

Revisiting Border and Defying Boundaries: Unravelling Echoes of the Partitioned Woman in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*

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Abstract—This paper explores the multifaceted concept of the border, which is geographical, social and psychological, through the perspective of the partitioned woman in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*. It aims to explore how borders serve as repositories of memory and examine diverse perspectives on the history of partition, critically analysing the impact on women and the courage and compassion they exhibited in overcoming these challenges. Furthermore, it investigates the significance of the concept of 'border' through protagonist Ma's experiences and understanding during the partition and in contemporary times. Using insights from border studies and feminist postcolonial theory, the researcher examines how the 1947 Partition continues to shape identity, memory, and femininity. Through Ma's journey across literal and metaphorical borders, *Tomb of Sand* reimagines the border not merely as a site of division and violence but as a space of reclamation, connection, and healing. This study analyses how Shree employs non-linear memory, symbolic spatiality, and intertextual references to Partition narratives to illuminate Ma's suppressed experiences and the courage required to confront them. This paper also argues that Shree's novel offers a transformative framework for understanding the resilience of the partitioned woman, revealing how borders can be crossed, defied, and utilised as a locus of healing. Through this lens, the article contributes to broader discourses on trauma, gendered history, and the enduring human quest to transcend imposed boundaries in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Index Terms—nation, border, partition, trauma

I. INTRODUCTION

"There is no way we can begin to understand what Partition was about unless we look at how people remember it". (Butalia, 2000, p. 10).

Women, borders, and boundaries intersect in profoundly complex ways within the historical and cultural memory of the 1947 Partition of India. The creation and dissolution of borders have long shaped histories, identities, and memories, but few events illustrate their profound human cost as vividly as the Partition of India in 1947. The Partition was not merely the drawing of a political boundary between two nations; it was an act that ruptured identities, families, and communities, leaving deep scars on the social and emotional fabric of the subcontinent. The division has long impacted individuals, but women suffer the most due to being targeted by male aggression for two main reasons: their gender and their faith. The loss of division is catastrophic. As Geetanjali Shree stated during her interview at the Jaipur Literary Festival, "If you think partition happened in 1947 and it's over, you are mistaken. It is very much a part of our lives. We are still a divided family, divided people, and divided hearts" (Singh, 2023).

This momentous political rupture, which divided the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, was not merely a redrawing of territorial lines; it was a violent reconfiguration of lives, communities, and gendered realities. In the midst of mass migrations and communal violence, women's bodies became contested sites upon which notions of honour, nation, and belonging were inscribed. A partition establishes a physical boundary that has a lasting effect on human experiences. In academia, partition has been focused on the "high politics" and "demographic divisions of land" and "facts about the number of migrants" rather than the impact it had on humans. Abduction, rape, forced conversions, and displacements rendered women both symbols and victims of nationalist fervour. Border studies came into existence through the partition literature. According to Sendhardt (2013), the border is not simply geographical, but also social as well as psychological. The study of borders has seen a radical shift in the last 20 years, moving away from the long-held concentration on state borders as unchanging ontological entities with primarily physical qualities. A perspective that emphasises the shifting meaning of borders, their various types and functions, and their social construction has replaced the earlier view of borders as merely geographical demarcations in the recent history of border studies. Wilson states, "borders are expected to be places and spaces of various forms of culture and expression, particularly the nations" (Wilson, 2009, p. 6).

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The creation of borders thus entailed not only geographical division but also the reinforcement of patriarchal and communal boundaries that redefined women's roles within the emerging nation-states. Revisiting these borders thus involves more than mapping geography; it demands confronting the social and emotional boundaries that partition is imposed and continues to reinforce, and simultaneously navigating immense personal loss and societal stigma. To "defy boundaries" in this context means reclaiming women's voices and experiences that were silenced beneath dominant political narratives. Through the lens of border theory, the exploration of borders becomes an inquiry into memory, identity, and resistance, revealing how women have continually negotiated, challenged, and transcended the limits imposed upon them by history and patriarchy alike. It also shows how women resisted the limitations imposed upon them by reclaiming their agency, bearing witness to their trauma, and challenging the official narratives that sought to silence them.

Geetanjali Shree is a renowned Indian Hindi-language writer who is well known for the exploration of female experience through her work. Geetanjali Shree, through her unusual storytelling methods, beautifully presents the ordinary lives of people. She paints the plot and character through her magnificent use of words and wit. This study involves the exploration of the theme of the reconstruction of the border and the courage of woman in Geetanjali Shree's novel, *Tomb of Sand*. This novel, originally written in Hindi as *Ret Samadhi* (2018), was translated into English by Daisy Rockwell. The book won the International Booker Prize in 2022, making history as the first book translated from an Indian language to win it. *Tomb of Sand* tells the story of Ma, an 80-year-old widow engulfed in sorrow and overwhelming grief following her husband's death. She eventually resumes her relationships with the outside world, and she sets out on a journey to Pakistan, where she spent most of her life before the partition, driven by her inner desire. This novel is characterised by its immersive nature, as it explores the intricate dynamics of human connections and the enduring impact of historical events in contemporary society. It also talks about how women get used to society's limits and stop questioning them. These limitations and boundaries based on unimportant variables grow ingrained in them. It is a meandering, powerful literary journey that constantly veers off the path before finally bringing you back to its central ideas. It is a partitioned tale with magical realism strewn throughout. The border 'land' turns into the border 'sand' as the border transforms into a fluid and kaleidoscopic gateway to a new world.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recently, there has been a significant increase in research regarding the impact of partition on women's lives. Some are anthropological, whereas others examine psychological, sociological, political, and economic dimensions of division and post-partition. Jennifer Yusin, in her article "*The Silence of Partition: Borders, Trauma, and Partition History*", enunciates that the history of the 1947 Partition is characterised by borders that were delineated to separate and form the sovereign nations of India and Pakistan, representing both a tangible historical split and an unfathomable source of anguish and pain. She discusses that the Partition-created border becomes the spatial inscription of the meaning and impact of history on the identity of both the collective as a community and as an individual. Shabana Ahmed and Abha Rupendra Pal, in their essay titled "*Partition of India and Women*," primarily provide an account of how women were distressed and tormented both physically and psychologically, viewing them as embodiments of community honour and, secondarily, as sites of community reproduction. Females of both sides had paid the price of independence by renouncing their freedom and femininity. Few scholarly articles exist on Indian border studies, especially with women being the central 'voice'. "*Gender, Memory, Trauma: Women's Novels on the Partition of India*" by Ananya Kabir explains in her essay how women writers like Bapsi Sidwa and Krishna Sobti have written about other women whose lives have been significantly impacted by partition. In this essay, she mainly gives a glimpse of partition as a collective trauma and outlines the different ways in which the event has been recalled and how books penned by women excavate the gendered dimension of such a tremendous event in history. The authors have depicted women as figures of torment and torture during the partition and the catastrophe they have undergone in the novel, such as in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*. Dr Sanket Kumar Jha, in his essay "*A Critique of Geetanjali Shree's Tomb of Sand as a Feminist Metafiction*", enquires into the "understanding of the word 'borders' from a feminine perspective and juxtaposes it against the male-centric interpretation of the term. The essay discusses how Geetanjali Shree uses self-reflection, playfulness and intertextuality, which makes it metafiction. According to Jha, it highlights various issues about contemporary existence, including the roles of gender, class, ethnicity, religion, governance, and others.

III. AN OVERVIEW OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The origins of border studies can be traced to the field of social geography concerning the U.S.-Mexico border. However, its theories and critiques can be extended to a broader spectrum of boundaries. Theories and critiques have evolved border studies into a more discursive and dynamic discipline, providing several layers of comprehension that enrich social and psychological insight. The source of development is incipient in the seminal border text, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, when she claims in the Preface:

The actual physical borderland that I'm dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. The Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy

the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, and where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (Anzaldúa, 1987, para. 1).

However, at the border of India and Pakistan, the divergence of culture, race, and economic conditions is very minimal. Then the question arises: how is it possible to incorporate the partition and its aftermath within the border studies? Sucharita Sarkar theorises that the Partition established physical boundaries through state-sanctioned violence, which provoked more violence that inflicted psychological scars and established mental barriers. The Partition is inherently connected to the phenomenon of border crossings and the anguish caused by such forced displacement (Sarkar, 2015). According to recent work done on border studies, it is considered that the Palestinian and Indian partitions are the most controversial and traumatic since World War 2. "India's partition created a novel border, separating India from two entities, West and East Pakistan. The new lines did not restore old Mughal jurisdictions... that illustrate fresh cuts" (Wilson & Hastings, 2012, p. 30). These 'fresh cuts' will never age; they still bleed, and they still leave scars on psychics and create unforgettable memories.

Emily Hicks, in her work *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text*, states that "border writers allow the reader to practice multidimensional perception and non-synchronous memory" (Hicks, 1991, p. 23). Various Partition writers like Manto, Amitav Ghosh, and Bapsi Sidwa use 'multidimensional perception' and 'non-synchronous memory' to give an account of cataclysmic events that happen due to borders created within the nation. Border studies not only focus on the 'divide' it creates but also on the 'uniting'. People have used the term border as a term to portray the 'other' nation as an enemy. Recently, the counter-discourse has been presented by individuals like Butalia (2000), Menon and Bhasin (1998) and others who seek a re-signification of the term 'border' to indicate 'join' rather than 'divide'. As Passi (2001) says, 'borders' are not merely physical, empirical lines or zones that can be frozen on maps and atlases as naturalised 'entities' (Passi, 2001, p. 22). Broader aspects of life and human experience nullify the border. We should look at the border from the perspective of a better world that is more 'unified' and 'healing' rather than with the limited perspective of 'division' and 'hurt'. "The borderlands... are the privileged locus of hope for a better world" (Michaelsen & Johnson, 1997, p. 3). Where the focus of border studies shifts from 'divide' to 'join' and from 'hurt' to 'heal'.

Within post-colonialism, border studies are often read as a legacy of colonialism, particularly in the context of the Partition of India. Bhasin and Menon (1998) argue that the Partition imposed artificial national identities, forcibly separating people based on religion and nationhood. These imposed boundaries generated not only physical violence but also emotional and psychological fractures, especially for women. As Kumar (2001) states, the boundary that was established as a result of the Partition is not only a line on the map; rather, it is recorded into people's minds, bodies, and memories. This observation directly applies to the character of Ma in *Tomb of Sand*, whose body and life were reshaped by the trauma of that division. Her late-life journey becomes a re-inscription of agency onto a landscape that once rendered her powerless. Border studies, thus, offer a multifaceted lens to understand how borders shape and are shaped by history, trauma, gender, and identity. Far from being inert lines, borders become active sites of conflict, memory, and possibility. By interrogating the colonial and patriarchal foundations of modern nation-states, this theoretical framework invites deeper engagement with the voices of those rendered invisible by border regimes while illuminating how memory, culture, and resistance continue to flow across imposed divides. When applied to *Tomb of Sand*, border theory reveals how borders function as both traumatic enclosures and transformative spaces. For Ma, the India–Pakistan border is not only a historical wound but also a site of return, reckoning, and resistance. The perspectives of Gloria Anzaldúa, Sucharita Sarkar, and postcolonial feminist theorists enrich the reading of the novel by challenging the notion of fixed identities and demonstrating that healing and agency often emerge not from avoiding borders but by courageously traversing them. This paper attempts to look at the post-millennial work based on the partition, Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* (2018), which reconstructs a border from the metamorphosis of Ma through a courageous journey she took to Pakistan. It explores how Shree reconstructs the border with the help of (1) the 'human experience' and 'voice' of woman through 'non-synchronous memory' and 'multiple perceptions', (2) exploring the border in terms of 'physical' and 'psychological' lenses from woman's perspectives in Partition literature, and (3) analysing how the border adds to the 'healing' of Ma in *Tomb of Sand*.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a qualitative research approach to achieve its objectives, focusing on the intersection of border, history, and gender. Both primary and secondary sources were utilised to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the research topic. The novel *Tomb of Sand* by Geetanjali Shree served as the primary text, offering a rich site for thematic analysis, particularly in its nuanced portrayal of the Partition of India and its profound effects on women. In addition to the primary source, a range of secondary materials was gathered to support the research. This included scholarly writings, academic articles, interviews, and various research papers that delve into partition and border studies, with a specific emphasis on women's experiences during this historical period. These secondary sources were meticulously collected from different sources, ensuring access to credible and relevant information. The integration of these diverse sources allowed for a thorough and profound analysis, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities related to gender and the historical context of the partition. The methodology is the integration of *border studies*, which offers a critical framework for understanding how physical and metaphorical borders, national, cultural, and gendered, shape individual and collective identities. Border studies enable a deeper engagement with the novel's exploration of transgression,

mobility, and the reconfiguration of boundaries, especially in the context of a female protagonist navigating post-Partition realities.

V. DISCUSSIONS

A. *Border Beyond Lines: The Multidimensional Study of Border - Physical, Social and Psychological Boundaries*

A border is a concept that is a reflection of the idea of a territorial state, and it has been one of the most critical keywords in the history of political geography. In *Tomb of Sand*, Shree intricately narrates the story of an octogenarian widow, Ma, beginning in a middle-class household in Delhi and culminating with an unforeseen twist in the Khyber region of Pakistan, as she seeks to reclaim her identity as Chandraprabha Devi. Through its humorous writing, it demonstrates an in-depth comprehension of the borders and boundaries that are present in every location. A consensus has emerged that boundaries should not be perceived merely as physical lines depicted on maps, atlases, or the terrestrial landscape. These regions serve as sites for political geographers, ethnographers, and anthropologists to delineate border landscapes and the experiences of individuals residing along the border (Passi, 2009). Shree transforms domestic and architectural spaces into powerful metaphors that reflect the psychological and political landscapes of post-Partition India. Among these, walls and doors play a central role in articulating themes of trauma, gendered confinement, resistance, and transformation, particularly through the journey of the protagonist, Ma. Indeed, this work depicts all sorts of border crossings. Be it nation, body, gender, memory, or language. The three parts of the novel, *Ma's Back*, *Sunlight*, and *Back to the Front*, represent three distinct phases of Ma's life. Shree has reconstructed the 'border' through these three phases in the following ways: The first phase of Ma's life, known as "Ma's back", marks the beginning of the narrative. This phase focuses on how the author's extensive use of metaphors, such as walls, doors, and borders, indicates the reconstruction of the border as a social and psychological boundary between family, society, and nation. At the beginning of the story, there is a note that revolves around the border. Shree states, "This particular tale has a border and women who come and go as they please. Once you've got women and a border, a story can write itself" (Shree, 2021, p. 1). Shree reconstructs the idea of a border from the very first line of the novel. The border comes and goes as per the needs of the tale. Shree focuses on the border. In this novel, the border plays a very pivotal role. The border manifests as indelible lines, sometimes visible between nations and sometimes invisible between family members. This opening line introduces significant themes and reflects the author's commitment to giving voice to the often-overlooked stories of women in the context of historical trauma. The border is represented through the metaphor of walls, doors, windows and much more, which indicates social and psychological boundaries between family members and the nation. Shree perfectly blends the border within the narrative through the use of metaphors, multiple perspectives, nonchronological memory, and a stream of consciousness.

In *Tomb of Sand* by Geetanjali Shree, walls and doors serve as powerful metaphors for boundaries, confinement, and transition. These physical elements transform into symbolic spaces that reflect the protagonist Ma's psychological journey and the post-Partition socio-political context. "The wall plays a special role in our story (as do the doors, since you use them to get from one side to another, from here to there, on and on through the centuries, from forever to forever" (Shree, 2021, p. 16). At the novel's outset, the wall becomes a symbol of Ma's retreat into herself after her husband's death. She sits silently, pressed against the wall, as though merging into it. Shree writes, "She was a bundle, shrinking ever more from moment to moment, sending out a scrambled signal from within her vast quilt that she was still in there somewhere" (Shree, 2021, p. 26). The wall reflects her immobilisation, grief, and the heavy silences around her traumatic past, especially during the Partition. As the narrator remarks, "The wall plays a special role in our story" (Shree, 2021, p. 41), signalling its centrality in representing her inner world. Here, walls frequently represent societal limitations and individual challenges. For instance, the protagonist's reflections on the walls that surround her life—both literally and figuratively—bring to light the fact that she has been captured by the cultural expectations and familial obligations that she is obligated to fulfil. This imagery makes one feel as though they are being suffocated and makes one yearn for freedom. Doors, on the other hand, are symbolic of the possibility of the beginning of something new and the possibility of change. Doors represent transition and awakening. Shree writes, "The door does not dance. Everything passes through it: people, air, colour, laughter, sunlight..." (Shree, 2021, p. 58). This description turns the door into a witness to life's fluidity. When Ma finally moves toward the door and "slips away" (Shree, 2021, p. 95), it marks a symbolic escape from confinement and the beginning of her personal transformation. "The door to Bade's home knows it must remain open no matter what, and there are no constraints on those who enter, in terms of time of arrival, advance notice or knocking before entry. Always free to be and free of charge" (Shree, 2021, p. 27). The act of opening or closing a door in the narrative often signifies pivotal moments in the characters' journeys, such as choices that lead to self-discovery or escape from oppressive circumstances. Together, walls and doors capture the tension between confinement and freedom. While walls represent repression, doors become gateways to healing, movement, and the rewriting of identity.

The last and third part of the novel, entitled 'Back to the Front', starts with the phrase, "Here we are at Wagah, where the tale is drama, and the story is Partition" (Shree, 2021, p. 535). In this section, Shree vividly portrays the group of Partition writers gathered at the Wagah border: Bhisham Sahni, Balwant Singh, Joginder Pal, Manto, Rahi Masoom Raza, Shaani, Intizar Hussain, Krishna Sobti, Khushwant Singh, Ramanand Sagar, Manzoor Ehtesham, Rajinder Singh Bedi. So many, one could go on and on. And crowding around them, actors, bobbling and swirling like acrobats as they read lines from their scripts" (Shree, 2021, p. 535). Through Ma's trip across spatial and temporal boundaries, the writing style deconstructs the idea of borders, both physical and symbolic. Borders, including those between countries, genders, and

identities, are not only crossed but also questioned and deconstructed as the tale unfolds. Passi suggests that, “A boundary does not only exist in the border area, but manifests itself in many institutions such as education, the media, memorial, ceremonies and spectacle. There are effective expressions of narrative linked with boundaries and border conflicts and serve as references to the other” (Passi, 1998, p. 76). In particular, Ma’s relationship with geographical and cultural barriers blurs the line between self and other. As the national borders that divided her after the Partition are reinterpreted as sites of connection rather than division, Ma’s wish to travel to Pakistan once she has recovered from the loss of her husband exemplifies this deconstruction. Ma raises a question to the interrogating officials, “Do you know what a border is ... It is something that surrounds an existence, it is a person’s perimeter..... A border does not enclose; it opens out. It creates a shape.... a border increases recognition. Where two sides meet and both flourish.” She further enlightens them, “A border stops nothing. It is a bridge between two connected parts (Shree, 2021, p. 652).” Here, Shree perfectly portrays the fluidity and flexibility of the border from physical to social, from national to psychological. She asserts that “Do not accept the Border. Do not break yourself into bits with the border. There’s only us. If we don’t accept, this boundary won’t stay” (Shree, 2021, p. 656). Shree defies all the bounds imposed on women in different settings.

B. Mapping Memories: The Border as a Site of Past Experience

Shree presents the border in the novel not just as a physical demarcation between two nations; it represents the fractured memories of the people who lived through the partition. Chauhan states, “Memory is often treated as a debatable concept due to its malleability. It is a fragile concept based on remembering and forgetting. Remembrance can be fragmentary as the events return in flashback. The trauma is ignited through these memories” (Chauhan, 2025, p. 95). In *Tomb of Sand*, the protagonist Ma’s journey back to Pakistan is symbolic of a recovery memory, where the border is no longer a boundary but a place where traumatic and personal past experiences resurface. As Ma navigates her memories, the border itself becomes a map of these memories, showing the distance and gaps that trauma has imposed on her sense of self and identity. Shree describes the border as a site where fractured, lost, and buried memories can flow across, akin to water crossing an open space. This metaphor highlights how the border is a conduit for memory and experience, where what was once divided is now intermingled and fluid.

Ma’s Memories of Partition demonstrate how borders serve as maps, delineating the agonising narratives of expatriation, personal loss, and trauma. Nithiyasri and Pandey state, “Borders are not just lines drawn on the map. They are the mere representation of past events that run through the blood and minds of every survivor who witnessed partition and got displaced from their homeland” (Nithiyasri & Pandey, 2025, p. 3). Memory acts as a cartographic tool, allowing characters to navigate their emotional landscapes. Ma’s memories often take her back to specific locations tied to her experiences during the Partition. These recollections are not merely nostalgic; they evoke feelings of loss and longing, highlighting the emotional weight of historical events. By confronting her memories, she learns to navigate the complexities of her life, transcending the emotional borders that have confined her. These memories are inextricably linked with her identity and the identities of those around her. The notion of the border also serves to map the trauma associated with Partition. Partition was a violent rupture that created irreversible divisions, not only between countries but also within the minds of the people. The traumatic experiences of displacement, violence, loss of family, and the destruction of homes are etched deeply in the memories of the survivors, and these traumatic memories form an invisible border within the psyche of the characters.

Ma’s internal struggle to come to terms with her past is a central theme in the novel, and her memories of Partition are marked by the physical and psychological violence she endured. As Ma reflects on the Partition, she recalls the violent displacements and massacres that tore apart families. The Partition is, for Ma, a painful reminder of the loss of home and identity, as she reflects on the human cost of this artificial division. The violence is implied, haunting her mind and affecting her psychological state: “At the time, everything fell apart the country, the people, and most of all, the people’s minds. What they saw, what they lived through, it left scars, marks they could not rub away” (Shree, 2021, p. 125). This passage speaks to the psychological violence caused by the physical brutality of Partition. The scars Ma refers to are not just physical but emotional, marking a generation of people who lived through atrocities. Despite not being overtly violent, Ma’s psychological withdrawal acts as a form of physical violence. Her immobility symbolises how the physical violence of her past, the massacres, the forced displacements, and the loss of loved ones, have left her incapacitated and unable to move forward. Shree’s depiction of Ma’s life in a state of paralysis also mirrors the paralyzing effects of the partition’s violence: “Ma did not speak. She remained frozen, the years of silence wrapping around her like thick layers of bandages, as though the violence of her youth had made her incapable of doing anything but wait” (Shree, 2021, p. 33).

Shree’s portrayal of Ma’s journey to Pakistan shows how the border becomes a traumatic site that Ma must cross, not only geographically but emotionally. The borders she encounters symbolise the lasting trauma of partition, which continues to resonate in her life and the lives of her family members. “The border was a scar, a reminder of the lives once lived and lost” (Shree, 2021, p. 347). This metaphor emphasises that the physical borders serve as tangible representations of emotional and historical wounds, encapsulating the pain and fragmentation that result from partition. The act of revisiting the site of her past trauma is a form of memory retrieval, where the border is no longer a closed line but an open space of reckoning. The act of crossing the border symbolises her attempt to confront the remnants of that violence, a confrontation with her own past and its ongoing impact on her psyche. “She had never thought she would step into the land that had been her past, her memory, her grief, the violence—now it was time to go there. To face what was lost and what had broken” (Shree, 2021, p. 144).

It shows how Ma's physical journey to Pakistan is an attempt to address the brokenness caused by Partition. The violence of her past is something she must confront directly, as it is inseparable from the pain of her personal history. "It was not the breaking of a boundary that was important, but what lay beyond it" (Shree, 2021, p. 140). This line speaks to the psychological shift that Ma undergoes. The act of crossing boundaries, whether physical, mental, or social, is not merely an escape; it is about the possibilities that lie beyond these limits. Ma's journey is about rediscovering herself and moving toward a future unencumbered by the past. Despite not depicting it in graphic detail, Shree subtly touches on the traumatic experience of physical and sexual violence during India's partition. Instead, Shree portrays the lingering effects of such violence on the psyches of women who lived through it, using Ma's memories as a way to access the border trauma experienced by women during partition.

The scene at the Wagah border serves as a poignant symbol of the complexities surrounding national identity, trauma, and the legacy of Partition. This border, known for its ceremonial flag-lowering event, becomes a multifaceted site of reflection and emotional resonance for the protagonist, Ma. As Ma observes the spectacle at the Wagah border, her emotional response reveals the deep-seated trauma tied to her memories of Partition. The juxtaposition of celebration and sorrow creates a rich emotional landscape. While the crowd cheers and celebrates, Ma is haunted by her past, reflecting on the lives disrupted by the very borders that are being glorified. This contrast evokes a sense of dissonance, highlighting the complexity of identity shaped by trauma. Geetanjali Shree incorporates references to various Partition writers, enriching the narrative and symbolising the complexities of memory, trauma, and identity associated with Partition. The intertextual references to Partition writers create a dialogue between texts, reinforcing the idea that literature transcends geographical boundaries. This aligns with border theory's emphasis on the fluidity and permeability of borders. These literary allusions serve multiple purposes, deepening the thematic exploration of the novel. The inclusion of Partition writers serves as a tribute to the literary tradition that has emerged from the traumatic experiences of the 1947 Partition. By referencing authors like Saadat Hasan Manto, Khushwant Singh, and Bhisham Sahni, Shree acknowledges their contributions to understanding the human cost of Partition. The references to these writers create an intertextual dialogue, allowing *Tomb of Sand* to converse with established narratives of Partition. Each referenced writer adds layers to the narrative, illustrating the multifaceted nature of trauma experienced during Partition. Their varying perspectives highlight different aspects of the human experience, ranging from the brutality of violence to the subtleties of personal loss. Manto's writings often expose the harsh realities of Partition, depicting violence and its psychological effects. His presence in the narrative underscores the rawness of trauma and the difficulty of reconciling with the past. Khushwant Singh's work, which often balances humour with tragedy, reflects the absurdities of human behaviour in the face of crisis. His influence in the novel serves to illustrate resilience and the complexities of human relationships amidst chaos. Throughout the novel, the interactions among women reveal how borders foster a collective memory among those affected by Partition. By sharing their stories, they create a network of remembrance that reinforces their identities and connections to the past. Shree's narrative suggests that while borders can signify division and loss, they can also represent connections to the past. As Ma's understanding of her identity evolves, she begins to see borders as flexible spaces that encompass both memory and past experiences of partition.

C. *Beyond the Barrier: The Border as Locus of Healing*

In Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*, borders are not mere physical boundaries demarcated on land but rather depicted as complex and multifaceted structures that embody both despair and healing. "Borders are never to be found only in border areas but are also located in wider social practice/discourse all around societies and increasingly in relation to global space" (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 63). The narrative represents how these boundaries can serve as space for courage, compassion, transformation, and growth, specifically through the journey of the protagonist, Ma. Dasgosh and Hussain state, "Ma's cross-border journey exemplifies this hybrid space, as she moves beyond the rigid boundaries of nation and gender to reclaim and reinterpret the legacy of partition" (Dasgosh & Hussain, 2025, p. 789). Border theory denotes that borders are fluid constructs that influence identities and social connections among people. Therefore, even though there is misery and pain caused due to borders, there is also hope for healing. "You have crossed the border, they reprimand. She chuckles. Anything worth doing transcends borders" (Shree, 2021, p. 17). For the protagonist, Ma, crossing physical borders allows her to regain her identity as Chandraprabha Devi or Chanda, rather than Ma or Amma. Her journey to Pakistan represents a search for self-awareness, which was originally hampered by memories of partition and the resulting anguish. As Ma confronts and resists societal and psychological limitations, her perception of 'self' evolves. This process highlights that identity is a dynamic combination of events and decisions, rather than a static state.

As she navigates her past, she begins to forge a new understanding of herself that transcends the hurt of her experiences. The narrative emphasises her strength in navigating the complexities of borders. Ma's journey reflects the resilience that arises from confronting and transcending the pain associated with displacement. As she learns to embrace her multifaceted identity, she discovers that borders can also be sources of empowerment. The act of revisiting memories associated with borders allows Ma to confront her trauma. By engaging with her past, she transforms her understanding of those experiences. The memories, once painful, begin to serve as sources of strength, enabling her to integrate her history into her present life. Shree suggests that borders are not fixed; they can shift and adapt based on personal journeys. For example, "Like a body engaged in challenging all stereotypes and definitions. A body unrecognizing of the legitimacy of any border. Flowing this way and that" (Shree, 2021, p. 289). With reference to Rosie, Shree explored the fluidity and permeability of the border within bodily space. This fluidity allows for the reimagining of borders as spaces of healing rather than

confinement. Ma's dreams and reflections illustrate this idea, where she envisions crossing boundaries that are not merely physical but also emotional and psychological.

Geetanjali Shree masterfully redefines borders as spaces for healing rather than mere sources of hurt. Through Ma's journey across physical and emotional boundaries, the narrative illustrates the transformative power of memory, community, and resilience. According to Akkamwad, "healing doesn't mean forgetting but rather embracing the past to move forward" (Akkamwad, 2025, p. 174). By embracing her past and forging connections with others, Ma discovers that borders can serve as pathways to empowerment, growth and healing. "At this point, both grandpa-beings spread out their wings..... they crossed some invisible border and lay down on the other side" (Shree, 2021, p. 495). The crossing of the 'invisible border' marks the pathway to healing and growth, overcoming physical and emotional barriers.

VI. CONCLUSION

Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand (Ret Samadhi)* is about transcending borders, both literal and metaphorical: boundaries about gender, identity, religion, reality, and imagination, as well as arbitrary national borders. Geetanjali Shree sharply and poignantly demonstrates the cataclysmic impacts of partition and unwanted borders, whether they are created between nations, religions, or genders. *Tomb of Sand* tells the tale of an elderly Ma, who defies the conventional Lakshman Rekha of complying with traditions. Through Ma, an octogenarian widow, Shree brings out the impact of partition on women. Shree vividly exhibits the migration and resettlement throughout the novel. Like any other partition novel, Shree exuberantly depicts violence and trauma, which are inextricably linked to the construction of a border through Ma's memories of the past. Furthermore, Shree situates the *Tomb of Sand* at the intersection of history and memory. Shree explores how memory and past events could potentially tell a fictitious tale that transports us on a fictional journey of human migration through time and space. The novel *Tomb of Sand* perfectly captures key aspects of partition literature. It is built upon the quest for self-awareness of an octogenarian widow who transcends all the physical and psychological borders. It flawlessly reconstructed the idea of a border constructed in the text by Geetanjali Shree through recollections of traumatic past events faced by Ma during the Great Partition of India. Ma boldly addresses the lingering anguish of her childhood memories during Partition and reassesses her identity as a mother, daughter, and woman. Geetanjali Shree brings out the critical and timely demonstration of the destructive consequences of borders and boundaries, whether between religions, countries, or genders. Thus, a close reading of Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* tells a tale that explores the permeability of borders among nations, societies, religions, genders, languages, oneself, life, and death, surpassing all linguistic barriers, despite all the obstacles and boundaries.

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