonging. (564)

Geetanjali Shree illustrates how memories of Partition are constantly reinterpreted in shifting social and historical circumstances using Beti's narrative viewpoint. Instead of portraying historical memory as something static, this emphasizes how it is dynamic and ever-changing. The significance of storytelling in bridging generations is also emphasized throughout the book. Ma's experiences become more than just personal recollections as she progressively shares pieces of her life with Beti; they become a tool for fostering empathy, understanding, and emotional connection. This conversation serves as an example of how intergenerational communication can heal collective trauma and overcome historical and emotional barriers. *Tomb of Sand* provides a compelling analysis of the lingering consequences of historical trauma by relating Partition to modern socioeconomic realities

and emphasizing intergenerational relationships. The novel suggests that the past is never truly gone; instead, it survives through stories, memories, and the bonds formed across generations and borders.

Tomb of Sand is a thorough examination of the trauma brought forth by India's Partition, demonstrating how past suffering still shapes both individual and societal identities. Through Ma's journey, Geetanjali Shree confronts the silences surrounding Partition and restores the voices of those who have been marginalized in dominant historical narratives. By showing how trauma is passed down and reinterpreted down the generations, the book highlights the importance of storytelling in maintaining and transforming memory. Shree disrupts traditional historical depictions and offers a feminist and profoundly human version of Partition by concentrating on women's experiences and using a nonlinear story framework. In the end, the book makes the argument that healing comes from actively interacting with the past through recollection, communication, and unity rather than from forgetting it. Its examination of borders—both real and imagined—acts as a potent reminder of the enduring consequences of history and the potential for bridging gaps by compassion, comprehension, and interpersonal relationships.

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